Lesbos

Naturetrek Tour Report

25 April – 2 May 2015





Glossy Ibis

Eastern Black-eared Wheatear





Collared Pratincoles

Persian Squirrel

Report & images compiled by Chris Murphy



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Day 1

Saturday 25th April

The second of three Naturetrek groups on Lesbos this spring landed slightly ahead of schedule at 1.30pm. First things first – lunch! From an excellent vantage overlooking the Straits of Mytilini, the hazy Turkish coast beyond, we tucked into a hearty picnic of Greek salad and Spanakopita whilst taking the opportunity to watch Bottle-nosed Dolphins and both Scopoli's and Yelkouan Shearwaters. Resident, red-eyed Sardinian Warblers sang from thick cover as, overhead, hundreds of migrating Swallows continued their journey northward.

An hour's drive to Skala Kallonis, a quick freshen-up, and we were soon out birding again in what proved to be a very productive couple of hours on the Kalloni saltpans. Having first familiarized ourselves with some of the commoner birds of Lesbos, such as Corn Bunting and Crested Lark, we then focused our attention on some more distant birds. Closer inspection showed them to be Red-footed Falcons, ten in all, of a variety of ages and plumages. There was also a good variety of wading birds to look at on the saltpans and adjacent freshwater marshes, including Glossy Ibis, Marsh Sandpiper, Spotted Redshank and Temminck's Stint. A pair of Little Owls, which had taken up residence in an old stone building, was spotted as we returned to the hotel.

Dinner tonight was slow-cooked lamb, a Pasaphae speciality.

Day 2

Sunday 26th April

We began the day with a return to the Kalloni saltpans where we counted 745 newly arrived Ruff, busy feeding before the resumption of their journey north. Further evidence that spring migration was in full flow came in the form of a text message telling us of a Demoiselle Crane at the nearby Christou River. Such is its rarity in Europe - this would be a first for Lesbos and only the fifth for Greece - we made a dash for it, not something we would normally do. We arrived just in time to see this beautiful big bird circling higher and higher before drifting completely out of sight, all the time pestered by the local Yellow-legged Gulls. Walking back to the minibuses, we flushed some pipits with calls as sharp and penetrating as a dentist's needle. Thankfully they weren't in the air long, and we were soon enjoying wonderful views of this flock of Red-throated Pipits, many sporting bright brick-red bibs. Duly elated and now feeling a tad hungry we headed into Skala Kallonis for lunch in one of the harbourside tavernas.

Our first stop after lunch was to look for Scops Owls on the outskirts of Kalloni, soon finding six birds in what might be the best place in Europe to see these beautifully camouflaged owls. Next up was a walk around the many chapels of Limonas Monastery where we encountered some classic Lesviot species, such as Middle Spotted Woodpecker, Hoopoe, Black-eared Wheatear and Cirl Bunting: species we would see again and again on our travels through this beautiful island.

Our final birding of the day was spent slowly walking beside the Tsiknias River, where highlights included very good views of Little Bittern, Long-legged Buzzard, Red-footed Falcon, Collared Pratincoles and a pair of Penduline Tits building their bottle nest.

Day 3

Monday 27th April

An early morning visit to Metochi Lake had us watching Little Crakes and Little Bitterns creeping through the reeds in the first rays of sunshine, and also gave us fine views of a well-marked Long-legged Buzzard. The Demoiselle Crane, having returned to roost in its original field by the Christou River, was then our first stop after breakfast. With the Yellow-legged Gulls now ignoring the crane, we were able to watch it at leisure through telescopes, foraging for frogs and grasshoppers. Continuing westwards, our next stop was the hillside chapel of Agios Ioannis, where we climbed a hundred steps into the rocky habitat of Black-eared Wheatear, Rock Nuthatch, and Cinereous, Cirl and Cretzschmar's Buntings. Migrants included Black Stork, Cuckoo, Turtle Dove and Tree Pipit, while a resident pair of Sombre Tits had four young.

Later this morning we took the minor road to Makara, which forms the western headland of the mouth of the Gulf of Kalloni. Along the way, we enjoyed wonderful scope views of a Long-legged Buzzard perched on a rock and a Rock Nuthatch. Down on the shingly beach, we had a view of Garbias Island, home to colonies of Lesser Kestrel and Alpine Swift, numbers of which made regular flights to the mainland, often coming right over our heads. At a roadside pool, Purple and Squacco Herons hunted frogs, and our thoughts turned to lunch. So we continued west to the simple resort of Skala Eresou where we enjoyed a feast of seafood overlooking the Aegean Sea. Another off-shore island here was home to Mediterranean Shags and wild Rock Doves.

