

## Holiday Highlights

### Cyprus

21-28 March 2012

**Guide:** Roy Atkins

**Guests:** Barbara Gray, Margaret Murphy, Hilary Macbean, Anne Turner and Stuart Bridger

**Day 1:** The flight leaves from Gatwick right on time but rather early in the morning and lands a good twenty minutes early at Paphos airport where we are met by the representative from the car hire company who soon has us on our way to their office to sign the paperwork. Formalities sorted we head for the hotel just ten or so minutes away where we are made to feel very welcome by Christina and the Swallows nesting in the bar! After a little time to settle into our rooms we meet up at around 4:00pm for a short walk.

The hotel is in a valley that can be excellent for migrants and with recent rain there is quite a fast flow of water in the river and the grass is lush and green, studded with wild flowers including sheets of brilliant yellow Crown Daisies. House Sparrows are happily chirruping from the bushes and amongst them are some much smarter looking male Spanish Sparrows plus a few Corn Buntings and there are lots of Wood Pigeons migrating through. We keep getting glimpses of warblers which is a little frustrating, but patience pays off with views of Sardinian Warbler, Blackcap and Chiffchaff then down beside the river we find a lovely mixed flock of Goldfinches and Serins, some of the male Serins are beautiful! There are a few very smart Linnets too and more Corn Buntings and Spanish Sparrows. The Hooded Crows look particularly smart looking even paler grey than those in Scotland and the flocks of Jackdaws on the cliffs opposite are of the eastern race with the pale whitish half collars.

Our next find is particularly pleasing - a stunning male Cyprus Pied Wheatear. It drops down behind some bushes so we wait and get several good views when it hops up onto the bushes again. A female Black Redstart appears and we get better views of Sardinian Warbler that sits right out in the open preening for ages! Eventually we decide to start walking back to the hotel and glimpse a Zitting Cisticola on the way. We notice patches of Turban Buttercup as we walk back which look very anemone-like.

Back at the hotel we take a break before our evening meal but a couple of us try for the Scops Owl that often appears in the tree next to the hotel. It is a little frustrating as although we can hear it calling clearly it does not show itself - but never mind - we have plenty more opportunities to try for this one.

We then enjoy a delicious evening meal before having a look at the map to see what the plans are for the next few days - and in particular tomorrow... there is great excitement as there has been a report of two Cream-coloured Coursers today!! There is little wondering where we are heading tomorrow then!

**Day 2:** Those who decide to take a pre-breakfast stroll have an excellent time getting great views of the Cyprus Pied Wheatear, plus Sardinian Warbler, Chukar and a pair of Great Spotted Cuckoos - a great start to the day!

After breakfast we set off towards Akrotiri area where we make our first stop near the Phassouri reed-beds. Here amongst the Coots we find a pair of Little Ringed Plovers, a couple of Ruff, Black-winged Stilt and several Wood Sandpipers while a Northern Lapwing is a good find. A Snipe is feeding in the long grass and in the distance a Marsh Harrier is hunting over the reeds. A couple of Cattle Egrets are following the cattle and a Zitting Cisticola flies through.

We move on towards the gravel pits where the coursers were seen yesterday. We arrive to find it very quiet - well bird-wise at least - but not actually quiet as the famous Red Arrows team are practicing their flying routines overhead!! This is a big surprise and they are spectacular creating twisted bands and starbursts with coloured smoke in red, white and blue - maybe they heard we were here! As we search for the coursers we find a few Northern and a single Isabelline Wheatear, a scattering of Stonechats including one very striking bird that is clearly one of the more eastern races with a larger white neck and wing patches. It is tempting to call this bird a Siberian Stonechat but it is completely orange underneath more like a European bird so we are not sure what to make of it. Around the edge of the shallow flashes of water are lots of Kentish Plovers, we watch another Marsh Harrier and then Hilary spots a superb immature Long-legged Buzzard looking almost eagle like with its long wings. Barbara in the meantime is finding some very nice plants including many vetches but they prove difficult to identify with certainty as does a pink flowered silene with petals that curl back at the tips. There are lizards running around between the scrubby bushes and eventually we get a good enough view of one to identify it as a Spiny-footed Lizard.

Sadly there seems to be no sign of the coursers and this is confirmed by the various people we meet who are also looking for them. One couple tell us they had seen a Great Sand Plover so we head over to check the pool they were watching. There are several Kentish Plovers here allowing us excellent views, a Green Sandpiper and we flush a Short-toed Lark, then suddenly Hilary says she may have found the bird. And there - at the back of the pool and dwarfing the Kentish Plovers - is a very nice Greater Sand Plover. Not quite a Cream-coloured Courser but not a bad second best. We take turns enjoying this bird through the scope getting excellent views then spot a flock of seven Grey Herons flying in off the sea. They are obviously migrating and spiral up on a thermal like storks!

Our next stop is a small church nearby where several Alpine Swifts circle overhead as we arrive. We enjoy lunch before doing a bit of birding around the outside of the wall though even as we eat we can't help spotting Chiffchaffs in the trees and a nice Great White Egret in the pools down below. Around the church we find a couple of Black Redstarts and two or three Lesser Whitethroats. We get excellent views of a cracking Isabelline Wheatear - a particularly well marked bird, and spot several Stonechats on the tops of the bushes. But best of all are the Cretzschmar's Buntings - a group of five of them feeding on the ground by the church wall and looking absolutely fantastic in the sunshine.

