

Sicilian Sortie

24-28th April 2019



Introduction

This was a short break with only a little focus on wildlife and plenty of tourist stuff and stops to see the view etc. There were two targets Corsican hare and rock partridge.

We flew with Easyjet from Luton to Catania which was fine and flew to time.

Car Hire with Europcar – very very poor service and they still owe me 120 Euros at the time of writing.

All accommodation was booked in advance at [Agriturismo Leano](#) it was a very nice place and we enjoyed the stay, well recommended.

Temperatures were warm upper 20s during the day and high to mid teens at night, hot and sunny all the time.

We did not do any night driving and no early mornings either.

The photos are hyperlinked to larger versions.

Diary

24rd April 2019

We picked up our hire car and headed south to the hills around Buscemi for general wildlife watching targeting nowhere and nothing in particular just general wildlife watching. We made several stops for birds such as **Subalpine warbler** and **serin** and plenty of **buzzards**. One brief stop we had plenty of lizards both **Italian and Sicilian wall lizards** and a **green lizard**.

The plants were stunning all the roadsides heaving with amazing flowers including many orchids, some **wild gladioli** particularly spectacular.

One stretch of road had an amazing number of orchids, and we stopped many times to see a selection of orchid species the spectacular **pink butterfly orchid** the highlight.

A small roadside meadow where we stopped was amazing and had loads of orchids of several species. **Yellow bee orchid, bumblebee orchid, man orchid, large flowered tongue orchid, toothed orchid mirror orchid** to name a few.

We headed to our accommodation Agriturismo Leano which was just outside the small town of Piazza Armerina and checked in, it was an excellent place and we had it to ourselves for most of the visit.

I found a nice spot round the corner to set a few small mammal traps in some scrub before heading into Piazza Armerina for a nice pizza and a beer.

Back at our accommodation we could hear a **Scops Owl** calling but only got a brief view of it before calling it a night.



Subalpine warbler



Naked Man Orchid



Italian Wall Lizard



Yellow Bee Orchid



25th April 2019

We were not far out of Piazza Armerina when I had to swerve to avoid an oncoming car and the edge of the road punctured two tyres, so the planned day would change a lot. It was compounded by it being Liberation day so no tyre repair places were open, and our only option was to go to the airport to get a new hire car. All taxis were not running either so the emergency tow truck drove us there.

We eventually got a new car and we headed south to do some touristy things such as visiting Inspector Montalbano's house, eat ice creams and walk along the beach. A few **gulls** but nothing of note along the coast.

We headed to Biviere di Gela nature reserve, for a wander round, it held a nice selection of wetland birds, a **spotted flycatcher** and a few plants including the rare endemic ***Centaurea sphaerocephala***. A distant **Corsican hare** on the drive back was the highlight of the day



Centaurea sphaerocephala



Cyclamen repandum

26th April 2019

We headed north exploring some of the island doing touristy things and doing a bit of wildlife watching particularly looking for Corsican hares.

We drove slowly through the Madonie Mountains where we made lots of stops for common birds and the vast arrays of orchids present at almost every corner of many species including **Naked Man orchids**, **Provencal Orchid**, ***Paeonia flavescens*** and a field full of **Southern Dwarf Iris**.

The next stop was a planned stop for orchids near Bosco della Ficuzza an fantastic meadow held an amazing array of species and numbers of orchids. It was a great place and we spent some time here. There were a few tracks which led up into the hills and we explored them for a bit. A water trough had a few **Italian Pool frogs** in and we had a few **long tailed tits** of the local subspecies.

We headed to Corleone for ice creams and something to eat and then searched the arable areas for hares, it took a while but we did find one distant **Corsican hare**, and we had another brief one as we drove home.



