

Orchids of Crete

Mariposa Nature Tours trip report

20th-26th April 2026

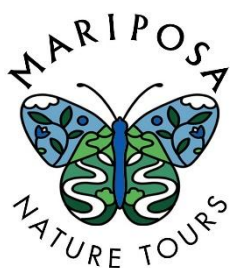


Tour leader Dr Richard Bate

Trip report by Dr Richard Bate

(Images (clockwise from top left) *Ophrys bicornuta* © Pete; *Ophrys dictynnae* © John;

Ophrys iricolor © John; *Ophrys helios* © Ken)



Tel: +44 (0) 7748 598768

Email: info@mariposanature.com

Website: www.mariposanature.com

Mariposa Nature Tours Ltd

2 Ashtree Cottages

Langrove

Parkmill

Swansea

SA3 2EB, United Kingdom

[Please note – while some of the orchids encountered in Sicily 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. *Anacamptis x gennarii* to describe *Anacamptis morio x papilionacea* – but where no such formal name could be found, we have simply described the presumed parents in question, e.g. *Orchis anatolica x prisca*].

Introduction

Crete is a large island situated in the eastern Mediterranean Sea, south of mainland Greece, and sits within an active tectonic zone on the boundary between the African and Eurasian tectonic plates. The island is comprised of a variety of rock formations, from ancient metamorphic rocks to newer sedimentary deposits. This diverse geology has produced the varied habitats set against the rugged mountains that form the characteristic landscape.

Crete is home to a high number of plant species that have flourished in the varied landscapes and climates; the sheer range of habitats and lengthy geographic isolation resulting in a wealth of biodiversity and numerous endemic species.

The island has been occupied by humans for around 130,000 years and has been an influential centre for many civilisations up to the present day, where it remains a major region of modern-day Greece.

Our Tour

This tour focusses on the orchids of Crete, and we aim to explore a range of habitats across the island. We focus on the Central and Eastern areas, and focus much of our activity around the hotspots in these regions, that are home to some of the highest numbers of orchids anywhere in Europe.

Orchids can be seen throughout most of the year on Crete, but the period around the middle of April represents the best opportunity to see the greatest number of species. In a good year, we hope to catch the last of the earlier species and catch many species as they peak, as well as encountering the first of the later flowering species.

Our tour leaders at Mariposa have considerable experience of travelling across the Mediterranean, and Richard has accumulated a wealth of knowledge on the flora of the Greek Islands having visited the region numerous times over the last couple of decades. Knowledge and experience count for much when it comes to tour leading, but our team has forged excellent links with a host of partners, from locals through to other experienced travellers and other guides that work across the region.

We have a strong commitment towards conservation and we work closely with our partners, as well as making donations towards charities for every tour we carry out.

We pride ourselves on the quality of the experiences we provide and aim to associate with those that share our philosophy – as well as quietly distancing ourselves from those who don't share the same values, or live up to the standards they claim to.

Arrivals Day

The earlier our guests arrive, the more time we can spend in the field! All of our guests for this tour arrived either the day before, or arrived in good time – allowing us to get out into the field straight away.

Our first site is located around 20 minutes south of Heraklion Airport, near one of the island's many Peak Sanctuaries, overlooking the town of Archanes. This site has a mixture of open scree and verges backing onto woodland and boasts a lovely mixture of orchid species.



Within a few seconds of arriving at the site, our guests were spotting orchids – the sharp eyes of John and Roger picking out patches of ***Orchis pauciflora***, a particularly handsome species with strongly contrasting white and yellow flowers that are particularly large, and appear almost disproportionately sized compared to the plants themselves. It would turn out to be a species we encountered throughout the tour, and one that rarely failed to catch the attention of our guests.

This site is particularly varied, and many of the orchids were visible at the edge of the roadside and this allowed easy access for viewing. We found our only example of ***Ophrys cinereophila*** clinging on and counted ourselves fortuitous for doing so as this is a species that would normally flower a lot earlier in the year. A small a rather dull-coloured plant, it is easily overlooked compared to the many examples of ***Ophrys sicula***, another small but yellow-coloured species that were present in this area.

Further interesting finds soon followed – Monkey Orchids ***Orchis simia*** and Man Orchids ***Orchis anthropophora*** could be found at the top of a short slope, alongside multiple examples of the Naked Man Orchid ***Orchis italica*** that extended into the pine woodland behind it. The more adventurous among us decided to scale the slope to see what we could find, and the woodland revealed a fabulous pair of Sawfly Orchids from the ***Ophrys tenthredinifera*** complex. ***Ophrys tenthredinifera*** has been split quite substantially in recent times by a number of authors, and a number of these taxa are described from Crete.

