

Introduction

This is a Trip report for Cyprus from 31st July – 14th August 2019. Areas covered include various sites around Paphos, sites near Kyrenia in Northern Cyprus, and finally some sites on the Karpas peninsula in the north east of the island. This is primarily a family holiday, but with some early morning birding squeezed in, which accounts for the vast majority of the sightings listed. These early morning visits are typically from 07:00 to around 10:30, allowing some scope for travel. Apologies in advance for the quality of images – these are the result of digi-scoping, and sometimes are not great quality.

Note, unlike previous trips, where my birding was quite general, this trip targeted certain species, resulting in a lower overall number of species seen.

Resources

For southern Cyprus, I relied mainly on the Gosney guide, 'Finding Birds in Southern Cyprus' which I found to be useful on a previous trip (August 2015). I also read many of the trip reports on cloudbirders.com

For the North of the island, information was much more difficult to come by. I had to rely entirely on trip reports, some of which I list below...

1. <https://www.cloudbirders.com/tripreport/show/17897/25960>
2. http://www.surfbirds.com/trip_report.php?id=1441
3. <https://www.birdforum.net/showthread.php?t=250820>
4. <http://www.birdtours.co.uk/tripreports/cyprus/cyp9/cyp-ap-04.htm>
5. <http://www.birdtours.co.uk/tripreports/cyprus/cyprus-15/n-cyprus-09.htm>

Diary & Site Information

Day 1

Travelled from Belfast to Paphos, and from there to Episkopi village, which would be our base for the first week. I actually knew very little about the area prior to booking, and was pleasantly surprised to discover that this region was recently designated as an SPA. I think it's worth including some details on this area, as it might assist some in the selection of a good base.

Episkopi is a small village overlooking the Ezousa valley. As mentioned, this is an SPA and is home to many endemic plants, and hosts a good variety of birdlife, although spring is by far a more favourable time of year to encounter these. Of particular interest are 3 pairs of Long – Legged Buzzard and a pair of Bonelli's Eagle toward the back of the valley. The valley also hosts Black

Frankolin (50 – 250 pairs), Cyprus Warbler, Cyprus Wheatear and Black Headed Bunting. The village itself is dripping with Cyprus Scops Owl, which can be heard in and around the village from dusk.

The valley remains quite lush even in August (the photo below was taken from the villa) due to the constant water supply of the Ezousa river. The area to the head of the valley I'm informed is best for Eagles / Buzzards, while the area towards the sea is better for warblers / Frankolin etc.



There are many little trails and drivable tracks that I have no doubt would produce during the spring. Given that the valley lies in close proximity to Anarita park, it should in theory share some of the more sought-after species with that site? I include some links below for further information.

<http://datazone.birdlife.org/site/factsheet/ezousa-valley-and-cliffs-iba-cyprus>

<https://in-cyprus.com/ezousa-valley/>

<https://mycyprustravel.com/thingstodo/ezousa-nature-trail/>

<https://www.wikiloc.com/hiking-trails/ezousa-walking-trail-10376553>



The Environmental centre (above – and which is actually sign-posted from Paphos) has a display area describing the flora and fauna of the valley. This unfortunately includes quite a few stuffed birds, but there you go. On admission you are taken to an audio visual room, where you are invited to view a short documentary that provides loads more info on the area. The centre actually had a pair of Cyprus Scops Owl breeding in the adjacent garden. They had however left the nest long before August.

Note, I don't own shares in this place! It just seems like a good base for the undecided (and if you like peace and quiet). However, if I were to visit the area again, it would have to be a spring visit.

Anyway, to the birds. At the end of day1 we had heard at least 3 Cyprus Scops Owl from the patio.

