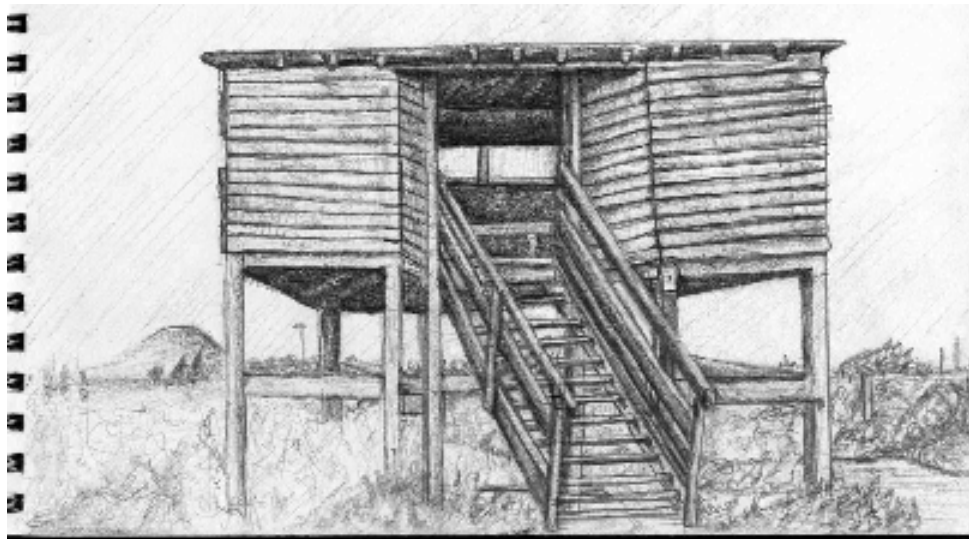


## **BIRD WATCHING IN CYPRUS**

### **A BRIEF GUIDE FOR VISITORS TO THE ISLAND**



### **Information on Cyprus in general**

The position of Cyprus in the eastern Mediterranean with Turkey to the north, Syria to the east and Egypt to the south, places it on one of the major migration routes in the Mediterranean and makes it a stop off point for many species which pass each year from Europe/Asia to Africa via the Nile Delta.

The birds that occur regularly on passage form a large percentage of the 'Cyprus list' that currently totals nearly 380 species. Of these only around 50 are resident and around 40 are migrant species that regularly or occasionally breed.

The number of birds passing over during the spring and autumn migration periods are impressive, as literally millions of birds pour through Cyprus. Spring migration gets underway in earnest around the middle of March, usually depending on how settled the weather is, and continues into May. A few early arrivals can even be noted in February, especially the swallows, martins and swifts, some wheatears and the Great Spotted Cuckoo *Clamator glandarius*. Slender-billed Gulls *Larus genei* and herons can be seen in flocks along the coastline. Each week seems to provide a different species to watch for. The end of March sees Roller *Coracias garrulous*, Masked Shrike *Lanius nubicus*, Cretzschmar's Bunting *Emberiza caesia*, Black-headed Wagtails *Motacilla flava feldegg* and Red-rumped Swallows *Cecropsis daurica*, while on the wetlands Marsh Sandpipers *Tringa stagnatilis*, Collared Pratincole *Glareola pratincola*, Spur-winged *Vanellus spinosus* and Greater Sand Plover *Charadrius leschenaultii* can be seen. Into April the Eastern Olivaceous Warbler *Hippolais pallida eloecia* and the European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster* are notable as are flycatchers and Ortolan Buntings *Emberiza hortulana*. A late arrival that stays to breed is the Black-headed Bunting *Emberiza melanocephala*, which comes from Asia. Raptor passage can also be observed with Red-footed Falcon *Falco vespertinus*, Eleonora's Falcon *Falco eleonora* and Hobby *Falco subbuteo* while Ospreys *Pandion haliaetus* and Lesser Kestrel *Falco naumanni* are also possible.

In the autumn the passerine migration may seem less notable but wagtails and wheatears can be seen. The migration period gets underway in earnest during August with herons, egrets and ducks cruising along the coastlines, especially along the north-west coast and a considerable passage of cranes and raptors attracting attention in September and October. Honey Buzzard *Pernis apivorus*, Red-footed Falcon and harriers are regularly observed. Lesser Spotted Eagle *Aquila pomarina*, Booted Eagle *Hieraetus pennatus*, Black Kite *Milvus migrans* and Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus* have all been spotted in recent autumns.

The winter is also good for birds, with around 90 species occurring as regular winter visitors. The notable ones are the Greater Flamingos *Phoenicopterus roseus* and wildfowl that congregate on the two salt lakes in Akrotiri and Larnaca in their thousands. Many other winter visitors to Cyprus are common to the European birdwatcher – Stonechats *Saxicola torquata*, Chiffchaffs *Phylloscopus collybita*, Robins *Erithacus rubecula*, Song Thrushes *Turdus philomelos*, Blackbirds *Turdus merula*, White Wagtails *Motacilla alba* and Starlings *Sturnus vulgaris*. Others include Wallcreepers *Tichodroma muraria*, Finsch's Wheatear *Oenanthe finschii* and Bluethroat *Luscinia svecica*. Hard winters in Europe may bring swans to the wetland areas.

Summer in Cyprus is not really suited for bird watching as it can be extremely hot. This is a good time to visit the cooler mountainous regions where Pallid Swifts *Apus pallidus*, Crossbills *Loxia curvirostra*, Jay *Garrulus glandarius glaszneri* and Masked Shrike are among the breeding species. The endemic Cyprus Wheatear *Oenanthe cyprica* also breeds in considerable numbers there. As do the four endemic sub-species – Jay, Short-toed Treecreeper *Certhia brachydactyla dorotheae*, Coal Tit *Parus ater cypriotes* and Scops Owl *Otus scops cyprius*. While the first three of the sub-species are confined to the mountains, the endemic Cyprus Warbler *Sylvia melanothorax* is mainly found at lower elevations.