It is not too early in this trip report to roll out the old “Ophrys taxonomy discussion” because it plays an important part in determining what we see on our tours – and what our guests wish to take from them. Some authors prefer to “lump” described taxa together with a view that the overall characteristics of a species can be morphologically plastic and that there is not enough



genetic evidence to separate groups of plants from others. Others try to “split” on the basis of multiple characteristics, such as the morphology – sometimes to the point that very subtle characteristics define the differences between species – or that the pollinators that visit the plants effectively determine the species because of the closely-developed associations between them.



The *Ophrys tenthredinifera* plants that we found were all rather pale, yet quite impressive in size. It was my determination after the tour ended that these were ***Ophrys dictynnae*** on the basis of their overall colouration. We would catch up again later with other Sawfly Orchids, much to the delight of our group.

I quite enjoy this site because there are a series of corners on the track that are often hot spots of activity, with much to be seen. At the first area we found some small Early-Spider-type plants, and the differences between them were quite stark. *Ophrys knossia* and *Ophrys cretensis* are similar species that can be quite difficult to separate, having the smallest flowers of any in the *Ophrys sphegodes* complex. We also found some lovely examples of ***Ophrys gortynia***, a species closely related to *Ophrys mammosa* with prominent white borders to the stigmatic cavity and sometimes a yellow border the base of the labellum.

The next corner proved particularly exciting and we were introduced to one of Crete’s halo species, the magnificent ***Ophrys cretica***. This attractive bee orchid can have large flowers, that are dark in colour with strong white markings usually flushed with blue or purple tones, forming an “H” pattern. Nearby was the similarly elegant and large flowered ***Ophrys iricolor***, another dark-flowered bee orchid but this one with a large blue band across its labellum with highlights of magenta that shimmers in the light. A small patch of Ploughshare Orchids were on show in the short turf, these large-flowered examples consistent with ***Serapias cretica***.



Further orchids were found up the track – ***Orchis anatolica*** and ***Orchis quadripunctata*** plus numerous intermediate forms, a common sight on Crete. On Cyprus, a hybrid swarm of these species has become established and displaced them, described as ***Orchis x seizikiana***. On Crete it is possible to find plants that are morphologically identical, and many authors recognise it here. Many of the plants here were good examples of this.



Towards the end of our exploration of the site, further delights were to be found. ***Ophrys bombyliflora*** is quite often a small plant that is easily overlooked across most of its range, but the examples on Crete can be quite large and quite colourfully flowered. A discussion that

often results from its find is the poor choice of vernacular name – the Bumblebee Orchid. It looks nothing like one.

One last exciting find was made before we left in the form of *Ophrys episcopalis*, a brightly coloured orchid from the Late Spider Orchid complex with complex patterns across its flowers. A member of the *Ophrys bornmuelleri* group, these plants usually have a strongly trapezoid shape to the labellum and dense hairs on the pale or even yellow-bordered lateral aspects that flare out into a distinctive appearance.

From the site we made our way to the central mountains of the island to the village of Spili, that sits at 430 metres above sea level beneath Mount Vorizis. An essential visit for anyone travelling to Crete, it is a bustling centre of activity in the region and compared to many of the other villages of the region, has the feel of a large town more than a sleepy backwater. The host of our hotel is famously accommodating, and fusses over us all incessantly, ensuring that we are well-fed in the mornings or able to buy some of the freshly made ice creams her inn is known for. After settling in, we travelled into Spili and enjoyed a hearty meal at one of the local tavernas, that specialised in serving the finest local cuisine.

Day 2

Immediately above Spili is a mountain range, that opens into a large plateau at around 750 metres above sea level, known as the Gious Kambos. It is a well-known haven for botanists and hikers, who can be found exploring the hills throughout the year. The numbers of orchids here in a good year can be scarcely believable, and this is what we have come to see.

Our first stop is at the side of a stream, where the ground is fairly damp. A long walk up to a series of hills beckons, where numerous species can be seen - within minutes of our arrival, we have seen a dozen species and counting. First to draw intrigue is *Anacamptis boryi*, an endemic of



Crete. Superficially resembling a lax Green-winged Orchid, this species has distinctive morphology that separates it from other species within the genus, with just a close relative that can only be found in restricted mountain ranges of Israel. It blooms inversely, the flowers on its lax inflorescence opening top-down and having labella that are deeply divided into three lobes. Its colour varies from dark pink, through to very pale tones.

We came across our first examples of *Ophrys heldreichii* found by Ken, an orchid considered endemic to Crete by many authors – but not by others. This colourful orchid has a long flowering period, and can be found in a variety of habitats but it usually favours damp(ish) ground in full sun. A member of the *Ophrys scolopax* complex, it has all of the classical features of a Woodcock Orchid and the distinctive feature of this taxon is its rotund waistline and

prominent appendage. Some examples may have poorly developed lateral prominences, whereas others can have particularly prominent ones, reminiscent of taxa described elsewhere in the Mediterranean.

