



Pacific Golden Plover © A.P. Leventis

## REPRESENTATIONS OF BIRDS IN CYPRIOT ART

Throughout time, birds have served as one of the most favourite topics in primitive and advanced cultures across the globe.

The frequent representations of birds in the Cypriot art confirm the rule. In the ancient world of Cyprus, mainly during the 8th-6th century B.C., the depiction of birds is prevalent in the decoration of vessels, as stylized birds, true works of art.

Statues of priests with eagles in their hands reveal the symbolic importance of these birds, in all likelihood as elements of power and authority. By contrast, the dove, being Aphrodite's bird par excellence, is represented with female figures and considered a symbol of love and childbearing. The goose, the duck and small birds are depicted with children, often in relief representations where they are probably featured as pets.



Roller © D. Nye



Bonelli's Eagle © A.P. Leventis



**Glazed bowl**  
Sgraffito decoration depicting a bird (possibly a falcon), 13th century AD



**Clay vessel**  
from the village of Foini decorated with two birds in relief on the handles, 19th century AD



**Detail of a mosaic floor**  
with grape harvesting scene from the House of Dionysos in Kato Pafos. A partridge is depicted pecking at a cluster of grapes, 2nd- 3rd century AD

During the Medieval period, birds ranked among the most common decorative themes, especially on glazed wares. However, it is not easy to identify the specific species of birds depicted. The paintings convey the love of the people for the winged world of birds or allude to the charms of some of these species, such as the resplendent, plumed partridge, the long impressive neck of water-birds; or the pride of raptors which, among other things, have been associated with wealth and power.

In more recent years, representations of birds are encountered both in utilitarian and decorative objects, for instance weavings, embroideries, jewels and earthenware. Prevalent in ecclesiastical vessels is the double-headed eagle, emblem of the last Byzantine emperors, the Paleologues, and a symbol in the Greek Orthodox post-Byzantine world.

In general, the presence of birds and their images evoke a sense of the outdoors and the sounds of the countryside, conveying euphoria and optimism.

The exhibition showcases representative items from the Collections of the Department of Antiquities.



**Bird-shaped rhyton**  
Bichrome Painted ware, 11th century BC



Bee Eater © D. Nye



Kingfisher © A.P. Leventis



Kentish Plover © A. Stoeker

## Exhibition Organisers



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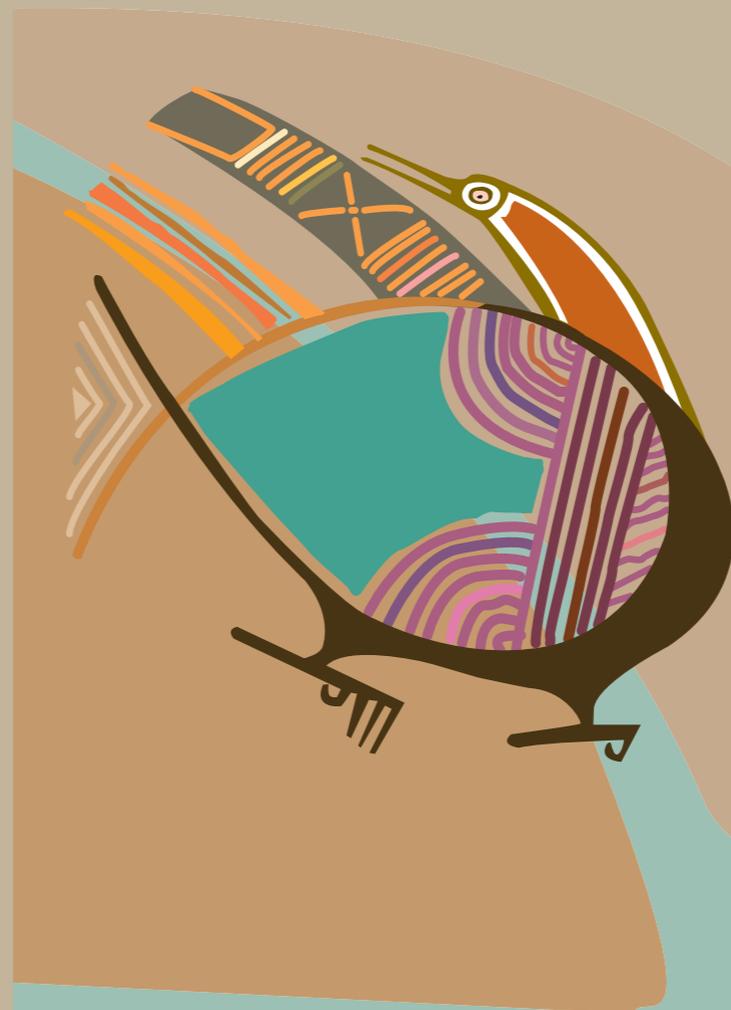
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## Exhibition

# FROM THE WORLD OF CYPRUS BIRDS



## FROM THE WORLD OF CYPRUS BIRDS

Cyprus is a very important place for birds at a national, European and global level. This is due mainly to the fact that the island is situated on one of the longest migratory corridors of Europe. More than 200 bird species fly over the island every autumn and spring, as they migrate between Europe, Africa and Eurasia. It is estimated that during migration, around 150 million birds pass through Cyprus – an impressive number! Of the migratory species, around 40 make their nests regularly or occasionally on the island, while there are around 50 resident breeding species. In total, to date over 400 species have been recorded in Cyprus. BirdLife International has also identified Cyprus as an Endemic Bird Area of world importance, as it has endemic species and subspecies of birds, i.e. birds that do not occur anywhere else.

Birds in Cyprus occur in a variety of habitats: from the rocky shores, to the high peaks of Troodos, from farmland areas to wetlands and scrub areas. In the past, traditional practices in Cyprus, such as farming and agriculture, supported a high biological diversity, but unfortunately this is diminishing as these practices have been gradually abandoned. Birds are good indicators of the state and quality of the natural environment, and changes in bird populations reflect changes in our environment. Loss of bird diversity is a threat to other species, to nature and ultimately to humankind. Every living organism, including birds, is part of a food chain, and every piece of this chain is essential to maintain the balance of the ecosystem. A healthy and diverse ecosystem is the basis for economic prosperity, and ensures a healthy world for us and for future generations, as well as a way to help tackle climate change. However, the intrinsic value of birds is just as important, for their presence makes everyday existence more beautiful, by adding colour, sound and inspiration to our lives. They are a reminder of what it is to be free.

We therefore have a responsibility to protect this global heritage living on our island or as it passes through.

