

# Butterflies of Cyprus & Crete, April 2022.

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Last Updated Thursday, 07 September 2023

Having seen all but four of Europe's seventeen swallowtails, festoons and apolloes, the primary goal of this trip was to find one of these remaining two, namely Cretan Festoon. With no convenient flights from Lithuania directly to Crete however, I decided to travel via Cyprus - this not only enabling me to look for Cretan Festoon and the other Crete endemics, but also to savour the delights of early spring in Cyprus, the specific targets here being Paphos Blue, the Cypriot race of Eastern Festoon and Little Tiger Blue, though with Cyprus having seen a cold winter I expected to be too early for the last of these species. Naturally, with spring migration in full swing, and the likes of Pallid Harriers moving through and Cyprus Warblers and Cyprus Wheatears arriving, birding would also figure prominently, generally the idea to go birding earlier in the day, switching to butterflies as it warmed up.

## PART A. CYPRUS

### 14 April. Lithuania - Cyprus.

Groan, a 9.20 pm scheduled flight didn't manage to leave Vilnius till 10 pm. Further delayed by the need to avoid Ukrainian airspace, it was over three-and-a-half hours later that we did a bleary-eyed landing in Larnaca, the car rental place fortunately remaining open. Picked up the car, tootled the few kilometres into Larnaca town, checked into accommodation near 2.30 am.

### 15 April. Larnaca.

After not very long in bed, rose and drove round to the area south of the Larnaca airport, a fantastic area of mixed habitat - salt lagoon, coastal marshes, agricultural meadows and, top of the lot, the large pools of Larnaca Sewage Treatment Works. Black Francolins calling from scrub all around, a nice male strutting out into the open, Zitting Cisticolas and Crested Larks even more widespread. After a quick look at the salt lagoon (essentially full of Greater Flamingos and Black-winged Stilts), I then sat myself in the hide overlooking the freshwater sewage pools - a very nice place to spend an hour or so, two Ruddy Shelducks and at least 45 Garganey among the many wildfowl present, a good mix of waders picking their way along the margins, Ruff, Wood Sandpipers and Little Stints in the main, but also Spur-winged Lapwings too, perhaps 40 in all, including those on adjacent fields. The undoubted highlights here, however, were two Collared Pratincoles that hawked the pools for most of the time I was present, plus a female Pallid Harrier that cruised through about a half hour after I arrived. Also nice, several Little Terns active, a party of Gull-billed Terns passing through and a dozen or so Glossy Ibises. Quite happy with that, I then continued to Spiro's Pool a couple of kilometres further - had been a Caspian Plover here some days earlier, but if it was still present, I certainly did not find it. Huge numbers of waders present though, Ruffs and Little Stints in their hundreds, Wood Sandpipers also abundant. Sifted through them, adding Marsh Sandpipers and Kentish Plover to the day tally, plus Ringed Plovers and Little Ringed Plovers, but nothing even remotely similar to a summer-plumaged Caspian Plover! Some compensation in the neighbouring agricultural fields - very impressive indeed, a mixed flock of about 25 Yellow Wagtails and 30 Red-throated Pipits, the former in mixed races and the latter in full summer colours, nice indeed. Assorted extras this morning included several Marsh Harriers, one Purple Heron, a flushed Quail, four Hoopoes, a Northern Wheatear and two Oortolan Buntings.

It was now midday, fairly hot and full glorious sunshine & time to look for butterflies. My main target in the Larnaca area was Little Tiger Blue, a species that likes arid area and is particularly fond of Zizyphus bushes. Unfortunately, this species is generally a later season specialist and though they can fly in mid-April, 2022 had been an unusually cold winter and chances of it already being on the wing were somewhat low. And that is how it turned out, several hours of walking the margins of Larnaca Salt Lagoon yielded not a single sign of one. Butterfly numbers in total were actually very low, the totals amounted to about 50 Small Whites, one Clouded Yellow, eight Painted Ladies, one Red Admiral, one Common Blue, one Small Copper and, top of the day, two Lesser Fiery Coppers, one Mallow Skipper and one Pygmy Skipper. In the course of searching for the Little Tiger Blues, some bird action too - one Great Spotted Cuckoo, one male Collared Flycatcher and two Marsh Sandpipers.

Day one over, 73 species of birds, nine species of butterflies.

16 April. Akrotiri.

Twitch &hellip;two days earlier, a Demoiselle Crane had been frequenting Akrotiri Gravel Pits, a fairly extensive area of arid gravel lands and damper depressions. Many a year since I'd seen this species, so seemed a good idea to move the Akrotiri Peninsula forward in my plans, my initial idea to explore the area later in the week. After an hour or so along Lady's Mile, umpteen waders including summer-plumaged Curlew Sandpipers and Spur-winged Lapwings among the again dominant Ruffs and Little Stints, I shifted westward to the Gravel Pit area. Started at Agios Georgios church, Collared Flycatcher and Spotted Flycatcher in the surrounding shrubbery, plus too Spanish Sparrows and Lesser Whitethroat. And from there, I meandered north, a Woodchat Shrike and a few Isabelline Wheatears on the open gravel areas, Cetti's Warblers in the scraps of reed. Didn't really have high hopes of finding the target bird, but reaching the far north of the area, almost abutting Akrotiri Marsh, I stopped to scan and there, stately strutting its stuff, one most resplendent Demoiselle Crane, immediately elevating itself to 'bird of the trip' status. Stayed with the bird a half hour or so, then skirted round to the north of Akrotiri Marsh. A very productive area, a mix of damp meadows grazed by cattle, shallow pools and extensive reedbeds, all were full of birds - aside plenty of Wood Sandpipers, Moorhens and Coots, also one Purple Heron, two Squacco Herons and plenty of Cattle Egrets, Little Egrets and Glossy Ibises. Also one Honey Buzzard and a pair of Bonelli's Eagles overhead and assorted passerines around the marsh, Red-throated Pipits, Great Reed Warblers and Zitting Cisticolas included. With that, it was back on the hunt for butterflies for the afternoon, this time the key target being Paphos Blue. Fairly randomly, I chose to head to low hills a little to the north, occasional Small Whites on route not inspiring much confidence. Then however I hit the jackpot - a fairly unassuming roadside verge full of small blue butterflies &hellip; and in moments it was clear what they were, all Paphos Blues. Quite mobile, they were at least 60 at this single spot, a further colony a kilometre or two further even better with perhaps 200 along an old track, cracking little butterflies. Also Orange Tips and Large White. A couple of kilometres further again, I stopped in a gently wooded area aside a stream. Paphos Blues distinctly lacking here, but a second treat awaiting - floating around the slopes, at least 30 Eastern Festeons! Also my only Speckled Woods of the trip to date, several more Orange Tips, two Cleopatra, a Mallow Skipper and a Common Blue. Rather a pleasing mix in all, added Eastern Dappled White and Lesser Fiery Copper to the day tally at a further random stop in the lowlands.

