Cyprus Birding 1-8 April 2018 Text and photographs by Jonathan Faroogi



Paphos Headland

Day 1 - 1st April 2018

Our flight arrived mid-afternoon, and by the time we had reached our villa in Latchi there was just enough time to have a brief look around the garden before dark. A **Sardinian Warbler** singing in the scrub over the fence was the first bird of what would prove to be a great trip.

Day 2 - 2nd April 2018

On our second morning we decided to get up early and make the short journey to the Baths of Aphrodite, hopefully to see a few migrants as well as any interesting breeding birds. We focused our attention on the caravan park, starting at the gully by the entrance. Immediately we started seeing Blackcaps and it became clear that there had been a bit of an arrival. We estimated that we saw at least 40 in the area, and Sardinian Warblers were also present in abundance. A rather Reed Warbler like song had us suspecting that we were about to get our first lifer of the trip, and sure enough, after a short wait, an Eastern Olivaceous Warbler appeared close to us, showing its actually quite distinctive plumage and habit of dipping its tail. As we walked east along the edge of the caravan park we saw our first Cyprus Wheatear of the trip - a female sitting on a gorse bush. Continuing along the track, a female harrier flushed out of the grass, giving us a close flyby. With quite broad wings and five primary 'fingers', this was a Hen Harrier, and our only one of the trip. The day wasn't over in terms of harriers however, as around just ten minutes later, when we reached the east end, another adult female harrier lifted off the cliff. However, this one was clearly different to that earlier, with slightly slimmer wings, dusky secondaries and a narrower wingtip - a female Pallid Harrier. A pair of Cyprus Wheatears were showing well on patch of burnt ground at this end of the



Lustern Bonem's Wurbler

Buzzard also flew over.

caravan park, and a pale phyllosc revealed itself as an **Eastern Bonelli's Warbler**, eventually giving stunning views against the dark blue sea as it fed in a cliff top bush. We headed back towards the car park along the path of the bank of the west side of the caravan park, and picked up a **Wood Warbler** in the trees above the 'bath'. Back at the car park, a large flock of hirundines had gathered above, and as well as plenty of **Swallows**, **Swifts** and **House Martins**, also included several **Red-rumped Swallows** and a single **Crag Martin**, while a **Long-legged**

During the afternoon of day two we stayed around the villa, having a look at what birds were around Latchi. There was a small track running behind the villa, through an area of scrub and up into the fields behind, and this proved particularly attractive. Immediately a pair of Cyprus Wheatears appeared on the roof, and plenty of Sardinian and Fan-tailed Warblers were singing around the scrub. We had noticed a large flock of sparrows over the back fence and wanted to check them for Spanish Sparrows. Sure enough when we reached the small track we were straight onto about half a dozen males and probably a similar number of streaky females. A few metres further on we found a female Masked Shrike sitting on the side of the next row of bushes, and my dad got some great views as I was watching the sparrows. Two Crested Larks also landed close by. We walked back to the villa and stayed there for a few hours, but headed back to the track when we heard the distinctive call of a Black Francolin. By the time we reached the wheat fields there were two calling, and one seemed to be just a few metres away, but we could not see them. Eventually though, my dad did pick one up in a field margin and this Francolin showed well during the evening. During the last hour of daylight, a steady passage of Swallows was evident overhead with several flocks of over fifty birds, and a large group of over forty Red-rumped Swallows were a great sight.





Black Francolin (left) and Spanish Sparrow (right) both photographed close to our villa in Latchi.

Day 3 - 3rd April 2018

Day three was the day of our trip which was designated to birding. We decided to head south from where we were staying to the area east of Paphos and basically try and see as many new birds as we could. We were pretty successful and ended up seeing seven lifers. Our first stop was the Asprokremmos Dam where we hoped we'd be able to see Cyprus Warbler. To start with we weren't exactly sure of where to look but eventually chose to search some suitable looking habitat south of the dam. We were in luck and a male **Cyprus Warbler** appeared on some low scrub and gave some decent views. Two **Chukars** were among the stones on the dam wall and a flock of 7 **Purple Herons** flying west were joined by two of the local **Greys**. We started walking back to the car, and passed the dried up 'Aspro Pools', where a very smart **Spur-winged Lapwing** was sitting on the stony

banks. This saved us a trip to Pahphos sewage works later in the day, and while watching the plover, our only **Alpine Swift** of the trip was in a flock of 30+ **Commons**.