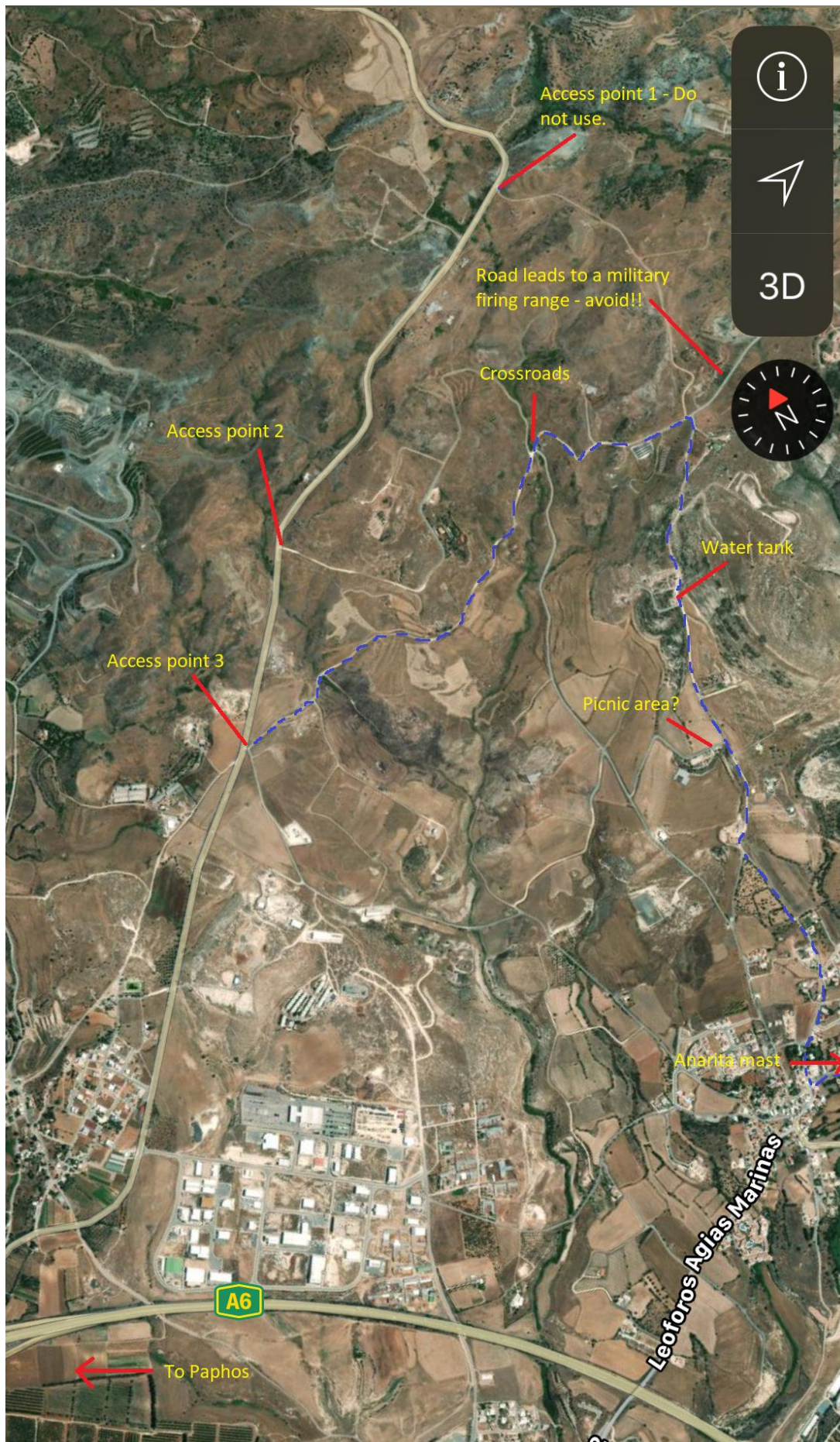
Day 2

07:00 – Decided to try Anarita park. I found that the track on the top-most entrance had been washed away in places and was undrivable (Access Point 1), so moved on to Access Point 3. Many reports discuss Anarita park, and I found some of the descriptions to be a bit confusing. The below map should at least clarify my understanding of the area. Since I'm approaching from the direction of Episkopi, I reach Access Point 1 first, then 2 and 3. It would be more typical I suppose to access from the direction of the A6.

The Gosney guide describes the area in some detail, as does the link below, so I'd recommend looking over these for more details on the site...

<https://www.birdforum.net/showthread.php?t=250820>

The dashed blue line indicates the route I took, but the terrain is very similar, so I suppose any of the tracks are worth a look. It's all quite sparse in terms of coverage, and to be honest, I'm surprised that it seems to produce the birds that it does.



In the above map, I drove along the track indicated by the dashed blue line towards the crossroads, and then onwards towards the water tank, getting out occasionally to check bushes etc. This produced 2 **Little Owl**, at least 6 **Roller**, plenty of **Red-Rumped Swallow**, and at least 160 **Chukar** (easily the most common bird). **Kestrel** were present in good numbers, as were **Hooded Crow**. At the water tank itself, had the first **Cyprus Pied Wheatear** of the trip, a pristine adult, and a nice adult **Masked Shrike**.



