

Honeyguide

WILDLIFE HOLIDAYS

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Crete
12 – 19 April 2005

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Holiday participants

Dorothy Vincent	Oxford
Ruth Wootton	London
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Anne Shearcroft	Cambridge
Raymond Harrison	Surrey
Sue Smith Rosie Smith	Stroud Oxfordshire
Trevor Darby Maureen Darby	Hampshire
John Durdin	Norfolk
Leaders	
Ivan Nethercoat	Beverley
Chris Gibson	Harwich

Report by Ivan Nethercoat and Chris Gibson

Illustrations by Rob Hume, except cover by Maureen Darby

Front cover: (clock-wise, from top) black-winged stilt, Italian man orchid, little crane, swallowtail butterfly, spiked star-of-Bethlehem, tree frog, Jerusalem sage, Egyptian grasshopper, hoopoe, Balkan green lizard, Bermuda buttercup, common vetch, clouded yellow butterfly.

As with all Honeyguide holidays, £25 of the price of the holiday was put towards a conservation project, in this case for the lammergeier project of the Hellenic Ornithological Society (HOS), which is based in Athens but whose work covers the whole of Greece and its islands. The conservation contribution this year of £25 per person was supplemented by gift aid through the new Honeyguide Wildlife Charitable Trust, leading to a total of €535 (£374). This brings Honeyguide's total contributions to HOS since the first Honeyguide holiday in Crete in 1995 to £5,319. A thank-you letter from HOS is at the end of this holiday report (*but not in this web version the report*).

The conservation contributions from all Honeyguide holidays totalled £33,330 at the end of 2004 and will be in the region of £38,000 by the end of 2005.

Crete 12 – 19 April 2005

Tuesday 12 April - the way there

All were safely gathered in at Gatwick, in spite of some ‘terminal confusion’ (when we arrived, our expected flight didn’t exist!), and not even a further bout of airport mayhem, with unannounced switches to the luggage carousels, nor temperatures of only some 10°C could dampen our enthusiasm for the week ahead. As we travelled by coach to Plakias, a glorious sunset over the north coast, before we plunged deep into the gloom of the mountains, served to put us in holiday mood, aided and abetted on arrival by an excellent taverna meal.

Wednesday 13 April - Plakias & Kotsiphou Gorge

Following the long flight and the adjustment of our body clocks, this was an easy day with little minibus travel and a chance to orientate ourselves around our home for the next week. However for the early birds, a minibus drive along the bay allowed us to cover more ground before breakfast. A small river enters the sea at Plakias, and this is a favourite place to start. A lone little egret was fishing alongside a little ringed plover and a pied wagtail. This example of the British subspecies was a long way from home, but has frequently been seen by this bridge on previous Honeyguide trips.

Farther on, the rough ground by the beach is often home to other migrants and today we were greeted by a superb black-headed wagtail, fresh in from Africa and *en route* to the Balkans. From the fences, whinchats were hunting insects, resplendent in fresh breeding plumage, while the familiar but no less colourful goldfinches twittered away feeding on seeds from the roadside plants. Crested larks marked our path and sang from the dusty fields, and a little botanical exploration produced the first endemic of the trip, a splendid specimen of the Cretan wall lettuce (an unusual member of the bellflower family), growing out of the roadside kerb. All this under a bright sky alongside the Mediterranean: a good way to start the day!

Following a continental breakfast with some of the best bread to be found anywhere, we all set off through Plakias (checking out the sparrows – Italian not house) and up a road leading into the valley behind the town. After a few minutes we were strolling up a path alongside giant reeds and olive groves. Cetti’s warblers gave their indignant call at our presence while remaining extremely elusive. The roadside was a blaze of colour with yellow Jerusalem sage and Bermuda buttercup, red poppies, and a purple haze of viper’s-bugloss, shrubby sage and branched broomrape, while Ray discovered a patch of the minute (but attractive) endemic *Solenopsis minuta* ssp. *annua*.

Buzzards accompanied us as we wound our way up the path to the remains of a Venetian mill. Pied flycatcher, purple heron and green sandpiper were along the river, ravens and griffon vultures overhead and everywhere the songs of chaffinch and great tit. As the sun grew ever warmer, so the insects were spurred into action, including speckled wood (of the southern form), wall brown, holly blue, violet carpenter-bee, blue-winged grasshopper and several Egyptian locusts, posing well and displaying their distinctively striped eyes.

The mill is now a ruin, but imposing as it fends off the encroachment of nature. It rests in a narrow part of the valley, also the residence of blue rock thrush, the male making frequent trips from one pinnacle to another to sing out the boundary to his territory. Overhead a buzzard circled with a large Balkan green lizard dangling from its talons, our first reptile, dead but identifiable by default, and again there were masses of flowers including *Arum concinatum*, Cretan viper’s-grass and our first orchids, a few spikes of small-flowered tongue-orchid and Marengo orchid.

Once at the mill we doubled back part way and took the minibuses for a short drive up the hill to Mirthios, and a taverna aptly named Panorama. The view across the valley to Plakias and the sea is

glorious and a good lookout for birds. Today the wind kept the small ones down among the trees but a peregrine made a brief fly-past for a few keen-eyed diners.

Following lunch we made good use of the vehicles and headed further into the gorge. This is an area where the near-endemic Cretan arum grows below the wings of eagles and vultures. This gorge, the Kotsiphou, is much smaller than many on the island but still provides valuable updraughts of air for large birds, and shelter and crevices for plants. The arums were in good form right along the road. Another pied flycatcher waited for insects on a riverside perch, and we took the chance to explore a previously untravelled (by Honeyguide) road that took us behind the range of hills, through small villages and among wonderful scenery. The arum was extremely common here as were naked-man orchids. Leaving the vehicles to examine a fine specimen soon showed it to be merely one of very many growing just off the road. A distant but obliging pair of hoopoes perched in a tree and allowed everyone to get very good telescope views of this sometimes difficult species. Heavy skies and a cool wind then sent us back to the vehicles and the hotel, but not before the dramatic, sun-splashed cloudscape was captured on many a camera.



Thursday 14 April - Kourtaliotiko Gorge & Spili

A very wet and windy night left a few of us hoping for migrant birds blown onto the coast, so despite the wet the early crew set off before breakfast full of hope. But the apparently ideal conditions didn't deliver: it was a very quiet morning in Plakias. A short drive on to Damnoni was equally disappointing, with the exception of a singing great reed warbler and an unusually confiding Cetti's warbler. As we headed back, a marsh harrier was struggling across the bay, on migration and looking very different to the views we tend to get across a reedbed in the UK. Here, perhaps, was a sign of things to come.

