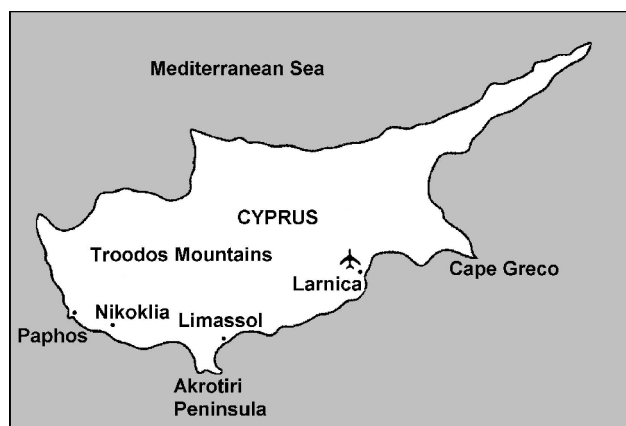


CYPRUS

relaxed birding on the charming island of Aphrodite



Situated to the south of Turkey and north of the Nile delta, the sun-kissed island of Cyprus enjoys some of the best bird migration in the eastern Mediterranean. Our visit in early April is timed to coincide with the peak of the spring migration, when the island plays host to a multitude of small passerine and wetland birds heading north. We can explore all the habitats the island has to offer, each yielding a variety of species, many in colourful and pristine spring plumage. Of primary interest are the three endemic breeding species. Cyprus Wheatear and Cyprus Warbler are both found with some frequency. The third, the Cyprus Scops Owl, has been recently elevated to full species status because of different vocalizations, slightly darker plumage and a more sedentary nature compared to its Eurasian cousin. Also of interest are four endemic subspecies – those of Coal Tit, Short-toed Treecreeper, Jay and Crossbill, some of which are considered almost far enough down the evolutionary branch to be separate species in their own right. Foremost amongst these is the endemic form of Short-toed Treecreeper, *dorotheae*, which is greyer above with a simple and shorter song, and is sometimes known as Dorothy's Treecreeper!



Cyprus Warbler

Initially based near the coast we can easily visit a number of rocky promontories, wetlands and salt lakes in search of migrants where a wide variety of larks, pipits, wagtails, warblers and buntings are all targets. Later in the tour we venture into the lofty Troodos Mountains of the interior.

Notable breeding specialities of Cyprus include Spur-winged Plover, Audouin's Gull, Great Spotted Cuckoo, Black Francolin, Masked Shrike, Spectacled Warbler and Cretzschmar's Bunting, whilst regular sought-after migrants include Pallid Harrier, Isabelline Wheatear, Little Crake, Red-throated Pipit, Ruppell's Warbler, Eastern Subalpine Warbler and Eastern Bonelli's Warbler. Such variety will ensure that each day will be bird-filled with new surprises for us to enjoy. Cyprus is the sort of island where anything can and regularly does turn up, so we need to be alert to all the possibilities. Regular vagrants include Caspian Plover, Citrine Wagtail, Demoiselle Crane and Desert Wheatear.

Whilst we will always focus on birds, most days will provide chances to embrace other aspects of the island's history and traditions. In fact, some of the foremost archaeological sites such as Paphos Headland and Curium are also amongst the major birdwatching locations, so offer dual attractions. This tour will embrace an ambience of relaxation and fun amongst the group, with birding and enjoyment of everything this enchanting island has to offer being at the heart of our time together.

ITINERARY

LARNICA

Within a one hour drive of Larnica are a wide variety of easily explored habitats including a large salt lake, home to many

Greater Flamingos and other wetland birds. The shallow pools prove attractive to migrant waders such as Little Stint, Curlew Sandpiper and Marsh Sandpiper. Nearby *Salicornia* scrub hosts breeding Eurasian Stone-curlew, Spectacled Warbler and Black Francolin, whilst passage migrants,

including various wheatears, can find rich pickings. An elevated bird hide offers vantage over two lagoons where Black-necked Grebe, Slender-billed Gull, Ruddy Shelduck, Garganey and perhaps a late Armenian or Baltic Gull may frequent the open water. Cape Greco, a scrub covered headland in the far south-east, is arguably the foremost migration watch point on the island. It has hosted rarities over the years including Steppe Grey Shrike, White-crowned and Kurdish Wheatears, Cinereous Bunting, Grey Hypocolius and many more. We can expect a large number of passerines including Cyprus, Spectacled, Eastern Subalpine and Ruppell's Warblers. Rather closer to our hotel is the Oroklini Marsh, a small yet productive wetland where a Cattle Egret colony can be observed. Spur-winged Plovers and Red-crested Pochard breed regularly and, sometimes, White-headed Duck, Squacco Heron and Little Crake can be found.

