

# Orchids of Rhodes tour for Orchid Conservation Alliance

Mariposa Nature Tours trip report

17<sup>th</sup>-24<sup>th</sup> March 2026

---

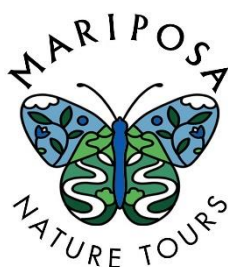


Tour leaders Jon Dunn & Sarah Cuttle

Trip report by Jon Dunn

(Images © Jon Dunn)

---



Mariposa Nature Tours Ltd

2 Ashtree Cottages

Langrove

Parkmill

Swansea

SA3 2EB, United Kingdom

Tel: +44 (0) 7748 598768

Email: [info@mariposanature.com](mailto:info@mariposanature.com)

Website: [www.mariposanature.com](http://www.mariposanature.com)

[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*]

### Day 1, arrivals day 17<sup>th</sup> March

With everyone on the same flight from Athens, and Rhodes airport extremely quiet, arrivals were a straightforward process and we were soon all on the road heading back to our hotel in Embonas where a warm welcome, a log fire in the dining room, and a delicious lunch awaited us.

Once everyone was checked in, and we'd had lunch and a chat about the outline of the week ahead, with no further ado we could get down to some orchid-hunting! With everyone having been travelling today – and for some who had come direct from the US, within the



*Ophrys ferrum-equinum* © Jon Dunn

past 24 hours – Jon and Sarah kept things easy this afternoon, with our orchid sites all within a two minute drive of our hotel. Embonas sits in the centre of the island of Rhodes, making it an ideal base from which to explore the island as a whole and, as a bonus, the pretty village lies right in the heart of prime orchid country.

Our first site a stony low hillside, began to deliver orchids from the very moment we set foot upon it, with the first of many dozens of *Ophrys ferrum-equinum* quickly found. This is a particularly striking bee orchid, with rich deep violet sepals, a dark inky black lip, and a shiny speculum often shaped like a horseshoe – seeing plenty of these, and in pristine condition, set the tone for the afternoon! Gisela spotted something different – our first *Ophrys dodecanensis*, albeit an example that was a little faded – while a few feet away stood a fine fresh *Ophrys polyxo* - a surprising orchid, for this is a later-flowering species. It was sat in a damp, sheltered dip, and perhaps this advantageous microclimate had hastened its flowering.

Jon led the group diagonally up the hillside towards two important *Ophrys* he and Sarah had located in a recce on the hillside that morning. Ours was a pleasantly meandering path, for as the group spread out on the slope, fresh discoveries were announced regularly – Monica found a beautiful patch of *Ophrys ferrum-equinum*, while Norman and Carolin were finding our first yellow-flowered *Ophrys sicula*, and shiny blue-flowered Mirror Orchid *Ophrys speculum*. Beside Monica's *Ophrys ferrum-equinum* was a lovely patch of *Ophrys*

*omegaifera*, the ‘boxing glove’ orchid – the brown lip of this species, while not colourful like many of its brethren, has a very distinctive shape, heavily curved at the tip and, when seen in profile, it looks rather like the shape of a boxing glove, or a curled cat’s paw.

This was a useful orchid to set in our minds, for the two species Jon had to share with us further downhill were both brown-flowered also, but distinctly different in their own right. One of the earliest-flowering *Ophrys* species on the island is *Ophrys sitiaca*, which has a dark brown, flat lip with a strongly marbled speculum. By mid-March the species is coming to the end of its flowering season, so seeing an example in pristine condition was a priority early in the week – and we had one such flowering plant ready and waiting for us.



*Ophrys sitiaca* © Jon Dunn



*Ophrys sancti-isoridii* © Jon Dunn

Nearby was something much scarcer, and an orchid that Jon was justly pleased to have found earlier in the day – a colony of a dozen *Ophrys sancti-isoridii*, another of the *fusca*-type brown *Ophrys*, with a distinctive elongated lip with a deeply incised stigmatic cavity whose yellow colouration bled down onto the sides of the lip; and with a richly coloured blue speculum when fresh. Having these ostensibly similar species almost side-by-side was useful for the purposes of comparison.

We left the hillside, but not before Monica had found a Pink Butterfly Orchid *Anacamptis papilionacea* higher on the site, and a couple of non-flowering Giant Orchid *Himantoglossum robertianum*, her orchid-hunting experience allowing her to recognise those distinctive orchid leaves at a glance. Cutting across country to our vehicle, Carolin saw our first flowering example of Giant Orchid – Jon reassured the group we’d see plenty more of those in just a few minutes time on the other side of the village!