After breakfast the heavy clouds appeared to lift as we headed for Kourtaliotiko gorge. The entrance to the gorge allows good views across the mouth and also into the caves of nesting griffon vultures. Within minutes of arriving, Chris spotted two raptors over the ridge which obligingly came lower out of the clouds and flew in front of the cliff face revealing a distinctive white patch across the shoulders - a key feature of Bonelli's eagle, a rare bird across Europe and seldom seen in this gorge. These were followed by three high-flying red-footed falcons, and then a few minutes later John asked for help with a large raptor that was "not a griffon". Sure enough it certainly was not - very large with a falcon-like profile, it was a lammergeier, a star bird of Crete. Meanwhile the griffon vultures were busy feeding their young, nicely on view in the telescope, apparently unperturbed by rain that sent us scurrying back into the vehicles for shelter. All this and a superb male black-eared wheatear on the hillsides clothed in spiny surge and thorny burnet made it a very productive stop, interrupted only by a couple of sharp showers

A short drive farther on there are well-made steps down to a chapel in the bottom of the gorge. So with waterproofs donned and hats strapped down we descended. The route gave a great opportunity to see the flora of the gorge walls (several of the plants being endemic to the island) and a few of its feathered inhabitants. Wild cyclamen, turban buttercup, Cretan gorge comfrey and ricotia looked sad in the rain, but a male chukar was keen to tell us he was still king of his territory as we viewed him during a downpour from the cover of a shelter at the end of the path.

From the gorge, the back road to Spili climbs high over the hills to give impressive views back into the

canyon. Pictures of the view and a few associated orchids (including fan-lipped) were duly taken before heading to lunch by the fountains in Spili, for some involving *gyros*, the local fast food. From the car park, a largish raptor was struggling along in the wind, showing very distinctive white patches to the base of the primary feathers on the upper wing – a long-legged buzzard, albeit a deceptively dark-plumaged bird.

Then it was off to Spili Bumps, an unassuming name for an amazing place. What was once a quiet stop in the middle of nowhere is rapidly becoming a world famous site. Two other English groups were there plus a fifty-strong coach party from Australia! The floral display was as good as ever, but it was obvious that the extra pressure had resulted in some plants being damaged. Some twenty species of orchids were located in just a couple of hours, including *Orchis boryi*, few-flowered and naked-man in unimaginable numbers, along with a confusing array of *Ophrys* species, the leaders' nightmare! And there was plenty more as well, including a meadow full of the endemic red tulip *Tulipa doerfleri*.

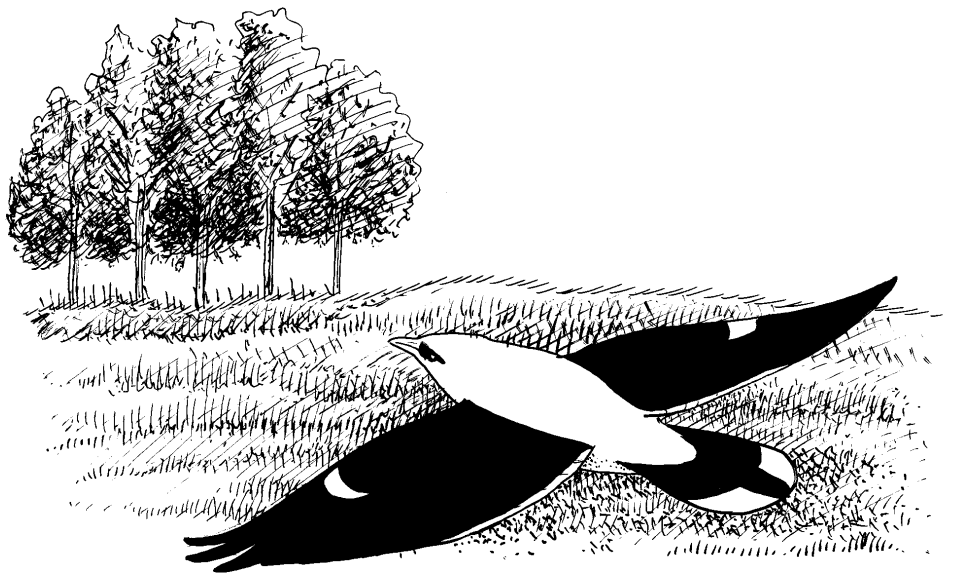
While the orchids were keeping botanists busy, the birders wandered off in search of avian distractions. Despite the wind there was a lot to see – skylark and short-toed larks tested our patience as they fed behind clumps of earth; flocks of sparrows and corn buntings gave a feel of what England's countryside was like a few generations ago; and among the familiar was the exotic and unusual with another superb black-eared wheatear, tawny pipits and, feeding in the open, a nightingale. So with a contented feeling we set off back to Plakias and another excellent taverna meal.

Friday 15 April - Phaestos & Agia Triada

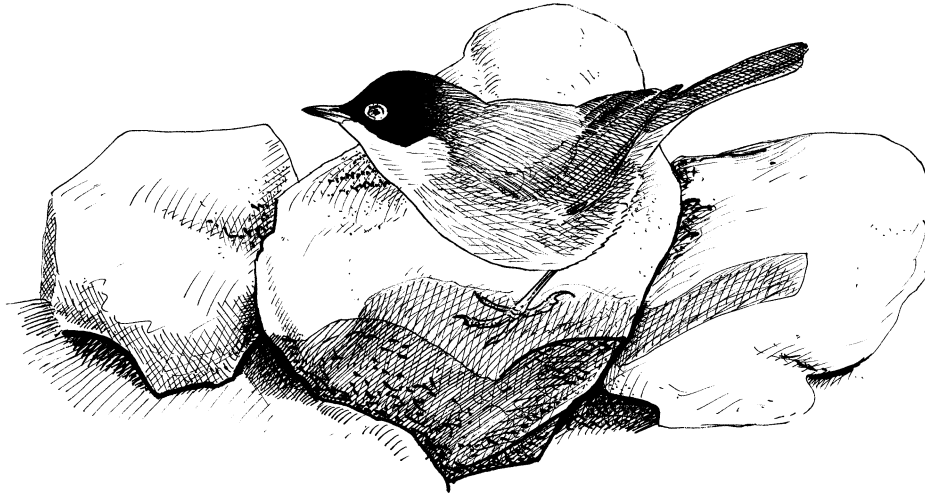
The drive to Phaestos takes one through some fine Cretan scenery and alongside the mountain range of Psiloritis, still draped in snow. Phaestos is the second most important Minoan site on Crete. Sited on a hill over a fertile plain it is a magnificent place and easy to see why it was a desired location. One can only guess what the wildlife on Crete was like when the palace was occupied some 4000 years ago.

