

**ORNITHOLIDAYS' TOUR TO GREECE - THE ISLAND OF LESVOS  
AT LEISURE**

*Spring Migration Magic*

**22 – 29 April 2010**



**Leaders: Roger Lawrence and Colin Bushell**

## ORNITHOLIDAYS' TOUR TO GREECE - THE ISLAND OF LESVOS AT LEISURE

*Spring Migration Magic*

22 – 29 April 2010

### A Personal Diary

#### **Thursday 22 April**

It was with some apprehension that the majority of the group assembled at the North Terminal at Gatwick Airport early on Thursday morning. The eruption of the Icelandic volcano Eyjafjallajökull a week earlier and the ash cloud that had closed UK and European airports had made this holiday very doubtful. Luckily the flying ban had been lifted yesterday and the terminal building was remarkably calm. Check-in was surprisingly easy and the flight from Manchester that we were to board to join Colin and the rest of our party, landed on time. The aircraft was full of birdwatchers as this was the first direct flight to Lesvos this year.

The flight to Mytilene, the capital of Lesvos, was a little over three hours and the Boeing 737 landed at 14.55 local time, fifteen minutes ahead of schedule. We learned that the two party members, due to fly with Colin from Manchester, had been unable to travel so just eleven of us loaded our two VW Transporter minibuses and set off for the hour's drive to Skala Kallonis and the Hotel Pasiphae.

With Alan navigating we successfully negotiated the one-way system in Mytilene and were soon speeding westwards through the beautiful countryside, first skirting the northern end of Gera Gulf then the north eastern end of Kalloni Gulf and past the saltpans that we were to be visiting frequently in search of migrant birds in the coming days. Lesvos is Greece's second largest island and is a major olive producer so we passed many olive trees. It is said that there are over a million on the island. The lush meadows, nestling at the foot of rugged hills clothed in cistus, broom and oak, suggested that it had been a wetter than usual winter.

Hooded Crows, Yellow-legged Gulls, a few Black-winged Stilts and Barn Swallows were our first birds but once we had reached our hotel and dropped our luggage in our rooms some of us did a little gentle birding before dinner. Skala Kallonis Pool right outside the hotel produced the first Crested Larks of the tour and there were many Barn Swallows, House Martins, a few Sand Martins, Wood Sandpipers, Spanish Sparrows and a fine Black-headed Wagtail too. The latter is considered by some a distinct species, but most taxonomists still regard it as one of the many subspecies of Yellow Wagtail. It breeds in the Balkans, east to the Caspian Sea and south to Turkey, Iran and Afghanistan. Migration here is clearly well under way.

The Christou River a little further on along the road provided our first Kentish Plovers, several Common Greenshanks and a distant Squacco Heron.

We met in the hotel bar before dinner but after we had eaten no one objected to an early night. It had been a very long day. A Nightingale sang in the hotel garden as we retired to our rooms for some much needed sleep.

#### **Friday 23 April**

Despite the long day yesterday, six of our party were out in the hotel car-park ready to commence birding at 06.30. Did they not realise that this was an 'at leisure' tour? Although the sun was beginning to rise above the surrounding hills, there was a distinct chill in the air and hat, gloves and a warm coat were required for the first hour. The short drive to Metochi Lake, our pre-breakfast venue, took less than 15 minutes and there was just one other birder there when we arrived but others soon followed.

As we parked the vehicles a Squacco Heron in full breeding plumage flew up from the very full lake. Water levels here were higher than is usual at this time of the year so there was not the usual muddy fringe. However the birds were still easy to see. Iain spotted the first of three Little Bitterns and a female Little Crake in full view on the opposite side of this small lake. Two more Little Crakes, one a fine male, a Spotted

Crake that flew off from close to where we had set up our telescopes, a Purple Heron and a Black-crowned Night-heron all appeared within a few minutes and all gave wonderful views. Croaking Great Reed Warblers and explosive Cetti's Warblers were all around us in the reeds and tamarisk bushes fringing the water's edge. A male Masked Shrike landed on the top of a bush right opposite us and stayed there for long enough for our telescopes to be focused on it. Distantly a Golden Oriole's fluty call could be heard above the croaking of Levant Water Frogs and a Raven flew overhead. One could understand why this is a popular early-morning destination for birders staying in the Skala Kallonis hotels.

We were back in the hotel for a buffet breakfast by 08.00 and joined the rest of our group. At 09.30 we were off again, this time in the opposite direction for another short drive to the Kalloni Salt pans. We drove slowly along the road skirting the western edge of the pans, and stopped frequently to set up our 'scopes by the minibuses. There were well over a hundred Greater Flamingos, many Pied Avocets, Black-winged Stilts and dozens of Wood Sandpipers mingling with Ruff, Little Ringed Plover, Kentish Plover and Spotted Redshank. Two Collared Pratincoles flew over and on one of the bunds, separating two pans, two Stone Curlews were crouching in the grass.

Nine Black Storks drifted past high in the sky and there were two White Storks too. Common and Long-legged Buzzard tested our ID skills, and a Western Marsh Harrier and a Peregrine Falcon all appeared seeking out the thermals in order to rise high above the rugged hills as they migrated north across the island. It was magical to witness migration in action on this fine, sunny, very warm morning.

