

Orchids of Rhodes tour for Orchid Conservation Alliance

Mariposa Nature Tours trip report

30th March – 6th April 2025



Tour leaders Jon Dunn & Sarah Cuttle

Trip report by Jon Dunn

(Images © Jon Dunn)



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[Please note – while some of the orchids encountered in Rhodes have common, vernacular English names, many do not. Rather than impose our own clumsy vernacular names upon the latter, we've stuck with the scientific names in the interests of accuracy and clarity. However, where a widely-used vernacular name exists, it's used (suffixed with its scientific name) in the text that follows, e.g. Giant Orchid *Himantoglossum robertianum*. Similarly, where hybrids have known formal names, they are used – e.g. *Ophrys x kalteiseniana* to describe *Ophrys ferrum-equinum x reinholdii* – but where no such formal name could be found, we have simply described the presumed parents in question, e.g. *Ophrys ferrum-equinum x regis-ferdinandii*]

Arrivals day, Sunday 30th March



Arrivals day proceeded wonderfully smoothly, with everyone accounted for and conveyed to our welcoming hotel in the mountainside village of Embonas in time for a delicious welcome lunch – our first taste of Mama's lovely home cooking!

After lunch, we drove all of two or three minutes out of the village to explore on foot a track network that ascends the lower slopes of Mt Attaviros, mountain upon which Embonas nestles. Having explored the area for many years now, Jon knew the individual terraces of the mountain, both cultivated and abandoned alike, like old friends and, indeed, some of the special orchids to be seen here really are annual familiars – not least a dense patch of approaching 100 *Ophrys ferrum-equinum* that he introduced us to shortly into the walk.

Nor were they alone – they shared that one terrace with a yellow-flowered bee orchid, *Ophrys sicula*, and the rich royal purple flowers of *Orchis anatolica*, a particularly delicate and refined orchid. Neither of the latter adjectives could fairly be applied to the nearby Giant Orchid *Himantoglossum robertianum* that we saw in their dozens – these large orchids look a little like their flowers are made of melted candlewax, slightly lumpy and misshapen. Nonetheless, they have real chutzpah and presence, and Jon was rightly chided for being a little unkind about their appearance!

No such admonishments were necessary for the real star of the afternoon, *Ophrys reinholdii* – these dramatic orchids have velvety lips that approach black, so dark are they, beautifully contrasting with snow white speculum patterning. These, by some margin,



were the orchid of the day. Not endemic to Rhodes, it's here on the island where they're by a long way most readily seen and in the greatest numbers anywhere in the Dodecanese.

Suitably introduced to a mere taster of the orchid delights the week ahead promised us, we returned to the hotel for a more fulsome display of Mama's cooking skills, with a delicious three course dinner awaiting us in the early evening after our first run through our orchid checklist, with Jon and Sarah on hand to identify any mystery plants that had been photographed earlier in the day.

Monday 31st March



Orchis italica

After breakfast on this, our first full day in Rhodes, we set off for Rodos Old Town, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, where we would meet our dear friend and local cultural guide, Nektaria. The morning would be spent in her company exploring the streets of the old town, where the architecture, defensive walls and turrets, and the Royal Palace all spoke eloquently of Rhodes' turbulent history over the centuries. A green island as lush and strategically placed on the cusp of Europe and the Middle East would always attract human attention of the wrong kind, and with Nektaria as our guide we learned of the various occupations, invasions, and cultural shifts that had combined to make Rhodes the Dodecanese island it is today.

After a delicious lunch in one of the town's charming restaurants we said au revoir to Nektaria and made our way slowly back across the island towards our hotel, making the first of three strategic orchid stops along the way. The first, a craggy hillside, was home to a magnificent colony of Naked Man Orchid *Orchis italica* – we speculated as to what the appropriate collective noun should be for such an assemblage of proud plants. When we spotted our first Serapias tongue orchid in their midst, a small example of *Serapias bergonii*, Karen was heard to observe dryly about the sight of a tongue amongst a collection of naked men!

Downhill, we stopped again to admire some more accessible Naked Man Orchid and, nearby, Sarah found the first of what would prove to be many dozens of Pink Butterfly Orchid *Anacamptis papilionacea*. These beautiful, delicate orchids were proving popular with us all for photographs, and none more so than that which Brian found with a solitary bee busily pollinating it, the orchid's greyish-green pollinia stuck to its head.