Day totals, 66 species of birds, 11 species of butterflies.

17 April. Cape Greco.

Started the morning at Cape Greco, a limestone headland jutting south-east into the Mediterranean. On arrival, one Whinchat on a spindly branch, one female Pallid Harrier cruising over, not a bad start. Initial signs however did not hint at heavy migration this day, the outer peninsula actually quite quiet, bar hordes of non-migrant House Sparrows and Chukars! Nevertheless, over the next few hours, the tally of good species did begin to rise - a Long-legged Buzzard and a splendid male Pallid Harrier migrating through, a mini-bevy of wheatears (three Cyprus Wheatears, one Black-eared Wheatear and one Northern Wheatear) and an assortment of Sylvia warblers, no less than seven species in all, eight Cyprus Warblers heading the east, ably supported by four Eastern Subalpine Warblers and a Spectacled Warbler. Red-rumped Swallow, Common Nightingale, Turtle Dove and Quail also seen, plus European Bee-eaters overhead. Moving inland a couple of kilometres, a small belt of pines also proved very productive, chiefly as haunt for at least six Collared Flycatchers, right smart birds. Aside them, one Wryneck, a couple of Ortolan Buntings, four Common Redstarts and a couple of Whinchats. European Bee-eaters overhead again.

Departed Cape Greco mid-morning and drove the few kilometres up to Paralimni, the extensive salt flat to the town's west the main attraction. Full of water and full of waders, Ruff and Little Stints were the main components, both in their hundreds, a reasonable mix of others also present, including Spur-winged Lapwings and Kentish Plovers. New for the trip, also added Woodlark and Tawny Pipit here. For a 'quiet' morning, it hadn't been bad - ended up with 70 species, a few real specials in their midst. Switching back to butterflies, I needn't have bothered - high cloud and hazy sunshine at best, this was to be a poor day for butterflies: only four species in total, these being about my first Swallowtail of the trip, plus about 15 Small Whites, one Eastern Dappled White and one Mallow Skipper.

With that, I abandoned the southern coast and decided to have a look at Nicosia, more the curiosity of seeing the only divided city in Europe than anything else. Crossed into the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, had a wander round, admired the mass flocks of Common Swifts. Curiosity satisfied, back to southern Cyprus.

18 April. Mountains and Southern Coast.

Warm and humid, but blighted a little by a kind of hazy sun merging into light cloud cover, somewhat darkened on occasion by dust brought on southern winds. Plan for this day was to focus on butterflies while crossing the central mountains from Nicosia in the east to Paphos in the south-east. With considerable luck, perhaps there could have been an early Cyprus Grayling on the wing, but with the not perfect weather it was always going to be a struggle to see any

butterflies! In the event, in the few sunny spells that did break through, the main butterfly that I encountered was Eastern Festoon, almost all in pristine fresh condition suggesting a somewhat late emergence this year. Large White and Small White also seen in small numbers, so too Orange Tip.

On route, a few nice birds too - several Masked Shrikes, occasional Cyprus Wheatears, one Black-eared Wheatear, several Red-rumped Swallows and one Cretzschmar's Bunting, plus a general assortment of Cypriot hill country birds, Jays, Coal Tits et al.

With weather not looking to significantly brighten, I quit the hills mid-afternoon and headed for the southern coast. Two relatively short stops - Kensington Cliffs and Agio Varvara. The first of these is famed for its Eleonora's Falcons, a couple of which had returned in previous days, but my birding highlights here were limited to flocks of Alpine Swifts cruising the cliffs. Still, did have a new species of butterfly for the trip - at least 20 Bath Whites on the slopes at the base of the cliffs. Also flying, several Small Whites, a couple of Clouded Yellows, a small colony of Paphos Blues, one Lesser Fiery Copper, one Common Blue and one Painted Lady. Moving onto Agio Varvara, my final stop of the day, a short walk around these pools was a very pleasing way to end the day - a mass swirl of Barn Swallows and House Martins, a smattering of Red-rumped Swallows and Sand Martins in the midst, then four Little Crakes and a Kingfisher on the pools themselves.

Moved down to Paphos, base for the next few days.

19 April. Paphos District.

With bright sun till early afternoon, a dedicated butterfly day, the key target being the rare African Ringlet, a highly localised species favouring steep rocky lowland slopes. Arrived at my chosen locality as the sun began to warm, Bath Whites already on the wing, a loose colony of Paphos Blues soon after, plus the first of the day's Small Coppers. Ambling round trying to identify the most likely spot for African Ringlet, my first surprise of the day was a Cyprus Grayling, an endemic species that I had assumed would not be flying yet given the lateness of the season this year. Wandered down the slope, things got better and better - among many Small Whites, a few Large Whites and Eastern Dappled Whites, quite a few more Paphos Blues, a scattering of Common Blues and, holding territories on the track, at least 18 Pygmy Skippers. At slightly lower altitude, flying around a steep slope as they should, I then found my target for the day - five African Ringlets, a sixth along a track nearby. Dainty little butterflies, this is indeed a mini ringlet. Sharing the general habitat, alongside Pygmy Skippers, one splendid Millet Skipper, another butterfly that I didn't expect to be on the wing. Truly was becoming a good butterfly day, this further reinforced with a fly-by Swallowtail and a Cyprus Meadow Brown, this latter being the final of the island's three endemic butterfly species. By early afternoon, with Red Admiral, Painted Lady, two more Cyprus Meadow Browns and a Mallow Skipper added, my day tally had now reached 19 species &hellip;one higher than the total I had seen on the whole trip prior to this day!

