

Cyprus at Christmas

Naturetrek Tour Report

20 - 27 December 2019



Eastern Strawberry Tree



Greater Sand Plover



Snake-eyed Lizard



True Cyprus Tarantula

Report by Duncan McNiven
Photos by Debbie Pain



Naturetrek

Mingledown Barn

Wolf's Lane

Chawton

Alton

Hampshire

GU34 3HJ

UK

T: +44 (0)1962 733051

E: info@naturetrek.co.uk

W: www.naturetrek.co.uk

Tour participants: Yiannis Christofides & Duncan McNiven (leaders), Debbie Pain (co-leader) and Theodoros Theodorou (Doros, driver) with a group of 16 Naturetrek clients

Day 1

Friday 20th December

Gatwick - Mandria Beach – Paphos Sewage Works - Paphos

The bulk of our group of ‘Christmas refugees’ took the early morning flight from Gatwick to Paphos where we met up with our local guide Yannis and driver Doros, as well as the remaining guests who had arrived separately. At the airport we boarded our bus and drove the short distance to Mandria beach. Although it was already late afternoon in Cyprus, here we had a chance to stretch our legs, get some fresh air, feel the warmth of the Mediterranean sun and begin to explore the nature of Cyprus in winter.

Amongst the coastal scrub at the back of the beach we noted some familiar Painted Lady butterflies and a flock of lovely Greenfinches that positively glowed in the low winter sun. The scrub was full of Stonechats and noisy Sardinian Warblers, a chattering call that would form the backdrop to our trip wherever we went. A Zitting Cisticola popped up briefly but our attention was drawn to the recently ploughed fields beyond the scrub. These proved to be full of swirling flocks of Skylarks, Crested Larks and Meadow Pipits, but careful searching revealed the presence of two smart Red-throated Pipits as well.

Yiannis had been pointing out some interesting plants which thrive in this kind of seaside habitat including a member of the Borage family in Narrow-leaved Bugloss (*Echium angustifolium*), Wavy-leaved Mullein (*Verbascum sinuatum*) and *Polygonum equisetiforme*, a member of the Dock family.

The sun was now close to setting so we moved a short distance to the salubrious surroundings of the Paphos Sewage Works where, before the light faded, we counted 37 Spur-winged Lapwings, a very attractive wader that is widespread in Africa and the Middle –East but is now resident in this part of Cyprus. In addition, we noted four Cattle Egrets, two White Wagtails and a noisy Green Sandpiper which were all savouring the delights of the treatment works.

Satisfied with our first few hours foray in Cyprus, we retreated to our comfortable hotel in Paphos where we checked in before assembling for our nightly checklist which was only briefly interrupted by a visiting Hummingbird Hawk-moth. After the log we took a pleasant 15-minute stroll through the lively streets of Paphos bedecked with Christmas lights to a local restaurant for the first of many delicious Cypriot meals before retiring at the end of a long but fruitful day.

Day 2

Saturday 21st December

Paphos Archaeological Site – Asprokremmos Dam

After a sumptuous breakfast, we boarded our coach but not before admiring a Hawfinch and two Blackcaps in a tree next to the hotel car park. After some brief safety instructions from Yiannis we were off to our first stop, which was only a 15 minute drive from the hotel at the Paphos Archaeological Site, home of the Paphos Mosaics. These very beautiful and rare Roman mosaics were discovered by accident when the land was being ploughed in 1962. Over 40 mosaics, mostly dating from about the Third Century AD, have now been found,

containing many interesting geometrical patterns usually surrounding a central mythological scene. We spent the best part of three hours walking around this extensive site enjoying the beautifully warm, sunny morning and exploring both the archaeology and the nature of the ruins.

Birds were plentiful and many were in song. We noted Stonechats, Sardinian Warblers, Zitting Cisticolas, Crested Larks, Goldfinches, Linnets and Corn Buntings. Close scrutiny of the flocks of House Sparrows on the site allowed us to distinguish some strikingly marked Spanish Sparrows amongst them. Four very obliging Woodlarks foraged for food along one of the paths and a very tame male Kestrel perched in a tree allowed some of us to get within a few metres of him.

The warm, rocky nature of the site ensured that this was good habitat for a variety of interesting reptiles and so we duly studied the essential differences between Snake-eyed Lizards, Troodos Wall Lizards, Schreiber's Spiny-footed Lizards and some impressively large Starred Agamas.

The stony substrate interspersed with grassy areas was also an attractive area for plant hunting and with Yiannis's help we also found Autumn Grape Hyacinth (*Muscari parviflorum*), Tuberous Hawkbit (*Leontodon tuberosum*), Field Marigold (*Calendula arvensis*), Indian Ginseng (*Withania somnifera*) and the Mignonette *Reseda orientalis*.

Around midday we returned to our coach and drove a short distance to a taverna where we enjoyed a leisurely lunch. After the meal, as we were boarding the bus, we noticed a flock of Feral Pigeons that were feeding quietly in an adjacent field. All of a sudden, they scattered in panic as a Peregrine swooped in but ultimately failed to catch his lunch and flew off to hunt elsewhere.