Spur-winged Lapwing at Asprokremmos Dam

On leaving Asprokremmos Dam we headed to the town of Mandria. Parking in the village it took a bit of searching for us to locate our next target - a Laughing Dove. We found two males singing from aerials with the Collared Doves. While the provenance of the Laughing Doves on Cyprus isn't known for certain, it is thought that they arrived from the expanding African population.

Our next stop was Mandria where, on this visit, we spent less time than we intended. We had enough time to see a **Spur-winged Lapwing** flying along the beach, along with a few **Black-headed Wagtails** and a small flock of **Short-toed Larks**. Our reason for not staying much longer was that we spoke to a birder who told us about one of our most hoped for birds of the trip on the nearby Timi Beach. We headed straight round there, and on getting to the beach it wasn't long until we had the stunning **Greater Sand Plover** in our sight. We spent a while watching this bird, before exploring the grassy areas and fields behind. This produced a couple of **Isabelline Wheatears**, a male **Eastern Subalpine Warbler** and a **Whinchat**.

There were a couple of other sites we wanted to visit before the end of the day, and the next was Anarita Park to try and see some Lesser Kestrels. Sure enough, when we got to the pull in looking up towards the hill, we were able to see four Lesser Kestrels hovering over the fields. Three Tawny Pipits were also visible from here and a Peregrine flew over.

Our final site of the day was Nata Ford. **Spanish Sparrows** were the most obvious bird here and a



Greater Sand Plover

rough count gave 100+. 2 **Turtle Doves** were purring from the wires by the river, but there was no sign of the hoped for Great Spotted Cuckoo. We picked up two large raptors over the distant hills and through the scopes we got nice views of two impressive **Bonelli's Eagles**. The small river by the bridge was attracting a few waders, and here we had our only **Little Ringed Plover** and **Snipe** of the



Black-headed Wagtail at Nata Ford(left) and Cyprus Warbler at Asprokremmos Dam (below)



trip as well as a **Green Sandpiper**. A small group of **Black-headed Wagtails** included one 'superciliaris' bird.

Day 4 – 4th April 2018

Day four was spent mostly around the villa and local towns with little birding part from the usuals around the villa. However, in the evening we ventured out to go and look for the recently split and endemic Cyprus Scops Owl. We decided to try and the area around Saint Minas Chapel and Neo Chorio, and it wasn't long after dark that we started to hear them. Cyprus Scops Owls seemed to be calling from all around us, but it took a while to get one close enough to get our specially purchased torch onto. In the end we did manage some really good views in the torch light, especially when a couple sat in the wires which I managed to photograph by balancing my camera on the car wing mirror.



Cyprus Scops Owl

Day 5 - 5th April 2018

Our destination for day 5 was Paphos Headland. Not only did this have the potential for good birds, it was also a good place for the whole family. We got lucky and one of the first birds we looked at was a female **Rüppell's Warbler** in one of the bushes. A group of **Swifts** swirling overhead included at least two **Pallid Swifts**, and a male **Masked Shrike** sat on some low scrub. At one point we heard some sylvia warbler song which we couldn't identify, and eventually we got onto a very elusive first-summer male **Eastern Subalpine Warbler**, although we did have to confirm its ID when we got back to the villa. Several **Common Nightingales** showed quite well around the headland. Offshore a flock of 12 **Pintail** flew west, and a group of 4 **Purple Heron** arrived 'in off' and flew overhead.

We continued around the headland, visiting the lighthouse and exploring the ruins as we did so. A movement in one of the ruins caught my eye and saw a dark looking bird flick over a wall. Moving



Masked Shrike at Paphos Headland

closer, I managed a brief view of a **Thrush Nightingale** sat on a wall, before it darted right into the bottom of a thick bush. As we walked back to the car, our only **Black-eared Wheatear** of the trip was sat up on a branch.

The day had one last surprise in store, as on the drive back to our villa in Latchi, a **Roller** was sat on a wire close to the town of Kritou Tera. We had assumed we would be too early to get a Roller so it was nice to see one of the first in Cyprus this year.