Cyprus warbler

## **Where to watch birds in Cyprus**

### ***Pafos area(Paphos)***

Pafos itself is in the southwest corner of the island and is served by its own airport. There are many sites worth visiting in its vicinity including the Akamas peninsula to the north of Pafos.

- *Asprokremnos Dam*

This is a man-made reservoir that requires four-wheeled drive for full access. Leave the motorway at the exit to Timi. Follow the old Pafos-Lemesos road towards Mandria and continue in the direction of Lemesos. A sign post to the left indicates the dam. The track leads all the way to the top of the dam and views of the reservoir and surrounding area are obtained from here.

To explore the area fully drive through Anarita after taking the Timi exit instead of heading to Mandria. Follow the road through Anarita and past the large army training camp heading for Nata. Just before the village of Nata look out for a disused water tank to your left. Take a track opposite this to the right past the deserted village of Foinikas until you reach the water's edge.

In winter the area is good for Finsch's Wheatear and in summer visiting Black-headed Buntings are present from late April onwards. Various water birds visiting the reservoir include wildfowl, gulls, herons, egrets and waders – depending on the water level. If this is high and the river flowing, the area between the dam and the road is worth checking out especially for warblers on migration such as Great Reed *Acrocephalus arundinaceus*, wintering Moustached *Acrocephalus melanopogon*, and the Cyprus Warblers that breed there. These pools – known to local birders as Aspro Pools - provide shelter for herons etc, waders, rails and crakes. They are best reached by turning off the track that leads to the head of the dam onto an unsurfaced track that goes past some old 'industrial' style buildings.

The dam is now part of a Special Protection Area for birds declared by the Cyprus government, and forms part of the pan-European NATURA 2000 network.

- Pafos Headland



This can be an excellent area during migration. Although possibly not as productive as it once was it is definitely worth checking out, especially in the early morning and late afternoon. It can be reached by following the track from the right of the castle at the edge of the harbour. Other tracks allow access while entrance to the area around the lighthouse itself is via the entrance to the archaeological sites in the harbour vicinity.

Trees and bushes in the area can be full of a variety of warblers including Ruppell's *Sylvia rueppelli*. Cretzschmar's and Black-headed Buntings can be seen as can Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*, larks – including Short-toed *Calandrella brachydactyla*- pipits and various wheatears.

The rocks along the coast can hold various waders such as Greater Sand and Golden Plovers *Pluvialis apricaria* which together with the occasional Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres* often winter there. This is a good area for sea watching and duck, herons, egrets and gulls can be seen passing during migration.

The headland has now been declared a Special Protection Area for birds and forms part of the pan-European NATURA 2000 network.

- Akamas Peninsula

The area of Akamas covers the northwest promontory of Cyprus, extending north from Pafos after Lara beach (which is worth a visit if you have time) to the Baths of Aphrodite in the north, east to the village of Polis and Latsi harbour. Although there has been tourist development on the approaches to and outskirts of the area, at present it is still largely unspoilt and wild although four-wheel drive 'safaris' do disturb the peace at times.

One of the most accessible ways to 'bird watch' the area is to walk the coastal track from the Baths of Aphrodite towards Cape Arnaouti. This is actually 8km in distance so the 16km round walk should not be attempted in hot weather and never without ample supplies of water. The terrain can be rough in some parts so it is advisable not to go alone. Although there are parts of the track that do accommodate 4-wheel drive vehicles this is not true of all stretches, some of which have sheer drops away down the cliff to the seaward side. In fact if you do not feel like a long walk the area of the caravan park near the Baths of Aphrodite can be productive. It is both a landfall for migrants and also a good observation point overlooking Chrysochou Bay to see passing birds.

Again spring and autumn are the best times when almost any type of migrating bird may be spotted: wagtails, wheatears (including Isabelline *Oenanthe isabellina* and Black-eared *Oenanthe hispanica*), buntings such as Ortolan, Cretzschmar's and Black-headed, shrikes, flycatchers and all sorts of warblers. Sea watching, especially in late summer/early autumn can be rewarding here. A large movement of westward coasting ducks, herons, egrets, waders and gulls, the latter sometimes including Audouin's *Larus audouinii*.

Lying on your sunbed on the beach watching flocks of, for example, Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus*, pass by is an ideal way to spend a late summer afternoon.

The village of Polis has a campsite situated in eucalyptus trees that can turn up the odd migrant and is an excellent area for Black Francolin *Francoelinus francoelinus*. The reed beds on the outskirts of Polis are also worth investigating for bitterns, herons, Sedge *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus* and Reed Warblers *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*. Inland, past the village of Neo chorio, the track leading to the Smigies area holds Golden Oriole *Oriolus oriolus* in summer and on passage along with flycatchers, Red-backed *Lanius collurio*, Woodchat *Lanius senator* and Masked Shrikes. Great Spotted Cuckoo and Black-headed Buntings nest in the area.

- *Mandria(Pafos plain)*

The area of Pafos plain after the airport (leaving Pafos) towards Petra tou Romiou consists of cultivated areas, ploughed fields and a rocky shoreline. Needless to say, in line with most of the Cypriot coastline, development is also taking place there. However, the area is an excellent site for birdwatching especially during both migration periods and the winter. The village of Mandria and the surrounding area hold probably the most productive and easily accessible sites.