Exploring an area of stony riverbank nearby gave us many more Pink Butterfly Orchid, but also smaller numbers of



Anacamptis papilionacea



Ophrys cornutula

Serapias bergonii, *Ophrys sicula*, and *Ophrys ferrum-equinum*. We were on the cusp of leaving here when Jon found the first of the week's *Ophrys lucis*, adding to our haul of *Ophrys* bee orchids for the afternoon.

A final stop near to our hotel promised more *Ophrys*, and it delivered spectacularly. Here we knew from Jon's prior knowledge of the area that we could expect some late examples of the rather understated brown *Ophrys cinereophila*, and these were duly noted – but nearby there were some spectacular examples of bristly, insect-like *Ophrys regis-ferdinandii*, and the first of the week's colourful and extravagantly be-horned *Ophrys cornutula*, greatly appreciated by all, and in particular Karen and Paul. By the roadside were yet more *Ophrys ferrum-*

equinum and *Ophrys reinholdii*, the latter including a very strikingly contrasting black and white example of its kind, and not surprisingly given the proximity of the latter two species to one another, a clear example of *Ophrys x kalteiseniana*, their hybrid offspring.

Tuesday 1st April

The weather forecast for today was pretty apocalyptic, with Greek national weather warnings of storms and heavy rain forecast for Rhodes during the course of the day, and dawn breaking grey over our hotel with looming clouds cloaking the top of Mt Attaviros. We decided to head to the southern end of the island, our logic being that this was potentially likely to dodge the weather that afflicted the rest of the island. A calculated gamble, and one that paid off, as we didn't experience a drop of rain all day until the very moment we returned to the hotel that afternoon with a rich haul of orchids under our belts.

The wind was blowing strongly from the south, and had been doing so all night – before we could set off for the south end of the island we had to clean our vehicles' windows of a thick layer of red North African dust that had been deposited on them overnight. Further signs of an African influence were visible during the drive south – fair numbers of Painted Lady *Vanessa cardui* butterflies passing over the road and, with every passing mile, more and more large dragonflies on the wing – at times, hundreds were visible high in the sky and hunting low over coastal vegetation. Alas none were settling and thence approachable, so their identity remained for now tantalisingly elusive. (As the week wore on, settled insects finally revealed them to be Vagrant Emperor *Anax ephippiger*, an irruptive African species).

We spent the morning wandering a large system of ruderal fields near Kattavia, with new orchids coming thick and fast. *Ophrys* orchids love broken ground, and here they were



Ophrys cretica



Ophrys rhodia (chlorotic)

flourishing in vast abundance – many thousands of orchids must have been seen between us in the course of the morning, with colourful *Ophrys cretica* and *Ophrys lutea* particularly numerous. There were a great many Mirror Orchid *Ophrys speculum* and *Ophrys regis-ferdinandii* to be seen, and plenty of *Ophrys x butleri* their hybrid offspring, also to be found. In no time we were also seeing the first of many *Ophrys rhodia* with their characteristically patterned lips; and after some searching, Jon found a fine example of the closely related, but more attractively coloured *Ophrys umbilicata*. Before lunch we made a beeline for three special orchids found the previous year – a hybrid between *Ophrys*

cretica and *Ophrys mammosa*; a hyperchromic *Ophrys cretica*; and a chlorotic, pale wraith of an *Ophrys rhodia*.

Lunch was taken a few minutes down the road at a small chapel, where we ate our picnics in the sun surrounded by a few more *Ophrys cretica* and *regis-ferdinandii*. Nearby were our first *Serapias carica*, a large-flowered and bristly, deep burgundy tongue-orchid; and good numbers of colourful *Ophrys cornutula*.

The remainder of the afternoon was spent on a shallow hillside in phrygana habitat. The wind was significantly picking up by this stage, so our every step had to count.



Anacamptis coriophora

And how they did!

More magnificent *Serapias carica* were duly admired before Sarah was on *Anacamptis*-finding form, quickly spotting our first Pyramidal Orchid *Anacamptis pyramidalis* and, shortly afterwards, a lovely *Anacamptis coriophora* in full bloom too. New *Ophrys* weren't neglected – Brian found our first *Ophrys iricolor*, while Jon found a very stunted *Ophrys calypsus*. On the way back to our vehicles we had one final new orchid to add to our daily tally – a couple of typically diminutive, dark *Ophrys parvula*, their black lips beautifully offset by thin, lime-green edging.

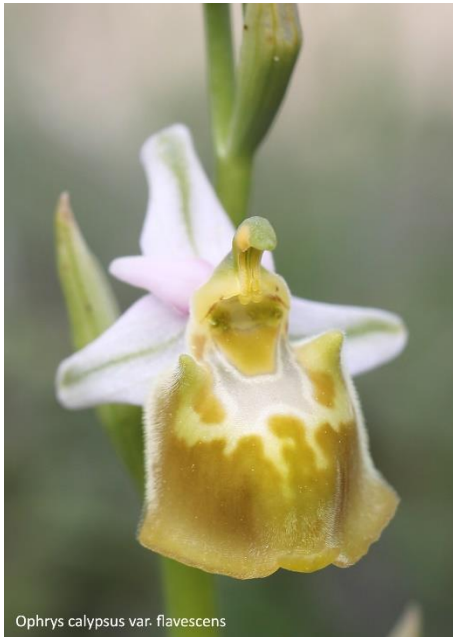


Ophrys parvula

We arrived back at our hotel in the very nick of time for, having avoided rain all day, the heavens opened – the bad weather that we would later learn had afflicted the

north of the island all day so badly now arriving on our very doorstep, with torrential rain falling until sunset.

Wednesday 2nd April



Ophrys calypsus var. *flavescens*

We were set to meet Nektaria again this morning at the beautiful coastal town of Lindos, but we were able to build an hour for orchid-hunting into our drive across the island to meet her. We stopped at a small olive grove near Lardos, where a burgeoning colony of *Ophrys calypsus* was to be found. Unlike the stunted example we'd seen the day before in the arid phrygana habitat, these plants were exuberantly happy, with many boasting multiple large flowers on their flowerspikes, and some growing well over a foot tall.

Nearby, Jon had a couple of special, unique examples of their ilk to share with the group – one, a *flavescens* form, had none of the usual brown or pink tones to be expected in its kind, and was instead a yellowish-green colour – we all agreed this genetic rarity was a very

elegant beauty indeed. Where there's a beauty, there's sometimes a beast... and nearby, we found it – a *lusus* form of *Ophrys calypsus*, with two large lips fused together on one flower.

From here we made our way to Lindos, a white-painted, compact gem of an old town, surrounded by an impossibly turquoise blue sea, and shielded by the ancient acropolis on its seaward side. We met Nektaria in the town square, all of us admiring and petting the many cats that call Lindos home. Wending our way through the narrow streets, with Nektaria as our guide, we learned of the maritime history of the town, the buildings' architecture speaking eloquently down the centuries of the former inhabitants' lives – their success as captains of ships, their accrued wealth and status, their social lives, and their relationships with their gods. Nektaria's local knowledge is profound, and we simultaneously learned of contemporary life in Rhodes too, and how it related to the island's past. This was a fascinating insight.



Ophrys calypsus f. *lusus*

Some of us then headed up the steep stone steps into the acropolis, while others continued to explore the town and enjoy a refreshing drink in the courtyard of a captain's house that now hosts a small bar and restaurant. Those who headed to the acropolis with Nektaria not only got to admire the defensive structures and places of worship it housed, but also some fine Lesser Kestrel *Falco naumanni* and Alpine Swift *Tachymarptis melba* that were clearly



Ophrys colossaea

relishing the strengthening wind. Looking north from our vantage point on the acropolis, we could see that bad weather was not far away...

Saying adieu to Nektaria, we drove 10 minutes up the coast to our lunch site, another olive grove. Our arrival coincided with that of the storm, heavy rain falling as our vehicles drew to a halt. We elected to eat our picnics in the dry sanctuary of the vehicles and wait the storm out – looking at radar maps of the rain on our phones, we could see there was a break in the storm coming our way. We just needed to be patient for a little while before our moment would come.

When the rain stopped, we were ready, and jumped out of the vehicles. Our quarry was a very little way into the olive grove – a colony of *Ophrys colossaea*.

This large-flowered orchid flowers early at this site, and the first of its kind were obligingly coming into bloom for us. We could hear thunderclaps in the near distance, announcing the approach of the next wave of the storm, so we chose not to linger here, though Cyndy and Brian saw the first *Ophrys mammosa* of the week, much to Brian's evident delight...

Our final site of the afternoon was some half an hour away to the south, and this distance was sufficient to completely change the weather picture – we arrived at another olive grove to find it bathed in warm sunshine. This was after a brief stop en route when Jon spotted a new orchid at the roadside – a fine example of Man Orchid *Orchis anthropophora*. Sure enough here in Rhodes, we needed only to start looking in any given area and we'd find more orchids – there were a number of *Ophrys cornutula* and *Serapias carica* also blooming with yards of the Man Orchid.