We drive further round towards the salt lake where there are several flocks of Greater Flamingos. Some are swimming, kicking their legs up behind them as they paddle along. There are several gulls out there which look at this distance to be Slender-billed Gulls - but they are a long way off! We get excellent views of a Zitting Cisticola which flies in and perches on top of one of the tall stems right in front of us.

Next we drive the length of Ladies Mile but it is incredibly quiet. We make a stop to try and find Spectacled Warbler, and try playing a little of the song. The response is very quick with a bird flying straight towards us and perching right on the tops of the bushes - superb! We arrive at Zakaki Lake which proves almost birdless! This is a big surprise as this can be excellent however today all we add here is Moorhen. There is a track that leads out to the salt flats and we head out there to check out a pool we have heard about. There are loads of waders here including many Kentish Plovers, Dunlins and Little Stint, but we are delighted to find two more Greater Sand Plovers including one that is coming into breeding plumage and looking very smart. There are lots of Ruff and five Gull-billed Terns and we are surprised to see a Sanderling here.

Heading back towards home we make a stop at Kurion Stadium - an ancient Roman stadium where all kinds of sports were watched including races, long jump etc. It is interesting to stand and try and imagine what it must have been like - but it is now quite overgrown with grass etc and surrounded by bushes. We have a quick check of these bushes before we leave and are pleased to find a smart male Cyprus Warbler - excellent!

Our final stop is the Kensington Cliffs where we hope to find Griffon Vultures. They are nowhere to be seen but there are several Alpine Swifts racing around above the cliff top and down below there are Mediterranean Shags and Yellow-legged Gulls on the rocks. A Peregrine is perched on the cliff face but while Roy is scanning the cliff carefully looking for any sign of Griffon Vultures perched there suddenly there is a small bird flitting its way up the vertical cliff - a Wallcreeper!! Although they are known to winter here on the cliffs they are notoriously difficult to find and we are delighted to see this bird despite it being rather distant.

As we head back out to the road two Chukars are walking up the track and allow excellent views before we head back to the hotel. Here we try to see the Scops Owls but despite hearing them well we don't get to see one. The Cyprus race of Scops Owl has a different call to the rest of Europe adding a second lower call between the louder higher pitched main calls. After our evening meal the owner's brother tells us he has just found one in the car park so we dash out. Sadly the bird flies almost immediately he puts the torch on it and Hilary is the only lucky one to get a good view. We'll try again tomorrow.

**Day 3:** Another glorious day with wall to wall sunshine and before breakfast a few of us take a walk down the valley. The only new bird is Red-rumped Swallow near the hotel while further down the valley we spot two male Cyprus Wheatears, several Sardinian Warblers, a pair of Kestrels that are clearly nesting on the far ledges, a Zitting Cisticola and a nice male Cretzschmar's Bunting.

At the end of the day yesterday Roy received an e-mail from a person we met yesterday saying that she had managed to find the Cream-coloured Coursers after three hours of searching and that they had moved to a new area - so armed with new directions we decide to head back and renew our search. We are soon there and drive slowly along the track looking carefully as we go. Somehow we still manage to miss them and find instead a nice mixed flock of Short-toed Larks and Tawny Pipits, but we have only just started going through them when a very helpful lady comes running down the track to let us know that they have found the coursers! We all jump back in the van and soon enough we are grinning from ear to ear as we enjoy these absolutely delightful birds! They are just so elegant and pretty and we spend ages watching them as they wander about in a rather plover like way - a few steps then stop to look and perhaps pick something off a bush, a few more steps then stop again and so on. They are clearly finding plenty of insects on the vegetation and it is a real pleasure to spend such a long time in the presence of such lovely birds.

As we watch them we also find a distant Marsh Harrier and what looks like the same Long-legged Buzzard as yesterday. We eventually leave them behind and slowly work our way down the track stopping to enjoy scope views of Tawny Pipits, Short-toed Larks, Northern and Isabelline Wheatears and Linnets. A Black Francolin is calling constantly in the background but despite a search we can't spot him - and we get attacked by mosquitoes as we scan which doesn't make us want to linger.

We are quite a way down the track when Roy spots three cranes flying around in the distance. He quickly identifies them as Demoiselle Cranes and this is confirmed when a single Common Crane joins them - the size difference being very obvious indeed. Hilary spots a wader in flight coming in off the sea and we wonder what it is, thinking perhaps a Golden Plover but being silhouetted doesn't help and we leave the identification open. The cranes eventually drop

down behind the ridge but we are confident that we can get to the area and set off at speed. It does not take long to relocate them and following the tracks round we soon are enjoying fabulous views! We decide to eat lunch while we watch them and enjoy long views of the three Demoiselle Cranes though the Common Cranes flies off to the reed-bed instead. Delighted with these views we eventually drag ourselves away and head round to the church where we find not just toilets but three species of wheatear in one tiny patch of ground - Northern, Isabelline and Cyprus - two males and a female.