Coming from Pafos, leave the motorway at the exit signposted Mandria/Anarita (the fourth exit out of Pafos). Join the old Lemesos road and take the turning to Mandria opposite a petrol station. Drive through the village taking a right and then left turn past the church and into the agricultural area. The ploughed fields/stubble – depending on the time of year – are excellent during migration for Red-throated *Anthus cervinus* and Water Pipit *Anthus spinoletta*, and the Black-headed, Blue-headed *Motacilla flava flava* and Grey-headed *Motacilla flava thunbergi* sub-species of the Yellow Wagtail. Red footed Falcon are common here on passage and harrier species such as Pallid *Circus macrourus* and Montagu *Circus pygargus* as well as rare migrating birds of prey, such as the Egyptian vulture *Neophron percnopterus* may be spotted during peak bird of prey migration periods. In the winter large flocks of Spanish Sparrow *Passer hispaniolensis* and wintering Starlings use the fields as do Stone Curlew *Burhinus oedicanus*. In 2004 a Black-bellied Sandgrouse *Pterocles orientalis* was recorded here – only the second record since 1992.



Red footed Falcon

Moving down towards the beach, turn left towards three rocky islets. Shags *Phalacrocorax aristotelis* may be seen here throughout the year and migrating heron species pass by and roost here both in spring and autumn. Inland here is a magnet for all kinds of wheatears as well as Tawny *Anthus campestris*, Red-throated and Meadow Pipits *Anthus pratensis*. Larks such as Short-toed and the occasional Lesser Short-toed *Calandrella rufescens* are quite frequent, especially on spring passage. Keeping to the left and following the track inland (next to a blue sign) takes you to the area christened 'lark corner' by local birders. As well as those already mentioned both Calandra *Melanocorypha calandra* and Bimaculated Lark *Melanocorypha bimaculata* have been seen there. In the winter this area also holds Golden Plover, Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus* and the occasional Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus* of the eastern race *calidus*.

- Pafos Sewage works

This is a new site on the Cyprus birdwatching 'map' as the sewage works were only recently built and just now are starting to provide interesting sightings. Sightings so far seem to indicate that it has the potential to attract sought after birds.

It is reached from the old Pafos-Lemesos road heading towards Pafos International Airport. Driving through the village of Koloni enter Acheleia and then turn right opposite Akis tavern at the signpost for the Agricultural Research Station. Take the asphalt road that zigzags towards the coast. Driving past the airport control tower to your left, turn right (you are driving along the airport boundary). After about 1km the fenced perimeter of the sewage works is on your left. At present there is no public access into the works but the pools and any birds present can be seen from outside.

So far records have shown some interesting waders and passerines including Wood *Tringa glareola* and Curlew Sandpipers *Calidris ferruginea*, Temminck's Stint *Calidris temminckii* and Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola*. Spur winged Plover are reported to have attempted to breed. The surrounding fields have also held Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*, White Stork *Ciconia ciconia* and Cream-coloured Courser *Cursorius cursor*.

#### Cape Drepanum/Ayios Georgios

Leaving Coral Bay outside Pafos take the road leading northwards for Ayios Georgios. To reach the Cape, go through Ayios Georgios till you reach a restaurant and an old small stone-built church. A track leads down to a small fishing shelter and overlooks Geronisos island.

The bushes on the cliffs should be checked for migrant passerines as should the grasslands at the top of the cliffs. Turning back southwards towards Coral Bay as well as northwards towards Lara will turn up migrants – the area being the 'first landfall' for many birds.

Looking offshore Yelkouan Shearwater *Puffinus yelkouan* is a possibility while the commoner Yellow-legged Gull *Larus cachinnans* and Rock Dove *Columba livia* breed on the island. Coasting flocks of heron and egret are certain to be seen during passage as maybe are migrating birds of prey. Blue Rock Thrush *Monticola solitarius* seems to be regular during the winter while migrating passerines include wheatears, pipits, larks, buntings and shrikes. Subalpine *Sylvia cantillans* and Ruppell's Warblers occur in spring while it is one of the few areas in the west of the island where both Cyprus and Sardinian warbler *Sylvia melanocephala* breed. Quail *Coturnix coturnix*, Stone Curlew and Wryneck *Jynx torquilla* are possibilities while a Bar-tailed Lark *Ammomanes cincturus* was a recent rarity.



- Evretou Dam

Although like many of the man-made reservoirs in Cyprus there is disturbance from use by anglers, this dam to the east of the main Pafos – Polis road still has some interesting records. This seems to be especially so when the water levels are lower at the shallow end of the dam.

Both ends of the reservoir can be visited. Access to the dam is well-sign posted at both ends. If travelling from Pafos to Polis, about 3km outside the village of Giolou turn right towards Simou. Continue up a steep road and then turn left onto a track on which there is a concrete water tank. Turn left at the tank and taking the higher track that veers round to the right continue to where the road widens and park. There may be pools here that attract herons and waders. Little *Porzana porzana* and Baillon's Crake *Porzana pusilla*, Great Snipe *Gallinago media* and Citrine Wagtail are recent sightings.

The other viewpoint is at the dam head itself. This may be reached by continuing along the main road towards Polis until the village of Skoulli. Turn right here (the dam is signposted) and drive for about 3km into the village itself following the signs to Peristerona. Leave this road by taking a right hand fork 4km outside Peristerona and this takes you up to the dam head. At both accesses it is best to park and walk to obtain good views. The latter has better road access but the former gets you closer to the water. The nearby valleys and road to Stavros tis Psokas are good for Nightingales *Luscinia megarhynchos*, Golden Orioles and Black-headed Bunting in late spring/early summer and good places to search for Siskin *Carduelis spinus* and Woodcock *Scolopax rusticola* in winter.

