



# Honeyguide

## WILDLIFE HOLIDAYS

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**Crete**  
**27 April – 4 May 2016**

### Participants

Margaret Palmer  
Timothy and Phylida Wright  
Philip and Jacqueline Jenkins

### Leader

Chris Durdin  
Report by Chris Durdin

Photos in this report by Tim Wright (TW) and Chris Durdin (CD) were all taken during the holiday.

Cover: swallowtail on lantana (CD), griffon vulture (TW), Plakias (CD),  
*cretensis* subspecies of Banded Demoiselle (TW), pintail and glossy ibis (TW).



We stayed at the family-run Hotel Sofia in Plakias, [www.sofiahotelplakias.com](http://www.sofiahotelplakias.com).

Above: Plakias at night (TW). Below: the group near the hotel.



As with all Honeyguide holidays, £40 of the price of the holiday was put towards a conservation project, in this case for the lammergeier project of the Hellenic Ornithological Society (HOS), which is based in Athens but whose work covers the whole of Greece and its islands. There were just five breeding pairs of lammergeiers on Crete in 2015.

Honeyguide's donation to HOS (BirdLife Greece) for Crete this year is a small one, by Honeyguide standards, £230 from our group of five people made up of £40 per person and supplemented by gift aid through the Honeyguide Wildlife Charitable Trust. However it is a landmark as it takes our running total of donations over £10,000 since our first Crete group in 1995: the total is now £10,165. In the early years (1995-1999) the donation was towards the work of HOS in safeguarding Important Birds Areas. Since the year 2000, we have supported HOS's work for the bearded vulture (lammergeier). The total for all conservation contributions through Honeyguide since 1991 was £107,556 to May 2016.

More information about the work to protect bearded vultures – as they prefer to call them in Greece – is on the website of the Hellenic Ornithological Society [www.ornithologiki.gr/page\\_cn.php?aID=907](http://www.ornithologiki.gr/page_cn.php?aID=907)



## DAILY DIARY

### 27 April – arrival

Frost in the Gatwick area was a surprise, but was not a problem for Margaret and me and the easyJet flight was a smooth one, arriving at the much warmer Heraklion airport a little ahead of schedule. We were grateful for the SatNav to guide us through some very narrow streets to the Hotel Lena in Heraklion where we picked up the other four, who had enjoyed a successful morning visiting Knossos. Crete's warm winter and lack of rain was obvious as we drove west, with dry countryside punctuated by bright pink oleanders on roadsides.

Having turned south at Rethymnon, we paused in a lay-by not long afterwards, initially to have a look at the valonia oaks that grow in this central part of Crete – though they are probably not native. Buzzard, raven and stonechat were among the birds here and there was a rich mix of wayside flowers, including tassel hyacinth, the star-of-Bethlehem *Ornithogalum narbonense* and lots of the scabious mournful widow, which attracted several butterflies.

A second stop was in the lower part of Kourtaliótiko Gorge, where it didn't take long to find griffon vultures, crag martins, high flying alpine swifts and a chough for Margaret.

At the Hotel Sofia, Vagelis greeted us and we soon settled in. Being such a fine, warm evening, I went for a walk on the sea front and found, where the river meets the sea, a remarkably tame curlew sandpiper which was quite a long way into developing its brick-red summer plumage. Happily it stayed there and everyone saw it well, alongside some Italian sparrows, before our evening meal at the Sofia taverna.

### 28 April – Plakias, Myrthios and Kotsiphou

Philip and Jackie found a little ringed plover before breakfast. It had gone when all six of us arrived at the river's mouth after breakfast, though the curlew sandpiper was still there. On the water were several large pond skaters, sometimes easier to see by looking for their shadows on the river bed. Looking down from the bridge there were two close Balkan terrapins, but more remarkable still was an equally close adult night heron, which then flew up-river.

As soon as we were out of Plakias the impact of the winter's drought and warm spring was apparent. Happily there was still plenty to find, especially in shady spots, such as honeywort and pale flax. After taking a look at the typical Mediterranean scrub of lentisc, wild pear and carob, we paused at the bridge, wondering if the night heron had come up to this point. It hadn't, but there was water speedwell, watercress and large patches of *Lythrum junceum*; a holly blue fluttered around the ivy.

We turned left through the olive groves, making for the old Venetian olive mill. A raven was chased by hooded crows and the local buzzards were in the sky over us off and on all morning. Sounds were dominated by chaffinch and Sardinian warbler, with Cetti's warbler, a few tits and blackcaps thrown in from time to time. The plant list grew steadily, with highlights including showy Cretan wall lettuces, *Scutellaria sieberi* (another large endemic species) and small-flowered cistus. A Balkan green lizard scurried across the path. Egyptian grasshoppers, mammoth wasp and violet carpenter bee were some of the notable invertebrates, plus a fine Red-veined Darter dragonfly that perched nicely for us. We climbed the hill, past the pomegranate trees, reaching Mirthios at one o'clock, perfectly timed for a lunch at the Panorama Taverna of mixed starters, *horta* (wild greens) and various salads.



A field of corn marigolds near Kanevos (CD); Cretan festoon (TW).

After a little time to check out the craft shops, we descended past the renovated communal outdoor washing facility and down to Plakias. After ice creams we drove beyond Mirthios, through Kotsiphou Gorge and into the woods above Kanevos.

Here, somewhat higher and shadier, it was green and full of life. The main target was Cretan cyclamen: it was no surprise that they were mostly over, but that left many still in flower, not far from some reddish-coloured broomrapes.

Walking up the hill, we found our first orchids, heart-flowered serapias in an abandoned vineyard. Here also was a *Lathyrus annuus*, a particularly attractive yellow pea with a fine pod and red lines on the standard petal. We turned into a former arable field that was yellow with corn marigold, mixed with mayweed *Anthemis chia*, with small-flowered campion and a patch of flowering milk thistles. A cirl bunting was singing, and a female settled in good view. A turtle dove purred and just beyond the bush with the stonechat a golden oriole flashed in and out of sight, but sadly just for me. As we retraced our steps, a fine Cretan festoon settled on the path, then a painted lady; better still, no less than three Bonelli's eagles soared over us. We paused briefly as we drove back down, to study one of the many patches of *Osyris alba*, and here Tim located a turtle dove on a bare tree top.