Further along the track, at a sort of play park / picnic area with some nice cover, I found several **Sardinian** and 2 **Eastern Olivaceous Warblers**. 2 **Lesser Grey shrikes** also. **Goldfinches** were all over the park in good numbers.

Having left the park, I drove on towards the Aspro dam. The pools at the base of the dam were empty, so went straight to the Amenities area as described in the Gosney guide. Nothing much there, but added **Hoopoe**, **Crested Lark**, and 3 **Cisticola** to the tally. **Goldfinches** and **Greenfinches** also present.

From the villa at Episkopi that evening, had **Peregrine** at the escarpment at the rear of the village, and heard Cyprus Scops Owl calling again from all around the village.

Day 3

07:00 – Went to Theletra Gorge as described in the Gosney guide in an attempt to score Long-Legged Buzzard, which should in theory be easy at that site. From 08:00 to 10:00, I had very little with only Cyprus Wheatear, Sardinian Warbler, Greenfinch, **Linnet**, 2 **Turtle Dove** and a couple of Kestrels being present. As I was about to give up, 2 large raptors came into view towards the base of the gorge, working their way towards me. Not Buzzards, but a pair of adult **Bonelli's Eagles**. One of my target birds.

A trip to the Lara Bay turtle beach later that day produced only a few Linnets and a couple of Kestrels. It was nice to see the young Loggerhead and Green turtles in the holding tanks, stragglers from the previous nights batch of hatchlings.

That evening a flock of Red-Rumped Swallow hawked over the village before dusk, and after dusk I located a tree with a calling Scops owl in the village, but no sighting.

Day 4

07:00 – Had some info from BirdWatch Cyprus that the area between Anarita park and Episkopi was good for Long-Legged Buzzard, so decided to bird the local area. A distant Frankolin calling was a promising start. However, despite good habitat, I had relatively few birds. Chukar, Goldfinch, and **Spanish** and **House Sparrows** made up the bulk of the birds, but also had Hoopoe, several **Reed Warblers**, **Collard Dove** & **Woodpigeon** also made an appearance. Sardinian Warbler also. A **Moorhen** with chicks frequented the ford area below the village.

A trip to Agios Neophytos later that day added nothing to the tally, but that night while having a beer on the patio, a **Cyprus Scops Owl** started calling from a telegraph pole at the entrance of the driveway! Just enough time to get the bins on to it before it moved on. Target bird number 2.

Day 5

06:30 – Decided to try Theletra Gorge again for the Buzzards. After scanning the valley for a couple of hours, I had seen only Linnet, Greenfinch, Sardinian Warbler and Cyprus Wheatear. I had one buzzard species, but based on the view obtained, I would have to put it down to **Steppe Buzzard**.

Later that evening, the Red-Rumped swallows returned to hawk over the village before dusk, so this must be a regular occurrence. Heard Green Sandpiper, Little & Scops Owls that night calling from the patio.

Day 6

06:30 – Decided to head in the direction of the Anarita Mast via Anarita park to have another crack at early migrants or Spectacled Warbler. On the mountain road from Episkopi to Anarita had 60 Chukar, 4 Masked Shrike, Turtle Dove, and 2 Cyprus Pied Wheatear. At Anarita park itself, had 6 Roller, loads of Kestrel and tons of finches. The Mast area itself produced the first confirmed **Cyprus Warbler** of the trip along with **Blue** and **Great Tit** and 20 Crested Larks.

Fasouri waterpark later that day produced nothing more, but that evening at Episkopi village, while having a beer at the Coffee Shop, had another Cyprus Scops Owl calling while perched on wires next to the road below the escarpment. This is apparently a regular occurrence, so if you fancy seeing Scops owl with a beer in your hand, this is the spot! Only 2 Euro 50 for a huge beer – bonus.



Day 7

06:30 – Decided on Evretou Dam, having heard that LL Buzzard had been seen recently there. En route, I passed through a new millionaires golf resort called ‘Minthis’, This is built on the crest of a hill and must have demolished hectares of prime habitat in the process. In any case, it still holds good numbers of **Corn Bunting**, with at least 40 seen, along with Crested Lark, Blue and Great Tits.

