

Cyprus: 2nd – 8th May 2019

A bird trip report by Bob Swann

For our early summer holiday this year we decided on Cyprus. We booked flights with Easyjet and used Booking.com to book the Kings Hotel in Paphos for four nights and the Marianna Apartments in Limassol for the final three nights. We used CarRentals.com to book a car via Budget which we collected at Paphos Airport. Finally I bought Dave Gosney's excellent booklet – Finding Birds in Southern Cyprus. This gives details of all the sites we visited, though there have been some changes since it was written in 2010.

2nd May. Our first full day. Began by driving east to Mavrokolympos. Checked out the owl site and then drove up to the dam. The reservoir was full, but just held a few **Yellow-legged Gulls**. On scrubby slope got good views of **Cyprus Warbler**, **Sardinian Warbler** and **Cyprus Pied Wheatear**.

Drove back down to coast road headed west and then north to Polis. From here continued west via Latchi to the Baths of Aphrodite car park and then walked up to the caravan park. Masses of **House Sparrows** with a few **Goldfinch**. Lots of **Blackcaps**, but only migrant we found was a **Common Whitethroat**. Nice views of a pair of **Masked Shrikes** courtship feeding.

We drove back through Latchi, then turned right heading for Neo Chorion, which we drove through and followed the track up to Agios Minas Chapel. Parked by the chapel at 35.0241N, 32.3404E and had lunch. Then followed the track down passed the west end of the chapel and out into a scrubby area with fields. Here we had a couple of pairs of **Black-headed Bunting**, a **Corn Bunting**, **Greenfinch**, **Spanish Sparrows** and more **Sardinian Warblers**. Had three **European Bee-eaters** overhead.

Drove back through Polis and then south to Evretou Reservoir. Parked at 34.9605N, 32.4770 above the reservoir and then walked down the track, which would only have been driveable with a 4x4. Reservoir was completely full with very little exposed shoreline. Had a couple of **Great Cormorants**, 2 **Squacco Heron** and 2 **Little Egret**. In scrub more **Sardinian Warblers** and a **Hoopoe**. On reflection it would have been better to approach it from the opposite shore. Got back on to the main road and continued south turning off right to Theletra. Stopped to view the gorge. Good views of a **Long-legged Buzzard**. In the gorge huge numbers of **Spanish Sparrows**, some **Linnet** and a **Red-rumped Swallow** flew by.

Returned to Paphos and found a nice restaurant opposite the hotel. After our meal we headed back to Mavrokolympus and to a small parking area at 34.8508N, 32.3965E. A flock of seven **Purple Heron** flew over and later a **Grey Heron** flew down the valley. Sunset was at 1935 and at around 2000 we heard our first **Cyprus Scops Owl** calling. Eventually we had four calling birds and got great views of two of them on the wires above the road. Success!

3rd May. Headed east to Asprokremmos Dam. Checked woodland out but only migrant was a female **Pied Flycatcher**. Drove down to track below dam and tried to access pools. High water levels meant the tracks were flooded. Drove back down to main road and then followed track on east side of river. In adjacent fields our first **Crested Larks** and **Zitting Cisticolas**. Overhead at least five **Alpine Swift**. On the steep valley side a **Chukar** was calling on top of a large boulder. We tried, unsuccessfully to find the pools. Have they been overgrown or eroded away? Did flush a **Black-crowned Night Heron** and a **Squacco Heron** from riverside bushes.

Drove up east side of reservoir via Choletria to Nata ford and parked at 34.7751N, 32.5807E. Walked up the east side of the river following a track. In scrub **Turtle Doves**, singing **Eastern Olivaceous Warblers** and **Nightingale**. Walked back down the gravelly river flood plain. Flushed at least ten **Stone Curlew** and a **Common Sandpiper**. Then checked fields on west side of valley. Good views of a **Great-spotted Cuckoo**.

Headed back south through the hills seeing more **Chukar** and hearing **Black Francolin**. Eventually arrived in the agricultural area south of Mandria. Most fields were full of crops so difficult to bird. At the east end above the river had a **Golden Oriole**. Only bird of note in the fields was a **Tawny Pipit**. Gave up and drove back west till just beyond Acheleia where turned left and headed down through fields to the mouth of the Ezousas River. In the river channel **Moorhen**, a **Purple Heron** and a **Glossy Ibis**. Overhead lots of **Common Swift**, **Barn Swallow**, some **House Martin** and **Sand Martin**. At the river mouth a pair of **Spur-winged Plovers**. Final stop was at the sewage works. Quite difficult to view but did have a **Green Sandpiper** on one of the tanks.