Our final olive grove was a large and extensive one, with many gnarly and ancient olive trees beneath which to wander and look for orchids. We had three principle targets here, and none of them were to disappoint. First up, and most numerous, was *Ophrys blitopertha* with its long, slightly domed yellow-edged flowers. This orchid is pollinated not, like most of the *Ophrys* tribe, by a bee or a wasp, but instead by a scarab beetle, *Blitopertha lineolata*. While we didn't see any of the beetles performing their pollination duties, we saw hundreds of the orchid in flower beneath the trees.



Serapias carica

Scattered amongst them were a few darker *Ophrys* – these were the rare near-endemic *Ophrys attaviria*, a local treasure that's always found sparingly in loose, hidden colonies on



Ophrys lindia

the island. Rarer still and harder yet to find is *Ophrys lindia*, a small and beautiful thing. Tucked away in a corner of the olive grove were three plants in flower. Today had been a great success with all of our olive grove orchid targets obliging us, and at this midway point in our orchid-hunting expedition in Rhodes we found ourselves, at the evening checklist, sitting on a haul of 29

species seen well thus far. Tomorrow would significantly augment that as we would be exploring a different habitat type altogether in the heart of the island...

Thursday 3rd April

Having largely concentrated on the coastal fringes of Rhodes to date, today we stayed inland, our route for the day never straying within sight of the coast. The pine-clad mountain of Profitis Ilias is an easy 20 minute drive from our hotel, so we were up in the rich orchid-hunting territory of its upper elevations in no time. The day had dawned grey and cloudy again, though mercifully the sun was to burn through the cloud as the day wore on, and by the afternoon we were bathed in sunshine.

We began our orchid-hunting wandering beneath the pine trees, quickly bumping into more black-and-white flowered *Ophrys reinholdii*, and nearby some fine Pink Butterfly Orchid too. Brian's sharp eyes spotted the first new *Ophrys* of the day, a small colony of fresh *Ophrys oreas* while, nearby, Sarah found the first of a number of primrose yellow Provence Orchid *Orchis provincialis*. We scattered beneath the trees, gathering whenever somebody found something interesting. Orchids, both new and familiar to us, came regularly during the next hour or so – both pink and white forms of sweetly honey-scented Dense-flowered Orchid *Neotinea maculata*, *Ophrys dodekanensis* with its swept-back pink sepals, and some fine drifts of deep purple *Orchis anatolica*.



Orchis provincialis

We moved our vehicles a couple of minutes uphill, using them to take the sting out of the climb before we abandoned them for a short walk uphill to an open clearing. The walk was a delight, with many large and fresh examples of Provence Orchid flowering beneath the pine trees and, as we made our way towards the hilltop, the first of many delicately marked Green-winged Orchid *Anacamptis morio* with their tracers of green lines within their purple and white sepals, and Milky Orchid *Neotinea lactea* – the latter species a particularly beautiful one, with rich red freckles heavily suffusing their pale white lips. The hilltop itself



Ophrys dodekanensis

was home to a great many examples of all three species, so we enjoyed picking our way from flower to flower here, taking our time to appreciate each and every one.

Among them were a handful more *Ophrys dodekanensis* and, a little way downhill, there were the first *Ophrys omegaifera* of the week, their heavily curved flowers looking like boxing gloves or curled cat paws.

We drove down off the mountain to our lunch site, at the edge of some pine woodlands that line the Gadouras river valley. The sun was fully out by now, and a short walk after lunch ensured everyone had now seen *Ophrys mammosa*. Small parties of Fallow

Deer bounded through the woodland around us. Working our way down the valley we stopped near to the Italian Bridge for a fine display of Naked Man Orchid, and still more *Ophrys regis-ferdinandii*. Pete quietly announced he'd found an orchid that looked different to those we'd seen hitherto and, sure enough, he had – our first *Ophrys polyxo*! This was greatly admired and appreciated by all.

Our penultimate site for this day is invariably an absolute peach, and so it proved once again today – an olive grove bordered by a bowl of phrygana hillside, and an absolute hotbed for *Ophrys*. We were soon enjoying our first *Ophrys sitiaca* of the week – an early-flowering species, it was good to catch up with one in fresh condition here. Nearby we soon found the first of good numbers of *Ophrys persephona*, a dark orchid aptly named after Persephone, queen of the underworld in Greek myth. These lovely orchids were surrounded by a great many delicate Rhodes Fritillary *Fritillaria rhodia*, an island endemic with beautiful butter yellow flowers.



