

Orchids of Rhodes

Mariposa Nature Tours trip report

27th March – 2nd April 2026



Tour leaders Jon Dunn & Sarah Cuttle

Trip report by Jon Dunn

(Images, clockwise from top left: *Ophrys cretica x speculum* © Jon; *Anacamptis coriophora* © John;

Serapias carica pollination © Valerie; *Neotinea lactea* © Jan)



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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 ferrum-equinum x regis-ferdinandii*]

Arrivals Day – 27th March

Everyone having arrived either the previous day or by 9am on arrivals day, we had in effect an extra day to make the most of the orchids of Rhodes this week. With a weather forecast ahead that promised some rain, this might prove to be fortunate... so we resolved to make the most of it.

With leaders Jon and Sarah having been in Rhodes by now for almost a fortnight, and having the benefit of information shared by our network of European orchid-hunting friends who'd also been on the island in the past week, we were going into the week equipped with the best information possible. Not least the exciting finds that Jon and Sarah had made for themselves lately...



Ophrys speculum © Acid John

But first, having dropped guest bags off at our comfortable hotel base, and enjoyed a late breakfast courtesy of the thoughtfulness of Mama, we headed for the outskirts of Embonas. Our hotel is right in the heart of orchid country, and we'd a couple of early-flowering species we needed to catch up with lest the imminent inclement weather do for them entirely. One example of *Ophrys sitiaca* was hanging on for us... and nearby, a small colony of *Ophrys sancti-isidorii* also retained a couple of fine examples of this scarce species still in good condition.

Also present on this orchid-rich hillside were many *Ophrys regis-ferdinandii*, *O. speculum*, *O. sicula*, *O. ferrum-equinum*, and *O. reinholdii*... and hybrids of the latter two species for good measure. With Giant Orchid *Himantoglossum robertianum* and Pink Butterfly Orchid *Anacamptis papilionacea* also seen here, this was a strong start to the week... and augmented the finds made earlier in the morning by the early arrivals, John, Rick, and Valerie, who'd also enjoyed *Orchis anatolica* among other species.

From here we headed south to Kattavia, spending what remained of the morning on a stony hillside clad in phrygana. New orchids came thick and fast, with *Serapias carica* and *Ophrys cornutula* both striking and charismatic early finds, quickly followed by *Ophrys iricolor* with its sparkling blue speculum, and subtle and diminutive *Ophrys parvula* nearby.

A dense colony of Pink Butterfly Orchid sported three hyperchromic examples, including a deep, rich royal purple-flowered plant, and a more rufous plant found by Rick. While we could only find *Anacamptis coriophora* in bud for now, the first Pyramidal Orchid *Anacamptis pyramidalis* were already coming into bloom.



Uphill from here we saw our first *Ophrys calyptus*, a large-flowered *Ophrys* bee orchid and, in the immediate surroundings, several Rhodes Fritillary *Fritillaria rhodia*, including a scarce red-flowered plant. A walk in a nearby ruderal field yielded many *Ophrys cretica* ssp. *beloniae*, *Ophrys speculum*, and *Ophrys regis-ferdinandii*, and the first of several of the latter two species' hybrids we'd see during the course of the afternoon.

Lunch at a nearby chapel was pleasant, with a few orchids noted to liven up the picnic, though they were scarcely needed for our group was comprised of old friends of our leaders, so we were straight into carefree conversation, and laughs and stories shared.

The afternoon was to be an epic one. Jon and Sarah had thoroughly explored a complex of ruderal fields and had some surprises up their sleeve for the group. First up though, setting the scene, were our first *Ophrys rhodia*, with their spotted lips and apple green sepals.

Nearby, we enjoyed two of their hybrid offspring with *Ophrys speculum*... and then, to the best of our knowledge a first ever record, four *Ophrys regis-ferdinandii* x *Ophrys speculum* hybrids. Two of these had been found by our German friends earlier in the week, and Jon had found two more nearby the original plants. Today, there was a fifth plant now in flower – and this one looked more like *Ophrys speculum* x *Ophrys cretica*, with a rounder and bluer lip. Jon and Sarah had some recent experience to draw upon here when it came to appraising putative Mirror Orchid hybrids...

Our walk through the fields was enlivened by *Ophrys lutea* aplenty, more *Ophrys rhodia*, and several examples of *Ophrys umbilicata*, including a lovely photogenic plant found by Beth





Ophrys cretica ssp. *beloniae* x *Ophrys regis ferdinandii* © Jon

and enjoyed by all. Sarah discovered a hypochromic *Ophrys rhodia* that also stopped us all in our tracks.

Heading towards the next of our 'banked' discoveries from our extensive pre-tour recce work, we paused for more unusual *Ophrys rhodia*, including a green-flowered plant found by Jon and a previous Mariposa guest, Steph J, a couple of years beforehand.

Next up was a new plant for our itinerary, a hypochromic *Ophrys cretica* found by Jon, the usual dark brown flowers now the colour of pale caramel. And then, the highlight of the day...

Two days beforehand, Sarah had stumbled upon two staggeringly beautiful hybrids, *Ophrys cretica* ssp. *beloniae* x *Ophrys speculum*, in peak condition, with amazing marbled blue and green iridescent flowers. To the best of our knowledge, nobody had ever seen this before in the wild.

We were delighted to share these special plants with our guests – these are the sorts of moments that we love to create on our orchid tours, and are just one of the reasons



Ophrys cretica ssp. *beloniae* x *Ophrys speculum* © Jon

our orchid guests choose to travel with us time and again.

Alas, a deer or a goat somewhere in rural Rhodes hadn't read the script, for a final stop on the way home to enjoy a gorgeous lime-green *Ophrys halia* at a woodland margin was a bit of an anti-climax – the plant had been consumed, leaving a half-nibbled leaf and nothing more. A shame, certainly, but not the end of the world – we'd see more *halia* before the week was out...

Back to the hotel after an action-packed day, we'd seen 20 species already, half a dozen hybrids, and several hypochromic or hyperchromic colour forms. Not a bad start, and we were just getting warmed up!



