

Fauna of Cyprus – an overview



Seminar contribution to the module "Terrestrial Ecosystems" (2101-230)
Institute of Botany (210a) · University of Hohenheim · Stuttgart
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Structure



Arthropods

Amphibians

Reptiles

Birds

Mammals

Arthropods

Cyprus is inhabited by approximately 6000 Insect-, 60 Spider- and 343 Crustacean-Species.



European Mantis *Mantis religiosa*.



Cyprian Cone-headed Grasshopper *Truxalis eximia cypria*.

Endemic subspecies



Globe-shaped Olive Scale *Pollinia pollini*.



„Trauer-Rosenkäfer“ *Oxythyrea funesta*.

Lepidoptera

There are 52 species of Butterflies in Cyprus, 3 of which are endemic



Cyprus Grayling
Hipparchia cypriensis

Found April-October in all of Cyprus.



Cyprus Meadow Brown
Maniola cypricola

Found April-October in all of Cyprus.



Paphos Blue
Glaucopsyche paphos

Found April-May in the Paphos Forest near Troodos.

Lepidoptera

Pine Processionary *Thaumetopoea pityocampa*

Moth of the family Thaumetopoeidae with a wingspan between 31 and 49mm.

Adults only live one day in which they mate and lay their eggs.

The caterpillars overwinter in tent-shaped silk nests.

The hairs of the caterpillars are highly irritating and can cause severe rashes and eye irritation.

The caterpillars will form long chains with up to 300 individuals to search for a pupation site.



Adult female and male.



Procession of caterpillars.



Silk nest.

Arachnids



European Tarantula *Lycosa tarantula*

Origin of the name Tarantula which today refers to members of the family Theraphosidae.

One of the biggest Wolf Spiders
(♀30 mm/♂25mm).

Females carry their eggs on their backs.

Mesobuthus cyprius

Endemic scorpion species described in 2000 with DNA-fingerprinting.

Lives under medium sized rocks on sandy soils.



Amphibians

The only Amphibians living on Cyprus are 2 Frog and 1 Toad species.



Cyprus Water Frog
Pelophylax cypriensis.



Middle East Tree Frog
Hyla savignyi.



Variable Toad
Bufo variabilis.

Endemic



Reptiles

Cyprus is home to 25 reptile species: 11 Lizards, 11 Snakes and 3 Turtles.

Lizards include: Agamas, Chameleons, Geckos, Skinks and Wall Lizards (Lacertidae).



Mediterranean House Gecko
Hemidactylus turcicus.

Family: Gekkonidae



Troodos Lizard
Phoenicolacerta troodica.

Family: Lacertidae

Endemic



Schneider's Skink
Eumeces schneideri.

Family: Scincidae

Lizards



Mediterranean Chameleon ***Chamaeleo chamaeleon***

Body length: 20-40cm (females larger).

1 of only 2 chameleon species currently living in Europe.

Found in isolated populations throughout Europe.

Lives in Trees and uses its extendable tongue to hunt insects.

Can change its color between yellow, green and brown.

Hardun *Stellagama stellio cypriaca*

Endemic subspecies and the only agama in Cyprus.

Robust Lizards with a body length between 28-30cm.

Live in rocky areas and have an omnivorous diet consisting of insects, smaller lizards, young mice and plants.



Snakes

Cypriot Blunt-nosed Viper *Macrovipera lebetina lebetina*

One of the most venomous snakes in Cyprus, its bite can be dangerous to humans but is rarely deadly.

Can reach lengths of up to 1,5m.

Lives in warm and dry areas with little vegetation near the ground.



Worm Snake *Xerotyphlops vermicularis*

Has a mostly subterranean lifestyle and prefers areas with loose herbaceous vegetation.

Reaches lengths between 18-30cm.

Mainly eats ants and their pupa but also worms, millipedes and other subterranean insects.

Turtles

Cyprus is inhabited by 1 fresh water Turtle: **Caspian turtle** *Mauremys caspica rivulata* and 2 sea turtles who come to the coast to lay their eggs:



Green Sea Turtle *Chelonia mydas*

Carapace length: 112cm

Weight: 185kg

4 costal scutes



Loggerhead Sea Turtle *Caretta caretta*

Carapace length: 95cm

Weight: 135kg

5 costal scutes

Conservation efforts in Cyprus

Threats: overhunting (mainly in the past), fishing nets, pollution, global warming, feral dogs and foxes.