We take a drive around the tracks looking for Red-throated Pipits but with no luck though we get good views of Crested Larks, Stonechats and lots of Meadow Pipits and Short-toed Larks. We can't find any Red-throated Pipits but as we drive back towards the coast we spot a small flock of birds and stop to check them. Immediately a bird catches Roy's eye - perhaps it is the plover we saw fly in off the sea? He is completely shocked when he raises his bins to discover it is an immature Sociable Lapwing!! This is a seriously rare bird here - well anywhere!! Trying not to say too many expletives he gets everyone on the bird which is easily close enough to get some semi-decent shots then enjoy watching it for a few moments before suddenly our fun is brought to an abrupt stop by a military guy who pulls up and taps on the window of the van and asks what we are doing. It has to be admitted that we are parked beside a great big sign that says 'No stopping'!! Oh dear - there isn't much we can say in defence and after a brief discussion in which we try to explain that we have just found the rarest bird on the island, he is unimpressed and tells us to move on! This is incredibly frustrating but at least we had already had a fabulous view of the bird and got photographic evidence so it could have been a lot worse.

We drive back to the coast where we stop and let it sink in - we have just found an incredibly rare bird and need to tell someone! Roy phones the chairman of the Cyprus rarities committee who sounds completely astonished - apparently it is only the second ever on the island, the last being in 1986 - wow!! It is an even better record than we thought! Now we are really, really pleased we got the photos.

Unable to go back for another look we work our way slowly along the coast again checking all the Tawny and Meadow Pipits, Short-toed Larks and Wheatears before again arriving at the Cream-coloured Coursers. We are delighted to find them in even better lighting than earlier and enjoy a good half hour or more just watching them feeding and wandering around - even trying to steal a caterpillar off an Isabelline Wheatear!

Finally with time moving on we head back towards the main road pausing at the reed-beds for a quick check of the shallow pools. We are very pleased to find five Ferruginous Ducks. The Northern Lapwing and Black-winged Stilts are still here and a couple of Little Grebes are at the back of the open water. A Green

Sandpiper flies in but there is little else so we decide instead to head into the nearest village and celebrate with an ice-cream!

We now head back to the hotel where after a short break we meet outside to have another try for the owl. At almost exactly half past six it appears flying into the trees and flitting restlessly from branch to branch calling constantly. At one point Roy lights it up with his torch allowing for an excellent view. A Stone Curlew calls overhead and we head in to enjoy a drink at the bar before our evening meal - what a day!

**Day 4:** Today we feel like a change of scenery and head up into the hills. It is another glorious sunny day with wall to wall blue skies as we start our drive keeping our eyes on the skies as we travel in case of raptors. A couple of Chukars cross the road in front of us and then further up an Eastern Festoon flutters across the road so Roy stops and we all jump out to try and get a better look. It is a nice spot and we enjoy good flight views of this lovely butterfly as well as Eastern Dappled White, Orange Tip and Swallowtail. There are some very nice flowers here too with orange and scarlet flowered vetches, a species of salsify and some Purple Roman Squill which looks rather like a big Grape Hyacinth. On our way again we spot a couple of Cleopatra butterflies and as we gain height the view really opens out.

We are now in an area of scrub covered limestone hills and a good area to look out for Bonelli's Eagle - and Hilary is the first person to spot one! A pair is circling above the hillside and we soon get the scopes set up to enjoy these fabulous birds. They put on a good show flying right past us and even display a little as they cruise around together. At times the white patch on the upper back shows very well. We see several Kestrels from this spot as well and a single Red-rumped Swallow plus a few Alpine Swifts fly through.

We continue on our way pausing to scan occasionally but it seems rather quiet. We make a stop when Roy spots a couple of large orchids at the side of the road and investigating the surrounding area we soon discover that as well as the tall specimens first spotted - which turn out to be impressive Giant Orchids - there are also Naked Man Orchids, two species of Tongue Orchids, Umbilicate Woodcock Orchids, *Ophrys attica* and *Ophrys flavomarginata* - a great collection of species! The area seems to abound with Sardinian Warblers as well.

We continue on our way, pausing for a moment when a Great Spotted Cuckoo flies over the van, continuing until we reach a junction where we have to decide whether to try and look for Griffon Vultures which are sometimes in this area. They have a breeding programme as a way of trying to increase the population of this species which was shot out some years ago. There are now several breeding pairs on the island but there are still some here in cages. Some of the wild birds often hang around here and we soon find one - perched on top of the

cage! It demonstrates it is free to come and go as it pleases by flying away to a large expanse of cliff nearby where we also see another couple of birds. The whole area is covered in delightful Crown Anemones in every shade from white through various shades of pink to deep purple and blue! It is a lovely sight. We also find Yellow Star of Bethlehem (*Gagea villosa*), Naked Man Orchid and a whole host of little flowers that are too tricky to name. We have lunch here scanning for raptors as we sit and chat and eat, but see nothing different, though it is a lovely place to just sit and enjoy the warmth of the sunshine and the tremendous views.

We move on again towards a reservoir where we make our next stop. From the dam we scan the water finding just three Little Grebes and a couple of Mallard. However a raptor overhead is far more exciting - a Pallid Harrier! It flies right overhead allowing us to see the details of its plumage - it is clearly a young male just beginning to moult into adult plumage with a pale belly, dark secondaries and the first of the long black primaries moulted in. We watch as it gains height soaring above us and then lose it momentarily in the bright sky - and when we think we have relocated it we are surprised to discover that it is now a Bonelli's Eagle!! It is bizarre that we had not seen this bird appear and now can't find the harrier at all. We are not complaining though as it is a great view of this superb adult. Before we set off again a scan from the car park reveals a Cyprus Wheatear, a couple of Cretzschmar's Buntings and yet more Sardinian Warblers while both Black Francolin and Quail call from the fields.