Ophrys cretica ssp. *beloniae* hypochromic variation © Jon

Day 2 – 28th March

With foul weather forecast for today, we were prepared to vary our itinerary accordingly... but, with the day starting relatively dry with just a few spots of rain in the air, we made the most of the conditions from the moment we left the hotel.

Just a few minutes away from our accommodation is a lovely stony, gently sloping hillside upon which our guides had found two *Ophrys lucis* in good condition in the days before the tour began – and, with this early-flowering species potentially finishing for the season soon, it made sense to see this species before bad weather hit. Sarah’s plant had been munched by something, but we found another *Ophrys lucis* nearby... while Jon’s original plant, an unusually brown-toned example, was still untouched, the top flower being fresh and photogenic.



The same hillside yielded another *Ophrys sitiaca* in reasonable condition, found by Rick, and several *Ophrys apollonae* and *Ophrys omegaifera*, allowing for handy side by side comparisons. It was a pleasant surprise to find *Ophrys polyxo* starting here too, its brightly coloured flowers a punch of colour on the grey stony hill. And, of course, yet more *Ophrys reinholdii* and *ferrum-equinum* (and their hybrid offspring, *Ophrys x kalteiseniana*), and *Ophrys regis-ferdinandii* were also seen.

A drive of some 20 minutes then took us to the margins of an olive grove near Salakos, where we had a rare, golden form of *Ophrys sicula* to enjoy among its more conventionally marked brethren. Nearby were still more *Ophrys polyxo*, more advanced at this lower and warmer elevation and sporting more open flowers, and *Ophrys rhodia* once more too.

From here we ventured up onto Profitis Ilias. To be honest, as we ascended the mountain the auguries were already not ideal – thick cloud shrouded the pine woodlands, and the rain was becoming more persistent. Nonetheless, we set out onto an open area, quickly notching up some beautiful Provence Orchid *Orchis provincialis*. Between us we also found the anticipated *Ophrys dodecanensis* and *Ophrys oreas* but, with the wind suddenly picking up, and the rain torrential, Jon swiftly decided we should leave the mountain for another day. In the sanctuary of our vehicles, a check of the rain radar revealed a window of relative calm and dryness in the vicinity of Lardos so, with sites aplenty well known to us around there, that’s where we headed.



Our first site there, which filled the late morning and early afternoon, is a particular gem.



Our walk onto the site from the road took us around olive groves with sporadic *Ophrys rhodia* to catch our attention, and we paused at a small colony of Pink Butterfly Orchid *Anacamptis papilionacea* well-known to Jon for its rare colour variants – and sure enough, there were five pure white *alba* forms of the orchid there to be seen. Nearby, we also found our first *Serapias bergonii* too.

Moving onwards along the network of tracks through the countryside, Rick made a startling discovery beneath pine trees – a Violet Limodore *Limodorum abortivum* in flower! Given the generally cool weather for the past fortnight this came as a most pleasant surprise. Looking around the immediate vicinity, Valerie, Sarah, David, and John all found further plants, more of which were either in flower or just about to bloom. This was a cherry on the cake of a site that we already knew was an absolute peach.

Just how good it was became clear very shortly afterwards as Jon and Sarah started to share the site's orchid riches with everyone – a strong colony of *Ophrys episcopalis* thrives in a sheltered former olive grove, with Pink Butterfly Orchid, *Serapias bergonii*, *Ophrys ferrum-equinum*, *Ophrys omegaifera*, and *Ophrys phryganae* also all present in good numbers.

Among the *Ophrys phryganae* was our second golden orchid of the day – an all-yellow form, gleaming like precious metal on the ground. On higher ground nearby we found yet another compelling variation of Pink Butterfly Orchid, a bi-coloured form, masses of *Ophrys iricolor* in good condition, and our first *Ophrys blitopertha* too.



Just a few minutes drive from this fabulous location brought us to our lunch site, another olive grove that wraps itself around a fragment of former phrygana habitat. We knew we'd see masses of *Ophrys calypsus* here, and so it proved – and, to Jon's considerable joy, an old friend was flowering again here, a startling variation with a golden lip and coral pink sepals. Much smaller in stature than in previous years, the plant appears

to be weakening. Maybe this would be the last year we'd see it... Alongside it was a considerably less beautiful variation of *Ophrys calypsus*, a lusus plant with ill-formed flowers

and a fasciated stem. This site also sports a small colony of *Ophrys persephona*, which were duly admired and, nearby, our first delicate *Serapias politsii* too.

The weather was due to deteriorate significantly across the whole island in what remained of the afternoon, so we started heading back towards Embonas, stopping near Laerma for a wet water meadow studded with enormous and vivid Loose-flowered Orchid *Anacamptis laxiflora*, and some significantly more subtle Bumblebee Orchid *Ophrys bombyliflora*.

We had just one more stop to make, albeit with the rain absolutely bucketing down now, it would be by necessity a brief one. One of our network of European orchid-hunting friends had made a startling discovery the previous week – a lone example of Dodecanese rarity *Ophrys herae*, a species closely related to *Ophrys mammosa*. The *O. mammosa* on Rhodes, sometimes referred to as *O. monolitha*, have coal-black basal fields on their lips – but *O. herae* has a basal field of pale caramel, and holds its flowers almost parallel to the stem, unlike the horizontally-presented flowers of *mammosa*. Furthermore, *herae* is an



early-flowering species, whereas the *mammosa* on Rhodes were just getting started – and this lone plant was already well advanced in its flowering period. We were delighted to have been made aware of this plant in advance of the tour, testament to our solid network of friends on the European orchid scene.

The drive back to Embonas from here was memorable, taken slowly by Jon and Sarah with due caution due to the extremely wet conditions. Our reward for safely navigating the roads around Attaviros was a pleasant hour in the local creperie, a favourite haunt of guides and guests alike in Embonas. Ice cream, coffee and tea kindly courtesy of Jan

was a fine way to celebrate a day that saw 30 orchid species recorded, and our weekly tally soar to 38 species after just two days in the field. Everyone's spirits had remained high despite the weather – this was a tremendous team effort today, and we'd had a great time.

