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the wildlife of UK's Overseas Territories (UKOTs) and
Crown Dependencies (CDs)*

FACT-SHEET ON:

Cyprus Bee Orchid *Ophrys kotschyi* ssp. *kotschyi*
UK Overseas Territory: Cyprus Sovereign Base Areas

Importance: The Cyprus Bee Orchid belongs to the iconic genus *Ophrys*, all of which display exquisite morphological adaptation to attract specific insect pollinators (a Digger-cuckoo Bee in the case of the Cyprus Bee Orchid). The Cyprus Bee Orchid is highly localised within Cyprus, occurring only in scattered localities, and is listed as Vulnerable. One of the remaining strongholds of the species is on the Akrotiri peninsula, within the Akrotiri Sovereign Base Area.

Ecosystem: Across Cyprus, the Cyprus Bee Orchid occurs in a range of vegetation types, including open pine woodlands and grasslands. However, within the SBAs, it is most frequently encountered on the fringes of salt-marshes, particularly in Akrotiri. These habitats provide the open conditions required by the orchid to hold its own in competition with other plants species, and to successfully attract insect pollinators.

Threats: The fragmented nature of the species' current distribution, coupled with the small size of individual populations, means that the Cyprus Bee Orchid is vulnerable to fluctuations in environmental conditions and reproductive success. For example, entire populations could be lost in the event of an extreme seasonal weather event. Little is known about the genetic relatedness and connectivity of different populations across the island. The direct threat of habitat loss from development and industrial pollution is also significant, as is the risk of destructive fires made increasingly likely by climate change.

Needs: The protection of known sites and suitable habitat for the founding of new populations should be a priority for the conservation of this species. Further research is needed into the best management practices for existing sites, including whether hand-pollination is a viable means of increasing fruit set and preventing erosion of genetic diversity. The good co-operation between authorities responsible for the management of sites within the SBAs and those in the Republic of Cyprus will be key to maximising the species' chances of survival in the long term. Support for propagation of the Cyprus Bee Orchid in living collections is also important to ensure that as much as possible of the species' genetic diversity is preserved.



Above: Cyprus Bee Orchid. CC-BY Orchi (Wikimedia)

Below: Salt-marsh at the edge of Akrotiri Salt-lake (in the distance), the largest wetland in the island of Cyprus - designated as a Wetland of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention.

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