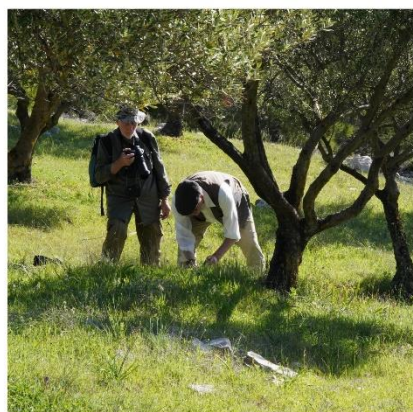


Orchids of Rhodes

Mariposa Nature Tours trip report

1st-8th April 2024

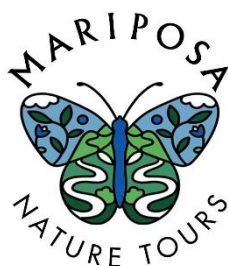


Tour leaders Jon Dunn & Dr Richard Bate

Trip report by Jon Dunn

Images kindly shared by our guests

(Images © upper left & right [Paul Upward Photography](#); lower left Jenny H; lower right Jon Dunn)



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[Please note – while some of the orchids encountered in Rhodes have common, vernacular English names, many do not. Rather than impose our own clumsy vernacular names upon the latter, we've stuck with the scientific names in the interests of accuracy and clarity. However, where a widely-used vernacular name exists, it's used (suffixed with its scientific name) in the text that follows, e.g. Giant Orchid *Himantoglossum robertianum*. Similarly, where hybrids have known formal names, they are used – e.g. *Ophrys x kalteiseniana* to describe *Ophrys ferrum equinum x reinholdii* – but where no such formal name could be found, we have simply described the presumed parents in question, e.g. *Ophrys blitopertha x parvula*]

Monday 1st April

Once everybody had arrived safely in Rhodes on a fine sunny Easter Monday we transferred to our comfortable, family-run hotel in the village of Embonas on the slopes of Mt Attaviros, where a warm welcome and a delicious light lunch awaited us.

After a morning of travelling, it seemed only fair to everyone to have a chance to stretch their legs, so we decided to explore the countryside around Embonas. Within a few hundred yards of the hotel a network of tracks lead into the lower slopes of Attaviros, a maze of ancient terraces and vineyards, and this was to prove a fruitful orchid-hunting ground.

We'd no sooner left the road than Jon spotted our first orchid, *Ophrys sicula*, but after that everybody got their eye in and the finds came thick and fast from everyone. Dainty examples of cerise *Orchis anatolica* were frequently seen, together with the much heftier forms of Giant Orchid *Himantoglossum robertianum*.



Orchis anatolica © Paul
www.paulupward.co.uk



Ophrys x kalteiseniana © Jon

A small meadow had much to offer, with a mixed population of *Ophrys ferrum-equinum* and *Ophrys reinholdii*. Unsurprisingly, we found several examples of their hybrid offspring, *Ophrys x kalteiseniana*, showing a hint of white *reinholdii* tracery around the normally dark shiny speculum spots of *ferrum-equinum*.

A little further uphill, to her delight Jenny spotted one of her target species for the week, a Pink Butterfly Orchid *Anacamptis papilionacea*, right at the side of the track by her feet. We were clearly in orchid-rich country here! And not just orchids...

Parties of Alpine Swift hawked overhead, while a great many beautiful Eastern Festoon butterflies were on the wing, zipping past us regularly.

Once we reached the level of the vineyards we found a lovely colony of *Ophrys omegaifera* and, as we traversed across the contours of the slopes, many more *Ophrys sicula*. They were, however, more often than not at the end of their flowering, the hot sun having accelerated their flowering period. Many young Dragon Arum *Dracunculus vulgaris* plants were growing in the vineyards – seeing their immense velvety blooms would be a treat saved for another day.



Ophrys reinholdii © Paul
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As we began our descent through a small patch of light woodland we discovered still more *Orchis anatolica*, but also our first Dense-flowered Orchid *Neotinea maculata* – including a truly giant specimen, knee-high to Gabriel – and our first delicate *Cyclamen rhodium*, an island near-endemic. Still more *Ophrys ferrum-equinum* and *reinholdii* brightened our walk back down to Embonas, while Rosie found the very best Giant Orchid we'd seen yet – a huge flower spike in pristine condition.

While the afternoon was pressing on, and

we were mindful this had been a long day for everyone, the hot weather and our observation of the declining state of the *Ophrys sicula* in hotter, exposed locations meant it was necessary to ensure we didn't miss some of the earlier flowering *Ophrys* to be found nearby. A short drive to the other side of town to a convenient roadside site quickly remedied that, with examples of both early-flowering *Ophrys sitiaca* and *Ophrys cinereophila* still to be seen in reasonable condition. The location also gave us exceptional *Ophrys reinholdii* growing at the very edge of the tarmac on the roadside, another *Ophrys x kalteiseniana* and, just a few metres away from the road, a great many more *Ophrys ferrum-equinum* including a dark, hyperchromic individual, and yet another new orchid species, the strange, bristly *Ophrys regis-ferdinandii*.



Himantoglossum robertianum © Paul
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Returning to the hotel to freshen up before a delicious dinner, we convened on the veranda with a cold drink to go through our checklist and look forward to the orchid-hunting adventures of the day to come. Dinner was a convivial affair, with many orchid and other wildlife stories swapped, and the extremely pleasant discovery that Roger was a talented harmonica player. We were treated to a couple of bluesy numbers as the evening drew to a close.

Tuesday 2nd April

Our first full day on the island dawned bright and sunny and, by the time we had gathered for breakfast, Paul joined us with a camera memory card already bulging with gorgeous images, having joined tour co-leader Richard for a pre-breakfast return to the last site of the prior day, taking advantage of the cool early morning light.

A pleasant drive south through Rhodes' pretty countryside brought us to the dry phrygana habitat that surrounds the village of Kattavia in the very south of the island. We spent the morning that followed wandering a stony hillside splashed with the pinks and whites of flowering *Cistus* rock roses, and the scarlets of anemones – but these were obvious distractions. We had our eyes trained on smaller, but no less pleasing treasures!