We drive on, taking a quiet track into the forest close to the reservoir. From here we check the water again finding very little - Little Grebe, Moorhen and Grey Heron but nothing else however we do find some great flowers including Friars Cowl which is a very strange hooded flower that looks insectivorous, and more orchids. Here there are lots of Roman Orchids, a lovely primrose yellow species and further on a small number of Green-winged Orchids, lots of Bornmueller's Orchids and a small patch of Dense-flowered Orchids. It is quite quiet for birds though we do get good views of a Coal Tit. The Cyprus race looks very different to those in the UK with the black from the bib coming right down onto the flanks. There are a few Chiffchaffs and a couple of Chaffinches but little else.

We decide to start heading back and drive back the way we came. We make a stop when 'hawk-eye' Hilary spots another raptor - this time a Long-legged Buzzard. It is a very smart adult with a lovely pale head and slightly orange tail and as we watch it soaring in circles above us it is joined by a male Hen Harrier! We have hardly gone any distance on when Roy spots another Long-legged Buzzard dropping down below the bank up ahead. We look down the slope and there it is perched quite close in the trees looking superb, a lovely rufous coloured bird.

We drive on down to Nata Ford where we take a stroll in search of Black Francolins. It is very quiet though we do find a couple of Crested Larks, see more Kestrels and a Buzzard carrying a snake that is twisting around in its talons. We spot a nice Hen Harrier quartering the ground the other side of the river. There are at least three or four Black Francolins calling but none are visible despite scanning the entire area very carefully indeed. We drive across the ford - which is exciting given the rains before we arrived - then as we drive up the other side towards the main road we pause to watch a hunting Short-eared Owl - a very nice surprise.

**Day 5:** Today we are heading up into the Troodos Mountains in search of beautiful scenery and endemic sub-species. We have only been driving for ten minutes or so when we make our first stop as Roy has heard a Black Francolin calling through the open car window. Not only that but even before he has stopped the car he has spotted it perched right out in the open on top of a long water trough! It is with great delight and some relief that he gives directions and soon everyone is watching the bird calling from its vantage point. Shortly it drops to the ground and we get out to see if we can relocate it. By chance there is a track from which we can see the ground the other side of the pipe and there running down the track is not just the male but also a female Black Francolin! They run then stop and look round allowing us excellent scope views. In fact we watch the birds for the next five minutes or more getting almost constant views and the male even jumps back up onto the pipe. The whole area seems to be alive with birds and over the next fifteen minutes or so we add Spanish Sparrow, Linnet, several Sardinian Warblers that keep perching on the tops of old thistles like Stonechats, a Red-rumped Swallow, a couple of Blackcaps and a Chukar. A great start to the day.

We continue on our way pausing here and there to scan the surroundings and look at flowers and butterflies. We find several Orange-tips, Clouded Yellow, Cleopatra and Large Whites and the flowers are beautiful with lots of vetches and Crown Daisies etc. We find plenty more Sardinian Warblers - they seem to be everywhere this year - and a single Cyprus Warbler. Circling over the hills we spot Common and Long-legged Buzzards circling together which makes for a very useful comparison. We see Common Swifts and several Kestrels. There are some beautiful patches of the pretty *Arabis purpurea* - an endemic flower of the Troodos area that grow in clumps on rock faces.

Eventually we arrive at Troodos and before taking a walk enjoy our lunch in the company of a particularly well coloured Cyprus Wheatear. The track we want to walk however proves too covered in snow! It is incredibly thick here with more than a foot over the forest floor so instead we take a different rather shorter track. This does a short loop but we are soon watching several Coal Tits and commenting on how different they look to their British counterparts - and also how different they sound! While they can call just like the ones back home

they also make a variety of other calls, buzzing like Willow Tits and singing like Great Tit and Marsh Tit! Next we try playing a little Short-toed Treecreeper call song. There is no immediate response but a couple of minutes later one calls very nearby as if it has been working its way in to check out the intruder. It turns out there is a pair and over the next ten minutes we get excellent views of them both. We are keen to see Crossbills as well but there doesn't seem to be any around despite listening and scanning all the tree tops so we decide to drive and stop to scan at intervals. This we do but sadly with no luck though we do enjoy the spectacular scenery.

We gradually work our way downwards and slowly the snow gets thinner and eventually disappears completely. We make a stop at a very nice looking area with a lot more understory and try listening for Jays. Again we try a bit of call and soon two birds fly in - surprisingly not calling much at all but having a quick look at us then moving on. To be honest they look very like the Jays back home! There are plenty of Coal Tits here too, lots of Chaffinches, a Wren and another Short-toed Treecreeper.

We decide to head back via the Cedar Valley which makes for a much longer drive but better scenery and we enjoy the views as we make our way down this incredibly windy road. The Cedars are beautiful - the only ones left on the island - but bird-wise it is remarkably quiet with the odd Jay flying across the road and plenty more Coal Tits but little else.

Eventually we are heading rapidly down the hills and with time flying by heading for home but it is in the last few minutes of our return journey that we add a couple more good birds with brief views of Hen Harrier and Pallid Harrier hunting in the fields by the road.

