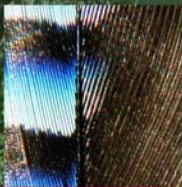




# WILDLIFE ON CORFU



DAMIAN DOYLE



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## Corfu ( Kerkyra )

is a long irregular shaped island in the Ionian sea, it is approximately 53km. long, 24km. wide in the north and 4km. near its southern end. It has a total area of 592 square kilometres and a coastline of 217 kilometres. There is a permanent human population of approx. 110,000, which swells dramatically during the summer months due to tourism. Compared to mainland Greece the Island is blessed with a Maritime / Subtropical climate i.e. mild winters and relatively cool summers The annual rainfall varies between 700mm and 1400mm, the majority of this in the winter months. Snow and frost are rarities on the island even though the Albanian and Greek mountains a few miles away have a covering of snow for most of the winter. As a result of this, humidity is high which gives rise to lush vegetation, which in turn harbours a great variety of wildlife. The terrain is varied with at least six peaks



Typical countryside near Chlomos.

over 500meters the highest being Mount Pandokrator at 906 meters. On the higher slopes there is maquis, the typical Mediterranean landscape i.e. rocky with low scrub and grass etc. There is rich pasture/tillable land like the Ropa Valley which includes a golf course, coastal plains with salt water lagoons some of which contain disused salt pans, the remainder of the Island comprises undulating hills carpeted in endless olive groves with a scattering of family owned and cultivated vegetable patches including small fields of fodder for their animals.

Historically a large part of Corfu was covered with natural oak forests but these were exploited for shipbuilding by the Venetians whose shipyard remains can still be seen at Gouvia. Later the British and French took advantage of these resources. However it was during the Venetian occupation (1386-1797) that the Corfiots were convinced to plant olive trees, rewarding them with a payment for every ten trees planted and also allowing them to pay their taxes in oil. Obviously a very successful venture as today the island is home to over 3 Million olive trees.





# TREES AND SHRUBS

## Olive: -

The present day olive tree is thought to have been cultivated from the Oleaster bush about 3500BC in Crete and Syria simultaneously.

Thereafter it rapidly spread throughout the region, no doubt due to its culinary and economic value. Cultivation methods vary slightly in the different regions and on Corfu the trees are not pruned and are therefore much larger than elsewhere. Many of the trees are hundreds of years old with some reputed to be up to six

hundred years. Some are virtually hollow due to their knarled and distorted trunks. Today olive groves cover more than 40% of the island. Here the fruit is left to mature on the tree until it falls naturally as this is said to increase the value of the oil.

Other Mediterranean areas use mechanical tree shakers or beat/comb the fruit from the trees. The fruit is harvested with large black nets spread beneath each tree from November to April. Once gathered the olives are brought to the olive press where they are crushed and then the oil is extracted from the paste by mechanical means followed by filtration to remove any remaining particles. Olive oil is the only oil that can be consumed without any further processing once extracted from the fruit.

Olive oil is extremely beneficial for the cardio vascular system, which is evident in the longevity of many Corfiot residents. The olive fruit fly, which is by far the greatest threat to the olive crop, has been the subject of much debate especially regarding its eradication as on Corfu and most other countries this has been done to date using helicopters to aerial spray insecticides. This has led to uneasiness regarding the long-term effects of these insecticides on both the human population and the beneficial insects of the island and ultimately the food chain. Recently a comprehensive study of the olive fruit fly was carried out by Scientists Fletcher and Kapatos in unsprayed olive groves on Corfu, which has led to a better understanding of the population ecology of the olive fruit fly. This study in turn has helped worldwide development of alternative methods of control most notably Pheromone traps, which are now the only allowable method of control in some areas of Corfu.



Olive grove.



Olives.





Myrtle.

### Myrtle: -

There are many Greek legends concerning the myrtle bush. One of them tells of a nymph called Mirsine who raced against the goddess Athena and won. Athena, in a rage then killed Mirsine whose body was transformed into a beautiful myrtle bush. In mythology there are also close associations with the Roman goddess Venus and the Greek goddess Aphrodite. So it is not surprising that in Greek culture this plant has close associations with love marriage and death. Branches and flowers are still used in wedding bouquets and in classical times poets and renowned thinkers wore wreaths of Myrtle.

The leaves and flowers contain scented oil, which is used in the perfume industry. The

leaves are also used as a herb when cooking meat and fish. Myrtle is a fast growing low bush, usually about 3 to 4 feet high. It is widespread throughout Corfu.

### The Strawberry Tree: -

Has dark green leaves and beige coloured bottle like flowers, its fruit resembles strawberries and ripen from green to yellow to vivid red. It is a member of the Heather family (ericaceae). This plant can live for up to a thousand years where older stems are replaced with new growth from its flattened woody base, which is called a Lignotuber. The Strawberry tree is native to Mediterranean countries and also some milder Atlantic coasts such as western Ireland although it has been decimated in these areas where it was used to make charcoal



Strawberry tree.

for iron smelting. It is fortunately still quite common on Corfu. The fruit is edible with a delicate flavour and is used in liquors and jam making. The Two Tailed Pasha butterfly uses the Strawberry tree as a host for its eggs and caterpillars.

### **Eucalyptus: -**

A regular sight on the island. It is easily recognisable by its long leaves and peeling pastel coloured rust and cream bark. Eucalyptus trees are amongst the largest trees to be found on Corfu. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century they were commonly known as “Fever Trees” due to their miraculous ability to reduce the number of cases of malaria in the vicinity. Malaria from the Italian “Male Aria” literally “ bad air” was believed to be an illness caused primarily by living in an area close to swamps or marshland and the associated smells from the stagnant water. The Eucalyptus is fast growing and has the ability to absorb large quantities of water, which then evaporates through the leaves thereby helping to dry the land. The pleasing smell of eucalyptus helped to alleviate any pungent odours and it is thought the leaves in the water made the environment unsuitable for mosquito larvae.



Eucalyptus.

### **Judas Tree: -**

So named because it is from this type of tree that Judas is said to have hanged himself after he betrayed Jesus, therefore it is said to blush with shame ever since with a display of pink(magenta) flowers on the trunk and stems before the leaves appear in spring, it flowers from march to April, the flowers have 2 larger lower petals and 3 erect upper petals and it has bright green circular leaves. This plant is from the same family as peas or legumes.

### **Fig:-**

Usually found near habitation, they have large indented leaves and fruit in the summer months .Fig have been cultivated as far back as 7000B.C. in Jerico and is the first tree to be mentioned in the bible. Originally from Caria in Asia Minor, hence its scientific name of Ficus Carica. The Fig tree is unusual in that it doesn't have a resinous sap instead it exudes a slightly caustic milky substance when cut. It is very deep-rooted and able to withstand extreme drought, also its wood is very porous and retains large reserves of moisture. Fig does not flower and fruit like a normal tree instead it actually flowers inwardly and the fruit is really the flowers, full of stamens etc.



Ficus Carica.





Kermes oak.



Holm oak



Cypress.

**Kermes oak: -** (*Quercus coccifera*).

Has the appearance of a large shrub rather than a tree and can be found anywhere from 1 to 6 metres tall depending on its habitat. It is evergreen and has acorns 3cm. long by 2cm. in diameter with the cup having rearward pointing scales. The acorns take two years to ripen and were often used as pig food.

Kermes is the preferred habitat for the kermes insect (*Kermes ilices*) which was a valuable source for a beautiful red dye.

**Holm Oak: -**

Distinguishable by its elongated oval shaped leaves. Holm Oak is an evergreen compact tree not unlike the olive and is one of the trees still remaining from the primeval forests of Corfu.

The bark was used for tannin in the preparation of leather and its wood makes excellent charcoal.

**Cypress: -**

No picture of Corfu would be complete without a number of tall elegant Cypress trees scattered around the landscape. The Greeks know them as “Dachtila tou Theo” which literally means the finger of god. Every village in Corfu has its own story or superstition concerning this beautiful tree. Due to the straight growing nature of the Cypress, it was regularly used to provide the upper floors in the traditional Corfiot houses and even today is still used for roof supports and traditional boat building.