After lunch we watched hundreds of Terrapins from a bridge over the Vergias River, a Nightingale unusually singing from a telephone wire, and a field full of *flava* Yellow Wagtails and Spanish Sparrows. We broke for coffee in the village of Eresos, from where the poetess Sappho originates, before continuing uphill on the approach to the Lardia Valley. This took us through an area known as the Isabelline Triangle on account of it being the only place on the island where the wheatear of the same name can be found. Two pairs of these big, sandy-coloured chats were watched, along with other species typical of this rocky habitat including Cinereous Bunting, Woodlark and Blue Rock Thrush. A pair of Masked Shrikes was the highlight of the Lardia Valley. A ringtail harrier flew over as we arrived at the hotel.

Dinner tonight was in the village of Skala Kallonis.

Day 4

Tuesday 28th April

A fine morning saw us back on the Kalloni saltpans soon after breakfast. The best birds here were a delightful pair of Lesser Kestrels, a second-calendar-year Pallid Harrier and a Spur-winged Plover. Continuing on to the sheep fields, we found a Citrine Wagtail, more Red-throated Pipits and our first Spoonbills and Short-toed Larks. As we were leaving, a German birdwatcher Chris had met the evening before kindly told us where he had earlier seen a Stone Curlew, which we all got to see well.

Our picnic today was at the bandstand, where we had good views of Woodlark and Middle Spotted Woodpecker, before continuing across the hilly centre of the island to the north coast. It was now 3.30pm and a strong wind had got up which was seriously hampering our birding and giving us little chance of finding the skulking warblers we had hoped to see. So we headed inland, on foot, in search of shelter, eventually having brief but clear views of both Eastern Subalpine and Rüppell's Warblers in song. Before returning to the hotel we had time for one

more stop, at a little reservoir on the outskirts of Molivos. Here we found 13 Ruddy Shelducks and a female Citrine Wagtail.

Dinner tonight in the hotel.

Day 5

Wednesday 29th April

Another day of beautiful weather saw us winding our way up to the lovely Lardia Valley. One of our target species, the Eastern Bonelli's Warbler, we could hear singing and 'chipping' away but it was not so easy trying to see one. This we did, with everyone eventually getting good views and, in the process, also good views of Rock Sparrows, Rock Nuthatch and a handsome Blue Rock Thrush. At the end of the valley, we spent some time watching frogs beside the Perivolis Monastery, Gillian taking a great photograph of one with its air sacs expanded. From the Lardia Valley, it was a short drive up to Ipsilou Monastery, where both Cinereous Bunting and Sombre Tit were seen well. While scanning for the elusive Chukar, we found Isabelline Wheatear and Ortolan Bunting before proceeding down to Sigri for lunch by the sea.

Most of the group opted for a short walk after lunch, during which our first Lesser Grey Shrike was seen. From Sigri we drove north to Fanoremeni. The little fields here are always a magnet for migrants and today we saw Bee Eaters, Golden Orioles, Rollers, Red-backed Shrike and two more Lesser Grey Shrikes. A phone call from home reported snow in the Mourne Mountains, County Down. The return drive to Skala Kallonis was not without surprises, the highlights being two Chukars crossing the road and climbing up a hill giving excellent views, shortly followed by two Eleanora's Falcons lazily catching dragonflies, and a Masked Shrike, our fourth species of shrike for the day.

We dined out tonight, watching Barn Owls and listening to Stone Curlews on the walk back to the hotel.

Day 6

Thursday 30th April

Before breakfast we explored the saltpans, noting that a constant change over of birds had reduced the number of Ruff to just 50. Six Temminck's Stints were new, as were a few Curlew Sandpipers and 16 Little Terns. The rest of the morning up to lunchtime was spent slowly walking up the Napi Valley, where we had wonderful views of four Golden Orioles through the telescope, an abundance of shrikes, buntings and chats, and fantastic views of a female Goshawk as we picnicked.

Returning to the hotel pool for afternoon drinks and a little rest, we resumed our birdwatching by visiting Achlederi Forest, probably the best site in Europe to see Krüper's Nuthatch. We knew where they were nesting and, after getting into position, had a pleasant hour watching the parents bringing food to the nest. Short-toed Treecreeper, Red-backed Shrike and Turtle Dove were also fun to watch here.

Dinner in the hotel tonight was a traditional favourite, Moussaka.