Using the vehicle to take us through the village and to the base of a track that led onto the terraced slopes of Mt Attavros, Jon dropped the group and Sarah off and moved the van a few hundred yards downhill to a parking place. By the time he caught up with everyone five minutes later, Sarah had shared a gorgeous *Ophrys reinholdii* at the side of the track – one of our favourite species on the island, with beautiful contrasting black and white lips. With every turn of the concrete track, a new terrace opened up – the first with several fine flowering Giant Orchid, which were duly admired.

Gisela found our first *Orchis anatolica* at the side of the track – and a little higher up the track we walked onto a terrace upon which a large patch of these delicate, hot cerise orchids were thriving. Among them was something of a rarity – a pure white, alba variation.

These are an infrequent variation, and often rather smaller and weaker than their regularly coloured companions – this example however was a fine, strong plant, and still in pristine condition. These *Orchis anatolica* shared their terrace with *Ophrys ferrum-equinum*, *O. sicula*, and a handful more *O. reinholdii* – this was orchid-rich territory indeed, and a fine introduction to the joys of orchid-hunting on Rhodes!

We elected for an early dinner tonight, to allow for early nights and a chance to catch up on sleep for the weary travellers. Mama's home-cooking was as delicious as ever... and when we completed our pre-dinner checklist (and photo ID clinic), we found we'd already seen a dozen orchid species in the space of just a couple of hours in the field.



*Orchis anatolica* © Jon Dunn

## Day 2, 18<sup>th</sup> March

With poor weather forecast for much of today, it was with some relief that our itinerary moved us towards the shelter of Rhodes Old Town for the duration of the morning and early afternoon. This was to be our first cultural diversion of the week, accompanied by Team Mariposa's dear friend, and local guide and historian, Nektaria.

Nektaria's knowledge of the history and culture of her home island is second to none, and with her as our guide for the morning we explored the streets, fortifications, and strata of times gone by of the old, eponymous city of Rhodes, taking us from antiquity through to the dark days of the fascist occupation of the island in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Nektaria's local insight, of course, brought us right up to the current day, with tales of her family's everyday life helping to illustrate her answers to the many questions posed to her by the group,



*Serapias bergonii* © Jon Dunn

covering everything from the annual olive harvest to the education system on the island. Our walk through the city's pebbled streets eventually brought us to the palace and, having taken our time to admire and wonder at the many mosaics and other antiquities that were plundered and brought to decorate this architectural quirk, we then walked the short distance to a nearby restaurant to enjoy a fine cooked lunch.

We bid adieu to Nektaria, safe in the knowledge we'd be seeing her again as the week wore on, and moved along the coast to the Loutani river valley – this, we knew, was likely to be a visit curtailed by the weather, for the rain was steadily intensifying as the day progressed. Nonetheless, we made a spirited attempt to cover first a roadside site, picking our way around stunted pine trees beneath which orchids sheltered, and then a further hillside site nearby. The former yielded *Ophrys ferrum-equinum* and *Ophrys leochroma*, albeit rather soggy and dejected specimens, and our first *Serapias bergonii* tongue-orchids. The latter site

provided good views of Naked Man Orchid *Orchis italica* just coming into their full pomp, and our first *Ophrys dodecanensis* with their characteristic swept-back sepals.

We then headed homeward bound, back towards Embonas, the van's windscreen wipers getting a work-out on the way. It seemed like a wise decision to make a stop on the way into the village at our favourite ice cream parlour and coffee shop, for hot drinks to warm us and toast our ongoing success with the island's orchids.

### Day 3, 19<sup>th</sup> March

Today dawned grey and cloudy around our mountainside hotel, but with the weather forecast to be dry in the south of the island, we set our sights there after breakfast. The drive down towards Kattavia is a scenic one, and this was made all the better by the skies clearing and, ten minutes from our morning site, full sunshine! It was a joy to feel the sun on our faces and, with three hours in which to explore a large ruderal field and its adjacent stony, phrygana-clad hillside, the contrast with yesterday's rainy orchid-hunt could not have been starker.

The first hour was devoted to the ruderal field, and here we were immediately walking through a sea of orchids – thousands of Mirror Orchid *Ophrys speculum* were by some margin the most common species, and in perfect condition, their shiny blue faces turned to the sky to catch the attention of passing pollinators – and passing orchid-hunters too. Growing among them in smaller numbers were their close relative King Ferdinand's Orchid *Ophrys regis-ferdinandii* – while the phylogenetic taxonomists at Kew currently consider the two to be conspecific, it was instructive to see in the field how the two have retained their very different forms and integrity over the millennia. We would see hybrids between them later in the afternoon, but they remain a scarcity rather than a regular occurrence.



