

Lesbos

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1	<u>Fly Mytilini</u>
Day 2/7	<u>Lesbos – with daily programme of birdwatching excursions from Skala Kallonis</u>
Day 8	<u>Fly London</u>

Departs

April

Dates & Prices

See website (tour code GRC05) or brochure

Grading

A. Gentle birding walks

Focus

Birds.

Highlights

- Witness spring bird migration in the Mediterranean
- Impressive variety of resident birds
- Atmospheric Greek Island
- Colourful flora
- Single hotel base in Skala Kallonis
- Guided by our expert Naturetrek ornithologists



From top: Krüper's Nuthatch, Sardinian Warbler & birdwatching in Lesbos



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NB. Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.

Introduction

Lesbos is the third largest of the Greek islands and lies in the Aegean Sea just a few kilometres from the coast of Turkey. Unlike many of its congeners, the economy of the island is not dependent upon tourism and the traditional industries of Olive Oil production and fishing are major sources of revenue. The quality of the Olive Oil from Lesbos is considered to be amongst the best in the world and groves of Olive trees are one of the most conspicuous features of the island's landscape. Despite the proximity of Turkey, the island is quintessentially Greek in character and in rural districts many villages follow a way of life that has hardly changed for centuries. Most of the limited holiday developments are in the north of the island but even here there are none of the excesses that have blighted other Greek islands. A rugged mountainous interior is dotted with scrubby bushes and at higher elevations there are pine forests filling the air with scent. The coastline is also a delight with long stretches of both shingle and sandy beaches, secluded coves and a shimmering blue sea. All these natural attributes would be reason enough to spend a holiday on Lesbos but for birdwatchers the island has gained a reputation for being one of the very best places in Europe to experience the exciting phenomenon of migration and during the spring passage period it is possible to see an impressive range of species, including the chance of rare vagrants if suitable conditions prevail. Regardless of the vagaries of migration, the island's breeding birds are also of great interest, with attention particularly focused on the resident Cinereous Buntings and Kruper's Nuthatch which are difficult to find elsewhere in Europe



Day 1

In Flight

We depart from London Stansted on a direct flight to Mytilini, typically arriving at around midday. On arrival in Mytilini we then transfer to Hotel Pasiphae at Skala Kallonis for a stay of seven nights. This small, family-run hotel has a swimming pool and all the amenities necessary for a comfortable stay, making this tour particularly suited for anyone with a non-birding partner who might wish to enjoy the facilities while the group is out birdwatching. Those wishing to relax after the flight will find the Pasiphae a pleasant location to do so, but if time allows we will make a trip to one of the local wetlands.

Day 2 - 7

Skala Kallonis

The pleasant little town of Skala Kallonis is at the head of a large shallow inlet from the sea, approximately in the centre of the island. The town is renowned for its sardine fishery but the empty beaches and sun-warmed sheltered waters of the bay are beginning to attract an increasing number of tourists, although these have yet to have any

impact on the sleepy pace of life in this typically Greek resort. Apart from being centrally located, the town is also close to some of the best wetlands on the island and is thus an ideal base for a birdwatching tour. (it should be stated however that in recent years the marshes have been in a particularly dry condition) Our programme will be entirely flexible and partly dictated by the weather conditions, as a change in wind direction or overnight rain may presage the arrival of migrants and necessitate an appropriate itinerary for the day. Whatever the route to be followed, each day will usually begin with post breakfast departure for the day's excursion returning to the hotel again in the late afternoon. Distances between localities are not great, even though the roads are not designed for speed, and emphasis will be on a leisurely exploration of the best birding sites rather than rushing frantically from one place to another. On some days it may be expedient to return for lunch at Skala Kallonis but on other occasions we will sample the cuisine in the nearest taverna to our chosen birdwatching locality or take a picnic meal. There could be no better end to an enjoyable morning in the field than a relaxed meal in a seaside taverna, with perhaps a delicious Greek salad or a plate of locally caught fish to tempt the palate. What may be less conducive to afternoon activity is a glass or two of another local product, the extra strength Ouzo which has to be treated with the greatest respect!