Our afternoon excursion was an exploration the habitats surrounding the Asprokremmos Dam and we started out by looking at the valley below the dam. As our bus inched its way down a bumpy dirt track, those of us in the front of the vehicle suddenly saw a very large black snake slither across a roadside field and disappear into some roadside scrub. We all piled off the bus to see if we could relocate this impressive reptile but to no avail. It had gone to ground. Yiannis said it was undoubtedly a Large Whip Snake, a species that is sexually dimorphic with only the males being black in colour.

We all walked the rest of the short distance up the valley towards the wall of the dam noting lots of wintering Chiffchaffs and hearing a Cetti's Warbler as well as the ubiquitous Sardinian Warblers. Showy purple blooms of *Fagonia cretica* and the small white flowers *Prasium majus* in the Dead-nettle family provided some botanical interest.

Near the top of the track Duncan heard a different call that sounded 'interesting' emanating from a bushy hillside. With a little bit of encouragement, the songster was eventually seen well by everybody. It was a lovely spotty male Cyprus Warbler. Most of the population of this breeding endemic migrate to the Middle East for winter with just a few remaining on territory all year. Satisfied at having this important bird 'in the bag' we trooped back to the bus and drove up to the top of the dam.

As we got out of the bus again, a Great Egret flew across the reservoir whilst out in the middle a flock of Yellow-legged Gulls harboured a solitary Lesser Black-back. Meanwhile, Geoff and Julie had been trying to locate a group of Chukars they had heard calling and soon enough they pinpointed the birds, four of them, in a

scrubby area close to the dam wall. We all got reasonable views of these attractive partridges through the scopes. A Kingfisher was spotted quietly perched in some reservoir-side bushes and both Little and Cattle Egrets were noted flying across the water but now, with the sun setting over the distant Mediterranean Sea and the temperature beginning to drop, we decided it was time to head back to our hotel for the evening after a very satisfactory day in the field.

Day 3

Sunday 22nd December

Akrotiri – Zakaki Marsh – Lady’s Mile – Bishop’s Pool – Salt Lake – Phasouri Marsh

Today we headed east towards Limassol to explore a variety of wetland habitats around the Akrotiri Peninsula but before boarding the bus we again watched the Hawfinch which seemed to have adopted the car park tree as his daily breakfasting spot. After stopping in Limassol to pick up some lunch provisions from a wonderful bakery, we drove through the port area noting a solitary Laughing Dove on the wires, a recent colonizer from Africa. Soon we were out on the peninsula and our first stop was Zakaki Marsh. A small freshwater wetland was dominated by huge stands of reeds on one side of the road whilst on the other side more saline conditions were evident by the presence of some saltmarsh plants including *Sueda vera* and a *Salicornia* species.

Coots and Moorhens were pottering around in the pool in front of the hide and a Water Rail grunted from the reeds. Meanwhile, Elspeth drew our attention to a small, bright green object on a reed frond in the marsh. It might have easily been dismissed as a chocolate bar wrapper or some other piece of discarded plastic caught up in the vegetation. But closer scrutiny revealed it was a tiny Savigny’s Tree Frog hunkering down on the reed frond. Excellent work Agent Mackenzie!

But we didn’t have too long to admire this dapper little amphibian as a call went up from Julie over the road, “Bluethroat”. So, we all crossed over to this part of the marsh where the male Bluethroat showed itself several times but was maddeningly difficult to pin down in the dense reeds, even without the added distraction of a female Hen Harrier quartering close by.

Eventually tiring of the cat-and-mouse game with the Bluethroat, we moved on up the road to a saline lagoon where a large flock of Black-headed Gulls were loafing. We discovered two dainty Little Gulls pirouetting around on the edge of the flock picking up morsels of food from the water surface. Four Redshanks and three Avocets were feeding along the edge of the lagoon whilst a colony of African Grass Blue butterflies were fluttering around the fringing vegetation among carpets of colourful Crown Anemones (*Anemone coronaria*). Also thriving in this maritime environment were the Sea Lavender *Limonium meyeri*, a member of the Caltrop family *Zygophyllum album*, the daisy Golden Samphire (*Inula*, now *Limbarda*, *crithmoides*), and Sea Daffodil (*Pancratium maritimum*).

We drove along the Lady’s Mile road searching the coastal lagoons for waders but the pools were strangely birdless so we continued on. We decided to stop for our picnic lunch at a shelter outside the Bishop’s Pool interpretive centre where the curious Friar’s Cowl (*Arisarum vulgare*) was in flower. We walked down to the reed-fringed pool after lunch noting some Serins singing from some tall trees. Out on the pool a gathering of waterbirds turned out to consist mostly of Eurasian Teal and Little Grebes. However, careful searching of the reed fringes unearthed a small group of globally threatened Ferruginous Ducks mooching around. Despite the fact that this was late December a number of dragonflies were on the wing including a beautiful Violet Dropwing which perched on a convenient stem allowing the photographers to spring into action.

Further botanic investigations at this site turned up Smooth Sow-thistle (*Sonchus oleraceus*), Field Marigold (*Calendula arvensis*) and the buttercup *Ranunculus bullatus*. Then, just as we were leaving with half the group on and half off the bus, a small covey of three Black Francolins was spotted down the road. Whilst the smart black-breasted male took off over the fence quite quickly, the two attractively marked females ran back and forth for several minutes before eventually disappearing into the bushes. This was a really good sighting as Yiannis had only ever seen solitary males of this largely Asian gamebird before.