*Ophrys speculum* © Jon Dunn



*Anacamptis papilionacea* © Jon Dunn

Tom found, among the Mirror Orchids, our first *Ophrys cretica*, a delightful bee orchid with a black and white lip, and bruised cherry sepals and petals. Once we'd got our eye in we soon began finding many more of these attractive orchids scattered across the field. Here and there were some spikes of *Anacamptis collina* that had already finished flowering and had swollen ovaries; and some rosettes of *Anacamptis pyramidalis* and *A. coriophora* that had yet to flower. *Anacamptis* were teasing us... but at the side of the field we found the first of many magnificent and pristine Pink Butterfly Orchid *A. papilionacea* in full flower.

Moving onto the phrygana-clad hillside, new *Ophrys* orchids began to appear in quick succession. Jon had staked out a

lovely patch of *Ophrys parvula*, an orchid whose diminutive stature matched its name – we admired at close quarters its tiny, velvet black lip with thin, lime-green edges. Nearby, Carolin found our first *Ophrys cornutula*, an altogether more colourful affair, with pink sepals and protruberant long ‘horns’ framing its lip; and Gisela and Sarah found a patch of our first *Ophrys iricolor*, an orchid with a large lip almost an inch long, with an extensive iridescent blue speculum when freshly opened.



*Ophrys cornutula* © Jon Dunn

Our progress across the lower slopes of the hillside was, therefore, slow and considered as we spent plenty of time enjoying these orchids... Here and there were more examples of all these species, and more besides – our first *Serapias carica*, a dramatic example of the tongue-orchids with deep maroon, hairy-lipped flowers, and still more Pink Butterfly Orchid, including some lovely hyperchromic examples – some much more intensely cerise and heavily-marked than their counterparts, and one plant in particular a deep, suffused royal purple.

A little way uphill we found our first *Ophrys calypsus*, a large-flowered *Ophrys* just starting to bloom in this arid environment – Jon and Sarah promised more of this in due course in the lush environs of an old olive grove in days to come. Nearby were a couple of Rhodes Fritillary *Fritillaria rhodia* for some non-orchid variety – though, to be fair, we’d already been enjoying other wildflowers, with Turkish Buttercup and Freesia both greatly admired hitherto this morning.



*Ophrys cretica* © Jon Dunn

Walking back towards our vehicle Jon found a surprise – an early-flowering Pyramidal Orchid *Anacamptis pyramidalis*, which was a species Carolin had particularly hoped to see. Monica found another example as she explored the higher reaches of the hill.

We moved a few minutes along the road to enjoy our lunch sat in the sun outside a rural chapel, finding still more orchids as a pleasant distraction. After we’d finished lunch we headed to a large network of ruderal fields for the remainder of the afternoon. This has proved a happy hunting ground ever since Jon first happened upon the area, and this year proved to be no exception. We’d no sooner left the vehicle and got under way than the finds began to come thick and

fast – first up, a hyperchromic example of *Ophrys cretica* that Jon knew from his previous reconnaissance of the fields; followed in short order by a marvellous stand of *Ophrys cretica*, almost a bush of it, found by Norman. This was greatly admired and photographed by all. Nearby, Jon and Kay found a late-flowering example of *Anacamptis collina*.

Meanwhile, Sarah and Monica were making fresh finds nearby – Sarah found our first *Ophrys rhodia*, followed shortly after by Monica’s sharp eyes picking out the decidedly scarcer pink-sepalled *Ophrys umbilicata* – the latter a tall, multiple-flowered spike. Moving into further fields, Jon was delighted to see that two examples of the incredibly rare hybrid between *Ophrys rhodia* and *Ophrys speculum* were in bloom, while Carolin found a terrific couple of plants of *Ophrys x butleri*, the hybrid between *Ophrys regis-ferdinandii* and *Ophrys speculum*.

We spent a couple of hours exploring this marvellous site, with further finds accenting constant *Ophrys cretica*, and only left once everyone had seen a beautiful *Ophrys leochroma* that Sarah had found earlier. We headed to a nearby village taverna for refreshments before heading back towards Embona.



*Ophrys umbilicata* © Jon Dunn

However, we weren’t quite finished for the day... having not found any fresh *Ophrys lucis* the previous day, we needed to put that right, and we had the benefit of a terrific large, fresh flowering plant Sarah had found during the days of reconnaissance she and Jon had done before the guests’ arrival day. Having paid our due respects to this plant, we headed back to the hotel, where a log fire and dinner in due course awaited us.

#### Day 4, 20<sup>th</sup> March

We began today by driving 30 minutes down to the coast to meet Nektaria once more, for a guided tour around the impressive archeological site of ancient Kamiros, one of the former great cities of ancient Rhodes. Nektaria’s insight was invaluable as she walked us through the city, explaining the lives of those who lived there so many centuries ago, the practicalities of their daily existence, and their interactions with their gods.



