# Greece – The Reptiles & Amphibians of the Peloponnese

## Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

### Outline Itinerary

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| **Day 1** | Fly Athens |
| **Days 2 – 7** | Explore the Peloponnese Peninsula |
| **Day 8** | Inbound Flights |

### Departs

April

### Focus

Reptiles and Amphibians

### Grading

Important: please read the 'Tour Grading and Focus' section at the end of the document before booking.

### Dates and Prices

See website (tour code GRC19)

### 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 sought-after Nose-horned Viper and African Chameleon.
- Explore pristine freshwater habitats for European Pond Terrapin.
- Discover Loggerhead Sea Turtle.







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# Introduction

Within Europe, one region stands out for its remarkable diversity of reptiles and amphibians: the Peloponnese Peninsula of southern Greece. An impressive 46 species occur here, a total unmatched anywhere else in Europe. It is the only place on the continent where the African Chameleon can be found, while true endemics such as Peloponnese Wall Lizard, Peloponnese Slow Worm, Greek Rock Lizard and Greek Algyroides add further interest. Other specialities, including Marginated Tortoise and Limbless Skink, are also largely confined to the Peloponnese.

Reptiles and amphibians have long featured in Greek culture and mythology. The snake-haired Medusa is perhaps the most famous example, but even today these fascinating creatures remain an integral part of the landscape. Thanks to the region's varied habitats and warm Mediterranean climate, reptiles and amphibians can still be encountered here with impressive frequency.

While searching for our target species, we are also likely to enjoy a wealth of other southern European wildlife. Birds may include Short-toed Eagle, Sardinian Warbler, Woodchat Shrike and, with luck, Western Rock Nuthatch. The flora is equally appealing, with citrus, fig and olive groves providing a quintessential Mediterranean backdrop. Spring wildflowers will be at their best, and we can expect to see a variety of orchids, fritillaries and many other blooms.

The Peloponnese also offers excellent opportunities to observe invertebrates. Species may include the striking Ladybird Spider, Swallowtail, Southern Swallowtail and Scarce Swallowtail, alongside a fascinating array of grasshoppers, mantises and crickets. Mammals are less conspicuous but may include hedgehogs, martens and even Golden Jackal.

Beyond the sheer variety of species, it is the abundance of wildlife and the unspoilt character of the region that make the Peloponnese so special. The deafening chorus of Tree Frogs at dusk or a stream crowded with inquisitive European Pond Terrapins are experiences that are increasingly rare elsewhere in Europe. Combined with dramatic mountain scenery, superb flora, quiet beaches, ancient chapels, warm hospitality and delicious Mediterranean cuisine, these encounters promise an unforgettable wildlife holiday in Greece.



African Chameleon (*Chamaeleo africanus*) © B. Bok

# 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 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. Before arriving at our first hotel we'll stop at a nearby lake for our first opportunity to look for reptiles and amphibians including Glass Lizard (*Pseudopus apodus*), Worm Snake (*Xerotyphlops vermicularis*) Epirus Water Frog (*Pelophylax epeiroticus*). After our first delicious dinner together we'll visit some nearby ponds to search for amphibians such as, Agile Frog (*Rana dalmatina*), European Tree Frog (*Hyla arborea*) and the endemic Balkan Spadefoot Toad (*Pelobates balcanicus chloeae*).



Hermann's Tortoise (*Testudo hermanni*) © B. Bok

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

We'll start the day with an early morning visit to the nearby Lake Strofilia, home to many interesting bird species such as Dalmatian Pelican, Purple Heron, Glossy Ibis and White Stork.

After a delicious breakfast, and with the sun gently warming, we'll head out to the nearby Umbrella (Stone) Pine forests. The mornings present great opportunities to encounter snakes such as Nose-horned Viper (*Vipera ammodytes meridionalis*), 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 the rarer Marginated Tortoise (*Testudo marginata*). Amongst the leaf litter we hope to encounter

Snake-eyed Skink (*Ablepharus kitaibelli*) along with a plethora of interesting invertebrate species. We can expect the air to be buzzing with insects and blooming flowers carpeting the forest.

As the midday sun passes, the late afternoons are a favourable time for reptile activity and we'll have chance to explore the vast coastal sand dunes, salt marshes and stunning forests.

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 evening continue to search interesting habitats 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 and Black-winged Stilt. In the afternoon we arrive at Lake Kaiafa where we will search for some amphibious reptiles such as Dice Snake (*Natrix tessellata*), European Pond Terrapin (*Emys orbicularis*) and Balkan Terrapin (*Mauremys rivulata*). We will investigate the lake surroundings while planning our evening excursion, and hope to see the endemic Peloponnese Wall Lizard (*Podarcis peloponnesiacus*) Four-lined Snake (*Elaphe quatuorlineata*) and Europe's only boa species, the Javelin Sand Boa (*Eryx jaculus*). Tonight, we'll stay at a comfortable hotel nearby and after dinner together we'll return to the lake to look for amphibians such as Greek Smooth Newt (*Lissotriton graecus*), Agile Frog (*Rana dalmatina*) and European Tree Frog (*Hyla arborea*).