We drove a couple of kilometres down the road to an area where we could overlook the huge Akrotiri Salt Lake and marvelled at the spectacle of thousands of pink Greater Flamingos scattered across the wetland. Up to 11,000 birds had been counted here recently and it seemed that most of them were still present. Most had their heads down and were busily filter-feeding, but one small group were in full heads-up, bill-wagging mode as they strutted about in display.

We had time for one more stop as the sun was by now setting so we headed off to nearby Phasouri Marsh where we flushed some Common Snipe and saw some Marsh Harriers quartering the reedbed. As we sat in the hide, we heard an *Acrocephalus* warbler chuntering away quietly in vaguely Reed Warbler-like fashion. After a while we came to the conclusion that it had to be a wintering Moustached Warbler in subsong, which was borne out when Julie glimpsed the songster low down in the rushes. However, the bird was soon silenced by a large cow which suddenly and unexpectedly emerged from the reeds in front of us. We weren't sure who bore the most astonished look – us or the cow!

Now it was time to head back to Paphos after another long but satisfying day in the field, so we bade goodbye to our friend the cow and headed back to our hotel.

Day 4

Monday 23rd December

Ezousa Valley – Episkopi – Agia Varvoura – Kritou Terra – Aphrodite Beach

Early risers went to look at the Hawfinch tree before breakfast and sure enough the bird was there enjoying its breakfast with a Grey Wagtail nearby. As this was our last night at the Axiothea Hotel we packed up, said our goodbyes to the hotel staff and loaded up the bus after admiring a huge, dead Oleander Hawk-moth which managed to fool some into thinking it was a live specimen. Before we left, Yiannis explained to us about the Mediterranean Biome, where on the planet it is found (five regions, not just the Med!) and what strategies plants have developed for coping with its unique climate of hot, dry summers and mild, wet winters.

Our destination this morning was the Ezousa Valley where a unique conservation project is underway to try to preserve the valley's various habitats. We picked up our lunch from another impressive bakery and then headed up the valley. On the way Geoff spotted a large raptor soaring over the valley so we all piled out of the bus to look at it. It was a Long-legged Buzzard – and there was not one buzzard but three of them. We spent some time admiring the distinctive plumage features and jizz that distinguish this species from the Common Buzzard and also noted their propensity to hover whilst hunting.

Further up the valley we visited the new Episkopi Environmental Information Centre where we watched a brief film about the valley's ecology. We had a look at the small interpretive museum and toured the gardens where Yiannis explained the different habitats that were represented in the valley. Among the attractive plants to be

seen were the Bunch-flowered Narcissus (*Narcissus tazetta*) and the Persian Sowbread (*Cyclamen persicum*). But Yiannis had a bigger surprise up his sleeve. Calling us over to a tree near to the Centre he motioned us to look up into the branches. We looked up and found a Scops Owl sitting there looking down at us. But this was not just any old Scops Owl. This was the newly described Cyprus Scops Owl which had been announced as a new species by Birdlife International just a few days previously!

Well satisfied with seeing Europe's newest endemic bird we left the Centre and moved a short distance to Episkopi cliffs to check in case any Peregrines or Wallcreepers were at home. They weren't, so we concentrated on some of the interesting flowers growing on an around the cliff. These included Southern Polypody fern (*Polypodium cambricum*), Rusty-back (*Asplenium ceterach*), *Verbascum levanticum* and Annual Mercury (*Mercurialis annua*). Two Hummingbird Hawk-moths hovering around the rock-loving plants obviously found them as interesting as we did.

We moved on, crossing over the valley in the bus and then took a side road near the village of Agia Varvara, where it was clear Yiannis had something else up his sleeve that he wanted to show us. Soon enough, we spotted a dapper little bird with a white back dashing between the rock piles in an old quarry and realised it was a Finsch's Wheatear, a species that breeds in Turkey and the Middle East but comes to Cyprus to spend the winter. We had our picnic lunch at this spot and whilst the birders admired the wheatear as well as a covey of Chukars and lots of Corn Buntings, Yiannis took the botanists a little way up the hill. Among the interesting flowers discovered were the endemic Cyprus Crocus (*Crocus veneris*), a pretty Sand-crocus *Romulea tempskyana* and the buttercup *Ranunculus bullatus*.

After lunch we drove down to the Ezousa River at Agia Varvara where we flushed two Green Sandpipers and a Common Snipe from the pools and watched some Magpies, Hooded Crows and Jackdaws mobbing something unseen on the hillside – maybe a snake. By now, time was moving on and we had to reach our new hotel over on the other side of the Akamas Peninsula, so we set off back through Paphos and up into the hills to the west.

We still had time to stop for a short walk though, so we stopped near Kritou Terra where the beautiful Cypriot Sowbread (*Cyclamen cyprium*) was growing on roadside verges and Maiden's Bower (*Clematis cirrhosa*) was also in flower, as well as Southern Daisy (*Bellis sylvestris*). Scattered Aleppo Oak (*Quercus infectoria*) and Kermes Oak (*Quercus coccifera*) provided examples of the extensive forest that once must have covered this now-agricultural landscape. Jane found some interesting bird feathers on the road which puzzled us. She promised to send photographs off to Naturetrek colleague Ed Drewitt that evening to see if he could ID them. But now it was time to complete our journey and check in to our new hotel down on the coast near Polis. As we left, another beautiful Long-legged Buzzard took off from a roadside bush and gave us exemplary eye-level views as it glided past.