*Ophrys regis-ferdinandii* © Jon Dunn

Before we travelled back in time with her, a short walk at the site’s perimeter yielded a new orchid, kindly pointed out to us by the site’s staff – *Ophrys korae*, a colourful ‘sawfly’-type orchid. *Ophrys mammosa* is usually also present here, but those that Jon found had all been grazed off, or picked, by goats or persons unknown. Within the site, the temple of Apollo was a fruitful spot, sporting *Ophrys iricolor*, *O. regis-ferdinandii*, and *O. sicula*.

Leaving Kamiros in the late morning, we headed back towards Embonas, making a stop en route to admire a very special *Ophrys sicula* indeed – a *chlorantha* variation, lacking all the usual brown markings. Now in its prime, with two fresh flowers fully open, this golden orchid was our very own gift from the orchid-hunting gods.

We chose a particularly scenic site for our picnic lunch, an olive grove overlooking Mt. Attaviros, fringed by woodland at the margins of which were many highly-scented *Narcissus tarzetta*. Beneath the trees were small patches of a new, small *Ophrys*, *Ophrys cinereophila*. At this altitude, *Ophrys mammosa* flower a little behind those at lower elevations like Kamiros, but fortunately the first of the local population was fully open, and there to be enjoyed at the trackside close to where we'd parked.

After lunch, we moved to the other side of Embonas, skirting around the base of Attaviros to a series of broad grassy terraces that had, in recent years, been a fruitful location that supported a wide variety of *Ophrys*, including the species that bears the mountain's name, *Ophrys attaviria*.

Jon cautioned us before we arrived that this site might not be as good as in prior years, for in 2025 a works crew were present there with heavy machinery installing a new power line through the surrounding woodland. Sure enough, the most productive areas of the terraces were, this spring, bare earth. Knowing how orchids and *Ophrys* in particular love to colonise bare soil, this site will doubtless come back into its own in years to come, but after half an hour of exploring the wider site – with some lovely *Ophrys reinholdii* the main prize – we opted to cut the visit short and make for Mt. Attaviros itself.

A short drive brought us to the lower elevations of the mountain, and immediately we were back in the groove, with a profusion of orchids to enjoy – yellow-fringed *Ophrys sicula*, some *Ophrys dodecanensis* with their swept-back sepals, and a great many *Ophrys reinholdii*, displaying a wide range of variety in their lip markings. This was an instructive *Ophrys* – one cannot identify many *Ophrys* on a literal basis, expecting each flower to be identical to all the others. Indeed, on many individual plants the flowers vary from one another on a single flower-spike! Broad characteristics that are unique to a given species need to be applied by the observer.



*Ophrys reinholdii* © Jon Dunn

We took the sting out of the mountain by driving up it, parking on a plateau halfway up. Here we had a panoramic view of the Aegean Sea... a very moody and dramatic view, for bad weather was brewing out to sea, with the clouds a dark, bruised blue-black over the water. We started orchid-hunting in earnest, aware this might be cut short by the weather. Between us we enjoyed many *Orchis anatolica*, including some fine colour forms and variations, more emergent *Ophrys reinholdii*, and a handful of *Ophrys omegaiifera*. Dense-flowered Orchid *Neotinea maculata* was not yet in bloom – so close! – but Jon found a particularly fine example of Milky Orchid *Neotinea lactea* that several of



*Ophrys sicula* var. *chlorantha* © Jon Dunn

the group, having returned to the vehicle with rain spots and the air temperature alike falling, elected to head back out to savour.

We made the short drive back down the mountain to our hotel, and headed on foot into the village, a five minute walk that took us to our favourite ice cream parlour, where Jon treated the group to ices (or a cold beer!) to round off the day.

### Day 5, 21<sup>st</sup> March

Having ascended one mountain the previous afternoon, we started this morning on another, Profitis Ilias. Unlike Attaviros, Profitis Ilias is pine-clad to its very summits, albeit as we were to see some areas had been badly scarred by the wildfires that swept part of the island some years ago. These fires have proven at least partly beneficial for orchids on the mountain, for in the areas where once they grew sparingly beneath the trees, some species are now proliferating – we were to find a great many *Ophrys dodecanensis* here, in both colour forms, with either pink or white sepals; and areas of the woodland floor were studded with Provence Orchid *Orchis provincialis*, its primrose yellow flowers accented by fine cerise spots.



