

Crete, 20-27 April 2019: orchids and mammals

This spring I was so stressed out by my work that my colleagues, students, and family all urged me to take a break. I looked at last-minute options and ended up on Crete, which I had long wanted to visit. I based myself half of the time in Zaros, which gives access to a number of cultural sites and good orchid hunting grounds in central Crete, and Gerani, from where I could access the Omalos plateau and the peninsulas of the northwest. I spent my days mainly searching for orchids (finding 51 of the 70 or so species on Crete) and did some mammalwatching in the evenings and early nights. Since the weather was quite bad, often very windy, sometimes rainy, and at the beginning of the trip very cold (down to 4°C), and since I had already seen many of the species, my mammalwatching was limited. I explored the first part of Tzani cave near Omalos in the afternoon and stayed into the night to watch and bat-detect the bats emerging from the cave. A very good reference for the bats of Crete is Benda *et al.* (2008) Bat (mammalis: Chiroptera) of the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East. Part 7. The bat fauna of Crete, Greece. *Acta Soc. Zool. Bohem.* 72: 105-190, which can be freely downloaded.

Species recorded

Northern White-breasted Hedgehog (*Erinaceus roumanicus*): 3 dead on road (DOR)

Cretan (Zimmermann's) White-toothed Shrew (*Crocidura zimmermanni*): I followed Vladimir's example and flipped many rocks at the entrance to Tzani cave, but found nothing. However, I stayed into the night and found one with the thermal imager.

Pygmy (Etruscan) White-toothed Shrew (*Suncus etruscus*): One found in a wasteland in Gerani village.

Greater Horseshoe Bat (*Rhinolophus ferrumequinum*): A few at Tzani cave.

Lesser Horseshoe Bat (*Rhinolophus hipposideros*): One at Tzani cave.

European Free-tailed Bat (*Tadarida taeniotis*): Several in the evenings above Zaros village.

Balkan (Kolombatovic's) Long-eared Bat (*Plecotus kolombatovici*): One at Tzani cave.

Libyan (Hanaki's) Pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus hanaki*): Several foraging over Lake Votomos near Zaros.

Kuhl's Pipistrelle (*P. kuhlii*): Several at Lako Votomos, others elsewhere in Zaros, and several at Lake Agia near Gerani.

Savi's Pipistrelle (*Hypsugo savii*): Several in Zaros and at Lake Agia.

Lesser Mouse-eared Bat (*Myotis blythii*): Several at Lake Votomos.

Long-fingered Bat (*M. capaccinii*): Several at Lake Agia.

Steppe (Golden) Bat (*M. aurascens*): One in Tzani cave.

Stone Martes (*Martes foina*): About a dozen DOR.

Cretan Wild Goat (*Capra hircus* or *C. aegagrus*, depending on your taxonomic opinion): From the lookout at the start to the Samaria trail, I scoped the lower slopes until I eventually found a small group way down the valley on a steep, green slope. Samaria gorge does not usually open before 1 May, so I was too early to do the hike, but this year was extremely rainy and the trail was not expected to be opened before the end of May.

European Hare (*Lepus europaeus*): 1 DOR.

Rabbit (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*): Several DOR.

Eastern Rock (Broad-toothed) Mouse (*Apodemus epimelas*): Several at night on the dry, stony hills above Lake Votomos.

House Mouse (*Mus musculus*): 2 being carried around by cats, 1 in Zaros, 1 in Gerani.

Cretan Spiny Mouse (*Acomys minous* or *A. cahirinus minous*, depending on taxonomic opinion): Several at night on the dry, stony hills above Lake Votomos.

And here some photos of the amazing diversity of bee orchids (*Ophrys*) to be seen in April on Crete:

