

'Wildlife Travel's Tales of the Unexpected' – Christine Donnelly or Henry Stanier (January 2015)

It's not always the species you expect that you remember most. A look at some of the less well-known plants and animals from around the world.

Wildlife Travel was started in 1987 and so has been going for 27 years now. Over the years they have visited many parts of the globe – some well-known places, such as the Norfolk coast and some more obscure places. They have visited Western Australia, Cyprus, Turkey, Argentina, Tanzania, the Danube Delta, Crete, the Galapagos Islands and many other interesting places. Here are some

Wildlife Travel visit Cyprus in December and have found such species as Cyclamen Persicum and the orchid, Ophrys Israelites, in flower. The highlight of this trip was finding an African Mantis (*Sphodromantis viridis*) in the bushes outside of the hotel they were staying at.

Also in December, they took a trip to the Norfolk coast where, as well as grey seals, they came across a rarity in a Desert Wheatear, which normally resides in the Far East.

Turkey in November gave them the opportunity to see snowdrops growing in the wild as well the Greek tortoise. On the coast of Turkey, they visited Kekova Island, which has a sunken city under water. It was here that they came across five or six Green-eyed Squid.

They visited Western Australia in September time and came across Kookaburas, Banksia Coccinea, Red Kangaroo Paw and the Bottle Brush Fern, from the myrtle family. Of the fauna, they came across the alien looking Thorny Devil which is a spiny lizard. Water at night in the desert condenses on its' spikes and the water runs down and is channelled through the forest of spikes into its mouth.

A visit to Tanzania in May 2014 allowed them to spot the big African animals but also some smaller species such as the Caracal, a rare cat, and the yellow-winged bat. Some of the places they visit are excellent for butterflies and Tanzania is a good place to see some spectacular, attractive species.

Closer to home, the Danube Delta in Romania was a good site for birdwatching and they came across the Squacco Heron and Eurasian Spoonbill. A highlight was seeing the Whiskered Tern nesting on the lily pads and a rare sighting of the Trumpeter Finch, which is from Africa.

Crete is renowned for its orchids and a visit in April results in a long plant list. During one visit, they were lucky to see only the sixth recording in Crete of the Blue Cheeked Bee-eater.

In the Galapagos Islands, they saw the Great Frigate bird with its red inflatable pouch and the Blue-footed Booby with its strange mating ritual - they try and pair up with mates with similar coloured feet! A trip to somewhere such as the Galapagos Islands allows people a chance to go snorkelling to see the other wildlife beneath the waves. Golden Rays were seen whilst snorkelling in the Galapagos and can be very playful - blowing bubbles in the face of swimmers! On one trip to the islands they recorded the first ever Grey-breasted Martin seen in the Galapagos.

Wildlife Travel have also visited South America and Argentina. Quebrada de Humahuaca is east of the Andes and is a very dramatic landscape comprising of hills of different colours. They also visited the Ibera Marshes on this trip, a home to Anacondas and Caiman. In the marshes they came across Capybara, which are a giant type of guinea pig and Water Hyacinth. Another place they visited in Argentina is the spectacular Iguaza Falls, which has a water flow greater than the Victoria Falls.

There have been many surprises on trips hosted by Wildlife Travel and I am sure there will be other rarities recorded in the future. Christine summed up the talk by saying: "you expect the unexpected!"