### ***Lemesos area (Limassol)***

The town of Lemesos is a sprawling urban area. To the north there are several dams that may be worth a visit in years of good rainfall. The coastal areas may turn up any kind of migrant. The coastal stretch towards Pafos contains high cliffs on which Eleonora's Falcons breed in the summer, Alpine Swifts *Apus melba* may be spotted as occasionally may Griffon Vulture *Gyps fulvus*, although its numbers are now greatly reduced.

The most important and rewarding site for bird watching in the area and possibly Cyprus itself is the Akrotiri peninsula. This is the southern most point of the island and is excellent for visible migration of, for example, raptors and cranes in the autumn. There are a variety of habitats in the area – coastal cliffs, salt lake and flats, reed beds, woodland, gravel pits and maquis. Please, however bear in mind at all times that the peninsula is the location of a British military base. This means that certain areas are off limit to civilians but most of the best birding sites are accessible. Great care should be taken not to enter into or park near prohibited areas. Provided you are sensitive to these facts you should not encounter any particular problems. It is wise to carry identification/passport at all times and obey military instructions. Photography of, or of birds near, military areas is not permitted nor is parking near the 'aerial farm'.

- *Akrotiri Salt Lake*

From Lemesos the salt lake (and the peninsula in general) can be reached via a number of roads, Akrotiri being clearly signposted whether you are travelling from Pafos or Lemesos. The turnoff on the motorway for Kolossi offers the best approach. Follow the road to Kolossi castle and then all routes converge on the road that runs south through the Fasouri plantation towards the air base of RAF Akrotiri.

When full the Lake covers a maximum area of about nine sq.km. It holds most water in winter and is then home to several thousand Greater Flamingos, wildfowl and gull. The numbers of flamingo can surpass 10000 and in years when there is a hard winter in Europe swans also visit.

As the water recedes in the Lake during spring, the margins can host a variety of waders that can include Little Stint *Calidris minuta*, Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*, Marsh and Curlew Sandpipers, and Greater Sand Plovers. Egrets, herons and wildfowl can also be present, while flocks of gulls such as Slender-billed pass through in March and April.



Greater Flamingo

During the autumn migration the water may have dried up altogether. The Salt Lake becomes a regular stopover and roosting area for Demoiselle Cranes *Anthropoides virgo* from late August to early September and the Common Crane *Grus grus* during October and November. Dawn or dusk viewing is essential and great care must be taken not to disturb the birds. In September and October, the Salt Lake is also excellent for raptor migration, mainly involving Honey Buzzard, other buzzards and various harrier species. In 'good' years Black Kite, Egyptian Vulture, Lesser Spotted Eagle and Osprey may be observed in small numbers. The migrating raptors often rest on the fields to the east and south of the lake. As late morning approaches they can be seen thermalling up over the southern shore.

The track along the southern shore (which leads to Lady's Mile) often holds many passerine migrants that in spring include Pied *Ficedula hypoleuca*, Semi-collared *Ficedula semitorquata* and Collared Flycatchers *Ficedula albicollis*. There are also several marshy pools that can hold waders such as Ruff *Philomachus pugnax* and Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*.

- Lady's Mile

This can be reached either from taking the track running along the south of the lake and then driving across the lake itself on one of the tracks there. Although usually firm enough for vehicles great care should be taken in wet conditions. The other way to access the area is by following signs from the area of the new port of Lemesos past Zakaki Marsh and across a small causeway.

The sea is on one side with pools and stretches of sand to the other. There are also a few restaurants and the area is used by bathers during the warmer months. The pools can be alive with waders during migration and to a lesser extent during the winter. Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta* and Greater Sand Plover have been recorded there.

- Zakaki Marshes

From the new port traffic lights head for a roundabout at the entrance to the port itself. Take the road heading west and follow signs to Ladies Mile. Before reaching a rather dilapidated football stadium you will see a pool of water to your right fringed by reeds. This is all that is left of the previously extensive marshes that have been swallowed up by the port and accompanying development. The area can also be reached by heading towards the port from Ladies Mile and the two areas can easily be combined as part of one excursion, which if time permits can continue to the Salt Lake itself.

This area is especially noteworthy in the winter and spring. Larks, pipits, wagtails and Spectacled Warblers *Sylvia conspicillata* can be found in the scrub and flats in the area. Harriers patrol the area. The pool next to the road attracts Ruff, Marsh and Wood Sandpiper, Glossy Ibis, Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralliodes*, Black-winged Stilt, Whiskered *Chlidonias hybridus* and White-winged Black Terns *Chlidonias leucopterus*, and pratincoles. Garganey *Anas querquedula* occur in spring, while wintering ducks can include Pochard *Aythya ferina* and Pintail *Anas acuta*.

- Fasouri Reed Beds(Phassouri)

To get to this excellent site take the turn to the right as you pass the Fasouri plantation heading for Akrotiri Salt Lake (see above). **(The reputation of this area assumes that there is water in the area. The recent drought (2006 onwards) means that at the time of writing, February 2009, there is no water. Visitors should therefore be advised that many of the species mentioned below may not be present.)** Before reaching the Salt Lake and the aerial farms take the turning to the right that leads past the Malcolm Cat Protection Sanctuary. Follow the road and take a narrow turning to the right signposted as a dead end. The reed beds lie to the left surrounded by an area of marsh and meadow that can be flooded in winter and spring. It is not actually necessary to leave your car to watch any birds but beware of blocking what is a frequently used narrow road.