A walk up to the site yielded few birds in the wind, apart from the shrill call of a red-throated pipit overhead. While it was not seen again, it was tantalising proof of migrants being around. A short coffee break allowed us to take in the panorama before us and also to catch up on migrating hirundines, including a red-rumped swallow, and a confiding southern comma, basking out of the breeze.

Just around the corner, a small road heads off to the Minoan summer palace of Agia Triada. This roadside offers splendid views across the plain and a host of flowers. As some of the group set off for the plants, a few stayed to try and see the red-rumped swallow better. Ruth's keen eyes spotted a couple of odd birds flying back to Phaestos – golden orioles! A great find, they obligingly sat in a tree giving clear views in the telescope. For a bright yellow and black bird they are extremely well camouflaged and this was a rare treat.



Our luck with obliging birds continued with a beautiful male Sardinian warbler (*below*) perching out in the open, its red eye ring clear to for all to see. A short distance on, an impressive dragon arum was close to being in full flower; under the shade of a tree this was going to be a few days away, but not so a magnificent eastern tongue-orchid, in full glory. The plants on the roadside verges were a patchwork of delights, but perhaps short-lived as further down it seemed as though maintenance crews were set to strip all roadside vegetation in an attempt to improve the road. We shall see what happened next year perhaps.



On reaching Agia Triada, lunch was overdue, among the fragrant and vibrant botanical glories of Cretan ebony and cistus, while a scarce swallowtail repeatedly perched in front of us. The site overlooks the wide fertile valley of the Geropotamus river, an area of intensive agriculture, and perhaps not unconnected the river itself was dry. A pleasant walk down to the river produced a cuckoo, calling and flying among the olives, where a spotted flycatcher was hawking insects, and buzzards and kestrels riding the winds with ease. There was rather little in flower, due to the use of herbicides, apart from the ubiquitous Bermuda buttercup and a few tassel hyacinths, although the number of dried stems of giant orchid were an indication of earlier-season riches.

Saturday 16 April - Agia Reservoir & Omalos Plateau

Agia Reservoir is probably one of the best birdwatching sites on the island, an artificial lake that has matured nicely with reeds, gently sloping sides, mature trees on the edges and, for us, a dam with easy access and a new development of one of the best-placed tavernas in Crete. Walking up from the car park one is always greeted with a hive of activity: today it was the swallows and alpine swifts swooping down to drink among the many coot and little grebes. Closer inspection brought to light five garganeys, squacco herons, great reed warbler and sedge warbler; several huge Balkan terrapins basked in the sun; while black-winged stilt and little stint together on the edge of the dam spanned the entire range of wader form and function. The stars of this site however are the crakes: little crakes are often seen here, sometimes quite close. As it was we were there on a day with few other people and the crakes were very visible, one female in particular feeding on the edge of the water immediately below our feet! Amazing views and the best Honeyguide has had of these charismatic little birds.

Lunch was taken in the taverna overlooking the water. Our group overwhelmed the lone chef but it was important we were seen to be providing custom to them and that we were there because of the wildlife – ecotourism in action. The sound of tree frogs accompanied our meal for a while, a striking accompaniment to excellent Greek yoghurt and honey. Ivan managed to locate one for good views and photographs, while a male Balkan green lizard looked on.

28 kilometres farther along the road was our next destination: not far, but a world away in landscape contrast. The Omalos Plateau is a depression in the heart of the high mountains, twice the height of anything we have in the UK. The road snakes its way up via a series of hairpin bends, ending up among the forested mountain slopes before dropping down onto the plain of Omalos. Such plateaux are a distinctive part of the Cretan landscape, created through the faulting of massive blocks, an indication of the turbulent geological history of the area. Some, such as the famous Lassithi plateau farther east, are very fertile and intensively agricultural, while others like Omalos are more stony, used for grazing sheep, and remarkably rich in wildlife.

Omalos is also the route to the start of the well-known trek down the gorge of Samaria. A taverna perched on the edge of the gorge provides a great lookout across the void. The owner came over to us and redirected the telescope to rocks on the opposite side of the gorge, stepped back and proudly announced 'Kri Kri!'. This is the wild goat of Crete, possibly native or an ancient introduction, a very rare animal and seldom seen. Even when shown where it was, it was remarkably difficult to pick out, a combination of colour that blended into the rocks, with the realisation that the far side of the gorge was a lot farther away than it first appeared. But with perseverance, most managed to see it through the 'scope, a female which had given birth on the previous morning - a good view of a rare animal and a new addition to the Honeyguide list. While we were watching this, our first Scops owl called from distant trees further up the valley. Then to the high mountain plants, a scramble around the hillside produced some lovely sprawling, flowering patches of *Prunus prostrata*, while the most obvious species in flower, a mouse-eared chickweed, proved to be the endemic *Cerastium scaposum*.

By now it was late afternoon, and time to start the long drive home, but not before stopping on the plateau for the wild tulips, two species forming pink drifts in areas fenced off from the incessant attention of grazing sheep and goats. Woodlarks and tree pipits were in the hedges and scrub, and the very long-dead body of a badger lay on the road. Striking a blow for British eccentricity, Basil realised it may contain things of interest for a colleague of his back home. Wielding the corpse in a manner reminiscent of our ancient ancestors and bringing it back down to earth with a thump he disturbed several beetles from their active recycling duties, and popped them into a pot for identification on distant shores. Whether these will ever be ticked again by subsequent Honeyguide groups is perhaps doubtful but they will provide an interesting addition to our list of things seen on the island!

Sunday 17 April - Moni Preveli & free half day

First stop today was Souda, a couple of kilometres west of Plakias, at the mouth of a small stream. The stream may be small, but it clearly modifies the environment sufficiently to allow the establishment of one of the really special plants of Crete, the Cretan palm. Until recently considered to be endemic, this distinctive palm with squat, often branched trunks gives a strong indication of one reason for Crete's botanical richness – it is at the crossroads of three continents.

Next, back through Plakias to Preveli. This is a special place. If you are of a certain age then its association with the war makes it a fascinating place to visit. For the naturalist it is also a place of tremendous interest and always holds the prospect of something extraordinary. The monastery where British soldiers were hidden before escaping the German army in submarines is placed on a south-facing headland covered in scrub, where the ground gives way to a small valley in which birds can find food and shelter.

Not only is the headland a good site but the road up to the monastery passes alongside a river with well-vegetated banks of giant reed, plane and storax trees (the last in full, beautiful flower), before passing the old monastery. A quick stop in a calm corner, out of the fierce wind, by the old monastery was interesting botanically, but quiet for birds.