Neotinea maculata © Jon Dunn

Also sporting pink or white sepals is another species of *Ophrys*, *Ophrys oreas*. Jon and Kay found our first examples, one of each colour form, alongside a fresh *Ophrys cinereophila*, while Sarah discovered a particularly photogenic example further across the hill face that all enjoyed. Carolin, ranging a little more widely than the main body of the group, was to find our first Dense-flowered Orchid *Neotinea maculata*, although the discovery wasn't apparent until Sarah found what we thought were our first examples and Carolin announced she'd already seen lots of them! While the latter species will never win any prizes for ostentatious showiness, examined closely they have a charm of their own, as well as a very pleasant perfume, and they too come in two colour forms – white with apple green accents, or white with raspberry pink accents. Both were seen well.



Neotinea lactea © Jon Dunn

Nearby Sarah found the first of the season's Man Orchid *Orchis anthropophora* coming into bloom, the lowest florets fully open and looking just like a diminutive human figure. Climbing up to one of the mountain's many peaks revealed a great many Milky Orchid *Neotinea lactea* in excellent condition – this appeared to be a particularly fine year for them. Less so for Green-winged Orchid *Anacamptis morio*, for the few plants we found coming into bloom were rather miserable affairs. Some environmental factor over the winter period appeared to have made them unhappy. They shared

their meadow with more Provence Orchid and *Ophrys dodecanensis*, and some fresh *Ophrys omegaifera* for good measure.

We headed down into the Gadouras River Valley for lunch, Sarah, Gisela and Carolin finding an *Ophrys mammosa* in fine flower at eye level nearby that Jon, Tom and Norman had somehow managed to walk straight past while in deep conversation! Making our way down the valley following the river's course we made two further stops – one a brief interlude in a dry stony area for Naked Man Orchid *Orchis italica*, and *Ophrys regis-ferdinandii*; and the second a rather longer stop at a fabulous low-lying hillside site that's traditionally proved extremely orchid-rich – and so it was to prove once more today.



*Ophrys persephona* © Jon Dunn

The main target here was *Ophrys persephona*, a dark and subtly attractive *Pseudophrys*. Jon found the first of what would prove to be many dozens of examples of it in flower – it was having an excellent year, and appeared to be more extensively scattered across the site than hitherto, an encouraging sign. Sarah spotted our first example of *Serapias politsii*, just coming into flower – between us we found a few more of its kind, all beginning to bloom – the cool weather of the past few days was slowing emergence down. Bumblebee Orchid *Ophrys bombyliflora* was also slow getting started, but Jon found us a perfect example tucked in the protective cocoon of a small dip, perhaps providing a fractionally warmer microclimate. Other orchids found by our keen team here included more Naked Man Orchid, and *Ophrys ferrum-equinum*.



*Ophrys calypsus* © Jon Dunn

We finished the afternoon in the countryside near the large village of Lardos, where our prior reconnaissance ensured we had two excellent sites to visit among the olive groves that flank the village. At the first we enjoyed dozens of *Ophrys calypsus* in exuberant bloom, their large, colourful flowers a particular joy in the dappled, late afternoon sunlight. Jon, wandering restlessly on the lookout for more species, made two notable discoveries nearby – a single example of *Ophrys apollonae*, similar but distinctively different to *Ophrys omegaifera*, and a species we would see much more of tomorrow; and more surprising still, a small colony of *Ophrys persephona*. This sort of serendipitous discovery happens every year as we expand our knowledge of the island's hidden places, adding depth and texture to future tours.

The day finished on the edge of another olive grove, where a small colony of Pink Butterfly Orchid *Anacamptis papilionacea* includes some 'white butterfly orchid' – five examples of the rare *alba* variation that lacks any pink tones whatsoever. With this final orchid flourish we headed for home and another delicious evening meal at the hotel – our checklist this

evening revealed we'd logged 26 species today, and with nine new ones in that number, our weekly tally had now surpassed 40 species – and we still had two days to go, and some special sites to visit in that time.

### Day 6, 22<sup>nd</sup> March

We awoke to a fine, sunny morning that boded well for an extremely pleasant day to come. We headed down towards the pretty coastal town of Lindos for our final meeting with Nektaria but, of course, we stopped for a little orchid-hunting en route... Half an hour at a fen-like damp meadow was extremely productive, for Loose-flowered Orchid *Anacamptis laxiflora* were already coming into bloom, with some really fine fully open examples to be seen. Monica found our first from the road and, within the meadow, we must have seen several dozen more examples. Harder to spot were Bumblebee Orchid *Ophrys bombyliflora*, but they were also present, and a few were seen in full flower.