Day 7 Friday 1st May

With the weather remaining fine, we drove west via the southern route to Eresos and the Pythario Reservoir. It was soon evident that there were more migrants on the island today as we had soon notched up 30 Red-backed Shrike and a good variety of warblers, which included Marsh, Eastern Olivaceous, Barred, and Eastern Orphean. Andrew was alert as ever when finding a very shy, female Red-breasted Flycatcher, which all too quickly disappeared. Pied and Collared Flycatchers proved to be more obliging as was a Chukar which sat on top of a high rock for us all to see through a telescope.

We had a picnic in the Melardi Valley, where we added another 20 Red-backed Shrikes, an Icterine Warbler and several Golden Orioles. Before returning to the hotel we looked at a shore pool near Faneromeni and enjoyed instructive views of Little and Temminck's Stint side by side.

Dinner was in a village restaurant tonight.

Day 8

Saturday 2nd May

For our last morning, we opted for an early breakfast leaving the hotel at 8am to drive north to Kavaki where, in beautiful morning sunshine, we enjoyed perfect views of Rüppell's Warbler along with Eastern Subalpine Warbler and Chukar. Out to sea, small parties of Yelkouan Shearwaters were flying past. All too soon, it was time to pack away our binoculars and telescopes and transfer to the airport where Chris bid everyone a fond farewell, including Marcus, his co-leader for the past two weeks.

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Species Lists

Birds (✓= recorded but not counted; h = heard only)

							April/May							
	Common name	Scientific name	25	26	27	28	29	30	1	2				
1	Chukar Partridge	Alectoris chukar				2			1	1				
2	Ruddy Shelduck	Tadorna ferruginea		2	2	17	10	60	10	2				
3	Shelduck	Tadorna tadorna	2	2		2		2						
4	Garganey	Anas querquedula		1										
5	Mallard	Anas platyrhynchos	4	1		1			1	1				
6	Scopoli's Shearwater	Calonectris diomedea	20		4									
7	Yelkouan Shearwater	Puffinus yelkouan	200		100					100				
8	Little Grebe	Tachybaptus ruficollis			6	1	1		2					
9	Great Crested Grebe	Podiceps cristatus	4			1								
10	Greater Flamingo	Phoenicopterus roseus	300	300	20	100		100		100				
11	Black Stork	Ciconia nigra		2	1	12		2	1					
12	White Stork	Ciconia ciconia		2	1	1		1	1	2				
13	Glossy Ibis	Plegadis falcinellus	13	16	4	40		11						
14	Eurasian Spoonbill	Platalea leucorodia				2								
15	Eurasian Bittern	Botaurus stellaris	2		2									
16	Little Bittern	Ixobrychus minutus	1	3	5	1	3		1					
17		Ardeola ralloides	6	1	8	6			1					
18	-	Ardea cinerea		4	2	2			1					
19	-	Ardea purpurea		3	3	4		3						
20	·	Ardea alba	10		1			1						
21	_	Egretta garzetta	30	20	10	40		20	11	6				
22	Great Cormorant	Phalacrocorax carbo			1	3								
23	European Shag	Phalacrocorax aristotelis desmarestii	4	2	8	1	2							
24	-	Circaetus gallicus		7	6	1	3	4	6					
25		Circus aeruginosus	1	2	1	1		1						
26	Pallid Harrier	Circus macrourus				2								
27	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	Accipiter nisus					1	2						
28		Accipiter gentilis						1						
29		Buteo buteo		3	1	3	4	10	6	3				
30		Buteo rufinus		3	2	1			2					
31	Lesser Kestrel	Falco naumanni	1		6	2	10		6					
32	Common Kestrel	Falco tinnunculus		1	1		1							
33	Red-footed Falcon	Falco vespertinus	10	15		1								
34		Falco eleonorae					2	4						
35	Eurasian Hobby	Falco subbuteo		1										
36	-	Falco peregrinus			1									
37		Rallus aquaticus				h	h							
38	Little Crake	Porzana parva			3		2							
39		Gallinula chloropus	1	6	6	3			1					
40		Fulica atra		3	1	1								
41		Crus virgo		1	1									
42	Eurasian Stone-Curlew	Burhinus oedicnemus	h		h	2				†				
43		Himantopus himantopus	40	30	4	30		30	2	10				
44	_	Recurvirostra avosetta	400	400		300		400		100				
45	Spur-winged Lapwing	Vanellus spinosus				1				1				
46	Common Ringed Plover	Charadrius hiaticula							1	1				
47	-	Charadrius dubius		6		1			1	+				