Ophrys speculum © Gabriel

Firstly, though, we walked the length of strip of ruderal field where we immediately encountered our first *Ophrys* of what Jon had promised us would be an especially *Ophrys*-rich day – small patches of Mirror Orchids *Ophrys speculum* still in good condition despite the days of warm sunshine that had gone before, more *Ophrys regis-ferdinandii*, and our first *Ophrys cretica* subspecies (ssp) *beloniae*. *Anacamptis coriophora* soon followed, and our first large, deep burgundy *Serapias carica* too. Many *Ophrys cretica* ssp *beloniae* were past their best, but it was not long before keen eyes began to pick out plants with flowers in

excellent condition – indeed, by the end of the day we had seen many hundreds. We soon found one individual that looked far more like the nominate *Ophrys cretica* than the local subspecies *beloniae*, and spent some time examining the finer details of differentiation with Richard explaining the minutiae we should be looking out for.

Moving onto the hillside itself, the group scattered and wandered freely, some choosing to explore the higher slopes with Richard, others following Jon onto the lower elevations. In both instances, we were spoiled for choice where the orchids were concerned and, by the time we all convened back at the bottom of the gently sloping hill, everybody had done extremely well for themselves, and we ensured nobody was



Ophrys cretica © Paul
www.paulupward.co.uk

missing out on anything. The *Ophrys* had come thick and fast, with *Ophrys iricolor* still in excellent condition, their large iridescent blue and black flowers proving irresistible for photographers; as did those of the contrastingly tiny *Ophrys parvula*, their diminutive black flowers rewarding a closer look to enjoy the fine lime-green margins each sported. At the site of the latter, Richard spotted the first of two sparkling, hairy beetles that Juliet was quick to identify for us as jewel beetles, and these too proved popular with the assembled cameras.



Pink Butterfly Orchid (*Anacamptis papilionacea*) © Paul
www.paulupward.co.uk

Ophrys cornutula and *Ophrys calypsus* were widespread across the hillside, and offered more colourful *Ophrys* distractions. *Anacamptis coriophora* was coming into flower in some numbers too, alongside two more of its tribe – plentiful Pink Butterfly Orchid *Anacamptis papilionacea*, and Pyramidal Orchid *Anacamptis pyramidalis*. While we're familiar with the latter species back home in the UK, here we noted their looser and generally much paler-toned pink flowers.

For lunch we decamped to the pleasant surroundings and shade offered in the lee of a roadside chapel – which, this being a Mariposa Nature Tours lunch site, also gave us ample orchid distractions! The immediate surroundings of the chapel supplied large and pristine *Ophrys cretica* ssp *beloniae* flower spikes, still more *Ophrys regis-ferdinandii* and, nearby,



Aberrant *Ophrys rhodia* © Jon

Serapias carica and some magnificent, photogenic *Ophrys cornutula* discovered by Paul.

Heading a little further south to explore a network of ruderal fields beloved of Jon, we spent the next couple of hours in something close to orchid heaven. New orchid species, and some startling varieties thereof, came thick and fast. First up were the intricately marked flowers of *Ophrys rhodia* and, amongst them, a startling aberration found by Steph – a plant with a smooth, featureless green labellum. Nearby, the hybrids (*Ophrys cretica* x *mammosa*) found by our Orchid Conservation Alliance group the preceding week were starting to go over, but we could still see some flowers that betrayed their hybrid origins.

Juliet then made a truly remarkable discovery – a large and healthy clump of apparently chlorotic *Ophrys rhodia*, sporting pallid stems and leaves, and flowers with snow white sepals. If this were not enough, she then went on to find a deeply hyperchromic *Ophrys cretica* with sepals of uncharacteristically deep, royal purple. Two orchids that were both crowd-pleasers!

The discovery of a large patch of *Ophrys lutea*, with wide-margined gorse yellow flowers, distracted us all for a while, before Jon led the group to a roadside colony of *Ophrys x buttlerrii*, the hybrid of *Ophrys speculum* and *Ophrys regis-ferdinandii*, and then back into the fields for a fine example of *Ophrys umbilicata* found earlier in the day by Helmuth, one of our network of fellow orchid-hunters present on the island. This new area of ruderal field was to prove a happy hunting ground, with a great many fresh and wonderfully marked *Ophrys cretica* ssp *beloniae* to be seen. Gabriel, wandering a little further afield, found a fresh patch of *Ophrys cretica* x *mammosa* hybrids, their flowers in pristine condition, much to the great appreciation of the group.

Tired but happy, we returned to Embonas and headed to our favourite ice cream parlour for delicious ice creams, beers (or both!) to celebrate an exceptional day of orchid-hunting.

Wednesday 3rd April

Another warm, sunny day on Rhodes began with a short drive from our hotel to a very different habitat to that we'd explored the previous day – the forest-clad mountain of Profitis Ilias. The effects of the terrible wildfire that swept parts of the island the previous

autumn could be seen as we ascended to our parking place high on the mountain – areas of charred black, leafless trees that reached like fingers towards the blue sky up above the slopes. Fortunately, these accounted for a relatively small area of the mountain as a whole, and we knew that the areas of bare soil beneath would be fertile ground for a succession of wildflowers, orchids included, in years to come.



Dense-flowered Orchid (*Neotinea maculata*) © Steph

We spent the morning exploring the southern side of the mountaintop, starting in the cool shade beneath trees the fire hadn't reached. Here the forest floor was carpeted with anemones, and amongst them we quickly found our first orchids – Dense-flowered Orchid *Neotinea maculata*, before Gabriel spotted a classic *Ophrys dodecanensis*, with swept-back sepals and a narrow labellum. This was swiftly followed by the discovery of many more fresh *Ophrys reinholdii*, displaying a great



Ophrys umbilicata © Gabriel

Scarce Swallowtail © James



deal of variety in the extent and patterning of the white markings on their dark lips, and our second new orchid species of the day – *Ophrys oreas*, contrasting nicely in terms of morphology with *dodecanensis*, with a flat, broad lip, and rounded sepals held proudly at right angles to the sides of it.

Other orchids of interest here were our first, solitary Naked Man Orchid

Orchis italica, and primrose yellow Provence Orchid *Orchis provincialis*. The morning was punctuated by frequent sightings of initially somewhat torpid and approachable Eastern Festoon, a butterfly sighting that was further embellished by some showy nectaring Scarce Swallowtail found by George and Juliet, and Small Copper seen basking and feeding by several of the group.

A slow walk to a nearby meadow yielded Man Orchid *Orchis anthropophora* by the roadside and, in the meadow itself, a great many more Provence Orchid, perhaps equal numbers of Green-winged Orchid *Anacamptis morio ssp caucasica*, and maybe a dozen Milky Orchid *Neotinea lactea* that the days of hot sunshine had spared and could still be seen in good condition. A colony of *Ophrys omegaifera* were found also in good condition, one sporting an orchid pollinia stuck to its 'boxing glove' lip – close, but not close enough to the flower's reproductive parts to make itself useful!