**Day 6:** After hearing of a Ruppell's Warbler down the track we have a look for it before breakfast but sadly to no avail. It is astonishing that we have not seen one yet this trip and entirely down to the weather being far too nice!! (Not a complaint most visitors to the island are likely to be heard saying!) Sardinian Warblers are around and we get good views of the usual Cyprus Pied Wheatear but see little else of note before heading back for breakfast.

Well fed we are soon on our way to Lamaka. It is a bit of a drive, so we head to the big salt lake first as there are toilets here! Here we get fabulous close up views of Slender-billed Gulls - many of which are a lovely pink colour now they are coming into breeding plumage. In the distance there are flocks of Greater Flamingos and also some big flocks of Shoveler and a couple of Shelduck. We find a Great Crested Grebe and three Black-necked Grebes in breeding plumage. Apart from that there is very little else so we head round to the other pools.

We make several stops in places beside the various pools and soon start to amass a good list of birds. There are plenty of Black-winged Stilts, a few Little Egrets and a nice flock of Avocets and a very smart looking Baltic Gull (or Lesser Black-backed Gull of the Baltic race if you prefer). A Marsh Harrier is hunting over the wetter areas and as we drive round further we notice that there are lots of wet areas amongst the scrubby plants along the roadside. This is a result of the rain before we arrived and the waders are loving it! There are well over a hundred Ruff here and a few Redshank and we are delighted to find two Marsh Sandpipers. There are Northern Wheatears on the bushes and lots of Crested Larks, then a lovely male Spectacled Warbler appears on top of one of the bushes and sings for several minutes allowing us great views through the scope. We find our first Spur-winged Plovers on the top of the bank in the background and then spot a flock of Teal wheeling around in the sky. Roy scans out to sea hoping for a passing Shearwater or something and is surprised to spot a big flock of Flamingos out near the horizon!! They look very incongruous indeed but better still, while watching them, Hilary spots a group of four or five Bottle-nosed Dolphins.

Our next stop is the hide overlooking the water treatment ponds. This looks incredibly sterile with no vegetation around the edge at all but there are a surprising number of birds including the big flock of Teal we saw earlier, now all relaxing on the bank with at least two Garganey amongst them. There are several Little Grebes, a couple of Black-necked Grebes, Coots, Mallards and several Spur-winged Plovers on the banks, some very close and looking very smart. Right in front of us is a mixed flock of gulls which prove very interesting indeed. There are several Yellow-legged Gulls which form our starting point and it is interesting to compare the large headed shape of the adults with the young birds that are there. From this we surmised that some of them are also Yellow-legged - but others look slimmer, longer necked with rather elongated looking faces and long slim bills typical of immature Caspian Gulls. There are also some smaller looking gulls similar to the Yellow-legged that we suspect may be 1<sup>st</sup> winter Armenian Gulls but then we find a couple of gulls that really stand out. They look darker backed than the Yellow-legged and have a yellow bill with a big black tip! The head is small and rounded and the eye dark - a combination that can only fit Armenian Gulls! We are very pleased with all this detective work even if a few gulls have to remain unidentified for certain. There are also three beautiful adult Baltic Gulls - gorgeous long winged birds with almost jet black backs and easy to identify! The Black-headed and rather pretty Slender-billed Gulls are also a doddle in comparison to all these.

As we move on we pause to enjoy great views of a couple of Isabelline Wheatears before driving round past some more wet pools amongst the scrubby salt-marsh bushes. Here there are loads of waders feeding amongst the bushes including large numbers of Ruff, a good dozen or more Wood Sandpipers and several Green Sandpipers. It is a real pleasure to be able to enjoy such incredibly

close views and they continue to feed right beside the van as we compare the identification features. We add Redshank and at least two more Marsh Sandpipers much to our delight and then find a few Snipe. We hear a Greenshank as well but then start to work through the small birds flitting about there too. There are plenty of White Wagtails, and amongst them we find our first Black-headed Wagtails. These really are stunning birds in immaculate breeding plumage. Then a Blue-headed Wagtail appears followed shortly by a very smart Grey-headed (thunbergi). Hilary says she has just seen one with a yellow head!! This rings alarm bells and we spend an agonising time trying to relocate it - then after what seems like an age it appears again - a stunning male Citrine Wagtail! What a fantastic find!! It proves rather elusive and we have to work quite hard before finally managing to get some good views but its well worth the effort. We are very pleased to have the chance to compare all these wagtails but we are still puzzled by one more that seems to have a nice bluish grey head and the small thin supercilium. It stands out as different to the others and after much deliberation (and even study of photos from the internet back at the hotel) we decide it is a *dombrowskii* race - a nice find. In amongst all these wagtails and waders it seems odd to find a Corn Bunting!

Hilary comes up trumps again a few minutes later when she finds a Bluethroat which perches up on the scrub briefly. A second one is found later with much less blue on the throat so we are confident there are at least two here. There are also a few pipits and while some are definitely Meadow Pipits Roy is suddenly alerted by the call of a Red-throated Pipit that flies right over his head. We watch it circle round and drop back in and over the next half hour have to work hard to get glimpses of this and at least another two birds in amongst the vegetation. But in the end we manage a few good looks and certainly good enough to make out the brick red throat - excellent!!