AKROTIRI

On day three we will thoroughly explore the vast salt lake at Akrotiri where flocks of Greater Flamingos sift the shallow water and the marginal pools attract a good selection of herons, including Squacco and Purple as well as Glossy Ibis. The reed fringes of the Phasouri and Zakaki Marshes might produce a secretive Little Crake, a calling Penduline Tit or even a Ferruginous Duck. Nearby the Ladies Mile Beach has breeding Kentish Plovers and, if water levels are not too high, pools here attract migrant waders such as Dunlin, Little Stint and Curlew Sandpiper, whilst Marsh Sandpiper and even Greater Sand Plover can almost be regarded as regular. The dry plain known as the Akrotiri Gravel Pits is one of the best areas on Cyprus for migrant passerines, which in turn attract Pallid Harriers, a not uncommon visitor at the time of our visit. The Curium archaeological site overlooks this whole area and is thought to have been occupied since 4000 BC. The majority of the ancient remains date from Roman times and include a magnificent and well preserved Greco-Roman amphitheatre, hot and cold Roman baths, fine mosaics and marble columns from noblemen's houses. We will spend a while exploring this famous historical site which, being on the coast, also attracts migrant birds. Just a few miles away are the imposing white Kensington Cliffs where breeding Griffon Vultures and Peregrines patrol the skies.

PAPHOS

The open ground of the Paphos Headland World Heritage Site is interspersed with small bushes, some larger trees, gardens and low walls, making it a classic migration site. Short turf provides ideal feeding areas for pipits and wheatears. Isabelline, Northern and Eastern Black-eared Wheatears and both colourful Ortolan and Cretzschmar's Buntings are often to be seen side by side, affording nice comparisons. The rocky foreshore might well reveal a lingering Greater Sand Plover, small numbers of which overwinter here. Warbler lovers will not be disappointed with excellent chances of discovering the attractive Ruppell's and Eastern Bonelli's Warblers, whilst Eastern Orphee is also possible. The ground will be carpeted in stunning spring flowers, the array of colours being matched by the various races of Yellow Wagtail which pause briefly before heading north on their journeys. We will pause frequently, allowing time for the birds to come to us, which is often the best way to achieve close and prolonged views. We must also be alert for raptors such as Pallid or Montagu's Harrier.

Good though the bird watching is, the headland is most famous for its Roman ruins which include a small amphitheatre and extensive mosaics housed in purpose built buildings for their protection. We will have time to explore this impressive archaeological park as well as look for birds.

On one day we will head into the lofty Troodos Mountains. Our route initially takes us through the beautiful Dhiarizos

Valley, where Great Spotted Cuckoos and Black Francolins can be found, before we climb up through more extensive pine forests. The high mountains will still be snow covered, but lower down the island subspecies of Short-toed Treecreeper, Coal Tit, Crossbill and Jay, all thrive in the cooler air. The drive will also give more opportunities to see both Cyprus Wheatear and Cyprus Warbler, and raptors may include Long-legged Buzzard.

Descending from the mountains we will stop for lunch at a streamside taverna. Down at the coast, the nearby Mandria fields are just one of a number of agricultural areas which provide ready access to species such as Black-headed Wagtail, Red-throated Pipit and Isabelline Wheatear.

Although Cyprus has a history of shooting and netting, it is very unlikely that we will see any of these activities in progress. It is our fervent belief that ecotourism will help the Cyprus Ornithological Society and Birdlife Cyprus in their fight to eradicate such repugnant activities. Bird Holidays feel strongly about this and for every client booking on this tour we will donate £25 to Birdlife Cyprus to continue its work.

CLIMATE AND PACE

Temperatures begin to climb during March and we can expect blue skies and warm days of around 20°C. Mornings in the Troodos Mountains will be more chilly. April is generally a dry month but the occasional short shower is possible. Basic fitness is all that is required. Breakfast will be taken at about 7.30am and lunch will normally be a picnic so we can continue to enjoy the outdoors. Walks will be short or medium length on mainly flat ground. There will be little uphill walking, even in the mountains.

ACCOMMODATION AND FOOD

Full board accommodation is provided, with two nights at the Lordos Beach Hotel near Larnaca and five nights at the rural Vasiliakos Inn. Both are of a very good standard featuring comfortable twin en-suite rooms. Please note: limited single room availability - please book early.

PRICE INCLUDES

All birdwatching excursions with Bird Holidays leader, full-board accommodation (starting with dinner on 4th, ending with lunch on 11th), soft drinks at meal times, bottled water throughout, transport throughout by minibus, reserve and archeological site entrance fees and international flights.

WHAT IS NOT INCLUDED

Travel insurance. Personal items, alcoholic drinks, laundry.

INTERNATIONAL FLIGHTS

Return flight from Manchester to Larnaca using the scheduled services of Jet2. Outbound flight departs mid-morning and return flight arrives back mid-evening. Flights are also available from Leeds/Bradford and Gatwick Airport, please call for details.

7 nights:	4th to 11th April 2018
Principal leader:	Lance Degnan
Maximum group size:	12 clients with two leader
Cost with discount (if you book before 20th December 2017):	£1810 per person sharing (£180 single supplement)
Full Cost:	£1910 per person sharing
Deposit:	£300 per person