**Carob or Locust Tree: -**

This tree is evergreen and has brown broad bean like seedpods, which have been used as a substitute for chocolate and also to make carob flour, which has been used historically during times of hardship. Today it is still cultivated by some for animal fodder. The Carob seed due to its uniformity of weight has been used to measure precious items such as gemstones for thousands of years, hence the word Carat as in the measure of diamonds.

### **Prickly Pear: -**

Christopher Columbus has been attributed with the responsibility for the introduction of Prickly Pear to the European mainland from Mexico. The Mexicans utilized the plant by cooking both leaves and fruit as a form of sustenance.

Once the plant arrived in Europe it quickly spread throughout the Mediterranean, and the Venetians are thought to have introduced it to Greece where they used it as a form of natural barrier around valuable crops. In Greece the leaves have been used as fodder for animals by burning off the hard thorns and the fruit is edible and if you value your fingers is best

approached by peeling with a sharp knife and fork. Be careful though as a small amount of the fruit is a cure for an upset bowel, too much fruit will only exacerbate the condition.

The plant can grow up to 5 metres high and is regularly seen scattered along the roadsides and cultivated areas on Corfu.



Prickly Pear.

### **Juniper: -**

A number of species of juniper can be seen on Corfu; the Prickly Juniper with its needle like leaves having two white stripes the length of the leaf. Its fruit is about 1cm. in diameter and is at first green then later turning a reddish brown. Oil extracted from the wood of the Prickly Juniper is used in the treatment of skin disorders and also in shampoo and other cosmetics.

The Phoenician Juniper with its totally different leaf structure- has small scale like leaves, which cover its stems. The fruit of the Phoenician juniper are brown berries up to 14mm. In diameter.

Both species can be found around Lake Korission on the south west of Corfu.



Juniper.

Other trees and shrubs, which are a common feature of the landscape, are Holly again a remnant of the primeval forests. Oak, a number of varieties however they doesn't normally attain the girth and size of Oak trees in northern Europe. Pomegranate favoured for its fruit and praised in many a Greek legend. Found also throughout the island are Plane trees, Walnut, Almond, Wild Pear and although not a tree but a grass quite large Bamboo thickets.





## HERBACEOUS PLANTS



Olive grove flowers in spring.

March and April most notably, and May through to June are undoubtedly the best months on Corfu for wild flowers, including some rare orchids.

In July and August most plants have either produced seed and withered, or retired beneath the surface into bulbs and tubers. Evidence of this can be seen everywhere in the tinder dry remnant stalks of once beautiful flowers.

September onwards often seems like a second spring though not as spectacular as March and April, with many plants making a colourful debut or encore after the long hot and dry summer months.

From mid October onwards due to the high rainfall and acceptable temperatures, most herbaceous plants take advantage and produce foliage more akin to that which appears in April in the northern climes.

Even in the depths of the northern winter, on Corfu, some so called spring flowers are happily blossoming, to bring the occasional diversion to an otherwise lacklustre winter walk.



## Spring.

In springtime, the variety and profusion of flowers and foliage in some places is done in an English cottage garden like style, which has to be seen to be appreciated. Pathways and clearings in the olive groves come alive with wild Tulips, Iris, Bluebells, Poppies and a variety of flowering plants found in Northern Europe but here their flowers colours appear more vivid, scent more intense and foliage even more succulent. Also the wild cousin of our cultivated Chrysanthemums, Lupins, Geraniums, Crocus, Asphodel and Gladioli can be found in fields, ditches and even by the roadside. Ipomoea or Morning Glory drapes itself over

fences and hedges and although the flowers only last a day nature replaces them with fresh blossoms every morning. Other plants include the bright blue flowering Sea Holly and Sea Lavender, Heather's and Oleander. Orchids, especially the Bee Orchid and the Fly Orchid start to flower in March and are at their best in April.

Wisteria is in bloom as are the orange and lemon trees. The Judas tree with its magenta flowers, blossoms before the leaves appear. Prickly pear presents a brash display of yellow flowers. In the woodlands the arum lily also called "Lords and Ladies" can be found peering out through the undergrowth and if you are lucky the telltale smell of rotten meat could lead you to the Snakeworth with its beautiful but strange purple, brown and green flower. The foul smell is its clever way to attract flies, which are necessary for pollination. Also in late spring Rockroses begin to display their pastel coloured pink and cream flowers, and Broomrape, a strange parasitic plant which lacks chlorophyll can be found in meadows, usually close to its host plant, clover. The olive groves have a fairy tale carpet of mosses, fungi, grasses and ferns, the favoured haunt of the tortoises, butterflies and woodland birds.



Gladioli.



Alium.



Broomrape.





Arum lily.



Larkspur.

## Summer.

Early in summer the spring flowers are beginning to recede but the overall impression on the island leans towards a lush subtropical type of landscape. The sea appears turquoise/azure blue, the foliage on the trees and bushes become more dense and the cicadas burrow to the surface and begin their summer long daytime chorus. Given the time of year it was traditional for the young men in Greece to make wreaths of wild flowers to win over the hearts of the ladies. As the hotter, drier months of July and August arrive the hardier plants appear such as the golden thistle (*Scolymus hispanicus*.) with its bright yellow flowers.



Convolvulus.

Sea holly (*Eryngium maritimum*.) another thistle like plant can be found on sandy shorelines, it's leaves a cross between holly and thistle.

*Eryngium creticum* a close relation of the sea holly which inhabits the general countryside, looks inconspicuous at first until July when its thistle like leaves change from green to blue. From a distance a colony of these plants in a clearing has the appearance of a surreal blanket of blue mist. Along the roadside in the evening, night scented stock and jasmine spray their beautiful, lingering but invisible clouds of delicate scent. Thyme is abundant and its unmistakable smell explodes from underfoot making it relatively easy to identify. Wild mint grows truly wild and can be found almost everywhere.

Mullein is in bloom with its large moleskin textured leaves and spires of miniature primrose like flowers. Mullein was once used as a type of fish poison.

*Nigella damascena*, which has numerous alternative names such as "love in a mist" or "devil in a bush", these names being quite apt given the thorny, twig like veil surrounding the flower.

The chaste tree flowers all through the summer months and is a favourite of many butterflies and bees, its leaves and flowers are said to have anti-aphrodisiac properties, probably due to the disagreeable smell when crushed.

Larkspur and honeywort seem to like semi shade and can frequently be seen beneath the olive trees, as can hairy flax with its striking pink and violet flowers.

The Sea lily is in bloom in the later summer months but unfortunately is becoming rarer due to mankind's pressure on its specialised habitat.



Hairy flax.



Mullein.



Rock rose.



## Sea lily: -

*"There was, however, a certain time of the year when the lake was at its best, and that was the season of lilies. The smooth curve of the dune that ran between the bay and the lake was the only place on the island where these sand lilies grew, strange, misshapen bulbs buried in the sand, that once a year sent up thick green leaves and white flowers above the surface, so that the dune became a glacier of flowers."* © Copyright - Gerald Durrell (*My family and other animals.*)

The Sea Lily which is also known as the Sea Daffodil or Sand Lily is an attractive member of the amaryllis family. The Minoans of Crete held this plant in high esteem. It flowers for a number of weeks from July through to August when little else is in flower. The distinctive pure white flowers are highly scented and multiple blossoms appear

on top of a 30 to 60-cm. stem. Its normal habitat is sand dunes often only a few metres from the breaking waves, hence its Greek name – Krinos tis thalassas.

This plant is quite rare due to its specialised habitat but can now be found in a number of locations on Corfu, most notably Antiniotissa and Korission.



Sea lily (pancratium maritimum).



Love in a mist.



Sea holly (Eryngium maritimum.)



## Autumn.

If one plant were said to steal the show on Corfu in Autumn it is without doubt the Cyclamen. Clumps of them are to be found sprouting everywhere, even from a handful of soil in a fissure on the rocks. A number of varieties are to be found, some with plain ivy shaped leaves, others with large variegated leaves as pretty as the flowers themselves and again some with pink flowers and others with white. Another unusual looking plant which springs to life in Autumn and persists well into the winter months is the Friars cowl (*Arisarum vulgare*).



