

EXERCISE LION SUN 13
BIRD OBSERVATIONS DURING AN EXERCISE
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Exercise LION SUN is low-level infantry exercise package run throughout the year within and around the Western Sovereign Base Area of Cyprus. Headquarter Squadron, 4th General Support Medical Regiment took part in the exercise between 7th September and 5th October 2006 which, luckily for me, coincided with the Autumn bird migration over the island. The Squadron was based initially at Radio Sonde Camp then for the last week at Episkopi Garrison where I managed to obtain a room in the Officers' Mess with a balcony and excellent views of Griffon Vulture and passage Warblers. My appointment during the exercise was Exercise Co-ordination Officer which involved all the planning for the final exercise which in turn allowed me to recce all the training areas. This gave me an excellent opportunity to birdwatch whilst taking part in my official military duties.

My initial reaction to being told I was off to Cyprus in September was 'excellent, Demoiselle Cranes' and after consultation with Mark Easterbrook I was told I would have to hurry up as the Cranes left the Island by the 7th September. In the first few days I managed to see two small flocks of these beautiful birds, one of ten individuals and a flock of thirty which flew over my head as I recce'd a potential exercise site close to Akrotiri Salt Lake. During the initial visits to Akrotiri I managed to meet Doug Radford the RSPB warden for Fowlmere who was helping Birdlife Cyprus conduct a raptor count. He became a useful person to know, with information on the birds around, and a welcome but often not sanctioned, break from my long days trudging around the southern areas of Cyprus. He also gave me a master class in raptor identification which came in useful during the final exercise.

Migration was very much in evidence throughout my visit. Honey Buzzard flocks, of up to 100 individuals, were seen on a regular basis and from our watchpoint at the Akrotiri Conservation Centre. We also counted Eleanor's Falcon, the odd Lesser Kestrel, Red-footed Falcon, Marsh, Montegu's and Pallid Harriers. Throughout the island a large passage of passerines was evident. Daily I observed large flocks of European Bee-eater, whilst pairs of Hoopoe and Golden Oriole darted from bush to bush. Hirundines flew overhead and Radio Sonde Camp saw good numbers of Isabelline and Northern Wheatear passing through. On an early morning trip to Phassouri Reed Beds I manage to find the second only record that year of Baillion's Crane.

Birdwatching from the office window produced Black Francolin whilst shooting on the range saw Long-legged Buzzard and Black Kite flying low over the three 300 metre point. On one visit to a potential harbour area I accidentally flushed a Booted Eagle from scrub.

Phasouri Reed Beds is a RAMSAR site on the Akrotiri Peninsula. This is the place I did most of my birding and the place where I saw the greatest amount of species. During my visits I managed to see species close at hand including two species of Crane, Osprey, Booted Eagle and many other passage species. This is a must see area if you ever visit Cyprus.

The final exercise went as planned. During quiet time in the afternoons I kept myself busy watching Raptors, Larks, Wagtails, Warblers, Flycatchers and Shrikes around our Harbour Areas and in the hour prior to a first light attack on Paramali village I lay listening to the diagnostic double call of the Cypriot race of Scops Owl whilst Nightjars hawked above.

The three day 'In-country stand-down' was spent driving in a ramshackle hire car from the Mess to Phasouri Reed Beds, the Salt Lake and Bishops Pools to add birds to my list. On the final day I headed over to Asprokremmos Dam, Paphos, Troodos and the fields around Mandria to bag the final illusive species on my Cyprus 'Wish List'. The flight back on the 5th October was uneventful and on the morning of the 7th I arrived at Portland to take part in the annual pilgrimage to the Observatory.

In summary, if you are still serving, get to a unit which is pencilled in for LION SUN. Cyprus is an excellent island; the birding is outstanding and, if you get there, never leave your binoculars more than an arms length away, even if you are carrying a bergen and a rifle.