We had stayed out in the perfect evening light and warmth, saving checklists for our evening meal at the Gio-Ma taverna. On one of the rocks in Plakias Bay were two squacco herons, no doubt recently arrived migrants, then a third tucked mostly out of sight on the far side of the rock. A common sandpiper called and perched on other rocks and all three squaccos flew round the bay in the half light.

### 29 April – Kourtaliótiko Gorge and Spili

Two common sandpipers on the beach before breakfast seemed at first the only thing of note, but as we returned to the Hotel Sofia we met Margaret who'd seen a squacco heron on the rocks, perhaps one from last night. We paused on the seafront on the way out of Plakias after breakfast to scan a distant cave on the headline. The hirundines there earlier had gone, but a little ringed plover flew past and a shag was out at sea alongside a yellow-legged gull.

There was also a brief stop by the solar panels to look at a road kill beech marten before the first proper stop in the lay-by in Kourtaliótiko Gorge. At least three male blue rock thrushes were singing on various vantage points or in flight and it wasn't long before a small squadron of griffon vultures took to the air along with the usual jackdaws, kestrels and ravens. A small group of red-rumped swallows came over, and we shared telescope views with a German family of a perched griffon.

The advanced season was evident here but in the protected gorge there were still good numbers of flowers to find, including groups of the pretty crucifer *Ricotia cretica* and two other endemics, Cretan gorge comfrey and hanging mullein. Farther down was a nice group of choughs, not far from a stonking (and stinking) dragon arum, and a Blue Emperor dragonfly was patrolling. The last lingering flowers of storax offered a more appealing scent. A Cleopatra was on the wing and Cretan small heath was an excellent find.



Birdwatching in Kourtaliótiko Gorge; Cretan small heath; a view of the gorge (CD).

Back at the lay-by two coaches had boxed us in, but one was swift to move to allow us room to exit. We took the pretty back road to Spili, stopping for views and photos of the gorge by the rock with the joint-pine. In Spili's car park, a market was in the process of shutting up shop as we made our way to the busy square to picnic by the row of lion-head fountains.

After drinks and/or ice creams we made the short trip up into the Kedros Foothills, better known as Spili bumps. Thoughts of the challenging year for plants were cast aside as we were immediately occupied with birds: an ortolan bunting was singing, and that and a corn bunting were soon found. A chukar walked in front of where the ortolan was throwing back its head to broadcast its 'Beethoven's Fifth' song. Around the corner, a yellow wagtail on a fence was joined by a male, then a female, whinchat. Orchids, apart from pyramidal orchids and gone-over Italian man orchids were conspicuous by their absence, but the 'supporting cast' was strong: *Gagea graeca*, red Mediterranean kidney-vetch, bellardia and one-flowered clover among many.



Fields of corn marigolds were just stunning. A tawny pipit settled close to two of us, and on the return walk we followed it along the main path. A tour of the biggest of the small 'bumps' eventually led us to more orchids. A sombre bee orchid type was identified as *Ophrys cressa* and Philip joined us with a photo of an Italian man orchid still in flower (even if his book did give it a strange English name). Tongue orchids began to show. One was a Bergon's tongue-orchid but the bulk were *Serapias lingua*, the common tongue orchid – and bulk and common are good words as there were patches of hundreds of these, probably well into four figures all told. A bishop's ophrys and some rather depauperate man orchids added to the list and the final species was a couple of lax-flowered orchids close to the minibus. So a total of seven orchid species – not many compared with, for example, 14 last year, but not bad in the circumstances.



*Ophrys cressa* (CD), tawny pipit (TW) and *Allium nigrum* (CD), all at 'Spili bumps'.

Our evening meal at Lysseos taverna was interrupted helpfully by two British naturalists, regulars in Plakias, with news of nesting bee-eaters and, more immediately, an adult night heron in the river just a few steps away from the taverna.

### 30 April – Festos and Kalamaki

There was a little fall of aerial feeders first thing: swallows, house martins, sand martins and red-rumped swallow over the car park by the Hotel Sofia, then more plus common swifts at Souda. There, Philip, Jackie and I looked at the grove of Cretan palms and had a good view of a Sardinian warbler on a wire.

We left sharp at 9:15 to head east, through Spili and a short diversion, then through Timbaki. We turned for Ayia Triada where strong winds created swirling dust around the car park, prompting a change in the usual itinerary. At Festos, Margaret glimpsed a bee-eater as we arrived and alpine swifts and red-rumped swallows flew over the car park. There was a very clear and patient northern wheatear from the walk up to the café, but just the briefest sighting of a hoopoe disappearing into a tree. A bright Cleopatra showed well while we had drinks, after which all five of the group did self-guided tours of the ancient Minoan site while I guarded bags on the café's more sheltered side. The wildlife had good timing: a swallowtail floated over us when most had reassembled, followed by another bee-eater. We saw the hoopoe again on the way down.

Ayia Triada was dropped in favour of the coast at Kalamaki where we found a sheltered spot for picnics. In the meantime I'd checked the walk over the dry dunes to the pool – we'd come into a slightly different spot to last year. There was plenty of open water in among the reeds, enough for four garganey: these migrant ducks flew around and moved in and out of view all the while we were there, plus a ferruginous duck flying past just the once. One patch of the wetland also had muddy edges supporting a brilliant range of wetland birds. The biggest and most obvious were five pintails, two (later three) glossy ibises, a little egret and a squacco heron. Alongside these were waders, mostly wood sandpipers and little stints.



Wood sandpiper, one of many seen today;  
glossy ibises, squacco herons and a little egret at Kalamaki (TW).

There was a tight group of four feeding curlew sandpipers and it was almost certainly one of these that was snatched by a peregrine that appeared out of nowhere. It was exhilarating birdwatching yet challenging conditions with sand being driven by the fierce wind, though there were sheltered spots to watch from that helped. We were almost back at the minibus when another falcon appeared: this time an immature red-footed falcon that settled in a dead tree.

There was still time to find another coastal wetland. Forking left just before the Shell petrol station on the far side of Timbaki, we carried straight on until we found a small coastal lagoon towards Kokkinos Pirgos. There, feeding on mud, algae or in low water was another splendid sprinkling of waders. Wood sandpipers, little stints and little ringed plovers were the commonest; six ruffs were a new species as were singles of dunlin, turnstone and black-tailed godwit.

