

Cyprus

17-24th June 2022

In mid-June 2022, I visited Cyprus for a weeklong holiday with my very understanding girlfriend. It was mainly a non-birding holiday, however, I did manage two mornings where I saw as much as I possibly could in the short space of time. It is worth noting to anybody visiting Cyprus that hiring a car seems very difficult if you do not have your driving license for more than three years (this was the case for me). Luckily, I was pointed in the direction of local bird guide Anders Gray by some UK birders. We organized two mornings in a row in an attempt to clean up as many species as possible. I sent Anders my targets and he sorted out the best possible route to increase our chances of connecting with them.



Figure 1: Troodos Mountains

17th June: No birding

18th June: An evening stroll along the outside of Paphos Archeological Site (34.761808, 32.404783) produced my first lifer of the trip, **Crested Lark**. These ended up being very common in Cyprus.

19th June: A slightly longer stroll in the same area up as far as Paphos Headland (34.754882, 32.400240) produced several good birds. A minimum of 4 **Crested Larks** and my first **Zitting Cisticola** were again just inside the Archeological site. A quick check of the rocks on the headland produced two **Greater Sand Plovers** and a **Kentish Plover**. Both species showed very well. Walking back to Paphos, near the Goat Field (34.767008, 32.409187), a **Laughing Dove** showed very well. These were surprisingly common in Paphos, I had them from the balcony of our hotel almost daily.



Figure 2: Greater Sand Plover, Paphos Headland



Figure 3: Laughing Dove, Paphos

20th June: Anders arrived at the hotel at 07:00 and we headed for the Troodos Mountains. A Hoopoe flew in front of the car on the way, but better was soon to come! Shortly after the **Hoopoe**, in the

area of Omodos, A **Great Spotted Cuckoo** almost flew straight into the car! Jamming on the brakes and running to where it landed, I managed to get one more flight view of it. What an awesome bird! Continuing on, we arrived at Troodos Square (34.923474, 32.881096) at around 08:30. Swifts were everywhere. After grilling them for ages it was clear that they were mainly **Common Swifts** with one or two **Pallid Swifts**. It didn't take long before the first '**Cyprus**' **Coal Tits** started calling around us, these were easily picked up. '**Cyprus**' **Jays** were everywhere around Troodos Square. Anders picked up another lifer for me soon after, an adult **Masked Shrike** was busy feeding a begging juvenile. The views were amazing. Masked Shrike ended up being fairly common. While watching the Shrikes, I heard a '**Cyprus**' **Crossbill** flying over, unfortunately though, I never got eyes on it!



Figure 4: Masked Shrike, Troodos Square

We decided to move on and try get more satisfactory views of Pallid Swift later, We had only just moved on when we noticed several Swifts flying into the roof of a small building (34.924579, 32.881088). A quick check proved that they were all **Pallid Swifts** and incredible views were had as they flew around at eye level. They are buggers to photograph though! Only a few minutes later we were watching our first **Eastern Olivaceous Warbler**, these also proved to be fairly abundant in the Troodos Village area. Anders called a species that I really wasn't expecting to see, **Goshawk**! I managed a few shots of the distant male circling, but it didn't hang around for long. A really good pickup by Anders.

We walked slowly down the Atalanti Trail (34.924117, 32.880565) and this produced our first '**Dorothy's**' **Short-toed Treecreeper**, these were very easy to find as they were so vocal, '**Cyprus**' **Coal Tits** were everywhere here too! This area was supposed to be very reliable for Cyprus Wheatear, but proved more difficult than expected. Several **Eastern Olivaceous Warblers** were singing and showing intermittently in this area. I eventually got eyes on a male **Cyprus Wheatear**, a few hundred meters along this Trail. It turned out that a male and a female were busy attending a nest relatively nearby. It was at this stage where I heard another '**Cyprus**' **Crossbill** flying over, and

after a few seconds we got eyes on it in flight, unfortunately, it never landed. After having our fill with the Cyprus Wheatears, we headed off.



Figure 5: Cyprus Wheatear, Atalanti Trail

A few minutes outside of Troodos Village, we pulled over to check on a colony of Crag Martins. Up to this point in the summer, there had been no sign of the **Crag Martins** returning, so I was very happy to see that there was ten flying within inches of our heads! I found that the Crag Martins were more difficult to photograph than the Pallid Swifts earlier in the morning, mainly because they were too close for my 400mm lens! The views were mind-blowing! A **Red-rumped Swallow** gave a flyby here. Two female-type **Sardinian Warblers** fed in a lone bush on the cliff edge. Satisfied with our views, we headed for Asprokremmos Dam.

On the way we passed several roadside **Cyprus Wheatears** and our first **Rollers** of the day. A quick stop to check for Black-headed Bunting proved fruitless. As we arrived at Asprokremmos Dam (34.720777, 32.551931), two **Chukars** flew in front of the car. One landed and afforded decent, if brief views through the binoculars. As we waited for Cyprus Warblers to show, I had an unexpected lifer in the form of a **Bee-eater** which flew over calling. They are much trickier to see in Cyprus in the summer compared to the spring. As it was late morning at this stage, I felt our chances at seeing **Cyprus Warbler** was low, however, I was wrong! We had great views of approximately five individuals, including two adult males. My shots were poor, so we planned to try again in the morning.