Approximately 30% of the mediterranean population come to Cyprus to lay their eggs.

During the egg laying season from June to August beaches are closed for tourists and guarded at night.

Volunteers collect the hatchlings and bring them to the ocean to protect them from beach predators.

The project is also used to collect data about the number of females, nests, eggs per nest and hatchlings.



Birds



Cyprus has around 400 identified bird species.

The island is right next to one of the main bird migration routes from Europe to Africa.

As a result Cyprus is visited by millions of summer- and winter guests every year.

2,3 Million birds are killed every year because they are eaten as a traditional delicacy.

Only about 50 species stay on Cyprus year round.



Endemic Birds

Cyprus Wheatear *Oenanthe cypriaca*

Bodylength: 14-15cm



Cyprus Warbler *Sylvia melanothorax*

Bodylength: 12-13cm



Both birds live in the Mesaoria plain and mainly eat insects.

They breed in Cyprus but spend the winter in warmer areas in the middle East (Warbler) and Africa (Wheatear).



Migratory and Resident Birds

Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus roseus*

Between 2.000-12.000 individuals overwinter in Cyprus between November and March.

Come to the salt lakes of Limassol, Larnaca and Famagusta to feed on brine shrimp.

Use their specialized beak to filter food from the mud.



Cyprus Scops Owl *Otus scops cyprius*

Endemic (sub)species that stays on Cyprus the whole year.

Lives in pines, maples and olive trees.

Its characteristic calls can often be heard at night.

Debated if it's a subspecies of *Otus scops* or its own species (*Otus cyprius*).

Common Birds



[32]

Chukar Partridge
Alectoris chukar.



[33]

European Bee-eater
Merops apiaster.



[34]

Bonelli's Eagle
Aquila fasciata.



[35]

Red Crossbill
Loxia curvirostra guillemardi.

Mammals

Cyprus is inhabited by around 30 different mammal species including foxes, mouflons, donkeys, rabbits, mice, hedgehogs and about 20 species of bats.

Nch zoolo

Discovered in 2004 by Thomas Cucchi.

Only endemic rodent that survived the introduction of foreign species by humans.

Has bigger skull, ears, eyes and teeth than European mice.



Egyptian Fruit Bat *Rousettus aegyptiacus*

Wingspan: 60cm, Body length: 15cm

Weight: 160g

Only fruit bat species found in Europe.

Nocturnal and exclusively eat fruit and nectar.

Unripe and damaged fruits are preferred.



Feral Donkeys

Equus asinus asinus

Wild population in the Karpas Peninsula of around 1000 individuals.

Descendants of domesticated Donkeys, who are descendants of the African wild ass *Equus africanus* themselves.

They were bred during the 19th century to be used as working animals or exported to India.

Unpopular with local farmers because they cause a lot of damage to their fields and crops.

Nevertheless they are protected by the North Cypriot government.



Endangered Mammals



Cyprus Mouflon *Ovis gmelini ophion*

Biggest Mammal in Cyprus with a shoulder height of 90 cm.

National Animal of southern Cyprus.

Probably descendants of sheep brought by the first human settlers around 12.000 years ago.

Almost went extinct in the 20th century due to intense hunting by british settlers.

Small protected population remains in the Paphos Forest.





Endangered Mammals

Mediterranean Monk Seal ***Monachus monachus***

There are only around 700 individuals spread between several subpopulations in the Mediterranean.

Primarily feed on octopuses, squids and eels.

Females give birth in caves that are only accessible through the water.

Hunted by fishermen since the Roman Empire because they were seen as pests.

Today strong preservation efforts are made by Greece (MOM Organisation) and Turkey (Mediterranean Seal Research Group).



Extinct Mammals

Until recently Cyprus was inhabited by wild boars, deer and goats but they went extinct in the 19th century because of intensive hunting by humans.

During the last ice age in the Pleistocene epoch Cyprus was also inhabited by endemic elephants and hippopotamuses with Insular dwarfism:

Cypriot Pygmy Hippopotamus *Hippopotamus minor*

Height: 76cm Weight: 200kg

Cyprus Dwarf Elephant *Palaeoloxodon cypriotes*

Height: 1,4m Weight: 200kg

It's still debated if the first human settlers caused their extinction around 11.000 years ago.



Fossilized skeleton of *Hippopotamus minor*.



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