Crocus.



Variegated cyclamen leaf.

The green stripes of the flower in this photograph are less common than the usual maroon coloured stripes, which can make it look altogether more evil.

During autumn, the crocus also flowers, they seem to cohabit happily with the cyclamen and indeed their colouration is similar, but their blossoms are not as hardy and don't last as long before wilting. Luckily they are numerous and fresh flowers are usually only a few steps away. Many of the autumn flowering plants persist well into the winter months and frequently overlap with some so called spring flowers on Corfu, due primarily



White cyclamen.



to the usually mild and sometimes relatively warm daytime temperatures during the winter months.



Cyclamen.



Friars cowl.

**Sea squill: - (*Urginea maritima*),**

which is common throughout the Mediterranean, can regularly be found in clearings of well-drained soil. It flowers in October with spikes of blossoms 1mtr. In height from a 10-15cm. bulb which can weigh up to 2kg. The top of its bulb usually protrudes from the soil surface.

The plant contains cardiac glycoside, which has similar medical properties to digitalis, which is found in the foxglove and therefore very dangerous to consume except under medical supervision. Is also used in the treatment of bronchitis and asthma. Was also used as a form of rat poison and as such an effective rodenticide, Arabs regularly planted *Urginea* around their graves to protect them.



Sea squill bulbs.



Sea squill.



## Winter.



Olive grove, early December.

Winters on Corfu are generally mild, bright sunny days are interspersed with days of overcast cloud. It is frequently wet and usually damp at night. Sub zero temperatures are very infrequent, although when they do occur, damage to some plants is evident in frost damage. Every few years a covering of snow can occur, which generally would only last a day or two before melting. The foliage on the trees has thinned out dramatically, allowing more light through to the herbaceous plants below, which in conjunction with the rainfall, gives rise to an eruption of greenery. Beneath the olive trees, which fruit every second year, this growth will have been cut down to facilitate the laying of nets in order to harvest the fruit. In spite of this there will still be something of interest to see.

Some of the notable winter flowering plants include: Anemones, in mauve, scarlet and white are common, whilst cyclamen and crocus are still to be found.

Wild almond blooms during winter in shades of pink or white.

Narcissi and the rare Corfu snowdrop can be seen from November onwards, at times even by the roadside.



Narcissi.



Corfu snowdrop.

Note: The Corfu snowdrop is protected by law.



## Horta:

A traditional pastime, which is today still as important and popular, is gathering “Horta”. This is an activity carried out from October to May and involves the picking of a variety of edible plants including Dandelion, Wild Mustard, Neapolitan Garlic, Honeywort, Borage, Wild Asparagus and Chicory. Many families have a favoured area on which they gather what they regard as the best horta. Indeed some people will allow “weeds” to grow in their gardens in order to have a readily available supply of their favourite plants. These are then boiled, covered in olive oil and served with potatoes, feta, fish and bread or whatever else is available to constitute a substantial meal. The only tools necessary to partake in this activity are a plastic bag and sharp kitchen knife.



Borage.



An abundance of herbs.



Chicory.

The island is also inundated with a great selection of herbal plants, which the islanders have utilised to their benefit. Amongst them Oregano is gathered by every household in June just as the flowers begin to bloom, they are then cleaned in water and hung in the shade. After a week or two the flower heads are removed when dry, this is known as “rigani” which is used copiously in the Corfiot kitchen. Bay and Mint along with Wild Celery are also part of the natural bounty of this fertile island.



## ORCHIDS

There are also a number of unusual plants including Orchids, of which there are about 36 species on Corfu some of them endangered, this is exceptional considering the whole British isles contains only between 40 and 50 species. Orchids on Corfu include *Spiranthes spiralis* which has greenish white flowers around the stem like plaited hair, less than 12 inches tall. Also *Orphrys reinholdii* a beautiful purple orchid with a horseshoe printed in white and the Bee orchid, which is also to be found in northern Europe.

### **Lady's Tresses: - (*spiranthes spiralis*.)**

This diminutive plant is Corfu's only autumn flowering orchid. The name is due to its resemblance to a lady's plaited hair. Although widespread in Europe it is classed as rare with colonies of usually less than ten plants. Prefers grassy clearings in pine forests near the coast. Flowers during September and October, plants are less than 30 cm. tall and the tiny flowers only 5 mm. It is said to give off an almond like scent in the evenings. Historically the plant was used as an aphrodisiac and as a homeopathic remedy for some skin and eye afflictions.



*Spiranthes spiralis*.



*Spiranthes spiralis*.



Pyramidal orchid.

**Note:** Due to their increasing rarity great care must be taken so as not to disturb these plants in their natural habitat and under no circumstances should the flower heads be picked. Please watch your step when taking photographs.





## Fungi.



Once September comes, the temperature moderates and the ground becomes moist from the sporadic rainfall, fungi appear above ground.

Fungi are an unusual organism. Most are composed of Hyphae which are long microscopic strands. Hyphae group together to form Mycelium, usually below ground or in a rotten tree on which they feed. They are therefore mostly invisible and only present themselves when the time comes to produce spores. What is seen above ground is similar to a flower head. The spores are similar to seeds, mostly miniscule and are dispersed to germinate and produce more Hyphae.



Fungi can be very specialised in their requirements, some will only colonise the dead wood of a certain tree, others the fallen leaf matter of a particular tree. Others are parasitic on a specific host.

Many fungi form a mycorrhizal relationship with their host, this relationship is often crucial to the development of both partners. It is thought that there are between one and two million species of fungi with only about 5% of these catalogued, so identification of some is difficult and specialised, often only after microscopic analysis.



Corfu has a number of colourful and striking fungi, which in autumn provides a pleasant and interesting subject worth photographing.





# MAMMALS

As in the rest of Europe mammals on Corfu are shy and retiring and you would have to be fairly lucky to spot them, but if you are an early riser and tend to take early morning strolls your chances of a glimpse or better are dramatically improved. You could quite possibly see Fox, Hare, Rabbits, Otter, Weasel, Beech Marten and Dormice. Dormice are known by the locals as “the flyer” due to its habit of leaping from branch to branch, sometimes quite substantial distances. At dusk the bats appear, their numbers substantial, with some, quite large. The floodlights at the airport seem to be the most popular restaurant for the bigger bats.

The telltale earth upheavals of moles are a common sight in the clearings and fields throughout the lowland areas and if by chance you found yourself wandering home after a night out, Hedgehogs can regularly be heard or seen rummaging in the undergrowth.

The Otter was thought to have been wiped out on Corfu through persecution, but in the last number of years evidence of their presence in numerous areas has been found, including visual reports of an otter in the Messongi river.

There are also thought to be limited numbers of Europe’s Small jackal (*Canis aureus*) living on Corfu, which along with Samos are the last remaining pockets of this species in Greece.

Unfortunately many of the above species live a very precarious existence on Corfu, in no small part due to the indiscriminate hunting practices and loss of habitat.



Bats roosting.



Hedgehog.



## BIRDS



Little Egret on Korission.

Due to the Corfiots love of hunting most species of birds on the island shun human contact and might not be as abundant as in other parts of Europe therefore you have to work hard to observe them. In excess of 150 separate species have been catalogued on Corfu, some as migrants, and some quite rare. Certain species however are plentiful, whether this is because of their unsuitability for the pot or superstition is unknown. Throughout the island there are various habitat types, all within easy driving distance of each other. Just to whet your appetite some of those sites include:

### **Lefkimmi Salt Pans: -**

Now disused and returning to nature. This is quite a large area and provides an undisturbed breeding ground for a number of species including waterfowl, Shorebirds, warblers Pipits etc.

If you were really lucky you might spot Flamingo's, a flock was seen in summer 2006, flying offshore only to divert to the saltwater marsh near Igoumenitsa on the mainland.

During the hottest summer months much of this area resembles a desert landscape and it is easy to imagine it in its original working state. Therefore early spring and autumn would undoubtedly be the best time to visit.

The surrounding reed beds, ditches and saltwater marsh/lagoon harbour most of the wildlife.