Day 3, 29th March

The day dawned bright and sunny, a welcome change from the torrential rain that had continued well into the night. Oranges and lemons littered the ground beneath the hotel's fruit trees, and the swimming pool had started to fill itself ahead of the arrival of tourists later this spring! (Our lovely family-run hotel opens early in the season especially for the Mariposa groups that come searching for orchids here every year).

We could see on the weather radar that some rain was due to pass over Profitis Ilias in the mid-morning, so we decided not to resume our time on that mountain until this had had a chance to pass through. Instead, we worked our way up our closer, neighbouring mountain, Attaviros, beneath which the village in which we were staying shelters. At the base of the mountain a short walk revealed some *Ophrys dodecanensis* with their characteristic swept-back sepals, and the first of what would prove to be many *Ophrys reinholdii* seen today, sporting infinite variations in white lip markings and sepal colour, including one striking individual with dark green sepals. Our first Dense-flowered Orchid *Neotinea maculata* were also found, eliciting much attention as we enjoyed the subtleties of this small-flowered but pretty orchid.

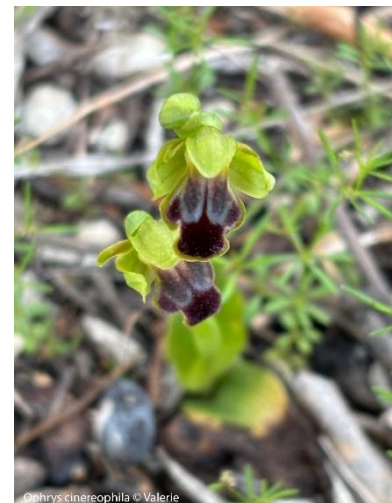


Higher on the mountain proved to be a happy hunting ground, with another *Neotinea*, Milky Orchid *Neotinea lactea*, the star of the show. This large example of the species had a yellow crab spider, *Thomisus onustus*, lurking upon it, a trap for the unwary pollinator. Nearby many *Orchis anatolica*, *Ophrys omegaifera*, and *Ophrys reinholdii* provided variety.

We came off the mountain in the mid-morning, and moved around its western flanks to a site Jon and Sarah had explored during their prior time on the island. A strip

of phrygana flanked on both sides by pine woodland, the conditions were auspicious for some interesting *Ophrys* and, potentially, maybe a hybrid... a friend of Jon's had found an *Ophrys mammosa* x *reinholdii* here some years previously. We'd no sooner got out of our vehicles than we saw the first of many *Ophrys cinereophila* the site would reveal to us, and these were swiftly followed by *Ophrys ferrum-equinum*, *O. regis-ferdinandii*, *O. sicula*, *O. reinholdii*, and our first *Ophrys mammosa* of the week.

The latter were classic examples of their kind, with rich rufous lips... until one wasn't. Sarah and Wendy found a plant with flowers that had dark, almost black lips. All the *Ophrys* here





were still wet from the previous night's rain, so Jon carefully allowed a tissue to absorb the excess moisture from the freshest flower so we could ascertain the flower's true colour – and it was still deliciously dark, with a thin lime green fringe to the lip's edge.

Our contemplation of this fine hybrid was broken by a call from further along the site – Beth had found a dramatically-marked *Ophrys*, which proved to be a spectacular *Ophrys halia*, with a huge flower in pristine condition, and a complex lip pattern that looked like hieroglyphics. What a find! Understandably, this took a lot of our time as we took turns to negotiate the surrounding prickly phrygana vegetation that protected and sheltered this special plant, in order to enjoy close views and take our photos.

We left the site a little before lunch time, and headed back onto Profitis Ilias. We had unfinished business here from the previous day... This time, we arrived on the mountain in bright sunshine, and having had our lunch we were straight into orchids, particularly enjoying more *Ophrys dodecanensis* and *Ophrys oreas*, and the opportunity to compare the two species.

The sunshine was enervating the insects too, and David and John were soon in pursuit of several Eastern Festoon *Zerynthia cerisy* butterflies that languidly quartered the mountain, stopping from time to time to nectar and bask.

Meanwhile, Sarah had found a Rhodes Peony *Paeonia clusii* ssp. *rhodia* in flower – for all there are information boards on the mountain proclaiming it is



managed with the peony's conservation in mind, our experience is that the many goats stationed on the mountain usually delight in munching the large, globular flower buds, so any plant in flower is to be savoured in a non-edible way by its human admirers. And that's just what we did.

We moved further up the mountain, taking in our first Man Orchid *Orchis anthropophora* of the week en route, and some spectacular examples of Dense-flowered Orchid too for good measure.

In a grassy meadow we were treated to more Milky Orchid, alongside Provence Orchid *Orchis provincialis*, and our first Green-winged Orchid *Anacamptis morio*, the latter generally rather feeble and weedy compared to their orchid congeners nearby. While we'd been finding many orchids in greater

numbers and more vigorous growth than usual in Rhodes this year, presumably an artefact of the wet winter that had preceded our visit, the Green-winged Orchids seemed not to be prospering.

The weather gods once again intervened on Profitis Ilias, a heavy rain shower signalling it was time to take our leave of the mountain. Fortunately, this coincided with our finishing our orchid-hunting and, with Jon and Sarah having run ahead to bring the vehicles uphill to meet everyone, we were spared a soaking. We moved off the mountain and down into the Gadoura River valley, with one final site in mind for the afternoon.

Our plans were somewhat interrupted by the sight of a magnificent Naked Man Orchid *Orchis italica* growing at the edge of the road – it would have been rude not to stop to enjoy that and, of course, in this most orchid-rich of islands, we soon found more species nearby – *Ophrys polyxo* and *Ophrys reinholdii* in particular.



Finally, we reached the last site of the day, two small, shallow valleys that are a reliable site for *Ophrys persephona* in particular, but also *Serapias politsii* and, by way of a bonus for us on the day, some of the finest, tallest examples of *Ophrys bombyliflora* we'd ever seen on the island. Rhodes Fritillary *Fritillaria rhodia* was also to be found here, to our delight.

