



The Gargano

8th - 15th April 2026

Led by Paul Harcourt Davies & Lois Ferguson



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GARGANO: Greenwings Tour Report 8 -15 April 2026.

(With Paul Harcourt Davies & Lois Ferguson)

Day 1 Given the afternoon arrival of a client flight, it made sense to travel directly to our first port of call in the seaside town Peschici where a warm welcome awaited us.

Day 2 Our first full day in the field began with a short trip west of Pechici to Monte Pucci and a site that Paul HD found some 30 years ago for the Horned Ophrys (*Ophrys cornuta* aka *O scolopax subs cornuta* or, as it has been renamed in Italy. *Ophrys montis-garganica*). Here was the first chance to explain the taxonomic confusions people find with the genus Ophrys and establish a 'scheme'.

Flowers were well advanced and in superb condition...everything is now happening much earlier in the year. The location is also a very good introduction to the local flora with several other orchid species, including the small flowers Serapias (*Serapias parviflora*) Tongue Orchid (*S. lingua*) and Bumblebee (*Ophrys bombyliflora*) Additionally, there were a few bushes of Sodom Apple (*Solanum linnaeanum* also *S. sodomium*), one carrying both flowers and fruit plus a few different broomrapes (*O. crenata*, *O. alba* and *O. Samosa*) and many plants characteristic of Mediterranean hillsides. We had a mid-morning coffee, an Italian habit we have acquired and readily pass on...

Our next stop looked at first sight like a waste area but, as in previous years had hundreds of Gargano Ophrys (*O. passionis*) and three Serapias species, two mentioned earlier plus the Eastern Serapias (*S. orientalis*).

We drove on eventually taking tracks into the North-facing hills and to a picnic spot amongst Iris (*bicapitata* and *I. pseudopumila*), anemones, Naked Man Orchids (*Orchis italica*) and many more. The post prandial treat was seeing numerous Peonies (*Paeonia macula*) in superb condition ... perfect timing and so hard to predict. Diligent searching revealed a few unobtrusive spikes of the rather insignificant looking Dense-flowered Orchid (*Neotinea maculata*) whose flowers are a tiny Gemini close-up. Descending to the road we stopped to enjoy a well-hidden display of the Small-patterned Ophrys (*O. parvimaculata*) growing with the Eyed Ophrys (*O. bisutella*) and a single distinct hybrid between them.

Day 3 Today a change of scenery with a coastal exploration where the flowering season was already well-advanced: all spikes of Gargano endemic (*Ophrys archipelago*) were well over. However, on our coastal ramble we found the local variant Sawfly Ophrys (*O.tenthredinifera subs neglecta*), with Bumble-bee Orchid (*O. bombyliflora*) and the Small Yellow Ophrys (*O. galilea*).

The coastal maquis contained several species of shrub such as Lentisk (*Pistachio lentiscus*), Tree Germander (*Teucrium germander*) White Hedge-nettle (*Prasium majus*) and Cistus - both white *C. monspessulanus* and the first flowers of the pink *C. creticus*) which a few weeks later would cover whole hillsides down to the blue sea beyond..

We then walked a short distance to see Giant Orchids (*Himantoglossum robertianum*) with only a few photographable flowers since they had begun flowering in December of the previous year. In contrast, there was a glorious population of one of the finest of orchids ...The Apulian Ophrys (*O. fuciflora subsp apulica*) in excellent condition.

The final stop was an area of regenerated ground following severe fires of a decade ago where the bushes and regrowth of pines are now thick but between them were the Dark Ophrys (*Ophrys atrata*), Serapias orientalis and Pyramidal Orchid (*Anacamptis pyramidalis*) flowering.

Day 4. This was a designated transfer day where we made a leisurely journey to our destination in Monte Sant Angelo. There was another peony stop en-route where the display was, in all honesty the best we have seen in three decades...Serendipity struck. Additionally, there were carpets of pink spring cyclamen (*C. repandum*), blue Apennine anemone (*A apennina*) and also the coral root bittercress (*Cardamine bulbosa*) a UK rarity but frequent in Italian mountain woods on limestone.

We made various short stops by roadside banks where we could photograph orchids and plants characteristic of the limestone pavement and thence to our picnic spot in view of Monte Sacro. Here, there was an astonishing range of colour variants of the endemic Twin-flowered iris (*Iris bicapitata*) purple, blue, yellow, whitish and a whole range of intermediates growing with swathes of Green-winged Orchid

(*Anacamptis morio*), Pink Butterfly orchid (*A. papilioancea* and several hybrids between them...)