Further lovely species followed – Loose-flowered Orchid ***Anacamptis laxiflora***, a tall and elegant plant found on damp calcareous ground with a large range of distribution across Europe (as far West as the Channel Islands) and ***Anacamptis collina***, that has a particularly rich colour here on Crete. This species is usually found much earlier in the year, but here at altitude the season is truncated and many species come at once. Also clinging on was Giant Orchid ***Himantoglossum robertianum***, another species that usually flowers earlier and in much better condition than the examples we saw the previous day.



Our walk up to the hilly areas revealed further wonderful new sightings; two *Serapias* species in the form of ***S. bergonii*** and the multiple colour forms of ***S. lingua*** that is near-ubiquitous on the plateau – and quite spectacular for it. Numerous sightings of ***Orchis italica***, ***Orchis anthropophora***, ***Orchis pauciflora***, ***Orchis quadripunctata***, ***Ophrys bombyliflora*** and ***Ophrys iricolor*** followed – along with multiple large-flowered *Ophrys* from the ***O. lutea*** complex, that closely matched the description of the type plant.



Up on one of the hills we came across another taxonomic minefield, with multiple colourful *Ophrys* species present, some clearly ***Ophrys episcopalis***, some ***Ophrys heldreichii***, and many somewhere between the two. Described from the island are two taxa that would fit the bill of these plants we encountered; ***Ophrys helios*** and ***Ophrys taloniensis***. The former is considered an earlier flowering form with smaller flowers and the latter is a later flowering species and has duller flowers that sit somewhere in size between ***O. helios*** and ***O. episcopalis***. Regardless of one's opinion on the taxonomy, there are plants in this region that fit the classical appearance of ***Ophrys bornmuelleri***, plants that look like classical

examples of ***Ophrys fuciflora***, and others that have features somewhere between the two – not to mention ones that demonstrate strongly scolopaxoid features.

In the most sheltered parts of this exposed area were further delights; small examples of ***Ophrys tenthredinifera*** shaded by larger plants. These darkly coloured plants were quite a contrast to those seen the day before, classical examples of ***Ophrys leochroma*** so called due to its resemblance to a lion's mane.

For lunch we visited a sheltered quarry and a good site for Monkey Orchids ***Orchis simia***. Numerous examples of other species could be found here, and while some of our guests spent more time enjoying their lunch, others disappeared into the scrub seeking further finds.





They were rewarded with some really fine examples of *Orchis x sezikiana* and some lovely examples of *Ophrys ariadnae*, a form of *Ophrys cretica* identified by the complex patterns on its labellum and lack of a constriction at the base of its stigmatic cavity.

Our final stop of the day took us a track leading down to another large stream, a site blessed with huge numbers of *Anacamptis boryi*, *Orchis anthropophora* and *Orchis italica*, with a good deal of variation. A wonderful find at this site was a white example of this species, that one of the group members said he had come across elsewhere on Spili in the previous few days. Duly noting this as a possible destination, we carried out along the track and through the scrub where we were able to find some examples of *Ophrys kedra* and a single example of *Ophrys mesaritica*. Both of these

plants are large-flowered members of the *Ophrys fusca* complex and are part of the *Ophrys iricolor* group. *O. kedra* has quite large flowers that are quite heavily folded over at the edges, whereas *O. mesaritica* is generally an earlier-flowering species more closely resembling a dull *O. iricolor*, lacking the strong pigmentation to the rear of the labellum, with smaller flowers.

That evening we returned to Spili and upon arrival back at the hotel we were greeted by our host, whose ice cream stand was duly raided. We headed to another taverna in the village, and enjoyed another evening of fine food and wine.



Day 3



As we left after breakfast we were able to appreciate why Spili was given its name as our host explained it to us. Its name refers to the caves that sit in the cliffs at the base of the mountain that overlooks the village, and in the mornings the Eurasian Griffon Vultures *Gyps fulvus* can be seen leaving them. This massive vulture has an enormous wingspan (between 7-9ft) and its dark flight feathers contrast heavily with the rest of its body. We encountered many of these magnificent birds in the mountainous regions throughout the tour, but the population in Rethymno is particularly large and significant.

We travelled further onto the plateau for this day, exploring some of the slopes behind the wet meadows in the centre. Our first site saw fabulous examples of *Anacamptis boryi*, *Anacamptis pyramidalis*, *Ophrys bombyliflora*, *Ophrys ariadnae*, *Ophrys*

heldreichii, and *Serapias lingua* but we did not come across what we were looking for here – a reflection of the season.

