

# Greece - The Reptiles & Amphibians of the Peloponnese Peninsula

## Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

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### Outline Itinerary

<b>Day 1</b>	Fly Athens
<b>Days 2 - 7</b>	Explore the magnificent Peloponnese Peninsula
<b>Day 8</b>	Inbound Flights

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### Departs

April

### Focus

Reptiles & Amphibians

### Grading

**A/B.** A moderate level of fitness is required with easy walks on occasionally rough, uphill, terrain

### Dates and Prices

See website (tour code GRC19) or brochure

### Highlights

- Enjoy the standout area for reptile and amphibian diversity in all of Europe
- Survey for the regions' amphibians including Fire Salamander, deafening chorus of European Tree Frog and Green Toad
- Search for the incredible and sought-after Nose-horned Viper and African Chameleon
- Explore pristine freshwater habitats for beautiful European Pond Terrapin
- Discover Loggerhead Sea Turtle in some of the most beautiful seas in Europe



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## Introduction

Within Europe there is a standout place for its high diversity of reptile and amphibian species - the Greek peninsula of Peloponnese. A superb 46 species of reptile and amphibians occur here, a tally unrivalled within Europe. Here is the only place in Europe where you can find the superb African Chameleon. Along with many true endemics such as Peloponnese Wall Lizard, Peloponnese Slow Worm, Greek Rock Lizard and Greek Algyroides there are many other Greek specialties found here. Species such as the wonderful Marginated Tortoise and Limbless Skink occur almost exclusively on the Peloponnese.

Reptiles and amphibians have long been of interest in Greek culture and they are encountered commonly in Greek mythology such as Medusa, with her ophidian hair. With its wonderful habitats and alluring Mediterranean climate, reptiles and amphibians can still today be encountered with splendid frequency here.

Whilst searching for our targets, we can be sure to stumble upon tantalizing Southern European wildlife from other groups. Birds could include Short-toed Eagle, Sardinian Warbler, Woodchat Shrike and, if we are fortunate, Western Rock Nuthatch. The plants too are typical Southern European with Citrus, Fig and Olive groves to delight us. Spring wild flowers will be rich at this time of year and we will see orchids, tulips and fritillaries amongst many others. Whilst searching for reptiles we will have a chance at finding some amazing invertebrate life such as the highly treasured Ladybird Spider, Swallowtail, Southern Swallowtail and Scarce Swallowtail and a large variety of grasshoppers, mantis and crickets. Mammals could include martens, hedgehogs and even jackals.

In addition to the range of species that occur here, the unspoiled nature and the densities of animals that are associated with it are truly impressive. A deafening chorus of Tree Frog or a stream full of curious European Pond Terrapin are experiences we will have the rare privilege of enjoying in Europe. Add stunning mountains, wonderful flora, empty beaches, ancient chapels, friendly people and mouth-watering Mediterranean cuisine and it's easily imagined how this will be an unforgettable Greek adventure.



African Chameleon (*Chamaeleo africanus*)

## Itinerary

*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.*

### Day 1

### Fly London to Athens

After arriving in Athens and meeting with our expert guide, we'll leave the Greek capital behind us and begin our journey towards the Corinth Canal. Here we enter the Peloponnese and, with the Corinthian Gulf on our right, we'll head West towards our first base, Kalogria in Messenia.

We'll arrive into the highly diverse coastal sand dunes of Kalogria, encompassed by crystal clear sea-waters. After leaving our luggage behind in our comfortable hotel we head to the nearby Umbrella (Stone) Pine forests. Here we'll hope to encounter species such as the splendid small Hermann's Tortoise (*Testudo hermanni*) and Snake-eyed Skink (*Ablepharus kitaibelli*) along with a



Hermann's Tortoise (*Testudo hermanni*)

plethora of interesting invertebrate species. After our first delicious dinner together we'll visit some nearby ponds to search for amphibians such as Epirus Water Frog (*Pelophylax epeiroticus*), Agile Frog (*Rana dalmatina*), European Tree Frog (*Hyla arborea*) and the endemic Balkan Spadefoot Toad (*Pelobates balcanicus chloae*).

We have a good chance to encounter interesting mammals, especially on our night searches, which may include Beech Marten, Golden Jackal and Wild Boar.

After a wonderful first day in Greece, we'll head back to our hotel for a well-earned night's rest.