This was clearly a year with very early spring but we were fortunate to see a few remaining yellow tulips (*T. australis*) accessible close to the road and, as a bonus, beautifully backlit by the sun. Finally we reached our Hotel which was to be our base for the next four days.

Day 5 We began with a visit to one of our favourite spots - a hidden plateau with a veritable plethora of orchids and hybrids to delight and confuse...This considerable area of limestone pavement provides an astonishingly rich rock garden ideal for pottering and taking photographs in relaxed fashion.

Paul rushed around finding things and checking spots where he has over many years discovered some 'specials' ...making sure everyone knew of these and new finds. The *Ophrys* species were exceptional with endemics such as *Ophrys biscutella*, *O. bertoloniiformis*, *O. promontori* and superb small clumps of *O. tenthredinifera* subsp. *neglecta* and many more.....

Orchis species were in fine form too with patches of yellow Few-flowered Orchid (*Orchis pauciflora*) and pink 4-Spotted Orchid (*O. quadripunctata*) plus the delightful (and rather local) hybrid between them - *Orchis x pseudanatolica*. There were hundreds of spikes of Man Orchid (*Orchis anthropophora*) some with greenish yellow flowers and others a deep chestnut brown with abundant Naked Man Orchids (*Orchis italica*). We were lucky to find a few hybrids between Man and Naked Man....(*Orchis x bivonae*) some specimens being very robust with brilliant magenta 'man' flowers

This is an area in which we always find numerous *Ophrys* hybrids, some easy to relate to putative parents and others requiring a degree of 'faith' when attaching a 'valid' name...all part of the fun.

The track we follow meanders across Mother Nature's rock garden to where it enters oak woodland with carpets of white Poet's Narcissus (*Narcissus poeticus*) and an occasional creamy-yellow variant...Wood Spurge (*Euphorbia amygdaloides*), Eastern Leopard's Bane (*Doronicum orientale*), numerous anemones in white and blue (*Anemone apennina*) and magenta (*A. hortensis*) plus two birthworts (*Aristolochia rotundifolia* and *A. Lutea*) that grow here. These latter plants are the food plant of

the Italian Festoon butterfly (*Zerynthia cassandra*) though we saw only one fleetingly since the ambient temperature was cool.

Our picnic spot was accompanied by several nightingales singing competitively and a frog's chorus from a nearby pond.

Finally, latish afternoon, we took a lane walk we have long known and found magnificent, tall specimens of that finest of Ophrys the Siponto Ophrys (*O. sipontensis*) and a meadow gaudily coloured with a mix of Few-flowered and Pink Butterfly Orchids in a timeless landscape of stone walls, centuries old...

Day 6 The weather outlook was far from promising and the forecast turned out true to form with grey skies and a strong wind. To lift spirits we stopped at to a vast open meadow full of orchids and then moved on to another superb Peony (*Paeonia mascula*) site, again with numerous perfect, photogenic blooms. We did as we always do and changed things around a bit. Then, aided by an essential morning coffee we made our way beyond San Giovanni Rotondo and ia patch of waste ground where the abundance of Ophrys is astonishing, growing in a veritable forest of Guant Fennel (*Ferula communes*) We found almost all the species seen thus far but many were already past their best...however there was more than enough to occupy us.

Lunchtime approached and so we took to the hills where we have a delightful picnic site full or orchids, the endemic Gargano Pansy (*Viola heterophylla subsp. graeca*) in multicoloured forms and lots of anemones (both species) plus a new orchid, the Elderflower orchid (*Dactylorhiza sambucina*...mainly the yellow flowered variant in Gargano though a magenta flower spikes sometimes turn up...

Skies started to clear (slightly) and so we followed roads into the Bosco Quarto area with extensive limestone pavements, dolines and open woodlands of Downy Oak. Here there were lovely colonies of Few-flowered Orchids and the small flowered Ophrys classic one of the Ophrys sphegodes group.

Day 7 Our hotel lies at around 700m and offers is a staggering view down over the Puglian coast from Manfredonia onwards to the lagoons of the salt pans of Santa Margherita both day and night. Not this time, however for swirling clouds had descended and we were in thick mist. We delayed our start for a walk along the ridge and, at least,

this let us see what was in front of us. Clouds lifted to reveal a wonderful landscape of ancient stone walls forming enclosures and occasional small traditional shepherds' huts reminiscent of the 'Trulli' of further south in Puglia. built from the stones collected in clearing the land In Orchids flourish in those areas that are not grazed...*Ophrys tenthredinifera*, *O. promontori*, *O bisuctella* and more often in localised populations where their pollinators flourish.