Lefkimmi Salt Pans.



**Ropa Valley:** - this is the remains of a long dried out lagoon and spring would be the best time of the year to make a visit here. If you are lucky you can see quite a variety of species due to the fertility of the land and the changing terrain surrounding it. Rivers, streams and drainage ditches, many abundant in wildlife, crisscross the valley.



Kingfisher.

**Airport Lagoon:** - ( Lake Halikiopoulos) Unusual in its closeness to the airport, your plane will land on what is reclaimed land on the lagoon. There are almost always a number of Great White Egrets, Grey Herons, Cormorants and possibly Pygmy Cormorants, Terns and Marsh Harrier to name but a few. Note: EU funding has been secured to provide a nature trail and bird watching facilities on the lagoon. (2004).



Lake Halikiopoulos.

**Lake Korission:** - on the south west of Corfu Lake Korission is separated from the sea by a strip of sand dunes, again Egrets, Gulls, Waterfowl, Harriers, Kingfishers, Warblers, Hoopoe and a great variety of migrants can be sighted here during the spring and autumn migration.



Korission.

**Pantokrator Mountain:** -Because Pantocrator is the highest peak on Corfu on a clear day (most days) the whole island is visible from the summit as are the Albanian and mainland Greek coastlines. Bird life although sparse is quite interesting and varied. Eagles, Kites and Buzzards patrol the skies while Falcons and Kestrels can also be seen pursuing their quarry. Blue Rock Thrush, Black Redstarts and Cirl Buntings are regularly seen here and obviously the lower foothills have a greater variety of species.



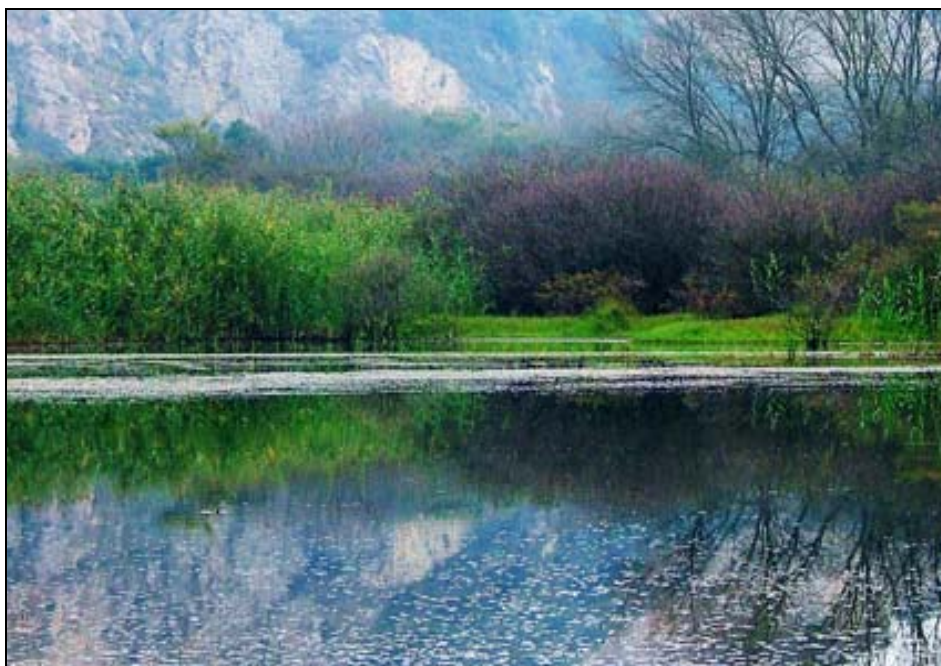
Buzzard.

**Major river valleys:** - The main rivers such as the Messongi, Potamos and Ropa etc. don't always dry up completely during the intense summer heat and consequently they become an oasis for all wildlife during the mid summer months. Find yourself a nice shaded and secluded spot away from human activity, sit down quietly for half an hour and you are guaranteed to see something interesting.



Lake Korission.

**Scotini:** - One of the few small lakes or large ponds that never completely dries up during the summer months. A haven for fresh water loving birds including the Bittern with its booming call. Grey heron, egrets and ducks are constant residents. Early mornings during the summer months finds the surrounding bird population visiting to quench their thirst. Scotini is naturally teeming with fish, terrapins, frogs and snakes! Worth the visit as the surrounding area is relatively unspoilt.



Scotini.





Swallow.

Beside the above specialised areas, throughout Corfu Swallows, Swifts, Gulls, Oriole, Sparrows, Magpies, Jays, Shrike and most of the common European birds are regularly seen.

Local folklore prevents the Greeks from disturbing swallows nests, for fear of developing freckles ! or as in some areas, the fear of a death in the household. So if there are nests on an establishment there will always be a strategically placed piece of cardboard or wood beneath to catch any stray debris but the nest will remain undisturbed.

At night most often heard but not seen is the Scops Owl who once the sun sets can be heard no matter where you are on the island, this is a small owl about 8 inches long and its call is a single penetrating "PIUWW". The Scops owl is known by the Greeks as " gionis ", a Greek pronunciation of the sound of its call.



The Little Owl (Athene Nocturna), known by the Greeks as Koukouvaya because of its call was very important in Athenian culture to such an extent that it appeared on their coinage. The modern Greek One Euro depicts a copy of one side of this ancient coin.



Design on Greek One Euro coin.





# REPTILES

As can be expected of most warm climates Corfu has its fair share of reptiles, some quite common and easy to observe whilst others are less co-operative and have to be searched for. The best time to see reptiles is in spring or before 10 o'clock in the morning during summer months, with the exception of the Gecko of course. There have been at least 23 reptile species recorded on Corfu.

**Tortoise:** - ( Testudo Hermani ) Can be found rustling around in undergrowth if you sit and listen for a while, but during the hot summer days they take refuge from the sun and rest in the shade. During the 60's they were exported for the pet trade but thankfully the EU placed a ban on exportation.

Coloration is normally amber and black, adult males are smaller than the females and have larger and longer tails. Tortoises hibernate during the winter months below

ground. Mainly vegetarian, but also eat slugs and snails etc. Nests are 3 - 4 inches deep and contain from 2 to 12 hard-shelled eggs which are about 1.25 inches long. Incubation is from 90 to 120 days. Tortoise can be taken by large birds of prey where they cruelly drop them from a height to break their shells. They have unfortunately been badly affected by herbicides, which causes death and deformities. However they are now a protected species.



**Testudo Hermani.**



**Slowworm.**

## **Slowworm: -**

This is not a snake but more like a lizard without legs. The most noticeable differences are, a slowworm has moveable eyelids, numerous rows of scales on its belly and a detachable tail. Can grow up to 20 inches long. They are hardy and eat mainly slugs, worms and insects. The female gives birth to 5 to 26 live young in August / September who then fend for themselves. If gardening they

can be found hibernating in groups from October to March usually in garden litter or under logs etc. Slow worms have been recorded to live up to 54 years.

**Geckos:** - can be seen around lights at night where they feed on moths and other insects attracted by the light. Their more natural habitat is stone walls and tree trunks. The Gecko's feet are unusual in that they have thousands and thousands of tiny hairs which in turn split into thousands of smaller hairs, these microscopic hairs create "Van Der Waals forces " which produces a molecular attraction with the surface on which they climb which allow it to walk across ceilings and on virtually any surface.



**Moorish Gecko: -**

This is Europe's largest species up to 6 inches long, also known as the Wall Gecko. They are more stockily built than the lizards. Their colour is grey / tan brown with darker blotches, the under belly is white. They have pronounced wart like scales along the side of the body and tail. Two to four clutches of two eggs are buried where they hatch after about two months; the hatchlings take up to two years to mature. The males can sometimes be heard making a clicking sound.

**Turkish Gecko:-**

Smaller in size to the Moorish Gecko. It's habits however are very similar. Distinguishable by it's very pink colouration. The Greeks have always had a superstitious fear of geckos. They call geckos "Molintiri " the defiler.



Turkish Gecko.

**Lizards: -**

There are a number of species to be found on Corfu and it would be very difficult to spend a day here without seeing at least one of the species.