Tonight's taverna was Tasomanolis, which specialises in fish, and after starters two of the mixed fish meals for two were plenty for six of us. The sounds of firecrackers punctuated the night as people celebrated after Saturday night Easter services.

### 1 May – Moní Préveli

It was Easter Sunday and there were signs of some who had been up all night: music from one of the bars and a young woman in glad rags and high heels at the 'Love Life' snack bar. This was as the pre-breakfast crew drove to Damnoni beach where our run of squacco herons continued: one flew across the bay and three more were on rocks beyond the beach umbrellas. We also found a little ringed plover, two common sandpipers, a turtle dove and plenty of sea spurge *Euphorbia paralias* on the beach. The night life was over when we came back for breakfast, as usual in the hotel's courtyard under the Norfolk Island pine.

A short drive took us all to Moní Préveli. There was a distinct lack of migrants in the cypress trees though a Cretan grayling on a tree trunk was good to see, and there were soon several more. Walking down below the monastery I caught sight of a golden oriole, which characteristically stayed well hidden, so we moved on down the hill by the Billy Goat Gruff and barking dogs. There a woodchat shrike flew through and perched on a distant tree and a small party of egrets flew along the coast. Back in the cypresses there were more flashes of orioles – two males and one female – and eventually it proved possible to get the telescope on a bright male at the back of a mulberry. The café was shut, presumably an Easter thing, so we all went into the monastery, an enjoyable short visit. We also paused to look at the memorial to the monks who helped Allied troops escape occupied Crete in WW2.

We had picnics by the Venetian Bridge where there was yet another tame squacco heron near the Muscovy ducks and paddling children. Both wood and common sandpipers also showed and seemed to cope with people around; later a great white egret flew over. The vegetation was dry and there was no sign of freshwater crabs, but a great show of dragonflies in the warmth of the early afternoon more than made up for that. Most obvious at first were big Blue Emperors. Under the bridge I found a very tame male Keeled Skimmer, which kept coming back to the same perch and was very happy to be watched and photographed. Then there were even bluer Southern Skimmers along the edge of the road and very red Broad Scarlets.



Dragonflies at the Venetian Bridge: Keeled Skimmer, Southern Skimmer and Broad Scarlet (CD).

The café here was open and understandably popular. Our table was close to a patch of lantana where a fresh-looking swallowtail was so pre-occupied with feeding that it was untroubled by an audience. A demoiselle damselfly dashed through here and in the meantime Margaret had found some more by the river.

Afternoon plans were quickly adapted as we pottered a short way down the track towards Préveli's palm beach, the best spot being where there was a confluence of two small rivers under the Oriental planes. Here there were several of the robust, bright blue males of the *cretensis* subspecies of Banded Demoiselle, which also differs from the species in the UK by having dark on the wings almost to the tips. At one point there were four male demoiselles together plus three of the very green-winged females.



It was time to move on to our final site of the 'free' afternoon, following up a tip-off from the people we'd talked at Lysseos taverna. We drove inland to a bee-eater colony in a sand quarry (exact location not noted on purpose). It's a species that isn't known to breed regularly on Crete, but there was a good deal of activity around nesting holes with a minimum of 14 birds (the best count) and probably at least 20.

Three of the group had Easter Sunday roast lamb at Sirocco taverna. After dinner we looked at Jupiter and four moons, albeit at an awkward angle as they were high in the sky.

## 2 May – Ayia Lake and Omalós Plateau

Two surprises this morning: some light rain and a Temminck's stint in Plakias. The overcast sky probably also contributed to a fall of hirundines – swallows, house martins and sand martins – with 100 or more on wires around the car park as we made an earlier departure than usual at 8:45. After looking at the stint we journeyed non-stop, apart from re-fuelling, across Crete then west to Chania and up the Omalós road to Ayia Reservoir.



Bee-eaters at nesting holes; a tame Temminck's stint; swallows and martins on a wire (TW).

The weather here was good and the reservoir and paths were busy with day trippers as well as other naturalists. Coots and calling little grebes were the most obvious birds on the water, plus large numbers of sand martins over the reservoir, a good 150 martins and probably nearer to 200. A little bittern shot out of the nearest vegetation. After drinks in the adjacent café we first walked right. A flying night heron and another little bittern fly-past were a good start and we found a little crake moving rapidly in and out of the edge of the reedbed. Warblers created lots of interest, with good views of sedge warbler, a reed warbler in giant reed and a Cetti's warbler seen at last. A spotted flycatcher was, well, flycatching from a eucalyptus. There was a lack of waders, though, just one wood sandpiper from the bridge where a grey wagtail also showed up. Heading the other way, there was little new, though a good view of a blackcap – having heard them daily – was a first for the holiday, and a snipe zigzagged away from the water's edge.

We wound up the new road to Omalós, with the weather getting windier all the time. A woodland of cypress and *Acer sempervirens* provided a little shelter for picnics. We noted prickly oak and little bushes of *Daphne oleoides*. Driving on, there was the impressive landscape of Omalós Plateau. At our first stop by a fenced orchard, a woodlark sat quietly on a fence long enough to get the 'scope on it for everyone. We knew the endemic *Tulipa bakeri* would be over but it was replaced by sheets of tassel hyacinth, here and elsewhere where the land was uncultivated on this part of the plateau. A Cretan barberry was in fine flower.

At the top of Samaria Gorge we took in the view then walked up the steep steps through the scrub. *Gagea graeca* was the most obvious flower, but there were also a few lingering blooms of Cretan mouse-ear and Phylida noticed the interesting looking daisies, namely the endemic *Bellis longifolia*. The main café at the top was shut for renovation so we walked down the road, past wild aubretia, to the lower café, over which a large group of griffon vultures was hanging in the wind.

After hot chocolate or mountain tea we carried on around the plain. A fenced area had patches of a bright yellow umbellifer which later study found was the endemic *Chaerophyllum creticum*, which is largely confined to the Omalós Plateau (according to Fielding and Turland<sup>1</sup> and <http://www.cretanflora.com/> (photo in plant list). Large Venus's looking-glass and hoary cress were noted too. Two ladies were picking *horta* – mountain greens – though they had pick-axes rather than knives, which suggests careless commercial harvesting as it makes a mess of the turf and doesn't allow the plant to re-grow from the root. They were working by the 'Mediterranean temporary pond', which had water despite the winter drought. One wood sandpiper stood on the edge of the sheet of water crowfoot. We completed the circuit and left the plateau at five o'clock, though did stop almost immediately for a clump of goldendrop *Onosma erecta* on a roadside rockface.