Our second site, that became the majority of the day's focus, really delivered. Outstanding examples of multiple *Ophrys* species ensued, and we were dazzled by large patches of fresh *Ophrys tenthredinifera*, and multiple forms of it. We were also treated to patches of *Ophrys episcopalis*, and its close relatives *Ophrys helios* and *Ophrys taloniensis*.

On the top of the ridge, we encountered further fine finds in the form of *Neotinea maculata*, and both forms of *Neotinea tridentata* including *var. angelica*. We were also able to track down some decent examples of *Neotinea lactaea* that were somehow managing to cling on, including a plant late in the day that was seeking shelter under a livestock bath.



Ophrys creberrima © Richard

Further along the road, on some of the further slopes, we were able to find numerous examples of *Ophrys phaidra*, another endemic species to the island with a particularly distinctive appearance of long and flat chestnut brown flowers with a fine shine, and prominent yellow margins. Also in this region was *Ophrys creberrima*, another species with a distinctive appearance – this time a shortened lip that gives its flowers a rather blunt-tipped appearance. Interestingly, this region has some plants that appear to be intermediates of the two, suggesting hybrid influence. Another hybrid on show at this site was the delicate offspring of *A. laxiflora* and *A. boryi* that has been described as *Anacamptis x gerakarionis*.

Further sites before we departed to the hotel included a stop looking for white examples of *A. boryi* and *O. italica*, that duly delivered, and a final stop in the central meadow of the plateau where there are literally tens of thousands of Naked Man Orchids *Orchis italica* and Loose-flowered Orchids *Anacamptis laxiflora*.

Our evening meal was a trip to a gyros bar in Spili, a choice of food that certainly hit the spot after a long day of chasing orchids in the field.

Day 4

Our tour leader Richard is a strong believer in a good recce, and on this morning, before breakfast, he took half of the group out to the fields below Spili because one of the species we were expecting to see had not revealed itself. Familiar with the region, he knew exactly where to look.

Ophrys candica is an attractive member of the *Ophrys fuciflora* complex, its appearance similar to a Late Spider Orchid with a garbled pattern for a mirror. This pattern is unique to each flower, this species often displaying contrasting patterns on the same plant. We encountered a handful of examples, but it appeared that most of them were still coming through. Also present was *Ophrys minoa*, a near-identical taxon with prominent lateral horns.



Ophrys minoa © Richard

The sharp eyes of John were drawn to a particularly satisfying find, and one that many orchid lovers would be familiar with – a Bee Orchid *Ophrys apifera*. Whilst this species can be locally abundant in the UK in habitats such as road verges and quarry margins, it tends to be quite a shy and unpredictable plant in many parts of the Mediterranean and rarely appears in good numbers. Upon our return to this site with the rest of the group, we made sure that we enjoyed these finds!

Crete is a pretty big place, so this changeover day is more of an island transect than a straight hotel transfer – and we hit two awesome sites after leaving Spili.

The first site, near Kastelli, is situated at the edge of abandoned olive groves bordering a small forest and is home to some spectacularly colourful species. This site is great earlier in the year for *Dactylorhiza romana* but we could not find any plants hanging on at this site. We did however encounter multiple examples of *Anacamptis boryi* and also pristine *Anacamptis papilionacea* ssp. *aegea*, one of the subspecies of the Pink Butterfly Orchid. With two members of the same genus growing close together, we were hopeful that a hybrid would be present and towards the end of our time at this site we found one in a dense cluster of plants. This extremely rare hybrid was described as *Anacamptis x lasithica* by Kretzschmar et al in 2007.



We made our way further east towards the Lasithi plateau, another mountainous area of Crete but in sharp contrast to Spili, this area does not attract a wealth of visitors. The roads on the east of the island can be rather trying, and this journey had its fair share of bumps on the way. A series of outstanding views proved ample distraction, before we ascended into the clouds to our stop.



Home to high numbers of rare species, we soon encountered many fine examples of *Neotinea tridentata* var. *angelica*, and a few nice examples of *Neotinea lactea*. The finest specimens of *Neotinea maculata* were also on show, sometimes growing from the bare soils. Further exploration revealed large numbers of representatives from the *Ophrys tenthredinifera* complex, including fine patches of *Ophrys dimidiata* discovered by Pete and Cheryl near the roadside. Higher up the slopes were some fine examples of other taxa seen earlier in the tour, such as *Orchis quadripunctata* that was in particularly fine form at this site. Unfortunately, and not wholly unexpectedly, the small number of the rare endemic *Orchis prisca* were not in flower at this site.

After exhausting as much of the site we could in the thickening fog created by the cloud, we moved on to our next hotel, a spa resort in the east of the island with an abundance of facilities and a marked contrast to the homeliness of the previous nights' stays.

A full spread awaited us that evening, and we retired to the bar to share our experiences from the day.