21st June: Another early start, we headed straight for Asprokremmos Dam again, on arrival, I immediately picked up a distant large raptor, it was a **Long-legged Buzzard**, however, my views were very unsatisfactory, and it felt wrong to tick on such views. Sadly, it didn't show again. The **Cyprus Warblers** couldn't have shown any better! The views were really good. One male in particular was very showy. They were surprisingly active for this time of year. This was the only location we had any

Cyprus Warblers. It seems that Sardinian Warblers are outcompeting them and are a cause for their recent decline. **Sardinian Warblers** were vocal at this site also. **Chukars** were heard distantly, as were **Zitting Cisticolas**. With a little bit of effort, we managed to see one of the **Zitting Cisticolas** very well. What was presumably the same **Bee-eater** from the previous day, gave another flyby. An excellent start to the morning.



Figure 6: Cyprus Warbler, Asprokremmos Dam

We then headed to Kensington Cliffs (34.669802, 32.857564) where the main target was **Eleonora's Falcon**, and they didn't disappoint. The eye level views were something I will not forget any time soon! We counted a minimum of twenty individuals with many sitting distantly on the cliff face. At this time of year, Eleonora's Falcons are basically guaranteed here. We scanned the cliffs for Griffon Vulture but we had no luck. One was reported only a few days later. 3 distant '**Mediterranean**' **Shags** were on the rocks below the cliffs. **Alpine Swifts** were common over the motorway approaching Kensington Cliffs.



Figure 7: Eleonora's Falcon, Kensington Cliffs

Next stop was near Kolossi, where there was a small **Roller** colony of approximately ten birds. This was one of the highlights of my birding in Cyprus. As an Irish birder, we are completely starved of Rollers, so it was great to see them so well. As we were leaving, a distant **Black Francolin** started singing. I pulled myself up a steep bank and immediately found the Francolin sitting on a mound on the opposite side of the field. It was slightly distant, but they are completely unmistakable. I was really glad we had found one as they can be hit and miss, and far from guaranteed.



Figure 8: Roller, Kolossi

Having almost cleaned up our targets so far, we then tried Akrotiri Marsh (34.635955, 32.922830), which I had heard so much about. One of the first birds we saw was a lovely adult **Spur-winged Lapwing** sitting in a field. Two **Stone-Curlews** were also present. Continuing down further, **Cattle** and **Little Egret**, **Black-winged Stilt**, **Eleonora's Falcon**, **Glossy Ibis**, **Spur-winged Lapwing** and **Reed Warbler** were common. I also managed to get eyes on my first male **Sardinian Warbler**, which gave good views.

Driving past Akrotiri Salt Lake (34.618429, 32.975095), it was obvious that the large flock of summering **Greater Flamingos** were still present. They can be uncommon in Cyprus during the summer. Before stopping we checked Bishop's Pool (34.596548, 32.985150) where we had some good birds in the form of 11 **Ferruginous Ducks** (including two drakes), **Black-winged Stilt** and an adult **Turtle Dove**.

A quick stop to check for Spanish Sparrow proved fruitless with **Alpine Swift** being the best. These are classed as 'very common' in the new 'Birds of Cyprus' book by Colin Richardson and Richard Porter, however, this was definitely not the case for me. Despite checking hundreds of Sparrows over the week that I was in Cyprus I didn't manage to see a single Spanish Sparrow. We continued to on try to get better views of the **Greater Flamingos**. There were hundreds of them on the Salt Lake. Other birds present included a 2cy **Yellow-legged Gull** and numerous **Black-winged Stilts**.



Figure 9: Spur-winged Lapwing, Akrotiri Marsh

With time dragging on, we had one more stop before heading back to Paphos. We headed to an area called Germasogeia (34.741416, 33.078605), to check for Cretzschmar's Bunting. On arrival it was clear that it wasn't going to be easy. The wind was quite strong, and the dust was making conditions tricky. I had a quick scan behind us and picked up a **Long-legged Buzzard** which gave better views than first thing that morning! It dropped back down after a minute or so. I was beginning to lose hope of seeing the Buntings so continued to scan for the Buzzard again. After about ten minutes I picked it up again and just as I called it Anders picked up a female **Cretzschmar's Bunting**! A really good pickup. We walked closer and the scope views were decent. What a brilliant end to our two days of birding. We headed back to Paphos at this stage. That night, we walked down to Paphos Harbour for food, and I was very surprised to see two **Eurasian Nightjars** feeding under the street lights (34.762612, 32.412381), these were present for the next three nights and were very easy to see.

22nd June: A vocal **Serin** flew over the Aphrodite Waterpark (34.742342, 32.441342), outside Paphos. Both **Eurasian Nightjars** still present.

23rd June: A **Laughing Dove** flew over our pool at the hotel and three adult **Yellow-legged Gulls** flew along the coast at Coral Bay. Both **Eurasian Nightjars** still present. As we walked back, I could hear a **Nightingale** singing from the vegetation around the bus car park (34.756993, 32.411104) near Paphos Harbour, as it was our last night, I didn't get to try to see these birds during the day. Apparently, they breed there but I found that out too late unfortunately.

We flew home on Friday the 24th June. I never got to try for the Cyprus Scops Owl, but I will try again some day for them. I absolutely loved Cyprus and would recommend it to anyone. The food was great as was the weather. A massive thanks to Anders Gray for all his help, I can't recommend him highly enough, an extremely sharp and knowledgeable lad.