**Nature**

The fauna and flora of the Greek islands are incredibly rich and diverse. Visiting Greece in the middle of summer, one can feel like they're in the Sahara in some regions. The sun dries up the land, and the wind swirls up clumps of dried grass.

In spring, everything undergoes a magical metamorphosis. Plains and hillsides are covered with colorful flowers, and the greenery of leaves is ubiquitous. The first autumn rains trigger plant growth, and just a few weeks after the New Year, flowers bloom in the far southeast. Spring first arrives in Rhodes, Karpathos, and eastern Crete, then moves on to western Crete, the Peloponnese, and the eastern Aegean Islands. By the time spring arrives in the Ionian Islands and Thasos, summer is already in full swing in Rhodes.

Animals become more active in spring because it's easier to find food. Insects, insect-eaters, and other food chains emerge.

Before human arrival, the Greek islands were covered with forests and high shrubs called maquis and garigue, consisting mainly of thorny bushes. Among these bushes, one can now find aromatic herbs, colorful annual plants, and wonderful orchids.

Long before humans arrived, many Greek islands were home to many herbivorous animals, such as deer. To protect themselves from these herbivores, many plants evolved spines, thorns, or a distasteful flavor. This defense was successfully used against domestic sheep and goats.

Mammals living on the Greek islands are very shy. The White Mountains on Crete are home to a species of wild goat called **agrimi** or **kri-kri**, which is extremely similar to a goat. To protect the species, these goats were transported to the island of Dia, where they multiplied excessively and wreaked havoc among the endemic plants.

In addition to goats, the largest mammals are jackals, badgers, and domestic martens inhabiting the eastern Aegean Islands, which are often seen both during the day and at night. On Skiros, there are small, wild horses that were immortalized on a frieze in the Pantheon. Other mammals inhabiting Greece include rats, mice, shrews, and bats, which fly between the islands and the mainland.

Among the mammals, the Mediterranean monk seal, a species of seal protected in the Marine National Park north of Alonisos, is noteworthy. There are 500 animals of this species worldwide. Dolphin herds can also be seen in the waters surrounding the islands.

The Greek islands are a stopover for many migrating bird species from North Africa, where they rest after a long flight across the Mediterranean Sea. Bird enthusiasts can encounter white and black storks, as well as flamingos, which especially favor Lesbos, Samos, or Limnos.

The rose-white-black hoopoes, blue-brown bee-eaters, and colorful goldfinches are incredibly beautiful. Birds of prey, such as the golden eagle and vulture, inhabit mountainous areas, where they find safe places for nesting among ravines and cliffs. Meanwhile, the bearded vulture tirelessly hunts turtles, which it drops from a height onto rocks to crack their shells and enjoy the tasty prey.

Turtles are found on many islands, although they cannot be found on the largest one, Crete. They used to be collected en masse and sold in pet shops, but today they can feel relatively safe. **Terrapins** are freshwater turtles that eagerly inhabit streams with bare, muddy banks. By the sea, you can encounter **Caretta-Carreta**, sea turtles, which are subject to special protection. Snakes, like everywhere else, evoke fear among tourists and native Greeks, although most of them are harmless and try to avoid people. On some Ionian Islands, Cyclades, and eastern Aegean Islands, you can encounter a venomous snake. It can be recognized by its characteristic zigzag pattern on its back.

However, it's not turtles and snakes that are the most numerous reptiles on the Greek islands. Lizards have dominated Greece, with the most beautiful being the three-striped lizard. The **agama** lizard is also noteworthy, sometimes called the Rhodes dragon, although it is also found on Corfu and the Aegean Islands.

Insects that become active at night and disrupt sleep are mosquitoes, but in spring, on Corfu, you can admire glowworms glowing after dark and creating a magical atmosphere. During the day, you can admire butterflies, which often occur in huge numbers and diversity in one place. During the day, you can observe moths from the **Zygaenidae** family, especially burnets, which hover motionless above flowers because, like hummingbirds, they flap their wings at a high frequency. Hanging over the flowers, they sip nectar from them. Making more noise are the large, shiny blue-black cicadas, tirelessly searching for a suitable place to lay their eggs in empty reed stalks. The loudest are **cicadas**, sitting on branches, emitting deafening sounds. Cicadas are masters of camouflage. They are very difficult to spot because they blend perfectly into the background. The Greek islands are also haunted by the African locust, or giant field grasshoppers. However, their population is small and they do not cause devastation.

A keen observer will spot praying mantises, lying in wait for potential prey. Female mantises, surrounded by bad reputation, will not hesitate to devour their partner to provide food for their offspring.