Ophrys persephona

Cyndy swiftly announced she'd found a *Serapias* tongue orchid which, as we expected at this stronghold for the species in question, proved to be our first *Serapias politisii*. Many more were to follow in the vicinity. Returning to the edges of the olive grove, we found more *persephona* and *sitiaca*, allowing for a side-by-side comparison. Nearby, we rounded off what had proved yet again to be a superb site for us with our first Bumblebee Orchid *Ophrys bombyliflora*. These tiny orchids took a bit of finding – a full five minutes! – before Sarah's sharp eyes spotted our first, and these were soon followed by many more. We noted how similar their flowers were in appearance to the Ewoks in Star Wars!



Anacamptis laxiflora

Our final site for the day was some miles away on the outskirts of the village of Laerma where, in a damp water meadow, we found still more Ewoks (sorry, Bumblebee Orchids) and, far more obviously, good numbers of Loose-flowered Orchid *Anacamptis laxiflora*. These tall, majestic orchids were a fabulous sight to behold with their rich, royal purple flowers. A couple more *Ophrys polyxo* put in an appearance to round off what had proved to be an excellent day – when we sat down for a pre-dinner drink and the daily checklist, we discovered we'd seen over 20 species of orchid in the course of the day, and a good many new species in their number – our weekly total now sat on a very respectable 42 species. What would tomorrow bring?

Friday 4th April

The weather finally dawned clear and sunny today – no more cloudy nonsense to contend with! We'd deliberately saved today for later in the week, as we'd be heading to a site at high elevation in the south of the island – the high elevation serving to carry us a little way back in orchid-time, giving us a decent chance of picking up some late-flowering examples of species that traditionally flower earlier in the spring elsewhere on the island, and the location itself harbouring at least one particularly charismatic species of bee orchid that we particularly enjoy seeing. The stage was set for a journey up to what we know as Windmill Hill.

The roads that lead to this renowned location gradually deteriorate from smooth tarmac to a graded gravel track – in the past, this journey has been 'entertaining' from a driver's perspective! Today it went very smoothly indeed and, by mid-morning, we were exploring the dry phrygana-type habitat at the summit of the hill. Orchids came thick and fast – many more *Ophrys polyxo*, *Ophrys omegaifera*, and our first *Ophrys phryganae*, the latter completing the *lutea*-type yellow bee orchids set for the island. Rich purple *Orchis anatolica* were extremely commonplace here, while we bumped into regular *Ophrys reinholdii* and *Ophrys ferrum-equinum*.

Initially there was no sign of either of the *tenthredinifera*-type bee orchids we hoped to see – or rather, there were just shrivelled husks of their kind that had gone beyond the point of being either identifiable to species, or pleasant to gaze upon... Jon began putting in the hard yards, scouring the hillside for examples of either. After a while, he'd found both *Ophrys korae* and *Ophrys leochroma*, and gathered Brian and Cyndy to come and see them.



Ophrys korae



Ophrys halia

As is so often the case, once the first orchids that are playing hard to get are found, others follow in short order. Jon found a better example of *Ophrys korae* nearer to the vehicles that was more accessible for the rest of the group to see; and shortly after that, Sarah found an absolutely mint-fresh example of it that everyone gathered to enjoy. We'd been seeing sporadic Rhodes Cyclamen *Cyclamen rhodium* all morning, but Margery significantly trumped them with the non-orchid find of the day in the form of a newly opened and immaculate snow-white Rhodes Peony *Paeonia clusii* ssp *rhodia*.

We dropped downhill for our lunch, the restless Jon soon whooping with delight as he ate on the hoof – never switching off from orchid-hunting for the group, he'd found the first half dozen *Ophrys halia* of the

week. These large-flowered, colourful orchids are always a feast for the eyes, and so these proved. Nearby, we found first of all an immaculate *Ophrys leochroma* and then, nearby, Jon spotted a great rarity – our second *flavescens* form of orchid for the week, a var. *flavescens* *Ophrys halia*! This was a tremendous find that inspired the rarely seen Jon Happy Dance...

A further drop in elevation yielded still more *Ophrys halia*, and fair numbers of *Ophrys ferrum-equinum*, and *Ophrys korae* and *leochroma*. Gilding the *Ophrys* lily, Cyndy added *Ophrys bombyliflora* to the day's tally.