Ophrys dodecanensis © Paul www.paulupward.co.uk

The downhill walk back to our vehicles treated us to more *Ophrys dodecanensis*, and a



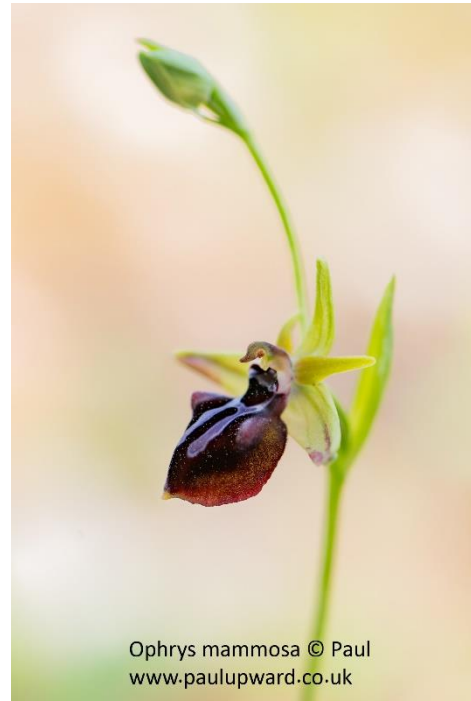
Rhodes Peony twitch © Jenny & Ian

couple of surprise *Ophrys rhodia* too. Our drive off the mountain was punctuated by two more stops, one scheduled, and one spontaneous. The latter was thanks to Jenny's sharp eyes that spotted a pristine Rhodes Peony *Paeonia clusii ssp rhodia* in bloom away from the road – this was greatly appreciated by all, and we chose to use this impromptu stop in a shady place as an opportunity for lunch. After that was finished, we followed up a

tip off one of our orchid-hunting friends on the island had shared, and searched a small roadside meadow for *Anacamptis x gennarii*, the hybrid between Green-winged Orchid *Anacamptis morio*, and Pink Butterfly Orchid *Anacamptis papilionacea*. The former were readily seen scattered amongst the strappy tussocks of asphodel, but there was no sign of the latter parent that we could find.

However, Jon found the first of the two flowering hybrids we'd been told were present, and we were all able to appreciate the halfway house in form between the two parent species it displayed. Nearby, the group found two more flowering plants, all slightly different as the parent genes expressed themselves in subtly different ways.

Leaving Profitis Ilias, we dropped down towards the Gadoura Valley. This famous orchid-hunting location had also been touched by fire, though the orchids appeared largely unaffected by the damage done to the trees. Indeed, at our first stop of the afternoon we were able to find dozens of *Ophrys mammosa* easily where the undergrowth had been removed by fire. These dark orchids aren't as overtly colourful as some of their counterparts, but have a more subtle beauty, and were generally agreed to be very elegant by the group.



Ophrys mammosa © Paul
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A little way further down the road, we bumped into a small team of Jon's orchid-hunting friends – a most serendipitous meeting, as they'd just found *Ophrys saliarisii* in flower at the



Naked Man Orchid (*Orchis italica*)
© Paul www.paulupward.co.uk

roadside! This large, colourful orchid was much appreciated, and we were able to compare it to several smaller *Ophrys polyxo* that were coming into flower nearby. Walking to see a large and magnificent Naked Man Orchid *Orchis italica* meant we also tripped over a single Bumblebee Orchid *Ophrys bombyliflora* on the roadside verge. The new orchids were coming thick and fast!

Stopping by the narrow, cool river that threaded its way down the valley we stalked Karpathos Frogs *Pelophylax cerigensis* in the clear shallows with some success, while Richard's intrepid wading in the shallows was rewarded by a most unexpected discovery, a Rhodes Freshwater Crab *Potamon rhodium*. Apart from Roger, who had some prior knowledge of the ecology of this fascinating crustacean, this came totally out of the blue for us all,

and thanks to Richard sacrificing a small chunk of his hand, we were rewarded with brief views of this small, sharp clawed individual before it scuttled away into deeper waters.

Our next stop put us into *Ophrys* heaven – a compact area of dry hillside flanked by a cooler, green olive grove yielded several species of their kind. The main target was still flowering in good condition, much to Jon’s relief as he’d been worrying the warm weather might have hastened it to go over – this was the dark beauty that’s *Ophrys persephona*. Initially found in typical habitat on the dry hillside, surrounded by scattered delicate, yellow Rhodes Fritillary *Fritillaria rhodia* for good measure, we then discovered several beneath one of the olive trees. Remarkably, they shared their shady home with not one, but two more subtle brown *Ophrys* – a single *Ophrys sitiaca*, spared the direct sunlight and unlike its companions on the hill, remained in fine condition; while three *Ophrys apollonae* were also looking fine and fresh too. This was a wonderful opportunity to compare the morphology and features of all three, side by side. The cherry on the cake came with the discovery of a single flowering *Serapias politsii*, the island’s endemic tongue-orchid, just a few feet away under the very same tree.



Ophrys persephona © Jon

Many more *Serapias politsii* were present in flower on the dry hillside next to a colony of Bumblebee Orchid *Ophrys bombyliflora* that Jon had found the previous week, while Gabriel found a single *Ophrys ferrum-equinum* nearby, and in this patch of the hill Rhodes Fritillary was particularly numerous once one looked closely.



Ophrys bombyliflora © Gabriel

Our final stop of the day were the meadows near Laerma that are famous for their colonies of Loose-flowered Orchid *Anacamptis laxiflora* – a statuesque, tall and colourful species that was very photogenic in the cool shade of the tall trees that towered over the meadow below. Still more Bumblebee Orchids were here, and also a handful of *Ophrys polyxo* for good measure.

We returned to the hotel and some welcome cold drinks on the veranda with an incredible haul of orchids safely under our belt – we realised, when we came to do our checklist before another delicious dinner that we were already knocking on the door of 40 species for the week! 38 species had been seen by this point, and several superb hybrids too. What more would the coming days bring us?

Thursday 4th April

Time travel was the order of the day today, as we took ourselves to a high and exposed site and, with the change in altitude, temperature and humidity, transported ourselves a week or two back in orchid-time.

But first, conscious of the gathering pace of the orchid season here in the face of the warm weather we'd been enjoying, we needed to ensure that we didn't miss one of the more elegant and early-flowering *Ophrys* species – *Ophrys lucis*. Two sites where it had been in flower the previous week no longer had plants in good condition when we'd worked our way through them in the past few days, so a visit to a very specific, sheltered valley site was needed, where the plants flowered late on a north-facing slope. This was a location Jon had discovered years ago, and kept up his sleeve for just these circumstances. Better still, it was not far from our hotel, being just a couple of miles down the road.