Unfortunately, clouds were beginning to build, hugging the hills to the north. Decided to call it quits, spent some time more searching for Dark Grass Blue in coastal patches of grass &hellip;no sign.

Total butterfly count for the day:

Swallowtail - 2  
 Eastern Festoon - 1  
 Large White - 4  
 Small White - 60  
 Bath White - 15  
 Eastern Dappled White - 3  
 Clouded Yellow - 2  
 Small Copper - 3  
 Paphos Blue - 80  
 Common Blue - 10  
 Red Admiral - 1  
 Painted Lady - 1  
 Cyprus Grayling - 1  
 Cyprus Meadow Brown - 3  
 Large Wall Brown - 1  
 African Ringlet - 6  
 Mallow Skipper - 1  
 Millet Skipper - 1  
 Pygmy Skipper - 18

With nose stuck to the ground most of the day, not a lot of birds to add this day, top of the lot were two Bonelli's Eagles and a fly-over flock of Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters. 20 April. Paphos.

A moderately quiet day. Ambled around Paphos Archeological Site early morning, migration relatively muted however - top birds were one Montagu's Harrier in-off and a Blue-cheeked Bee-eater hawking around the amphitheatre. Best of the rest, one Woodchat Shrike, one Collared Flycatcher, an Eastern Olivaceous Warbler, a Wood Warbler and a flock of Tawny Pipits.

Thereafter, I visited the valley beneath Asprokremmos Reservoir to look for butterflies. Bar masses of Paphos Blues and a scattering of other common species, not a lot happening on that front either. Fortunately, there was another highlight - one massive and very fat Blunt-nosed Viper, the only venomous snake in Cyprus. Not at all timid, this super beast actually slithered towards me each time I crouched to take photographs, rearing its head cobra-style. Cracking snake! Also saw the non-venomous Black Whip Snake, a far more wary thing, rapidly vanishing into vegetation when it saw me.

For evening entertainment, it was time to seek out Cyprus Scops Owl, the final of the island's endemic bird species. Chose a site about a half hour north-east of Paphos, an area of streamside olive orchards and larger trees dotted alongside. Seems to have been a good strategy, pulling in a little after sunset, several Cyprus Scops Owls were already calling, one pair very close to the one side. Didn't take long to find them, the one bird seeming to engage in courtship feeding, flying in several times to pass food to the mate, very nice views. Bonus, also one Long-eared Hedgehog here. Not a bad night! 21 April. Paphos.

Things to attend to in the morning, so just an afternoon out and about, returning to the same valley as two days earlier for another sampling of the butterfly riches. Temperature sitting at 32 C, butterfly activity was actually dampened a little, clearly some taking shade. Still, couldn't complain - headed again by African Ringlets, plentiful Paphos Blues and 12 Pygmy Skippers, managed 15 species of butterflies over the space of a couple of hours, mostly species as on the previous trip, but additions of Lesser Fiery Coppers and increased numbers of Eastern Dappled Whites.

22 April. South Coast and Mountains.

8.00 am on the impressive Kensington Cliffs, the sea a millpond, temperature already 24 C, quite glorious &hellip;even more so for the 30 or so Alpine Swifts darting through the skies and, point of being there, two simply stunning Eleonora's Falcons, one heading way out to sea, the other doing loops in and out of the cliff face, very nice. For added effect, one Montagu's Harrier also arrived off the sea and, only my second of the trip, a Cyprus Grayling had the good grace to pose for a photograph. Still relatively early, I then decided to pop into Akrotiri Marsh, perfect place for my morning coffee. Four Squacco Herons and a Purple Heron, one Little Crake and one Spotted Crake, one Marsh Harrier. In the reeds, oodles of Reed Warblers, Cetti's Warblers also belting out song, while in the damp meadow, still lingering Red-throated Pipits and Wood Sandpipers, quite a few Glossy Ibises too and half dozen Spur-winged Lapwings. Coffee finished.

Next stop Lady's Mile, I actually had a one-hour online meeting to attend, but I decided the perfect backdrop to that meeting would be a pool full of waders &hellip;who says work has to be a drag? In that hour, along with the usual medley of Black-winged Stilts et al, close on 200 mixed Ruff and Little Stints, 15 cracking full summer-plumaged Curlew Sandpipers, six similarly plumaged Spotted Redshanks and, surprise of the morning, one Broad-billed Sandpiper. Meeting went perfectly well too, even if questions were asked every time the Black-winged Stilts started their loud incessant alarm calls! Work over, time to head for the hills and get back into the butterflies. Very nice afternoon basically meandering from Kouris to Arminou. Among the butterflies logged, approximately 220 Paphos Blues, 45 Eastern Festoons, 26 Orange Tips, six Cleopatra and a whole bunch of the more common species. Also added my first Long-tailed Blue of the trip and Speckled Woods for only the second time.

All in all, a pretty good day I reckoned. 23 April. Larnaca.