Our journey home to our hotel and the truly exceptional evening meal that awaited us was broken by a stop at a pleasant taverna where we enjoyed a refreshing drink, and made the acquaintance of the taverna cat – the waiter confided in us that he'd spoilt it to the point where it would accept nothing less than grilled souvlaki! Sure enough, Paul's kindly supplied cat biscuits were treated with disdain by this particularly spoilt feline... other cats we'd met this week had enjoyed the treats we carried, but this aloof creature was having none of it. A village dog, much more amicable than the cat, made short work of them...



Ophrys halia var. flavescens

Upon our return to the village, Sarah and Jon made a mysterious recce before we met for the evening checklist. We're not known for 'winging it', and leave nothing to chance. They came back to the hotel with the good news that they'd confirmed a nearby site held more new orchids for us the following morning... and, when we worked our way through today's sightings, we found ourselves now sitting on a fine total of 47 species of orchid seen during the week. Would we hit the magic 50 tomorrow?

Saturday 5th April



Ophrys mammosa

The fruits of Sarah and Jon's mysterious recce were revealed to us shortly after breakfast. We were bound for ancient Kamiros, a stupendous archaeological site on the coast of Rhodes, where we were scheduled to meet Nektaria for one final morning in her company. Nonetheless, the day needed to start with some orchids, and what better than a couple of new species?

A little way out of our village base we left the quiet main road and drove a short distance up a graded track to park in an area of quiet woodland. Straight away, there were orchids to be seen, including some fine examples of *Ophrys mammosa* right beside our parking area. We walked for 10 easy minutes along the track, passing through woodland with a fine view of Mt Attaviros on the horizon and, in the distance, the blue

of the sea painting a line further away still.

At the edges of the track were more *Ophrys* – colourful *Ophrys polyxo*, bristly *Ophrys regis-ferdinandii*, and still more of our monochrome favourite, the striking *Ophrys reinholdii*. It was not, however, these that we'd come here specifically to see, charming though all four of these bee orchid species undeniably were. Our quarry awaited us in an old, hidden olive grove...

Here was a small colony of a scarce species on the island, *Ophrys sancti-isidorii*, with one example in fine flower to be enjoyed by us all at the foot of an olive tree. And nearby, in the damp lower reaches of the grove, something else new besides – a suitably diminutive Small-flowered Tongue-orchid *Serapias parviflora*. After an hour or so enjoying their company, we moved on towards Kamiros, our orchid tally now resting on 49 species for the week.

At Kamiros we met Nektaria, and spent the rest of the morning slowly traversing the site of the excavated ancient city. With Nektaria as our guide, the intricacies of the site were clear – why and how the city was built; how it functioned as a community both socially and practically, right down to the mechanics of the running fresh water the houses in the city enjoyed in the city's heyday; the city's defences and place in the wider Rhodian world at the time; and, of course, how all of this related to the Rhodian culture of the present day. We finished our exploration of the city grateful to Nektaria for her insight and humour – Rhodes has no



Ophrys regis-ferdinandii

better ambassador than this colourful, charming, and intelligent woman. We bade sad goodbyes to her at lunchtime, all of us surprised and delighted to be given gifts by her as she left – gifts to delight the palate and bring us good fortune alike!

After lunch, we wended our way back to Embonas, pausing briefly as we passed the hotel for a comfort break before heading up Mt Attaviros in the afternoon. The mountain had been our benevolent neighbour all week, sheltering us on its slopes, and it was now time to pay our respects to it, and to see what orchids it harboured at higher elevations.



Ophrys candica

A small road leads up the mountain, taking the sting out of the climb – we were able to drive to where the road levels out for a while, and were able from here to walk easily on a small plateau with sparse pine forest coverage that is prime orchid habitat. Of course, orchids were numerous here – the sites we'd visited this past week had unfailingly delivered the goods in that regard – and right beside our parking spot we were straight into yet more fresh *Ophrys reinholdii* and, at the very edge of the road itself, some fine examples of *Ophrys omegaifera*.

However, it was one of Rhodes' most colourful and impressive *Ophrys* bee orchids with which Jon and Sarah wished to round off the week, and this was the beautiful *Ophrys candica*, a highly attractive and

variable species that abounds up there on the mountainside. No two flowers of *candica* are ever quite the same, even on the same plant, so we greatly enjoyed wandering from one plant to another, comparing each to the last. Sarah and Jon had one final surprise for the guests – two bottles of chilled, local white wine they'd collected from lovely Yiannis, our host at the hotel, as we passed through Embonas. We opened these and, with the sapphire blue sea far below us as our view, we stood in the late afternoon sunshine and toasted the orchidaceous triumphs of the week – a magnificent tally of 50 species enjoyed, a great many of those seen in their hundreds or even thousands as the days went by.