<sup>1</sup> *Flowers of Crete* by John Fielding and Nicholas Turland, 2005 (Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew)



Group members against the backdrop of Samaria Gorge;  
the 'Mediterranean temporary pond' on Omalós Plateau (TW).

We made steady progress home, though there was another botanical stop just south of Rethymnon. Philip had talked about hoping to see squirting cucumber, and here it was growing in big patches. In the words of Chris Grey-Wilson<sup>2</sup>, "The exciting fruits are always a source of amusement to catch the uninitiated observer." I also found a gourd ladybird, which specialises on cucumber family plants, and a larva.

We were back at Plakias at 7:30 and Muses taverna was able to feed us at short notice. Rain was falling as we left for the hotel.

### 3 May – Souda, Frangokastello and Kotsiphou gorge

The little ringed plover was on Plakias beach before breakfast, but otherwise it was quiet. Our first stop this blustery day was at Souda where our first wall butterfly of the week spread its wings on the ground, with the similar southern speckled wood nearby for easy comparison. The main reason for calling was to look at the Cretan palms here with everyone.



Frangokastello (TW).

We didn't meet anyone on the single-width street of Sellia so we headed west without incident, through Rodákino and, many twists and turns later, to the coastal plain of Frangokastello, parking by the always impressive shell of the castle. Our walk there was rather dominated by the strong wind so, other than the ever-present crested lark, birds were decidedly thin. It was surprising how well butterflies coped in the conditions, hugging the ground or in sheltered spots, including clouded yellow and marbled skipper near the small chapel and graveyard. For flowers, two

bushes of caper were interesting and good-looking and tucked into some rocks was a clump of some pretty bellflowers. Examination of photos later points to an ID for these of *Campanula tubulosa* rather than the rare *C. saxatilis* ssp. *saxatilis*. Searching for mandrake in the dry conditions was tough. It's always a scruffy looking species and even more so this year: here we found just one rather sad rosette of leaves, but there were more later.

After fresh orange juice in a café, and the courageous choice of Greek coffee for Philip, we returned to the minibus to pick up picnics, which we ate by the statue of the unknown notable with mason bee mud under his ear.

Most of the group also looked inside the fort, for general interest and the view from the top but especially for a display of local Sfakia lacework.



A camouflaged mallow skipper (TW); caper (CD).

<sup>2</sup> *Mediterranean Wild Flowers* by Majorie Blamey and Christopher Grey-Wilson.



After lunch we potted on the beach for a while, seeing fast-running tiger beetles and various plants, though nun's farts (balls of *Posidonia* fibres) were tricky to find. There was a Blue-tailed Damselfly from where we ate ice creams. Back at the car park I took Phylida to see the small restharrow *Ononis reclinata* and she was alert to more mandrake plants, less shrivelled than this morning's example and one with a fruit. We then drove a different way out to see more of the coastal plain and had the good luck to come across a migrant black kite that settled in a dead tree, allowing excellent views. An ortolan bunting was singing when we stopped on the return journey to take pictures of distant Plakias Bay.

Our final stop was at the top of Kotsiphou Gorge. By some one-flowered clover a tiny iris caught Phylida's eye, *Gynandryis monophylla*. There were various other plants farther down including tree flax, pink *Asperula incana* and white-flowered *Coronilla globosa*. There was a swallowtail caterpillar on some very narrow umbellifer leaves: across the road there was a plant in flower later identified as the endemic – and shy-flowering – *Ferulago thyrsoiflora*. Overhead were the usual griffons, some noisy jackdaws and several crag martins. More puzzling was an unusual warbler that was singing from a cypress tree: it transpired to be an olivaceous warbler, with a second in song over to our left.

A little rain in Kotsiphou Gorge turned into a downpour, including over dinner in Gio-Ma taverna. Here the group shared their highlights of the trip, which are listed below.

#### 4 May – Heraklion airport and home

The gang of four had more days to look forward to, but not so for Margaret and me. After a relaxed breakfast, we left just after ten o'clock for Heraklion airport. It was a smooth journey to and through the airport and we arrived back at Gatwick ahead of schedule.

#### Holiday highlights

<b>Tim</b>	Griffon's vulture's nesting spot; Kalamaki pools; Ayia Reservoir; the dragonfly hunt.
<b>Jackie</b>	Griffon vultures; singing blue rock thrush; crown daisy; river by the Venetian Bridge; Kalamaki pools.
<b>Philip</b>	Cetti's warbler; golden oriole; caper; dragon arum; the day in Kourtaliótiko Gorge.
<b>Phylida</b>	When you can sit and look at birds e.g. griffons, golden orioles; Kalamaki pools; little bittern and little crane; Banded Demoiselle.
<b>Margaret</b>	Landscape, scenery, sea and night sky; solitary migrants at Plakias e.g. night heron, curlew sandpiper and Temminck's stint; squacco herons on the rock; Cretan wall lettuce.
<b>Chris</b>	Kalamaki pools; Venetian Bridge and the dragonflies and damselflies there; seeing new places, namely the bee-eater colony and the lagoon near Timbaki.



Tame curlew sandpiper in Plakias, a holiday highlight (TW).