Ophrys lucis © Jon



Windmill Hill © Jenny & Ian

As we hoped, two plants here remained in fine condition, one which was a magnificent spike tucked in the shelter of a small *Cistus* bush. Given the surroundings supported several plants that were now setting seed, we exercised even more than our usual level of care, with just one guest at a time coming to join Jon at the plant.

This gem safely seen by all, we continued our journey to the south end of the island to Windmill Hill, an exposed location high above the island where in the morning many plants sported a fine dusting of dew. Sure enough, as soon as we stepped out of the minibuses, we were greeted by our companion for the morning and early afternoon – a ceaseless wind blowing at us from the west off the Aegean. At first glance, this exposed hillside, covered in *Cistus* and spiny shrubs, seems an unlikely place in which orchids might thrive, let alone be numerous, but appearances can be deceiving.

We swiftly found the first of many rich, yellow *Ophrys phryganae*, taking care to compare their profiles with those of the *Ophrys sicula* we'd become familiar with in previous days. Also present here in some numbers were more *Ophrys omegaifera*, *reinholdii* and *ferrum-equinum*, the latter two species admittedly starting to look worse for wear as they came to the end of their season. The *tenthredinifera*-type sawfly orchids too were not as numerous as they were a week before, but crucially, they were still to be found here – Paul and Jenny both independently finding a dark, richly marked *Ophrys koraе* near to the vehicles, and Jon an immaculate, pale *Ophrys leochroma* at a higher elevation. Jon also picked out our first confirmed *Ophrys halia* near to the *leochroma*, while Richard found another a short distance away, and also pointed out some *Neotinea maculata* on the hill's westerly aspect.

At the top of the hill we found more *Orchis provincialis*, while at every step we were seeing drifts of rich purple *Orchis anatolica*. James, a man with a keen eye for a variation, found a white example of the latter, with cerise lip spotting contrasting with its otherwise pure white flower colour. Steph, meanwhile, found an *Ophrys* that immediately rang alarm bells for a hybrid origin – a *ferrum-equinum* with strangely shaped, elongated and angular flowers, and long parallel lip markings. Looking at it in profile, it also had swollen protuberances on the lip – surely this was a good candidate for *Ophrys x ionica*, the hybrid between *ferrum-equinum* and *mamosa*?

We moved to a slightly lower elevation, and a site justly renowned for producing *Ophrys* hybrids, where we took our picnic lunch. For Jon and Richard, a working lunch – they ate their sandwiches as they walked and orchid-hunted, and soon found a fabulous *Ophrys ferrum-equinum x koraе* hybrid (*Ophrys x feldwegiana s.l.*), clearly intermediate between its parents. Gabriel, soon on the hunt after lunch, found a fine hybrid *Ophrys ferrum-equinum x leochroma* (*Ophrys x feldwegiana s.l.*), while nearby Rosie found another example of a



Ophrys halia © Paul www.paulupward.co.uk



Ophrys x feldwegiana © Jon

strange *ferrum-equinum* that shared the morphology of the plant Steph had discovered in the morning. This one, however, also showed the characteristic bi-coloured sepal patterning of *mamosa*, making the hybrid case for *Ophrys x ionica* far stronger still.

Drifting back towards the vans, Richard hit the jackpot with the discovery of an utterly sumptuous *Ophrys halia*, a

huge-flowered plant with wholly lime-green sepals. This may have been the most photographed orchid of the day as the orchid paparazzi all took their time to drink in and record for posterity the beauty of this startling plant. Peter found two more conventionally-coloured plants in flower a short distance away, providing us with a handy nearby comparison.

It was hard to tear ourselves away from here, but we had a date with a lowland olive grove to keep. Or should that be orchid grove? Because when we got there, we had some surprises in store for us beyond what we expected to see. The drive here was packed with good omens – a blessing from a Greek Orthodox priest as we drove past him, and a sighting of a fine Short-toed Eagle soaring overhead. Surely the orchid-hunting gods were telling us something...

We were here for two specific species, *Ophrys attaviria* and *Ophrys blitopertha*, the first a dark and enigmatic species, the latter a more colourful *Ophrys* that's the close relative of *Ophrys persephona*, but is significantly embellished with a fringe of chartreuse around the lip. Richard quickly found the former in deep shade, while the group found the latter to be much more numerous under open, sun-baked olives.



Ophrys lindia © Jon

It was in this particular olive grove that the surprises began to make themselves known. To our delight, Juliet found *Ophrys lindia* in flower – one of three flowering plants in the area, and to our knowledge a new site for this scarce species. At the edge of a patch of *Ophrys blitopertha*, Jon found a strangely shaped and marked orchid that he simply could not reconcile with any species – surely a hybrid, but what were the parents?

Richard and he debated the options, while we took our turns to thoroughly document the plant. The flowers had a thin lime green margin, and were dark, suggesting *Ophrys parvula*, but where was that parent? Could the nearby *blitopertha* have lent it their flower-length? The plant was an enigma... until Gabriel found *Ophrys parvula* elsewhere in the olive grove, and then Richard and Jon finally spotted *parvula* within six feet of the hybrid. Had a hybrid between *blitopertha* and *parvula* been described before? We didn't think so.

Richard's keen eyes then found a plant intermediate between *Ophrys blitopertha* and *Ophrys lutea* – the latter had been seen nearby by James, so we knew both parents were present. This was a cryptic hybrid, both parents having yellow tones to varying extents in



Ophrys blitopertha x parvula © Jon

their flowers, and needed Richard's analytical eye to pick it out from the crowd. Once seen closely, the intermediate nature of the hybrid's flowers was apparent.

The extent of the day's wonderful orchid-hunting success wasn't lost upon us, and was reinforced when we worked our way through our checklist in the evening – after an earlier celebratory ice-cream in the village – our overall tally for the week now rested on 46 species, and we still had some tricks up our sleeve for the days to come...

Friday 5th April

Richard and some of the group's early birds had been busy at first light today on a pre-breakfast reconnaissance mission to an olive grove near our hotel, and greeted us at breakfast with the good news that a new orchid for the week was in flower – this would, naturally, be our first stop on today's foray into the Rhodian countryside!