Rising above the coastal plain the rocky hills were close enough for us to be able to identify even some of the passerine species on the move here. A Black-eared Wheatear, a distant shrike, almost certainly Lesser Grey, although we would have to wait a day or two to be certain about this species, became our focus of attention. A Woodchat Shrike in a field right by the side of the road was much more positively identified, and Sally spotted a Little Owl on an electricity pole that later perched under the eaves of a farm building to taunt the farm cat. Iain got excellent photographs of a pristine Swallowtail butterfly, an insect that he had long wanted good images of.

Beyond the salt extraction plant we stopped by what is usually just a wet meadow but the exceptional winter rains had now left as a proper wetland right next to the road. Here two superb drake Garganey, Common, Little, Whiskered and White-winged Terns, Ruddy Shelduck and Great and Little Egrets were in breeding plumage and in full view, totally oblivious of the presence of the birdwatchers. A Wood Sandpiper flew past and almost landed just feet from us. Had this bird ever encountered *Homo sapiens* before? In tamarisk bushes along the roadside at least two (Eastern) Olivaceous Warblers were in full song and eventually one came out on top of the shrubbery and everyone managed to see it fairly well. Surely better birding could not be had anywhere in Europe.

By lunchtime we had clocked up 65 species and a relaxed taverna lunch became our main priority. Taverna Enigma close to our hotel, on the other side of Skala Kallonis pool, has always been a popular venue with Ornitholidays' clients and today proved to be no exception. We were welcomed like old friends and were soon tucking in to local calamari, sardines or omelettes with Greek salad and fresh bread. The tables are under cover but adjacent to the beach on the shore of the Gulf of Kalloni. Barn Swallows flew in and out, investigating nest sites on the rafters and bursts of Nightingale song were background music as we ate. As we left, Iain spotted the songster perched on the top of the TV aerial, rather easier to see than these birds in southern England.

We returned to the hotel, three minutes drive away, for a siesta after lunch then set off again at 16.00. This time the Lower Tsiknias Valley, close to the salt pans, was our destination. However this was unusually quiet. Apart from the ubiquitous Nightingales there were just a couple of (Eastern) Olivaceous Warblers disputing territory in tamarisk along the banks. In the shallow river Wood Sandpipers, Ruff and a pair of Little Ringed Plovers waded searching for tit-bits and, on a mudbank at the river's mouth where it flowed into the Gulf of Kalloni, a Black Stork stood around looking rather lost and on a spit there were a few Yellow-legged Gulls and a single Eurasian Curlew.

We decided to look upstream on the north side of the Kalloni-Mytilene road. Here we ended our first full day's birding at Madaros in the hills overlooking the Upper Tsiknias Valley and coastal flats, a tranquil and

beautiful spot. This proved to be more productive for, not only did we have close views of a pair of Black-eared Wheatears and a Western Rock Nuthatch, but we also saw the only Great Spotted Cuckoo to be seen by anyone during the holiday. This scarce migrant and occasional breeder parasitises Magpie nests. The other notable species here was a reptile - a Starred Agama – a particularly ugly lizard basking in the evening sun on a rocky outcrop.

### **Saturday 24 April**

The 'early birders' had diminished somewhat in number this morning before breakfast and only four of our number ventured forth with Colin and me. Alan was not feeling very well and returned to the hotel and Roger joined us briefly after his walk to the small fishing harbour of Skala Kallonis. It was actually rather quiet with little obvious migration and we walked as far as the road bridge over the Christou River less than half a mile from the hotel. Three Wood Sandpipers, a Squacco Heron, Common Terns offshore over the Gulf, Spanish Sparrows and Barn Swallows prospecting nesting sites under the bridge were the main featuring avian cast.

We had breakfast a little earlier than yesterday and set off promptly. We drove via the flats at Mesa and on to Achladeri pinewoods that lay on the eastern side of the Gulf of Kalloni. Once off the main road to Mytilene we were able to cruise slowly along, pausing to look at any interesting-looking bird. There were many Yellow Wagtails, mainly Blue-headed, the nominate race *Motacilla flava flava* but Black-headed Wagtails too. There was a fine male Kentish Plover with its bright chocolaty-orange cap, four Great and several Little Egrets, a Grey Heron and a Common Buzzard sitting on the ground.

We soon reached the pinewoods and quickly located the same nesting site where one of the island's sought-after species had bred last year. The snapped off stump of a pine less than three metres tall was riddled with holes and within seconds of our arrival one, then two Krüper's Nuthatches perched briefly before disappearing into one of them carrying nesting material. We stood several metres back so that we did not disturb the birds and one returned repeatedly every few minutes to continue with the nest building.

The other species occurring in these woods that birders come here for was less cooperative. We heard a Short-toed Treecreeper calling but the bird was constantly on the move high in the canopy of the pines and we were unable to locate it in order to get a decent view of it.

A Cirl Bunting was more sedentary, perched on top of a pine as it delivered its rather tuneless flat trilling song and everyone got good scope views of it. Our first European Turtle Dove purred from its tree up the hillside and, on the other side of the road there were both Masked and Woodchat Shrikes on full view. We also saw the first European Roller to be seen here this year, perched obligingly on overhead electricity transmission wires.