4th May. A glorious day so we decided to head up into the Troodos Mountains. First stop was on the roadside at 34.8734N, 32.8012E where we had a **Cretzschmar's Bunting** on the overhead wires. We also had **Serin** here and

Red-rumped Swallows and heard a **Common Cuckoo**. Continued on up to Troodos. Parked and walked to toilet block then followed the track up through the pine woodland to the water tanks (as described by Gosney). In the woodland we soon found the endemic specialities – *glaszneri* **Jay**, *cypriotes* **Coal Tit**, *dorotheae* **Short-toed Treecreeper** and a pair of *guillemardi* **Crossbill**. Other species at this altitude included a **Woodlark**, **Blackbird**, **Serin**, **Chaffinch** and a **Spotted Flycatcher**. Note the tanks no longer have water dripping from them.

Returned to the village and to the car par by the meteorological station. The stream described by Gosney had dried up. Did have nice views of **Hoopoe**, **Masked Shrike** and **Eastern Olivaceous Warbler** and lots of **Common Swift** overhead.

It was getting quite cloudy and windy so we decided to head back south. Stopped just before Dora in an area of open scrub (34.8017N, 32.7439E) where we had good views of a flyover **Eleonora's Falcon**, a **Roller**, **Cyprus Warbler** and **Cyprus Pied Wheatear**.

5th May. We left Paphos and began our journey east. Quick stop at Asprokremnos Dam revealed a **Wood Warbler** in the pines. Headed along the motorway taking the exit to Episkopi where we cut back along the old coastal road to just before the Garrison Base. Here we followed a track down to the cliff top where we got a good view of the Kensington Cliffs, where we had at least 5 displaying **Eleonora's Falcon** along with **Alpine Swift** and **Jackdaw**. As we left a **Griffon Vulture** came in very low over the bushes giving superb views.

Next stop was Phasouri Reedbeds or Akrotiri Marshes as it is now named (and signposted). Drove along north edge stopping to check the more open areas and visit the hide. Lots of **Cattle Egrets**, a few **Little Egrets**, four **Squacco Heron** and a **Purple Heron**. In the reeds **Reed Warbler** and **Cetti's Warbler** were singing. Had at least three calling **Black Francolins**, but could not see any of them. In a damp field at the west end a flock of 27 **Glossy Ibis** and 2 **Wood Sandpiper**.

Then drove through the Akrotiri gravel pit area. Got nice views of **Spectacled Warblers** and a **Great Spotted Cuckoo**. Heard two more francolins, but still could not see them. Skirted round the south end of the salt lake, which was full of water and contained a few hundred distant **Greater Flamingo**. We tried to access Bishops Pool but the gate at the end of the track and at the monastery was locked. Did find another **Wood Warbler** in bushes by the monastery.

Cut across the salt pans to check the lagoons on Lady's Mile. Eventually found a group of 150+ **Little Stints**, virtually all in nice summer plumage. With them 21 **Curlew Sandpiper**, 3 **Broad-billed Sandpiper**, 5 **Ringed Plover** and 7 **Kentish Plover**. Also on the lagoons a few **Little Egret**, 2 **Spur-winged Plovers** and at least 12 **Little Tern**. Final stop was at Zakahi Pool where had nice views of a singing **Great Reed Warbler** from the hide.

6th May. Headed further east today to the Larnaca area. First stop was the wetlands south of the airport – all of which had very high water levels. On the Meneou Pools only 100+ **Greater Flamingo**. Continued to the Sewage Works pools and to the hide. Very quiet with just 25+ **Mallard** on the water. Had two drake **Shoveler** fly over and in the distance two **Black-crowned Night Heron** dropped down somewhere behind the tanks. As we left the hide an **Eleonora's Falcon** flew low over us. Also found a late **Northern Wheatear** perching on the boundary fence.

Drove on to Spiros Pool. We had been hearing a **Black Francolin** and thankfully I eventually located it calling from a block of concrete along the access road to the desalination plant. Drove round a got very good views of it (at last!). Also had another **Great Spotted Cuckoo** in the bushes by the plant. The pool held good numbers of waders with 80+ **Little Stint**, a **Dunlin**, a **Curlew Sandpiper**, 30+ **Ringed Plover**, a few **Kentish Plover**, a pair of **Little Ringed Plover**, 10+ **Ruff**, 3 **Wood Sandpiper** along with **Black-winged Stilts** and **Spur-winged Plovers**.