Day 6 – 6th April 2018

Driving through our trip so far, we had noticed a couple of reports of a Baillon's Crake from the small town of Agia Varvara just east of Paphos. We didn't really have any idea where exactly around the town it was seen but we decided to drive there and have a look anyway.

We arrived early morning and found our way down to the small stream and dried up ponds in the small valley nearby. We searched around the ponds, and one still had a bit of water in. There was no sign of the Crake but a flock of 7 **Ruff** also contained a **Wood Sandpiper** and a flock of 7 **Garganey** flew over. We flushed a **Purple Heron** from the stream and the vegetation alongside held a couple of singing **Great Reed Warblers**.

We moved west, still searching for any areas of water where the Crake may be hiding, but continued not to have much luck. I noticed an interesting looking bird sat on a bush on the hillside, and was pleased to get the scope on it and see a male **Ortolan Bunting** – my first ever. Another lifer just a few minutes later as my dad picked up a **Great Spotted Cuckoo** close by.

We had just started to walk back to the car, when we noticed another birder walking along the track. We asked him if he knew anything about the Crake, and were really grateful when I said he would show us the tiny patch of the stream where it had been favouring. We followed him through some reeds and scrub, and arrived at a very small stretch of stream bordered by reeds on one side and rocks on the other.

Incredibly, we had to wait just a few minutes before the **Baillon's Crake** emerged from the reeds. We were treated to some prolonged and stunning views as it foraged around the stony edge and walked towards us. Eventually, with it just a few metres away, the Crake walked back into the reeds. This would prove to be our bird of the trip, and without the helpfulness of the other birder, one we would not have seen.



Baillon's Crake

Encouraged by this success, we decided to head to Mandria next, hoping for better numbers of birds than our last visit. Sure enough, a recently cut field was proving very attractive for **Yellow Wagtails**. We estimated 30+ **Black-headed** and 10+ **Blue-headed Wagtails**, and there were also singles of **Grey-headed Wagtail** and a 'Dombroskii' intergrade. At least 15 smart **Red-throated Pipits** also showed well and an **Isabelline Wheatear** was in the field too.

We walked around to the short grassy area close to the beach. The group of **Short-toed Larks** had increased to at least 45, and had been joined by 5 **Northern Wheatears**. 3 **Shag** and 3 **Little Egret** were sat on the rocks just offshore, while four **Baltic Gulls** flew east offshore.

Our final stop of the day was at a viewpoint near Kathikas. We were treated to some great views of a **Long-legged Buzzard** and 7 **Purple Herons** moved over high.

<u>Day 7 – 7th of April 2018</u>

This was our final full day on Cyprus and we decided to spend it walking the 7.5km Aphrodite Trail on the Akamas Peninsula. It was a hot and sweaty walk at 27°C, but really enjoyable with a decent selection of birds seen.

We started again at the Baths of Aphrodite, and there were few migrants around the caravan park. The highlight was a first-summer male **Pallid Harrier** which flew over low and south. Otherwise, a single **Eastern Bonelli's Warbler** showed well in song, 6 **Eastern Olivaceous Warblers** were seen, and an **Isabelline Wheatear** was our first at the caravan park.





Pallid Harrier (left) and 'Steppe' Buzzard (right)

The trail led up into the hills behind the caravan park. **Cyprus Wheatears** were common throughout the walk, and 5+ **Serin** were in the higher woods. Just as we neared the highest point of the trail, we noticed a large falcon overhead and were astonished to see a pale morph **Eleonora's Falcon** overhead. We'd assumed we were much too early to see one of these, so this was perhaps the biggest surprise of our trip, and possibly one of the earliest sightings on Cyprus. A **Steppe Buzzard** also flew over soon after.

The only one of my main targets remaining at this point was **Cretzschmar's Bunting**, so it was good to see and hear a couple of singing males as we descended back down towards the caravan park. 3 **Masked Shrikes** were in the same area.

Before heading back to our villa, we stopped at the nearby Smygies Picnic Site. There was no sign of any more Cretzschmar's Buntings here, but there were a few **Serin**, **Cyprus Wheatears** and two day calling **Cyprus Scops Owls**.