Day 5

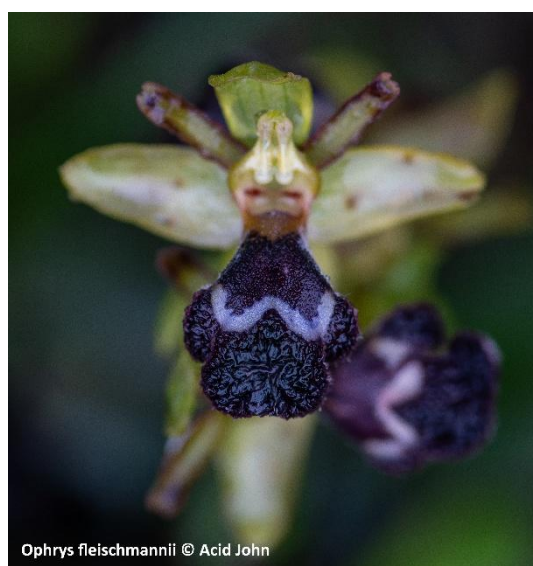
Some of our group were woken quite early by an earth tremor in the small hours, a common occurrence on Crete due to its geography. Reports put it at a Magnitude of 5.7, 25km off the coast of Lasithi. We were to feel further small tremors throughout the day.

Unfortunately, and wholly unseasonally, the weather took a turn for the worst on our final couple of days and the shorts and shirt weather was replaced by periods of heavy rain. We were however, determined to make the most of it and head back up to the higher elevations of Lasithi.

The route we take is a narrow track towards one of the larger villages in the region, although at this time of year the footfall is very low indeed. Knowledge of the region is critically important, as it is easy to beach a vehicle even if you know the correct roads to take.

Our journey consisted of multiple stops on our way to the top, and we were able to catch up with a large number of species on the way. At our first site at the edge of a field being left to fallow, we found some marvellous examples of *Serapias cretica*, as well as other colour morphs that checked out as *Serapias orientalis*. Also in the area were our only examples of *Anacamptis coriophora* ssp. *fragrans*, a widespread plant on some of the Mediterranean islands but one that can be quite difficult to find in flower if you arrive for earlier or later species. As an aside, the closely related *Anacamptis sancta* is a very rare plant on Crete in contrast to other parts of this region.

On our way further up we found some fantastic pockets of orchids, including *Orchis anthropophora*, *Orchis italica*, *Orchis anatolica*, *Orchis quadripunctata*, *Orchis simia*, and *Orchis pauciflora*. In addition to the hybridogenous taxon *Orchis x sezikiana*, our sharp-eyed tour leader also came across a couple of hybrids between *O. simia* and *O. anthropophora*, known as *Orchis x bergonii*.



Many fine *Ophrys* were also on show, particularly the fuciform *Ophrys episcopalis*, *Ophrys helios* and *Ophrys taloniensis*, and the ubiquitous *Ophrys heldreichii*. We had travelled here seeking new finds, and were handsomely rewarded with some fine plants – albeit ones we were lucky to encounter.

Ophrys basilissa and *Ophrys omegaifera* are large flowered plants from the *fusca* complex and are similar morphologically, both sporting flowers shaped like a boxing glove with a large band across the labellum, casting the classical “omega” shape. The latter is darker in tone and possesses one of the largest flowers of any of the European *Ophrys* species. A somewhat surprise

find was made by the sharp eyes of John again, who was able to locate ***Ophrys fleischmannii***, a taxon similar to *O. omegaifera* in form but sporting grey-black flowers that are incredibly hairy.

With the species numbers racking up, we carried on as far as the track would let us – fortuitously to the point we hoped to find one of Crete’s rarest species. A search of the lower parts revealed some nice examples of many species, including ***Anacamptis collina***, ***Ophrys bombylifera***, ***Ophrys knossia***, ***Ophrys cretica***, ***Ophrys dimidiata***, ***Ophrys ariadnae***, and ***Ophrys iricolor***. We made our way up a path towards the edge of one of the numerous small quarries in the region and here we found several examples of ***Ophrys thriptiensis*** in flower, a *fusca*-group species endemic to the region.



Orchis prisca © Pete



Orchis anatolica x prisca © Richard

Whilst *O. thriptiensis* is probably a species for the orchid-obsessed purist, our final finds of the day certainly aren’t. ***Orchis prisca*** is another endemic species, and one closely related to *Orchis spitzelii* found in Central Europe. It has large pink flowers that are quite heavily marked, with unspotted leaves. Among these plants we also found a hybrid with nearby ***Orchis anatolica***, a considerably rare hybrid given the scarcity of *Orchis prisca*.

On the way back to the hotel we revisited some of the stops we had made earlier in the day, encountering a very large Morel ***Morchella esculenta***, known as Mouchrista in Greece and a rare endemic subspecies of Mistletoe ***Viscum album ssp. creticum*** that unusually favours the Calabrian and Aleppo pines that grow there – a great spot again by John.