European Bee-eater

Fasouri has something to offer at almost any time of year but spring is possibly the most prolific time. Little Egrets *Egretta garzetta*, Cattle Egrets, Glossy Ibis, Purple Herons *Ardea purpurea*, Squacco and Night Herons *Nycticorax nycticorax* occur. Wood Sandpipers, Ruffs and Spur-winged Plovers are seen as are pratincoles. Yellow Wagtails, Red-throated Pipits and Great Reed Warbler can be present as can the occasional crake. Ferruginous Duck *Aythya ferina* have recently bred providing Cyprus with a new breeding species. Autumn is good for Red-footed Falcon and Bee-eaters are numerous in both passage periods.

### Episkopi Cliffs

The area of Episkopi (to the west of Akrotiri) is also part of the British Sovereign Base Area and Episkopi Garrison itself is on top of the cliffs overlooking the bay.

The scrub and agricultural areas behind the beaches of Kourio (Curium) and – after the Garrison – of Avdimou and Pissouri attract many migrants such as chats, warblers and buntings while rafts of Garganey can sometimes be spotted off the coast in spring. However, it is the cliffs here that are the attraction. Access is restricted to the cliffs themselves but there are several points where good views may be obtained. After Kourio take the road into the Garrison and you will find a sign on the right for the Sanctuary of Apollo archaeological site. Near here to the left unmetalled tracks lead out towards the sea. These give excellent views over the bay itself. Quarry Beach and Kensington cliffs. This is one of the few places where the increasingly rare Griffin Vulture may be seen. In the summer good sightings include the local Eleonora's Falcon and Alpine Swift populations. Peregrines can be seen here as can the occasional overwintering Wallcreeper.



Wallcreeper

- Cape Aspro

After Pissouri, heading towards Pafos, is Cape Aspro, (aspro being the Greek for white), which is another important area for Eleonora's Falcon. These colossal white cliffs are also home to large colonies of Jackdaws *Corvus monedula*, while Shag and Alpine Swift also breed in the area.

The cliffs are not very accessible but good views can be obtained by parking in a lay by about 2km before the view point of Petra tou Romiou and walking back towards the cliffs taking care however to avoid the traffic.

The area has now been declared a Special Protection Area for birds and forms part of the pan-European NATURA 2000 network.

- Troodos Mountains

Although there is good road access from Lemesos, the Troodos mountains can also be easily reached from Lefkosia and for those of a more adventurous nature, and in possession of a four wheel drive vehicle, via Stavros tis Psokas and other areas of the Pafos forest. At any time between November and March snow may cover the ground, sometimes making the area virtually inaccessible. Those visiting during this period should travel in a four wheel drive and take snow chains. Keep up to date with the local weather forecasts.

Platres is a good place to stay enable full coverage of the area and is famous for the nightingales which can be heard singing in its densely wooded valleys in the summer. Nightjars *Caprimulgus europaeus* are also a possible summer visitor. The Kalidonia (Caledonian) falls area/trail on the road between Platres and Troodos is a good area in winter for Siskins and Goldcrest *Regulus regulus* as well as Wrens *Troglodytes troglodytes* and Blackbirds all year. The forested areas of the nearby village of Prodromos may hold Dunnock *Prunella modularis* and Goldcrest in the winter.

However, on a day trip to the small village of Troodos there is an excellent chance of spotting many of the target species on one of the signposted nature trails at least four of which start close to the village square. (The Cyprus Tourist Organisation publishes a leaflet of all these trails.) Troodos is one of the few remaining areas where the Raven *Corvus corax* can be observed, albeit infrequently these days. There is also the possibility of raptors such as Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis* and Bonelli's Eagle *Hieraetus fasciatus*.

The Atalante trail commences near the former post office situated in the village square and allows sightings of Short-toed Treecreeper, Coal Tit, Crossbill and Jay all year round and many breeding Cyprus Wheatear in spring and summer. Pallid Swift

are frequently spotted flying over the square and Crag martin *Ptyonoprogne rupestris* anywhere in the area at any time of year.

Hoopoes *Upupa epops* can be heard and seen in the summer as can Masked Shrike.



Hoopoe

On the other side of the square there is a weather station. In this area both Yellowhammer *Emberiza citronella* and Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes* have been recorded in the winter. Further down this road, heading back towards Lefkosia, near an army camp there is a dirt road that leads to a ridge overlooking a dry riverbed. (This turning is after the Troodos Military cemetery and before the large army camp). Look here in the winter for Bramblings *Fringilla montifringilla*, Crossbill and thrush species. Bramblings have also been spotted off the road that leaves the square for Mount Olympos. Before reaching the summit of Mount Olympos the Artemis trail goes off to the left – it is well signposted. As well as the endemics and other mentioned summer visitors, Wood Lark *Lullula arborea* are said to breed here. However, a short walk in any area should be profitable.



Wood lark

Winter especially brings up rarities, which recently have included Pine Buntings *Emberiza leucocephalus* and Bullfinches *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*. Be aware that the Troodos area is quite heavily militarised both with Cypriot National Guard sites and those of the British army. As always use discretion in such areas.

The Troodos area has now been declared a Special Protection Area for birds and forms part of the pan-European NATURA 2000 network.

## ***Larnaka area (Larnaca)***

Larnaka is the largest town in the south east of the island. It has the main airport for the Republic of Cyprus and several areas in the vicinity offer profitable bird watching. Like most of the sites mentioned so far it is best visited in spring, autumn or winter.

- *Larnaka Salt Lake*

This salt lake is to the south west of Larnaka and lies between the town and the airport. It is the first birding spot noticed by those flying into Larnaka. The lake is therefore easily found by just following the signs to the airport. There are also several smaller pools in close proximity that were previously part of the main lake but now separated due to airport development.