On arrival at Evretou, I was greeted by a flock of 9 Green Sandpiper, quickly followed by a very large raptor. Before I could get on to it, it had disappeared over a ridge, so only managed brief views of upper body and tail, which appeared mainly plain brown. Looked too large for either Steppe or Common Buzzard, but it will have to remain unassigned..

The lake itself had **Mallard**, **Grey Heron** and **Cormorant**. Looks like a popular spot for English anglers for some reason.

A trip to Paphos later that day produces 3 Cisticola, Cyprus Wheatear and 3 **Greater Sandplover** at the headland.



Day 8

06:30 – Last day at Episkopi, so only had a couple of hours before moving on. I walked down the valley for an hour or so and produced **Kingfisher**, Reed Warbler, 3 Eastern Olivaceous Warbler, Sardinian Warbler and Peregrine. Of course, Chukar were everywhere. The vegetation lining this track is lower than the track going up the valley and much better in terms of attaining views.

As a final work on this area, I'm convinced that spring would be a more rewarding time to visit. Eagles and Buzzards probably disperse after breeding and could be anywhere really. I'm told that Frankolin become much less conspicuous later in the year, hiding in the long grass. Passerines are also rather skulking and difficult in August. Seeing them in spring in full song would be a much better proposition.

Later that morning we drove into Northern Cyprus to our next location near Kyrenia which was to be our base for the next four days.

Day 9

06:30 – For my first day in the north, I decided to try a small wetland described in the first of the reports I reference in the resources section. This small reservoir (Çataldere Göleti or Değirmenlik Göleti) had produced Frankolin for that observer. In my case however I only managed 6 Chukar, a couple of **Little Grebe**, a dozen **Coot** and 6 Mallard. 4 Eastern Olivaceous Warblers were in the surrounding pines.

On the way back I called into a small reservoir near the coast called Acapulco reservoir (I think). This had only Little Grebe, more Coot and Mallard.

A trip to Bellapais Abbey later that day produces a couple of **Pallid Swift**.

Day 10

06:00 – Fed up looking at Chukar & Crested Larks, I drove inland to Hispolat Sewage Works near Nikosia hoping for some variety. Thankfully I got it. In the two hours I spent there I notched up 200+ **Black-winged Stilts**, around 75 **Spur-winged Plover**, 20 **Wood Sandpiper**, 5 **Green Sandpiper**, 3 **Common Sandpiper**, 100's of Mallard and Coot, at least 100 little Grebe, Grey Heron, and 100+ **Cattle Egret**. Also Cormorant, **Great Crested Grebe** in winter plumage, **Ruff** and a single **Gargany**.



In the reed-covered fringes were Reed and **Cetti's** warblers, and the surrounding fields held **Marsh Harrier**, **Glossy Ibis**, **Bee-eater**, and Roller. **Tree Pipits** called on several occasions as they passed over head.

While walking the tracks towards the rear of the pools, I finally connected with **Black Frankolin**, with 6 birds being present.

This site is without doubt the most populated wetland I have encountered in Cyprus to date, although it should be noted that I've only visited during August. Info on the area was pretty thin so I've added a map...



If in the area, this site is a must. Don't be put off by the fact that it is a sewage works – it actually doesn't smell that bad! The tracks themselves are probably drivable, although I elected to walk the area.

The Cattle Egrets seem to prefer the trees near the entrance, coming & going on a regular basis.

A trip to St. Hilarion castle later that day provided no addition species, but well worth the hike up the side of the mountain. Apparently Wallcreeper is possible there in the winter months.



Day 11

06:00 Decided to try Gecitkoy dam having read that it is one of the best in the area. I starting from the left hand side of the dam, walking up a track (which is closed to traffic) that runs up along the side of the lake. Very few birds were evident, with only 2 Cormorant, the ever present Sardinian Warbler, a Turtle Dove some Crested Larks and a Great Tit. And of course... Chukar. To be honest, it felt like a bit of a waste of time.

On the way back, before coming to Karsiyaka, I pulled into at a small track that took me to the coast. This track is at the corner of the 'Forplay Night Club' and produced Masked Shrike and Cyprus Wheatear. A little further down the track to the right is a small olive grove. There, a very large warbler appeared in one of the olive trees. Large, greyish overall but darker on the primaries and with a very 'angular' or 'peaked' head shape and long, heavy looking bill. Before I could get my scope

onto it for a record shot, it had flown towards the back of the olive grove. It must have been either Olive-Tree or Upcher's. Alas, the one that got away.