What a difference a week makes! Returning to Larnaca for another attempt on Little Tiger Blue, my first port of call was the Larnaca Water Treatment Pools and associated wetlands &hellip;one week earlier they had been excellent, absolutely heaving with bird migrants. Now however, it was clear they had been a mass departure, the pools were relatively quiet, a mere half dozen Garganeys, moderately small flocks of waders, no unusual species and precious few Yellow Wagtails and Red-throated Pipits, both of which had been abundant on the previous visit. Even the Greater Flamingos had shifted out, the several hundred present now reduced to about 40. On the butterfly front however I had high hopes - despite extensive searching a week earlier, I had not located a single Little Tiger Blue nor Dark Grass Blue. Fast forward a week of good sunny weather, maybe they would be on the wing. Started out on wasteland near the seafront, a Lesser Fiery Copper and a couple of Small Whites to kick things off, but no big numbers. But then a tiny butterfly caught my eye, flitting fast and erratic. Lost it a few times, then a glimpse on the ground &hellip;a species that had been eluding me for days, Dark Grass Blue! And then there were two. European range essentially limited to Cyprus and Crete, a good butterfly to see. Small colony of Pygmy Skippers also seen. With that, time to try again for Little Tiger Blue on the shores of Larnaca Salt Lake. Key here is to find the Zizyphus lotus bushes, the butterflies rarely wander far from these, the food plant of the caterpillars. Well, good plan, I studiously examined each bush I found, nicely stratching my legs in the process. Not a sign, one last bush a little yonder. And there, quite miraculously, one exquisite Little Tiger Blue quietly sitting on a Zuzyphus leaf. Perfectly fresh, it would appear a new emergence. And then I found two more on

adjacent flower. Success, three Little Tiger Blues, my final target species in Cyprus. Temperature rising steadily, already 34 C early afternoon, I decided to spend the rest of the day climbing to the hilltop monastery at Stavrovouni. A delightful area of stunted pine, it was also good for Cyprus Graylings: after having seen only two all week, there clearly had been a major emergence, a minimum of 70 seen over the four kilometres I hiked. Also a few Small Coppers and, at higher altitude, about 16 Eastern Festoons.

And that was that for this day, all my targets on Cyprus now seen. Headed back to the coast for an evening on Larnaca. 24 April. Agla Varvara.

Final half day on Cyprus, popped in to Agla Varvara, a convenient stop some 15 minutes north of Paphos airport. Four Little Crakes on the pools, along with a Purple Heron, three Squacco Herons, five Night Herons and a Purple Heron, three Great Spotted Cuckoos and a Masked Shrike active in the valley, but the day's main action fell to butterflies on a wander down the valley - a clear emergence, a number of very fresh Lesser Fiery Coppers flying, so too several Swallowtails and three Cyprus Meadow Browns, only the second day I had seen these. On top of these, one fresh Lulworth Skipper, my first of the trip, and a good bunch of others, including Common Blues, Mallow Skippers, Pygmy Skipper, Clouded Yellows, Bath White and plentiful Small Whites. Then off to the airport, returned my car at midday, checked in for my flight. A grand total of 27 species of butterflies seen during my stay in Cyprus, including the three endemics (Cyprus Meadow Brown, Cyprus Grayling, Paphos Blue) and the much desired Little Tiger Blue and Dark Grass Blue. PART B. CRETE Mostly dedicated to butterflies, with the key target being Cretan Festoon, I stayed on the north coast for the first few days, then ventured into the mountains and to the south coast.

24 April. Chania-Heraklion.

Late afternoon arrival from Cyprus, landing in Chania to the backdrop of snow-capped mountains to the south. I collected a car and departed en route to Heraklion, immediate impressions were of a far greener island than Cyprus, an abundance of roadside flowers quite enticing. Though already 4 pm and late in the day for butterflies, I nevertheless did a couple of random roadside stops, adding my first four species on Crete - Swallowtail, Small White, Brown Argus and Holly Blue. On a small wetland near Georgioupilis, a Pygmy Cormorant was a little unexpected, sharing its pool with assorted Coots and Moorhens, plus a small flock of Wood Sandpipers. Alongside, common birds of Crete - pretty much like Cyprus, Sardinian Warblers all over the shop, Cetti's Warblers two-a-penny along the wetland edges. Not very much like Cyprus however, the ubiquitous House Sparrows of that island were replaced by the considerably more dapper Italian Sparrows.

Arrived in Heraklion early evening, base for the next three nights. 25 April. Karteros Canyon.

Twenty minutes north-west of Heraklion, Karteros Canyon is a superb location - green, full of flowers and with an abundance of butterflies. Arriving at 9.00, when the main gorge was still shaded, I initially focussed on areas of trackside vegetation adjacent to overgrown olive orchards, the first butterflies already emerging from the grass - several Speckled Woods, many sparkling Lulworth Skippers, a Common Blue or two. To ensure no Little Skippers were hiding in their midst, I spent a little while studying the Lulworth Skippers. No Little Skippers in there it seemed however, so I next climbed a little rocky knoll - excellent here too, several Swallowtails 'hilltopping', a couple of Eastern Baton Blues too, plus a Pygmy Skipper and Small Copper. Day was looking good. Before too long, it was time to head into the gorge, hopefully it would reveal a Cretan Festoon for me. Narrow, but quite open along the track, it really was good for butterflies - heading the east, lots of Swallowtails, an abundance of Speckled Woods and Holly Blues, many Small Whites, plus two Mountain Small Whites and singles of both Eastern Dappled White and Eastern Bath White. Also no shortage of Clouded Yellows, singles of Red Admiral and Painted Lady, reasonably frequent Common Blues and Eastern Baton Blues and my only two Long-tailed Blues on Crete.

As for Cretan Festoon, they made me wait &hellip;having walked as far as an old building midway up the gorge, I was beginning to worry a little about their absence! I needn't have, exactly at that point, a small creamy Cretan Festoon came floating past, hawked up and down the slope numerous times, then had the grace to settle upon a flower, many festoons never seem to do this! Heavily spotted, a fine female Cretan Festoon sunning before me, the trip's number one target! Soon found two more, both males but far less enthusiastic to stop, preferring instead to patrol their territories with vigor. I wandered further up the gorge, adding Brown Argus and Mallow Skipper, but soon it began to narrow and become more wooded, excellent for yet more Speckled Woods and Holly Blues, but probably not for much else. Turned and returned to the open country around the olive orchards, two Stone Curlews were a little put out by my appearance, Red-rumped Swallows zipped over.

More Eastern Baton Blues seen, but unfortunately I now had some work to do. Excellent first morning on Crete, 19 species of butterflies seen. 26 April. Voulismeno Aloni.