On our drive back to Skala Kallonis for lunch, we stopped for an hour on the eastern side of the Kalloni Salt pans. Here four Whinchats, three of which were brightly-coloured males, a Eurasian Hobby, a Common Sandpiper and close views of the many Greater Flamingos present here for much of the year kept us busy. By popular demand we ate again at Taverna Enigma, trying some of the many different dishes on offer and, like yesterday, we had the taverna almost to ourselves. The 'normal' holidaymakers do not arrive on Lesbos until much later in the year when the birders are long-gone. The day had started rather cool again but by mid-morning the temperature had risen into the 20's and the cool breeze coming off the Gulf of Kalloni made for a very pleasantly and comfortable lunch break. A siesta back at Hotel Pasiphae after a good meal suited everyone very well.

We met again at 15.30 and drove through Paraskevi north of the salt pans and into the Napi Valley. This is a route used by migrating storks and raptors in particular moving north through the island but almost anything can turn up here. Just before reaching the tiny village with its very narrow winding street, Colin who was driving the second vehicle, spotted a fine male Red-backed Shrike and they paused to watch it. Our chance was yet to come!

We stopped at a rough lay-by with a commanding view along the lower part of the valley, and scanned the surrounding hillsides. A Common Buzzard was perched distantly on top of a dead tree on the skyline and a Long-legged Buzzard was trying to find a thermal in order to rise out of the valley. This was a perfect

opportunity to compare the two similar species and as we were looking down on the latter the creamy-pink, unbarred tail and long wings were very obvious features. Colin drew our attention to a singing male Cretzschmar's Bunting on the opposite hillside. It eventually perched closer on electricity wires to give an excellent view of this colourful bird. A beautiful white-throated morph Black-eared Wheatear perched obligingly on top of a bush just below our vantage point. Both this and the black-throated morphs are splendid birds and we were to see many of both of them during our week. Two Eurasian Hoopoes flew past, one perching on an oak and giving really good views.

We drove a little further into the valley before stopping again by the roadside where four Sombre Tits were flying about low in the oaks and brushwood beneath them. This is another 'must see' species in Lesvos. A Great Tit joined them almost by order for the purpose of comparison. Two Short-toed Eagles flew high towards the north (the valley is orientated SSW to NNE), Iain spotted a Chukar motionless on a rocky outcrop above the road and a European Turtle Dove perched right on top of a dead tree. We failed to actually see the Common Cuckoo calling from across the valley. As we watched and waited for birds to appear, a farmer arrived in a pick-up and filled three troughs with animal feed. He then called loudly a couple of times and instantly, through the trees a small flock of sheep came charging up the hillside to tuck into the food.

It was a lovely place to end our birding day and it was quite hard to leave the rural bliss to drive back to freshen up before dinner.

### **Sunday 25 April**

The Kalloni Mini Soccer Pitch was where just three clients drove with Colin and me to begin our third day's birding. This rectangular site, also known as the 'Scops Copse' is a six-a-side soccer pitch, a small taverna, only open in the summer and a car park, surrounded by mature trees some of which are eucalypts. As the name implies it is a regular spot in which to find Eurasian Scops Owl. I had been told the exact daytime roosting tree last evening and went straight to it and, as with the Krüper's Nuthatch, it took only seconds to locate the bird about twenty feet up and pressed hard against the bole. It might have been a cardboard cut out for all the notice it took of us but did open its eyes to look in our direction once. The array of optics and cameras pointing at it were, however, treated as if part of its normal surroundings. A Golden Oriole called but there was little else to stay for so we drove to the Lower Potamia Valley on our way back for breakfast. Apart from a Black Stork that flew over as we climbed the bank of a large reservoir, on which were a few gulls and a Little Grebe there was nothing to delay our return for breakfast.

Alan was still poorly and said that he would have another quiet day in the hotel while the rest of us drove 50 kilometres or so to the western end of the island. He has been to Lesvos several times so was fairly sure that he would not miss any new birds.

There was very little traffic. Indeed, apart from the main Mytilene road, all the island's roads are very empty except in the main tourist season, so roadside stops are not a problem. Consequently we stopped several times wherever an interesting bird was spotted from the minibuses. The route was very scenic and the open, hilly countryside rock-strewn and in places quite barren. Broom, cistus, poppies and many flowering plants lined the roadside verge and it was a beautiful day. After passing the Limonas Monastery in a valley below the road we threaded our way through tiny villages perched precariously on the hillsides - Filia, Skalochori, Vatousa and Andissa. Roadside stops produced a Cretzschmar's Bunting, Woodlark on overhead wires, Woodchat Shrike and Middle-spotted Woodpecker. At the end of the gorge-like section of the Lardia Valley, that used to be called 'the Grand Canyon', we pulled over and watched our first Red-rumped Swallows and Eurasian Crag Martins swooping about.

At a T-junction where the road from Agra, Mesotopos and Eressos joined the road we were on, we stopped again. This is one of the best places on the island to see Isabelline Wheatear and it was not long before one was spotted. We had seen four by the time we drove on to the spectacular Ipsilou Monastery, perched on the top of a huge conical hill over 500 metres high and the highest point on the western end of Lesvos.

Parking just before the small official car park and with a commanding view of the surrounding countryside, we set up our 'scopes to search the oak-covered slopes of the hill that attract tired migrants. There was a strong north-easterly wind blowing and the hill was very exposed. However, a rock buttress below us was a bit sheltered and held three very nice species. A Western Rock Nuthatch was building its mud nest, stuck to

the rock face, below a slight overhang. A Common Rock Sparrow carrying nesting material went into a crack in the rock nearby and a Cinereous Bunting sang from the flat buttress top, all three birds visible without swinging the telescope round at all.