Very soon we had arrived at the comfortable Aphrodite Beach Hotel and, before dinner, we all convened for the bird log next to a roaring fire where Jane told us that Ed had already replied to her message with the information that the rusty margined, white-tipped feathers found on the road belonged to a Eurasian Woodcock. However, it was decided that three stray feathers probably didn't quite reach the qualifications required to make it on to the official trip list!

Day 5

Tuesday 24th December

Baths of Aphrodite – Neo Chorio - Smygies

Christmas Eve. The weather forecast for the next three days of our trip had not looked promising, with a series of rain squalls predicted to hit Cyprus, so it was no surprise when Christmas Eve dawned cool and damp. However, that did nothing to prevent a group of us taking a brisk pre-breakfast walk along the coast road near the hotel. Black Redstarts, Sardinian Warblers, Blackcaps and Greenfinches seemed to be the common birds around the hotel.

After breakfast, we left at 8.30 to take the short coach ride to the Baths of Aphrodite where we gathered in the Botanic Gardens as Yiannis talked about the geology of this part of Cyprus and how that governs the plant communities present. A hedge of *Bosea cypria* provided Yiannis with the opportunity to talk about this important endemic species and we admired the edible-looking fruits of the Eastern Strawberry Tree (*Arbutus andrachne*). We walked along the coastal path, tolerating some squally showers whilst Yiannis pointed out some more interesting plants including Mediterranean Clubmoss (*Selaginella denticulata*), Bunch-flowered Narcissus (*Narcissus tazetta*), Persian Sowbread (*Cyclamen persicum*) and Friar's Cowl (*Arisarum vulgare*).

The inclement weather truncated our walk somewhat, so we retired to the welcome coffee shop near the entrance, where the round was on Naturetrek! Feeling suitably refreshed, we headed uphill to a site that in previous years had held some flowering orchids. But this year we were not in luck so, after scraping our muddy boots, we continued in the bus to the village of Neo Chorio where the local taverna served us a mezze that seemed to involve an almost never-ending supply of delicious local dishes until we were all replete.

Emerging from our lunch stop, we boarded the bus again and drove a bit further into the hills through pine and juniper forests until we reached a ridge top called Smygies. Here we looked at the stunted vegetation whilst Yiannis explained the local geology and why it had resulted in several endemic plants being found there. Among the species we encountered here, and as we made our way down through the pine forest, were the tiny Jersey Fern (*Anogramma leptophylla*), the tiny little Least Adder's-tongue (*Ophioglossum lusitanicum*), the beautiful orchid *Ophrys omegaiifera* subsp. *israelitica*, *Narcissus serotinus* and *Hyacinthella millingenii*.

A small roadside pool fed by warm spring water contained a single endemic Cyprus Freshwater Crab but also many introduced non-native fish. These minnow-like fish were Western Mosquito Fish, a native of North America which, as the name suggests, are widely introduced to control mosquito larvae.

The track back through the pine forest had been very quiet except for a colourful flock of Siskins feeding near the picnic area. However, as we continued our walk the landscape opened out into an area of fields borders by scattered trees which was more birdy. Scanning the trees, we found a Hawfinch in a flock of Chaffinches, a flock of Corn Buntings and, in the fields, some Woodlarks were searching for food. A lovely flock of Serins that included a number of lemon-yellow males were singing their hearts out although Catherine left the tour leader momentarily speechless when she dismissed them as "windswept sparrows"!

Day 6

Wednesday 25th December

Agios Georgios Tispegeias – Paphos Headland

Christmas Day on Cyprus dawned with a moody-looking sky and rainbows over the Mediterranean. After a leisurely breakfast, during which Rosemary kindly delivered chocolate Santas to everyone, we greeted Doros who had given up his Christmas Day to drive us. We drove over the Akamas peninsula to Agios Georgios Tispegeias, with rain showers visible all around us.

We explored the area just inland of the rocky beach. Yiannis turned over a few stones and we were enthralled to find tiny Kotschy's Geckos as well as a huge spider with hundreds of tiny baby spiders clinging to her back. We later researched this spider from photos we took and found that it was called a True Cyprus Tarantula (although rather confusingly it wasn't a real tarantula but a type of wolf spider). Others who had walked down to look at the harbour reported that there were two Kingfishers sitting on the No Diving signs!

We retreated back to the bus as a sharp shower threatened to drench us and drove back up to the cliff-top car park. After the rain had stopped some went to look at the ruins of the old Basilica whilst others scanned the sea and found a Common Sandpiper on the rocky shore.

With the threat of rain showers receding we returned to the beach and scoured more of the rocky habitat finding more geckos, spiders and millipedes. On an outcrop above the beach a Blue Rock Thrush put in an appearance, whilst out on an offshore island Yellow-legged Gulls shared the rocks with a Eurasian Shag, resplendent in its full breeding crest. Interesting plants encountered included the purple-flowered Mandrake (*Mandragora officinarum*), Autumn Squill (*Prospero*, formerly *Scilla autumnalis*), an endemic dandelion *Taraxacum aphrogenes* and *Asparagus horridus*.