			April/May								
	Common name	Scientific name	25	26	27	28	29	30	1	2	
48	Kentish Plover	Charadrius alexandrinus		4		8		2		2	
49	Black-tailed Godwit	Limosa limosa	4			3					
50	Spotted Redshank	Tringa erythropus	10			4					
51	Marsh Sandpiper	Tringa stagnatilis	8	7							
52	Common Greenshank	Tringa nebularia	6	3		4		3			
53	Wood Sandpiper	Tringa glareola	50	50	1	40		50	15	40	
54	Common Sandpiper	Actitis hypoleucos		2		1					
55	Ruddy Turnstone	Arenaria interpres				1					
56	Little Stint	Calidris minuta		124		20		1	10	1	
57	Temminck's Stint	Calidris temminckii	1	4				6	1	+	
58	Curlew Sandpiper	Calidris ferruginea	<u> </u>	2				1	2		
59	Dunlin	Calidris alpina		2				<u>.</u>			
60	Ruff	Philomachus pugnax	2	745		40		42	8	500	
61	Collared Pratincole	Glareola pratincola		26		40		42	0	300	
62	Audouin's Gull	Ichthyaetus audouinii		20		1				+	
		Larus michahellis	✓	✓	✓	I ✓	✓		✓	/	
63	Yellow-legged Gull		•	5			•		V	+	
64	Gull-billed Tern	Gelochelidon nilotica		_	1	1		40			
65	Little Tern	Sternula albifrons	1	2		10		16		2	
66	Common Tern	Sterna hirundo	4	6	2	10		6	2	4	
67	Whiskered Tern	Chlidonias hybrida		1						-	
68	White-winged Tern	Chlidonias leucopterus		3						<u> </u>	
69	Rock Dove /Feral Pigeon	Columba livia 'feral'	✓	✓	6	✓	3		9	✓	
70	European Turtle Dove	Streptopelia turtur			17		1	6	3		
71	Eurasian Collared Dove	Streptopelia decaocto	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
72	Common Cuckoo	Cuculus canorus			2			1			
73	Western Barn Owl	Tyto alba			1			2		<u> </u>	
74	Eurasian Scops Owl	Otus scops		6	h.						
75	Little Owl	Athene noctua	3		2	1	1	1	3		
76	Long-eared Owl	Asio otus						h			
77	Alpine Swift	Tachymarptis melba			50	3	4		8		
78	Common Swift	Apus apus	6	10	10	200	100	50	40	10	
79	European Roller	Coracias garrulus					2		2		
80	European Bee-Eater	Merops apiaster	1	20		20	25	h	h		
81	Eurasian Hoopoe	Upupa epops		2	3		2	5	1		
82	Middle Spotted Woodpecker	Dendrocopos medius		2		1	h	3			
83	Red-backed Shrike	Lanius collurio					1	8	50	1	
84	Lesser Grey Shrike	Lanius minor					3	1	5		
85	Woodchat Shrike	Lanius senator		3	3	2	8	10	8	1	
86	Masked Shrike	Lanius nubicus			2		1	8	6		
87	Eurasian Golden Oriole	Oriolus oriolus					2	4	10		
88	Eurasian Jay	Garrulus glandarius	2	3	10	6	5	6	15	2	
89	Western Jackdaw	Coloeus monedula			40		50		40	+	
90	Hooded Crow	Corvus cornix	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
91	Northern Raven	Corvus corax			6	3	2		4	5	
92	Sombre Tit	Poecile lugubris			6		_	6		+	
93	Great Tit	Parus major	1	4	6	6	4	8	6	2	
94	Eurasian Blue Tit	Cyanistes caeruleus	2	4	6	8	8	12	8	4	
95	Penduline Tit	Remiz pendulinus		2	0	3	J	12	0	+	
	Greater Short-toed Lark					2				+	
96		Calandrella brachydactyla Galerida cristata	✓	✓	✓	∠ ✓	✓	✓	✓	/	
97	Crested Lark Woodlark	Lullula arborea	-	,	3	3	4	6	4	+	