Much closer below us the oaks held a female Pied Flycatcher, an obliging Spotted Flycatcher flycatching from a bare branch out in the open and a Wood Warbler picking insects from the newly opened leaf buds, all presumably newly-arrived migrants.

We walked down the road a short distance as more birdwatchers arrived. As lunchtime was approaching and I knew that the best Taverna in the little fishing port of Sigri, on the extreme west coast and the only place locally to eat, had limited space inside so an early arrival was essential. It would be too windy to eat *al fresco*. A European Glass Lizard, like a giant slow worm writhed about on the tarmac unable to grip the surface properly as we set off westwards.

Lunch in Taverna Australia was excellent, after which we birded the fields north of Sigri. There was a European Shag just offshore and a small flock of Western Jackdaws flew around the church as we left. One newly irrigated hay meadow held as many as two hundred Blue-headed and Black-headed Wagtails. A visit to Faneromeni Beach gave distant views of both Yelkouan and fewer but much larger Scopoli's Shearwaters, the latter now 'split' from Cory's Shearwater of the Atlantic Ocean. The mouth of the Faneromeni Stream was a superb spot for really seeing small 'peeps' well and enabled us to compare Temminck's and Little Stint next to one another as well as close views of Wood Sandpipers and Ruff in non-breeding plumage.

Further along the main track we came to the ford over the stream a few hundred metres inland. The boulder and cobble covered stream bed was alive with thousands of tiny, newly emerged frogs while the slowly flowing, shallow water was almost black with tadpoles still to complete their metamorphosis. Downstream an immature male Citrine Wagtail was feeding with a Black-headed Wagtail and a Squacco Heron in breeding plumage and it was well worth the effort of walking over the cobbles to get a closer look. Three male Black-headed Buntings arrived to bathe and a Tree Pipit did likewise.

On the drive back towards the main road a Golden Oriole flew away from us, a Great Reed Warbler tried to hide in the flower head of Giant Fennel by the roadside, and our only Common Whitethroat was seen well by most of the party.

A brief stop at the Kalloni Mini Soccer Pitch enabled the non-early birders to catch up with Eurasian Scops Owl before reaching the Pasiphae where we found Alan was much better and was confident that he would be able to join us all again tomorrow.

### **Monday 26 April**

Before breakfast the 'early birders' drove to the Kalloni Salt pans. It was a very cool and overcast morning and the stiff northerly wind continued to blow relentlessly. We concentrated our efforts in the sheepfields beyond the saltworks and immediately we drove across the little bridge there was a Short-toed lark ahead of us on the sandy track. Colin heard a Red-throated Pipit but it flew away over the salt pans not to be relocated. However, we did see a couple of Tawny Pipits in the short turf. Eight Collared Pratincoles flew over and landed on the beach and Iain was able to photograph them and we saw at least 25 Ruddy Shelducks in the distance. We added both Marsh and Curlew Sandpipers to our list as we drove back for breakfast as well as a Eurasian Spoonbill on the wet meadows.

After breakfast we drove to the northern end of the island. The clifftop at Kavaki, between the coastal towns of Petra and Molivos (Mithymna), is a regular breeding place for Rüppell's Warbler and it is usually fairly easy to find here. Roger spotted the first of two males rather distantly on the top of a bush at the cliff edge, but we were then able to watch a pair building a nest much closer to the lay-by in which we were parked. There was a strong, cold wind and spots of rain but we still had excellent views of these lovely *Sylvia* warblers. There was also an even closer Subalpine Warbler also carrying nesting material. A Peregrine Falcon flew around the cliffs, Crag Martins zipped about and there was a steady passage of Barn Swallows and a small party of Yelkouan Shearwaters below us afforded much closer views than we had at Faneromeni Beach yesterday. A group of Glossy Ibis flew inland from across the sea. The weather was decidedly inclement and as the rain became a bit more persistent and we were getting chilled we decided to head back

to Skala Kallonis. We drove the scenic northern coastal route back cutting south when we reached Mandamados and through the Napi Valley. The poor conditions discouraged stops en route. Taverna Enigma was becoming rather a habit, but we ate inside this time.

During lunch the weather began to improve, the sun broke through the clouds and the temperature rose as the wind dropped. After a short siesta back at Hotel Pasiphae most of us returned to the sheepfields at the salt pans to have another attempt to find viewable Red-throated Pipits as we had heard that several had been seen there during the morning. Luck was with us and we located possibly as many as ten birds, some being quite approachable. The closer birds were also in good breeding plumage with good throat colour. We had good views of Short-toed Larks too. Terns had increased in number on the wet meadow and over the salt pans. There were now over 50 White-winged Terns and 35 Whiskered Terns and all in pristine breeding plumage. Garganey, mostly beautiful drakes, had increased to 29 birds and were all close to the road and very easy to see really well.

Despite cool and rather damp conditions, today had produced some very nice birds and there has been a steady increase in evidence of migration as the week has progressed.