Moving out to the headland, the wind grew ever stronger. The sky which had dawned clear was

beginning to develop a yellow smudge. The hoped-for small birds were apparently absent, keeping deep in cover due to the strength of the wind, and as we progressed it soon became clear that we were not wanted on this path as the farmer had blocked the way. On the way back we waited by a calm area with mature trees to see if the flycatchers had also found this site: the headland is an area where they are often found, and while we had seen several pied flycatchers no collareds had yet been seen on the trip. Luck was on our side as after a few minutes watching bare branches a superb, smart male collared flycatcher appeared, perched for a good telescope view before disappearing from view again.

By now the weather was also turning cool and clouds were obscuring the hilltops: the headland was not the place to be. A retreat to the calmer area by the river and alongside our lunchtime taverna was called for. By the time we reached the taverna and had set off for a walk along the river it became clear these were not clouds at all but was in fact a huge dust storm blown over from Africa. It was so fine it was impossible to feel or see close up except for the fact that our mouths dried up. The sky was yellow, visibility was reduced to a few hundred metres, and the light from the sun was so heavily filtered that the disc of the sun appeared blue. Moreover, its strength was so subdued that it was possible to look at it through the 'scope (don't try this at home!) and see a large sun-spot. In the river two black-headed wagtails appeared and we were left wondering what else was being blown across on this strange and seriously dramatic weather phenomenon. Dust storms are regular events on the island, although the first time such a storm had coincided with a Honeyguide trip, and this was clearly a big one – headline news on the local TV that night.

After a good lunch at the taverna we split into two groups, shoppers and explorers. Unfortunately, the dust storm got worse and while we explored some interesting areas the birds were very quiet, apart from numerous swallows feeding along the ground as their airborne insect food had been forced low down by the dust. Meanwhile the shoppers returned to Plakias and were treated to an amazing sight of electric-blue waves crashing on the beach amid the murk.

Later that afternoon, the dust storm was still very dense but overhead the distinctive sounds of incoming bee-eaters could be heard. But seeing them was impossible, and we resigned ourselves to admiring a woodchat shrike instead, although Ann on a solitary walk was lucky enough to see a troop of twenty or more glossy ibises heading in from the sea. And despite our world being bathed in yellow, the botanists met up for an exploration of the local dunes, finding a diverse mix of the familiar (sea spurge and sea-rocket), the attractive (*Silene colorata* and sea medick), and the endemic (a large patch of the grape-hyacinth *Muscari spreitzenhoferi*).

The evening meal was in a very rural taverna just beyond the Kotsiphou gorge. Here the food is chosen direct from the kitchen but as we were unsure we opted for a selection of everything, which was very well received. One of the local foods served was 'onions from the mountains'. These small objects did indeed look like onions but tasted, at least to me, very bitter and not at all onion-like. Chris did some investigation on our return and found out that one of the local foods is mountain onions, or wild tulip bulbs - the same species we had been admiring at Spili.

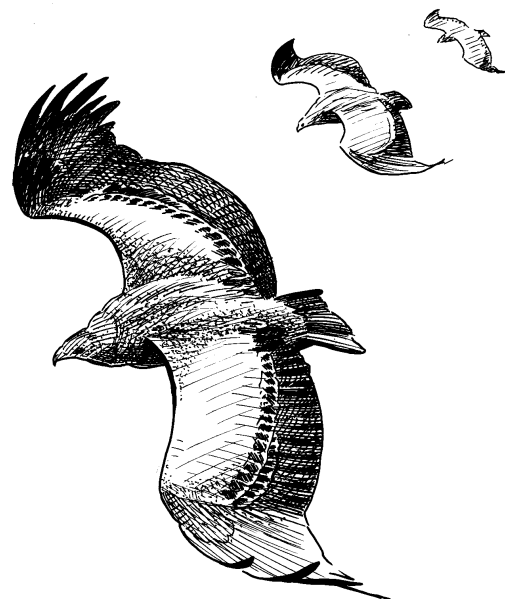
Monday 18 April - Frangocastello & Imbros Gorge

At 7am it was still 'misty' but noticeably thinner than yesterday. Through the dust the sun was clearer and from the beach it felt as though we could see the edge of the cloud. At 'egret bridge' things seemed pretty much as normal but farther along the beach it became clear that the dust cloud had carried with it numerous yellow wagtails. Blue-, black- and grey-headed were all feeding among the low vegetation and all in wonderful plumage. In among them a lone red-throated pipit appeared, with a fine red throat too, a good bird and satisfying finally to see one, after having only heard one earlier at Phaestos. By breakfast, the dust had all but gone and we were left with a bright, calm morning, only the cars and windows witness to our amazing African encounter. But it will not be forgotten, not least by those whose camera, binoculars and lungs were penetrated, nor those whose photos from the day before still

bear a strong yellow cast. For those who doubt the drama of this event, simply access the following website for a series of images of the day: <http://www.explorecrete.com/various/sahara-crete.htm>

Frangocastello lies to the west of Plakias on a large plain. Getting there means taking a delightful road through small villages up steep hills and along a superb stretch of coastline. Thirteen griffon vultures (*right*) greeted us as we left Plakias behind and headed on with the sea on our left and mountains on our right. A short stop along the way for wild lupins also allowed us to see another broomrape, the dramatic purple *Orobanche lavandulacea*, a very obliging Erhard's wall lizard and several new butterflies, including dappled white and Lang's short-tailed blue.

As the road approached our destination a wonderful male Montagu's harrier drifted in over the sea and on up through a mountain pass via our vehicles. By the time we reached Frangocastello the wind had returned with some force. Stopping at a quieter part of the plain proved a blustery experience but did allow us to see several dragon arums in full flower. Tawny pipits and short-toed larks were keeping low down among the scrub and along the road another excellent black-eared wheatear showed very well alongside the bus.



A walk along the plain from the castle was quiet for birds except for seven squacco herons flying over the sea, apparently arguing as to which bit of beach was best to land on. The startling white wings against a deep blue sea in bright sunlight was a most spectacular sight. Nearby Chris disturbed a quail from its hiding place among the scrub. That was a rare event but what was more remarkable is that it was disturbed from the same place as on the previous year's Honeyguide trip!

After lunch we headed to the Imbros Gorge in the hope of some shelter and a Bonelli's eagle or two. The road alongside the gorge is a spectacular drive full of hairpin bends and steep climbs that give a fantastic view back down to the wide plain of Frangocastello. As we got into the wooded area toward the top of the gorge, we came to one probably the best café on the island - a polished wood cabin-style structure, perched precariously on the edge of the gorge. The views were spectacular, and the owner only too pleased to show off his military collection and exchange stories of the war (having ascertained we were not German - some memories persist despite decades of European unity).

This was our last new venue of the trip and our turning point before heading home. As we were getting ready to go a pair of Bonelli's eagles flew down the gorge below the skyline giving wonderful views and effectively saying goodbye.