Ophrys sancti-isidorii © Jon

A short drive brought us to the entrance to a track off the main road where, after a short walk enlivened by *Ophrys mammosa* and *Ophrys polyxo* (including one hardy individual growing from the very track itself!) we stepped down into a small olive grove and were immediately greeted by a lovely *Ophrys sancti-isidorii*, the first of several we were to find at the base of the gnarled trees. Helpfully, for comparative purposes, some *Ophrys sitiaca* were also clinging on here, late in their flowering season. Richard explained the identification features of *sancti-isidorii* – later on at the evening checklist he also gave us a potted history of the species' convoluted taxonomic journey. Having a European orchid expert with his breadth and depth of knowledge in our

team was proving invaluable in helping us all get the most out of the tour.

We crossed the island next to the dry, high site where Jon and the Orchid Conservation Alliance group had seen the achingly rare hybrid between *Ophrys ferrum-equinum* and *Ophrys regis-ferdinandii* the previous week. The days of subsequent hot sunshine hadn't been kind to it, and its basal rosette was burnt black by the heat on the stony hillside. The top, final, flower on the hybrid's flowerspike was still in decent condition, however, and was duly enjoyed by those with an interest in the products of such orchid shenanigans! The rest of the site gave us a great many Naked Man Orchid *Orchis italica*, *Serapias bergonii* tongue orchids, and one or two *Ophrys regis-ferdinandii* in



Ophrys ferrum-equinum x *regis-ferdinandii*
© Paul www.paulupward.co.uk

fine condition still. The irrepressible Gabriel found us the only *Ophrys rhodia* we would see during the course of the day.



Violet Limodore (*Limodorum abortivum*) appreciation society © Jenny & Ian

We moved on to a shady pine woodland nearby, a cooler site for lunch and somewhere we might hope to find some more orchids, of course. What was unmissable at this location were the scores of magnificent Dragon Arum, which were much admired and appeared in several selfies taken on our phones! Broomrapes (*Orobanchae*) were much in evidence on the forest floor, and Paul found us our second *Ophrys saliarisii* of the week, to everyone's delight.

A different pine woodland was to be our location for the afternoon – we relocated high onto the sides of Mount Attavros near to our hotel, where we knew there would be a great many *Ophrys candica* in flower, and we had a stake-out for a flowering Violet Limodore *Limodorum abortivum*. The latter is a later-flowering species, and one that we might not reliably see in bloom in the first week of April – this was a treat, and the plant was looking particularly fine in the dappled sunlight beneath the pines. Many other spikes of this strange orchid were pushing through the woodland floor, looking like spikes of purple asparagus.

The *Ophrys candica* certainly didn't disappoint, with many found in flower, exhibiting much variation in the patterning and extent of the markings on their lips. We spent some hours happily wandering this area, also distracted by *Ophrys omegaifera*, *Ophrys reinholdii*, *Orchis anatolica*, Dense-flowered Orchid *Neotinea maculata*, carpets of Rhodes Cyclamen and, of course, the view – our elevated vantage point gave us a breathtaking vista encompassing many islands, and the Turkish coast in the distance, all set in a sea of appropriately Aegean blue.

This had been another good day, and our orchid checklist now sat on 49 species. What would give us the half century over the coming weekend?



Violet Limodore (*Limodorum abortivum*)
© Paul www.paulupward.co.uk

Saturday 6th April



Ophrys colossea © Paul
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We made tracks straight after breakfast out to a new section of the island we'd not yet visited, to spend the morning wandering at leisure in a complex of olive groves just inland from the coast. The area in question is a marvellous mosaic of olive groves in various states of succession from recently ploughed to fairly overgrown, and as such is a fruitful hunting ground for orchids. We were greeted by the sight of hundreds of fine *Serapis bergonii* beneath the olive trees of a more mature grove and, nearby, soon found *Ophrys calypsus* and, magnificently, the Colossus of Rhodes, the large-flowered and striking *Ophrys colossea*.

Another *Ophrys sancti-isidorii* was a not altogether unexpected surprise, as our Orchid Conservation Alliance tour had found that the prior week. Our wanderings in the vicinity revealed more *Ophrys mammosa* and *colossea*, and many widely scattered *Ophrys rhodia*.

Anacamptis species were seen in great numbers, most of which, frustratingly, remained in bud. Our search for an early *Anacamptis sancta* would have to continue until the very last minute of the tour... There were, however, some lovely Pyramidal Orchid *Anacamptis pyramidalis* in flower, many of which were the pure white *alba* form.

Down at the margins of the nearby beach Rosie was in her element plant-hunting, finding amongst other treasures the filamentous flowers of *Dianthus crinitus*. Rosie also slipped into the sea for a refreshing paddle... while Mel properly took the plunge and went in for a swim!



Dianthus crinitus © Rosie

Gabriel's energy and keen eyes had been a fruitful orchid-hunting combination all week, and paid off with the discovery of a lovely pale-flowered *Serapis bergonii*, with a straw-yellow tongue on each flower. While Rhodes isn't renowned as a birding destination, this area of the island did the group's birders proud this morning – James found a couple of Stone Curlew, while Peter was busy with Eastern Olivaceous Warbler and Woodchat Shrike. As it happened, the whole group got good views of two more Woodchats as we drove away from the site after a lovely picnic lunch sat in the shade of an olive tree with a fine *Ophrys colossea* for company.

After lunch we tried a new site recommended by one of our network of orchid-hunting friends on the island. A small area of undeveloped land fringed by olive groves, this was to prove to be an excellent site – we found many *Ophrys calypsus* in bloom here, and Jon and



Ophrys calypsus © Paul www.paulupward.co.uk

Richard simultaneously spotted a fine flavescent form, with flowers of green, yellow and white tones rather than the usual browns and hot pinks. This fabulous plant was duly admired by all – truly a one-off. Nearby were a couple of Violet Limodore *Limodorum abortivum* beneath some pines, while beneath the *Cistus* rock roses Richard and Steph were finding fine patches of parasitic *Cytinus ruber* flowers, waxy red and white blooms that rewarded a closer look.

Heading back towards Embonas, we made two stops at roadside sites – one to spend some time wandering and wondering in a large field carpeted with Loose-flowered Orchid *Anacamptis laxiflora*, with additional bonus *Serapias bergonii*, and *Ophrys polyxo* and *bombyliflora*; and the other to see the diminutive hot pink flowers of Rhodian Catchfly *Silene salamandra*.