After a picnic lunch we decided to head to Paphos Headland, a short drive away, after a tip-off from a visiting British Birder. Parking at Paphos harbour, we walked out along the Lighthouse Trail next to a rocky shoreline battered by stormy waves, whilst thunderstorms out to sea provided a dramatic background.

Scanning the rocks, we found a roost of over 50 Eurasian Golden Plovers hunkered down against the wind. However, these were not the birds we were looking for, but a bit further along on a rocky promontory, near the lighthouse, we found them. Three Greater Sand Plovers, another eastern species which reaches its western most distribution in Cyprus. Out in the bay a Cormorant flew past whilst an unexpected female Red-breasted Merganser swam in the surf.

We walked back to the bus well satisfied with our Christmas Day excursion, so much so that everyone broke into a round of spontaneous applause as we arrived back at our hotel! That evening we all gathered for a splendid Christmas dinner, which even included turkey, and toasted each other a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Day 7

Thursday 26th December

Peristerona Gorge – Stavros – Cedar Valley (Troodos Mountains) – Evretou Reservoir

The Boxing Day weather forecast was still a bit 'iffy', so we would have to be dodging showers most of the day again. We decided to head up into the Troodos Mountains, after stopping at another magnificent bakery to pick up our picnic lunch opposite an equally magnificent Aleppo Oak in Polis. As we ascended the mountain road in the bus, Yiannis pointed out the different vegetation zones we were passing through. We stopped briefly at Peristerona Gorge to see if any raptors were soaring, but it was far too cool for that so, after tracking down the Chukars whose calls were echoing across the valley, we continued up into the mountains. *Rhamnus oleoides* and the endemic *Hyacinthella millingenii* were noted growing around the gorge.

Soon we reached the extensive pine forests that cover these mountains and made a brief stop to look at some Mouflons that were in a roadside enclosure. These sheep were thought to have been introduced to Cyprus some 8000 years ago. They have naturalised and are now recognised as an endemic subspecies, but the fence enclosing this flock meant they weren't going to make it on to the trip list. A few hundred metres further on we stopped at the Stavros Coffee Shop for hot drinks and chocolate by the roaring fire. Outside the café we noticed several Coal Tits of the local race *cyprioti* in the surrounding trees, with their distinctive large black bibs and dark undersides. Also here were a couple of Eurasian Jays of the endemic race *glaszneri* collecting acorns. Among the trees we had noted on the journey up to Stavros were Golden Oak (*Quercus alnifolia*), Oriental Plane (*Platanus orientalis*) and Italian Cypress (*Cupressus sempervirens*)

Another 40 minutes' drive in the bus took us to 'Cedar Valley' where there was a magnificent stand of Cyprus Cedars (*Cedrus libani* var. *brexifolia*) and where we had a picnic lunch by a swollen mountain torrent. A Short-toed Treecreeper shuffled up the trunk of one of the cedars but it quickly disappeared into the canopy and was lost to view. As we were wrapping up our picnic it began to rain again, so we jumped back on the bus and headed back down the mountain. We were hoping to scan mountain ridges on the way back to look for soaring Bonelli's Eagles, but the rain put paid to that, so we dropped down to Evretou Reservoir. Just before we got there, we stopped the bus to check through a flock of Chaffinches feeding by the roadside and found four Hawfinches amongst them.

There was a brief respite from the rain as we arrived at the reservoir, so we all got out and had a look around. The endemic race of the thistle *Ptilostemon chamaepeuce* was growing here and among the birds Kingfisher, Cormorant and a Little Grebe were the best finds until the shout went up, "Crag Martin". Sure enough, there were four of the chunky hirundines swooping about over the dam. We witnessed some impressive thunder and lightning storms approaching so we decided to call it a day and we headed back to our comfortable hotel as darkness fell and the rain continued.

Day 8

Friday 27th December

Aphrodite Beach – Mandria Beach – Paphos Airport

Our departure day in Cyprus dawned warm and sunny which was a bit of a frustration given the three days of inclement weather we had just endured. But no matter, we still had time to enjoy some more Cypriot nature as our flights were not until the afternoon. So, after another sumptuous breakfast, we bade a fond farewell to our nice hotel staff and drove up into the hills en route to Paphos. Since we had some good soaring weather, we

scanned a few ridges hoping for some eagles, but had to make do with some Long-legged and Common Buzzards, plus a few Common Kestrels.

After negotiating Paphos, we made our way back to Mandria Beach which had been our first stop when we arrived in Cyprus eight days previously. Yiannis found some spheres of fibrous material which he described as 'Poseidon's Balls'! In fact, they were 'egagropili' made from the leaves of *Posidonia oceanica*, a marine flowering plant that is endemic to the Mediterranean Sea and which gets washed up on beaches.

As on our previous visit, the fields were full of Skylarks, Corn Buntings, Greenfinches, Linnets and Meadow Pipits. But some Red-throated Pipits were also calling and, after careful scanning of the flocks, two finally showed themselves. Most people were captivated by a huge, purple-tinted oil beetle that proved highly photogenic, and some of us watched two different, colourful solitary wasps exploring an earth bank whilst a Snake-eyed Lizard looked on. A Red Admiral flew past and on to our checklist, but by now it was time to head for the airport.