The Gio Mar got the vote for best taverna of the week, and so we returned there for our last meal. A table outside was full of warmth and cheer despite the blustery weather clawing at the windbreak behind us. The food as always was wonderful, and provided the ideal accompaniment to our collective reflections on the many and varied high points of a splendid holiday.

Tuesday 19 April - the way home...

As ever on these trips, Plakias was calm and bathed in sunlight for our departure. The coach retraced its route back to Heraklion and confirmed the fact that we had spent our week in one of the most attractive parts of the island. Thanks for your good company, your stories and your enthusiasm. Thanks to you the Hellenic Ornithological Society is 500 Euros better off to help keep Crete the way we remember it.

Ivan & Chris

BIRD LIST CRETE**12-19 April 2005**

Little grebe	20+ Agia reservoir
Mediterranean shearwater	3 seen very distant from Plakias beach
Squacco heron	Flock of seven in off the sea at Frangocastello on 18 th ; 1 perched in tree at Venetian Bridge, Prevelli; 2 at Agia
Little egret	Single bird at Plakias river most of the week; Agia
Grey heron	1 reported at Giorgiopoulos, seen from the car
Purple heron	1 at Plakias, disturbed from the river on Mirthios footpath; 1 perched in trees by Venetian bridge en route to Moni Prevelli
Glossy ibis	20+ flew in off the sea during the dust storm
Mallard	A few at Agia
Garganey	c 6 at Agia
Shoveler	A few at Agia
Wigeon	1 at Agia
Pochard	1 at Agia
Lammergeier	One bird seen well at Kourtaliotiko
Griffon vulture	Seen regularly over hills. Birds on nest with young at southern end of Kourtaliotiko Gorge
Marsh harrier	One at Plakias on 13 th ; female at Agia
Montagu's harrier	1 male over the road very close just before Frangocastello, continued flying over the mountains
Bonelli's eagle	Pairs in the Kourtaliotiko and Imbros Gorges
Buzzard	Common and widespread
Long-legged buzzard	1 over Spili
Kestrel	Common and widespread
Red-footed falcon	3 over Kourtaliotiko Gorge
Peregrine	1 from taverna in Mirthios
Chukar	1 at Kourtaliotiko; also seen behind Kotsiphou
Quail	1 flushed from undergrowth at Frangocastello (almost exactly the same place as last year!)
Little crane	Several at Agia reservoir
Moorhen	Several at Agia; pair along road to Damnoni
Coot	Many at Agia reservoir
Black-winged stilt	1 at Agia
Little ringed plover	Plakias; Agia
Wood sandpiper	1 heard at Agia
Green sandpiper	1 behind Plakias
Common sandpiper	Plakias beach and river
Spotted redshank	1 at Agia
Redshank	1 at Frangocastello
Little stint	1 at Agia
Yellow-legged gull	Common and widespread
Black-headed gull	Agia
Rock dove	Several apparently wild birds at Kotsiphou Gorge
Wood pigeon	Seen regularly below Mirthios
Collared dove	Common and seen most days in ones and twos
Scops owl	Heard above Samaria
Cuckoo	The only sighting was of one from Agia Triada flying among fields in the valley below
Swift	Seen in good numbers each day
Alpine swift	Seen most days often giving very good views at low level
Kingfisher	1 at Plakias
Bee-eater	Heard over Plakias, during dust storm
Hoopoe	Hard to find, with just two birds behind Kotsiphou. Reported to be breeding in the valley behind the hotel along the footpath to Mirthios

Short-toed lark	A few at Spili and Frangocastello
Crested lark	Common and widespread
Skylark	Elusive small flock of c 15 birds at Spili Bumps
Woodlark	Spili and Omalos
Sand martin	Several at Agia
Crag martin	Regular in Kourtaliotiko and Kotsiphou gorges
Swallow	Many flocks each day passing through
Red-rumped swallow	Good views of one bird at Moni Preveli
House martin	Many hundreds passing through
Tree pipit	Sightings become more common throughout the week
Red-throated pipit	One heard at Phaestos; one seen well with yellow wagtails at Plakias after the dust storm
Tawny pipit	Spili and Plakias
Yellow wagtail	Blue-headed, Black-headed and Grey-headed males at Plakias
White & pied wagtail	White at Kourtaliotiko; male pied at river mouth at Plakias. This seems to be a regular spot for this subspecies
Wren	Heard occasionally throughout the week
Nightingale	1 at Spili Bumps
Whinchat	Several at Plakias after rain and on reeds at Agia
Stonechat	Seen well most days
Wheatear	4 at Frangocastello, individuals elsewhere
Black-eared wheatear	1 in Kourtaliotiko, 2 at Moni Preveli, 1 at Frangocastello
Blue rock thrush	A pair in Kourtaliotiko Gorge; Kotsiphou Gorge, and Moni Preveli
Blackbird	Common and widespread
Cetti's warbler	Regularly heard singing but rarely seen. 1 seen very well after very heavy rain at Damnoni
Sedge warbler	Several at Agia
Reed warbler	1 at Damnoni
Great reed warbler	One at Damnoni, one at Agia
Sardinian warbler	Common and widespread
Blackcap	1 singing in Spili car park, female at Souda
Wood warbler	1 at Moni Preveli
Chiffchaff	1 at Souda
Goldcrest	Imbros Gorge
Spotted flycatcher	Only 3 sightings
Pied flycatcher	Mirthios and Moni Preveli
Collared flycatcher	Only 1 bird seen this year, a male at Moni Preveli
Blue tit	Common and widespread
Great tit	Common and widespread
Golden oriole	Excellent views of two males at Phaestos
Woodchat shrike	Singles at Plakias
Jay	One seen in pines along the road toward the top of the Imbros Gorge road
Chough	Distant views at Samaria gorge
Jackdaw	Common in gorges
Hooded crow	Common and widespread
Raven	Seen in every gorge and often during journeys
Italian sparrow	Common and widespread
Spanish sparrow	Seen occasionally
Chaffinch	Common and widespread
Greenfinch	Common and widespread
Goldfinch	Common and widespread
Serin	Plakias
Linnet	A few birds at Spili only
Cirl bunting	1 singing briefly behind Plakias. Seen well behind Kotsiphou
Ortolan bunting	One at Spili and another seen west of Plakias
Corn bunting	Scarcer than previous years: none at Plakias, but a large flock at Spili

PLANT LISTS

The following list comprises the more obvious plants seen and identified during the week.

Key and nomenclature: Latin names of plants generally follow those used in *Flora of the Cretan Area* (Turland *et al.* 1993); any alternative names in common usage are given in brackets. English names are given only where one is in general use. Localities are not given: special plants in special places are mentioned in the text.