**Dalmatian Algyroides: -**

The most common lizard found on Corfu. They reach lengths of about 8 inches. the male is distinguishable by his bright blue throat. During the hottest part of the day they seek shelter in rocky walls etc. Two or three eggs are laid in may.



Dalmatian Algyroides.

**Balkan Green Lizard:-**

Europe's largest lizard, body length is up to 20cm. and if the tail is included can be 60cm. or more. Its long tail allows it to run along on only its hind legs. It has a bright green body . The females and juveniles have yellow or brighter stripes the length of the body.

Food is mainly insects and



Balkan Green Lizard.

(Gardiki Cave, obviously the resident Dragon.)



smaller vertebrates. Does not hibernate in hotter areas of its range like the Ionians. Regularly seen in the open countryside, where it invariably scurries off once disturbed. If you sit quietly it will usually re-emerge to continue its previous activity after a few minutes.



Balkan green lizard.



Agama.

#### **Agama:-**

Also known as the "Sling Tailed Agama ." . This species is about 12 inches long but quite heavily built and not dissimilar to an iguana. They have a gular fold and spiny scales around the neck. The male can change colour depending on mood. They love to bask in sunshine and are usually found on rocky terrain. Up to eight eggs are laid in June which hatch late August into September.

## Snakes: -

Don't worry snakes are more afraid of you and will do everything possible to avoid contact. If you do see one just back off and observe from a distance and if he does notice you he will certainly try to make himself scarce. Snakes on the island include.

### **Grass Snake : -** ( *Natrix natrix persa.* )

The grass snake although often found far from water, it likes to hunt for its favourite prey of frogs in and around water bodies. Adults rarely exceed 4 feet in length. It is a harmless snake and rarely bites. Some times rears up if threatened and will often play dead with its mouth open if caught. Hibernates during the winter months to emerge in March. Mating takes place in April and May with a clutch of 10 to 50 eggs being laid between June and August.



Grass Snake. (*Natrix natrix persa.*).

The eggs which are between 1-1 ½ inches long are laid in decaying vegetation or dung in order to utilise the heat generated from the decomposing matter.

The young hatch 6 to 10 weeks later and are from 6 to 8 ½ inches long. The young can hang around the nest for months, often until the following spring where they feed on earthworms and any other available grubs.

### **Nose-Horned Viper: -** (Very Dangerous).

Corfu's only poisonous snake. Adults can reach lengths of 24 to 32 inches, it gets its name from a fleshy horn on its snout, coloration is light slate-brown body with a pronounced chain of darker lozenges down the length of its back. Usually found in rocky habitats and sea shores but dislikes sandy terrain. Hibernates in groups where the males emerge in march or April with the females appearing a few weeks later. Mating occurs in may and after a gestation period of about four months up to 20 live young are born approx. 7 inches long. Diet includes lizards, small mammals etc. Although this species is poisonous it won't attack unless provoked and in fact it shuns human contact. If found ALWAYS view from a distance as it has a long strike.



**Four lined snake: -**

This snake has four black lines down the length of its body hence its name. It is a heavily built snake and can reach lengths of up to 2.5 metres although this is unusual. Its general colour is grey or brown. Four lined snakes are fairly easy going and placid and generally won't bite if handled. If you are brave enough.

**Montpellier Snake: -**

A large heavily built snake of up to 2 meters long. Coloration is dark brown almost black but this can vary to dark green. It can move very quickly and may rear up like a rattlesnake or cobra if cornered. Although not deadly its bite is painful and can lead to swelling and nausea. Fairly aggressive if caught !

**Balkan whip snake: -**

This is a fast-moving slender snake up to 1mtr. Long. It's body is greyish brown with distinct spots on the front section which fade and become indistinct as you reach the tail.

**Leopard snake: -**

The most striking and beautiful snake found on Corfu. Reaches lengths of up to 1mtr. The body is cream coloured with varying spots of brown and rust colouration as it's name suggests.

**Dice snake: -**

This snake is 1-1 ½ mtrs. long. Colouration can vary from grey to brown to dark-brown, almost black with distinct dark blotches on it's body. There are usually no defined markings on the head.

**Caspian whip snake: -**

Reaches lengths of 1 ½ -2 ½ mtrs therefore one of the larger snakes. Non venomous but very aggressive and will bite if handled which can be very painful. The upper body is usually brown/olive and its belly is cream/yellow.

**Greek blind snake: - (Typhlops vermicularis )**

This snake is approx. 10 in. long and lives the life of an earthworm. It is normally brown on top with a yellow underbelly. It has tiny eyes because of it's subterranean existence. Earthworms and other grubs are it's main food source.

**Western sand boa: -**

Leads a subterranean existence, hides beneath the surface with only snout exposed to ambush small rodents etc. Length up to 80cm. Has a russet/brown body with dark marbled markings. The scales are small. The nose and tail are noticeably blunt compared to the other snakes.

## Terrapins:

### **European Pond Terrapin: -** (*Emys Orbicularis*.)

One of the two terrapins found on Corfu. They can grow up to 10-12 inches long. They like to hide in the vegetation at the waters edge and as they are cold-blooded creatures, from mid-morning they clamber onto the bank or convenient rock to sunbathe and warm themselves. When dry their coloration takes on a dark chocolate hue. The males are distinguishable by their concave plastron. A clutch of 10 to 15 eggs is laid in sandy soil on the bank, which takes



European Pond Terrapin.

about three months to incubate. As they are Chelonians the eggs contain no sex chromosomes and are dependant on the incubation temperature to determine the sex of the hatchlings. At 28-29 degrees, both sexes will develop, a lower temperature will yield all males, and higher, all females. When the young hatch they only measure about two centimetres. Adults hibernate in the mud on the bottom of the pond or slow moving river. The young will hibernate in or close to the nest. Food consists of small fish, frogs etc.

### **Stripe Necked Terrapin: -** (*Mauremys Caspica Rivulata*.)

The second species of freshwater terrapin found on the island. Very similar in habits to the European pond terrapin. It lacks the yellowish streaks on its shell and the yellow spots on the limbs and head.

Distinguishable by the bright stripes down along its neck, which are discernible in this photograph. Said to be rarer than the pond terrapin.



Stripe Necked Terrapin.

Although in some areas of Corfu they appear to exist in equal numbers and quite happily together.

*Mauremys caspica* seem also to be unconcerned about the quality of the water it inhabits and can be found in some quite dismal places. Its breeding habits are very similar to those of the European pond terrapin.



# AMPHIBIANS

“Amphibios” from the Greek, meaning a being with a double life, very appropriate, as a portion of their life is spent in an aquatic environment and an even greater portion on land. As there are at least 8 recorded species of amphibians on Corfu, in spring, any pond, ditch or slow moving river if clean is almost guaranteed to be populated with a large number of frogs and newts. The frogs are very fast both on land and in the water and will disperse in all directions on your approach. Tadpoles, which are at least double the size of their northern European counterparts, are present well into August. Newts can often be found wandering through the vegetation during the summer and autumn months and are distinguishable from the lizards by their soft silky skin. Newts are also much slower in their movements than the lizards.



Marsh Frog.

**Marsh Frog: -** (*Rana ridibunda*).

Ridibunda is Europe's largest frog and is also known as The Lake frog or Laughing frog.

There are a number of subspecies of *Rana ridibunda* to be found around the European continent and eastwards. The name “Ridibunda” translates literally as “laughing”, and when

heard in full chorus it is easy to understand why.

They rarely venture far from water, sometimes sunbathing at the waters edge only to dive back in when disturbed. Their life cycle is very similar to the common frog although their spawn doesn't float on the surface, the tadpoles are also substantially larger when hatched.

**European Tree Frog: -** (*Hyla Arborea*)

Although not regularly seen, can be heard at night when they start their chorus of a gentle “KRACK-----KRACK” which has been compared to the sound of a duck. They climb through foliage including bushes and trees using their suckered footpads. They have a beautiful bright green colour on the upper surface and a creamy white colour beneath. A distinctive black/brown stripe extends from the side of the face to the hind legs. They can sometimes be found during the day scrunched up on the shaded side of a large leaf for protection from the scorching sun. The tree frog in the Photo is young and perched on a Bramble leaf so you can judge its size! Whereas the adults can reach a size of 60mm or more in length.



