

Crete – A Botanical Bonanza

14th – 21st April 2023



Introduction

I flew with Easyjet to Chania, uneventful going out but a 3 hour delay coming back. I hired a car with Auto trip Crete which was very good and very good value. I did everything by myself but had the privilege to share 3 days botany with Steve Lenton at the east of the island, an excellent botanist and I thank him for his help. The trip was mainly a botanical trip (one mammal target – Cretan Wild Goat) but as always, I keep an eye out for everything and did quite a few touristy things. The weather was good during the whole trip but quite cold the first night.



Lake Kournas



Balkan Terrapin

Friday 14th April



Poppy anemone

I headed to Lake Kournas directly from the airport, it was hot and sunny ideal herp weather and Cretan wall lizard and Balkan terrapins were taking advantage. I disturbed a basking cat snake before managing to locate a Oscellated skink. I headed off and after a quick look for Cretan goats on Agii Theodori but no luck. I headed to Omalos, plenty of birds including some crag martin and Griffon vultures seen on the way.

At Omalos I explored the entrance to the cave, only spotting a couple of Lesser horseshoe bats, but as dusk fell bat activity increased. It was extremely windy so I could not set up the moth trap and the bats did not leave the relative calm of the cave mouth or its immediate sheltered proximity. But the bats came in good number – Hanak's pipistrelle followed by common bentwing bats, Balkan (Kolombatovic's) Long-eared Bat and several myotis species , Steppe whiskered bat, Lesser mouse-eared bat and Long-fingered bat.

Saturday 15th April

An early start at the head of the Samaria gorge looking for Cretan Goats which after 4 hours only produced a brief view of two. Raven and Blue rock thrush of note, I worked my way back to Chania making several stops for butterflies and plants. No Goats on Agii Theodori that I could see so I headed to Lake Agias. I had a wander round the lake, a few common birds on the lake and its surrounds and a Balkan green lizard. The highlight was a marsh harrier that took a dice snake from the edge of the lake.

I explored the local area and found a nice spot for moth trapping. I headed back to the Lake for the evening had some food in the open air restaurant, a Tree Frog was in the restaurant pond area but incredibly hard to see and inaccessible but it made plenty of noise. As dusk fell the bats came mostly Kuhl's and Nathusius's Pipistrelles but a few passes of European free tailed bats.

I ran the moth trap a short distance away along with a few mammal traps encountering a stone marten running down the road on the way as I headed there.



Cretan Tulip

Sunday 16th April

Only a handful of moths pale shoulder the pick, 3 house mice and a black rat the only mammals trapped. I had a quick look at Lake Agia again but not much different to the previous day so I headed off. My first stop was Kourtaliotiko Gorge where near the chapel there was a good stand of Cretan Arum, along with a nice selection of other plants. My next stop was the Spili wildflower meadows, there are many but I concentrated on Orchid Hill, funnily enough for orchids, and there were thousands of several different species and it was a really impressive sight. I did not have enough time to explore all the meadows but did take a look at nice wet meadow with plenty of Cretan red tulips. I made a quick stop at Phaistos ruins which were closed but could be seen from the viewpoint. I headed off stopping for some amazing Dragon Arums by the side of the road.



Cretan Water frog



Cretan Bluet

I popped into Lake Votomos for a wander finding a couple of Cretan water frogs in a ditch, the place was busy so after a quick snack I headed to my accommodation, checked in etc. and then headed back to lake Votomos for dusk. Somehow, I had not realized that Greek Easter was different to that back home so today was Easter Sunday and a big party was under way with lots of people. Despite this the bats came out to hunt over the lake mostly Kuhl's Pipistrelle, Nathusius, Hanak's Pipistrelles and the occasional flyover European free tailed bat.

I could hear Edible dormice in the trees and the thermal imager helped me find them moving about, the party finished and people left and I had the lake to myself, the rocks on the hillside had cooled down and I could use the thermal imager to look for mice, I was largely unsuccessful but did manage to see a couple of large mice and managed to get the spotlight on one long enough for identification a Cretan spiny mouse.