The drive home was almost as eventful as that of the preceding day, for as we started to circumnavigate Mt. Attaviros the rain started once more – but not just rain, heavy sleet! Ice crystals were splatting on the vehicles' windscreens for a short time before we emerged into sunshine that accompanied us all the way back to the hotel.

A good omen for ice cream, and we headed to the ice cream parlour to enjoy another celebratory dive into the delicious array of flavours they stocked. Checklist that evening revealed we were now on 45 species for the week, having added seven new species during the course of a day that had yielded over 25 species in total. Rhodes really is the orchid island that just keeps on giving.

Day 4, 30th March

At last, a day that dawned fine and sunny, and remained that way all day! We made the most of the guaranteed weather window to head to one of our favourite sites on the island, the orchid wonderland of Windmill Hill.

This elevated site, commanding panoramic views of the island's coasts, abounds with orchids and, being high, allows us to step back in orchid time, finding species in mint condition that are long finished at lower elevations.

Ophrys orchids are a big part of the attraction on Rhodes as a whole, and on this site in particular. Having negotiated the winding and somewhat uneven roads that scale the dizzy heights of the hill, we were no sooner stepping from the vehicles than the first of the genus announced themselves –



dark, chocolate brown and diminutive *Ophrys korae*, and its larger, yellow-maned close relative, *Ophrys leochroma*.

These were surrounded by myriad *Orchis anatolica* in rich purples and mauves, and the bright canary yellow sparks of *Ophrys phryganae*.

We spent the next few hours exploring the faces of the hills here, with John, David and Wendy setting off initially on a birding foray to look for Cretzschmar's Bunting – an expedition on foot that, while it didn't connect with a bunting, did find a lovely cluster of snow-white Rhodes Peony in perfect bloom. We could smell their delicious perfume

from some way down the track when the rest of the group walked along to enjoy them for themselves.

Rick was also ranging widely, and added Dense-flowered and Provence Orchid to our daily tally. Jan added an entirely new species to the week's checklist – the first of several *Ophrys saliarisii* we would encounter in the course of the morning and early afternoon.

Nearby, a lone *Ophrys cretica* was something of a puzzle – the species is otherwise absent up on the hill, and in its immediate surroundings we found five curious further plants in flower – either extremely contrived and anomalously marked further examples of *Ophrys cretica*, or perhaps hybrids with either *Ophrys ferrum-equinum* or *O. reinholdii*, both of which were present within a few feet of the standard-patterned *Ophrys cretica*, and indeed had already spawned some hybrids between themselves that were evident nearby. An intriguing puzzle of identity, and one we could only speculate upon, given the variability of *Ophrys cretica* as a whole, and the similarities between it and the putative hybrid parent *Ophrys reinholdii*.





Less contentious *Ophrys* were there to be seen as the morning passed pleasantly by – some fresh *Ophrys iricolor* and *Ophrys parvula*, and examples of both *Ophrys omegaifera* and *Ophrys apollonae*, allowing for convenient side by side comparisons. The wind was gradually picking up as the morning unfolded and, by the time we moved downhill to our lunch site, it was definitely a lot brisker than it had been earlier in the morning. Undaunted, we set to exploring these new aspects of the hill with a vengeance.

Soon enough, Jon and Sarah had found some examples of *Ophrys halia*, while John and Sarah found some fine further examples of *Ophrys saliarisii*, including a particularly fine individual with magnificently shaggy, hairy shoulders to the richly patterned lip. Jon and Rick meanwhile discovered a contrastingly tiny Bumblebee Orchid lower down the hill. More *Ophrys korae* and *O. leochroma* continued to delight us all, as did the nodding yellow heads of Rhodes Fritillary.

Eventually, in the mid-afternoon we agreed we'd all had enough of the wind, and elected to take our leave of Windmill Hill and head to an olive grove near Apolakkia in which, in a previous visit two years ago, John, Sarah and Valerie had enjoyed seeing the hybrid between *Ophrys phryganae* and *Ophrys apollonae*.

The drive down from the hill went smoothly, interrupted only by a sighting of Alpine Swift, and before too long we were at the olive grove. Alas, some serious recent pruning of the olive trees had left piles of cut branches beneath them, smothering much of the formerly orchid-rich ground. Nonetheless, we did find both the contributing parent plants for the former hybrid, and some *Ophrys sicula* too to add to the day's tally, which reached a very respectable 25 species by the close of play. With a lovely taverna to be found on the drive home, we stopped for refreshing drink to toast a lovely day that saw our weekly tally now resting on 48 species.



Day 5, 31st March

Today sadly dawned with one of our group feeling unwell, so Sarah took him to the excellent medical centre in Embonas to be examined – the outcome of which was an ambulance sent promptly to admit him to the hospital in Rodos town for further treatment and monitoring. Sarah then rejoined Jon and the rest of the group in the mid-morning.



In the meantime, we'd taken a walk up the network of tracks and old terraces that crisscross the lower slopes of Mt. Attaviros above our hotel, and had been blessed with some lovely orchids and other floral delights. Giant Orchid *Himantoglossum robertianum* were still in good condition at this altitude, and we were spoiled for choice with many fine *Ophrys ferrum-equinum* and *O. reinholdii* too. *Ophrys lucis* eluded us, but this was not a problem, as Jon had a reliable site he'd found years ago nearby that always holds late-flowering examples of this early-flowering species. Before we headed there, though, we needed to pay our respects to the biggest *Orchis anatolica* we'd ever seen, bigger than some examples of Giant Orchid!

Further along the mountainside, we stopped at a sheltered small valley in which *Ophrys lucis* always flourishes late into the spring. Sure enough, the colony here was thriving – the site is quite compact, and whenever we visit we always pay particular attention to ensure we are mindful of unseen or non-flowering plants. Happily, by approaching from downhill, we could all enjoy a close view of the very best plant of all, a tall and sturdy specimen with immaculate flowers and, beside it, a fine aberration with a ruby-red speculum instead of the usual silvery mirror.