There was one final cherry to place upon the cake of the week – our network of European orchid-hunting friends invariably means we have friends on the island at the same time as our tours, and they share news of their special finds with us. One such unique plant had been found just outside Embonas, and we couldn't resist it – an *Ophrys polyxo* with two lips on one flower? Yes please!



Ophrys polyxo f. *lusii*

The plant's position, up a steep bank, meant it wasn't for everyone, but Karen and Brian were feeling intrepid, and their agility was duly rewarded when we located this striking plant. A final flourish for a week that had been packed full of terrestrial orchids of all forms and colours.

Before dinner that evening, we got to relive some of the week's highlights, and to virtually visit one another's orchid collections and growing spaces back home, courtesy of Sarah, who'd been gathering images from everyone as the week progressed. The stories, laughter, and drinks flowed before we sat down to one final feast courtesy of Mama's kitchen.

Departure day, 6th April

Alas, all good things eventually come to an end. After a leisurely final breakfast we loaded our bags into our vehicles, and made our way to the airport in good time for everyone's onward travel. We'd made some firm new friends this week, so we knew this wasn't goodbye – merely an au revoir until our paths would cross again someday, hopefully soon.

Jon and Sarah would particularly like to thank all of our OCA guests for joining us this year in Rhodes. We know the island better than anyone, and enjoy the benefit of a network of other orchid-hunters who willingly share their special finds with us. If keen orchid-hunters would like to see the best orchids of Rhodes, be they full species, hybrids, colour forms or variations, fuelled by the best of Greek food at a comfortable, friendly hotel in the heart of orchid-country, we believe there's nobody better-suited to share the orchids of Rhodes with guests, and look forward to doing so again in 2026.

Newsletter – if you'd like to join our mailing list and be the first to hear of new tours and special offers, you can join the Mariposa Nature Tours family on www.mariposanature.com

Social media - For the most up to the minute news of what we're seeing, give us a follow on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or YouTube, and see live sightings from the field, photos and videos, and all the very latest Mariposa Nature Tours news.

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And finally... We anticipate returning to Rhodes in 2026 with another exclusive OCA orchid-hunting tour; and also in 2026, we invite OCA guests to join us for an exclusive orchid-hunting tour in Italy's renowned natural rock garden, the incomparably beautiful Gargano Peninsula. We hope to see you there!

Orchids of Rhodes OCA 30 th March – 6 th April 2025										
	Species name	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7	Day 8	
	GENUS OPHRYS									
	Ophrys iricolor group									
1	<i>Ophrys iricolor</i>			✓						
	Ophrys fusca group									
2	<i>Ophrys cinereophila</i>		✓							
3	<i>Ophrys parvula</i>			✓			✓			
4	<i>Ophrys sancti-isidorii</i>							✓		
	Ophrys attaviria group									
5	<i>Ophrys attaviria</i>				✓					
6	<i>Ophrys eptapigiensis</i>									
7	<i>Ophrys lindia</i>				✓					
	Ophrys blitopertha group									
8	<i>Ophrys blitopertha</i>				✓					
9	<i>Ophrys persephona</i>					✓				
	Ophrys lutea group									
10	<i>Ophrys lutea</i>			✓	✓					
11	<i>Ophrys phryganae</i>						✓			
12	<i>Ophrys sicula</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓		
	Ophrys omegaifera group									
13	<i>Ophrys basilissa</i>									
14	<i>Ophrys apollonae</i>					✓	✓			
15	<i>Ophrys omegaifera</i>					✓	✓	✓		
16	<i>Ophrys sitiaca</i>					✓				
	Ophrys speculum group									
17	<i>Ophrys regis-ferdinandii</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
18	<i>Ophrys speculum</i>			✓	✓					
	Ophrys tenthredinifera group									
19	<i>Ophrys leochroma</i>						✓			
20	<i>Ophrys korae</i>						✓			
21	<i>Ophrys bombyliflora</i>					✓	✓			
	Ophrys apifera group									
22	<i>Ophrys apifera</i>									
	Ophrys holoserica group									
23	<i>Ophrys candica</i>							✓		
24	<i>Ophrys colossaea</i>				✓					
25	<i>Ophrys samia</i>									
26	<i>Ophrys halia</i>						✓			
27	<i>Ophrys saliarisii</i>									
28	<i>Ophrys oreas</i>					✓				
	Ophrys oestrifera group									
29	<i>Ophrys cornutula</i>		✓	✓	✓					
30	<i>Ophrys dodekanensis</i>					✓				