## WILDLIFE LISTS

BIRDS	
Little grebe	several on Ayia Reservoir
Shag	1 in Plakias Bay, 29/4
Little bittern	1 at Ayia Reservoir, 2/5
Night heron	Singles at Plakias, 28/4 & 29/4. 1 at Ayia Reservoir, 2/5
Squacco heron	a bumper year. 3 at Plakias, 28/4, also 1 on 29/4. 6, Kalamaki & 1, Kokkinos Pirgos (both 30/4). 1 at Ayia Reservoir 19/4. 4, Damnoni beach, 1, Venetian Bridge at Moní Préveli, both 1/5
Little egret	1 at the pools near Kalamaki, 30/4
Great white egret	1, flying over Venetian Bridge at Moní Préveli, 1/5
Glossy ibis	3 at the pools near Kalamaki, 30/4
Pintail	5 at the pools near Kalamaki, 30/4, 3♂, 2♀
Garganey	4 at the pools near Kalamaki, 30/4
Ferruginous duck	1 at the pools near Kalamaki, 30/4
Black kite	1 at Frangocastello, 3/5
Griffon vulture	Small numbers seen regularly over hills and gorges
Bonelli's eagle	3 above Kanevos, near Kotsiphou Gorge, 28/4
Buzzard	common and widespread
Kestrel	common and widespread
Red-footed falcon	1♀ near the pools near Kalamaki, 30/4
Peregrine	1 at the pools near Kalamaki, 30/4
Chukar	1 at 'Spili bumps', 29/4, heard on 1/5
Little crane	1 at Ayia Reservoir, 2/5
Moorhen	recorded at Ayia Reservoir
Coot	recorded at Ayia Reservoir and 1 at the pools near Kalamaki
Little ringed plover	1-2 regularly on Plakias beach, also at Damnoni
Little stint	3, the pools near Kalamaki, c 10 at Kokkinos Pirgos, both 30/4
Temminck's stint	1 very tame bird in Plakias, 2/5
Ruff	6, Kokkinos Pirgos, 30/4
Snipe	1 at Ayia Reservoir, 2/5
Curlew sandpiper	1 very tame bird in Plakias, 27/4 & 28/4. 4 on the pools near Kalamaki, 1 taken by a peregrine
Dunlin	1, Kokkinos Pirgos, 30/4
Black-tailed godwit	1, Kokkinos Pirgos, 30/4
Wood sandpiper	16, pools near Kalamaki, several at Kokkinos Pirgos, both 30/4; 1, Venetian Bridge at Moní Préveli, 1/5; 1, Omalós, 2/5
Common sandpiper	1-2 birds around Plakias, also Venetian Bridge
Turnstone	1, Kokkinos Pirgos, 30/4
Yellow-legged gull	common and widespread
Rock dove	feral pigeons everywhere; at least some pigeons in the gorges looked like feral pigeons
Woodpigeon	recorded on 4 days
Collared dove	common in towns and villages
Turtle dove	singles on 28/4, 29/4 and 1/5
Swift	an arrival of migrants at Souda, 30/4; also seen 2/5 & 3/5
Alpine swift	seen on 4 days
Bee-eater	an estimate of 20 birds apparently nesting in a sand quarry, 1/5
Hoopoe	single on 30/4 at Festos, heard 1/5
Crested lark	seen on 4 days
Woodlark	seen by the bee-eater colony and Omalós
Sand martin	migrants with other hirundines on 30/4 (Souda) & 2/5 (Plakias). 150-200 over Ayia Reservoir, 2/5.
Crag martin	in the gorges
Swallow	variable numbers passing through daily: 100+ in Plakias, 2/5
Red-rumped swallow	c.10, 29/4 Kourtaliótiko Gorge, recorded on 20/4 & 1/5
House martin	recorded on four days
Tawny pipit	1 at 'Spili bumps', 29/4
Yellow wagtail	29/4 & 30/4, no subspecies identified
Grey wagtail	1 at Ayia Reservoir, 2/5
Wren	heard or seen in the gorges and mountains
Whinchat	2 at 'Spili bumps', 29/4
Stonechat	small numbers in most places
Northern wheatear	recorded on 30/4 & 1/5



<b>Blue rock thrush</b>	at least 3 males in Kourtaliótiko Gorge
<b>Blackbird</b>	recorded daily
<b>Cetti's warbler</b>	heard daily, seen at Ayia Reservoir
<b>Sedge warbler</b>	1 singing at Ayia Reservoir
<b>Reed warbler</b>	1 singing at Ayia Reservoir
<b>Great reed warbler</b>	1 singing at Ayia Reservoir
<b>Olivaceous warbler</b>	2 singing above Kotsiphou Gorge, 3/5
<b>Sardinian warbler</b>	common and widespread
<b>Blackcap</b>	small numbers seen and heard daily
<b>Spotted flycatcher</b>	1 singing at Ayia Reservoir, 2/5
<b>Blue tit</b>	common and widespread
<b>Great tit</b>	common and widespread
<b>Golden oriole</b>	1 above Kanevos, 28/4; 3 at at Moní Préveli, 1/5
<b>Woodchat shrike</b>	1 at at Moní Préveli, 1/5
<b>Jay</b>	at Omalós
<b>Red-billed chough</b>	Kourtaliótiko Gorge on 27/4 & 29/4
<b>Jackdaw</b>	a few in the gorges and at Omalós
<b>Hooded crow</b>	very common and widespread
<b>Raven</b>	widespread in small numbers
<b>Italian sparrow</b>	common and widespread
<b>Chaffinch</b>	common and widespread
<b>Greenfinch</b>	seen on 5 days
<b>Goldfinch</b>	common and widespread
<b>Serin</b>	heard while driving, 27/4
<b>Linnet</b>	a few birds on 3 days, especially at high altitude
<b>Cirl bunting</b>	Plakias and at bee-eater colony
<b>Ortolan bunting</b>	1♂ singing at 'Spili bumps', 29/4; heard 3/5
<b>Corn bunting</b>	recorded on five days on coastal slopes and on higher ground.

#### MAMMALS

Beech marten – several road casualties

#### REPTILES, AMPHIBIANS AND FISH

Balkan (Stripe-necked) terrapin – Plakias	Cretan marsh frog – Préveli River
Balkan green lizard – Plakias and several other glimpses	Grey mullet
Erhard's wall lizard – Frangocastello	

#### BUTTERFLIES

Swallowtail	Cleopatra	Wall brown
Cretan festoon	Painted lady	Small copper
Large white	Meadow brown	Holly blue
Small white	Cretan grayling	Common blue
Bath white	Cretan small heath	Mallow skipper
Clouded yellow	Southern speckled wood	Small skipper

#### ORTHOPTERA

<i>Cicada</i> sp. a cicada (heard)	<i>Acrida ungarica</i> / <i>A. turrita</i> nosed grasshopper
<i>Anacridium aegyptium</i> Egyptian grasshopper	<i>Oedipoda germanica</i> red-winged grasshopper

#### ODONATA

<i>Orthetrum brunneum</i> Southern Skimmer	<i>Sympetrum striolatum</i> Common Darter
<i>Orthetrum coerulescens</i> Keeled Skimmer	<i>Ischnura elegans</i> Blue-tailed Damselfly
<i>Crocothemis erythraea</i> Scarlet Darter (Broad Scarlet)	<i>Caleopteryx splendens</i> Banded Demoiselle ssp. <i>cretensis</i>
<i>Sympetrum fonscolombii</i> Red-veined Darter	<i>Anax imperator</i> Emperor (Blue Emperor)

#### OTHER NOTABLE INVERTEBRATES

Pine processionary moth (tents)	<i>Oxythyrea</i> sp. a black and white chafer
Honeybee	Bryony ladybird <i>Henosepilachna elaterii</i>
Buff-tailed bumblebee	7-spotted ladybird
Violet carpenter bee	<i>Cicindella littoralis</i> a tiger beetle
Mammoth wasp <i>Megascolia flavifrons</i>	<i>Albinaria corrugata</i> Cretan door snail
Paper wasp <i>Polistes gallicum</i>	<i>Aquarius najas</i> large pondskater
<i>Graphosoma lineatum</i> ssp. <i>italicum</i>	A robber fly <i>Machimus</i> sp.