Day 8 - 8th April 2018

With some gloomy weather overnight, we had just enough time to have a final look at the Baths of Aphrodite caravan park before our flight back to Newcastle. Unfortunately the weather had

produced nothing new whatsoever, but a small group of **Red-rumped Swallows** was a nice end to the trip.

Classified List

Garganey Spatula querquedula	Flock of seven at Agia Varvara on 6 th .
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Mallard Anas platyrhynchos	Two at Agia Varvara on 6 th .
Northern Pintail Anas acuta	Twelve flew west past Paphos on 5 th .
Chukar Alectoris chukar	Quite common. Good views had at
	Asprokremmos Dam and Nata Ford on 3 rd .
Black Francolin Francolinus francolinus	Heard at a number of sites. Seen well in
	Latchi on 2 nd .
Grey Heron Ardea cinerea	Two over Asprokremmos Dam on 3 rd .
Purple Heron Ardea purpurea	Seen flying over a number of locations.
Little Egret Egretta garzetta	Three on rocks at Mandria on 6 th .
European Shag Phalacrocorax aristotelis	Three on rocks at Mandria on 6 th .
Bonelli's Eagle Aquila fasciata	Two over Nata Ford on 3 rd .
Eurasian Sparrowhawk Accipiter nisus	One at Baths of Aphrodite on 2 nd .
Hen Harrier Circus cyaneus	Female at Baths of Aphrodite on 2 nd .
Pallid Harrier Circus macrourus	Two at Baths of Aphrodite - adult female on 2 nd and a first-summer on 7 th .
Long-legged Buzzard Buteo rufinus	One over Baths of Aphrodite on 2 nd and another at Kathikas on 6 th .
Common Buzzard Buteo buteo (vulpinus)	Seen at a number of localities. One definite 'Steppe' Buzzard on 7 th .
Baillon's Crake Porzana pusilla	One showed well at Agia Varvara on 6 th .
Spur-winged Lapwing Vanellus spinosus	Singles at Asprokremmos Dam and Mandria on 3 rd .
Little Ringed Plover Charadrius dubius	One at Nata Ford on 3 rd .
Greater Sand Plover Charadrius leschenaultii	One at Timi Beach on 3 rd .
Ruff Calidris pugnax	Seven at Agia Varvara on 6 th .
Common Snipe Gallinago gallinago	One at Nata Ford on 3 rd .

Green Sandpiper Tringa ochropus	Two at Nata Ford on 3 rd and one at Agia
, ,	Varvara on 6 th .
Wood Sandpiper Tringa glareola	One at Agia Varvara on 6 th .
Yellow-legged Gull Larus michahellis	
Baltic Gull Larus fuscus fuscus	Four past Mandria on 6 th .
Rock Dove Columba livia	
Common Wood Pigeon Columba palumbus	
Turtle Dove Streptopelia turtur	Two at Nata Ford on 3 rd .
Eurasian Collared Dove Streptopelia decaocto	
Laughing Dove Spilopelia senegalensis	Two in Mandria on 3 rd .
Great Spotted Cuckoo Clamator glandarius	One at Agia Varvara on 6 th .
Cyprus Scops Owl Otus cyprius	Heard in a number of places. Seen near Neo Chorio on 4 th .
Alpine Swift Tachymarptis melba	One over Asprokremmos Dam on 3 rd .
Common Swift Apus apus	
Pallid Swift Apus pallidus	Two at Paphos Headland on 5 th .
European Roller Coracias garrulous	One on a telegraph wire by the E709 near Tera on 5 th .
Eurasian Hoopoe Upupα epops	Widespread.
Lesser Kestrel Falco naumanni	At least four at Anarita Park on 3 rd .
Common Kestrel Falco tinnunculus	
Eleonora's Falcon Falco eleonorae	Pale morph over the Aphrodite Trail (Akamas Peninsular) on 7 th .
Peregrine Falcon Falco peregrinus	One over Anarita Park on 3 rd .
Eurasian Magpie <i>Pica pica</i>	
Western Jackdaw Coloeus monedula soemmerringii	Very large flock near Nata Ford on 3 rd .
Hooded Crow Corvus cornix	