However, Cyprus had not quite finished with us yet. Just as we were leaving Mandria to join the airport road, Julie shouted, "Raptor, I think it's a Booted Eagle". The bird had disappeared behind a row of trees so Doros stopped the bus, Duncan jumped out, ran to the end of the trees... and sure enough, there was a fine pale-morph Booted Eagle soaring with a group of corvids. So, everyone piled back out of the bus to take a good look at this rare winter visitor to Cyprus, including Yiannis who had never seen one before!

And that was that was pretty much it. What a way to finish the holiday! A few minutes later we were saying our goodbyes to Yiannis along with those of us who were travelling back separately. Before too long we were all winging our way back to the UK having enjoyed a nature-filled Christmas on Cyprus and looking forward to bringing in the New Year back home.

Receive our e-newsletter

Join the Naturetrek e-mailing list and be the first to hear about new tours, additional departures and new dates, tour reports and special offers. Visit www.naturetrek.co.uk to sign up.

Social Media

We're social! Follow us on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram and be the first to hear about the launch of new tours, offers and exciting sightings and photos from our recently returned holidays.



www.facebook.com/naturetrekwildlifeholidays



www.twitter.com/naturetrektours



www.instagram.com/naturetrek_wildlife_holidays

Species Lists

Birds (✓=recorded but not counted; H = heard only; K = thousand)

	E = Endemic; I = Introduced		December							
	Common name	Scientific name	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27
1	Chukar Partridge	<i>Alectoris chukar</i>		6	1	7	2	1	✓	✓
2	Black Francolin	<i>Francolinus francolinus</i>			3					
3	Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>			20					
4	Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>			8					
5	Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>			✓					
6	Ferruginous Duck	<i>Aythya nyroca</i>			4					
7	Red-breasted Merganser	<i>Mergus serrator</i>						1		
8	Feral Pigeon - I	<i>Columba livia var. domestica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
9	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
10	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
11	Laughing Dove	<i>Spilopelia senegalensis</i>			1					
12	Water Rail	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>			H	H				
13	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>			✓				1	
14	Greater Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i>			11k			6		
15	Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>			3					
16	Spur-winged Lapwing	<i>Vanellus spinosus</i>	37							
17	Eurasian Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>						51		
18	Greater Sand Plover	<i>Charadrius leschenaultii</i>						3		
19	Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>						1		
20	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>			25			1		
21	Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>			3	2				
22	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>						2		
23	Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>	1			2				
24	Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>			4					
25	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>			✓					
26	Little Gull	<i>Hydrocoloeus minutus</i>			2					
27	Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>		✓	✓		12	✓		✓
28	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>		1						
29	European Shag	<i>Phalacrocorax aristotelis</i>	1	1			2	1		
30	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>						2	20	
31	Western Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	5	3	1			1		
32	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>			2					
33	Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>		1						
34	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>		2	5					
35	Booted Eagle	<i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i>								1
36	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>								1
37	Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>			3					
38	Hen Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>			1					
39	Long-legged Buzzard	<i>Buteo rufinus</i>				5				2
40	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>			3	2	1			
41	Cyprus Scops Owl - E	<i>Otus cyprius</i>				1				
42	Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>		1	✓			2	1	
43	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
44	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>		1						1
45	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>							2	
46	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>		3	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
47	Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>		✓		✓		✓	✓	✓

	E = Endemic; I = Introduced		December							
	Common name	Scientific name	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27
48	Hooded Crow	<i>Corvus cornix</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
49	Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>							6	
50	Great Tit	<i>Parus major aphrodite</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓			
51	Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>		4		4	10			
52	Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	✓	✓				✓		✓
53	Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>	✓	✓	✓			✓		✓
54	Eurasian Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>							4	
55	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>		H	H	H	H	H	H	H
56	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
57	Moustached Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus melanopogon</i>			1					
58	Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>	1	2						1
59	Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
60	Sardinian Warbler	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
61	Cyprus Warbler	<i>Sylvia melanothorax</i>		1				H		
62	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>			1		3			
63	Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>							1	
64	Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓
65	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>		✓	1		1			
66	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>			1				✓	✓
67	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
68	Bluethroat	<i>Luscinia svecica</i>			1					
69	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
70	Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>		1				1		
71	European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
72	Finsch's Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe finschii</i>				2				
73	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
74	Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>		✓				✓	✓	
75	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>			1	2	1	H		
76	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
77	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
78	Red-throated Pipit	<i>Anthus cervinus</i>	2							2
79	Water Pipit	<i>Anthus spinoletta</i>		✓	✓					
80	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		✓		✓	✓		✓	✓
81	Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>		1	1	1	1		5	
82	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
83	Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
84	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
85	European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>			1		20			
86	Eurasian Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>					10			
87	Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓
88	Common Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus reiseri</i>			1					

Butterflies

1	Clouded Yellow	<i>Colias crocea</i>		✓	✓					
2	Large White	<i>Pieris brassicae</i>		✓						
3	Small White	<i>Pieris rapae</i>			✓					
4	African Grass Blue	<i>Zizeeria knysna</i>			✓					
5	Painted Lady	<i>Vanessa cardui</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		
6	Red Admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>								✓