SYSTEMATIC LIST OF BIRDS SEEN DURING EXERCISE LION SUN
7TH SEPTEMBER – 5TH OCTOBER 2006

Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	Barn Owl	<i>Tyto alba</i>
Little Bittern	<i>Ixobrychus minitus</i>	Scops Owl	<i>Otus scops cyprius</i>
Squacco Heron	<i>Areola ralloides</i>	Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus europaeus</i>
Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	European Bee-eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>
Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>	Wryneck	<i>Jynx torquilla</i>
Spoonbill	<i>Platalea Leucordia</i>	Calandra Lark	<i>Melnaocorypha calandra</i>
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	Short-toed Lark	<i>Calandrella brachydactyla</i>
Garganey	<i>Anas querquedula</i>	Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>
Ferruginous Duck	<i>Aythya farina</i>	Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>
Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>
Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>	Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Hirundo daurica</i>
Honey Buzzard	<i>Pernis apivorus</i>	House Martin	<i>Delichon urbica</i>
Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>	Tawny Pipit	<i>Anthus campestris</i>
Griffon Vulture	<i>Aegypius monachus</i>	Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>
Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus pygargus</i>	Red-throated Pipit	<i>Anthus cervinus</i>
Pallid Harrier	<i>Circus macrourus</i>	Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>
Montagu's Harrier	<i>Circus pygarus</i>	a. Blue-headed Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava flava</i>
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	b. Black-headed Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava feldegg</i>
Long-legged Buzzard	<i>Buteo rufinus</i>	c. Grey-headed Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava thunbergi</i>
Booted Eagle	<i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i>	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>
Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>
Lesser Kestrel	<i>Falco naumanni</i>	Nightingale	<i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i>
Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	Whinchat	<i>Saxicola ruberta</i>
Red-footed Falcon	<i>Falco vespertinus</i>	Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>
Hobby	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>	Isabelline Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe isabellina</i>
Eleanora's Falcon	<i>Falco eleonora</i>	Cyprus Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe cypriaca</i>
Peregrine	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	Black-eared Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe Hispanica</i>
Chukar	<i>Alectoris chukar Cypristes</i>	Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>
Black Francolin	<i>Francolinus francolinus</i>	Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>
Quail	<i>Coturnix coturnix</i>	Cyprus Warbler	<i>Sylvia melanothorax</i>
Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	Sardinian Warbler	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>
Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>
Water Rail	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>	Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>
Little Crake	<i>Porzana parva</i>	Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>
Baillion's Crake	<i>Porzana pusilla</i>	Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater Cypristes</i>
Demoiselle Crane	<i>Anthropoides virgo</i>	Great Tit	<i>Parus major Aphrodite</i>
Stone Curlew	<i>Burhinus oedicephalus</i>	Golden Oriole	<i>Oriolus oriolus</i>
Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>	Red-backed Shrike	<i>Lanius collurio</i>
Kentish Plover	<i>Chararius alexandrinus</i>	Lesser Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius minor</i>
Greater Sand Plover	<i>Charadrius leschenaultia</i>	Woodchat Shrike	<i>Lanius senator</i>
Spur-winged Plover	<i>Vanellus gregarius</i>	Masked Shrike	<i>Lanius nubicus</i>
Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>
Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>	Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>
Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>	Hooded Crow	<i>Corvus corone cornix</i>
Ruff	<i>Philomachus pugnax</i>	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>
Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>
Spotted Redshank	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>	Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>
Redshank	<i>Tringa tetanus</i>	Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>
Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>	Greenfinch	<i>Carduelis chloris</i>
Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus furcus</i>	Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>
'Baltic Gull'			
Yellow-Legged Gull	<i>Larus cachinnans</i>	Ortolan Bunting	<i>Emberiza hortulana</i>
Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	Cretzschmar's Bunting	<i>Emberiza caesia</i>
Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	Corn Bunting	<i>Miliaria calandra</i>
Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>		
Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canoris</i>		

The shaded observations denote species seen only outside the Western Sovereign Base Area.