European Tree frog.



**Balkan Marsh Frog: -** (*Rana balcanica*).

This frog is a very close relation to the Marsh frog (*Rana ridibunda*). Indeed they are so closely related that hybrids of the two species are thought to exist.

The Balkan Marsh Frog has similar habits and is generally found in the same habitat as The Marsh Frog.



**Smooth or common newt: -** (*Triturus vulgaris*).

The smooth or common newt is quite common throughout Europe, to be found in many a pond or ditch lacking large fish and with rich vegetation. Contrary to popular belief they spend the majority of the year on land, only to return to water in spring to breed. Newts spend the winter months sheltering beneath a convenient log or rock and whilst on land their diet consists of mainly worms, snails and small insects. In water, aquatic insects are their main source of nutrition.



Smooth or common newt.

In spring the female will lay up to 300 eggs over a long period, usually a few every day, which she will wrap in the leaf of some water plant. The young, called efts have feather like gills and will grow into their adult form in their first year but will not reproduce until their second or third year.

Also amongst the amphibians are the Toads, these depending on your point of view can be fairly large friendly looking creatures. Some of them are big enough to fill a large soup bowl. The Common toad (*Bufo bufo*) has a warty grey/tan coloured skin, sometimes with an airbrushed rust pigment.

The Green toad (*Bufo viridis*) also has a grey/tan coloured skin but with large irregular green spots and sometimes a rust coloured pigment on its back and the top of its head. They are quite harmless and beneficial creatures in that they rid the garden of many pests?





# INSECTS

If you take time to walk through some of the lush green unspoilt countryside of Corfu you will certainly see Dragonflies hover and shoot off only to pause and hover again. Large green grasshoppers, and if you just pause and look close enough a multitude of multicoloured beetles and other insects are available for inspection. Beneath rocks Scorpions can sometimes be found, scorpions on Corfu are not as dangerous a one would be led to believe. Their sting is painful but not fatal to a healthy person.

## **Praying mantis: - (Mantis religiosa).**

The word mantis comes from the Greek word for prophet. They are related to cockroaches and grasshoppers. They feed on any insect including their own kind that they can catch with their forelegs, which are equipped with a row of hooked spines making escape almost impossible. Because of their cannibalistic nature they are solitary and are usually found motionless in undergrowth awaiting their prey. The male mantis has 8 segments on its abdomen whilst the female has 6. The female is stouter and also has a tube like ovipositor with which she lays hundreds of eggs in what is called an Ootheca. Once the young hatch they resemble ants, they moult or shed their exoskeleton numerous times during growth and after the final moult they have developed their wings. If attacked they expose their brightly coloured wings to give the impression of greater size. Colour depends on their habitat; those found in grass are usually green while those in bushes are usually browner.



Mantis religiosa.

## **Mantis: - (Empusa fasciata.)**

This photograph is of a juvenile. The adult is more mantis like in appearance, the body becomes straighter with distinct wing cases. Adults retain the crested head and protruding flaps under the abdomen. Common throughout the Balkans. Prefers grassy shrub land. Feeds on a variety of insects. Can be found all summer long and well into October on Corfu.



Empusa fasciata. (Juv.)

**Carpenter Bee: - (*Xylocopa violacea*.)**

A rather large heavy looking black bee. The wings give off a violet and blue hue as seen from the photograph. Often seen bumbling through gardens and can cause alarm due to its size, although it is a placid creature and rarely harms humans. Its name is derived from its habit of burrowing in wood in order to nest.



Carpenter Bee.

**Fireflies: - (*Luciola lusitanica*).**

Unfailingly in May each year the olive groves come alive at night with a sparkling display to rival that of the milky way, this is the annual courtship display of the Firefly. Fireflies are small carnivorous beetles, they belong to the family "Lampyridae ". The more common species is *Luciola Lusitanica*. They are nocturnal in behaviour, where the males fly about after dusk.



Firefly.

The females of this species are flightless but also have wings. Both male and females emit light. The emitted light is believed to act in sexual attraction; it is produced by special light organs in the lower abdomen. These special organs are a complex of air tubes and nerves, backed by a layer of specialised reflector cells. Oxygen from the air tubes converts a product called luciferin to oxyluciferin, an enzyme called luciferase assists this chemical reaction, and the end product is energy in the form of a bright green light. Fireflies are a beneficial insect in that the larvae have a voracious appetite for snails and worms which they inject with a paralysing fluid which also semi digests their prey on which the larvae then feed.

**Glow-worms: - (*Lampyris noctiluca*).** Named because of the flightless, wormlike female which looks like a cross between a ladybird larvae and woodlouse, she emits a yellowish green glow to attract the male. The male resembles a duller version of the Firefly. The larvae is similar to the adult female and feed on small snails.



Glowworm.



**Red Darter: -**

(*Crocothemis erythraea*).

The male of this species of dragonfly stands out like a beacon against the summer vegetation as he flitters about and lands to rest on his favourite perch. The female is browner with a yellow tint and bright yellow markings on her side. Dragonflies are unusual in that they don't just bite and swallow their food; instead

they chew food before swallowing. They can hover and fly backwards. They are distinguishable from Damselflies in that they rest with their wings open and not folded by their sides. They are beneficial to man because one of their favourite snacks are mosquito larvae during the larval stage whilst adults will take any insect on the wing including mosquitoes.

Their preferred habitat is marshy terrain and waterside vegetation. The red darter is active from April to November and has a wingspan of about 65mm.



Red Darter.

**Black tailed skimmer: -**

(*Orthetrum cancellatum*).

The mature male only has the blue abdomen, females and juveniles are generally light brown. Identifiable by the black tail and black patches (pterostigma) near the wing tips. Most similar species have brown pterostigma. Frequents ponds, rivers and any waterside vegetation.

Wingspan is up to 80mm.

Common from April to august.



Black Tailed Skimmer.

**Cockchafer: -** (*Melolontha melolontha*)

The Cockchafer is a member of the Scarab family. It is also known as the May Beetle and in its larval form as the Rook worm. The adults are a common sight in the spring and early summer evenings as they habitually fly into lamps and windows only to fall to the ground beneath. They are distinguishable by their fan like antennal club, which is noticeable smaller on the female. Adults feed on leaves and flowers of trees like Oak and Lime and



Cockchafer beetle.

can cause serious damage. It is however the larvae which lives in the soil for three years that are the greater pest, their favourite food is the roots of cereal crops and grasses. The larva is a "C" shaped creamy white maggot with a brown head. Despite the destruction they cause, they do however have their uses as Jean-Henri Fabre wrote of watching the French peasant women and children following the plough to gather the Rookworms as a readily available source of protein. A recipe recounted by Henri Miot (1870) describes one of their favorite culinary dishes.

*"Roll the vers blancs, which are short and fat, in flour and bread crumbs, with a little salt and pepper, and wrap them in a stout piece of paper, well buttered inside. Place it in the hot embers and leave it to cook for twenty minutes, more or less, according to the degree of heat. On opening the envelope a very appetising odour exhales, which disposes one favourably to taste the delicacy, which will be more appreciated than snails, and will be declared one of the finest delicacies ever tasted."*

#### **Dor Beetle: - ( Geotrupes stercorarius )**

A member of a large group of beetles known as Dung beetles because of their unusual breeding habits. Animal dung is cut and rolled into a spherical shape, which can be larger than the insect itself. This is then rolled along the ground with the hind legs to a suitable location and buried; eggs are then deposited to mature in the dung.

The ancient Greeks associated the Dung beetle with uncleanness and evil, it was known as the "devils steed."

It was also associated with wealth and if one was discovered lying on its back it had to be up righted or else the

persons house or crops would be destroyed by some natural disaster.