## PLANTS

The warm, dry winter meant many of the flowers often seen in spring were over or absent, most obviously tulips and orchids but also in many other families. On the positive side, the advanced season meant we added many species to our Crete list. The main references for identification and names of plants are:

Mediterranean Wild Flowers (Blamey & Grey-Wilson 1993), *Wild Flowers of Crete* by Vangelis Papiomitoglou, *Flowers of Crete* by J Fielding & N Turland, and [www.cretanflora.com](http://www.cretanflora.com)

\* = Endemic to Crete P = Planted NiF = not in flower

# = Introduced and not native to Crete, and cultivated or planted species

### FERNS AND ALLIES

<i>Adiantum capillus-veneris</i>	Maidenhair fern
<i>Equisetum ramosissimum</i>	a horsetail
<i>Pteridium aquilinum</i>	Bracken
<i>Selaginella denticulata</i>	Mediterranean club-moss

### CONIFERS

#### Cupressaceae – Cypress Family

<i>Cupressus sempervirens</i>	Cypress
<i>C. sempervirens</i> var. <i>pyramidalis</i>	Funeral cypress
<i>Juniperus oxycedrus</i> ssp. <i>macrocarpa</i>	Prickly juniper

#### Ephedraceae – Joint pines

<i>Ephedra distachya</i>	Joint pine
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#### Pinaceae – Pine Family

# <i>Araucaria araucana</i>	Norfolk Island pine
<i>Pinus brutia</i>	Calabrian pine
# <i>Pinus pinea</i>	Stone pine

### FLOWERING PLANTS – Dicotyledons

#### Acanthaceae – Acanthus Family

<i>Acanthus spinosus</i>	Spiny bear's breech
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#### Aceraceae – Maple Family

<i>Acer sempervirens</i>	
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#### Aizoaceae – Aizoon Family

# <i>Carpobrotus edulis</i>	Hottentot fig
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#### Anacardiaceae – Pistacio Family

<i>Pistacia lentiscus</i>	Mastic tree or lentisc
<i>P. terebinthus</i>	Turpentine tree

#### Apiaceae (=Umbelliferae) – Carrot Family

<i>Apium nidiflorum</i>	Fool's watercress
* <i>Chaerophyllum creticum</i>	
<i>Crithmum maritimum</i>	Rock samphire NiF
<i>Daucus carota</i>	Wild carrot
<i>Eryngium campestre</i>	Field eryngo NiF
<i>Ferula communis</i> ssp. <i>communis</i>	Giant fennel
<i>Foeniculum vulgare</i>	Fennel
<i>Oenanthe pimpinelloides</i>	Corky-fruited water dropwort
<i>Scandix pecten-veneris</i>	Shepherd's needle
<i>Smyrniolus olusatrum</i>	Alexanders
<i>Smyrniolus perfoliatum</i> ssp. <i>rotundifolium</i>	Perfoliate Alexanders
<i>Tordylium apulum</i>	Mediterranean hartwort (equally 2-lobed petals)
<i>Tordylium officianale</i>	a hartwort (with unequally lobed petals)

#### Asteraceae (=Compositae) – Daisy Family

<i>Anthemis chia</i>	Mayweed
<i>Bellis longifolia</i>	
* <i>Centaurea raphanina</i>	a stemless knapweed
<i>Chrysanthemum coronarium</i> var. <i>coronarium</i>	Crown daisy
( <i>Glebionis coronaria</i> )	
<i>C. coronarium</i> var. <i>discolor</i>	Crown daisy
<i>Chrysanthemum segetum</i>	Corn marigold
<i>Crupina crupinastrum</i>	Crupina
<i>Dittrichia viscosa</i>	Aromatic inula NiF
<i>Galactites tomentosa</i>	Mediterranean thistle
<i>Helichrysum conglobatum</i>	a curry-plant without scent
<i>Pallenis (Asteriscus) spinosus</i>	Spiny golden star
<i>Phagnalon graecum</i>	Shrubby cudweed
<i>Scorzonera cretica</i>	Cretan viper's-grass
<i>Silybum marianum</i>	Milk thistle
* <i>Stachelina arborea</i>	NiF
<i>Tragopogon sinuatus (porrifolius)</i>	Salsify (seedheads)

#### Apocynaceae – Oleander Family

<i>Nerium oleander</i> ssp. <i>oleander</i>	Oleander
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#### Berberidaceae – Barberry Family

<i>Berberis cretica</i>	
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### **Boraginaceae – Borage Family**

*Anchusa italica* (azurea)  
*Cerinthe major*  
*Cynoglossum creticum*  
*Echium angustifolium*  
    *E. italicum*  
    *E. plantagineum*  
*Onosma erecta*  
*Symphytum creticum* (*Procopiana cretica*)

### **Cactaceae – Cactus Family**

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

### **Campanulaceae - Bellflower Family**

\* *Campanula tubulosa*  
*Legousia pentagonia*  
*L. speculum-veneris*  
\* *Petromarula pinnata*

### **Capparaceae - Caper Family**

*Capparis spinosa*

### **Caprifoliaceae – Honeysuckle Family**

*Lonicera etrusca*  
# *Sambucus nigra*

### **Caryophyllaceae – Pink Family**

\* *Cerastium scaposum*  
*Petrorhagia velutina* (*Kohlrauschia velutina*)  
*Silene bellidifolia*  
    *S. cretica*  
    *S. colorata*  
    *S. gallica*  
    *S. vulgaris*  
*Stellaria* sp.