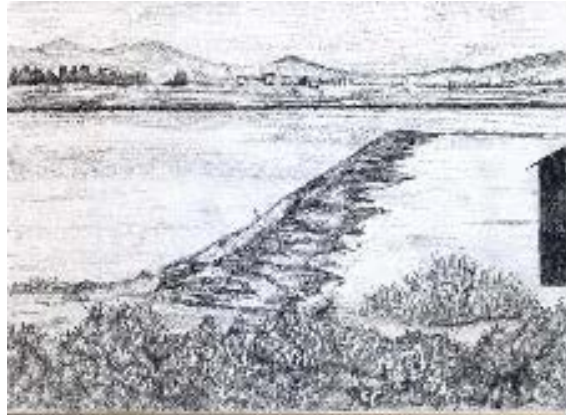
The main lake is smaller than that of Akrotiri and more accessible by both car and on foot. It too holds Greater Flamingo in winter – usually smaller flocks – but it is possible to get better and closer views of them here than at Akrotiri. A good starting point is the Tekke mosque that is reached by taking a clearly marked turning on the road leaving the airport away from Larnaka. It is on the western edge of the lake and surrounded by trees that hold migrant passerines. A footpath now runs down the eastern fringe of the lake. There is also a hide from which views can be obtained of wintering flamingoes, gulls and wildfowl. This is situated next to a National Guard army camp so care should be taken with binoculars and cameras here. As well as flamingoes, winter also gives a chance to see White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons* and Ruddy Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea* as well as Mediterranean *Larus melanocephalus* and Little Gull *Larus minutus*. Heron species and Spoonbills *Platalea leucorodia* may turn up on passage as may various waders. Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus* still breed as do Spectacled Warbler.

The pools closer to the airport on the side of the now busy road have held swans – Mute *Cygnus olor* and Whooper *Cygnus cygnus* – when winters are especially hard in Europe. Other wildfowl and waders are also present on these seasonal pools. However, the changes to the road system in the area make it now virtually impossible to stop and check these pools out.

Leaving the main salt lake towards Kiti, take a left turn in Meneou where there is a signpost for Meneou beach. This road leads to the sea with pools on either side as the coast is reached. These are also seasonal and worth checking for flamingoes and waders. Taking the coastal road to the left a hide may be seen on the inland side in



the distance along with the raised edges of the sewage work pools. This was erected by the Forestry department and provides excellent views of the Larnaka sewage works pools. Access is from a track to the left found when the hide is virtually opposite you. Care should be taken on this track if it is muddy as it is possible for a car to get stuck. In such circumstances park the car and walk to the hide.



The pools here have become a very important feeding area for birds in recent years attracting thousands of birds. Wintering wildfowl include Shoveler *Anas clypeata*, Teal *Anas crecca*, White-fronted Goose, Black-necked Grebe *Podiceps nigricollis*, Ruddy Shelduck and Red-crested Pochard *Netta rufina*. Gull species include Armenian *Larus armenicus* and Slender-billed. Herons, spoonbill, cranes and waders use the area depending on the water level. Common *Sterna hirundo* and Little Tern *Sterna albifrons* have bred in the area recently. Marsh harriers *Circus aeruginosus* are frequent and Yellow Wagtails and various larks occur in the nearby scrub and cereal plantation. This area can turn up almost anything at any time.

Leaving the hide and turning left back onto the metalled road Spiro's Pool is reached. This is also seasonal but holds both wildfowl and waders the latter especially during migration. Greater Sand Plover have been recorded here and Black-winged Stilt and Spur-winged Plover are frequent on passage, and breed if conditions are right. The scrub around the area hold breeding Spectacled Warbler and Calandra Lark. The salt lake has now been declared a Special Protection Area for birds and forms part of the pan- European NATURA 2000 network.

- *Kiti/Mazotos areas*

These two areas are to the west of Larnaka after Meneou village and both are worth exploring especially during migration. Cape Kiti can either be reached by following the instructions for Larnaka sewage works but instead of turning left when reaching the sea turn right and take the road heading westwards.

This contains many holiday home developments but a walk along the beach just after dawn or before dusk can reveal passerine migrants such as flycatchers and wheatears. The alternative is to travel through Meneou village and take the turning for Pervolia. Pervolia's coastal road is also being developed. It meets the Meneou coastal road at Cape Kiti where there is a lighthouse. Sea movements may be observed from here and it is a good place to observe hirundine migration especially in September. Raptor migration is sometimes seen from here.

Going back to Kiti village and taking the turning to Teresfanou (on your right if you are coming from Meneou) you will find a turning to Kiti dam. Turn here, then second right. Follow the unsurfaced road past a bakery and on for about 2km until you reach a small church to your left and can see the dam wall and a blue stepladder. Follow the road round and park in the wooded area. This site is excellent when the dam holds water – regrettably in the recent winters since 2005 it has not done so. The trees and undergrowth however hold passerine migrants regardless. If the dam holds water again you may see wintering wildfowl, which have included White-fronted geese and Red-crested Pochard. Rails and crakes are regular users of the area that has also hosted egrets, herons, spoonbills and various waders.

Back on the road to Teresfanou continue towards Mazotos. After a short while you will see a signpost denoting stables on your right near the village of Kivisili. Take the track and follow it out into the fields. During spring these are favourite haunts of migrating harriers and Red-footed Falcons. Lesser Kestrels are usually present in April.

#### Oroklini March(Voroklini)

This is a shallow, natural lake that holds water only in wetter years. It is located next to the Larnaka/Agia Napa motorway just south of Oroklini village. The site is either side of the road that leaves the motorway to go to the beach.

At present this is a very important site in Cyprus for breeding Black-winged Stilt and Spur-winged Plover. Grey *Ardea cinera*, Purple, Night and Squacco Herons are seen here on passage as are Glossy Ibis and many waders including Broad-billed Sandpiper *Limicola falcinellus*. Black Francolin can be heard and seen in the area.