### Day 2

### Kalogria

During our stay in Kalogria we'll have chance to explore the vast coastal sand dunes, salt marshes and stunning forests. A wide variety of reptiles can be found in these varied habitats and the mornings present great opportunities to encounter amazing snakes such as the incredible Nose-horned Viper (*Vipera ammodytes*), Four-lined Snake (*Elaphe quatuorlineata*), Aesculapian Snake (*Zamenis longissimus*) or even Leopard Snake (*Zamenis situla*). Tortoises are rather common here and in addition to Hermann's Tortoise (*Testudo hermanni*) we could also find Marginated Tortoise (*Testudo marginata*). After a delicious breakfast, and with the sun gently warming, we'll head out in

search of the aforementioned species. We can expect the air to be buzzing with insects and blooming flowers carpeting the forest floor.

After lunch we'll visit Lake Strofilia, home to many interesting bird species such as Dalmatian Pelican (*Pelecanus crispus*), Purple Heron (*Ardea purpurea*), Glossy Ibis (*Plegadis falcinellus*) and White Stork (*Ciconia ciconia*).

As the midday sun passes, the late afternoons are a favourable time for reptile activity and we will visit interesting habitats to try to find many species. The wetlands are home to species such as Grass Snake (*Natrix natrix persa*), Dice Snake (*Natrix tessellata*) and European Pond Terrapin (*Emys orbicularis*) along with several amphibian species. In the coastal sand dunes it is not easy to find animals but with our expert guide we have the best chance of finding a whole range of reptile species. We will dine at our hotel and in the evenings do excursions to interesting places in search of nocturnal herpetofauna.

### Day 3

### Lake Kaiafa

On our drive south we pass some very interesting salt marshes that are an excellent place to see Greater Flamingo (*Phoenicopterus roseus*) and Black-winged Stilts (*Himantopus himantopus*). In the afternoon we arrive at Lake Kaiafa where we will observe some amphibious reptiles such as Dice Snake (*Natrix tessellata*), and aquatic species including European Pond Terrapin (*Emys orbicularis*) and Balkan Terrapin (*Mauremys rivulata*). The thermal spring provides an inviting temperature for a dip and an opportunity to bathe for those who wish. Tonight we'll stay at a comfortable hotel nearby and after dinner together we'll explore the lake surroundings for amphibians such as Greek Smooth Newt (*Lissotriton graecus*), Agile Frog (*Rana dalmatina*) and Tree Frog (*Hyla arborea*).

### Day 4

### Lake Kaiafa and Pylos

We'll enjoy a beautiful morning searching the surroundings of the lake to try to find Europe's only boa species, the Javelin Sand Boa (*Eryx jaculus*) and other snakes such as Four-lined Snake (*Elaphe quatuorlineata*). We also visit another coastal area where we can find some interesting lizard species such as the endemic Peloponnese Wall Lizard (*Podarcis peloponnesiacus*) and Ocellated Skink



Sand Boa (*Eryx jaculus*)

(*Chalcides ocellatus*). On our drive south towards Pylos, we'll stop at a small harbor for a tasty lunch and here we'll hope to enjoy the magnificent resident Loggerhead Turtles (*Caretta caretta*).

In the afternoon we will have arrived in Pylos where, in the shadow of castle ruins, we'll take on the challenge of trying to find fossorial species such as Sand

Boa (*Eryx jaculus*), Limbless Skink (*Ophiomorus punctatissimus*) and Worm Snake (*Xerotyphlops vermicularis*). In the picturesque town square of Pylos we will enjoy dinner together before heading to a nearby hotel which will be our base for the next three nights. A sure highlight of the trip will come this evening when we head out in search of beautiful African Chameleon (*Chamaeleo africanus*), an introduced but endangered species that, within Europe, can only be found here, keeping to the path to carefully avoid accidentally treading on a nest of eggs, hidden in the sand.

## Day 5

## Pylos Valley

In the morning we head to a lush valley nearby with crystal clear water, blue lakes and a seemingly endless line of waterfalls. Here some other Greek specialties can be found such as Greek Stream Frog (*Rana graeca*) and Greek Rock Lizard (*Hellenolacerta graeca*). There are plenty of interesting invertebrates to be found here such as Freshwater Crabs, Ladybird Spiders and a number of stunning dragonfly species. Those who dare to brave the freezing waters of the lakes can even swim here.