It really has been a thoroughly enjoyable afternoon working through all these birds and making some quality finds amongst them but time eventually runs out and we head back to the hotel for our evening meal and run through the checklist. It seems from the reports on the internet and the bird-line later that we have without doubt had the best days birding of anyone on the island. There really is not very much else around!

**Day 7:** Yet another glorious day with sunshine and blue skies as we walk down the track to the river for our pre breakfast walk. Highlights this time include a lovely male Cyprus Pied Wheatear, Green Sandpiper, a brief Cyprus Warbler and more surprising - a Merlin! We also get wonderful views of a very pretty Fox that comes dashing across the river bed, then out onto the shingle and up onto the path. It turns to head down the path but spots a group of people there and almost falls over its own front legs as it stops before vanishing in to the tall vegetation.

After breakfast we are soon on our way to Paphos Headland. Before we get that far we make a stop at an Olive grove that has proved productive for Stone Curlew in the past. It comes up trumps again today and as we scan below the trees we gradually find more and more until our total reaches fourteen birds!! They look great through the scopes and we watch as they slowly wander around between the trees and a couple even take a small fly around and call - sounding like shrill Curlews. There are several Serins feeding on the weed seeds here as well as Chaffinch and Greenfinch. There are plenty of Sardinian Warblers here but not much else as we walk round towards the mosaics. Two Black Redstarts are flitting around the ruins, one a beautiful male in breeding plumage. There are Lesser Whitethroats and a few Spanish Sparrows amongst the House Sparrows and a few White Wagtails. The mosaics themselves are well worth a visit and some depict some interesting wildlife even! There are Tigers, Bears, Wild Boar, deer and more! The detail is quite extraordinary.

We head next up towards the lighthouse and find a few Blackcaps and another Black Redstart as well some very impressive Starred Agamas clambering around on the buildings. We meet a couple of other birdwatchers here who tell us they have been watching a Ruppell's Warbler and so we head round to the area they point out. On the way we pass several Northern Wheatears, a couple of Isabelline Wheatears and a few Meadow Pipits and Corn Buntings before arriving at the trees. Here we find several Sardinian Warblers and a couple of Blackcaps all of which get us momentarily excited in hope they are the Ruppell's but frustratingly we just cannot find the bird. Suddenly Roy gets a brief view of a Wryneck! It flies almost straight away and we spend a while trying to relocate it. There is no sign and still no Ruppell's either. In the end we try playing recordings of both - one gets no response but the Wryneck immediately starts calling back and then appears right at the top of one of the trees allowing us wonderful scope filling views - fantastic!

Eventually with the time now approaching lunch time head back to the van but not wanting to eat lunch in the car park we drive instead to a spot where we have been told a Little Crake was seen a week or so ago. It feels a bit of a long shot but at least we can watch out for it while we eat. These small pools look very nice and have a few Moorhens wandering around and swimming, a pair of Little Grebes and to our delight a pair of Kingfishers. These hang around the whole time we are there giving the most wonderful scope views. We have only been there about ten or fifteen minutes when suddenly Hilary spots the Little Crake coming out of the dense vegetation at the water's edge. It is a smart adult with dark grey chest and beautiful brown streaked back. We take turns to watch it through the scope getting excellent views at times when it comes right out then it dashes back into cover again. We are thrilled! Over the next hour or so we enjoy more views of this bird and the Kingfishers plus a couple of Spur-winged Plovers, two Green Sandpipers and a superb Purple Heron that flies right

past us, drops down to the edge of the stream and then proceeds to catch a snake!

Eventually we drag ourselves away and head up into the hills for a change of scene. This large area of scrubby limestone hillside with rocky outcrops is usually excellent for wheatears of various sorts so we are very surprised when there are none to be found! We see a few Kestrels, large numbers of Corn Buntings, our first Hoopoe of the trip (which is crazy!) plus some very nice plants in the form of large clusters of the Iris known as Barbary Nut and incredibly masses of Field Gladioli looking almost like poppies as they are all in amongst the barley crops.

We then find a pair of Great Spotted Cuckoos. First a single bird then a second comes in to join it - the first one flying off noisily. It returns shortly carrying a caterpillar which it passes to the female (well we are assuming that now anyway!) But they have drawn too much attention to themselves and a pair of Magpies come in to see them off. We watch them fly and follow them as they have not gone too far and over the next half hour or more we get the most incredible close up views as they continue their courtship, the male hopping around on the floor hunting for caterpillars then taking them to his mate. We see them mate, him feeding her again, and all the time the Magpies are on the lookout and at times come in to chase them away again. It is just wonderful to watch all this action until in the end they fly much further away and we decide to leave them be.

We have enough time left for one last place and head to Asprokremnos Dam - but above the dam in case any Masked Shrikes have arrived yet. We can't find any, though there are Chiffchaffs and some very smart male Spanish Sparrow. We find some beautiful Pyramidal Orchids amongst limestone outcrops and a selection of other lovely flowers. We get a brief view of a male Pallid Harrier which frustrates us by vanishing behind a large mound of earth and never coming out the other side!

Finally we head back to the hotel for our evening meal including a round of happy birthday as a cake is brought in for Barbara. She looks really delighted. Then we do a final run through the checklist before our usual last evening round up of the week. This allows each member of the group to select a species and a place they liked the best and also a 'magic moment' - something perhaps they will always remember from the trip.