Unfortunately, in the last three years, goats have been grazing where we used to find the Milky orchid (*Neotinea lactea*) but many other species were left as very tiny plants thanks to the challenging conditions and grazing)...for example there are many exquisite Burnt-tip Orchids (*Neotinea ustulata*) just a few centimetres tall.

Lois met us at the end of the walk and we travelled down in the vehicle to our picnic spot where a few rays of sunshine appeared and with them Orange-tip butterflies.

After lunch we travelled to the Monastery of Santa Maria di Pulsano, a favourite place we have known for many years since there was just a single monk doing much of the restoration himself. It has commanding views over the gulf of Siponto and rugged cliffs where there are caves once the retreats of hermits....There are also lovely plants such as *Ophrys sipontensis*, *O. tenthredinifera* and two endemics just coming into flower a Golden Drop (*Onosma lucano*) and the delightful Gargano bellflower (*Campanula graeca*).

In the gorge the afternoon sunshine brings out butterflies such as Cleopatra (*Gonepteryx Cleopatra*) and The Provence orange-tip (*Anthocaris euohenioides*) as well as several species of blues and skippers. An obliging Common Swallowtail (*Papilio machaon*) posed for the cameras....a fitting finale.

Day 8 Departure day comes around too quickly but we had done our level best to fill the week with those things that make the Gargano peninsula so special...

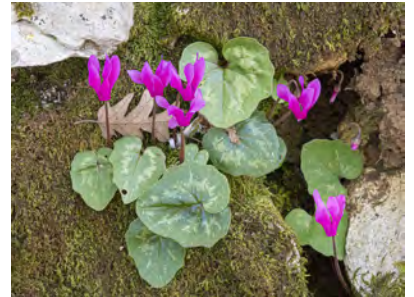
We left our hotel in thick mist and pouring rain at 9.30 and drove to Monte Saraceno but it was too wet and misty. Ergo, we stopped for coffee, and also visited the lovely old churches of San Leonardo di Siponto and Santa Maria. We stopped to see a few soggy flamingoes, Black-winged Stilts (which have the lovely Italian name Cavalieri

D'Italia...Knights of Italy) and then ate slices of pizza on the way to Bari airport.

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Gargano Gallery

Images by Paul Harcourt Davies



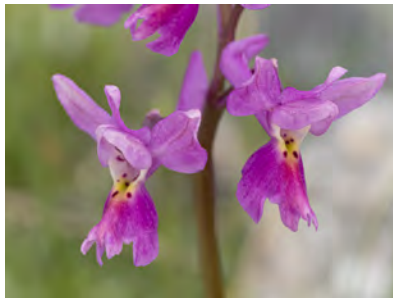
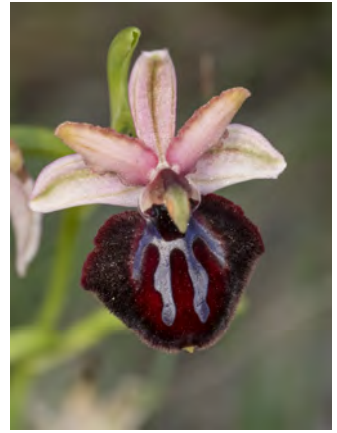
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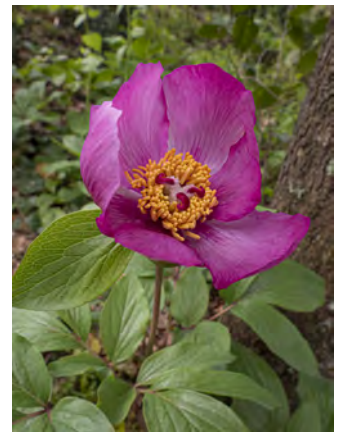
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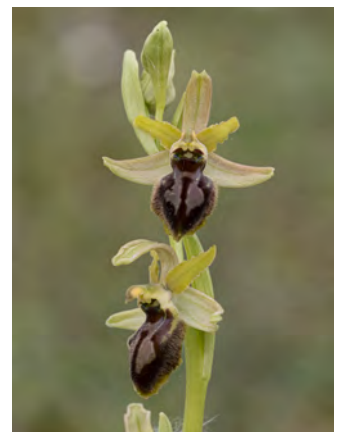
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