Wild Gladioli



Bellevalia dubia

27th April 2019

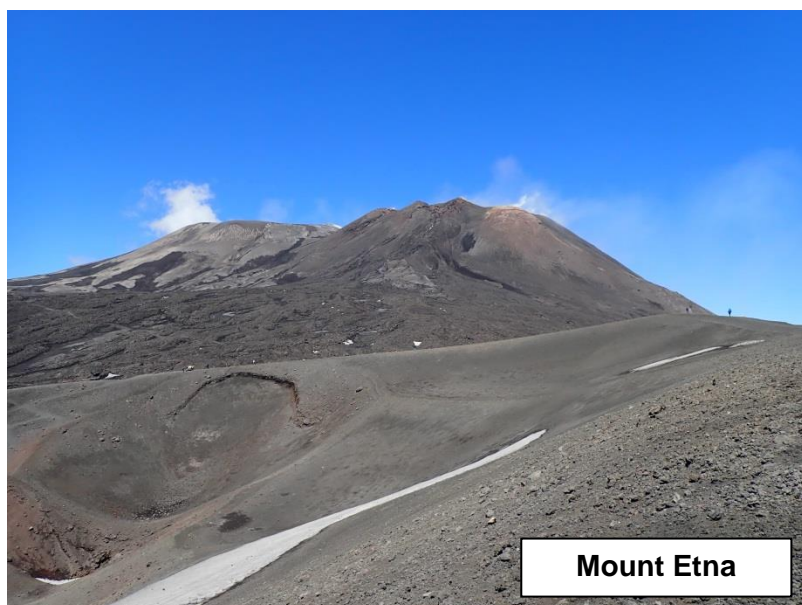
Our day was spent on Mount Etna, visiting the volcano in what was now amazingly clear conditions. It was well worth the visit but there was not much wildlife high up. As we drove slowly down we searched for Rock partridges in the area around the volcano in the lava and rock fields but had no luck, there were quite a few birds present such as **wheatears, linnets, sparrows etc.**

At the base of the volcano we made a stop at some nice looking scrubby areas alongside the road, here were a nice selection of plants such as **giant fennel**, butterflies and a **Forrester moth**.

On our leisurely drive back we encountered plenty of birds some nice species including **Montagues Harrier** and **bee eaters** but the highlight was a super flock of **swifts**, thousands upon thousands of birds. We had a nice meal in Piazza Armerina once again and headed back to check the traps one last time, one was tripped however it was a **Sicilian wall lizard** not a small mammal, I let it go and we called it a night.

28th April 2019

We checked out of our accommodation and flew home on a mid morning flight, after a nice holiday but not quite as much wildlife as usual, but the food was excellent and we will probably make another visit as there is plenty more to see.



Mirror of Venus Orchid



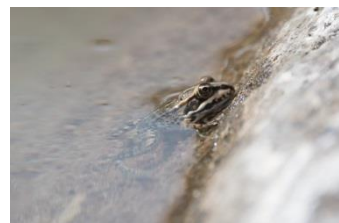
Orphys bertolonii



Forrester



Eastern Bath White



Italian Pool Frog

Checklists

Birds - 45

Subalpine Warbler	Serin	Linnet
Scops Owl	Blackbird	Wheatear
Spotted Flycatcher	Little Egret	Stonechat
Buzzard	Swift	Zitting Cisticola
Long tailed tit ssp sculus	White Stork	House Martin
Italian Sparrow	Starling	Raven
Jackdaw	Wood Pigeon	Collared Dove
Rock Dove	Kestrel	Montague's Harrier
Great Crested Grebe	Black Winged Stilt	Gull Billed Tern
Blue Tit	Great Tit	Lesser Black Backed Gull
Cuckoo	Cetti's Warbler	Bee Eater
Hooded Crow	Jay	Magpie
Turtle Dove	Crested Lark	Corn Bunting
Goldfinch	Cirl Bunting	Chaffinch
Blackbird	Nuthatch	Goldcrest

Selected Plants

Yellow Bee Orchid	Man Orchid	Dense Flowered Orchid
Bumblebee orchid	Naked Man Orchid	Milky Orchid
Annual Mallow	Sea Squill	Star of Bethlehem
Pale Speedwell	Alskie Clover	Toothed Orchid
Wavy Cyclamen.	Anacamptis picta	Large Flowered Tongue Orchid
Small Flowered Tongue Orchid	Silene colorata	Moon Orchid
Sawfly Orchid	Wild Gladoli	Common Broomrape
Tassel Hyacinth	Mirror of Venus Orchid	Ophrys incubacea
Ophrys obaesa	Pink Butterfly Orchid	Onosma echioides
Broad-leaved anemone	Centaurea sphaerocephala	Blue Hound's-tongue
Amethyst broomrape	Convolvulus elegantissimus	Southern Dwarf Iris
Paeonia flavescens	Provencal Orchid	Dactylorhiza markusii
Dingy Bee Orchid	Common Cudweed	Proliferous pink
Eastern Tongue Orchid		

Selected Others



Southern Speckled Wood

Painted Lady	Eastern Bath White	Garden Tiger
Corsican Hare	Southern Speckled Wood	Violet Carpenter Bee
Italian Pool Frog	Western Green Lizard	Sicilian Wall Lizard
Italian Wall Lizard	Forester	Small Heath
Common Blue	Pyrrhocoris apterus	Mullein Wave

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