Sarah rejoined us at this juncture and, with two vehicles, we set off for the olive groves of the southeastern corner of the island. It seemed rude to pass by a roadside colony of hot pink *Silene salamandra* so, of course, we made a pit-stop to enjoy this diminutive but distinctive species, before pressing on across the island. Within half an hour we were at our picnic and early afternoon site, a fine series of olive groves that stretch inland from the coast.



The principal orchid inhabitant here is *Serapias carica*, and as usual these dramatic tongue-orchids didn't disappoint. Occasionally inundated with silty river water, the olive groves here seem rather more fertile than the surrounding countryside, and the orchids regularly grow exuberantly tall and lush. There were hundreds of them beneath and between the trees, so we wandered slowly through the groves enjoying them, and the occasional *Ophrys cornutula*.

As we were preparing to move on, Jon made a discovery that put everything on hold – a solitary bee inside the flower of a large example of *Serapias carica*!

At first we could only see its dark abdomen pulsing within the flower but, in due course, the bee emerged and rested a while on the lip of the flower where we could admire not only its long, elegant antennae, but also four orchid pollinia stuck to its head. It was such a rare privilege to witness this aspect of orchid ecology, pollination in progress. Some *Serapias* tongue-orchids, *S. carica* included, employ a novel pollination strategy whereby the air temperature within their flowers is somewhat warmer than the ambient air temperature outside, thereby inducing solitary bees to roost within them and, with any luck, the transfer of pollinia between individual orchids can occur.



Serapias carica with bee pollinator © Rick

Our final site for the afternoon was another olive grove in which we hoped to find *Ophrys lindia* and *Ophrys attaviria*. This particular grove is a hotbed of similar species, and there is usually a wide range of flowering orchids that exhibit characteristics suggestive of some hybridisation and gene-swapping between both those species and also *Ophrys blitopertha*, *O. parvula*, and *O. cinereophila*. With *Ophrys lutea* and *O. apollonae* also present, it's quite the *Ophrys* melting pot! We always aim to see 'classic' examples of each species, and can only wonder at the origins of some of the intermediate plants.



Serapias carica with bee pollinator © Valerie

Ophrys lindia was enjoying a good year, and between us we found in the region of 10 examples of this attractive and scarce species. *Ophrys blitopertha* was, as ever, more numerous but *Ophrys attaviria* was still not in bloom, the cold weather of the past fortnight inhibiting flowering of this late species. We'd seen one early bloom of it here during the previous week, but this had been grazed, perhaps by Brown Hare, for two of these attractive mammals were seen in the grove during our time there. *Ophrys lindia* was new for the week, and meant we finished the day on 49 species for the week, a tally worth celebrating with a visit to the ice cream parlour in Embonas upon our return to the village.

Day 6, 1st April

With *Ophrys attaviria* very much on our minds, and with a national weather warning advising everyone to stay near to home, particularly as the day ahead progressed due to the arrival of Storm Erminio in the eastern Mediterranean, we decided to spend the morning in the vicinity of Embonas and check sites at which we'd seen the species flowering during our extensive explorations in previous years.

Devoting an hour to systematically scouring the first site, on the outskirts of the village, eventually paid dividends when Jon found a flowering example of *Ophrys attaviria* at the edge of a damp seep on the south-facing hillside, the dampness and aspect presumably

helping to tip this plant into flowering ahead of its brethren. Testament to the general lateness of the season, immaculate Mirror Orchid *Ophrys speculum* were still in bloom nearby, a species that is often finished for the year by the start of April. The site was extremely orchid-rich, with *Ophrys ferrum-equinum* seen in great numbers, but also *Ophrys reinholdii*, *O. polyxo*, *O. regis-ferdinandii*, *O. sicula*, *O. mammosa*, Pink Butterfly Orchid *Anacamptis papilionacea*, and Giant Orchid *Himantoglossum robertianum*.

We moved a little further out of the village to a track that cuts through low woodland, a safe place for a walk in the strengthening wind, and a walk that culminates in a damp area of grassland in which we knew a colony of Small-flowered Tongue-orchid *Serapias parviflora* might be found. As we suspected, however, the cool late season meant they were not yet in flower – but at least we'd checked and, in the meantime, enjoyed some particularly fine *Ophrys mammosa* en route, and a beautifully-scented patch of Freesia too. We spent a little time in a small olive grove that commands spectacular views of Mt. Attaviros, and here beneath the trees found small stands of *Ophrys cinereophila*.



Ophrys mammosa © Jon



Ophrys cardica © Jon

Sarah and Jan set off for Rodos at this juncture, delighted to be able to retrieve our recovering guest after his night at the hospital. The remainder of the group headed back towards Embonas, planning to have their lunch in the shelter of the hotel dining room – but making a quick stop at a further roadside site for more orchids, of course! An *Ophrys lucis* we'd enjoyed earlier in the week was still present, and Valerie found a second example nearby that had just finished flowering. Otherwise there were plenty of *Ophrys ferrum-equinum* and *O. reinholdii* here, and still more *O. regis-ferdinandii*.

Lunch was a welcome respite from the wind buffeting us, and before we ate we helped Mama to bring the dining chairs in from the hotel veranda to stop them from blowing away down the village street. Mama provided welcome coffee and Easter cakes to accompany our lunch, and then we headed out to see if there was a sheltered face of Attaviros upon which we could orchid-hunt in the afternoon.

This proved to be a brief foray, for Jon made the decision that, with the conditions deteriorating, we should put guest safety above all other considerations and return to the hotel for the afternoon. However, before we did so, he had found the first



Rhodes Cyclamen © David

colourful *Ophrys candica* of the season in flower, so we paid that some brief respects before heading back to the vehicle – slightly delayed by the discovery of a heavily-marked Dense-flowered Orchid *Neotinea maculata* by John and Rick, and of course the constant distraction of Rhodes Cyclamen *Cyclamen rhodium*!

In the late afternoon, Sarah and our poorly guest returned to the hotel. It was such a joy to have the team reunited. We had dinner a little earlier than usual, with the wood-fire blazing in the dining room, and torrential rain now falling outside. The road through the village became a surging, albeit shallow, river at one point. We headed to bed with occasional rumbles of thunder adding to the drama, but safe and warm in our rooms with the knowledge we'd now exceeded 50 species of orchid for the week.