		April/May								
	Common name	Scientific name	25	26	27	28	29	30	1	2
99	Sand Martin	Riparia riparia	2	2					8	2
100	Barn Swallow	Hirundo rustica	1000	300	200	200	100	100		40
101	Eurasian Crag Martin	Ptyonoprogne rupestris			11		10		4	
102	Common House Martin	Delichon urbicum	40	50	100	40	50	100	50	40
103	Red-rumped Swallow	Cecropis daurica		12	40		20	2	20	2
104	Cetti's Warbler	Cettia cetti	4	10	6	4	h	4	5	
105	Long-tailed Tit	Aegithalos caudatus				h				
106	Common Chiffchaff	Phylloscopus collybita		1		h				
107	Eastern Bonelli's Warbler	Phylloscopus orientalis					1, 4h			
108	Great Reed Warbler	Acrocephalus arundinaceus		2	2		1			
109	Sedge Warbler	Acrocephalus schoenobaenus	1	4	2	1			1	
110	Eurasian Reed Warbler	Acrocephalus scirpaceus		10	4	2			1	
111	Marsh Warbler	Acrocephalus palustris							1	
112	Eastern Olivaceous Warbler	Iduna pallida	2h	5	10	10	6	10	4	
113	Icterine Warbler	Hippolais icterina							1	
114	Zitting Cisticola	Cisticola juncidis		2	1	2	1	1	1	2
115	Eurasian Blackcap	Sylvia atricapilla		1	1	_	8		2	
116	Garden Warbler	Sylvia borin		1						
117	Barred Warbler	Sylvia nisoria		<u> </u>					1	
118	Lesser Whitethroat	Sylvia curruca		1	2		1	1	1	
119	Eastern Orphean Warbler	Sylvia crassirostris		1				4	3	-
120	Common Whitethroat	Sylvia communis		2			1	1	4	-
121	Subalpine Warbler	Sylvia cantillans				1	10	6	-	2
122	Sardinian Warbler	Sylvia melanocephala	3			'	10	0	'	
123	Rüppell's Warbler	Sylvia ruppeli	3			1				2
	Eurasian Wren	Troglodytes troglodytes				'	5			1
124							3	2		+ '
125	Krüper's Nuthatch Western Rock Nuthatch	Sitta krueperi			2		4			-
126		Sitta neumayer			3		4	2	3	-
127	Short-toed Treecreeper	Certhia brachydactyla	4		00	8	h	2		-
128	Common Blackbird	Turdus merula	4	2	20	4	10	10	4	3
129	Common Nightingale	Luscinia megarhynchos	2	10	50	10	30	8	10	2
130	Whinchat	Saxicola rubetra				2		1	10	-
131	European Stonechat	Saxicola rubicola		1	10	1	10	1	10	-
132	Isabelline Wheatear	Oenanthe isabellina			4		4		1	-
133	Northern Wheatear	Oenanthe oenanthe	1				1			ļ
134	Black-eared Wheatear	Oenanthe hispanica		3	20	1	20	10	20	-
135	Blue Rock Thrush	Monticola solitarius		1	2		3		1	-
136	Spotted Flycatcher	Muscicapa striata		1			1		1	
137	European Pied Flycatcher	Ficedula hypoleuca		2			1			ļ
138	Collared Flycatcher	Ficedula albicollis							2	
139	Red-breasted Flycatcher	Ficedula parva							1	
140	House Sparrow	Passer domesticus	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
141	Spanish Sparrow	Passer hispaniolensis		100s	1000	50	200	10	100+	1
142	Rock Sparrow	Petronia petronia					4			
143	Blue-headed Wagtail	Motacilla flava flava	1		4		7		4	
144	Black-headed Wagtail	Motacilla flava feldegg	6	20	1	2	1	4	1	
145	Citrine Wagtail	Motacilla citreola				2				
146	White Wagtail	Motacilla alba		1					1	
147	Tawny Pipit	Anthus campestris							1	
148	Tree Pipit	Anthus trivialis			3		1			
149	Red-throated Pipit	Anthus cervinus		15		6	h	1		

			April/May							
	Common name	Scientific name	25	26	27	28	29	30	1	2
150	Common Chaffinch	Fringilla coelebs	3		2	10	10	20	6	2
151	European Serin	Serinus serinus				1	h	6		
152	European Greenfinch	Chloris chloris	6	4	1	4	6			
153	European Goldfinch	Carduelis carduelis	6	6	4	2	2	10	10	
154	Common Linnet	Carduelis cannabina			4		2		6	
155	Corn Bunting	Emberiza calandra	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
156	Cinereous Bunting	Emberiza cineracea			2		1, 4h		3	
157	Ortolan Bunting	Emberiza hortulana					1			
158	Cretzschmar's Bunting	Emberiza caesia			20	1	20	5	20	
159	Cirl Bunting	Emberiza cirlus		2	4	2	10	8	6	
160	Black-headed Bunting	Emberiza melanocephala			3		10	4	50	2