Sadly, we were unable to find any examples of Violet Limodore ***Limodorum abortivum*** in flower, though we found several plants that were on the verge of opening. Also found in the area was a small *Epipactis* shoot, that was too small to be identified reliably but probably represented ***E. microphylla***.

Day 6

Our last full day was the very representation of the law of diminishing returns and we travelled as far east as we could in search of wonderful instead of new.

A stop via a bakery in Sitia rewarded our group with several fabulous pastries, and we arrived at a small site adjacent to a track in the literal middle of nowhere. This site is home to ***Orchis sitiaca***, superficially similar to the common Eastern Mediterranean species *Orchis anatolica*, though the plants on this side of the island are far more sturdy than those in the Central and Western regions. Taller, with large flowers tinged with green markings, this is a distinctive plant due to its accentuated features.



Also present here were numerous examples of *Ophrys episcopalis* with particularly large flowers, their appearance so stark that I have long wondered if these populations may one day attract attention from the splitters.

Another species that strongly stood out at this site was the magnificent forms of *Ophrys cretica ssp. bicornuta*, sometimes recognised as a species in its own right. On this side of the island, *Ophrys cretica* has large lateral horns protruding from its lateral appendages that can give the plants a completely different appearance.

Moving onwards from the site as the heavy rain came in, we stopped at a later verge to admire the large numbers of *Anacamptis papilionacea*, *Orchis italica* and *Anacamptis pyramidalis*. Close inspection of *A. pyramidalis* in the Mediterranean can reveal many subtle forms, and we were able to see that these particular examples were *ssp. brachystachys*, sometimes recognised as a species in its own right.

With a half day left, we decided to return to Thripti to see if we could find one last species for our tour. Our mission would prove to be successful, but somewhat eventful. A long drive up the mountain roads took us to a roadside site where the hills have been terraced and many orchids grow there. It was raining heavily when we arrived, and those of us who fancied it decided to explore the areas close to the van. We were able to locate *Ophrys pallidula*, another Cretan endemic but before we were able to fully appreciate it a large electrical storm broke out above us and we decided to move swiftly on. As we made our descent down the south side of the mountain, we encountered some temporary works that were taking place. It became apparent – in typical Greek road fashion – that there was actually no road here and sections of the tarmac were missing without any possibility of being able to turn around. We made it safely to the end, but would not have made the descent down this route had it been made clear that the road itself was missing in several places.



Upon arrival at the hotel we retired to the bar and watched the electrical storm play out over the sea, to the comments of the seasoned bar workers who couldn't recall seeing such a display in years.

Day 7

We had planned to make a final return to one of the sites from the preceding days but the weather was so poor that we decided against it and enjoyed the amenities of the hotel. We returned to the airport in good time, where connections and flights meant that everyone was away by early afternoon.

Richard, having booked a late evening flight, decided to return to Rethymno with his remaining hours and scouted a couple of new sites for potential backups in future years, finishing his tour with a trip to the village of Zaros to a taverna he knew from his first visit to the island many years before. Crete is a magnificent island with so much to see, that makes every second of time enjoyed here all the more precious.



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

Social media - For the most up to the minute news of what we're seeing, give us a follow on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or YouTube, and see live sightings from the field, photos and videos, and all the very latest Mariposa Nature Tours news.

[BLUESKY](#)[FACEBOOK](#)[TWITTER](#)[INSTAGRAM](#)[YOUTUBE](#)

Orchids of Crete 20th-26th April 2026

Notes to the list: the taxonomy of European orchids is in a state of considerable flux, with extreme positions adopted (and emotions engendered) by adherents of splitting into many species (i.e. Delforge, Kreutz), or of lumping into few species (i.e. Kühn, Pedersen, Cribb). What constitutes a species is a moot point – for the purposes of recording what we find in granular detail, the latter lumping approach is unhelpful, so this checklist follows the approach of Delforge *et al.* 'Taxa' is a useful umbrella term for what may, or may not, depending on one's taxonomic position, be a valid species...

Where common, vernacular English names exist for taxa, these are also included in the checklist alongside the binomial scientific name.