Cretan Arum



Katharo plain

Monday 17th April

I headed East to meet up with Stephen Lenton he had kindly agreed to show me round some local areas over the next couple of days looking mostly for plants but keep an eye out for other wildlife. We headed through the village of Kritsa stopping a couple of times for Cretan peony, Cretan Arum and a few other specialties before arriving on the Katharo plateau. This area holds an amazing diversity of wildflowers including some very rare species and we spent most of the day tracking them down. Some of the highlights were *Fritillaria messanensis*, Mountain Arum, rock tulip, Bearded iris. We also saw a Balkan whip snake.

I headed back to my accommodation searched locally for places to visit and headed to Prinias ancient settlement a few orchids on the impressive hill and some amazing views, it was too windy for moths so I had an early night.



Cretan peony

Tuesday 18th April

I headed to a small park overlooking Agii Pantos to look for Cretan goats one distant one. The park had plenty of singing Sardinian warblers used to the dog walkers so I got some nice photos.

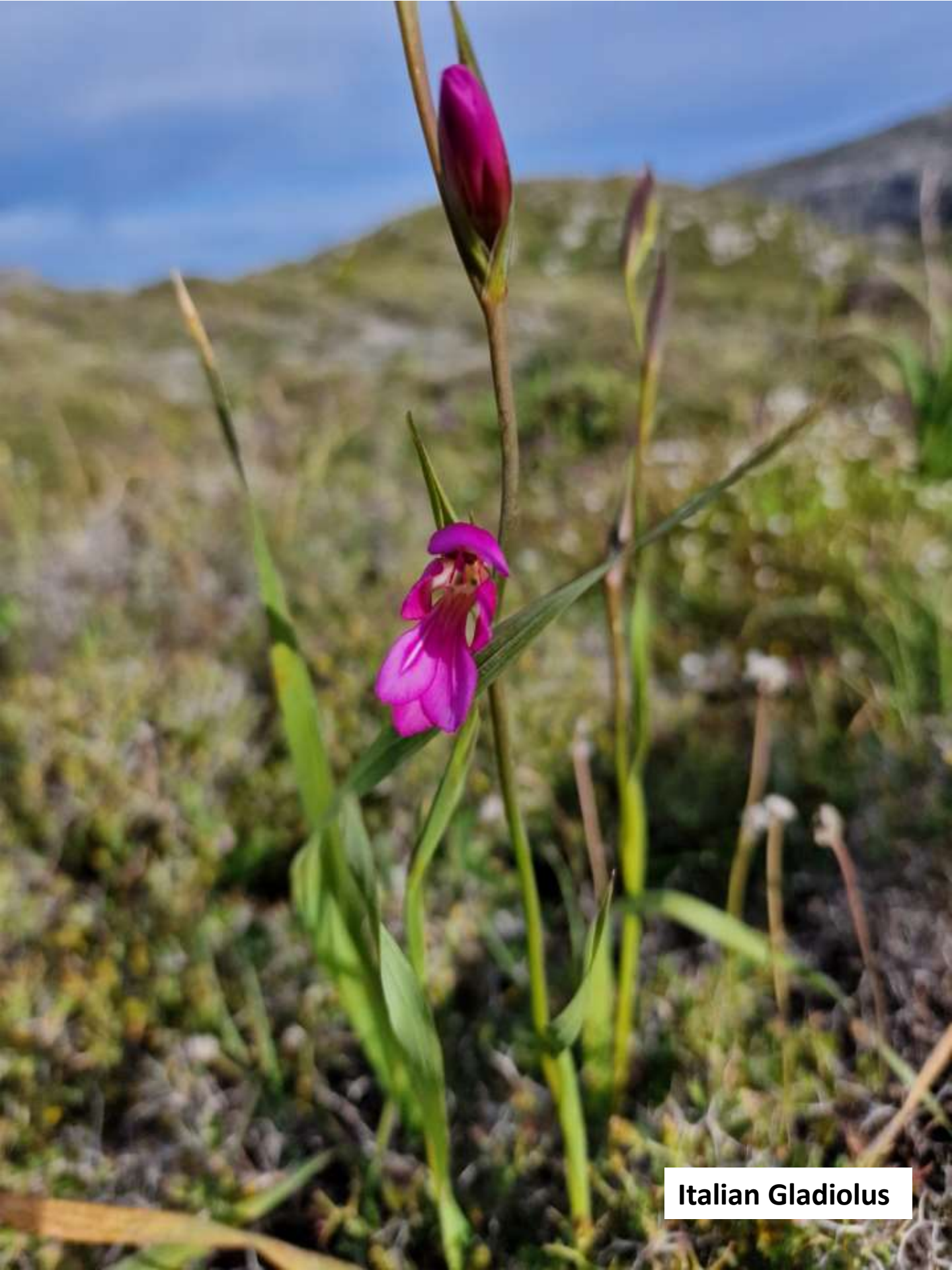
I met up with Steve again and we headed to Thripti, making a few stops on the way. Here was another area full of interesting plants, we stopped in the woods on the way but the Violet Limodore Orchids were not yet in flower but we did find a few other species including monkey orchid in flower.