Didn't have much time this day, but did have enough to squeeze in a couple of hours in the morning to a couple of steep valleys in the limestone karst a little west of Heraklion. Highly picturesque and not at all bad for birds - Griffon Vultures rising in the morning sun, Alpine Swifts zigzagging between them, down below Blue Rock Thrush and Black-

eared Wheatears in the valleys, Eastern Olivaceous Warblers common. My focus however was still on butterflies & what a pleasant two hours it was! Not as prolific as Karteros Canyon the day before, but I did manage 19 species again, including my only Cretan Small Heath of the trip, one of the island's endemics, along with several very smart Cretan Festoons, 18 Swallowtails, one Cleopatra, a number of Eastern Baton Blues and my first Wall Brown of the trip. Also Small White, Mountain Small White, Eastern Dappled White, Clouded Yellow, Small Copper, Common Blue, Holly Blue, Brown Argus, Painted Lady, Red Admiral, Speckled Wood and Lulworth Skipper.

Just before leaving, somewhere from a grove of old olives, a Scops Owl decided to make a rare daytime call. Clocked that location, then returned in the evening & what a racket, at least four very vocal Scops Owls in full voice, calls echoing around the slopes, one very close. Failed to see any however! Two Nightjars also churring, very atmospheric. 27 April. Aposelemis Dam & Mount Ida.

A half hour east of Heraklion, I had expected Aposelemis Dam to be similar in terms of butterflies to Karteros Canyon. As it turned out however, rather hotter and drier here, the lush greenery of Karteros more muted. Considerably less impressive for butterflies as a result, only nine species seen and moderately small numbers of all. On the butterfly front, the highlights were three Cretan Festoons and an Eastern Dappled White, but absolutely trumping them were three unexpected Eleonora's Falcons - not only impressive aerial displays, but even dropping down to drink at the reservoir, one dark phase, two intermediate. With Aposelemis not as productive as hoped, I then changed plans and decided to head to the high mountains, specifically the Nida Plateau on Mount Ida. Sitting at 1400 metres, this is the key locality for Cretan Argus later in the year, but with extensive snow patches remaining, I didn't expect too much at this altitude. How wrong I was, the road up was spectacular, butterflies especially plentiful in the 'Goldilocks' zone between 600-1000 metres - fourteen species, tops being at least 40 Cretan Festoons floating around the slopes! Also, among the rest, abundant Clouded Yellows, more Eastern Dappled Whites, a few Holly Blues and both Brown Argus and Mallow Skipper. At the plateau itself, the air rare and the skies with Griffon Vultures and Red-billed Choughs, still butterflies - Cretan Festoon over snowfields, pure magic. Also up here, Mountain Small Whites seeming to replace the Small Whites from lower down, one Wall Brown and my only Large Tortoiseshell of the trip. Optimistically walked around the sheep-grazed plateau in the hope a Cretan Argus had decided to emerge a six weeks early & probably wisely, none had. Northern Wheatears and Black-eared Wheatears, plus several Chukars, the tally here.

My destination for the evening was Kamilari on the south coast, but though less than 20 km distant, the rocky trail heading that way seemed no place for a car. Had to backtrack all the way to Heraklion, total journey 105 km. Checked into my nice apartment in the early evening, spotted some potted Geraniums in the garden. And bingo, what a good choice of accommodation - the Geraniums hosted an exquisite Geranium Bronze, the only one I would see on this trip.

28 April. Kamilari & Kastro Fortress.

Work to deal with in the morning, but did pop out and notch up the Geranium Bronze again, still dutifully flitting around the potted geraniums in the garden, now accompanied by several Lulworth Skippers. Also Clouded Yellow and Swallowtail drifting by, several Small Whites too.

With work done, I decided to head into the hills, choosing at random the tracks up to Kastro Fortress, some 15 km north of Kalimari. Definitely a mistake taking the shortest route, the rough boulder strewn track not ideal for the car I was driving! Somehow got up without causing any lasting damage, left the car a kilometre short of Kastro Fortress and walked the remainder. First Meadow Browns of the trip soon seen, about 35 in all, superbly fresh individuals clearly just emerged. Lots of Clouded Yellows too, plus sail-by Swallowtails and a general mix of more usual species. A pleasant wander, a couple of Woodchat Shrikes on the way up, plus plentiful Sardinian Warblers et al. Nearing the fortress, a little purple patch of flowers, a patch of flowers actively attracting butterflies - to a backdrop of Painted Ladies and Small Whites, one very exquisite Scarce Swallowtail and one very diminutive Pygmy Skipper.

Somewhere around here, just after an Eastern Dappled White, I made the not very wise decision to scramble down a steep rocky slope & didn't so much as scramble, but lost my footing and went head over heels twice and unceremoniously landed at the bottom. Twisted one angle, hurt the other foot and sprained my wrist & didn't damage my camera though

So to the remainder of the afternoon, now sporting a distinct limp, I decided to explore the coastal strip near Timpaki. Used the slightly longer, but better, northern track and 20 minutes later I was beside the Timpaki Salt Lake. Tucked in between the sea, a road and a disused football pitch, this tiny postage stamp sized piece of aquatic habitat nevertheless was not bad - smack in the middle a Mute Swan, surely not a very common bird in Crete, but perhaps of more interest the reasonable selection of waders - as well as a few Little Ringed Plovers a single Ringed Plover and a couple of Black-winged Stilts, at least 45 Wood Sandpipers, about 30 Ruff, a dozen or so Little Stints, two summer-plumaged Curlew Sandpipers and, pride of place, sitting on a small gravel island, seven very nice Collared Pratincoles. With my foot and ankle both hurting, it seemed a good excuse to just sit a while and watch the goings-on. Suddenly the entire pool of waders shot into the air & storming in, one Peregrine causing considerable alarm. Fortunately it didn't catch one of the Collared Pratincoles, a few minutes later all seven flew back in.

Dragged myself away and hobbled off into meadows a kilometre or so back towards Kamilari. A couple more Swallowtails, my first Large White on Crete, but the highlights were once again avian - nicely rounding the day off, a flock

of European Bee-eaters hawking over an adjacent slope, several Alpine Swifts in the midst. Climbed the slope and enjoyed the spectacle, so ended the day. 29 April. Agios Ioannis.