*Anacamptis laxiflora* © Jon Dunn

We paused once more before dropping down into the town, to enjoy the view of Lindos – set beside sparkling turquoise waters, its low houses snow white or honey gold sandstone, and sheltered on the seaward site by the protective mass of the ancient acropolis. We met Nektaria in the town square and, accompanied by her, walked through the beautiful streets admiring the architecture of centuries past. Having a local historian as our guide opened our eyes to the subtleties of meaning conveyed by carved sandstone and pebbled doorsteps. Lindos had once been an extremely important and prosperous town, particularly under the benevolent dictatorship of Cleobulus in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC. Cleobulus was one of the Seven Sages of ancient Greece and, with his wisdom, Lindos prospered.



*Ophrys mammosa* © Jon Dunn

Most of the group elected to walk up to visit the acropolis – those who didn't spent a pleasant hour practicing the words of Cleobulus in a lovely café and bar, a courtyard set within one of the beautiful captain's houses – though with delicious iced coffees on offer, it was hard to 'practice moderation in all things'! The acropolis was, as always, most impressive, and as a bonus gave excellent views of the near-endemic *Campanula hagiela*, and also eye-level views of Lesser Kestrel as they swept around the rocky promontory.

From Lindos it was a short drive north along the coast to our pretty lunch site, an extensive olive grove near the sea. Here we spent a pleasant hour after lunch wandering beneath the trees, where many *Serapias bergonii* were to be found, as well as more *Ophrys calyptus*, *O. mammosa*, and *O. sicula*. Alas, there was no bonus of an early *Ophrys colossaea*...

However, Jon was confident our final olive grove of the day would deliver many more *Ophrys*, and new ones for us all too. Forty minutes drive brought us down into the south-eastern corner of the island, to a secluded inland olive grove accessed via a network of stony tracks that we navigated with care in our vehicle. Our arrival was heralded by three young Fallow Deer bucks that we found browsing beneath the olives – surely a good omen, with the deer being the iconic symbol of Rhodes, representing its natural wealth and beauty.

In the time available to us here we had three principal targets – yellow-fringed *Ophrys blitopertha*, the dark inky *Ophrys attaviria*, and the eponymous *Ophrys lindia*, named after Lindos. *Ophrys blitopertha* was readily found within minutes, for it's extremely numerous here. Nearby, conveniently for the purposes of comparison, was an *Ophrys attaviria* in perfect condition too. We split up thereafter to wander the rows of trees, enjoying more examples of both, and with *Ophrys lindia* very much in mind. The range of variation in *Ophrys* here can be a little challenging, and there certainly appears to be some natural hybridisation taking place, with *Ophrys parvula* also present at the olive grove's fringes to add to the potential gene pool. Two orchids certainly looked like excellent contenders for *Ophrys blitopertha* x *parvula*, while at least one potential hybrid between *Ophrys attaviria* and *O. blitopertha* was found by Sarah. Coming to see the latter, Jon was thrilled to find a superb example of the rarest of the *Ophrys* of the site, *Ophrys lindia*. The latter is at best scarce on the island, and generally considered rather rare. Having a stone-cold classic example of it in perfect condition was a triumph.



*Ophrys blitopertha* © Jon Dunn

The drive back to the hotel took an hour, taking us cross country through some beautiful landscapes. Our checklist and pre-dinner drink time was greatly enhanced this evening by Tom, who had very kindly taken the time to prepare some slides elucidating the latest understanding of world orchid taxonomy, where European orchids fit within that, and specifically our evolving understanding of the complexities and subtleties of the *Ophrys*. This was such a rare treat to have a professor of Tom's standing present and able to make the complexities of orchid evolution clear to us non-scientists.

And our checklist? While perhaps we should now refer to taxa rather than species (thank you, Tom!), we were now on 45 for the week, an excellent tally, and with the potential to add significantly to it tomorrow.

### Day 7, 23<sup>rd</sup> March

We had deliberately left our visit to the heights of what we affectionately know as Windmill Hill to the very last full day of the tour – a decision informed by several factors, not least our experience of the site. Towering high above the south end of the island, the hill represents an opportunity to step back a little in orchid time for some species that have already



finished flowering at lower elevation, but it's also incredibly species-rich with a wide variety of orchid possibilities, including several of the later-flowering *Ophrys* species – leaving the site to the last day maximised our chance to find one or two of the latter coming into bloom, most notably *Ophrys halia*, which we have a particularly strong location for upon the hill's slopes.

The drive up onto Windmill Hill is always exhilarating, commanding terrific views over the island, and a mildly entertaining road upon which we sometimes have to weave our way around fallen boulders. On this occasion, we also encountered a vast and colourful herd of goats, and two slightly harried goatherds who were attempting to bring their

charges downhill, with mixed success. They may as well have been herding cats, for some of the goats were obstinately lingering well behind the main flock!