	Common name	Scientific name	December						
			20	21	22	23	24	25	26

E = Endemic; I = Introduced

Moths

1	Hummingbird Hawk-moth	<i>Macroglossum stellatarum</i>	✓		✓	✓				
2	Oleander Hawk-moth	<i>Daphnis nerii</i>				D				
3	Pine Processionary Moth	<i>Thaumetopoea pityocampa</i>							T	

Crustacea

1	Cyprus Freshwater Crab*	<i>Potamius potamius</i>					✓			
---	-------------------------	--------------------------	--	--	--	--	---	--	--	--

Other Invertebrates

1	Common Darter	<i>Sympetrum striolatum</i>			✓					
2	Red-veined Darter	<i>Sympetrum fonscolombii</i>			✓					
3	Southern Darter	<i>Sympetrum meridionale</i>			✓					
4	Violet Dropwing	<i>Trithemis annulata</i>			✓					
5	Migrant Hawker	<i>Aeshna mixta</i>			✓	✓				
6	Eastern Cone-headed Grasshopper	<i>Truxalis eximia</i>						✓		
7	A nematode worm	<i>Gordius aquaticus</i>					✓			
8	True Cyprus Tarantula (a wolf spider)	<i>Lycosa praegrandis</i>						✓		
9	Oriental Hornet	<i>Vespa orientalis</i>		✓						

Amphibians & Reptiles

1	Savigny's Tree Frog	<i>Hyla savignyi</i>			✓					
2	Marsh Frog	<i>Pelophylax ridibundus</i>				✓				
3	Starred Agama	<i>Laudakia stellio</i>	✓	✓						
4	Kotschy's Gecko	<i>Cyrtopodion kotschy</i>						✓		
5	Snake-eyed Lizard	<i>Ophisops elegans</i>		✓						
6	Schreiber's Spiny-footed Lizard	<i>Acanthodactylus schreiberi</i>		✓						
7	Troodos Wall Lizard*	<i>Phoenicolacerta troodica</i>		✓						
8	Large Whip Snake	<i>Dolichophis jugularis</i>		✓						

Fish

1	Western Mosquito Fish	<i>Gambusia affinis</i>					✓			
---	-----------------------	-------------------------	--	--	--	--	---	--	--	--

Mammals

1	Brown Hare	<i>Lepus europaeus cyprius</i>								1
---	------------	--------------------------------	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	---

Plants (* indicates that a species is endemic)

Nomenclature contained within this list follows the taxonomic amendments, based on DNA analysis, made by the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew and the Missouri Botanic Garden, and following The Plant List, an internationally accepted list of vascular plant families, published and maintained by these two Institutions.

Scientific name**Common name****PTERIDOPHYTES****FERNS & ALLIES****Lycophytes****Clubmosses & Quillworts****Selaginellaceae***Selaginella denticulata***Lesser Clubmoss Family**

Mediterranean Clubmoss

Eusporangiate Ferns*Ophioglossum lusitanicum***Adder's-tongues & Moonworts**

Least Adder's-tongue

Calamophytes**Horsetails****Equisetaceae***Equisetum ramosissimum***Horsetail Family**

Branched Horsetail

Leptosporangiate Ferns**True Ferns****Aspleniaceae***Asplenium ceterach***Spleenwort Family**

Rusty-back Fern

Polypodiaceae*Polypodium cambricum***Polypody Family**

Southern Polypody

Pteridaceae*Adiantum capillus-veneris**Anogramma leptophylla***Ribbon Fern Family**

Maidenhair Fern

Jersey Fern

GYMNOSPERMS**CONIFERS****Cupressaceae***Cupressus sempervirens**Juniperus phoenicea***Juniper family**

Italian Cypress

Phoenicean Juniper

Pinaceae*Cedrus libani* var. *brevifolia**Pinus brutia**Pinus pinea***Pine Family**

Cyprus Cedar

Calabrian Pine

Stone Pine

ANGIOSPERMS**FLOWERING PLANTS****Eu-Dicots****True Dicotyledons****Amaranthaceae***Bosea cypria***Halimione portulacoides**Noaea mucronata**Suaeda vera***Pigweed Family**