### **Tuesday 27 April**

We hoped that the initial popularity of Metochi Lake with other birders earlier in our tour might have diminished somewhat so, this morning before breakfast we decided to start here again. At 06.45 we arrived and our hopes were realised. Although we did not see anything new, we did get some excellent views of some quality birds. There were both a Little and a Spotted Crake very close to the track from which we were viewing. Four Squacco Herons and one sub-adult Black-crowned Night-Heron were on view. Despite the chilly wind, a couple of Cetti's Warblers perched boldly on the top of bushes. There was a Sedge Warbler, Great Reed and European Reed Warblers easily seen and a Black Stork, a Peregrine Falcon and a Common Raven flew over.

We had been told that there was a pair of Penduline Tits building a nest at Skala Eressos, only the second breeding record for Lesvos and directions in the log in the hotel were very clear. This species therefore became the focus for our morning session. We found the location without difficulty and the nest, suspended at the end of a willow branch was viewable with no fear of disturbing the birds from across a small stream. Both birds visited the nest, made mainly of sheep's wool it seemed, every ten minutes or so and were in the process of completing the short entrance tunnel. As a bonus there was a fine male Red-backed Shrike in the field adjacent to the site and a male Little Bittern for good measure.

We drove on to Ipsilou Monastery where the wind was near gale force. The south face of the hill was more sheltered and there were migrants to be seen in the calmer conditions. Golden Orioles, a singing Pied Flycatcher, a Spotted Flycatcher but, the best bird without doubt was a Levant Sparrowhawk that Colin spotted. We thought that most of the group had missed it but it was a most obliging bird and returned and gave us very close views leaving no doubt as to its identification.

At just after 13.00 we drove down to Sigri and lunched at Taverna Australia again eating inside out of the cold wind. A Short-toed Eagle headed inland high in the sky as we drove. After yet another excellent meal we drove slowly along the narrow coastal road past the Sigri fields as far as the ford at Faneromeni again but did not bother to visit the beach this time. As we passed the inlet north of the town Colin picked out a second summer Mediterranean Gull and an immature Audouin's Gull among their larger Yellow-legged cousins.

In the fields shrikes were much in evidence, obviously new arrivals. There were many, mainly male Red-backed Shrikes, and single Masked, Woodchat and Lesser Grey Shrikes. A superb male Collared Flycatcher perched prominently and it was Roger who first spotted three colourful European Bee-eaters hanging on to the small trees that were blowing in the wind. A Lesser Kestrel flew over and a very confused male Little Bittern clambered about in a small dead tree above a tiny pool right next to the road – a splendid photo opportunity for the photographers in the group. At the ford were many Wood Sandpipers, Ruff and one Common Sandpiper.

Today had obviously been one of arrival for migrants and considering the very windy conditions we had some very close views of most of them and, at least the rough conditions had not interrupted our

birdwatching activities.

### **Wednesday 28 April**

Acting upon information received last evening a select few left their beds early again and we headed into the Potamia Valley just 15 minutes drive from our hotel. An Olive Tree Warbler had been seen yesterday, the first for the year. Most arrive in May and they can be very difficult to see. We heard the quite distinctive song immediately but the bird was some distance away across an olive grove surrounded by a dilapidated barbed-wire fence. Patience was rewarded when it appeared briefly in a bramble. While we waited for the bird to show itself there was a pair of Masked Shrikes and a pair of Sombre Tits to keep us amused.

After breakfast we all set off to the Kalloni Saltpans to see another newly arrived migrant normally appearing a little later in the spring. At the water pumping station at the southeast corner of the saltpans there were already several birdwatchers and, after one false alarm when a Cetti's Warbler flew out of the conifers surrounding a fenced-off building, a Rufous Bush-robin hopped out onto a concrete, its tail cocked up in typical pose.

As more birders keen to see this rather scarce species arrived we left and drove north to the Napi Valley. At the head of the valley we heard another Olive Tree Warbler in song but could not see it through the mass of shrubs. Seeing us by the roadside four other birders joined us, one leaving her telescope and tripod behind when they left! Iain, who had walked on down the road, found a Subalpine Warbler building its nest, there were a couple of Masked Shrikes and a Hobby and two Red-footed Falcons flew over. There were Sombre Tits, a Short-toed Eagle, a Common Buzzard and many Barn Swallows passing north through the valley, all contributing to a pleasant morning's birding.

For positively the last time our favourite (and only!) taverna in Skala Kallonis provided our more than generously proportioned lunchtime fare. The obligatory short siesta followed back in the Pasiphae before venturing forth again for our last late afternoon's bird watching. Kalami Marsh was our first stop where about 30 splendid Whiskered Terns were dipping for insects on the water's surface. A Western Marsh Harrier quartered the reeds and five Squacco Herons in full breeding regalia glowed in the late afternoon sunshine. From the second minibus, Dick had spotted a European Roller on overhead wires as we drove along. Several Whinchats, Red-backed and a Lesser Grey Shrike perched on the barbed wire fences surrounding the adjacent fields and a magnificent male Golden Oriole sat in full view at the base of an oak.

We ended the day by driving past Mesa and Achladeri Forest to the dirt track along the eastern shore of the Gulf of Kalloni and on to the tiny fishing harbour of Skala Vasilikon in the hope of a different tern or gull, but it was not to be.

### **Thursday 29 April**

As Dick and Sally were going to join another Ornitholidays' tour, this one to Poland, they were not returning to England with us this afternoon but were flying to Warsaw via Athens. Their early flight meant a 05.30 departure from the Pasiphae and Colin and I rose early to see them off in their taxi.