We parked atop Windmill Hill, and stepped into an orchid wonderland. The day was fine and sunny at this end of the island, though on the way down here we'd driven through heavy rain showers. And barely a breath of wind either – a rare thing up here, and a welcome surprise. We spent the morning exploring the faces of the hill here at its highest point, with success from the very outset – ample examples of *Ophrys phryganae*, *O. omegaifera* and *O. apollonae*, *O. reinholdii* and *O. ferrum-equinum*, and the colourful starbursts of *O. koraе* and *O. leochroma*.



*Orchis anatolica* was flowering in great profusion, in some places carpeting the bare patches of ground between mounds of thorny scrub with a purple sheen. At the highest points, we found more primrose-yellow *Orchis provincialis*. It was barely possible to move more than one or two steps without encountering something that would give one a reason to pause anew. The cameras were getting a work-out here...



Windmill Hill never ceases to spring a surprise or two upon us, and Sarah found the orchid of the day, perhaps even the week – an extraordinary-looking flower, long and thin, with a dark lip, a suggestion of a strong pattern upon it, and dark, bruised purple sepals and petals. It grew at the edge of a large colony of *Ophrys ferrum-equinum*, suggesting a high possibility this had some influence upon it... but if a hybrid, what might the other parent be? The long, thin lip suggested a possible scolopaxoid ancestry, and there was *Ophrys cornutula* in flower within a foot of the plant in question...

but there were other possibilities within six feet of the plant – single examples of *Ophrys reinholdii*, and *Ophrys cretica* – the latter an anomaly, for we have never seen this species up here in our many years of visiting the site. On the whole, we considered our mystery plant to be one of two things – either an extremely contrived *Ophrys cretica*, with hyperchromic colouration and a very aberrant morphology, or a possible hybrid between *O. cretica* and *O. ferrum-equinum*. Either way, this was a remarkable orchid indeed.

We moved downhill for lunch, stopping at a lower elevation for an hour where, if we were blessed by the orchid gods, we might find *Ophrys halia* in bloom. While the guests ate their picnics, Jon and Sarah were combing the hillside. Early finds were many more *Ophrys korae* and *O. leochroma* and, pleasingly, lots of delicate yellow Rhodes Fritillary *Fritillaria rhodia*. Then Sarah hit the jackpot, again – a really fine example of *Ophrys halia*, with beautiful lime green-infused sepals. While everyone made the short walk uphill from the vehicle to enjoy this, Jon continued to restlessly search for more orchids – perhaps there might be another hybrid to see, or something else...



*Ophrys halia* © Jon Dunn

Sure enough, on the verge of our agreed departure time from the hill, Jon called Sarah to ask her to bring the guests around the hill to a sheltered spot where he'd found another surprise – an early-flowering example of *Ophrys saliarisii*. Windmill Hill had been most generous with its orchids again this year.



*Anacamptis pyramidalis* © Jon Dunn

We headed down to the coast for a final roll of the dice – hoping, at low elevation, that against all the odds we might encounter an early example of at least one of the later-flowering *Anacamptis* species, with *A. coriophora* the most likely. We tried two sites, and while we found many *A. coriophora* in bud, including some that were 'colouring up' and showing purple tones, suggestive they might open in the next 24 hours, none in actual flower were forthcoming. The cool weather of the preceding week had stymied them. Nonetheless, Monica found the first of several lovely Pyramidal Orchid *Anacamptis pyramidalis* starting to bloom, and the final site enhanced our day's tally of species, with last helpings of *Ophrys calypsus* and *O. iricolor*, not to mention plenty of fine *Serapias carica*.

From here we adjourned to our favourite taverna on the way home to Embonas for a refreshing drink. That evening, with Mama having excelled herself in providing another outstanding evening meal for us to enjoy, we recapped the day's sightings, and those of the week as a whole – we finished the week with 48 species seen well, and some of those in great quantity. While the weather had been cooler than we'd have liked, we'd avoided

being rained upon, and we'd made a great team – everyone had found notable orchids that had added to the appreciation and enjoyment of the group as a whole.

This had been a terrific week, and new friendships had been forged. Jon and Sarah would like to take this opportunity to thank our Orchid Conservation Alliance guests for joining them on Rhodes. Nobody knows the island's orchids better than us, and it was a privilege to share them with you all.

**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](http://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.

 [BLUESKY](#)    [FACEBOOK](#)    [TWITTER](#)    [INSTAGRAM](#)    [YOUTUBE](#)

**And finally...** We are heading to Sardinia in 2027 with another exclusive OCA orchid-hunting tour, led by renowned Italian orchid-hunter Michele Viganò and Mariposa founder and *Orchid Summer* author Jon Dunn. We hope our OCA friends, old and new, may join us there!