### **Chenopodiaceae – Goosefoot Family**

*Arthrocnemum macrostachyum*  
*Salicornia europaea*

### **Cistaceae – Rockrose Family**

*Cistus parviflorus*  
    *C. salvifolius*  
*Fumana arabica*  
    *F. thymifolia*

### **Clusiaceae – St John's-wort Family**

*Hypericum empetrifolium* ssp. *empetrifolium*  
    *H. empetrifolium* ssp. *tortuosum*

### **Convolvulaceae – Bindweed Family**

*Convolvulus (althaeoides) elegantissimus*  
*Cuscuta epithymum*

### **Crassulaceae - Stonecrop Family**

*Umbilicus horizontalis*

### **Cruciferae (=Brassicaceae) – Cabbage Family**

*Aubrieta deltoidea*  
*Biscutella didyma*  
*Cakile maritima*  
*Capsella bursa-pastoris*  
*Cardaria draba*  
*Nasturtium officinale*  
*Raphanus raphanistrum*  
\* *Ricotia cretica*

### **Cucurbitaceae – Cucumber Family**

*Ecballium elaterium*

### **Dipsacaceae – Scabious Family**

*Knautia integrifolia* ssp. *mimica*  
*Scabiosa maritima*

### **Dioscoraceae – Yam Family**

*Tamus communis*

### **Ericaceae – Heather Family**

*Arbutus unedo* P  
*Erica arborea*

### **Euphorbiaceae – Spurge Family**

*Euphorbia acanthothamnus*  
    *E. characias*  
    *E. dendroides*  
    *E. helioscopia*  
    *E. hirsuta*  
    *E. paralias*  
# *Ricinus communis*  
*Mercurialis annua*

Large blue alkanet  
Honeywort  
Blue hound's-tongue  
Narrow-leaved bugloss  
Pale bugloss  
Purple viper's-bugloss  
a goldendrop  
Procopiana or Cretan gorge comfrey

Prickly pear

a Venus's looking-glass  
Large Venus's looking-glass  
Cretan wall lettuce

Caper

Honeysuckle  
Elder

Cretan mouse-ear

Mediterranean catchfly  
Small-flowered catchfly  
Bladder campion  
Chickweed

Glaucous glasswort  
Marsh samphire or glasswort

Sage-leaved cistus

Thyme-leaved fumana

Shrubby St. John's-wort  
St. John's-wort, at Omalós

(cut leaves, pale in centre of flower)  
Dodder

Navelwort / wall pennywort

Aubrieta  
Buckler mustard  
Sea-rocket  
Shepherd's-purse  
Hoary cress  
Watercress  
Wild radish  
Ricotia

Squirting cucumber

a two-tone scabious  
Mournful widow

Black bryony

Strawberry-tree  
Tree-heath

Greek spiny spurge  
Mediterranean spurge  
Tree spurge  
Sun spurge

Sea spurge  
Castor oil plant  
Annual mercury

### Fabaceae (=Leguminosa) – Pea Family

# *Acacia cyanophylla*  
*Anthyllus vulneraria* ssp. *praepropera* (= *rubriflora*)  
*Bituminaria* (*Psoralea*) *bituminosa*  
*Calicotome villosa*  
# *Cercis siliquastrum*  
*Ceratonia siliqua*  
\* *Coronilla globosa*  
\* *Ebenus cretica*  
*Lathyrus annuus*  
    *L. clymenum*  
*Lotus pedunculatus*  
*Medicago arborea*  
    *M. arabica*  
    *M. orbicularis*  
*Onobrychis caput-galli*  
*Ononis (natrix) hispanica*  
*Ononis reclinata*  
# *Robinia pseudoacacia*  
*Scorpiurus muricatus*  
*Spartium junceum*  
*Trifolium angustifolium*  
    *T. campestre*  
    *T. nigrescens*  
    *T. resupinatum*  
    *T. stellatum*  
    *T. uniflorum*  
*Tripodion (Anthyllis) tetraphyllum*  
*Vicia bithynica*  
    *V. lutea*  
    *V. sativa*  
    *V. villosa*

### Fagaceae – Oak Family

*Quercus coccifera*  
*Quercus ilex*

Deciduous oaks on Crete, both doubtfully native, are the following:-

*Quercus pubescens*  
    *Q. ithaburensis* ssp. *macrolepis*

### Gentianaceae – Gentian Family

*Blackstonia perfoliata*  
*Centaurium pulchellum*

### Geraniaceae – Geranium Family

*Erodium cicutarium*  
*Geranium dissectum*  
    *G. lucidum*  
    *G. molle*  
    *G. purpureum*  
    *G. rotundifolium*

### Lamiaceae (=Labiatae) – Mint Family

*Ballota pseudodictamnus*  
*Coridothymus (Thymus) capitatus*  
*Marrubium vulgare*  
*Phlomis fruticosa*  
*Salvia fruticosa* (formerly *S. triloba*)  
*Satureja (Micromeria) nervosa*  
    *S. thymbra*  
*Stachys cretica*  
\* *Scutellaria sieberi*

### Linaceae – Flax Family

*Linum arboreum*  
    *L. bienne*

### Lythraceae – Loosestrife Family

*Lythrum junceum*

### Malvaceae – Mallow Family

*Lavatera cretica*  
    *M. sylvestris*

### Meliaceae – Persian Lilac Family

# *Melia azedarach*

### Moraceae – Fig Family

*Ficus carica*  
# *Morus alba*

### Oleaceae – Olive Family

*Olea europaea*

*Mimosa* / blue-leaved wattle  
Red (Mediterranean) kidney vetch  
Pitch trefoil  
Hairy thorny broom  
Judas tree  
Carob tree

Shrubby sainfoin (Cretan ebony)  
yellow flowers, often red-veined

Greater birdsfoot trefoil  
Tree medick  
Spotted medick  
Large disk medick  
Cock's-comb sainfoin  
Large yellow restharrow  
Small rest-harrow  
False acacia  
Scorpiurus  
Spanish broom

Hop trefoil  
a common annual white clover  
Reversed clover  
Starry clover  
One-flowered clover  
Bladder vetch  
Bithynian vetch (two-tone purple & white)  
Yellow vetch  
Common vetch  
Fodder vetch