At the coast itself, I found a mixed roost of Egrets consisting of Little and Cattle Egrets. There were about 80 birds in total.

A drive towards Alevkaya that afternoon produced Kestrel and Peregrine from a viewpoint along the road, and a little Owl was observed from the roof terrace that evening.

Day 12

06:00 – Wanted to see Cape Korucam with my own eyes, so I drove the hour or so journey to get there. Just after the little village of Sadrazamkoy, I came across a house with a little pool of water beside it.



As I drove closer a **Purple Heron** flushed from beside it, quickly followed by 3 more. As I watched them fly off, I could hear Tree Pipits calling from all around. Several Olivaceous warbler moved around in the tree beside the water tank along with Goldfinch, Sardinian warbler and Great Tit.

Driving a little further towards the cape, a Black Frankolin flushed and flew into one of the fields. The rest of the area produced only a few more Sardinians and Goldfinches, but I can see its appeal and potential.

Later that day we moved to the east side of the island to our final destination. Calling into Kantara castle on the way produced only a Kestrel. But it's worth it for the view alone, which stretches out along the Karpaz.



Day 13

06:00 – Decided to try Mehmetcik near where we were staying and is supposed to be a decent wetland. After about 100 meters in the car, the first birds were a pair of Frankolin, standing at the verge and remaining there until I drove along side. The journey to Mehmetcik was festooned with Roller and Kestrel which seemed to occupy every other telegraph pole. At Mehmetcik itself, there was no wetland – only dried mud. The only birds present included a calling Frankolin, Cisticolas and Cyprus Wheatears. I decided to drive north of there towards the coast hoping for some movement of migrants, but was rewarded with only Cyprus and Sardinian Warbler, Cyprus Wheatear, Kestrels, Goldfinches, Crested Lark and Red-rumped Swallows. A **Cerlew** flew in off the sea, calling as it went. The first gulls of the trip were there! comprising of a single **Yellow-Legged** and two **Audouin's Gulls**.



Day 14

06:00 – I couldn't come to this part of Cyprus and not check out the Karpaz peninsula. Again, the journey was littered with Kestrel and Roller, but also Lesser Grey Shrike, more Red-rumped Swallows, Cisticolas, and Goldfinches. The headland itself had Olivaceous and Sardinian Warblers in most of the scrubby areas, Common Sandpiper on the rocks. A few **Eastern Jackdaw** also. No sign of migration as such, so a quiet day in the end.



Later that day I had my only **Yellow Wagtail** of the trip!

Day 15

Homeward bound, so made our way back to Paphos. Didn't really have time for any birding, so that was that.

Conclusion

I half knew what to expect having been to Cyprus in August in 2015, so the lack of variety and low numbers didn't come as a great surprise. However, I didn't expect to have to work quite so hard to see the birds I wanted to. August in general is not ideal, and you will have to put in a lot more effort to find birds. If you stick as much as possible to the more traditional sites you should maximise variety. For example, Kensington cliffs, Bishop's pool and Lady's mile should all be on the itinerary.

Having visited there in 2015, I had already visited the more usual sites and wanted to target certain species that were new to me. A visit to Troodos would also be a must.

I think I will re-visit Cyprus, but it will be either spring when a greater variety of species is possible, or during the winter months when Finch's Wheatear and Wallcreeper are possible.

Incidentally, I thoroughly recommend Elephant care hire. I had an incident that caused some damage to the car I was driving, but they were very fair in dealing with the damage, costing only 100 Euro. Another rental company would almost certainly have made the absolute most of the situation.

You will definitely need a car to access many of the more interesting areas but since driving is on the left, it's not an issue. The road system is excellent, and travelling from one side of the island to the other can be done surprisingly quickly.

Northern Cyprus is really not that much different from the south, although the crossing point takes some finding – it's almost as though the south denies the existence of the north, and does not want to make it easy to get there. As such, unless I missed them, I did not see any signage helping to cross from south the north.

Be aware that you can take a hired car from the south to the north, but you will be required to pay additional insurance. This is reasonably priced however and costs only about 30 Euro for a month.

I have previous trip reports for Cyprus, Portugal and Croatia on Cloudbirders (also for August) so feel free to check those out if considering any of these countries.

Any questions / comments on this report are welcome. I can be contacted at...

derekbrennan20@hotmail.com

Thanks,

Derek Brennan