Jon and Peter were half an hour late for dinner, having had a final small adventure in the day. Peter had lost his footing in the afternoon, so a visit to the local medical centre was made. The kind medical staff checked him out, and referred him to the hospital in Rhodes for an x-ray of his wrist. The hospital there was excellent, processing their hardy patient quickly and efficiently – so it wasn't long before the irrepressible Peter was heading into dinner with a cast on his wrist to help a hairline fracture heal quickly.

And our orchid total for the week now? *Ophrys colossea* had taken us to the magical half century, being our 50th species of the week, a truly superb tally. And still a day to go...

Sunday 7th April

Our final full day in this orchid-hunter's paradise saw us returning to the southern extremity of the island. Our logic here was twofold – if we were to find *Anacamptis sancta* in early flower, it being a perennially late-flowering species, we would stand our very best chance of finding that in the warmest area of this island; and in the meantime, we knew that the areas in which we would spend the morning would be full of other lovely orchids besides, so even if we didn't find *sancta*, we'd still be enjoying a lovely time.

We spent the morning wandering the hills and ruderal fields around Kattavia. While *Anacamptis sancta* remained obstinately nowhere to be found in flower, this was an extremely fruitful morning. *Anacamptis coriophora* and *pyramidalis*, respectively, were now reaching their zenith, with many fine plants in full flower, while there were still plenty of

Ophrys to be seen too – our familiars, *speculum* and *regis-ferdinandii* were still to be found, and an abundance of *Ophrys rhodia*.

The latter was to give us particular pleasure, with several aberrantly marked flowers providing contrast with the species' usual 'dice-face' markings, and two hybrid plants that clearly had *rhodia* as one of their parents – one vigorous plant that



Ophrys rhodia x *speculum* © Paul www.paulupward.co.uk

bore flowers with tell-tale greenish-pink, 'muddy' sepals that appeared to be the offspring of *rhodia* and its pink-sepalled sister species, *umbilicata*; and the other a remarkable, hairy green flowered plant that could only be the offspring of *rhodia* and *speculum*. Both were much admired. Nearby, Gabriel spotted a curious, small-flowered but colourful orchid that seemed to suggest it had some *tenthredinifera* in its making, but what could the other parent be?



Anacamptis sancta © Paul www.paulupward.co.uk

We tore ourselves away from this fabulous ruderal field to journey 15 minutes down the road to a site that Richard had discovered. If anywhere was going to give us *Anacamptis sancta*, it would be here, on a headland jutting into the sea off the south-eastern side of the island. With snow-capped Turkish mountains visible across the water on the horizon, to our delight we found our quarry – at least a dozen *Anacamptis*

sancta, the so-called Holy Orchid, in various stages of jagged pink flower. Judging by the many hundreds of budding flowerspikes we saw all around us, this site would be spectacular in just a few days' time. But no matter! For we had seen *sancta*, and with it we'd equalled the record set by our Orchid Conservation Alliance tour the previous week – 51 flowering species of orchid recorded.

We knew we now stood a chance of surpassing that – a small colony of Small-flowered Tongue-orchid *Serapias parviflora* near to our hotel had been in bud three days previously and should, given the weather lately, be in flower by now. But that would have to wait until we got back to Embonas. We had a further new site up our sleeve on the way home... On a



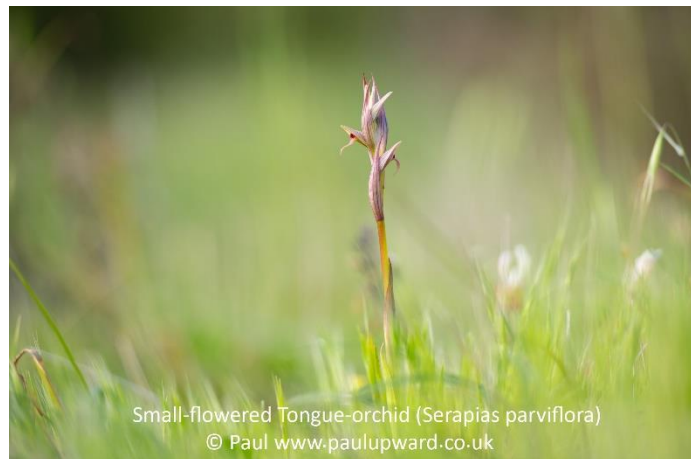
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Ophrys polyxo x rhodia © Jon

series of grassy terraces bounded by pine woodland we found a thriving colony of *Ophrys attaviria*, many *Ophrys sicula*, *rhodia*, and *polyxo*, and yet more *Ophrys* hybrids. One was readily enough diagnosed, given the parents present in the area – with elongated lips bearing markings halfway between their parents, and a faint pink flush to their sepals too, three plants were *Ophrys polyxo x rhodia*. Two plants, growing beside the colony of *Ophrys attaviria*, were more perplexing. They had lighter coloured and shorter lips than *attaviria* – the latter was presumably one parent, but what could the other be? Given the presence of *sicula* in the area, this seemed a plausible candidate, particularly given the yellow tones observed around the plants' stigmatic cavities.

Finally, we returned to Embonas, and walked along the forest track that led us to our colony of *Serapias parviflora*. Or did it? Upon our arrival, we could see a portion of the damp meadow in question had been churned into a morass of mud by heavy machinery using it as a turning space. Were all of our budding *Serapias* lost? Happily Richard found the first of what proved to be several flowering plants on the margins of this devastation, and we could now return, in celebratory mood, to the hotel for one final, magnificent meal – our Greek hostess had outdone herself this evening with a feast of delicious local dishes.



Small-flowered Tongue-orchid (*Serapias parviflora*)
© Paul www.paulupward.co.uk

Monday 8th April

With the warm glow only 52 species of orchid, almost 20 hybrid orchid combinations, and a great deal of variation within species could bring, we set off in good time for the airport in the morning after a leisurely breakfast. The journey was uneventful, and we said reluctant goodbyes. This had been a spectacular week of orchid-hunting that had surpassed even the high expectations of the tour leaders, Jon and Richard.

Both of them would particularly like to thank every member of the group for, in addition to their excellent company throughout the week, their superb orchid-hunting skills. Everybody had found special plants greatly enjoyed by the rest of the group, plants that might otherwise have gone overlooked. A record-breaking species count as high as ours was made possible by everybody's collective contributions. We made a brilliant team, and look forward keenly to orchid-hunting with all of the group again in future.

Postscript

Our guests might have departed, but Jon and Richard had a few hours to kill before their flights home later that afternoon. The sensible thing might have been to sit quietly at the airport and reflect upon a wonderful week's events. But that's not what orchid-hunters do... A plant seen by Richard and some of the group a few days previously had been rudely interrupted by the discovery, by Jon, of *Ophrys halia* and *leochroma* nearby. Richard had taken a passing record shot on his camera, and it was reviewing this photograph that had sown a seed of doubt in Richard's mind. Was this just another *Ophrys halia*? The margins of the well-marked lip seemed incredibly rufous, suggestive of *Ophrys samia*...