South of Kofinas, not for the faint hearted, there is an eight-kilometre narrow rocky track that virtually drops off a cliff to reach the hamlet of Agios Ioannis. Having seen a report that someone saw a White-banded Grayling here some days earlier, so it was that I found myself gingerly easing the car down the track, pretending not to notice the lack of barriers while navigating the steep gravel-laden hairpins and trying my best not to be too distracted by the Griffon Vultures hanging in the sky above. I eventually got to the bottom without incident, a pocket-sized patch of relatively flat land beside the sea awaiting, Crag Martins and Alpine Swifts were zooming around, a Black-eared Wheatear sang from rocks nearby.

I, however, was watching the sky with dismay - for the first time during my stay in Crete, the sun seemed to be losing a battle against a growing bank of cloud. I had doubts any butterflies would be flying, even less so as it was also windy. Still, with a kind of hazy sun showing itself every now and again, I set off to explore &hellip;several Small Whites fluttering weakly, one incredibly tatty Common Blue, one Speckled Wood in a gully. And that was it &hellip;and it seemed to be becoming even more overcast. I decided to drive back up the track a little and explore the deep gorge to the immediate east. I had driven all of a hundred metres when I spotted a butterfly sitting on the track, a grayling! Jumped out of the car and immediately took a few photographs, but something didn't look right - this seemed to be a Cretan Grayling not a White-banded Grayling! And when it took to the wing, this suspicion was confirmed. That was a bit luck, I thought I was too early in the season to see this island endemic. I also now wondered if the report of White-banded Grayling was erroneous, they too tend to fly a little later in the season. Anyhow, still hobbling from the day before's fall, I used the last remaining brightness to walk into the lower reaches of the gorge &hellip;and there I immediately found two more graylings, and these absolutely were White-banded Graylings! Double success.

All just in the nick of time, the cloud was thickening ever more, I would see only one more butterfly this day, a fast moving Swallowtail on my walk back to the car. Realising the cloud was set to stay, I drove back up the track to the top of the mountain and decided to use the remainder of the day to relocate to the west of the island. A quick look again at the salt lake at Timbaki added a Greenshank to the tally of waders there, then stopped later at Agia Lake near Chania. Not bad - two Whiskered Terns and one White-winged Black Tern hawking, plus heaps of hirundines hawking (Barn Swallows and Sand Martins in the main, a few House Martins and a pair of Red-rumped Swallows too). Also one Little Crake at the lake fringe and numerous Coots and a few Moorhens.

From there, I climbed back into the mountains to the village of Omalos, stayed overnight. 30 April. Omolas Road.

Chilly start in this spectacular landscape, only 6 C, far too cold for butterflies. Time for birding, chiefly at the head of the Samaria Gorge. A very pleasant mix here, alongside abundant everyday birds such as Blackbirds, Wrens and Chaffinches, some nice Cretan flavour additions - Griffon Vultures, Alpine Swifts and Red-billed Choughs overhead, Blue Rock Thrushes and Black-eared Wheatears on the crags, Turtle Doves, Woodlarks and Cirl Buntings in the scrub zone. Several Wrynecks also calling, a flock of European Bee-eaters in the agricultural area and a couple of pairs of Woodchat Shrikes too.

As for butterflies, I descended a little, following the road back down from Omolas and, even then, it wasn't until 10.30 that the action started. But when it did start, it was spectacular - first species a Cretan Festoon, seconds later a Scarce Swallowtail and then, while still watching these two, an Eastern Baton Blue. Within moments, the slope was full of butterflies, at 800 metres altitude, I was again in a Goldilocks zone. In temperatures now rising above 20 C, I slowly worked down the slope, exploring side tracks and flower meadows, amazing numbers of Cretan Festoons and Scarce Swallowtails all the way, these clocking in at absolute minimums of 75 and 26 respectively. Also plenty of other species, Eastern Dappled Whites moderately common, Holly Blues very much so. Unfortunately, descending below the village of Lakkoi, the super abundance dried up a little, though still Cretan Festoons remained in lesser numbers and Speckled Woods became ever more common.

Approximate totals:

Swallowtail - 12  
 Scarce Swallowtail - 26  
 Cretan Festoon - 75+  
 Large White - 12  
 Mountain Small White - 15  
 Small White - 80+  
 Eastern Dappled White - c.20  
 Clouded Yellow - 30  
 Red Admiral - 2  
 Painted Lady - 8  
 Speckled Wood - 45  
 Wall Brown - 8

Holly Blue - 50+  
 Common Blue - c.25  
 Brown Argus - 1  
 Eastern Baton Blue - 4  
 Lulworth Skipper - 2

In the lowlands by middle afternoon, I decided to pop into Agia Lake again - Whiskered Terns gone, but still the White-winged Black Tern was present, so too the Little Crake. Tried to find Wood White without success, but did encounter both a Little Bittern and a Great Snipe! I can live with that .

Tried later to find some wasteland near the coast, perhaps a Grass Jewel or Dark Grass Blue to round the day off. No such luck here either, several Swallowtails the main butterfly highlight, four circling Honey Buzzards also nice. With that, I called it a day and found accommodation in Platanius. 1 May. Agia Lake.

Flight out at 10 am, just time to pop into Agia Lake for a final visit, Little Crake duly showing, White-winged Black Tern hawking, still heaps of mixed hirundines and swifts. With that, to the airport, one Small White flying outside the terminal, trip over.

## CONCLUSION

Between Cyprus and Crete, I saw a total of 40 species of butterflies (27 species on Cyprus, 29 species on Crete). While islands do not have the diversity of mainland sites, I was more than happy with this number, not least as it included real gems such as Little Tiger Blue, Paphos Blue and both Eastern and Cretan Festoons, as well as Cyprus Grayling, Cyprus Meadow Brown, Cretan Grayling and Cretan Small Heath (all endemics). Also plenty of other very good butterflies such as Scarce Swallowtail, the highly localised Millet Skipper and Dark Grass Blue.