The Egyptian scarab beetle is also a member of this family and in contrast was regarded as sacred by them. They considered it a symbol of birth and immortality, probably because of it apparently burying itself only to be reborn as a young beetle. The scarab beetle was also thought to roll the sun across the sky and bury it each evening, only to dig it up the following morning. Scarabs carved from beautiful gemstones were regularly placed beside the heart (the only organ not removed during mummification) of the deceased at burial, to ensure rebirth in the afterlife.



Dung Beetle.

#### **Wasp Beetle: - (Clytus arietis)**

This beetle is a member of the longhorn beetle sub family. Although harmless, it mimics the appearance and movements of a wasp as protection against predators. It is about 1cm. in length and prefers open deciduous woodland with an abundance of flowers. The adult feeds mainly on pollen and the occasional small insect. The larvae feed on the wood of a number of deciduous trees that have been infested with a particular fungal growth. Quite common throughout Europe.



Wasp Beetle.



## Cicadas: -

During the hot summer months the only sound consistently heard even in the remotest olive grove is the reverberating chorus of the Cicadas. It is all pervading and even still you could easily hear a pin drop through the din - most unusual. Despite the racket they create Cicadas can be quite difficult to locate and observe. Cicadas are most unusual in that they only spend a few weeks of their entire life above ground. They are also peculiar because they cause little or no damage to crops or other foliage. This is due to their strange feeding habits. The female cuts out an egg chamber in thin branches with her saw like ovipositor, into which she lays a number of oval cylindrical eggs. Once hatched the nymph enclosed in a membrane with only its front legs free, pulls itself from the nest and falls to the ground. Immediately it burrows deep and attaches itself to a suitable root, which it penetrates and feeds on the Xylem. This gives them a watery, high amino acid and low sugar diet. This continues where they dig deeper for more suitable roots until eventually they return to the surface where they wait until ready for their next stage of metamorphosis. The nymph then climbs up a suitable stem to a predetermined height or until it can climb no further, where it emerges from its old grotesque skin to become a beautiful, singing, flying insect (see photo sequence below). The sound comes from special timbals on the upper side of their 1<sup>st</sup>. abdominal segment. The ancient Greeks kept Cicadas in small cages because they valued their singing.



Cicada orni.

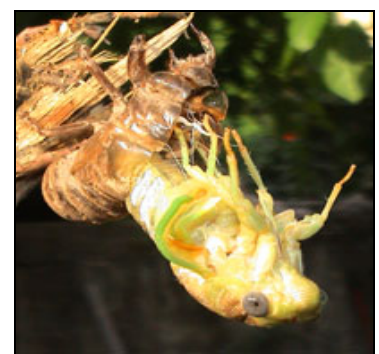
## Metamorphosis of the Cicada: -



0min.0sec.



1min.8sec.



2min.36sec.



4min.39sec.



5min.49sec.



6min.33sec.

**Mint leaf beetle: -**  
**(*Chrysolina menthastri*).**

A small pear shaped beetle with a beautiful metallic “paint-job”. Has a strong preference for mint, but is also to be found on other plants. Likes moist shaded locations. Its length is approximately 1cm. and it is common on Corfu and throughout most of Europe from May till September.



Mint Leaf Beetle.

**Bee-fly: -** (Diptera,  
Bombyliidae).

This early flying insect is not a Bee at all, but a true fly. Its legs are much longer than a Bee's, it only has one set of wings, its antennae are totally different to those of a Bee and in flight it is much faster.

The Bee-fly also has the unusual habit of hovering and anchoring itself with its feet as it sips nectar from flowers.

The Bee-fly makes its appearance very early in the year in order to lay its eggs in the unsealed nests of certain solitary wasps. Once hatched the pupae feeds on the food of the young wasps. It then goes through a transformation called hypermetamorphosis, where it changes into a more aggressive grub like larvae. At this stage of its development it proceeds to devour the young wasp larvae.

When all the available food supplies of the wasps nest are exhausted, it pupates, only to emerge again next year as an adult and repeat the process all over again.



Bee Fly.



# BUTTERFLIES AND MOTHS

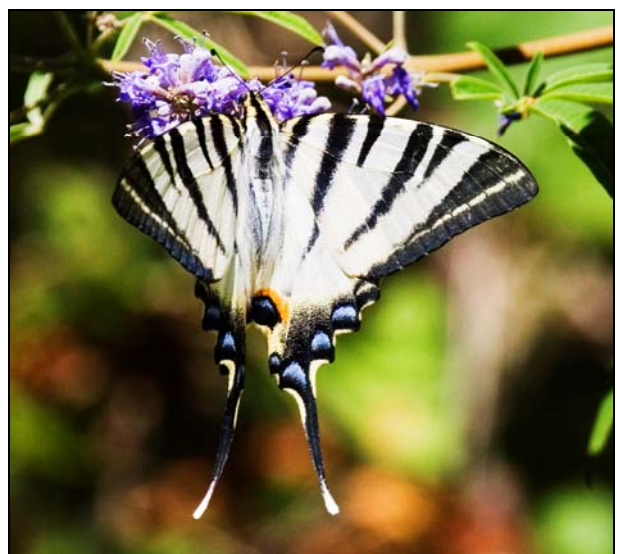
During the summer months butterflies of all shapes and sizes can be seen fluttering or gliding across the vegetation. Amongst them are: Long Tailed Blues, Southern White Admirals and the Two Tailed Pasha, which breeds on the Strawberry tree. At night a great variety of moths including the Hawk Moths can be seen, it is a good idea to leave a light on and see what it attracts. For the more curious or gruesome this also serves as a good location to watch Geckos stalk their prey. Amongst those regularly seen are -



The common badhairday caterpillar ???.

## Scarce Swallowtail: - (*Iphiclides podalirius*)

Despite its name is the most common Swallowtail in Europe; it is so called because of its rarity in the British Isles. It's flight is distinctive in that it appears to glide like a paper aeroplane in reverse. Wingspan is approx. 70mm to 80mm. Can be seen from may to September. Habitat is lowlands including gardens, orchards and scrubland. Caterpillars feed on fruit trees, brambles, hawthorn etc.



Scarce Swallowtail.

**Comma: -**

This butterfly has unusual torn looking wings, which are mottled brown underneath. In northern Europe it has a white comma shaped symbol underneath its wings, hence its name. But in southern Europe it is represented by the Southern Comma which has smaller wing spots ( see Photo. ) and instead of a comma symbol it bears a white v shaped symbol on the wing undersides. Wingspan is 45 to 50mm. Adults spend the winter in hedgerows making full use of their camouflage to avoid detection.



Comma.

**Silver-Washed Fritillary: - (*Argynnis paphia*)**

A large butterfly which prefers a forest like environment. The female does not have the long dark streaks on her wings, which in the male, contain the scent scales. The underside of the hind wing is mottled pale green with silver streaks, hence its name. Wingspan is up to 70mm. Frequently found close to deciduous trees and shrubs from June to September, some times in large numbers, especially during flowering time. Eggs are laid on trees and the caterpillars feed on violets and similar plants.



Silver-Washed Fritillary.

**Southern Small White (*Artogeia mannii*): -**

The male has a single black spot on the top surface of the forewing whereas the female has two black spots. Both male and female have two black spots on the lower surface of the forewing. The hind wings are white above and yellowish below in both sexes. Can be seen flying from March till October. Likes hot rocky terrain and gardens.



Southern Small White.



### **Gatekeeper or Hedge Brown: -**

There are usually two distinct white spots on the eye of the forewing although in this specimen the second spot is very faint. The forewing is mainly orange beneath whilst the hindwing is brown and yellow with distinct brown spots with white centres. Very fond of bramble, and likes scrubland. Caterpillars feed on a variety of grasses. Wingspan is approx 40mm.



Gatekeeper or Hedge Brown.

### **Brimstone: -**

Distinguished by the red spot in the centre of all four wings and the forewing, which sweeps out to a point. The male has yellow upper wing surfaces whilst the female has pale green. Wingspan is up to 60mm. Found in open woodland and gardens. They overwinter in evergreen foliage and are amongst the first butterflies to appear in spring.



Brimstone.