* Endemic to Crete

Introduced and not native to Crete and cultivated or planted species

FERNS AND ALLIES

<i>Ceterach officinarum</i>	Rustyback Fern
<i>Cheilanthes acrosticta (maderensis)</i>	
<i>Equisetum ramosissimum</i>	
<i>Pteridium aquilinum</i>	Bracken
<i>Selaginella denticulata</i>	Mediterranean Club-moss

CONIFERS

Cupressaceae - Cypress Family

<i>Cupressus sempervirens horizontalis</i>	Cypress
<i>C. sempervirens sempervirens</i>	Funeral Cypress
<i>Juniperus oxycedrus ssp. macrocarpa</i>	

Pinaceae - Pine Family

# <i>Araucaria araucana</i>	Norfolk Island Pine
<i>Pinus brutia</i>	

FLOWERING PLANTS

Dicotyledons

Aceraceae - Maple Family

Acer sempervirens

Aizoaceae - Mezembryanthemum Family

Carpobrotus edulis Hottentot Fig

Anacardiaceae - Pistachio Family

Pistacia lentiscus Mastic Tree
P. terebinthus Turpentine Tree

Apiaceae - Carrot Family

Crithmum maritimum Rock Samphire
Daucus carota Wild Carrot
Eryngium campestre Field Eryngo
Ferula communis Giant Fennel
Foeniculum vulgare Fennel
Lagoecia cuminoides
Oenanthe pimpinelloides Corky-fruited Water-dropwort
Pseudorhiza pumila
Scandix pecten-veneris Shepherd's Needle

Smyrniium perfoliatum Perfoliate Alexanders
Tordylium apulum Mediterranean Hartwort

Apocynaceae - Oleander Family

Nerium oleander Oleander

Araliaceae - Ivy Family

Hedera helix Ivy

Asteraceae - Daisy Family

Anthemis chia
Anthemis rigida ssp. *rigida* Rayless Chamomile
Asteriscus (Pallenis) spinosus
Bellis annua Annual Daisy
Bubonium (Astericus) aquaticum Yellow Sea Aster
Calendula arvensis Field Marigold
Carlina corymbosa
**Centaurea idaea*
Chrysanthemum coronarium Crown Daisy
Chrysanthemum segetum Corn Marigold
**Crepis cretica*
Crupina crupinastrum
Dittrichia viscosa
Filago (Evax) pygmaea
F. pyramidata Broad-leaved Cudweed
Galactites tomentosa Mediterranean Thistle
Geropogon (Tragopogon) hybridus
Helichrysum (stoechas ssp.) *barrelieri* Curry-plant
Leontodon tuberosus
Notobasis syriaca
**Onopordum bracteatum* ssp. *creticum* Shrubby Cudweed
Phagnalon graecum
Picnomon acarna
Ptilostemon chamaepeuce
Reichardia picroides
Scorzonera cretica Cretan Viper's-grass
Senecio vulgaris Groundsel
Silybum marianum Milk Thistle
Tolpis barbata
Tragopogon sinuatus (porrifolius) Salsify

Berberidaceae - Barberry Family

Berberis cretica

Boraginaceae - Borage Family

Anchusa hybrida (undulata)
A. italica (azurea) Large Blue Alkanet
Borago officinalis Borage
Cerithe major Honeywort
Cynoglossum columnae
C. creticum Blue Hound's-tongue
Echium angustifolium Narrow-leaved Bugloss
E. arenarium
E. italicum Pale Bugloss
E. plantagineum Purple Viper's-bugloss

Myosotis incrassata
Onosma graecum
Symphytum creticum (*Procopiana cretica*)

Golden-drops
Cretan gorge comfrey

Brassicaceae - Cabbage Family

Aethionema saxatile
Arabis verna
Aubrieta deltoidea
Biscutella didyma
Brassica nigra
Cakile maritima
Capsella bursa-pastoris
Erophila verna
Eruca sativa
Erucaria hispanica
Hirschfeldia incana
Matthiola tricuspidata
**Ricotia cretica*
Sinapis arvensis

Burnt Candytuft
Spring Rock-cress
Aubrieta
Buckler Mustard
Black Mustard
Sea-rocket
Shepherd's-purse
Whitlow-grass

Hoary Mustard
Three-horned Stock
Ricotia
Charlock

Cactaceae - Cactus Family

Opuntia ficus-barbarica (*O. ficus-indica*)

Prickly Pear

Campanulaceae - Bellflower Family

Campanula erinus
** Petromarula pinnata*
**Solenopsis minuta* ssp. *annua* (*Laurentia gasparrinii*)

Cretan Wall Lettuce

Capparaceae - Caper Family

Capparis spinosa

Caryophyllaceae - Pink Family

Arenaria muralis
Cerastium comatum
 **C. scaposum*
Herniaria hirsuta
Petrorhagia velutina (*Kohlrauschia velutina*)
Silene colorata
 S. gallica
 S. noctiflora
 S. vulgaris

Small-flowered Catchfly
Night-flowering Catchfly
Bladder Campion

Chenopodiaceae - Spinach Family

Atriplex halimus

Shrubby Orache

Cistaceae - Rockrose Family

Cistus (incanus ssp.) creticus
 C. salvifolius
Fumana thymifolia
Tuberaria guttata

Cretan Cistus
Sage-Leaved Cistus
Thyme-leaved Fumana
Spotted Rock-rose

Clusiaceae – St John's-wort Family

Hypericum empetrifolium ssp. *empetrifolium*

Shrubby St. John's-wort

Convolvulaceae - Bindweed Family

Convolvulus althaeoides

Mallow-leaved Bindweed

Crassulaceae - Stonecrop Family*Crassula alata**Sedum litoreum***S. praesidis**S. rubens**Umbilicus parviflorus*

Small-Flowered Navelwort

Dipsacaceae - Scabious Family*Knautia dipsacifolia***Ericaceae - Heather Family***Arbutus unedo*

Strawberry-tree

Erica arborea

Tree-heath

Euphorbiaceae - Spurge Family*Euphorbia acanthothamnus*

Greek Spiny Spurge

E. characias

Mediterranean Spurge

E. dendroides

Tree Spurge

E. helioscopia

Sun Spurge

E. paralias

Sea Spurge

Ricinus communis

Castor Oil Plant

Mercurialis annua

Annual Mercury

Fabaceae - Pea Family# *Acacia* spp.

Mimosa

*Anagyris foetida**Anthyllus hermanniae**Anthyllus vulneraria* ssp. *rubriflora*

Red Kidney Vetch

*Astragalus angustifolius**Bituminaria (Psoralea) bituminosa*

Pitch Trefoil

Calicotome villosa

Hairy Thorny Broom

Cercis siliquastrum

Judas Tree

Ceratonia siliqua

Carob Tree

Coronilla scorpioides

Scorpion-vetch

* *Ebenus cretica*

Shrubby Sainfoin (Cretan Ebony)

*Genista acanthoclada**Hymenocarpus circinnatus*

Disk Trefoil

*Lathyrus setifolius**Lotus halophilus**L. peregrinus**Lupinus micranthus*

Hairy Lupin

Medicago arabica

Spotted Medick

*M. disciformis**M. littoralis**M. lupulina*

Black Medick

M. marina

Sea Medick

M. orbicularis

Large Disk Medick

M. polymorpha

Toothed Medick

*Melilotus sulcatus**Onobrychis aequidentata**O. caput-galli*

Cock's-comb Sainfoin

Ononis reclinata

Small Rest-harrow

*O. viscosa**Robina pseudoacacia*

False acacia

Securigera (Coronilla) cretica

Cretan Crown Vetch

<i>S. securidaca</i>	
<i>Spartium junceum</i>	Spanish Broom
<i>Tetragonolobus purpureus</i>	Asparagus Pea
<i>Trifolium angustifolium</i>	
<i>T. campestre</i>	Hop Trefoil
<i>T. nigrescens</i>	
<i>T. resupinatum</i>	Reversed Clover
<i>T. stellatum</i>	Starry Clover
<i>T. tomentosum</i>	Woolly Trefoil
<i>T. uniflorum</i>	One-Flowered Clover
<i>Trigonella balansae</i>	
<i>Tripodion (Anthyllis) tetraphyllum</i>	Bladder Vetch
<i>Vicia bithynica</i>	Bithynian Vetch
<i>V. hybrida</i>	Hairy Yellow Vetchling
<i>V. lathyroides</i>	Spring Vetch
<i>V. lutea</i>	Yellow Vetch
<i>V. sativa</i>	Common Vetch
<i>V. villosa</i>	Fodder Vetch
Fagaceae - Oak Family	
<i>Quercus coccifera</i>	Kermes Oak
Fumariaceae - Fumitory Family	
<i>Fumaria macrocarpa</i>	
Gentianaceae - Gentian Family	
<i>Blackstonia perfoliata</i>	Yellow-wort
<i>Centaurium maritimum</i>	Yellow Century
<i>C. pulchellum</i>	Lesser Century
Geraniaceae - Geranium Family	
<i>Erodium cicutarium</i>	Common Stork's-bill
<i>E. gruinum</i>	Long-beaked Stork's-bill
<i>E. malacoides</i>	
<i>Geranium dissectum</i>	Cut-leaved Crane's-bill
<i>G. lucidum</i>	Shining Crane's-bill
<i>G. molle</i>	Dove's-foot Crane's-bill
<i>G. purpureum</i>	Little Robin
<i>G. rotundifolium</i>	Round-leaved Crane's-bill
Lamiaceae - Mint Family	
<i>Ballota pseudodictamnus</i>	
<i>Coridothymus (Thymus) capitatus</i>	Shrubby Thyme
<i>Lamium amplexicaule</i>	Henbit Dead-nettle
<i>Lavandula stoechas</i>	French Lavender
<i>Marrubium vulgare</i>	White Horehound
<i>Mentha longifolia</i>	
<i>Phlomis fruticosa</i>	Jerusalem Sage
* <i>P. lanata</i>	
<i>Prasium majus</i>	
<i>Salvia fruticosa</i>	Shrubby Sage
<i>S. verbenaca</i>	Wild Clary
<i>S. viridis</i>	
<i>Satureja (Micromeria) nervosa</i>	
<i>S. thymbra</i>	Savory

Sideritis curvidens
**S. syriaca* ssp. *syriaca*

Stachys cretica
S. spinulosa

**Scutellaria sieberi*
Teucrium microphyllum

Linaceae - Flax Family

Linum arboreum Tree Flax
L. bienne Pale Flax
L. strictum
L. trigynum

Lythraceae - Loosestrife Family

Lythrum junceum

Malvaceae - Mallow Family

Lavatera bryoniifolia
L. cretica Lesser Tree Mallow
Malva cretica
M. parviflora Small-flowered Mallow
M. sylvestris Common Mallow

Meliaceae - Persian Lilac family

Melia azedarach Indian Bead-tree (Persian Lilac)

Moraceae - Fig Family

Ficus carica Fig

Myrtaceae - Myrtle Family

Myrtus communis Common Myrtle

Oleaceae - Olive Family

Jasminum fruticans Wild Jasmine
Olea europaea Olive
Phillyrea latifolia

Orobanchaceae - Broomrape Family

Orobanche lavandulacea
O. pubescens
O. ramosa Branched Broomrape

Oxalidaceae - Sorrel Family

Oxalis pes-caprae Bermuda Buttercup

Papaveraceae - Poppy Family

Glaucium flavum Yellow Horned-poppy
Papaver purpureomarginatum
P. rhoeas Common Poppy

Plantaginaceae - Plantain Family

Plantago afra
P. bellardii
P. lagopus
P. lanceolata Ribwort Plantain
P. weldenii

Platanaceae - Plane Family

Platanus orientalis

Oriental Plane

Polygalaceae - Milkwort Family

Polygala venulosa

Eastern Milkwort

Polygonaceae - Dock Family

Emex spinosa

Rumex bucephalophorus

Primulaceae - Primrose Family

Anagallis arvensis

**Cyclamen creticum*

Scarlet Pimpernel

Cretan Cyclamen

Ranunculaceae - Buttercup Family

Adonis microcarpa

Anemone coronaria

A. hortensis ssp. *heldreichii*

Clematis cirrhosa

Ranunculus asiaticus

**R. cupreus*

R. ficaria ssp. *chrysocephalus*

R. gracilis

R. peltatus ssp. *fucoides*

Crown Anemone

Maiden's Bower

Turban Buttercup

Lesser Celandine

Pond Water-crowfoot

Resedaceae - Mignonette Family

Reseda alba

Reseda lutea

White Mignonette

Wild Mignonette

Rhamnaceae - Buckthorn Family

Rhamnus lycioides

Rosaceae - Rose Family

Crataegus monogyna ssp. *azarella*

#*Eriobotrya japonica*

Prunus prostrata

P. webbii

Pyrus spinosa

Rubus sanctus

Sarcopoterium spinosum

Hawthorn

Loquat

Almond-leaved Pear

Bramble

Thorny Burnet

Rubiaceae - Bedstraw Family

Galium aparine

Rubia peregrina

Sherardia arvensis

Valantia hispida

Cleavers

Wild Madder

Field Madder

Rutaceae - Rue Family

Citrus limon

Citrus sinensis

Ruta chalepensis

Lemon

Orange

Salicaceae - Willow Family

#*Populus nigra*

Black Poplar

Santalaceae- Sandalwood family

Osyris alba

Osyris

Scrophulariaceae - Figwort Family

Bellardia trixago

Bellardia

Linaria pelisseriana

Jersey Toadflax

Misopates orontium

Lesser Snapdragon (Weasel's Snout)