Day 7, 2nd April



Our final full day on Rhodes dawned fine and sunny, the wind and rain having vanished in the small hours of the morning. In their wake was a trail of some destruction – the road outside the hotel was littered with earth and small rocks washed down from the mountain. While we ate breakfast we watched the local villagers swing into action, clearing up Embonas swiftly and efficiently. A mini-digger arrived to clear the larger accumulations of earth and mud... and a much larger digger rumbled past, heading uphill to deal with something more significant. Later in the day, we'd see that on the road south out of Embonas there had been a larger landslide which, within hours, the clean-up crew had dealt with.

Yiannis, our lovely hotelier, let us know the state of the roads north of the village, for this was the direction in which we'd be heading after breakfast. Local news informed him that one arterial road around the mountain was temporarily blocked, so we opted for a slightly longer route to the coast, and took it carefully – every corner might reveal some new debris, so we prioritised safety.

Some 20 minutes later than the journey might normally have taken us, we arrived at a favourite olive grove site of ours on the eastern coast of the island. Even from the edges of the grove we could see a great many *Serapias bergonii* in flower and, once we walked under the trees, we soon found plenty of *Ophrys calypsus* and *Ophrys rhodia*. Our target here was another *Ophrys* – we were looking for the Colossus of Rhodes, *Ophrys colossaea*. This is a later-flowering species than *O. calypsus*, and with the last fortnight having been so cool, we knew the chances of finding an early example of it were longer than they might usually be. Happily, Jan's sharp eyes were on the case and, tucked into the warmth and



shelter of a low shrub, she discovered an *Ophrys colossaea* just coming into full bloom, with its first flower fully open.



Nearby were a handful of further *Ophrys* species to embellish the morning – *Ophrys mammosa*, *Ophrys ferrum-equinum*, and *Ophrys sicula*. John meanwhile had been looking closely at the tongue-orchids, and had found a *Serapias bergonii* with a beautiful lemon-yellow tongue, quite striking compared to its red-tongued counterparts all around. John's good run of form extended to spotting a fine Short-toed Eagle passing overhead – the strong south-easterlies of

the past 24 hours had brought with them a noticeable influx of migrating birds, this eagle being a notable arrival, but also including many Whinchat and Northern Wheatear too.

From here we worked our way south down the coast, stopping briefly to enjoy the view of white-washed Lindos bathed in sunshine, with white-capped waves crashing against the shore around the town.

Our lunch site was a small headland near Kattavia, where we hoped we might find an early example of *Anacamptis sancta*. Jon had cautioned this was a long-shot, given the species' later-flowering habits and the cool weather of preceding weeks and, despite our best efforts, so it proved – there were plenty of burgeoning flower-spikes, unopened as yet, and one or two starting to colour up, but none open. Nonetheless, plenty of *Serapias carica* and *Ophrys regis-ferdinandii* were fine compensation.

We headed to the ruderal fields and phrygana of Kattavia for the rest of the afternoon, with another *Anacamptis* on our mind... but principally to enjoy the large array of other orchids the area boasts. Our day's tally rose rapidly, with many *Ophrys* seen once more – *cretica*, *umbilicata*, *speculum*, *iricolor*, *parvula*, *cornutula*... and, happily, both of the rare hybrids we'd enjoyed earlier in the week, *Ophrys cretica x regis-ferdinandii*, and *Ophrys cretica x speculum*.

It fell to Jon to find our first flowering *Anacamptis coriophora*, two plants just starting to bloom, their lower flowers fully open, but this was significantly upgraded when Rick found a much more advanced flowering plant nearby. Beth spotted a further example that promised to be potentially hyperchromic, with extremely dark buds – one for Jon to check out in the days to come!



We headed back towards Embonas and a final visit to the ice cream parlour, but not before we'd returned to the slopes of Mt. Attaviros for second-helpings of *Ophrys candica*. The original plant we'd seen briefly the day before was still present and ungrazed by the local

deer and goats and, nearby, Sarah, Beth, Rick and John all found further flowering plants, allowing us to wonder at their varied lip patterns, each as individual as a fingerprint, yet all consistent with the species' general characteristics. Some of us went to pay our respects to Milky Orchid *Neotinea lactea*, while further discoveries for the day included *Ophrys dodecanensis*, a great many *Ophrys reinholdii*, fresh *Ophrys omegaifera*, and the ubiquitous *Orchis anatolica*.

What a day it had been! And what a week – our final tally was a very respectable 53 species, plus a good range of hybrids including some achingly rare and beautiful specimens. While the weather had been cool at times, and we'd had the drama of a daytime storm towards the end of the week, the orchids had excelled themselves on our behalf. And we'd made a brilliant team – the team spirit, warmth and camaraderie had been exceptional, and we'd had a fabulous time. Saying our goodbyes tomorrow would be tinged with sadness.

Jon and Sarah would particularly like to thank the group for being such a wonderful party, and not only for their sharp eyes that contributed so many terrific orchids to the collective experience, but also for their boundless good humour. We can't wait to see you all again soon!



Newsletter – if you'd like to join our mailing list and be the first to hear of new tours and special offers, you can join the Mariposa Nature Tours family on www.mariposanature.com