## Day 4 Lake Kaiafa and Pylos

This morning we will visit another coastal area where we can find some interesting lizard species including Ocellated Skink (*Chalcides ocellatus*). After refreshments at a beach café we'll continue south stopping at a small harbor for a tasty lunch and here we'll hope to enjoy the resident Loggerhead Turtles (*Caretta caretta*).



Sand Boa (*Eryx jaculus*) © B. Bok

In the afternoon we will have arrived in Pylos, where our base for the next two nights is a hotel in the shadow of the castle ruins and within easy walking distance of the picturesque harbour town square. A sure highlight of the trip will come this evening when we head out in search of African Chameleon (*Chamaeleo africanus*), an introduced but endangered species that, within Europe, can only be found here. We'll keep carefully to the path to avoid accidentally treading on nests of eggs, hidden in the sand.

## Day 5 Pylos Valley

In the morning we will have a short drive to an olive grove to try to find the elusive European Cat Snake (*Telescopus fallax*) and Sand Boa (*Eryx jaculus*). Common Toad (*Bufo bufo*) and Kotschy's Gecko (*Mediodactylus kotschyi*) can also be found.



Greek Stream Frog (*Rana graeca*) © B. Bok

We then head to a lush valley nearby where some other Greek specialties can be found such as Greek Stream Frog (*Rana graeca*) and Greek Rock Lizard (*Hellenolacerta graeca*), as well as Greek Algyroides (*Algyroides moreoticus*) and Peloponnese Slow Worm (*Anguis cephallonica*). There are plenty of interesting invertebrates to be found here such as Freshwater Crabs, Ladybird Spiders and a number of dragonfly species.

In the afternoon we take a short hike to a picturesque chapel from which we have stunning views of the surrounding area. 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*).

We will also have time to enjoy the beautiful scenery of the nearby coastal sand dunes and the lagoon which provides wonderful opportunities for birdwatching.

## Day 6 Lake Doxa and Lake Stymphalia

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*). Moving on towards our welcoming, cosy hotel, we'll stop at an area near to the stunning Lake Stymphalia where we could encounter several different snake species including Leopard Snake (*Zamenis situla*), Dice Snake (*Natrix tessellata*) and Worm Snake (*Xerotyphlops vermicularis*) and even European Tree Frogs (*Hyla arborea*).

## Day 7 Lake Stymphalia

We will spend today exploring the many varied habitats around 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*). The lake area is also teeming with amphibians, birds and plants and, in Greek mythology, is where Hercules slew the man-eating Stymphalian birds.



Nose-horned Viper (*Vipera ammodytes*) © B. Bok

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

We'll have a short period of time in the morning for a final look at Lake Stymphalia before we begin the journey home. 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

On a typical day on our herpetology tours we'll begin searching in the field after breakfast, when the sun has warmed the substrates and landscapes, often getting into the vehicles at 9am and, after stopping for approximately one hour for lunch (which is often a continental-style picnic eaten in-situ), we'll continue into early-evening 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 on average be for three hours after dinner. With an equal percentage of the target reptile and amphibian species likely to be nocturnal, these night searches are an important part of the tour but are optional, with some participants preferring to rest on some of the days. On average, 5-8miles are walked per day.

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 strongly remain our focus. Sensitively checking under stones, logs and other refugia is an effective way of finding many species. Some of the target reptile or amphibian species may require longer field hours to locate and therefore this tour is suitable, and most enjoyable, for experienced herpetologists or naturalists

who, aside from wishing to see the region's rarely-seen reptiles and amphibians, relish being in the field searching for and identifying the vast array of birds, butterflies, invertebrates, orchids and other wildlife which can be found sharing the wonderful habitats that we'll explore on the tour. Snakes do, of course, occur at low densities and are notoriously elusive, so it's unlikely that every species mentioned will be encountered. However, with the guidance of a leading herpetologist, your chances improve dramatically. A realistic goal might be to observe around 6-10 species – sometimes more, sometimes fewer – depending on conditions.

In summary, Naturetrek herpetology holidays are suitable, and offer tremendous value, for those of whom spending most of their holiday time in wildlife habitats and for whom seeing some of the world's superb reptiles and amphibians is the focus of their time away.

On this holiday some occasional hill ascents are required.

## Weather, Clothing & Equipment

Whilst we hope for very pleasant weather – with day temperatures in the early 20s – it would be sensible to come prepared for the occasional spring shower and cooler temperatures at elevation. 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 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, 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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