There was nothing for it. They had to go back to scour the hill and re-find the plant, to examine it properly and resolve its identity once and for all. And with just an hour and a half of in-the-field orchid-hunting time available to them, they did just that. The plant took a little finding but, once relocated, there was no doubt in the leaders' minds – *Ophrys samia*! Our final species tally for the week advanced by one more – standing finally on 53 species. Will we ever surpass that? It seems unlikely, but one never knows!

One thing's for sure – a line in the sand has been drawn. If keen orchid-hunters would like to see the best orchids of Rhodes, be they full species, hybrids, colour forms or variations, fuelled by the best of Greek food at a comfortable, friendly hotel in the heart of orchid-country, and led by the guides with the best site knowledge, our Orchids of Rhodes tour is the one to choose.

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Orchids of Rhodes 1 st -8 th April 2024									
	Species name	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7	Day 8
	GENUS OPHRYS								
	Ophrys iricolor group								
1	<i>Ophrys iricolor</i>		✓			✓			
	Ophrys fusca group								
2	<i>Ophrys cinereophila</i>					✓			
3	<i>Ophrys parvula</i>		✓		✓				
4	<i>Ophrys sancti-isidori</i>					✓			
	Ophrys attaviria group								
5	<i>Ophrys attaviria</i>				✓			✓	
6	<i>Ophrys eptapigiensis</i>								
7	<i>Ophrys lindia</i>				✓				
	Ophrys blitopertha group								
8	<i>Ophrys blitopertha</i>				✓				
9	<i>Ophrys persephona</i>			✓					
	Ophrys lutea group								
10	<i>Ophrys lutea</i>		✓		✓		✓	✓	
11	<i>Ophrys phryganae</i>				✓				
12	<i>Ophrys sicula</i>	✓		✓		✓		✓	
	Ophrys omegaifera group								
13	<i>Ophrys basilissa</i>								
14	<i>Ophrys apollonae</i>			✓					
15	<i>Ophrys omegaifera</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		
16	<i>Ophrys sitiaca</i>	✓		✓					
	Ophrys speculum group								
17	<i>Ophrys regis-ferdinandii</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	
18	<i>Ophrys speculum</i>								
	Ophrys tenthredinifera group								
19	<i>Ophrys tenthredinifera</i>								
20	<i>Ophrys leochroma</i>				✓				
21	<i>Ophrys korae</i>				✓				
22	<i>Ophrys bombyliflora</i>			✓			✓		
	Ophrys apifera group								
23	<i>Ophrys apifera</i>								
	Ophrys holoserica group								
24	<i>Ophrys candica</i>					✓			
25	<i>Ophrys colossaea</i>						✓		
26	<i>Ophrys samia</i>				✓				
27	<i>Ophrys halia</i>				✓			✓	
28	<i>Ophrys saliarisii</i>			✓		✓			
29	<i>Ophrys oreas</i>			✓					
	Ophrys oestrifera group								
30	<i>Ophrys cornutula</i>		✓		✓				
31	<i>Ophrys dodekanensis</i>			✓		✓		✓	

	Species name	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7	Day 8
	Ophrys heldreichii group								
32	<i>Ophrys calyptus</i>						✓		
33	<i>Ophrys calyptus</i> var. <i>pseudoapulica</i>								
34	<i>Ophrys calyptus</i> var. <i>scolopaxoides</i>		✓		✓				
35	<i>Ophrys polyxo</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	
	Ophrys umbilicata group								
36	<i>Ophrys rhodia</i>		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
37	<i>Ophrys umbilicata</i>		✓						
	Ophrys reinholdii group								
38	<i>Ophrys reinholdii</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	
39	<i>Ophrys cretica</i> ssp. <i>beloniae</i>								
	Ophrys argolica group								
40	<i>Ophrys lucis</i>				✓				
	Ophrys mammosa group								
41	<i>Ophrys ferrum-equinum</i>	✓	✓		✓				
42	<i>Ophrys mammosa</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
	GENUS EPIPACTIS								
43	<i>Epipactis densifolia</i>								
	GENUS CEPHALANTHERA								
44	<i>Cephalanthera longifolia</i>								
	GENUS LIMODORUM								
45	<i>Limodorum abortivum</i>					✓	✓		
46	<i>Limodorum abortivum</i> var. <i>rubrum</i>								
	GENUS SPIRANTHES								
47	<i>Spiranthes spiralis</i>								
	GENUS SERAPIAS								
48	<i>Serapias bergonii</i>			✓		✓	✓		
49	<i>Serapias carica</i>		✓		✓			✓	
50	<i>Serapias parviflora</i>							✓	
51	<i>Serapias politsii</i>			✓				✓	
	GENUS ANACAMPTIS								
52	<i>Anacamptis collina</i>								
53	<i>Anacamptis laxiflora</i>			✓			✓		
54	<i>Anacamptis morio</i> ssp. <i>caucasica</i>			✓					
55	<i>Anacamptis papilionacea</i> ssp. <i>heroica</i>	✓	✓		✓		✓		
56	<i>Anacamptis pyramidalis</i>		✓				✓		
57	<i>Anacamptis sancta</i>							✓	
58	<i>Anacamptis fragrans</i> (syn. <i>coriophora</i>)		✓		✓			✓	
	GENUS NEOTINEA								
59	<i>Neotinea maculata</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓			
60	<i>Neotinea lactea</i>			✓					
	GENUS ORCHIS								
61	<i>Orchis anatolica</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	
62	<i>Orchis anthropophora</i>			✓					
63	<i>Orchis italica</i>			✓		✓	✓		