	Species name	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7	Day 8	
	Ophrys heldreichii group									
31	<i>Ophrys calypsus</i>			✓	✓					
32	<i>Ophrys calypsus</i> var. <i>pseudoapulica</i>									
33	<i>Ophrys calypsus</i> var. <i>scolopaxoides</i>									
34	<i>Ophrys polyxo</i>					✓	✓	✓		
	Species name	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7	Day 8	
	Ophrys umbilicata group									
35	<i>Ophrys rhodia</i>			✓	✓					
36	<i>Ophrys umbilicata</i>			✓						
	Ophrys reinholdii group									
37	<i>Ophrys reinholdii</i>	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓		
38	<i>Ophrys cretica</i> ssp. <i>beloniae</i>			✓						
	Ophrys argolica group									
39	<i>Ophrys lucis</i>		✓							
	Ophrys mammosa group									
40	<i>Ophrys ferrum-equinum</i>	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓		
41	<i>Ophrys mammosa</i>				✓	✓		✓		
	GENUS EPIPACTIS									
42	<i>Epipactis densifolia</i>									
	GENUS CEPHALANTHERA									
43	<i>Cephalanthera longifolia</i>									
	GENUS LIMODORUM									
44	<i>Limodorum abortivum</i>							nf		
45	<i>Limodorum abortivum</i> var. <i>rubrum</i>									
	GENUS SPIRANTHES									
46	<i>Spiranthes spiralis</i>									
	GENUS SERAPIAS									
47	<i>Serapias bergonii</i>		✓		✓	Nf				
48	<i>Serapias carica</i>			✓	✓					
49	<i>Serapias parviflora</i>							✓		
50	<i>Serapias politisii</i>					✓				
	GENUS ANACAMPTIS									
51	<i>Anacamptis collina</i>			nf						
52	<i>Anacamptis laxiflora</i>					✓				
53	<i>Anacamptis morio</i>					✓				
54	<i>Anacamptis papilionacea</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
55	<i>Anacamptis pyramidalis</i>			✓						
56	<i>Anacamptis sancta</i>									
57	<i>Anacamptis coriophora</i>			✓						

	GENUS NEOTINEA									
58	<i>Neotinea maculata</i>					✓	nf			
59	<i>Neotinea lactea</i>					✓				
	GENUS ORCHIS									
60	<i>Orchis anatolica</i>	✓				✓	✓	✓		
61	<i>Orchis anthropophora</i>				✓					
62	<i>Orchis italica</i>		✓		✓	✓				
63	<i>Orchis provincialis</i>					✓				
64	<i>Orchis simia</i>									
	GENUS HIMANTOGLOSSUM									
65	<i>Himantoglossum robertianum</i>	✓								
	Daily total:									
	Running total:									
	Species name	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7	Day 8	
	HYBRIDS									
	<i>Ophrys x kalteiseniana</i> (<i>ferrum-equinum</i> x <i>reinholdii</i>)		✓							
	<i>Ophrys x buttleri</i> (<i>regis-ferdinandii</i> x <i>speculum</i>)			✓						
	<i>Ophrys cretica</i> x <i>mammosa</i>			✓						
	BUTTERFLIES									
	Eastern Festoon <i>Zerynthia cerisy</i>							✓		
	Swallowtail <i>Papilio machaon</i>									
	Scarce Swallowtail <i>Iphiclides podalirius</i>				✓					
	Green-underside Blue <i>Glaucopsyche alexis</i>						✓	✓		
	Eastern Baton Blue <i>Pseudophilotes vicrama</i>			✓						
	Green Hairstreak <i>Callophrys rubi</i>							✓		
	Painted Lady <i>Vanessa cardui</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
	Red Admiral <i>Vanessa atalanta</i>									
	Eastern Dappled White <i>Euchloe ausonia</i>			✓						
	Clouded Yellow <i>Colias crocea</i>									

	MAMMALS									
	Fallow Deer <i>Dama dama</i>				✓					
	REPTILES									
	Black Whip Snake <i>Dolichophis jugularis</i>			✓						
	Balkan Green Lizard <i>Lacerta trilineata</i>									
	Starred Agama <i>Stellagama stellio</i>			✓						

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