There was no pre-breakfast birding this morning as packing was the main priority and we left the hotel with the minibuses loaded and a picnic lunch on board at 08.45.

We had plenty of time for birding en route to the airport as our flight was not until 16.10 so we took full advantage of the opportunity offered.

Kalloni Saltpans and the pools in the wet meadow seemed an appropriate penultimate destination and the views of the superb marsh terns, waders and duck, all so close and unconcerned by our presence, was truly a joy. There was a Curlew Sandpiper moulting into its red summer breeding plumage among the Wood Sandpipers and Ruff and several Ruddy Shelduck and Garganey contributing to the colourful scene against a backdrop of lovely, rugged, oak-clothed hills. There were two Western Marsh Harriers drifting about often causing alarm amongst the marsh birds and a Black Stork flew over. Colin walked back to scan the saltpans and spotted nine Gull-billed Terns heading north towards the hills. Some of us managed to see them before they disappeared.

We thought that the terns might have paused at Kalami Marsh, so we drove on as it was in the right direction for the airport along the Mytilene road. Right up to the eleventh hour we managed to add a new species when a Pallid Swift flew over the marsh. More Squacco Herons, a Purple Heron and about 30 Whiskered Terns and, in the fields, Red-backed and a Lesser Grey Shrike provided an appropriate end to the tour.

After dropping off the two minibuses we were the first passengers to check-in, the inbound flight arrived spot on time and we departed on schedule. We landed at Gatwick 20 minutes early, said goodbye to Colin who was continuing to Manchester, collected our luggage, said our farewells and continued homeward, the end of a most enjoyable tour.

### **Acknowledgements**

We are most grateful to the staff at Hotel Pasiphae for their friendliness and assistance. The taverna waiters were also most welcoming and made our lunch breaks a memorable part of the holiday. However Colin and I would like to say the biggest 'thank you' to you, our clients, who made the holiday such a success. Your punctuality and good humour made our job a real pleasure. We thank you most warmly and hope that we may have the opportunity of travelling with you on another Ornitholidays' tour again soon. Many thanks to Iain Stewart and Colin Bushell for the photographs within this report.

Roger Lawrence  
Ornitholidays  
29 Straight Mile  
Romsey  
Hampshire SO51 9BB  
Tel: 01794 519445  
email: [info@ornitholidays.co.uk](mailto:info@ornitholidays.co.uk)

May 2010

## Itinerary and Weather

- 22 April Fly Manchester & Gatwick to Mytilene. Transfer to Skala Kallonis.  
Local birding around Skala Kallonis Pool & hotel  
Fine & sunny. 22 - 25°C.
- 23 April Metochi Lake before breakfast  
am. Kalloni Saltpans  
Lunch in Skala Kallonis & siesta  
pm. Lower Tsiknias Valley & Madros  
Gentle breeze but hot & sunny. 25°C.
- 24 April Christou River mouth & salymarsh before breakfast.  
am. Achladeri Forest, Mesa & Kalloni Saltpans.  
Lunch in Skala Kallonis & siesta.  
pm. Napi Valley.  
Calm. Sunny & warm after chilly start. 24°C.
- 25 April Kalloni Mini Soccer Pitch (“Scops Copse”) & Potamia Valley before breakfast.  
am. Ipsilou Monastery then lunch in Sigri.  
pm. Sigri Fields & Faneromeni beach & ford. Kalloni Mini Soccer Pitch again.  
Hot & sunny. 22°C.
- 26 April Kalloni Saltpans & sheepfields before breakfast.  
am. Kavaki cliffs (Molivos) then back to Skala Kallonis via Mandamados & Napi Valley.  
Lunch in Skala Kallonis & siesta.  
pm. Kalloni Saltpans & sheepfields.  
Cold northerly wind. A little ran then sunny and warmer later. 18°C.
- 27 April Metochi Lake before breakfast.  
am. Skala Eressos via Ipsilou Monastery  
Lunch in Sigri.  
pm. Sigri fields & Faneromeni ford.  
Cool, overcast & spots of rain. Very strong NNW wind but sunny later. 8 - 20°C.
- 28 April Potamia Valley before breakfast.  
Water pumping station (Kalloni Saltpans) then Napi Valley.  
Lunch in Skala Kallonis then a siesta.  
pm. Kalami Marsh, Mesa & Skala Vasilikon.  
Clear skies. Sunny but a cool northerly breeze. 15 - 17°C.
- 29 April No pre-breakfast session. Depart hotel.  
Drive to Mytilene Airport birding Kalloni Saltpans & Kalami Marsh en route.  
Fly back to Gatwick & Manchester. Tour ends.  
Clear but sunny. Cool breeze. 18 - 20°C.

## CHECKLIST OF BIRDS SEEN DURING TOUR

No of days recorded	Abundance Scale
	maximum for any one day
1 2h means seen on 1 day and heard on 2 other days. Max 8 days.	1 = 1 - 4
	2 = 5 - 9
	3 = 10 - 100
	4 = 100 - 1000
	5 = > 1000

SPECIES	No of days recorded	Abundance Scale	SCIENTIFIC NAME
---------	---------------------	-----------------	-----------------

The sequence and nomenclature of this list follow Collins Bird Guide 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition 2010.

