

# BOOK REVIEW

## ***The Birds of Cyprus: An Annotated Checklist. BOC Checklist Series No. 28* by Peter Flint and Colin Richardson**

Published 2024. 492 pages, 65 colour photos, 2 colour maps, 3 b/w illustrations, 13 tables. Paperback. ISBN: 9780952288695.

This is the twenty-eighth title in the renowned BOC Checklist Series (formerly the BOU Checklist Series), and the second to cover Cyprus. The first, published as BOU Checklist No. 6 and written by Peter Flint and Peter Stewart, was published in 1983 and revised as a second edition in 1992. Given the island's active and rapidly growing local birding scene and its increasing popularity as a destination for birders visiting from elsewhere, the state of our knowledge of the Cypriot avifauna has improved hugely since 1992, and an update was sorely needed. It is hardly surprising that the third edition, weighing in at almost 500 pages, is more than twice the length of the second. There is a wonderful continuity of authorship, with the same first author as the first edition over 40 years ago.

The island's avifauna is particularly interesting. It hosts three endemic breeding species, Cyprus Scops Owl *Otus cyprius*, Cyprus Warbler *Curruca melanothorax* and Cyprus Wheatear *Oenanthe cypriaca*. In addition there are some distinctive endemic subspecies, one of which (the subspecies *cypristes* of Coal Tit *Periparus ater*) might one day be recognised as full species. Cyprus also boasts an impressive list of vagrants, including Franklin's Gull *Leucophaeus pipixcan* from the west, Pied Bush Chat *Saxicola caprata* from the east, Bohemian Waxwing *Bombycilla garrulus* from the north and African Desert Warbler *Curruca deserti* from the south.

To describe this book as an 'annotated checklist', as mandated by the long series of titles of which it forms a part, somewhat undersells it because this is so much more than a dry list of species with a few notes on their status; it is a full-blown handbook of the island's avifauna and contains a wealth of fascinating information. If you are familiar with Hadoram Shirihai's *The Birds of Israel*,



or with *The Birds of Turkey* by Guy Kirwan *et al*, then the level of detail in this book will be familiar to you. Introductory chapters cover the history of ornithology in Cyprus, the island's geology, climate and environment and its avifauna and conservation. The book contains a selection of useful photos of typical habitats and mouth-watering shots of over 40 of the most sought-after species. Colour maps show the distributions of the island's mountains and wetlands. Appendices include a gazetteer of place names and a description of many sites of ornithological interest, both of particular use to visiting birders.

The bulk of the book comprises detailed accounts of all 404 species deemed to have been reliably recorded on the island, plus a few more whose occurrence is insufficiently documented. Of these 404 species, 92 are regular breeders (58 resident and 34 migrants). Three species added to the Cyprus list in 2023 and even as close to publication as early 2024 are included in an appendix, indicating just how up-to-date this book is. Species accounts are extremely detailed, covering status (both recent and historical), movements, population size, distribution, breeding, ringing recovering and even a list of the Cypriot specimens held in some of the world's major museum collections.

One of the book's most interesting findings is that the avifauna of Cyprus has changed hugely in recent decades, often for

the better, and that the rate of change appears to be accelerating. The authors themselves express surprise at how much things have changed since the previous checklist in 1992, something that only became apparent to them when they started collecting data for this new edition. The number of recent colonisers, and the number of resident species undergoing population increases, greatly exceeds the number of species being lost. The construction of artificial wetlands, for example, has allowed the number of regularly breeding waterbird species to increase from two to 15. However, the book also charts in detail the near extinction of certain species such as Griffon Vulture *Gyps fulvus*; an account from 1769 stated 'one sees many vultures standing in the fields like flocks of sheep' whereas the tiny population that survives now is dependent on intensive conservation action. The arrival of Sardinian Warbler *Curruca melanocephala* as a breeding species around

1990 and its subsequent spread across the entire island is no cause for celebration as it appears to be having a detrimental impact on the endemic Cyprus Warbler. There are many other fascinating stories of change, demonstrating that the avifauna of Cyprus is in a state of constant flux. The book is therefore an invaluable resource for island biogeographers.

Anyone with an interest in birds will find this a wonderful book to dip into, whether they have visited the island or not. Visitors to the island will gain hugely from their experience if they take a copy with them. Cyprus remains the only place in the OSME region to be covered by this forensic series of BOU/BOC checklists. How wonderful it would be see the series expand to cover other territories within the region.

Paul F Donald



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E [info@oriolebirding.com](mailto:info@oriolebirding.com)  
[www.oriolebirding.com](http://www.oriolebirding.com)

Freephone 0800 9993036