Travelling later in the season, though the festoons and Paphos Blue would no longer be flying, a greater variety of graylings would also be available, as well as Cretan Argus. However, for an early season butterfly trip, especially given most of the rest of Europe is still quite cold, it is hard to beat these Mediterranean islands. FULL LIST OF ALL BUTTERFLIES SEEN ON CYPRUS & CRETE, APRIL 2022.

Swallowtail (*Papilio machaon*)CYPRUS. Seven seen - one in Nicosia, two at Mavrokolypos Reservoir and four at Agia Varvara.CRETE. Widespread and fairly common. Best counts were about 40 at Karteros Canyon, 18 at Voulismeno Aloni and 12 along the road to Omolas. Additionally, one on the slopes of Mount Ida, four at Kastro Fortress, three near Kamilari and one at Agios Ioannis. Scarce Swallowtail (*Iphiclides podalirius*)CRETE. Top count was an impressive 26 along the road going down from Omolas. Elsewhere, just three seen - singles at Aposelemis Dam, Mount Ida and Kastro Fortress.

Eastern Festoon (*Zerynthia cerisy cypria*)CYPRUS. Localised, but fairly common in the low hills. Total records consisted of 30+ at Kouris Reservoir, about 20 at Gourri, one at Mavrokolypos Reservoir, about 25 at Arminou Reservoir and 16 at Stavrovouni. Cretan Festoon (*Zerynthia cretica*)

CRETE. Main target of the trip. Highest numbers were at fairly high altitude, specifically 40+ on the slopes of Mount Ida (altitudes 600-1450 metres, even flying where snow still lingered) and 75+ along the road down from Omolas (altitudes mostly 500-800 metres, though some down to less than 100 metres). Additionally, three seen at Karteros Canyon, four at Voulismeno Aloni and three at Aposelemis Dam. Large White (*Pieris brassicae*)

CYPRUS. Scattered individuals almost daily. Records included seven at Kouris Reservoir, five at Gourri, six at Mavrokolypos Reservoir and singles at Asprokremmos Reservoir, Arminou Reservoir and Stavrovouni.CRETE. One near Kamilari area, 12 along the road down from Omolas. Small White (*Pieris rapae*)

CYPRUS. Widespread and common. Seen at all localities visited, best counts being 50-60+ at Larnaca Salt Lake, Kouris Reservoir, Mavrokolypos Reservoir and Agia Varvara. At all other sites, generally 10-20 seen per locality.CRETE. Common and widespread, less so at the highest altitudes. Top counts were minimums of 150 at Karteros Canyon, 80 along the road down from Omolas, 50 at Voulismeno Aloni and 40 at both Aposelemis Dam and around Kamilari. Smaller numbers also seen on the slopes of Mount Ida, around Kastro Fortress and at Agios Ioannis. Mountain Small White (*Pieris ergane*)CRETE. Seems to partially replace Small White at higher or more rugged sites. Total records were two at Karteros Canyon, three at Voulismeno Aloni, five on the slopes of Mount Ida and 15 along the road down from Omolas. Easiest to identify by the small square black apical patch on the forewing, not running along the margins as in Small Whites.

Eastern Dappled White (*Euchloe ausonia*)CYPRUS. Total records consisted of three individuals at Kouris Reservoir, one at Nicosia and up to ten on both visits to Mavrokolypos Reservoir.CRETE. Widespread but not very common - other than about 20 along the road down from Omolas, all other records were of singles or twos, including at Karteros Canyon, Voulismeno Aloni, Aposelemis Dam, Mount Ida and Kastro Fortress.

Eastern Bath White (*Pontia edusa*)CRETE. Only three individuals seen - two at Karteros Canyon and one at Kastro Fortress. Bath White (*Pontia daplidice*)CYPRUS. Widespread, though considerably less common than Small White. Best numbers were about 20 at Kensington Cliffs and 15 at Mavrokolypos Reservoir. Elsewhere, scattered individuals were



seen at Asprokremmos Reservoir, Mavrokolypos Reservoir, Kouris Reservoir, Larnaca Salt Lake and Agia Varvara. Note: formerly, it was thought the species present in Cyprus was Eastern Bath White, but genetic work has shown it to be Bath Whites.

Orange Tip (*Anthocharis cardamines*)

CYPRUS. Recorded in the low hills - Kouris Reservoir (up to 16 on both visits), Gourri (four) and Arminou Reservoir (10).

Clouded Yellow (*Colias crocea*)CYPRUS. Widespread, but not very common - only 14 seen over the week, these being scattered individuals at Larnaca Salt Lake, Kensington Cliffs, Mavrokolypos Reservoir, Asprokremmos Reservoir, Arminou Reservoir and Agia Varvara. CRETE. Common and widespread, top counts being 25+ at Aposelemis Dam, 50+ on the slopes of Mount Ida, 40+ at Kastro Fortress, 30+ around Kamilari and 30 along the road down from Omolas. Elsewhere, six at Karteros Canyon and four at Voulismeno Aloni.

Cleopatra (*Gonepteryx cleopatra*)CYPRUS. Only recorded at Kouris Reservoir (two on 16th, four on 22nd) and Arminou Reservoir (two on 22nd).CRETE. One at Voulismeno Aloni. Large Tortoiseshell (*Nymphalis polychloros*)CRETE. One on the slopes of Mount Ida.

Red Admiral (*Vanessa atalanta*)CYPRUS. Only seen at two localities - Larnaca Salt Lake (one on 15th) and Mavrokolypos Reservoir (one on 19th, two on 21st).CRETE. Only nine seen in total - one at Karteros Canyon, two at Voulismeno Aloni, four on the slopes of Mount Ida and two along the road down from Omolas.

Painted Lady (*Vanessa cardui*)CYPRUS. Widespread, small numbers seen most days. Best counts were eight at Larnaca Salt Lake and four at Mavrokolypos Reservoir. Elsewhere, one at Kensington Cliffs, two at Asprokremmos Reservoir, two at Kouris Reservoir and one at Larnaca Water Treatment Pools.CRETE. Not very common, recorded at five localities - Karteros Canyon (one), Voulismeno Aloni (four), Kastro Fortress (four), Kamilari (two) and along the road down from Omolas (eight). Speckled Wood (*Pararge aegeria*)CYPRUS. Only seen at Kouris Reservoir, two on both the 16th and 22nd.