Great Tit Parus major	
Crested Lark Galerida cristata	Common and widespread.
Greater Short-toed Lark Calandrella brachydactyla	Fifteen at Mandria on 3 rd had increased to forty-five on 6 th .
Barn Swallow Hirundo rustica	
Eurasian Crag Martin Ptyonoprogne rupestris	One over Baths of Aphrodite on 2 nd .
Common House Martin Delichon urbicum	
Red-rumped Swallow Cecropis daurica	Seen at a number of locations. Forty over Latchi on 2 nd .
Cetti's Warbler Cettia cetti	Common and widespread.
Wood Warbler Phylloscopus sibilatrix	One at Baths of Aphrodite on 2 nd .
Eastern Bonelli's Warbler Phylloscopus orientalis	Singles at Baths of Aphrodite on 2 nd and 6 th .
Willow Warbler Phylloscopus trochilus	
Common Chiffchaff Phylloscopus collybita	
Great Reed Warbler Acrocephalus arundinaceus	Two at Agia Varvara on 6 th .
Sedge Warbler Acrocephalus schoenobaenus	Two at Agia Varvara on 6 th .
Eastern Olivaceous Warbler Iduna pallida	Up to six at Baths of Aphrodite on 2 nd , 7 th and 8 th .
Zitting Cisticola Cisticola juncidis	Common and widespread.
Eurasian Blackcap Sylvia atricapilla	Common in the first few days.
Lesser Whitethroat Sylvia curruca	Multiple birds at Paphos Headland on 5 th and Baths of Aphrodite on 6 th .
Common Whitethroat Sylvia communis	One at Asprokremmos Dam on 3 rd .
Eastern Subalpine Warbler Sylvia cantillans cantillans	Singles at Timi Beach on 3 rd and Paphos Headland on 5 th .
Sardinian Warbler Sylvia melanocephala	Common and widespread.
Rüppell's Warbler Sylvia ruppeli	Female at Paphos Headland on 5 th .
Cyprus Warbler Sylvia melanothorax	One-two at Asprokremmos Dam on 3 rd .

Common Blackbird Turdus merula	
Song Thrush Turdus philomelos	
Thrush Nightingale Luscinia luscinia	One at Paphos Headland on 5 th .
Common Nightingale Luscinia	Common. Especially good views at Timi
megarhynchos	Beach on 3 rd .
Whinchat Saxicola rubetra	One at Timi Beach on 3 rd and another at Paphos Headland on 5 th .
Northern Wheatear Oenanthe oenanthe	Common.
Isabelline Wheatear Oenanthe isabellina	Birds seen at Timi Beach on 3 rd , Mandria on 6 th and Baths of Aphrodite on 7 th .
Eastern Black-eared Wheatear	One at Paphos Headland on 5 th .
Oenanthe hispanica melanoleuca	
Cyprus Wheatear Oenanthe cypriaca	Common and widespread.
House Sparrow Passer domesticus	
Spanish Sparrow Passer hispaniolensis	Seen at a number of sites. Large flock at Nata Ford on 3 rd .
Black-headed Wagtail Motacilla flava	Good numbers at Mandria on 3 rd and 6 th .
feldegg	Also at Nata Ford on 3 rd .
Blue-headed Wagtail Motacilla flava flava	At least fifteen at Mandria on 6 th .
Grey-headed Wagtail Motacilla flava thunbergi	One at Mandria on 6 th .
White Wagtail Motacilla alba alba	
Tawny Pipit Anthus campestris	Three at Anarita Park on 3 rd .
Meadow Pipit Anthus pratensis	One on the Aphrodite Trail (Akamas Peninsular) on 7 th .
Tree Pipit Anthus trivialis	Several at Agia Varvara on 6 th .
Red-throated Pipit Anthus cervinus	Good number at Mandria on 6 th . Also at Asprokremmos Dam on 3 rd .
Eurasian Greenfinch Chloris chloris	
Common Linnet Linaria cannabina	
European Goldfinch Carduelis carduelis	
European Serin Serinus serinus	Five on the Aphrodite Trail (Akamas Peninsula) on 6 th .

Corn Bunting Emberiza calandra	Seen at a number of sites.
Ortolan Bunting Emberiza hortulana	Male at Agia Varvara on 6 th .
Cretzschmar's Bunting Emberiza caesia	Two singing males on the Aphrodite Trail (Akamas Peninsula) on 7 th .



Cyprus Wheatear on the Greek flag