

FLORA AND FAUNA OF CYPRUS

With its approximately 1.800 species and subspecies of flowering plants, Cyprus, is an extremely interesting place for nature lovers and has all the attributes which make it a botanist's paradise. Being an island, it is sufficiently isolated to allow the evolution of a strong endemic flowering element. At the same time being surrounded by big continents, it incorporates botanical elements of the neighbouring land masses.

About 8% of the indigenous plants of the island, 125 different species and subspecies, are endemic. The island's great variety of habitats, attributed to a varied microclimate and geology, is the main reason which contributed to this high number of endemics.

The arrival of animals in Cyprus has been a subject of interest to zoologists, since it has always been an island. According to existing evidence, the first arrivals were hippopotami and elephants, both excellent swimmers. They arrived 1,5 mil. years ago and apart from some shrews and mice, were the only land mammals roaming the island prior to Man's arrival 9.000 years ago.

The present-day fauna of Cyprus includes some 7 species of land mammals, 26 species of amphibians and reptiles, 357 species of birds, a great variety of insects and mites, while the coastal waters of the island give shelter to 197 fish species and various species of crabs, sponges and echinodermata.

The largest wild animal that still lives on the island is the Cyprus moufflon (*Ovis orientalis ophion*), a rare type of wild sheep that can only be found in Cyprus.

Cyprus is used by millions of birds as a stepping-stone during their migration from Europe to Africa and back, something that has been observed since Homeric times. The main reason for that is the occurrence on the island of two wetlands, with unique and international importance, namely Larnaca and Akrotiri salt lakes.

From the numerous wild birds of Cyprus, birds of prey are the most fascinating and amongst them the Eleonora's falcon (*Falco eleonora*) and the imperial eagle (*Aquila heliaca*) are the jewel on the crown. Our sea creatures include seals and turtles, though unfortunately the Monk seal no longer breeds in the coastal sea caves of the island. On the other hand two marine turtles, the Green turtle (*Chelona mydas*) and the Loggerhead turtle (*Caretta caretta*) have been found to breed regularly on the island's sandy beaches and are strictly protected.

SOME BIRDS OF CYPRUS AND THEIR FOLKLORE

The birds of Cyprus outnumber 350 species, about 200 of which are passage migrants. Some 46 residents and 27 migratory species breed regularly on the island while the endemic species (unique to Cyprus) are around 10.

By word of mouth a wealth of folk tales have been preserved to our days in which imaginary adventures of birds or people teach a lesson in morality and prudence or impart simple instructions for a wise conduct of life...

This relation of humans and birds is analysed through this selection of birds of Cyprus and their folklore.



THE CHUKAR (*Alectoris graeca*)



BLACK FRANCOLIN (*Francolinus francolinus*)



THE BLACK CAP (*Sylvia atricapilla*)



ELEONORA'S FALCON (*Falco Eleonora*)



MAGPIE (*Pica Pica*)



THE CYPRUS SCOPS OWL (*Otus Scops Cyprius*)



THE LITTLE OWL (*Athene noctua*)



MANAGEMENT AND CONSERVATION OF THE GRIFFON VULTURE

References:

- Cyprus Today, Ministry of education and culture.
- Pavlos Neophytou - *Megaln Kypriakn Evkyklopaidia*, Filokypros 1991.
- Pavlos 3ioutas, *Laografia twv zwwv*, Levkwsia, 1978
- David A. Bannerman, *Birds of Cyprus*, Oliver and Boyd
- J.M.E. Took, *Common Birds of Cyprus*, Nicosia 1973.
- *Excerpta Cypria*, Publications "The Library", Nicosia 1969.
- Elefterios Hadjisterkotis - *Migratory Birds and Small Game in Cyprus*