Parentucellia latifolia

Parentucellia viscosa

Yellow Bartsia

Scrophularia lucida

Shining Figwort

Scrophularia peregrina

Nettle-leaved Figwort

* *Verbascum arcturus*

Hanging Mullein

V. macrurum

V. sinuatum

V. spinosum

Veronica cymbalaria

Solanaceae - Nightshade Family

Hyoscyamus albus

White Henbane

#*Nicotiana glauca*

Styracaceae - Storax Family

Styrax officinalis

Storax

Tamaricaceae - Tamarisk Family

Tamarix smyrnensis

Tamarisk

Thymelaeaceae - Daphne Family

Daphne sericea

Thymelaea hirsuta

Ulmaceae - Elm Family

Ulmus minor

Small-leaved Elm

Urticaceae - Nettle Family

Parietaria judaica

Pellitory of the Wall

Urtica urens

Annual Nettle

U. pilulifera

Roman Nettle

Valerianaceae - Valerian Family

Centranthus calcitrapae

Fedia cornucopiae

**Valeriana asarifolia*

Cretan Valerian

Valerianella coronata

V. discoidea

Verbenaceae - Vervain Family

Vitex agnus-castus

Chaste-tree

Violaceae - Violet Family

**Viola cretica*

Vitaceae - Vine Family

Vitis vinifera

Grape Vine

Monocotyledons

Agavaceae - Agave Family

Agave americana Century Plant

Amaryllidaceae - Daffodil Family

Narcissus tazetta
Pancratium maritimum Sea Daffodil

Araceae - Arum Family

Arisarum vulgare Friar's Cowl
Arum concinatum
 A. creticum Cretan Arum
Dracunculus vulgaris Dragon Arum

Areaceae – Palm Family

Phoenix canariensis Date Palm
 P. theophrasti Cretan Palm

Cyperaceae - Sedge Family

Carex divulsa Grey Sedge
 C. otrubae False Fox-sedge
Cladium mariscus Saw-sedge
Cyperus longus Galingale
Scirpoides holoschoenus Round-headed Club-rush

Iridaceae - Iris Family

Gladiolus italicus Field Gladiolus
Gynandriris sisyrinchium Barbary Nut
Hermodactylus tuberosus Widow Iris
**Iris cretensis*
Iris pseudocorus Yellow Flag

Juncaceae - Rush Family

Juncus heldreichianus

Liliaceae - Lily Family

Allium nigrum
 A. roseum Rose Garlic
 A. subhirsutum
Asparagus aphyllus
Asphodeline lutea Yellow Asphodel
Asphodelus ramosus (aestivus) Common Asphodel
Charybdis (Drimia, Urginea) maritima Sea Squill
Gagea chrysantha
 G. graeca
Muscari comosum Tassel Hyacinth
 **M. spreitzenhoferi*
Ornithogalum exscapum
 O. narbonense
Smilax aspera Common Smilax
**Tulipa bakeri*
 **T. doerfleri*
 T. rupestris

Orchidaceae - Orchid Family

Aceras anthropophorum

Anacamptis pyramidalis

Barlia robertiana

Neotinea maculata

Ophrys bilunulata

O. bombyliflora

O. doerfleri (cretica)

O. fuciflora

O. (scolopax) heldreichii

O. iricolor

O. lutea

O. phryganae

O. (sphegodes) mammosa

O. sphegodes

O. tentredinifera

Orchis anatolica

O. boryi

O. collina

O. italica

O. lactea

O. laxiflora

O. (provincialis) pauciflora

O. quadripunctata

O. simia

O. tridentata

Serapias (vomereacea) orientalis

S. parviflora

Man Orchid

Pyramidal Orchid

Giant Orchid

Dense-flowered Orchid

Bumble Bee Orchid

Cretan Bee Orchid

Late Spider Orchid

Marengo Orchid

Rainbow Orchid

Yellow Bee Orchid

Mammose Orchid

Early spider orchid

Sawfly Orchid

Anatolian Orchid

Fan-lipped Orchid

Naked Man Orchid

Milky Orchid

Loose-flowered Orchid

Few-flowered Orchid

Four-spotted Orchid

Monkey Orchid

Toothed Orchid

Eastern Tongue-orchid

Small Tongue-orchid

Poaceae - Grass Family

Ammophila arenaria

Arundo donax

Briza maxima

B. minor

Hordeum leporinum

Hyparrhenia hirta

Lagurus ovatus

Lamarckia aurea

Lolium temulentum

Phragmites australis

Poa bulbosa

Triticum markgrafii (Aegilops dichasians)

Vulpia ciliata

Marram

Giant Reed

Greater Quaking-grass

Small Quaking-grass

Hare's-tail

Darnel

Common Reed

Bulbous Meadow-grass

BUTTERFLIES

Swallowtail

Scarce Swallowtail

Cretan Festoon

Large White

Small White

Mountain Small White

Dappled White

Clouded Yellow

Southern Comma

Painted Lady



Red Admiral
Southern Speckled Wood
Meadow Brown
Wall Brown
Small Copper
African Grass Blue
Lang's Short-tailed Blue
Baton Blue
Holly Blue
Common Blue
Mallow Skipper
Lulworth Skipper
Mediterranean Skipper

OTHER INVERTEBRATES

Potamon potamios
Oedipoda germanica
 O. coerulescens
Acrida sp.
Anacridium aegyptiacum
Anax imperator
Crocothemis erythraea
Ischnura elegans
Calopteryx virgo
Aquarius najas
Graphosoma italicum
Pyrrhocoris apterus
Oxythyrea funesta
Malachius bipustulatus
Trichodes sp.
Xylocopa violacea
Dasylabris maura
Polistes sp.
Thaumetopoea pityocampa

Freshwater Crab
Red-winged Grasshopper
Blue-winged Grasshopper
a straw grasshopper
Egyptian Locust
Emperor Dragonfly
Scarlet Darter
Blue-tailed Damselfly
Beautiful Demoiselle
a large pond-skater
a shield bug
Firebug
a black and white chafer
a beetle
a hairy-beetle
Violet Carpenter-bee
a velvet-ant
a paper-wasp
Pine Processionary-moth

AMPHIBIANS

Green Toad (dead)
Cretan Marsh Frog (heard)
Common Tree Frog

REPTILES

Balkan (Stripe-necked) Terrapin
Balkan Green Lizard
Erhard's Wall Lizard

MAMMALS

Eastern Hedgehog (dead)
Pipistrelle sp.
Badger (dead)
Cretan Wild Goat (Kri-kri)