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Orchids of Rhodes 27 March – 3 April 2026										
	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-isidorii</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 leochroma</i>				✓					
20	<i>Ophrys korae</i>				✓					
21	<i>Ophrys bombyliflora</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓				
	Ophrys apifera group									
22	<i>Ophrys apifera</i>									
	Ophrys holoserica group									
23	<i>Ophrys candica</i>						✓	✓		
24	<i>Ophrys colossaea</i>							✓		
25	<i>Ophrys samia</i>									
26	<i>Ophrys halia</i>			✓	✓					
27	<i>Ophrys saliarisii</i>				✓					
28	<i>Ophrys oreas</i>		✓	✓						
	Ophrys oestrifera group									
29	<i>Ophrys cornutula</i>	✓				✓		✓		
30	<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									
31	<i>Ophrys calyptus</i>	✓	✓					✓		
32	<i>Ophrys calyptus</i> var. <i>pseudoapulica</i>									
33	<i>Ophrys calyptus</i> var. <i>scolopaxoides</i>									
34	<i>Ophrys polyxo</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
	Ophrys umbilicata group									
35	<i>Ophrys rhodia</i>	✓	✓		✓			✓		
36	<i>Ophrys umbilicata</i>	✓						✓		
	Ophrys reinholdii group									
37	<i>Ophrys reinholdii</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
38	<i>Ophrys cretica</i> ssp. <i>beloniae</i>	✓			✓			✓		
	Ophrys argolica group									
39	<i>Ophrys lucis</i>		✓			✓	✓			
	Ophrys mammosa group									
40	<i>Ophrys ferrum-equinum</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
41	<i>Ophrys mammosa</i>			✓	✓		✓	✓		
	GENUS EPIPACTIS									
42	<i>Epipactis densifolia</i>									
	GENUS CEPHALANTHERA									
43	<i>Cephalanthera longifolia</i>									
	GENUS LIMODORUM									
44	<i>Limodorum abortivum</i>		✓					Nf		
	GENUS SPIRANTHES									
45	<i>Spiranthes spiralis</i>									
	GENUS SERAPIAS									
46	<i>Serapias bergonii</i>		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		
47	<i>Serapias carica</i>	✓				✓		✓		
48	<i>Serapias parviflora</i>									
49	<i>Serapias politisii</i>		✓	✓						
	GENUS ANACAMPTIS									
50	<i>Anacamptis collina</i>	nf				nf				
51	<i>Anacamptis laxiflora</i>		✓			✓				
52	<i>Anacamptis morio</i>			✓						
53	<i>Anacamptis papilionacea</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
54	<i>Anacamptis pyramidalis</i>	✓					nf	✓		
55	<i>Anacamptis sancta</i>							nf		
56	<i>Anacamptis coriophora</i>	nf						✓		
	GENUS NEOTINEA									
57	<i>Neotinea maculata</i>			✓	✓		✓	✓		
58	<i>Neotinea lactea</i>			✓				✓		
	GENUS ORCHIS									
59	<i>Orchis anatolica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
60	<i>Orchis anthropophora</i>			✓		✓				

	Species name	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7	Day 8	
61	<i>Orchis italica</i>		✓	✓						
62	<i>Orchis provincialis</i>		✓	✓	✓					
63	<i>Orchis simia</i>									
	GENUS HIMANTOGLOSSUM									
64	<i>Himantoglossum robertianum</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
#	<i>Ophrys episcopalis</i>		✓							
#	<i>Ophrys herae</i>		✓							
	Daily total:	20	30	25	23	23	18	27		
	Running total:	20	38	45	48	49	51	53		
	HYBRIDS									
	<i>Ophrys × kalteiseniana</i> (<i>ferrum-equinum</i> x <i>reinholdii</i>)	✓	✓		✓					
	<i>Ophrys regis-ferdinandii</i> x <i>speculum</i>	✓						✓		
	<i>Ophrys rhodia</i> x <i>speculum</i>	✓						✓		
	<i>Ophrys cretica</i> ssp. <i>beloniae</i> x <i>regis-ferdinandii</i>	✓						✓		
	<i>Ophrys cretica</i> ssp. <i>beloniae</i> x <i>speculum</i>	✓						✓		
	<i>Ophrys mammosa</i> x <i>reinholdii</i>			✓						
	BUTTERFLIES									
	Eastern Festoon <i>Zerynthia cerisy</i>			✓				✓		
	Swallowtail <i>Papilio machaon</i>	✓						✓		
	Scarce Swallowtail <i>Iphiclides podalirius</i>									
	Common Blue <i>Polyommatus icarus</i>									
	Green-underside Blue <i>Glaucopsyche alexis</i>	✓						✓		
	Eastern Baton Blue <i>Pseudophilotes vicrama</i>	✓			✓			✓		
	Long-tailed Blue <i>Lampides boeticus</i>									
	Green Hairstreak <i>Callophrys rubi</i>									
	Small Copper <i>Lycaena phlaeas</i>	✓		✓						
	Lesser Fiery Copper <i>Lycaena thersamon</i>									
	Painted Lady <i>Vanessa cardui</i>				✓					
	Red Admiral <i>Vanessa atalanta</i>									
	Large White <i>Pieris brassicae</i>							✓		

	Species name	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7	Day 8
	Eastern Dappled White <i>Euchloe ausonia</i>								
	Clouded Yellow <i>Colias crocea</i>								
	Pygmy Skipper <i>Gegenes pumilio</i>								
	Mallow Skipper <i>Carcharodus alceae</i>							✓	
	MAMMALS								
	Fallow Deer <i>Dama dama</i>	✓		✓	✓				
	Northern White-breasted Hedgehog <i>Erinaceus roumanicus</i>								
	Red Fox <i>Vulpes vulpes</i>								
	REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS								
	Black Whip Snake <i>Dolichophis jugularis</i>								
	Eurasian Blind Snake <i>Xerotyphlops vermicularis</i>								
	Balkan Green Lizard <i>Lacerta trilineata</i>	✓							
	Snake-eyed Lizard <i>Ophisops elegans</i>								
	Roughtail Rock Agama <i>Laudakia stellio</i>								
	Mediterranean Ocellated Skink <i>Chalcides ocellatus</i>	✓							
	Mediterranean House Gecko <i>Hemidactylus turcicus</i>	✓							
	Balkan Terrapin <i>Mauremys rivulata</i>								
	European Green Toad <i>Bufo viridis</i>					✓			
	NOTABLE MISCELLANEOUS FLORA & FAUNA								
	Rhodes Fritillary <i>Fritillaria rhodia</i>	✓			✓			✓	
	Freesia <i>Freesia leichtlinii</i> subsp. <i>alba</i>	✓							
	Rhodes Cyclamen <i>Cyclamen rhodium</i>		✓					✓	
	Rhodes Peony <i>Paeonia clusii</i> ssp. <i>rhodia</i>			✓	✓		✓		
	Hoopoe <i>Upopa epops</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓				
	Great Spotted Cuckoo <i>Clamator glandarius</i>		✓						
	Alpine Swift <i>Tachymarptis melba</i>				✓				
	Eurasian Crag Martin <i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>				✓				