	Taxa name	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7
	Genus Anacamptis							
1	<i>Anacamptis boryi</i>		✓	✓	✓			✓
2	<i>Anacamptis collina</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	nf
3	Bug Orchid <i>Anacamptis coriophora</i> ssp. <i>fragrans</i>					✓		
4	Loose-flowered Orchid <i>Anacamptis laxiflora</i>		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
5	Pink Butterfly Orchid <i>Anacamptis papilionacea</i> ssp. <i>alibertis</i>				✓			
	Pink Butterfly Orchid <i>Anacamptis papilionacea</i> ssp. <i>aegea</i>							✓
6	Pyramidal Orchid <i>Anacamptis pyramidalis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
7	<i>Anacamptis pyramidalis</i> ssp. <i>brachystachys</i>	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓
8	<i>Anacamptis pyramidalis</i> ssp. <i>cerigensis</i>							
9	Holy Orchid <i>Anacamptis sancta</i>							
	Genus Cephalanthera							
10	<i>Cephalanthera cucullata</i>							
11	White Helleborine <i>Cephalanthera damasonium</i>							
12	Sword-leaved Helleborine <i>Cephalanthera longifolia</i>							
	Red Helleborine <i>Cephalanthera rubra</i>							
	Genus Dactylorhiza							
13	Roman Orchid <i>Dactylorhiza romana</i>				nf	nf		
	Genus Epipactis							
14	<i>Epipactis cretica</i>							
15	Small-flowered Helleborine <i>Epipactis microphylla</i>						nf	
16	Marsh Helleborine <i>Epipactis palustris</i>							
	Genus Epipogium							
17	Ghost Orchid <i>Epipogium aphyllum</i>							
	Genus Himantoglossum							
18	Giant Orchid <i>Himantoglossum robertianum</i>	✓	✓		✓		✓	
19	<i>Himantoglossum x samariense</i>							

	Taxa name	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7
	Genus Limodorum							
20	Violet Limodore <i>Limodorum abortivum</i>					nf		
	Genus Neotinea							
21	Dense-flowered Orchid <i>Neotinea maculata</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
22	Milky Orchid <i>Neotinea lactea</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
23	Three-toothed Orchid <i>Neotinea tridentata</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓		
24	<i>Neotinea tridentata</i> var. <i>angelica</i>		✓	✓				
	Genus Neottia							
25	Common Twayblade <i>Neottia ovata</i>							
	Genus Orchis							
26	<i>Orchis anatolica</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓
27	Man Orchid <i>Orchis anthropophora</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
28	Naked Man Orchid <i>Orchis italica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
29	Sparse-flowered Orchid <i>Orchis pauciflora</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
30	<i>Orchis Prisca</i>						✓	
31	Provence Orchid <i>Orchis provincialis</i>							
32	Four-spotted Orchid <i>Orchis quadripunctata</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
33	<i>Orchis x sezikiana</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓		
34	Monkey Orchid <i>Orchis simia</i>	✓	✓			✓		
35	<i>Orchis sitiaca</i>		✓	✓		✓	✓	
	Genus Serapias							
36	<i>Serapias cretica</i>	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓
37	<i>Serapias bergonii</i>		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
38	Greater Tongue-orchid <i>Serapias lingua</i>		✓	✓	✓		✓	
39	<i>Serapias orientalis</i>						✓	
40	Small-flowered Tongue-orchid <i>Serapias parviflora</i>							
41	<i>Serapias politisii</i>							
	Genus Spiranthes							
42	Autumn Lady's-tresses <i>Spiranthes spiralis</i>						nf	
	Genus Ophrys							
	Apifera Group							
43	Bee Orchid <i>Ophrys apifera</i>				✓			
	Bombyliflora Group							
44	Bumblebee Orchid <i>Ophrys bombyliflora</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
	Fuciflora Group							
45	<i>Ophrys candida</i>				✓	✓		
46	<i>Ophrys episcopalis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

	Taxa name	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7
47	<i>Ophrys minoa</i>				✓	✓		
48	<i>Ophrys helios</i>		✓	✓		✓	✓	
49	<i>Ophrys taloniensis</i>		✓	✓		✓	✓	
	Fusca Group							
50	<i>Ophrys basilissa</i>					✓		
51	<i>Ophrys cinereophila</i>	✓						
52	<i>Ophrys creberrima</i>			✓				
53	<i>Ophrys cressa</i>							
54	<i>Ophrys cretica</i>			✓				
55	<i>Ophrys fleischmannii</i>					✓		
56	<i>Ophrys iricolor</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
57	Yellow Bee Orchid <i>Ophrys lutea</i>		✓	✓		✓	✓	
58	<i>Ophrys mesaritica</i>		✓					
59	<i>Ophrys kedra</i>		✓	✓				
60	<i>Ophrys melena</i>							
61	<i>Ophrys omegaifera</i>					✓	✓	
62	<i>Ophrys pallidula</i>							✓
63	<i>Ophrys phaidra</i>			✓		✓		
64	<i>Ophrys phryganae</i>			✓	✓		✓	
65	<i>Ophrys sicala</i>	✓		✓	✓		✓	
66	<i>Ophrys sitiaca</i>		✓					
67	<i>Ophrys thriptensis</i>					✓	✓	
	Scolopax Group							
68	<i>Ophrys heldreichii</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Speculum Group							
69	<i>Ophrys eos</i>							
	Sphegodes Group							
70	<i>Ophrys ariadnae</i>		✓	✓			✓	✓
71	<i>Ophrys bicornuta</i>			✓			✓	
72	<i>Ophrys cretensis</i>	✓	✓	✓			✓	
73	<i>Ophrys cretica</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
74	<i>Ophrys doerfleri</i>							
75	<i>Ophrys gortynia</i>	✓						
76	<i>Ophrys grammica</i>							
77	<i>Ophrys grigorianna</i>							
78	<i>Ophrys knossia</i>	✓	✓	✓				
79	<i>Ophrys mammosa</i>							
80	<i>Ophrys spruneri</i>							
	Tenthredinifera Group							
81	<i>Ophrys dimidiata</i>	✓		✓	✓		✓	