It is soon clear that two species are getting the votes - one being the Great Spotted Cuckoos from this afternoon. They certainly did put on a wonderful show for us - but it is the Cream-coloured Coursers that get the most votes giving these beautiful birds first place. There are also other species that people mention that they found it hard to ignore and Hilary in particular was struggling

to choose from six species! Demoiselle Cranes, Sociable Plover, Little Crake, Citrine Wagtail and others all get a mention. The favourite place is also a two horse race with Akrotiri Plain scoring well - and perhaps might have scored more were it not for the mosquitoes!! The place that took the rest of the votes however was the delightful spot at Lamaka where we worked through all the waders and found Bluethroat, Citrine and four races of Yellow Wagtail plus Red-throated Pipits - a wonderful selection of birds and all so close in such a lovely habitat! Magic moments are always harder to predict and true to form everyone's was different! Identifying her own Short-toed Lark on call was a great one from Ann while Stewart makes us all laugh as he admits he is choosing our personal display by the Red Arrows!! The waders and wagtails was the choice of a couple of people while Roy just had to choose that astonishing moment when he first set on eyes on the Sociable Lapwing and knew straight away he had found something really good! Barbara was allowed two as it was her birthday and one was getting her birthday cake! We are all agreed on one thing however and that is that we have enjoyed the most remarkable week with some fantastic birds. Every day has had something excellent and considering the lack of general migrants it is incredible what we have actually seen. And we still have one morning to go!

**Day 8:** Blue skies again are the order of the day as those of us up early head out for some pre-breakfast birding. It is very quiet this morning and apart from a high Merlin we see just Sardinian Warbler, Kestrel and Cetti's Warbler. There is also a very interesting spider like creature with long 'pincers' on the front like a scorpion which later research identifies as a species of solifugid or Camel Spider of which there are five species in Cyprus. They are generally found in arid areas of southern Europe.

Once we have enjoyed breakfast we head out for a couple of hours birding and make our first stop at Asprokremnos Dam. It is astonishing, the difference a year makes!! Last year the well known pool where people go in search of Little Crakes was a tiny puddle with algae growing all over the surface and the whole area below this was covered in bushes. Now the little pool is part of a fast running river! The water has clearly been a torrent at some point and the bottom end of the pool has been completely washed out and all the grass and bushes downstream have gone too! There is now a mass of shingle and debris and the whole place looks different. Not surprisingly there is nowhere here that looks suitable for crakes and we see little here of note, though we are surprised to not even find any Cyprus Warblers here. We see a couple of Kestrels and several Sardinian Warblers but little else bird-wise though there is lots of the lovely Salsify - *tragopogon hybridus*. We are also delighted to find a couple of Paphos Blues - an endemic species of butterfly.

From here we head down towards the coast and scan the fields as we drive through some nice agricultural ground. A ringtail Hen Harrier flies through and there are Crested Larks right by the road. At the coast we check the area

of short turf just inland of the road and soon find a few Meadow Pipits, a single Skylark and both Northern and Isabelline Wheatear. A Short-eared Owl appears hunting over the ridge a little further back and we have a couple of gulls fly past including a lovely Baltic Gull. We find Short-toed Larks of a very sandy coloured race. A Marsh Harrier appears and hunts along the back edge of the field scattering pipits and larks as it goes and another flock of gulls fly past. These are mainly Baltic Gulls again but there is a single bird that looks exactly like a Lesser-Black-backed gull from the UK - but since they don't occur here we assume it has to be a Heuglin's Gull. A single Shag is resting up on the rocks off-shore. But time is now flying and we need to get back so to get sorted and eat before heading to the airport.

Back at the hotel we have time to freshen up and pack before meeting up for lunch in the sunshine outside the bar. It is all very pleasant and perfect timing as after we have eaten we head off to the airport arriving at exactly the right time to check in for our flight and our journey back home to London.

## BIRDS

Little Grebe  
Great Crested Grebe  
Black-necked Grebe  
Cormorant  
Shag  
Cattle Egret  
Little Egret  
Great White Egret  
Grey Heron  
Purple Heron  
Greater Flamingo  
Shelduck  
Mallard  
Teal  
Shoveler  
Garganey  
Ferruginous Duck  
Griffon Vulture  
Marsh Harrier  
Hen Harrier  
Pallid Harrier  
Goshawk  
Sparrowhawk  
Common Buzzard  
Long-legged Buzzard  
Bonelli's Eagle  
Kestrel  
Merlin  
Peregrine  
Chukar  
Black Francolin  
Common Quail (*heard*)  
Common Crane  
Demoiselle Crane  
Little Crake  
Moorhen  
Coot  
Stone-curlew  
Cream-coloured Courser  
Black-winged Stilt  
Avocet  
Spur-winged Plover  
Sociable Plover