Common Shelduck	3	2	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>
Ruddy Shelduck	7	3	<i>Tadorna ferruginea</i>
Mallard	3	1	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>
Garganey	3	3	<i>Anas querquedula</i>
Northern Shoveler	1	1	<i>Anas clypeata</i>
Chukar	2	1	<i>Alectoris chukar</i>
Little Grebe	3 1h	1	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>
Scopoli's (Cory's) Shearwater	1	1	<i>Calonectris diomedea borealis</i>
Yelkouan Shearwater	2	2	<i>Puffinus yelkouan</i>
European Shag	3	1	<i>Phalacrocorax aristotelis</i>
Little Bittern	2	1	<i>Ixobrychus minutus</i>
Black-crowned Night-Heron	2	1	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>
Squacco Heron	8	3	<i>Ardeola ralloides</i>
Little Egret	8	3	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>
Great Egret	5	2	<i>Egretta alba</i>
Grey Heron	7	2	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>
Purple Heron	5	1	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>
Black Stork	6	3	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>
White Stork	4	2	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>
Glossy Ibis	5	3	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>
Eurasian Spoonbill	1	1	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>
Greater Flamingo	5	4	<i>Phoenicopterus ruber</i>
Short-toed Eagle	5	1	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>
Western Marsh Harrier	4	1	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>
Hen Harrier	1	1	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>
Montagu's Harrier	1	1	<i>Circus pygargus</i>
Long-legged Buzzard	3	1	<i>Buteo rufinus</i>
Common Buzzard	7	1	<i>Buteo buteo</i>
Levant Sparrowhawk	1	1	<i>Accipiter brevipes</i>
Common Kestrel	4	1	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>
Lesser Kestrel	2	1	<i>Falco naumanni</i>
Red-footed Falcon	6	1	<i>Falco vespertinus</i>
Eurasian Hobby	2	1	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>
Peregrine Falcon	4	1	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>
Spotted Crake	2	1	<i>Porzana porzana</i>
Little Crake	2	1	<i>Porzana parva</i>
Common Moorhen	3 1h	2	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>
Eurasian Coot	2	1	<i>Fulica atra</i>
Pied Avocet	5	3	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>
Black-winged Stilt	7	3	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>
Stone Curlew	2	1	<i>Burhinus oedicephalus</i>
Collared Pratincole	2	2	<i>Glareola pratincola</i>
Little Ringed Plover	6	2	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>
Common Ringed Plover	1	1	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>
Kentish Plover	5	2	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>
Curlew Sandpiper	2	1	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>
Temminck's Stint	3	2	<i>Calidris temminckii</i>

Little Stint	3		2	<i>Calidris minuta</i>
Wood Sandpiper	8		3	<i>Tringa glareola</i>
Spotted Redshank	2	1h	1	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>
Common Greenshank	7		3	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>
Marsh Sandpiper	2		1	<i>Tringa stagnatilis</i>
Common Sandpiper	5		1	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>
Black-tailed Godwit	2		1	<i>Limosa limosa</i>
Eurasian Curlew	2	1h	1	<i>Numenius arquata</i>
Common Snipe	3		1	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>
Ruff	6		3	<i>Philomachus pugnax</i>
Mediterranean Gull	1		1	<i>Larus melanocephalus</i>
Yellow-legged Gull	8		4	<i>Larus cachinnans</i>
Audouin's Gull	1		1	<i>Larus audouinii</i>
Little Tern	5		3	<i>Sterna albifrons</i>
Common Tern	7		3	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>
Gull-billed Tern	1		2	<i>Gelochelidon nilotica</i>
White-winged Tern	4		3	<i>Chlidonias leucopterus</i>
Whiskered Tern	4		3	<i>Chlidonias hybridus</i>
Rock Dove (Feral Dove)	2		3	<i>Columba livia</i>
Eurasian Collared Dove	8		3	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>
European Turtle Dove	5		3	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>
Common Cuckoo	-	3h	1	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>
Great Spotted Cuckoo	1		1	<i>Clamator glandarius</i>
Little Owl	1		1	<i>Athene noctua</i>
Eurasian Scops-Owl	1		1	<i>Otus scops</i>
Common Swift	8		3	<i>Apus apus</i>
Pallid Swift	1		1	<i>Apus pallidus</i>
Alpine Swift	5		3	<i>Apus melba</i>
Eurasian Hoopoe	2		1	<i>Upupa epops</i>
European Bee-eater	1	1h	1	<i>Merops apiaster</i>
European Roller	3		1	<i>Coracias garrulus</i>
Middle Spotted Woodpecker	4		1	<i>Dendrocopos medius</i>
Crested Lark	8		3	<i>Galerida cristata</i>
Woodlark	1		1	<i>Lullula arborea</i>
Greater Short-toed Lark	1		1	<i>Calandrella brachydactyla</i>
Sand Martin	5		3	<i>Riparia riparia</i>
Eurasian Crag Martin	3		2	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>
Barn Swallow	8		4	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>
Red-rumped Swallow	5		2	<i>Hirundo daurica</i>
Common House Martin	8		3	<i>Delichon urbica</i>
Tawny Pipit	1		1	<i>Anthus campestris</i>
Tree Pipit	1	1h	1	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>
Red-throated Pipit	2		2	<i>Anthus cervinus</i>
White Wagtail	3		1	<i>Motacilla alba</i>
Yellow (Blue-headed) Wagtail	6		4	<i>Motacilla flava flava</i>
Black-headed Wagtail	7		3	<i>Motacilla (flava) feldegg</i>
Citrine Wagtail	1		1	<i>Motacilla citreola</i>
Rufous Bush Robin	1		1	<i>Cercotrichas galactotes</i>
Common Nightingale	4	3h	2	<i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i>
Northern Wheatear	1		1	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>
Isabelline Wheatear	2		1	<i>Oenanthe isabellina</i>
Black-eared Wheatear	6		3	<i>Oenanthe hispanica</i>
Whinchat	6		2	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>
Common Stonechat	2		1	<i>Saxicola torquata</i>
Common Blackbird	7		2	<i>Turdus merula</i>
Blue Rock Thrush	4		1	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>
Blackcap	1		1	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>
Common Whitethroat	1		1	<i>Sylvia communis</i>
Rüppell's Warbler	1		1	<i>Sylvia rueppelli</i>
Subalpine Warbler	3		1	<i>Sylvia cantillans</i>
Cetti's Warbler	5	3h	1	<i>Cettia cetti</i>
Sedge Warbler	1		1	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>
European Reed Warbler	5		2	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>