	Species name	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7	Day 8
64	<i>Orchis provincialis</i>			✓	✓				
65	<i>Orchis simia</i>								
	GENUS HIMANTOGLOSSUM								
66	<i>Himantoglossum robertianum</i>	✓				✓			
	PRESUMED EXTINCT								
	<i>Cephalanthera epipactoides</i>								
	<i>Orchis punctulata</i>								
	<i>Dactylorhiza romana</i>								
	<i>Himantoglossum comperianum</i>								
	HYBRIDS								
	<i>Ophrys x kalteiseniana</i> (<i>ferrum-equinum x reinholdii</i>)	✓							
	<i>Ophrys x buttleri</i> (<i>regis-ferdinandii x speculum</i>)		✓					✓	
	<i>Ophrys cretica x mammosa</i>		✓					✓	
	<i>Ophrys blitopertha x parvula</i>				✓				
	<i>Ophrys blitopertha x lutea</i>				✓				
	<i>Ophrys x ionica</i> (<i>ferrum-equinum x mammosa</i>)				✓				
	<i>Ophrys x feldwegiana s.l</i> (<i>ferrum-equinum x korae</i>)				✓				
	<i>Ophrys x feldwegiana s.l</i> (<i>ferrum-equinum x leochroma</i>)				✓				
	<i>Ophrys ferrum-equinum x regis-ferdinandii</i>					✓			
	<i>Ophrys rhodia x umbilicata</i>							✓	
	<i>Ophrys rhodia x speculum</i>							✓	
	<i>Ophrys rhodia x leochroma</i>							✓	
	<i>Ophrys rhodia x polyxo</i>							✓	
	<i>Ophrys attaviria x sicula</i>							✓	
	<i>Anacamptis x gennarii</i> (<i>morio x papilionacea</i>)			✓					
	BUTTERFLIES								
	Eastern Festoon <i>Zerynthia cerisy</i>			✓		✓	✓	✓	
	Swallowtail <i>Papilio machaon</i>					✓			
	Scarce Swallowtail <i>Iphiclides podalirius</i>			✓		✓	✓	✓	
	Green-underside Blue <i>Glaucopsyche alexis</i>				✓			✓	
	Eastern Baton Blue <i>Pseudophilotes vicrama</i>					✓	✓	✓	
	Green Hairstreak <i>Callophrys rubi</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
	Painted Lady <i>Vanessa cardui</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
	Red Admiral <i>Vanessa atalanta</i>			✓		✓	✓		
	Eastern Dappled White <i>Euchloe ausonia</i>			✓	✓	✓		✓	
	Clouded Yellow <i>Colias crocea</i>			✓	✓	✓		✓	

	Species name	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7	Day 8
	Small Copper <i>Lycaena phlaeas</i>			✓		✓			
	Lesser Fiery Copper <i>Lycaena thersamon</i>							✓	
	Brimstone <i>Gonepteryx rhamni</i>					✓			
	Long-tailed Blue <i>Lampides boeticus</i>				✓	✓			
	MAMMALS								
	Fallow Deer <i>Dama dama</i>			✓				✓	
	Brown Hare <i>Lepus europaeus</i>						✓	✓	
	REPTILES								
	Black Whip Snake <i>Dolichophis jugularis</i>						✓		
	Balkan Green Lizard <i>Lacerta trilineata</i>					✓		✓	
	Starred Agama <i>Stellagama stellio</i>				✓	✓			
	Eurasian Blind Snake <i>Xerotyphlops vermicularis</i>							✓	
	Snake-eyed Lizard <i>Ophisops elegans</i>							✓	
	AMPHIBIANS								
	Common Toad <i>Bufo bufo</i>								
	Green Toad <i>Bufo viridis</i>					✓			
	Karpathos Frog <i>Rana cerigensis</i>			✓					
	MISCELLANEOUS								
	Rhodes Freshwater Crab <i>Potamon rhodium</i>			✓					
	NOTABLE BIRDS								
	Short-toed Eagle <i>Circaetus gallicus</i>				✓				
	Hoopoe <i>Upopa epops</i>				✓				
	Crested Lark <i>Galerida cristata</i>				✓				
	Chukar <i>Alectoris chukar</i>				✓				
	Red-rumped Swallow <i>Cecropis daurica</i>				✓				
	Hooded Crow <i>Corvus cornix</i>				✓				
	Woodlark <i>Lullula arborea</i>					✓			
	Blue Rock Thrush <i>Monticola solitarius</i>					✓			
	Sardinian Warbler <i>Curruca melanocephala</i>						✓		
	Woodchat Shrike <i>Lanius senator</i>						✓		
	Eastern Olivaceous Warbler <i>Iduna pallida</i>						✓		
	Eastern Black-eared Wheatear <i>Oenanthe melanoleuca</i>							✓	
	Ortolan Bunting <i>Emberiza hortulana</i>							✓	
	Long-legged Buzzard <i>Buteo rufinus</i>							✓	

Guests' Galleries

All images that follow were kindly shared by tour participants.



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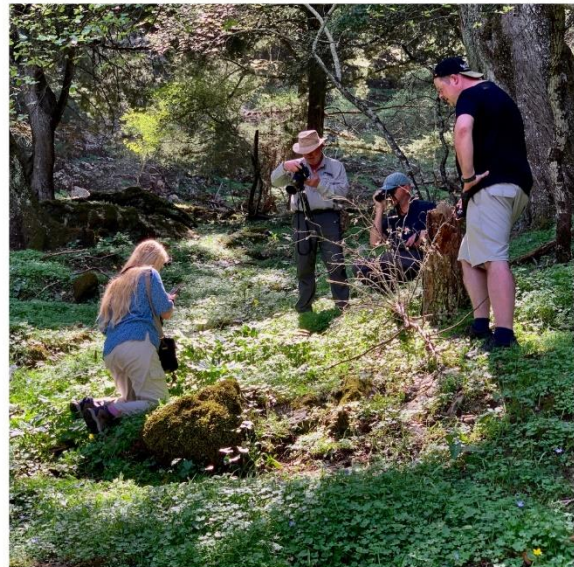
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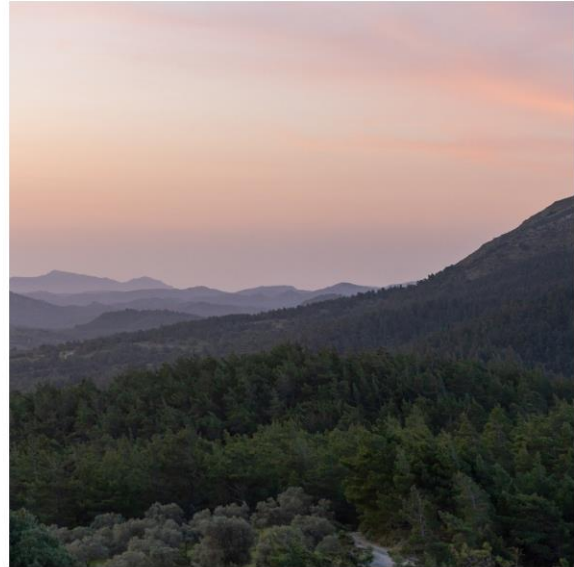
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