Within easy reach of Skala Kallonis are a number of pools and salt-pans which attract a wide variety of wetland birds including egrets, herons, waders and terns. With the potential for new arrivals to drop in at any time, we will check these areas as frequently as possible and hope to encounter some of the less regular visitors such as Ruddy Shelduck and Red-throated Pipit. The ebb and flow of migration can be dramatically illustrated by the birds present at each visit. One morning the reeds may contain Squacco Herons and Little Bitterns, the next day we could find all three marsh tern species dipping and swooping over the open water while Black-winged Stilts, sandpipers and stints pick their way around the muddy margins. White and Black Storks may be standing alongside Glossy Ibis and Spoonbill, as egrets dash to and fro after small fish in the shallows. The variety seems endless and we must also keep an eye skywards for the birds of prey which can drift overhead at any time. Short-toed Eagle, Buzzard, Long-legged Buzzard, Honey Buzzard, Montague's Harrier, Eleonora's and Red-footed Falcons could all put in an appearance during our stay and other rarer vagrants have been recorded in previous years. Turning our attention to the trees and bushes, we will discover further evidence to support the island's status as a birdwatching destination par excellence. Colourful Bee-eaters share roadside telephone wires with Red-backed, Lesser Grey and Woodchat Shrikes, whilst Serins, Black-headed and Corn Buntings add their contribution to the chorus of song. In their chosen habitats, Olive-Tree, Olivaceous, Orphean, Ruppell's, Subalpine, Cetti's and Great Reed Warblers are all to be found on the island and other breeding species of interest include Masked Shrike, arguably the most handsome of a striking quartet of shrikes, Middle Spotted Woodpecker, Sombre Tit, Crested Lark, Rock Nuthatch, Rufous Bushchat, Blue Rock-Thrush, Spanish and Rock Sparrows. Two of the commonest species on areas of rocky hillside will be Black-eared Wheatear and Cretzschmar's Bunting and it is this kind of terrain that we will search for the very local Cinereous Bunting. The other Lesbos 'speciality', Kruper's Nuthatch, inhabits pine forests and hopefully we will be entertained by one of these dapper little birds during a visit to localities where they are regularly found.



Woodchat Shrike

Although migrants can, and do, occur almost anywhere certain areas are more favoured than others and after overnight arrivals can be alive with chats, flycatchers and other long distance travellers. Many of these birds are on their way back to nest in Eastern Europe and as bad weather forces a temporary land-fall on Lesbos, they may be accompanied by rarer travelling companions bound for Turkey or Central Asia. The possibility of finding such vagrants adds spice to every excursion and in recent years visiting birdwatchers have recorded an impressive number of spring rarities including Lanner, Black-winged Pratincole, Citrine Wagtail and White-throated Robin.

In the course of our birdwatching outings we will travel through many little villages frozen in time, where Donkeys replace vehicles as the means of transporting goods and fields are still farmed by traditional methods, much as they would have been a hundred years ago. In the north of the island, Molyvos is often described as one of the most beautiful settlements in all the Greek islands, a jumble of elegant stone houses with red roofs rising above a small harbour filled with old-style wooden caiques. There are the ruins of a Genoese castle atop a hill above the town and from this vantage point a wonderful view across the straits to Turkey. More spectacular views of the coastline are afforded as we investigate further along the north coast and central regions of Lesbos and follow tortuous roads snaking through the range of hills which dominates the centre of the island. Here and there thickets of vegetation relieve the starkness of the boulder strewn hills, and in every sheltered corner there are Olive trees, spilling from hillsides into valleys where their silver leaves contrast with the green foliage of Oaks and Sweet Chestnuts. Wild flowers are at their best slightly earlier in the spring but botanists will still find plenty to admire in May and sunny days will bring clouds of butterflies to sip nectar, a profusion of species which includes the beautiful Scarce Swallowtail and a selection of fritillaries. Insects abound on the island and at night the buzzing of countless crickets and cicadas give a pleasantly tropical feel to the balmy evenings. Other, more strident amphibian voices may be heard coming from ditches and pools as Marsh Frogs proclaim their presence.



Female Rüppell's Warbler

Not even the greatest optimist can expect to see everything in an eight day tour, and spring migration can vary from year to year, with peaks occurring at different times just as it does in western Europe. What can be assured, however, is an immensely enjoyable week on one of the least spoilt and most attractive Greek islands.

Day 8

London

We make our way back to Mytilini to catch an early flight home, arriving back at London around midday.

Grading

This tour is graded A, consisting of easy day walks only, and is suitable for those of all ages and degrees of fitness.

Food & accommodation

We stay at the family-run Pasiphae Hotel in Skala Kallonis. Accommodation is on the basis of sharing twin-bedded rooms with private facilities but single rooms may be available on request. The hotel has a swimming pool, sun terrace, poolside bar, tv lounge and two restaurants.

Flights

We will use flights direct from Stansted to Mytilini with Jet2 for this tour. Direct flights may also be available from Manchester, and indirect services may be available from other regional UK airports. Please get in touch with a member of our operations team should you wish to discuss these further.

Weather

It is likely to be warm and sunny in late April/early May with temperatures possibly reaching 25°C, however much colder conditions can prevail (Greek weather in the spring is as capricious as our own!) There is a strong risk of precipitation and heavy, thundery downpours can occur at any time.

Your safety & security

You have chosen to travel to Lesbos. Risks to your safety and security are an unavoidable aspect of all travel and the best current advice on such risks is provided for you by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. In order to assess and protect against any risks in your chosen destination, it is essential that you refer to the Foreign Office website – www.fco.gov.uk/travel regularly prior to travel.

How to book your place

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website. Please stipulate any special requirements, for example extension requests or connecting/regional flights, at the time of booking.