### **Common Swallowtail: - ( *Papilio machaon* )**

This is one of the more striking butterflies to be found on Corfu. It loves the flowery meadowlands between the olive groves. Rarely at rest and active from April to October. ( 3 broods ) Wingspan is over 70mm. Caterpillars are creamy white with a random black and red striped pattern. They feed on milk parsley, fennel, carrots etc. The caterpillars also have a aromatic organ which is deployed if under threat, called the osmeterium from the Greek word osme which means scent.



Common Swallowtail.

### **Red Admiral: - (*Vanessa atalanta*)**

The upperside colouration is unmistakable. The undersides are similar but paler and less distinct. Adults overwinter to reappear again in spring. Its favourite haunts are flower gardens.

Wingspan is up to 60mm.

Caterpillars feed on nettles.



Red Admiral.

### **Spotted Fritillary: - (*Melitaea didyma*.)**

The upper wing colouration can vary with the male a darker shade of orange.

The underside of the wings is usually as in the photograph. Look for the two orange stripes on a cream background.

Likes flowery meadows and gardens.

Wingspan is 40mm. Approx.

Visible from april till September.

Caterpillars are cream below and black on top with orange tufts, they overwinter as a group in a silk nest.

Caterpillars feed on toadflax, plantains etc.



Spotted Fritillary.

### **Clouded yellow: - (*Colias crocea* )**

This butterfly is fast flying and hardly ever opens it's wings when at rest. The outer edge of the upper wing surfaces has a wide black border from front to rear. Can be seen from April to October in meadows and flowery scrubland.

Wingspan is approx. 50mm.

Caterpillars feed on clover, vetch and similar legumes.

About 10% of the females have a paler colouration.



Clouded Yellow.



**Southern White Admiral: -**  
**( *Limenitis reducta*. )**

The upper wing surfaces are black with a slight violet sheen and white markings. The underside is russet brown with white and grey markings and small black spots at the edges.

Can be seen gliding on the perimeter of woodland and shrubs from May till September.

Wingspan is 55mm.

Caterpillars feed on honeysuckle.



Southern White Admiral.

**Common Blue: - ( *Polyommatus icarus*. )**

This is a male, the female is brown with blue on the upper wing surface, the upper wing is also bordered with orange spots containing a smaller black spot.

To be found on grassy meadows.

The wingspan is about 35mm.

Can be seen from April to October.

Caterpillars feed on birdsfoot trefoil and similar plants.



Common Blue.

**Eastern Bath White: -**  
**( *Pontia Edusa* ).**

The Eastern Bath White is visibly indistinguishable from the Bath White. The top surfaces of the wings are white with black Dalmatian like spots on the wingtips. Found throughout the majority of eastern and south eastern Europe.

Habitat is rough scrubland at low altitudes.

Caterpillars feed on wild crucifers etc.

Active from February to October.

Wingspan is approx 45mm.



Bath White. ( Eastern ).

**Hummingbird Hawkmoth: -  
( *Macroglossum stellatarum* )**

Active during daylight. Wingspan up to 50mm. Unmistakeable in its hummingbird like behaviour as it visits flowers whilst feeding. Caterpillar is emerald green with longitudinal white and yellow stripes on each side, also a red dot on each body segment between the stripes. Caterpillars feed on bedstraws. Can be found all year round in southern Europe.



Hummingbird Hawkmoth.

**Tiger Moth: -**

This moth flies by day or night. Black and cream forewing with a beautiful scarlet hind wing, which is strikingly visible when flying. Flight period is from late May till early September. Habitat includes, Riverbanks and other moist environments. Wingspan is approx. 50mm.



Tiger Moth.

**Convolvulus Hawkmoth: - ( *Agrius convolvuli* )**

A migrant from Africa every spring to breed in Europe. Can be seen regularly at dusk when it resembles a hummingbird as it feeds with its very long proboscis. This photo is at a mandarin tree. Distinguishable by its greyish head and pink striped abdomen. Caterpillars feed on bindweed and other members of the convolvulus family. Wingspan is approx 100mm.



Convolvulus Hawkmoth.

**Giant Peacock Moth: - ( *Saturnia Pyri* )** This species is the largest moth to be found in Europe. Its wingspan is close to 140mm. Therefore it is understandable why it is often thought to be a bat when flying at night. This photo is the female, the male has feather like antennae. The adult moth does not feed, but the caterpillars which are 10cm. long, feeds on various deciduous trees including fruit trees and is regarded as a nuisance by fruit tree owners. They are bright green with blue protrusions topped with irritant bristles. The moth is active from March to late June.



Giant Peacock Moth.



## SEA LIFE



Sea Urchin's exoskeleton.

The crystal clear waters surrounding Corfu contain an amazing hidden habitat, with its own flora and fauna. Glimpses of this alien world can be snatched in the net of the local fishermen, or better still whilst snorkelling in the warm waters. A boat trip or ferry crossing could possibly lead to a close encounter with Dolphins; one of their favourite pastimes is "bowriding" the bow wave of large boats and ships.



Striped Dolphins.

The northern and western coastlines have more traditional sandy beaches and therefore larger waves, whereas the eastern coast has pebble beaches with very calm seas, indeed it resembles a large inland lake and is often as flat as a millpond during the summer months. Ideal for snorkelling.

Due to the relatively unpolluted water's in this area of the Mediterranean, several endangered species cling on to their very existence on some of Corfu's neighbouring islands.

The Monk seal of which less than 500 individuals remain on this planet, some off the coast of Morocco and in the Mediterranean its last stronghold is on the islands of Zakynthos and Cephalonia. Monk seals are very shy and avoid humans at all costs so they should never be approached.

The Loggerhead turtle is another endangered species found in these waters, the only marine turtle known to nest in Greece. One of its most important nesting sites in Greece is at Laganas on Zakynthos. Threats to its existence include: - Development on nesting beaches and marine pollution i.e. - fishing nets and plastic bags.

Snorkelling amongst the seaweed encrusted rocks is guaranteed to reveal many strange and otherwise private creatures.

Blennies, crabs, sea urchin's, octopus and the apparently inanimate sea cucumber, a strange sausage like creature, about five or six inches long with leathery skin. When taken from the water and squeezed it will exude a jet of water just like a water pistol-very useful!!



Taking in the nets near Messongi.



If when on holiday and the weather is bad, a trip to Corfu town may seem like a sensible way to spend the day: - be sure to visit the open air market adjacent to the new fort, where many species of fish are on sale, some quite bizarre.

A few minutes away from the open air market is the berth of Corfu's glass bottomed boat. The perfect way to see a lot of the underwater flora and fauna without getting your feet wet. Be prepared to wait your turn though as they are often quite busy.





A market bargain.



Common dolphin.



Waterspout near kotsakia 2006.

Occasional visitors to the seas around Corfu are the whales, a number of these majestic animals inhabit the Mediterranean including, the Sperm whale, Pilot whale, Curviers beaked whale and by far the largest in these waters is the Fin whale, up to 20mtrs. or more in length. Dolphins are a much more common sight, although their numbers have dwindled dramatically in the last century. A long ferry crossing usually presents the opportunity of seeing one or more species.

**The Common dolphin** which despite it's name is quite rare is identifiable by a distinct dark "V" shaped mark directly below the dorsal fin. Now an endangered species.

**The Striped dolphin**, by far the most numerous has dark stripes starting from behind the eyes and continuing rearwards towards the tail.

**Risso's dolphin**, which looks like a whale, it lacks the stereotypical dolphin's beak. Generally mottled grey with brighter undersides and about 3 ½ mtrs. long.

**Bottlenose dolphin**, the star of most aquariums has a strong looking head with a distinctive forehead and is grey/black in appearance with a lighter underside.

Another spectacular inhabitant of these waters is **Noctiluca miliaris**, a bioluminescent marine protozoan, responsible for the beautiful phosphorescence seen in the sea at night. Large by protozoan standards, 0.6 – 2mm. In diameter. This tiny creature emits a greenish-yellow light when disturbed to light up the sea around boats, nets and swimmers.

The high temperatures in the summer months sporadically lead to strange atmospheric conditions conducive to the creation of tornados or when over water, waterspouts.

A truly awe inspiring sight of the power of nature. Fortunately these don't have the ferocity or longevity of their cousins in America.

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