Spur-winged Plover

The area has now been declared a Special Protection Area for birds and forms part of the pan- European NATURA 2000 network.

### Paralimni Lake

This lake is seasonal and for a lot of the year does not hold any water and resembles a large dust bowl. Reaching Paralimni from the main Agia Napa to Paralimni road, keep going past Kokkinos supermarket until you reach a side turning to the left just before a CYTA shop. Another left turn from here takes you into a road running parallel to the main road. Follow the road until you get views of and access to the lake. Some development is taking place around the perimeter and motor-cyclists often use the area. The area is also frequented by hunters.

Despite this uninviting introduction the lake is worth investigating and has provided rarities in all seasons and especially during passage. Obviously wet winters turn up more species and the pools at the Sotira edge of the lake are especially productive. To cross the lake a four-wheel drive vehicle is advisable.

The lake itself is a good area for Spur-winged Plover, and Kentish Plover also breed there. Ruff and Wood Sandpiper are frequent on passage as are raptors such as Lesser Kestrel, Red-footed Falcon and Hobby. Recent rarities seen in the area include Caspian Plover *Charadrius asiatus*, Dotterel *Charadrius morinellus* and Steppe Grey Shrike *Lanius meridionalis pallidirostris*.

The side of the lake that adjoins the village of Sotira is especially interesting as the pools there may hold water all year. These are reached by driving through Sotira and taking the Dherynia road. Just off this a track to the right leads down to the lake and a reeded area with pools. In winter they host waders including Golden Plover, while Marsh and Hen Harriers *Circus cyaneus* are regular. However, it is possibly during spring that these pools can shine, holding for example Spotted *Porzana porzana*, Little and Baillon's Crake. Both Jack *Lymnocyptes minimus* and Great Snipe have been seen there together with Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus* and Bittern *Botaurus stellaris*. Citrine Wagtail is another visitor to make use of these pools as do many warblers on passage including all four *phylloscopus* warblers that pass through Cyprus and both Nightingale and Thrush Nightingale *Luscinia luscinia*. Orphean Warbler *Sylvia hortensis* has also been seen here and the region may turn up the Rufous Bush Chat *Cercotrichas galactotes* and Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush *Monticola saxatilis*.

The area has now been declared a Special Protection Area for birds and forms part of the pan-European NATURA 2000 network

- Achna Dam

This artificial reservoir was built around twenty years ago and has quickly established itself as one of the birding 'hotspots' of the island. As it almost invariably holds water it is worth a visit even in summer.

It is situated approximately 20km north east of Larnaka. Leave the Larnaka – Agia Napa motorway at the exit for Achna and it is situated to the south of the Achna bypass road about 10km from the motorway exit. A signpost marked 'Achna Dam' leads to the head of the dam and it is possible to drive, park and walk around many parts of the dam depending on water levels.

Taking the road back to the motorway for 2km the road dips and crash barriers are placed alongside the road. At the end of these barriers a track goes in on the left. Take this and then the track to the right. Again it is possible to drive or park/and walk around this area of the dam depending on water levels. Please note that Achna village itself is on the border of Greek- controlled and Turkish-occupied Cyprus. There are UN camps in the area and a strong Greek-Cypriot and Turkish military presence. Special caution is needed when using binoculars and cameras in the area and it is useful to carry identification. However, the site is now accepted as a regular for bird watching and those using discretion should have no problems at all. The military presence nearby should under no circumstances put you off visiting the area.



Pied Kingfisher

Highlights have in the past included Dalmatian Pelican *Pelecanus crispus*, Great Black-headed Gull *Larus ichthyaetus* and Lesser White-fronted Geese *Anser erythropus*.

Winter can bring White-fronted Goose, Jack Snipe, Pied Kingfisher *Ceryle rudis* and Bluethroat. Both Little and Baillion's crake have been observed during spring, while the shorelines attract waders which include Spur-winged Plover and Black-winged Stilt – the former having bred here recently. Terns, herons and wildfowl also occur, as do smaller passerines in the surrounding vegetation.

The area has now been declared a Special Protection Area for birds and forms part of the pan- European NATURA 2000 network.

- Cape Gkreko(Greco)

This lies between the holiday resorts of Agia Napa and Protaras, which lie to the east of Larnaka. It is well sign posted from both resorts. This region of Cyprus falls under a busy migration route between Africa and Europe/Asia and the area especially merits a visit during the migration periods.

Access to Cape Gkreko tip itself is prohibited but those parts that can be reached are very good for birds. Leaving Agia Napa follow the signs to Protaras and Cape Gkreko. The coast line here is always worth checking out as is the area around the Sewage works which is inland off a track before the Kermia Beach Hotel. Take the turn from this road to the right towards Cape Gkreko. After about 500m there is a track off to the right towards the sea. You can park and walk or drive here along the various footpaths including those that go down to the coast or to the left towards the rubbish tip. In winter the area has regular Finsch's Wheatear and Blue Rock Thrush.

Access to the tip of the Cape is prohibited and there are military sites to be avoided. However the area has lots of tracks for both cars and walkers. The road signposted to Agioi Anargyroi leads to productive areas especially the scrub behind the picnic site there.

It is during spring that this area can come alive with migrants including larks, pipits, warblers, Yellow Wagtails, various wheatears and both Cretzschmar's and Ortolan Buntings. Herons and egrets can be seen along the coasts and raptors such as harriers and falcons may be present. Autumn migration can also be interesting. The area has now been declared a Special Protection Area for birds and forms part of the pan- European NATURA 2000 network.