Thripti held some nice plants including a good selection of orchids, a pool full of Cretan frogs and a snake eyed skink made a nice day. Plants of note Cretan mistletoe, Cretan rock rose, Greek Lloydia, Veiny Milkwort.

I headed back to where I was staying and investigated a church down a track, the track had been washed away so the church was not accessible but the meadow was full of orchids mostly butterfly and giant. It looked a good spot so I ran the moth trap but only got a few moths. The highlight of the evening was a shrew, I could hear it squeaking and got the thermal imager and then the spotlight on a tiny Etruscan shrew.



Cretan Orchid



Italian Gladiolus



ΕκκλῖςΙΑ Αγίος Παντελεῖμονας

Wednesday 19th April

I met up with Steve once again and we headed to several areas before finishing at Perivolakia Gorge again we had loads of interesting plants but also nice array of birds Black eared wheatears, white wagtails, Griffon vultures and blue rock thrushes to name a few. Plants of note *Campanula pelviformis*, Small Blue *convolvulus* and *Nepeta Melissifolia*.

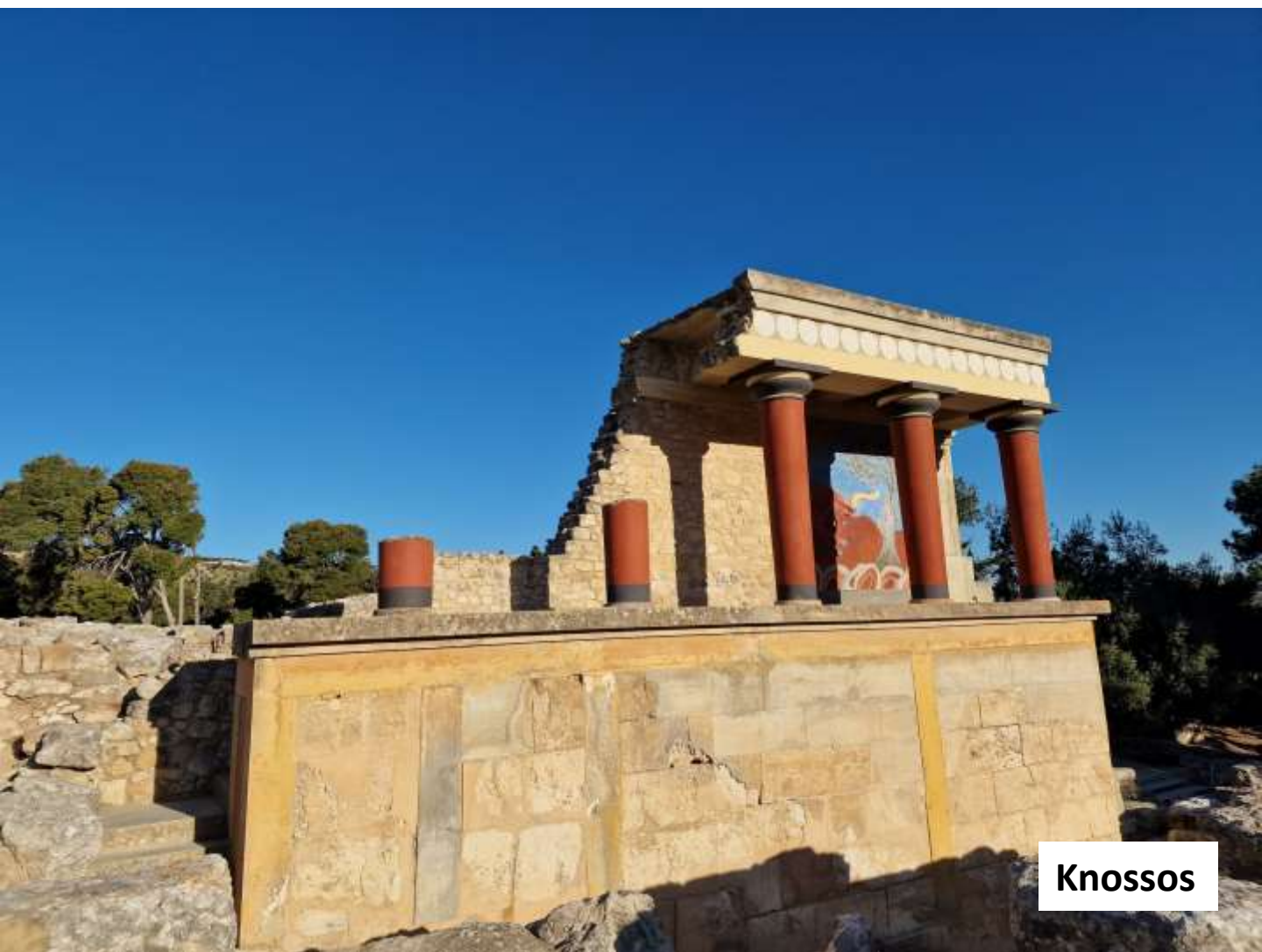
I headed back the accommodation stopping at a local church in a rocky area to put a few mammal traps down.



