

Greece in Autumn

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1 Fly Thessaloniki & transfer to Nestos Delta

Day 2/4 Nestos Delta National Park & Surroundings

Day 5/7 Lake Kerkini

Day 8 Fly London.



Departs

August/September

Focus

Birds, butterflies & general natural history

Grading

A/B. Easy to moderate walks only

Dates and Prices

See www.naturetrek.co.uk (tour code GRC12) or the current Naturetrek brochure



Highlights

- Enjoy the varied landscapes of north-eastern Greece
- Direct flights into Thessaloniki
- Migrating waders in the Nestos Delta
- Dalmatian & White Pelicans at Lake Kerkini
- Griffon Vulture & White-tailed Eagle at Nestos Gorge
- A variety of butterflies, reptiles & other wildlife
- Led by expert naturalists



From top: Spur-winged Plover, White Pelicans & Blotched Snake



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Introduction

The coastal wetlands, extensive forests and reed-fringed inland lakes of north-eastern Greece act as a magnet for migrating birds in both the spring and autumn. The region lies on an important 'migration flyway' between Europe and Africa and its easterly position — tucked between Bulgaria and Turkey — attracts an exciting range of migrant and breeding species with a decidedly eastern flavour. Waders such as Marsh and Broad-billed Sandpipers share the mudflats with more familiar Redshanks and Grey Plovers. A passing sparrowhawk is more likely to be a Levant than a Northern Sparrowhawk, and a shrike atop a bush could well be Lesser Grey or Masked. On this varied tour we will go in search of these and other species whilst exploring some of northern Greece's key wildlife sites: the Nestos Delta & Gorge, Vistonida Lakes and Lake Kerkini. Although birds will be the primary focus of this holiday, we will also enjoy the butterflies, reptiles and other wildlife we find along the way.

Itinerary

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.

Day 1

Fly Thessaloniki, transfer to Nestos Delta

Our holiday begins with a scheduled EasyJet flight from London's Gatwick Airport to Thessaloniki, Greece's second city, which sits on the northern side of the three-fingered Halkidiki Peninsula. From here we take the coastal highway east to the low-lying coastal region of the Nestos Delta. We aim to arrive into this region by mid-afternoon, upon which we will take the time to explore the local surroundings before checking-in to our accommodation for the evening. We will be based here for the next four nights, splitting our time across two hotels.

Days 2 – 4

Nestos Delta National Park

The Nestos Delta forms a unique mosaic of salt marshes, coastal lagoons, reedbeds, wet meadows and riparian forests, covering over 93,000 hectares. The Delta offers a refuge for an exciting variety of wildlife, with over 270 different birds species recorded annually. The region's high biodiversity has resulted in its designation as a Ramsar Site, IBA (Important Bird Area), and Natura 2000 reserve, and forms one of the largest national parks in all of mainland Greece.

In late August and early September southbound migration will be in full swing and, amongst many others, we hope to see such birds as Slender-Billed Gull, Marsh Sandpiper, Eurasian Spoonbill, Greater Flamingo, Ferruginous Duck, Glossy Ibis and the localised Spur-winged Lapwing here.



Waders and terns should be plentiful throughout the wetlands, and we will be on the lookout for all three species of marsh Tern (Black, White-winged and Whiskered). Pygmy Cormorant, Osprey, both Black and White Storks and Marsh Harrier may be seen too. Not only is the park home to an impressive suite of avifauna, 20 mammal species have also been recorded here, including Eurasian Otter, European Wildcat and Golden Jackal.

We will make sure we also explore Lakes Vistonida and Ismarida which sit in the eastern fringes of the park. The lakes are edged with a mix of reedbeds and willow carr, in which Great Reed Warblers and a variety of migrants shelter. Lesser Kestrel, White-tailed Eagle and Booted Eagle are often seen soaring overhead, whilst in the late afternoons, flocks of Collared Pratincole can be seen hawking for insects over the water. We will also look for the many reptiles that inhabit these wetlands, including Hermann's Tortoise, Balkan Terrapin and Blotched Snake.

On one of the days spent around the Nestos Delta we will follow the river north to the spectacular Nestos Gorge. The narrow ravine here has been cut over the millennia by the Nestos River, but the disused railway track and tunnels that can be seen too were laid down by French engineers during the Ottoman Empire, and during its heyday, were used as a key trade route to what is now Istanbul.



We will spend the day walking through the mixed forest and along the shrub-lined trails that follow the route of the gorge. Blue Rock Thrush, Honey Buzzard, Levant Sparrowhawk, European Roller, European Bee-eater, Eastern Subalpine Warbler, Eastern Olivaceous Warbler, Ortolan Bunting, plus various shrikes and flycatchers are all possible, as well as raptors including Griffon Vulture, White-tailed and Golden Eagles.

Days 5 – 7

Lake Kerkini

We end our tour with three nights at one of the finest wetland sites in Europe, the wonderful Lake Kerkini. The journey should take us in the region of four hours, although if the weather is clear we may divert enroute to one of the nearby mountains to try for a couple of high-altitude species such as Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush. Lake Kerkini is set against a backdrop of high forested hills. The lake – actually an artificial reservoir originally dammed in 1932 – is a designated RAMSAR Site and home to a multitude of breeding, wintering and passage species.

We will have two full days to explore the lake and its surroundings. Large numbers of White Pelicans arrive in September to join the resident Dalmatian Pelicans. Night Herons, Squacco Herons, White Storks, Greater Flamingoes and Pygmy Cormorants are common around the lakeshore, whilst on land we will look for Western Rock Nuthatch, Sombre Tit, Middle Spotted and Grey-headed

Woodpeckers and perhaps a lingering Masked Shrike. Various raptors, including Booted Eagle and Honey Buzzard, soar overhead and at a lower-level European Bee-eaters and Hoopoes add a splash of colour. There are also a wide variety of butterflies, amphibians and reptiles to enjoy.

Day 8

Fly London

After a thorough exploration of Lake Kerkini and the surrounding hills we must make the one-and-a-half-hour drive back to Thessaloniki Airport where we will catch our midday return flight back to London's Gatwick Airport arriving in the early afternoon.

Tour grading

This tour is graded A/B, consisting of easy to moderate day walks only. We will travel to each site by minibus then take leisurely walks to explore the area, generally over easy terrain, although some paths can be rough and steep in places. The holiday is therefore suitable for anyone who enjoys walking in the countryside and is of an 'average' level of fitness.

Focus

Primarily birds and butterflies, plus other natural history.

Weather

September weather in north-eastern Greece is usually hot and sunny with midday temperatures in the upper 20s to low 30s degrees C. The occasional wet day is always possible as are short, but sharp, afternoon thunder showers.

Food & accommodation

All food and accommodation are included in the price of this holiday. We use comfortable hotels and guesthouses for this tour, all rooms having private facilities. Single occupancy can be secured for the supplement cost outlined on our website and in our current brochure.

Please note that the accommodation outlined above may - very occasionally - need to be amended. Replacement hotels will always be of the same standard as the ones outlined in the itinerary and will in no way affect your holiday. Should we have to implement any changes to the above we will notify you as soon as possible.

Your Safety & Security

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.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/greece regularly prior to travel.

How to book your place

In order to book a place on this holiday, you will need to read the Naturetrek terms and conditions in the back of our brochure or on our website, and then book either online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, by calling us on 01962 733051, or by completing and returning the booking form in the brochure together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost. If you do not have a copy of this brochure, please call us on 01962 733051.

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Ferruginous Duck