### **Lefkosia area (Nicosia)**

The capital Lefkosia is easily accessible by motorway from all areas of the island. It is a large urban conurbation with a few green areas that permit birdwatching. Most of these however are man-made and very little of the original vegetation of the area remains.

- **Athalassa Forest**

Athalassa dam and forest are situated just outside Lefkosia. The area has been encroached upon recently for development but still offers good birding and a countryside 'feel' close to a busy urban area. On approaching Lefkosia leave the motorway at the exit for the Strovolos Industrial Estate. Take the third exit at the roundabout at the bottom of the slipway towards Latsia. Continue until you reach another large roundabout. Here take the second exit to Geri. A few hundred metres to the left a brown signpost shows an entrance to the park. Take this and drive into the forest park until a car park is reached. From here it is a short walk to the dam and its hide. Any other tarmaced road or footpath can also be taken to look for resident and visiting non-water birds. Please be aware that there are several National Guard army camps nearby so great care must be taken when using binoculars near the no-photography signs of the camp's perimeters. There are other entrances to the park from the peripheral road.



The area consists of tree plantations, scrub and a small dam that has recently held water throughout the year. A hide has been built over looking the dam but as it does not give viewing of the whole area a walk around the water's edge is advised – although in places it is quite overgrown. Wintering wildfowl include Shoveler, Pintail and Wigeon *Anas penelope* with Ferruginous Duck now proving regular. Heron species recorded include Great White Egret *Egretta alba*, Bittern and Night Heron as well as the Grey Heron and Little Egret which make regular use of the dam in winter

and on passage. Raptors spotted include Sparrowhawk *Accipter nisus*, Peregrine and harriers while waders such as snipe *Gallinago gallinago* and sandpipers occur on passage with Woodcock a possibility in winter.

A number of passerines turn up in the wooded areas near the lake and in the scrub and forests. Breeding warblers include Spectacled, Cettis *Cettia cetti*, Fan-tailed *Cisticola juncidi* and Olivaceous. Reed and Sedge Warblers, Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*, Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca* and Nightingale use the region on passage, as do shrikes and flycatchers. Cyprus Warbler is said to breed here as do Great Spotted Cuckoo, Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur* and occasionally Bee-eaters. Black Francolin are heard (and seen) in the area while all four of Cyprus' species of owl breed here. Woodlark and Skylark *Alauda arvensis* winter along with Serins *Serinus serinus* and Meadow Pipits. Incidentally although the area has been noted as one of the remaining sites in Cyprus for the Black-bellied Sandgrouse there have been no recent sightings of this species here.



Black Francolin

### **Climate and conditions**

The climate of Cyprus is typically Mediterranean with long, very hot summers and cool, sometimes wet and occasionally even cold, winters. Spring and autumn can seem relatively short with temperatures often remaining high from late April until late October. Temperatures over 29C are common and over 32C expected from June until September with 38C and over regularly reached in July and August. Rainfall is a possibility in spring with temperatures ranging from around 17C to 25C. Winter temperatures usually range between 13C and 20C but it can be colder. Snow falls regularly on the Troodos mountains between December and late March.

Sun cream and/or block are a must. So too are insect repellent and bite creams, especially if visiting coastal and wetland locations. In spring and autumn it is best to be prepared for any eventuality weatherwise. Hats are essential for hot sunny days and good walking boots useful as some of the terrain is stony and rugged. If you are walking in hot weather ensure that you have plenty of water with you at all times. Walking in the summer heat is not recommended as it can be quite debilitating.

There are several species of snake in Cyprus. Three are poisonous but only one, the blunt nosed viper is especially dangerous to humans. Boots and long trousers are vital in forest, scrub or close to water. Sandals and open toed shoes are not advisable and always look where you place your feet and hands.

### **Getting around**

Cyprus is a large island and its public transport system is not comprehensive. There are buses between major population areas and also a system of service taxis. However to visit most of the sites listed here a car, or minimum a motor-cycle is required. Four-wheel drive is not essential unless noted but greater caution is required without it. Do not take risks. If you think a road looks difficult without four-wheeled drive then do not attempt it.

Hire cars are readily available from all resorts. Check around for competitive rates. In Cyprus cars are driven on the left hand side of the road.



### **Military sensitivity**

As noted there are many military camps in Cyprus. Care and common sense should be used when bird watching near them. If there is a sign prohibiting the use of cameras, the military will include binoculars and telescopes in this, so it is best to avoid the use of such equipment in such areas.

### **General bird watching advice**

- The sites mentioned are just a few of those available. Many areas are good for bird watching and there are, for example, many reservoirs, ports and harbours that are liable to be profitable. Any coastal plain or hotel garden may be productive if you are staying in a beach resort – however unlikely this may seem when the extent of development is considered in some areas. Fields in these areas may be hiding larks, pipits, wheatears and shrikes so have a look around the area you are staying in before heading off for any of the named sites.

BirdLife Cyprus would be pleased to receive any reports or lists of sightings that you may make during your stay. Please send them to the Recorder, BirdLife Cyprus, P O Box 28076, 2090 Lefkosia, Cyprus. Tel: 22455072, Fax: 22455073.

For details of recent sightings call our Birdline on 0035725934076 which is updated regularly.

**Please act responsibly and respect private property during your stay. Bird watching is not a hobby that is well understood by most locals so avoid misunderstandings. Ensure that you do not damage any habitat and keep disturbance of the birds you are watching to a minimum. Always follow bird protection laws and do not harass birds. Remember that during migration periods many species may be resting after a long journey to get up their strength to continue what may still be a considerable distance. Please bird watch here in Cyprus observing the same rules of conduct as you would at home and enjoy yourself!**



Spanish sparrow