Northern Lapwing  
Greater Sand Plover  
Little Ringed Plover  
Kentish Plover  
Marsh Sandpiper  
Greenshank  
Redshank  
Green Sandpiper  
Wood Sandpiper  
Common Sandpiper  
Little Stint  
Dunlin  
Sanderling  
Ruff  
Common Snipe  
Curlew  
Yellow-legged Gull  
Lesser Black-backed Gull (Baltic *fuscus* race)  
Heuglin's Gull (or LBB Gull L f heuglini)  
Caspian Gull  
Armenian Gull  
Black-headed Gull  
Slender-billed Gull  
Gull-billed Tern  
Rock Dove / Feral Pigeon  
Wood Pigeon  
Collared Dove  
Great Spotted Cuckoo  
Scops Owl (endemic subspecies)  
Short-eared Owl  
Alpine Swift  
Common Swift  
Kingfisher  
Hoopoe  
Short-toed Lark  
Crested Lark  
Skylark  
Barn Swallow  
Red-rumped Swallow  
House Martin  
Tawny Pipit  
Meadow Pipit  
Red-throated Pipit  
Yellow Wagtail - Blue-headed race *Motacilla flava flava*

Yellow Wagtail - Grey-headed race *M f thunbergi*  
Yellow Wagtail *M f 'drombrowskii'* race  
Black-headed Wagtail *Motacilla feldegg*  
Citrine Wagtail  
White Wagtail  
Nightingale  
Wren (heard)  
Robin  
Black Redstart  
Bluethroat  
Stonechat  
Siberian Stonechat  
Isabelline Wheatear  
Northern Wheatear  
Cyprus Pied Wheatear  
Song Thrush  
Blackbird  
Zitting Cisticola  
Cetti's Warbler  
Blackcap  
Lesser Whitethroat  
Common Whitethroat  
Spectacled Warbler  
Sardinian Warbler  
Cyprus Warbler  
Chiffchaff  
Coal Tit (endemic ssp)  
Great Tit  
Wallcreeper  
Short-toed Treecreeper (endemic ssp)  
Jay (endemic ssp)  
Magpie  
Jackdaw  
Hooded Crow  
House Sparrow  
Spanish Sparrow

Chaffinch  
Serin  
Greenfinch  
Goldfinch  
Linnet  
Corn Bunting  
Cretzschmar's Bunting  
Reed Bunting

#### **MAMMALS**

Bottlenose Dolphin  
Fox

#### **REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS**

Starred Agama (endemic ssp)  
Snake-eyed Lizard  
Spiny-footed Lizard  
Levant Water Frog

#### **BUTTERFLIES**

Swallowtail  
Small White  
Large White  
Eastern Festoon  
Eastern Dappled White  
Orange-tip  
Clouded Yellow  
Cleopatra  
Paphos Blue  
Painted Lady  
Red Admiral

#### **OTHER INVERTABRATES**

Camel Spider

## SELECTED PLANT LIST

Nos. refer to Mediterranean Wild Flowers, (Grey-Wilson & Blamey) where they are found in this book

- Black (or Austrian) Pine *Pinus nigra* 4  
Calabrian Pine *Pinus brutia* 2  
Cedar of Lebanon *Cedrus libanii* 10  
Golden Oak *Quercus alnifolia*  
Crown Anemone *Anemone coronaria* 211  
Turban Buttercup *Ranunculus asiaticus* 257  
Cyprus Rock-cress *Arabis cypria* (syn. *A. purpurea*) 323  
Hoary Stock *Matthiola incana* 327  
Paronychia *Paronychia argentea* 136  
Sun Spurge *Euphorbia helioscopia* 799  
Wild Pea *Pisum sativum* 555  
Common Vetch *Vicia sativa* 531  
Asparagus Pea *Tetragonolobus purpureus* 682  
Blue-leaved Wattle *Acacia cyanophylla* 439  
Bermuda Buttercup *Oxalis pes-caprae* 735  
Sage-leaved Cistus *Cistus salvifolius* 965  
Tamarisk *Tamarix tetrandra* 1021  
Prickly Pear *Opuntia ficus-indica* 1040  
Giant Fennel *Ferula communis* 1141  
Scarlet Pimpernel (blue form) *Anagallis arvensis* 1198  
Persian Sowbread *Cyclamen persicum* 1210  
Winged Sea-lavender *Limonium sinuatum* 1220  
Narrow-leaved Bugloss *Echium angustifolium* 1382  
Cyprus Thyme *Thymus integer*  
Crown Daisy *Chrysanthemum coronarium* 1895  
Eastern Salsify *Tragopogon sinuatus* 2058  
Common Asphodel *Asphodelus aestivus* 2089  
Purple Roman Squill *Bellevalia trifoliata* 2198  
*Bellevalia nivalis* 2200  
Garlic sp *Allium cassium*  
Barbary Nut *Gynandris sisyrynchium* 2305  
Hairy Star of Bethlehem *Gagea villosa* 2106  
Field Gladiolus *Gladiolus italicus* 2307  
Friar's Cowl *Arisarum vulgare* 2377

## ORCHIDS

Roman Orchid *Dactylorhiza romana* 2394

Green-winged Orchid *Orchis [morio] syriaca* 2403c

Pyramidal Orchid *Anacamptis pyramidalis* 2447

Naked Man Orchid *Orchis italica* 2409

Dense-flowered Orchid *Neotinea maculate* 2393

Bornmueller's Orchid *Ophrys bornmuelleri* 2427

Umbilicate Woodcock Orchid *Ophrys umbilicata* 2435

Mt Carmel Orchid *Ophrys attica* 2435a

Yellow-margined Orchid *Ophrys flavomarginata*

Giant Orchid *Barlia robertiana* 2446

Ploughshare Tongue-orchid *Serapias vomeracea* 2450

Long-lipped Tongue-orchid *Serapias laxiflora* 2450b