Perivolakia Gorge

Thursday 20th April

Only a Brown rat in the traps, I headed to the Knossos palace ruins for a few hours before a revisit to Lake Votomos for damselflies. It was now very quiet but there were lots of Balkan terrapins, emperor dragonfly and Cretan bluet damselflies. The ditch was almost dry and the Cretan water frogs had moved up to the lake. I visited another lake not too far away Lake Digenis and I spent the rest of the day here there were plenty of Balkan green lizards, butterflies, dragonflies and Cretan water frogs. The lakes attracted birds and house martins came to drink, Alpine swifts and swallows hovered up the insects. Yellow legged gulls were bathing but the highlight was a flock of about 20 bee-eaters that came to drink. I headed back to my accommodation for a beer and a meal before moth trapping in the car park. Only a few moths but one of the three Scops owls I could hear came in for a look and I got some photos as it sat on a telegraph pole.



Knossos



Naked Man Orchids

Friday 21st April

I was off early to revisit Spili meadows, I had a good look round the meadows that I did not visit on my previous visit The orchids were out in force, it is a stunning place and the highlight was some *Romulea bulbocodium* and even better I had the whole place to myself.

I headed off, had a quick visit to Lake Votomos – Cretan Water Frogs and Balkan Green lizards plenty of Terrapins and some little grebes. I made one last stop to visit Souda Bay Commonwealth War Cemetery just a reminder how lucky we are. Then the 3 hour delay before flying home.



Romulea bulbocodium



Suda Bay War Cemetery



Birds - 46

House Sparrow	Collared Dove	Rock Dove
Hooded Crow	Raven	Mallard
Little Grebe	Coot	Yellow Legged Gull
Stonechat	Cetti's Warbler	Northern Wheatear
Eastern Black-eared Wheatear	Sardinian Warbler	Common Sandpiper
Buzzard	Booted eagle	Kestrel
Meadow pipit	Corn bunting	Swallow
Crag Martin	Cirl Bunting	Blackbird
Blue Rock Thrush	Blue Tit	Great Tit
Goldcrest	Marsh Harrier	Little Egret
Cormorant	Jackdaw	Moorhen
Griffon Vulture	Chaffinch	Wren
Alpine Swift	Common Swift	Serin
House Martin	Bee-eater	Scops Owl
Hoopoe	Crested Lark	Quail
Chukar		