	Taxa name	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7
82	<i>Ophrys dictynnae</i>			✓	✓			
83	<i>Ophrys leochroma</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
	NB to above: 'nf' = 'non-flowering'							
	Daily (in flower) total:	21	34	39	25	31	33	16
	Running (in flower) total:	21	39	46	50	55	57	59
	PRESUMED HYBRIDS							
	<i>Ophrys fusca</i> agg. x <i>omegaifera</i>			✓				
	<i>Anacamptis</i> x <i>gerakarionis</i> (<i>boryi</i> x <i>laxiflora</i>)			✓				
	<i>Anacamptis</i> x <i>lasithica</i> (<i>boryi</i> x <i>papilionacea</i>)				✓			
	<i>Orchis anatolica</i> x <i>prisca</i>					✓		
	<i>Orchis</i> x <i>bergonii</i> (<i>anthropophora</i> x <i>simia</i>)					✓		

Galleries

All images that follow were kindly shared by tour participants



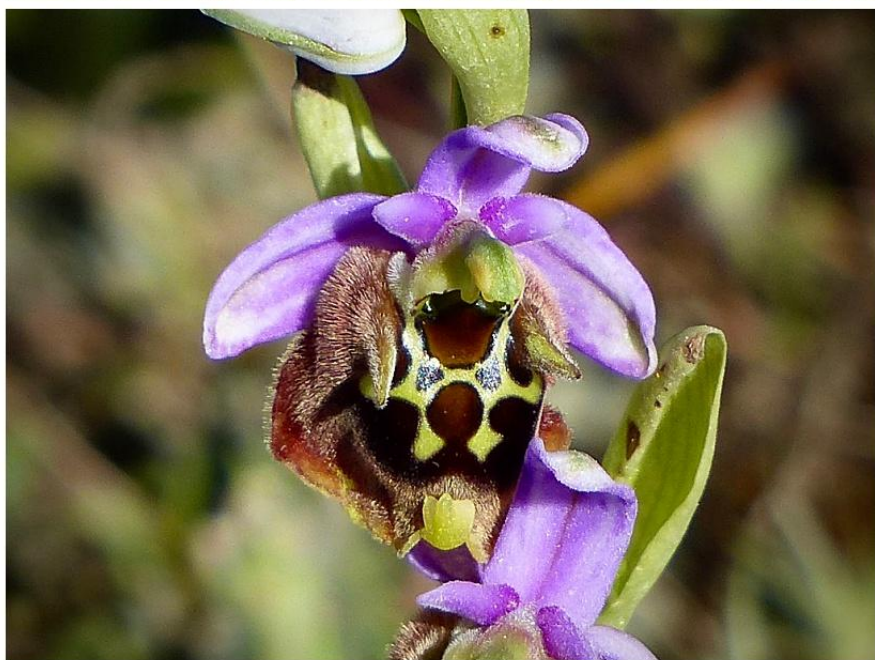
Images © John



Images © John



Images © Ken



Images © Ken



Images © Pete



Images © Pete

And finally...

Our Orchids of Crete tour for 2027 is already fully booked – we're not surprised, given what orchid riches we found there in 2026, and we can't wait to return to Crete next year. In the meantime, while they're filling up quickly, 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!

[Orchids of Tenerife](#)

[Orchids of Cyprus](#)

[Orchids of the Gargano Peninsula](#)

[Orchids of Sicily](#)

Last but not least, our flagship Orchids of Rhodes tour continues to prove the most popular of all – the 2027 tour is fully booked, as is the 2028 tour – the latter was fully booked two years in advance of its running date! To meet popular demand, we’re operating a second week in 2028, and at the time of writing that has just 2 places left available to book upon it... If you’d like to join *Orchid Summer* author Jon Dunn, and professional plant photographer and popular tour leader Sarah Cuttle in Rhodes, they’d love to see you there. Nobody knows the orchids of Rhodes better than Team Mariposa: [Orchids of Rhodes](#).