-

-

Sea-blite

Scientific name	Common name
Anacardiaceae <i>Pistacia lentiscus</i> <i>Pistacia terebinthus</i>	Sumach Family Mastic Tree Turpentine Bush
Apiaceae <i>Foeniculum vulgare</i>	Carrot Family Fennel
Boraginaceae <i>Echium angustifolium</i> <i>Heliotropium hirsutissimum</i> <i>Lithodora hispidula</i>	Borage Family Narrow-leaved Bugloss - -
Brassicaceae <i>Alyssum akamasicum*</i>	Cabbage Family -
Caryophyllaceae <i>Dianthus strictus</i> subsp. <i>troodi</i> <i>Paronychia argentea</i> <i>Silene fruticosa</i>	Pink Family Algerian Tea Woody Catchfly
Cistaceae <i>Cistus monspeliensis</i> <i>Cistus parviflorus</i>	Cistus Family Narrow-leaved Cistus Small-flowered Cistus
Compositae (Asteraceae) <i>Bellis sylvestris</i> <i>Calendula arvensis</i> <i>Centaurea akamantis*</i> <i>Dittrichia viscosa</i> <i>Helichrysum stoechas</i> subsp <i>barrelieri (conglobatum)</i> <i>Leontodon tuberosum</i> <i>Limbarda (Inula) crithmoides</i> <i>Phagnalon rupestre</i> <i>Ptilostemon chamaepeuce</i> <i>Sonchus oleraceus</i> <i>Taraxacum aphrogenes*</i>	Daisy Family Southern Daisy Field Marigold - Stink Aster - Tuberous Hawkbit Golden Samphire Phagnalon Shrubby Ptilostemon Smooth Sow-thistle a Dandelion
Ericaceae <i>Arbutus andrachne</i>	Heather Family Eastern Strawberry Tree
Euphorbiaceae <i>Euphorbia dimorphocaulon</i> <i>Mercurialis annua</i> <i>Ricinus communis</i>	Spurge Family - Annual Mercury Castor-oil Plant
Fabaceae <i>Ceratonia siliqua</i> <i>Genista fasselata (sphacelata)</i> <i>Lathyrus sativus</i>	Pea Family Carob -
Fagaceae <i>Quercus alnifolia</i> <i>Quercus coccifera</i>	Oak Family Golden Oak Kermes Oak

Scientific name	Common name
<i>Quercus infectoria</i>	Aleppo Oak
Geraniaceae <i>Erodium cicutarium</i>	Geranium Family Common Stork's-bill
Lamiaceae <i>Lamium amplexicaule</i> <i>Micromeria nervosa</i> <i>Prasium majus</i> <i>Salvia fruticosa</i> <i>Thymus capitatus</i> <i>Thymus integer*</i>	Dead-nettle Family Henbit Dead-nettle Prasium Greek Sage Capitate Thyme -
Meliaceae <i>Melia azedarach</i>	Persian Lilac Family Indian Bead Tree
Myrtaceae <i>Myrtus communis</i>	Myrtle Family Myrtle
Oleaceae <i>Olea europaea</i>	Olive Family Olive
Oxalidaceae <i>Oxalis pes-caprae</i>	Sorrel Family Bermuda Buttercup
Papaveraceae <i>Glaucium flavum</i>	Poppy Family Yellow Horned-poppy
Platanaceae <i>Platanus orientalis</i>	Plane Tree Family Plane Tree
Plumbaginaceae <i>Limonium meyeri</i>	Thrift Family
Primulaceae <i>Cyclamen cypricum*</i> <i>Cyclamen persicum</i>	Primrose Family Cypriot Sowbread Persian Sowbread
Ranunculaceae <i>Anemone coronaria</i> <i>Clematis cirrhosa</i> <i>Ranunculus bullatus</i>	Buttercup Family Crown Anemone Maiden's Bower -
Resedaceae <i>Reseda orientalis</i>	Mignonette Family -
Rhamnaceae <i>Rhamnus oleoides</i> <i>Ziziphus lotus</i>	Buckthorn Family - -
Rosaceae <i>Rubus sanctus</i> <i>Sarcopoterium spinosum</i>	Rose Family a Bramble Thorny Burnet

Scientific name**Common name****Scrophulariaceae**

Verbascum levanticum
Verbascum sinuatum
Veronica polita

Figwort Family

-
 -
 Grey Field-speedwell

Solanaceae

Lycium ferocissimum
Mandragora officinalis (*Mandragora autumnalis*)
Solanum nigrum
Withania somnifera

Nightshade Family

-
 Mandrake
 Black Nightshade
 Indian Ginseng

Styracaceae

Styrax officinalis

Storax Family

Storax

Urticaceae

Parietaria judaica

Nettle Family

Pellitory-of-the-Wall

Zygophyllaceae

Fagonia cretica
Zygophyllum album

Caltrop Family**Monocots****Monocotyledons****Amaryllidaceae**

Narcissus serotinus
Narcissus tazetta
Pancratium maritimum

Daffodil Family

-
 Bunch-flowered Narcissus
 Sea Daffodil

Araceae

Arisarum vulgare

Arum Family

Friar's Cowl

Asparagaceae

Asparagus horridus (*A. stipularis*)
Drimia maritima
*Hyacinthella millingenii**
Muscari parviflorum
Prospero autumnale (*Scilla autumnalis*)

Asparagus Family

Sea Squill
 -
 Autumn Grape Hyacinth
 Autumn Squill

Iridaceae

*Crocus veneris**
Romulea tempuskyana

Iris Family

Cyprus Crocus
 -

Orchidaceae

Ophrys omegaifera subsp. *israelitica*
Spiranthes spiralis

Orchid Family

-
 Autumn Lady's Tresses

Poaceae

Arundo donax
Hyparrhenia hirta

Grass Family

Giant Reed
 Common Thatching Grass

Smilacaceae

Smilax aspera

Smilax Family

Smilax

Scientific name

Common name

Xanthorrhoeaceae

Asphodelus fistulosus

Asphodelus ramosus

Asphodel Family

Hollow-stemmed Asphodel

Common Asphodel



Cyprus Scops Owl



Troodos Wall Lizard



Romulea tempskyana (a crocus)



Crown Anemone