Sardinian Warbler

Mammals - 17

Stone Marten	Cretan Wild Goat	Etruscan Shrew
Cretan Spiny Mouse	House Mouse	Brown Rat
Black rat	Hanak's Pipistrelle	Nathusius Pipistrelle
Kuhl's Pipistrelle	Common Bentwing Bat	European Free tailed Bat
Lesser Horseshoe Bat	Balkan (Kolombatovic's) Long-eared Bat	Steppe whiskered bat
Lesser mouse-eared bat	Long-fingered bat	Badger*
White Bellied Hedgehog*		

* Dead



Lesser Horseshoe Bat

Herps - 13

Balkan Green Lizard	Cretan Water Frog	Cretan Wall Lizard
Cat Snake	Balkan Whip Snake	Dice Snake
Balkan terrapin	Bulgarian Bent-toed Gecko	Snake Eyed Skink
Ocellated Skink	Green Toad	Moorish Gecko
European Tree Frog		



Balkan Green Lizard



Ornate Shieldbug

Others

Pale Shoulder	Angled Barred pug	Chinese Character
7 Spot Ladybird	Cretan Bluet	Emperor Dragonfly
Blue Tailed Damselfly	Denticulate Leatherbug	Endotricha flammealis
Exochomus nigromaculatus	Feathered Beauty	Garden Grass Veneer
Common wave	Gypsonoma dealbana	Idaea filicata
Least Carpet	Lime Speck Pug	Mullein Wave
Northern Dune Tiger Beetle	Oak Hooktip	Ornate Shieldbug
Pale Mottled Willow	Pale Oak beauty	Plain Wave
Portland Ribband Wave	Pyrausta sanguinalis	Ruby Tiger
Scarce Black Arches	Shuttle Shaped dart	Spilostethus pandurus
Tissue	V-pug	Waved Umber
willow beauty	Yellow Belle	Winter damselfly
tamarisk peacock	Rush veneer	Red Veined darter
Egyptian locust	Agonopterix scopariella	



Pyrausta sanguinalis

Butterflies - 22

Cretan Festoon	Red Admiral	Southern Comma
Speckled Wood	Wall	Painted Lady
Clouded Yellow	Large White	Mallow Skipper
Pigmy Skipper	Holy Blue	Small Copper
Cretan Small heath	Swallowtail	Eastern Bath White
Cleopatra	Small White	Mountain Small White
Large White	Eastern dappled White	Common Blue
Lulworth Skipper		

Cretan Festoon



Orchids - 36

Monkey orchid	Pyramidal Orchid	Naked Man Orchid
Heldreich's Ophrys	Sparsely flowering orchid	Small flowered brown ophrys
Small Yellow Ophrys	Small Cretan Ophrys	Ariadnae's ophrys
Bishop's ophrys	Bergon's Serapias	Bee Orchid
Anatolian Orchid	Bory's Orchid	Early Spider Orchid
Bumblebee Orchid	Fan Lipped Orchid	Forgotten Orchid
Lax Flowered Orchid	Man Orchid	Marengo orchid
Milky Orchid	Brown Bee Orchid	Yellow Ophrys
Phyrgana Yellow Bee Orchid	Cretan orchid	Roberts Giant Orchid
Sawfly Orchid	Toothed Orchid	Woodcock Orchid
Butterfly Orchid	Cretan Vetch	Cretan Vipers Grass
Monkey orchid	Tongue Orchid	Eastern Tongue Orchid



Selected Plants.

Dragon Arum	Cretan Arum	Cretan peony
Cretan red Tulip	Cretan Tulip	Rock Tulip
Cretan sowbread	Daphne serica	Gagea peduncularis
Cretan cistus	Tassel Hyacinth	Mallow leaved bindweed
Cretan Hound's Tongue	Messina fritillary	Spreitzenhof's muscari
Cretan Tulip	Rock Tulip	D Tulip
Field Gladiolus	Small Blue	Annual asphodel
White asphodel	Asphodeline liburnica	Yellow asphodel
Beaded Iris	Campanula pelviformis	Chionodoxa cretica
Cretan Ebony	Cretan Gorge Onion	Cretan Iris
cyclamen repandum	Fritillaria messanensis	Gagea heldreichii
Mountain Arum	Poppy anemone	Small Blue convolvulus
Snakes head iris	Broadleaf glandweed	Lathyrus cicero
Romulea bulbocodium	Veiny Milkwort	Arum Lily
Cretan Mistletoe		



Dragon arum

flickr