Kermes oak  
Holm or evergreen oak  
*Downy oak*  
*Valonia oak*; acorn cups with long, spreading scales

*Yellow-wort*  
*Lesser centaury*

*Common storksbill*  
*Cut-leaved cranesbill*  
*Shining cranesbill*  
*Dovesfoot cranesbill*  
*Little Robin*  
*Round-leaved cranesbill*

*Shrubby thyme*  
*White horehound*  
*Jerusalem sage*  
*Shrubby or 3-leaved sage*

*Summer savory*  
*Mediterranean woundwort*  
*a big white skullcap*

*Tree flax*  
*Pale flax*

*Lesser tree mallow*  
*Common mallow*

*Indian bead tree or Persian lilac*

*Fig*  
*White mulberry*

*Olive*



**Orobanchaceae – Broomrape Family***Orobanche ramosa*

Branched broomrape

**Oxalidaceae – Sorrel Family***Oxalis corniculata*

Yellow oxalis

# *O. pes-caprae*

Bermuda buttercup

**Papaveraceae – Poppy Family***Glaucium flavum*

Yellow horned-poppy

*Papaver rhoeas*

Common poppy

**Pittosporaceae – Pittosporum Family**# *Pittosporum tobira*

Pittosporum

**Plantaginaceae – Plantain Family***Plantago afra**P. coronopus*

Buckshorn plantain

*P. lanceolata*

Ribwort plantain

**Platanaceae – Plane Tree Family***Platanus orientalis*

Oriental plane

**Polygalaceae – Milkwort Family***Polygala venulosa*

Eastern milkwort

**Polygonaceae – Dock Family***Rumex bucephalophorus*

Horned dock

**Primulaceae – Primrose Family***Anagallis arvensis*

Scarlet pimpernel (scarlet and blue forms)

\**Cyclamen creticum*

Cretan cyclamen

**Punicaceae – Pomegranate Family***Punica granatum*

Pomegranate

**Ranunculaceae – Buttercup Family***Clematis cirrhosa*

Maiden's bower

*Ranunculus peltatus* ssp. *fucoides*

Pond water-crowfoot

**Rosaceae – Rose Family***Crataegus monogyna* ssp. *azarella*

Hawthorn

# *Eriobotrya japonica*

Loquat

*Pyrus spinosa*

Almond-leaved or wild pear

*Rosa sempervirens**Rubus sanctus*

Bramble

*Sarcopoterium spinosum*

Thorny burnet

**Rubiaceae – Bedstraw Family**\* *Asperula pubescens* (*A. incana*)

showy, pale pink, on calcareous cliffs

*Galium aparine*

Cleavers

*G. palustre*

Marsh bedstraw

*Sherardia arvensis*

Field madder

*Valantia hispida***Rutaceae – Rue Family**# *Citrus limon*

Lemon

# *Citrus sinensis*

Orange

**Santalaceae – Sandalwood Family***Osyris alba*

Osyris

**Scrophulariaceae – Figwort Family***Bellardia trixago*

Bellardia

*Cymbalaria muralis*

Ivy-leaved toadflax

*Linaria pelisseriana*

Jersey toadflax

*Parentucellia latifolia**P. viscosa*

Yellow bartsia

*Scrophularia lucida*

Shining figwort

*S. peregrina*

Nettle-leaved figwort

\* *Verbascum arcturus*

Hanging mullein

*V. macrurum**V. sinuatum**Veronica anagallis-aquatica*

Water speedwell

**Solanaceae – Nightshade Family***Hyoscyamus albus*

White henbane

*Mandragora autumnalis*

Mandrake

# *Nicotiana glauca*

Tree tobacco

*Solanum nigrum*

Black nightshade

**Styracaceae – Storax Family***Styrax officinalis*

Storax

**Tamaricaceae – Tamarix Family**# *Tamarix smyrnensis*

Tamarisk

**Thymelaeaceae – Daphne Family***Daphne sericea*

Thymelea

*Thymelaea hirsuta***Ulmaceae – Elm Family***Zelcova abelicea*

Zelcova, or ambelitsiá

**Urticaceae – Nettle Family***Parietaria judaica**Urtica urens***Valerianaceae – Valerian Family***\*Valeriana asarifolia**V. rubra***Verbenaceae – Verbena Family***Verbena officinalis**Vitex agnus-castus***Vitaceae – Vine Family***Vitis vinifera*

Pellitory of the wall

Annual nettle

Cretan valerian NiF

Red valerian

Vervain

Chaste tree

Grape vine

**Monocotyledons****Agavaceae – Agave Family**# *Agave americana***Amaryllidaceae – Daffodil Family***Pancratium maritimum***Araceae – Arum Family***Arisarum vulgare**Arum concinnum**Dracunculus vulgaris***Areaceae – Palm Family***Phoenix theophrasti***Iridaceae – Iris Family***Gladiolus italicus**Gynandryis monophylla**Iris pseudocorus***Liliaceae – Lily Family***Asphodeline lutea**Asphodelus ramosus (aestivus)**Charybdis (Drimia, Urginea) maritima**Gagea graeca**Muscari comosum*\* *M. spreitzenhoferi**Ornithogalum narbonense***Orchidaceae – Orchid Family***Aceras anthropophorum**Anacamptis pyramidalis**Ophrys (fusca) cressa**O. episcopalis**Orchis italica**Serapias bergonii (S. vomeracea ssp. laxiflora)**S. cordigera ssp. cretica**S. lingua***Poaceae – Grass Family***Arundo donax**Briza maxima**Lagurus ovatus**Phragmites australis***Posidoniaceae – Sea-grass Family***Posidonia aceanica***Smilacaceae – Smilax Family***Smilax aspera***Typhaceae – Reedmace Family***Typha domingensis*

Century plant

Sea daffodil (leaves only)

Friar's cowl

Dragon arum

Cretan palm

Field gladiolus

Yellow flag

Yellow asphodel

Common asphodel

Sea squill NiF

Tassel hyacinth

a spiked star-of-Bethlehem

Man orchid

Pyramidal orchid

Cretan bee orchid

Bishop's ophrys

Italian man orchid

Bergon's tongue-orchid

Tongue orchid

Giant reed

Greater quaking-grass

Hare's-tail

Common reed

Neptune-weed

Common smilax or sarsaparilla



*Rosa sempervirens*; small-flowered catchfly; *Chaerophyllum creticum* (CD).