CRETE. Very common in Karteros Canyon, at least 100 present. Elsewhere, most were at lower or middle altitude localities and included 45 along the road down from Omolas, 20 at Voulismeno Aloni, eight at Aposelemis Dam, three at Kamilari and three at altitude on the slopes of Mount Ida. One also at Agios Ioannis. Cyprus Meadow Brown (*Maniola cypriolica*)CYPRUS. Early individuals, three were noted at Mavrokolypos Reservoir on the 19th, one there on the 21st, then three at Agia Varvara on the 24th. Meadow Brown (*Maniola jurtina*)CRETE. A fresh emergence on the 28th, c 35 at Kastro Fortress and eight near Kamilari. One also next day at Agios Ioannis.

Cretan Small Heath (*Coenonympha thyrasis*)CRETE. One at Voulismeno Aloni.

Cyprus Grayling (*Hipparchia cypriensis*)CYPRUS. The beginning of the flight period - singles were seen at Mavrokolypos Reservoir on the 19th and Kensington Cliffs on the 22nd, then a mass emergence of at least 50 at Stavrovouni on the 23rd.

Cretan Grayling (*Hipparchia cretica*)

CRETE. One at Agios Ioannis.

White-banded Grayling (*Pseudochazara amalthea*)

CRETE. Two at Agios Ioannis.

Wall Brown (*Lasiommata megera*)

CRETE. One Voulismeno Aloni on 26th, two Aposelemis Dam on 27th, one on the slopes of Mount Ida on 27th, eight along the road to Omolas on 30th.

Large Wall Brown (*Lasiommata maera*)

CYPRUS. One record only - a slightly worn individual at Mavrokolypos Reservoir on the 19th.

African Ringlet (*Ypthima asterope*)

CYPRUS. Seen at one locality in the Paphos area, six on the 19th, two on the 21st. Geranium Bronze (*Cacyreus marshalli*)

CRETE. One attracted to potted Geraniums in Kamilari.

Small Copper (*Lycaena phlaeas*)

CYPRUS. One at Larnaca Salt Lake, 11 at Mavrokolypos Reservoir, one at Arminou Reservoir, four at Stavrovouni and one at Agia Varvara.CRETE. One at Karteros Canyon at two at Voulismeno Aloni.

Lesser Fiery Copper (*Lycaena thersamon*)

CYPRUS. Becoming more common as the week progressed - fairly faded individuals in the first half of the week (two at Larnaca Salt Lake, one at Kouris Reservoir and one at Kensington Cliffs), then fresh new generation individuals in the latter part of the week (three at Mavrokolypos Reservoir, one at Stavrovouni and eight at Agia Varvara).

Long-tailed Blue (*Lampides boeticus*)

CYPRUS. One record only - a single at Arminou Reservoir on the 22nd. CRETE. Two Karteros Canyon.

Eastern Baton Blue (*Pseudophilotes vicrama*)

CRETE. 12 Karteros Canyon, five Voulismeno Aloni, four along the road to Omola.

Little Tiger Blue (*Tarucus balkanicus*)

CYPRUS. After failing to find them a week earlier, three at Larnaca Salt Lake on the 23rd.

Dark Grass Blue (*Zizeeria karsandra*)

CYPRUS. Two at Larnaca Water Treatment Pools on the 23rd. Failed to find at this locality a week earlier, also failed to find in the Paphos area.

Holly Blue (*Celastrina argiolus*)

CRETE. Common and widespread - 40 Karteros Canyon, 15 Voulismeno Aloni, 10 Aposelemis Dam, five on the slopes of Mount Ida, four Kamilari area, 50+ along the road to Omola.

Paphos Blue (*Glaucopsyche paphos*)

CYPRUS. Localised, but abundant where it occurred. The best numbers were in the low hills and included 200+ at Kouris Reservoir, 180+ at Asprokremmos Reservoir, about 80 at Mavrokolypos Reservoir and 70+ at Arminou Reservoir. Also seen on various roadsides in the hill country. The only individuals seen at sea level were eight at Kensington Cliffs.

Common Blue (*Polyommatus icarus*)

CYPRUS. Widespread, but not overly abundant. In numbers up to 10-12, Common Blues were seen at Larnaca Salt Lake, Kouris Reservoir, Kensington Cliffs, Mavrokolypos Reservoir, Asprokremmos Reservoir, Arminou Reservoir and Agia Varvara. CRETE. Common and widespread - 15 Karteros Canyon, 12 Voulismeno Aloni, 15 Aposelemis Dam, 10 on the slopes of Mount Ida, ten Kamilari area, one at Agios Ioannis, c.25 along the road to Omolas. Brown Argus (*Aricia agestis*) CRETE. Only five seen - one Karteros Canyon, two Voulismeno Aloni, one Aposelemis Dam, one along the road to Omolas. Mallow Skipper (*Carcharodus alceae*)

CYPRUS. A total of seven seen - one at Larnaca Salt Lake, one at Kouris Reservoir, one in Nicosia, two at Mavrokolypos Reservoir and two at Agia Varvara. CRETE. Three Karteros Canyon, one Voulismeno Aloni, one on the slopes of Mount Ida.

Lulworth Skipper (*Thymelicus acteon*)

CYPRUS. One at Agia Varvara on the 24th. CRETE. 35 Karteros Canyon, four Voulismeno Alon, 20 Kamilari area, two along the road to Omola.

Millet Skipper (*Pelopides thrax*)

CYPRUS. One at Mavrokolypos Reservoir on the 19th.

Pygmy Skipper (*Gegenes pumilio*)

CYPRUS. Best numbers were at Mavrokolypos Reservoir (18 on first visit, 12 on second) and in the dunes near Larnaca Water Treatment Pools (eight individuals). Elsewhere, one at Larnaca Salt Lake, one at Asprokremmos Reservoir and one at Agia Varvara. CRETE. One at Karteros Canyon, one at Kastro Fortress.