Galleries

All images that follow were kindly shared by tour participants



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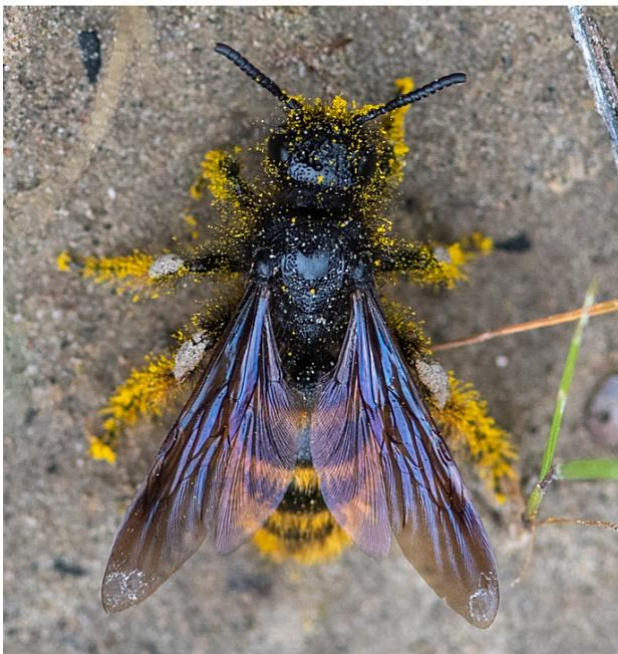
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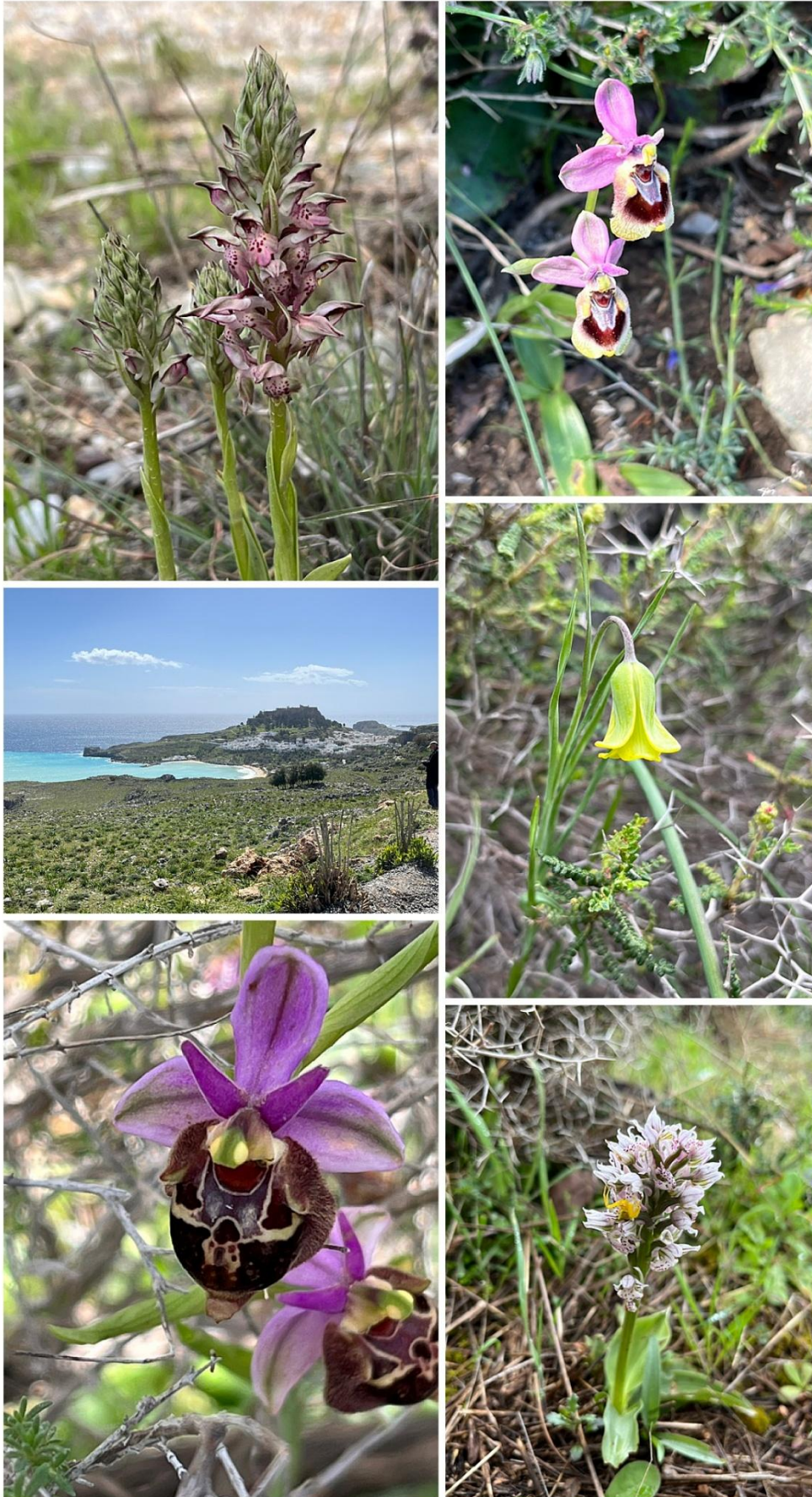
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And finally... Our Orchids of Rhodes tours for 2027 and 2028 are already fully booked – we're not too surprised, as we're confident our knowledge of the island's orchids, their distribution, and where to find their interesting variations and hybrids is unsurpassed. We've other orchid tours in 2027 visiting other species-rich areas of Europe with places still available to join us (see below), and have some further exciting orchid tours in the pipeline for 2028 – watch this space!

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