We drove back round Larnaca joining the motorway till junction 58 where we came off and drove down to Oroklini Lakes. This has changed a bit since Gosney's book was written. There are now two good hides at either end of the lake complex which allow you to view most of the site. As well as lots of **Mallard**, we had a pair of **Teal**, a nice male **Garganey**, 3 **Red-crested Pochard** and 5 **Ferruginous Duck**. There were lots of **Coot** and **Moorhen** with attendant broods as well as several **Little Grebes**. Water levels were high, so although there were lots of breeding **Black-winged Stilts** and **Spur-winged Plover** the only other waders we saw were two **Wood Sandpiper**. The reeds held singing **Reed Warbler**, **Great Reed Warbler** and **Cetti's Warbler**. The tamarisks were mostly full of **House Sparrows** but we also saw a **Laughing Dove**.

Had lunch in one of the hides and then we moved on to Achna Reservoir. Once again water levels were exceptionally high. On the water two **Great-crested Grebes**. At the top end of the reservoir found two **Grey Heron**,

a **Purple Heron**, a **Black-crowned Night Heron**, a **Squacco Heron** and a **Green Sandpiper**. In the bushes **Eastern Olivaceous Warblers** and **Turtle Doves**, whilst overhead a small flock of **European Bee-eaters**.

7th May. After breakfast headed back east to Paralimni Lake to find it full of water and birds. Stopped at the side of the road between Sotira and Paralimni at 35.0267N, 33.97114 to view the muddy lake edge where lots of waders were feeding. Drove back through Sotira and down a couple of tracks to view the north side of the lake. Overall we had c160 **Wood Sandpiper**, 120 **Little Stint**, 20 **Ruff**, 15 **Ringed Plover**, 6 **Kentish Plover**, 2 **Little Ringed Plover**, 2 **Curlew Sandpiper**, single **Broad-billed Sandpiper**, **Common Sandpiper**, **Temminck's Stint** and **Bar-tailed Godwit**. In addition there were lots of breeding **Black-winged Stilt** and **Spur-winged Plover**. Also along the shore a **Glossy Ibis** and 2 **Squacco Heron**. Out on the water 3 **Ferruginous Duck** and 260 **Greater Flamingo**. Huge numbers of hirundines overhead and **Common Swift**. This was a really nice site.

After lunch we continued east to Cape Greco, an area which Gosney says has produced many rarities. We parked at the top of the track that leads to the sea caves and walked down following the various tracks that eventually lead to the cliffs. Did not see much but numerous **Crested Larks**, **Spectacled Warblers** and near the old dump 5 **Spotted Flycatchers**. Returned on a different route checking the bushes and to our amazement found a flock of 9+ **Pale Rock Sparrows** at the side of one of the tracks. There had only been 13 previous records on Cyprus and the last was in 2008. I put out a tweet with the news and in the next few days many birders, local and visitors, connected with them and the flock peaked at 25 birds! A long drive back to Limassol.

8th May. After packing returned to the Akrotiri area. A brief stop at Zakahi Pool revealed a **Whinchat**. Lady's Mile pools held a 1Y **Slender-billed Gull** and similar numbers of waders to our previous visit. A drive through the Akrotiri gravel pit areas revealed another **Whinchat** and two **Spotted Flycatchers**. It was very windy which probably kept the birds low in the bushes. At Akrotiri Marsh stopped by the damp field at the west end. Here we had a **Collared Pratincole**, a **Common Snipe** and a nice flock of c20 **Yellow Wagtail** – mostly *feldeggs*, but a few *flavas*. Had nice views of a flyover **Eleonora's Falcon**.

Continued west with a quick seawatch from the old coastal road at Petra tou Romiou. Nothing moving on the sea but a **Shag** perched on the rock. The final stop was back at Asprokremnos Dam, where found a male **Pied Flycatcher**, two **Spotted Flycatcher** and the **Wood Warbler**.

It had been a very successful trip. We saw all the Cypriot endemic species and sub-species. Only disappointment was that the number of migrants was very low. However, finding the Pale Rock Sparrows made up for that. Overall we saw 106 different species.

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Cyprus Scops Owl



Pale Rock Sparrow