Orchids of Rhodes 17 – 24 March 2026										
	Species name	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7	Day 8	
	<b>GENUS OPHRYS</b>									
	<b>Ophrys iricolor group</b>									
1	<i>Ophrys iricolor</i>			✓	✓			✓		
	<b>Ophrys fusca group</b>									
2	<i>Ophrys cinereophila</i>				✓	✓				
3	<i>Ophrys parvula</i>			✓			✓	✓		
4	<i>Ophrys sancti-isidorii</i>	✓								
	<b>Ophrys attaviria group</b>									
5	<i>Ophrys attaviria</i>						✓	✓		
6	<i>Ophrys eptapigiensis</i>									
7	<i>Ophrys lindia</i>						✓			
	<b>Ophrys blitopertha group</b>									
8	<i>Ophrys blitopertha</i>						✓			
9	<i>Ophrys persephoniae</i>					✓				
	<b>Ophrys lutea group</b>									
10	<i>Ophrys lutea</i>			✓			✓			
11	<i>Ophrys phryganae</i>							✓		

	Species name	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7	Day 8	
12	<i>Ophrys sicula</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
	<b>Ophrys omegaifera group</b>									
13	<i>Ophrys basilissa</i>									
14	<i>Ophrys apollonae</i>					✓	✓	✓		
15	<i>Ophrys omegaifera</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓		
16	<i>Ophrys sitiaca</i>	✓								
	<b>Ophrys speculum group</b>									
17	<i>Ophrys regis-ferdinandii</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
18	<i>Ophrys speculum</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
	<b>Ophrys tenthredinifera group</b>									
19	<i>Ophrys leochroma</i>		✓	✓				✓		
20	<i>Ophrys korae</i>				✓			✓		
21	<i>Ophrys bombyliflora</i>					✓	✓			
	<b>Ophrys apifera group</b>									
22	<i>Ophrys apifera</i>									
	<b>Ophrys holoserica group</b>									
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>					✓				
	<b>Ophrys oestrifera group</b>									
29	<i>Ophrys cornutula</i>			✓				✓		
30	<i>Ophrys dodekanensis</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓				
	<b>Ophrys heldreichii group</b>									
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>	✓								
	<b>Ophrys umbilicata group</b>									
35	<i>Ophrys rhodia</i>			✓						
36	<i>Ophrys umbilicata</i>			✓						
	<b>Ophrys reinholdii group</b>									
37	<i>Ophrys reinholdii</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓		
38	<i>Ophrys cretica</i> ssp. <i>beloniae</i>			✓				✓		
	<b>Ophrys argolica group</b>									
39	<i>Ophrys lucis</i>			✓						
	<b>Ophrys mammosa group</b>									
40	<i>Ophrys ferrum-equinum</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		
41	<i>Ophrys mammosa</i>				✓	✓	✓			

	Species name	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7	Day 8	
	<b>GENUS EPIPACTIS</b>									
42	<i>Epipactis densifolia</i>									
	<b>GENUS CEPHALANTHERA</b>									
43	<i>Cephalanthera longifolia</i>									
	<b>GENUS LIMODORUM</b>									
44	<i>Limodorum abortivum</i>									
	<b>GENUS SPIRANTHES</b>									
45	<i>Spiranthes spiralis</i>									
	<b>GENUS SERAPIAS</b>									
46	<i>Serapias bergonii</i>		✓			✓	✓			
47	<i>Serapias carica</i>			✓				✓		
48	<i>Serapias parviflora</i>									
49	<i>Serapias politisii</i>					✓	✓			
	<b>GENUS ANACAMPTIS</b>									
50	<i>Anacamptis collina</i>			✓		nf		nf		
51	<i>Anacamptis laxiflora</i>						✓			
52	<i>Anacamptis morio</i>					✓				
53	<i>Anacamptis papilionacea</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		
54	<i>Anacamptis pyramidalis</i>			✓				✓		
55	<i>Anacamptis sancta</i>									
56	<i>Anacamptis coriophora</i>							nf		
	<b>GENUS NEOTINEA</b>									
57	<i>Neotinea maculata</i>					✓				
58	<i>Neotinea lactea</i>				✓	✓				
	<b>GENUS ORCHIS</b>									
59	<i>Orchis anatolica</i>	✓			✓	✓		✓		
60	<i>Orchis anthropophora</i>					✓				
61	<i>Orchis italica</i>		✓			✓				
62	<i>Orchis provincialis</i>					✓		✓		
63	<i>Orchis simia</i>									
	<b>GENUS HIMANTOGLOSSUM</b>									
64	<i>Himantoglossum robertianum</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓				
	Daily total:	12	6	21	14	26	16	23		
	Running total:	12	15	28	32	41	45	48		
	Key : <i>nf</i> – 'not flowering'									