Great Reed Warbler	3		2	<i>Acrocephalus arundinaceus</i>
(Eastern) Olivaceous Warbler	4	2h	2	<i>Hippolais pallida</i>
Olive-tree Warbler	1		1	<i>Hippolais olivetorum</i>
Wood Warbler	2		1	<i>Phylloscopus sibilatrix</i>
Winter Wren	-	1h	1	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>
Spotted Flycatcher	2		1	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>
Pied Flycatcher	2		1	<i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i>
Collared Flycatcher	1		1	<i>Ficedula albicollis</i>
Great Tit	8		2	<i>Parus major</i>
Eurasian Blue Tit	7		3	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>
Sombre Tit	3		2	<i>Poecile lugubris</i>
(Eurasian) Penduline Tit	1		1	<i>Remiz pendulinus</i>
Krüper's Nuthatch	1		1	<i>Sitta krueperi</i>
Western Rock Nuthatch	5		1	<i>Sitta neumayer</i>
Short-toed Treecreeper	-	1h	1	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>
Lesser Grey Shrike	3		1	<i>Lanius minor</i>
Red-backed Shrike	5		3	<i>Lanius collurio</i>
Woodchat Shrike	5		1	<i>Lanius senator</i>
Masked Shrike	4		1	<i>Lanius nubicus</i>
Eurasian Jay	4		1	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>
Western Jackdaw	2		3	<i>Corvus monedula</i>
Hooded Crow	8		3	<i>Corvus cornix</i>
Common Raven	5		1	<i>Corvus corax</i>
Golden Oriole	3	1h	1	<i>Oriolus oriolus</i>
House Sparrow	8		4	<i>Passer domesticus</i>
Spanish Sparrow	8		3	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>
Common Rock Sparrow	1		1	<i>Petronia petronia</i>
Common Chaffinch	4	2h	2	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>
Common Linnet	4		2	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>
European Goldfinch	8		2	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>
European Greenfinch	6		1	<i>Carduelis chloris</i>
European Serin	3		1	<i>Serinus serinus</i>
Cretzschmar's Bunting	4		1	<i>Emberiza caesia</i>
Cirl Bunting	5		2	<i>Emberiza cirlus</i>
Cinereous Bunting	1		1	<i>Emberiza cineracea</i>
Black-headed Bunting	5		2	<i>Emberiza melanocephala</i>
Corn Bunting	8		2	<i>Miliaria calandra</i>

#### OTHER SPECIES

Persian Squirrel	5		1	<i>Sciurus anomalus</i>
Balkan (Stripe-necked) Terrapin	2		3	<i>Mauremys rivulata</i>
Starred Agama Lizard	2		1	<i>Laudakia stellio</i>
European Glass Lizard	1		1	<i>Ophisaurus apobus</i>
Turkish Gecko	2		1	<i>Hemidactylus turcicus</i>
Ocellated Lizard	1		1	<i>Timon lepidus</i>
Levant Water Frog	-	1h	1	<i>Pelophylax bedriague</i>

**BUTTERFLIES & MOTHS**

Common Swallowtail	<i>Papilio machaon</i>
Large White	<i>Pieris brassicae</i>
Orange tip	<i>Anthocharis cardamines</i>
Clouded Yellow	<i>Colias crocea</i>
Painted Lady	<i>Cynthia cardui</i>
Spotted Fritillary	<i>Melitaea didyma</i>
Meadow Brown	<i>Maniola jurtina</i>
Small Heath	<i>Coenonympha tullia</i>
Wall Brown	<i>Lasiommata maera</i>
Small Copper	<i>Lycaena phlaeas</i>
Hummingbird hawk-moth	<i>Macroglossum stellatarum</i>

This list represents those birds and other animals seen by party members of this tour.



**Rüppell's Warbler**



**Spanish Sparrow**



**Black-winged Stilt**



**Crested Lark**



**Eurasian Scops Owl**



**Little Bittern**



**Spotted Crake**



**Black-crowned Night Heron**

**Front cover: Krüper's Nuthatch**

**All Photographs @ Iain Stewart and Colin Bushell**