Greek Stream Frog (*Rana graeca*)

Back in Pylos, we shall enjoy lunch together and in the afternoon explore some coastal sand dunes to search for Margined Tortoise (*Testudo marginata*) and Leopard Snake (*Zamenis situla*) and enjoy the beautiful scenery of this place. The town-square

of Pylos will provide us with another tasty dinner. In the evening we go out to look for European Cat Snake (*Telescopus fallax*), a mildly venomous rear-fanged species, which we might find at an abandoned castle.

## Day 6

## Pylos

In the morning we venture a little further North to a vista from where we have stunning views of the surrounding area and a picturesque chapel. On a small walk from here we might encounter Eastern Montpellier Snake (*Malpolon monspessulanus*), Balkan Whip Snake (*Hierophis gemonensis*) and the fascinating legless Sheltopusik/European Glass Lizard (*Pseudopus apodus*).

In the afternoon we visit another lush green valley where we can find another set of endemics such as Greek Algyroides (*Algyroides moreoticus*) and Peloponnese Slow Worm (*Anguis cephalonica*).

After dinner we try to find the elusive European Cat Snake (*Telescopus fallax*) at an Olive grove where other species such as Common Toad (*Bufo bufo*) and Kotschy's Gecko (*Mediodactylus kotschy*) can be found.

## Day 7

## Pylos

After breakfast it will be time to pack and leave the coast behind. We drive into the beautiful mountains in the northern part of the peninsula. In the afternoon we'll have ascended to almost 1000m asl where we can find a new range of lizard species such as Erhard's Wall Lizard (*Podarcis erhardii*), Ionian Wall Lizard (*Podarcis ionicus*), Common Wall Lizard (*Podarcis muralis*), Peloponnese Wall Lizard (*Podarcis peloponnesiacus*) and Greek Slow Worm (*Anguis graeca*). With some fortune we can also find Fire Salamanders (*Salamandra salamandra*).

Staying in the northern part of the peninsula tonight, we're in easy distance from the airport. We'll enjoy our last dinner together before getting a good sleep prior to the journey home tomorrow.

## Day 8

## Lake Stymphalia

In the morning we'll visit Lake Stymphalia, a designated protected site for fauna and flora under the EU's Natura 2000 programme. With some luck, we'll enjoy clear skies to get amazing views of the surrounding mountains reflecting on the lake. Here we will have a last try for several species such as European Cat Snake (*Telescopus fallax*), Leopard Snake (*Zamenis situla*) and Nose-horned Viper (*Vipera ammodytes*).



Nose-horned Viper (*Vipera ammodytes*)

The lake area is also teeming with amphibians, birds and plants and in Greek mythology, is where Hercules slew the man-eating Stymphalian birds. This beautiful lake amidst the rugged mountain scenery makes for the perfect place to say goodbye to the Peloponnese and start our return to Athens.

## Tour Grading & Focus

We'll focus our time in the field on building an enviable list of reptile and amphibian species seen. Whilst searching, there is no doubt we'll come across a huge variety of amazing fauna and flora, of which we'll also take time to enjoy, but reptiles and amphibians will remain the strong focus of our time in the field.

Typically we'll begin searching after breakfast when the sun has warmed the substrates and landscapes and, after stopping for lunch, we'll herp into mid-afternoon when we will stop for a rest

and dinner. Most evenings it will be possible to do excursions in search of nocturnal species, which will be for about two hours after dinner.

## Weather, Clothing & Equipment

The weather at this time of year can be changeable, and whilst we should hope for warm, sunny conditions, it can be overcast at times with occasional Spring rains. It would be sensible to come prepared for all possibilities. Binoculars are not essential but may be useful. There may be a chance to snorkel or swim and as such, you may wish to bring your snorkel, mask, fins and your choice of swim attire.

## What's Included

All meals and accommodation are included in the cost of this holiday, except for any meals required during travel, and starting with dinner on Day 1 and ending with breakfast on Day 8.

## Extending Your Holiday

We would be happy to assist in arranging extra nights after the tour has finished, should this be of interest. Please contact Dan Lay ([Dan@naturetrek.co.uk](mailto:Dan@naturetrek.co.uk) or 01962 733051) for further information and/or make sure to stipulate any interest in a possible extension upon booking.

## 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](http://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 at the time of booking.

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