

Lesbos in Autumn

Naturetrek Tour Report

10th – 17th September 2025



Greater Flamingoes



Krüper's Nuthatch



Little Gull



Persian Squirrel

Tour report by Mike Crewe



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Summary

Lesbos has a spectacular reputation for providing great spring birdwatching, but autumn also offers some fine birding, and this week was no exception. The weather proved to be hot; we were at the back end of a long, hot summer for the island. So, we adjusted our time in the field accordingly, taking afternoon siestas and heading out again later as the day cooled down. This worked really well for us, and our week provided some wonderful days full of chats, shrikes, flycatchers and wagtails. Birds of prey offered up some wonderful moments as a few Levant Sparrowhawks passed through, Short-toed Snake Eagles hunted the open hillsides, and Eleonora's Falcons put on a fine display. The entire island seemed to be awash with Willow Warblers, and we notched up a fine suite of local specialities, including Sombre Tit, Middle Spotted Woodpecker and the diminutive Krüper's Nuthatch. Add Greek cuisine, wonderful vistas and ice-cream, and there was surely something for everyone here!

Day 1

Wednesday 10th September

Arriving a little ahead of schedule, we were soon through airport formalities and heading across the island of Lesbos in glorious sunshine, under deep blue skies. Once settled at the hotel, we drove the short distance to the village square and enjoyed our first taverna lunch, overlooking the beautiful Kalloni Bay. In the afternoon, we walked local tracks and were soon immersed in a fine suite of Mediterranean migrants, especially at some nearby Lucerne fields, which were alive with Whinchats, Northern Wheatears and Yellow Wagtails. Two Turtle Doves were a treat, and the fences and scrubby bushes provided lookout posts for Spotted Flycatchers and both Red-backed and Woodchat Shrikes. We soon became familiar with the ever-present Crested Larks, which pattered along the dirt tracks, while Common Buzzards and a Marsh Harrier kicked off our raptor lists. A juvenile Common Cuckoo was a nice bonus.

Day 2

Thursday 11th September

After a great breakfast by the pool, we set off for the east side of the extensive Kalloni salt pans complex. Walking a dirt track gave us plenty of opportunity to enjoy the large number of Greater Flamingoes present, and to pick out the likes of Slender-billed Gulls and a nice mix of waders, including six Little Stints and a Marsh Sandpiper. A Caspian Tern did a fly-by and fifteen Dalmatian Pelicans impressed us with their sheer size, dwarfing even the Great Cormorants! Zitting Cisticolas are a local speciality along this track, and they perched up nicely for us, while Short-toed Snake Eagles put on an impressive display overhead as they searched for reptiles. A late Isabelline Wheatear was a good bonus bird.

We headed for the welcome shade of the Calabrian Pine forests for our first picnic lunch, then went back to base for a siesta. Late afternoon saw us heading to the nearby Metochi area for a walk around some irrigated farm fields. Red-backed Shrikes and Spotted Flycatchers vied with chats and pipits for our attention, and we enjoyed some smart Eastern Black-eared Wheatears with a family of local Stonechats. Near a set of small farm buildings, we found a couple of boisterous Western Rock Nuthatches, which were enjoying the seeds of the mass of spiny thistles growing here.

Day 3

Friday 12th September

The day's delights began with a drive up to a high viewpoint near the village of Filia. From here, we had a commanding view over the surrounding hillsides, and Ravens accompanied us for some time. Cirl Buntings perched up and sang, and raptors included Eurasian Sparrowhawk, Common Buzzard and Short-toed Snake Eagle. A Lesser Whitethroat was in the scrubby bushes with Eastern Black-eared Wheatears, and small parties of finches busied themselves on the slopes. Further west, we headed into Antissa for coffee, stopping to savour the delights of our favourite café, where seemingly German was the favoured language! Here, we also chanced across several Geranium Bronze butterflies, a colonist that has spread through the Mediterranean region, having been inadvertently introduced from South Africa.

The 'wild west' of Lesbos is an extraordinary place, perhaps even more so in the autumn when what little vegetation there is has become parched by the long, hot summer. Pausing to take a look at some of the extraordinary examples of petrified trees along the roadside, we chanced across an impressive flock of some fifty Rock Sparrows, which breezed in to take a drink from a small spring, then carried on their way across the hillside. Cresting the final hill, we made our way down to the west coast, passing through small orchards and farm fields, where shrikes and flycatchers again dominated the scene. We enjoyed our picnic in the shade of tall tamarisks, and took the opportunity for a beach stroll. Being further out from the hotel, we took a siesta locally, then began the journey back, stopping for a walk around the little village of Eresos, where we eventually found the hoped-for Laughing Doves, a recent colonist on the island.

Day 4

Saturday 13th September

Our morning was spent looking for birds along the lower sections of the nearby Tsiknias river, then along the dirt tracks to the Kalloni saltpans. A group of the Mediterranean subspecies of European Shag was at the river mouth, giving us an opportunity to study the clear differences of this form compared with our UK birds. Two Hoopoes were appreciated and a Kingfisher was briefly seen; they are winter visitors to Lesbos. Near the saltworks, a juvenile Lesser Grey Shrike was found on the perimeter fence and showed well in the scopes, while scanning of the open, harvested fields turned up Tawny Pipits and Greater Short-toed Larks with the commoner Northern Wheatears and Crested Larks. Passing through Mesa, we found the three Black Storks still present, and some of the group turned up another couple of Kingfishers for the day. We continued further up into the pineclad hills and took a walk under the shady trees before lunch. This stroll produced Coal Tit, Short-toed Treecreeper and our first Krüper's Nuthatch for the trip, but the latter was soon surpassed as we ate lunch, with at least four of these feisty little birds giving excellent views as they sought water at a favourite drinking spot.

After our siesta at the hotel, we made the short drive into the Potamia valley and checked out the local farm reservoirs. Little Grebes and Coots were soon in evidence, and a Ruddy Shelduck sat along the far bank of the larger reservoir. Beautiful Violet Dropwings hunted from convenient perches on the Chaste-trees, a Crag Martin put in an appearance, and a dripping water pipe attracted two Sombre Tits. Having heard Scops Owls calling on previous nights, we decided to try to seek out one of these charming little birds after dinner. Our luck was in, and we enjoyed excellent scope views of a perched bird right in the hotel car park: if only it were always this easy!

Day 5

Sunday 14th September

It was time for another day further afield, and we took a route along the side of the Kalloni Bay and down to the salt pans at Polichnitos. Once again, the Black Storks gave fine views on the lagoons as we passed through Mesa, and we stopped at some busy fields along the road beyond Achladeri. At the first field, we found at least ten Greater Short-toed Larks feeding, as well as two Hoopoes, which gave us great views. Further on, a recently cut field of Lucerne had attracted a large number of Yellow Wagtails and, among the bewildering array of young birds, we found smart adult males of the Blue-headed and Grey-headed forms. A small harbour provided us with close views of Mediterranean Shags and Mediterranean Gulls resting on the rocks.

Much of the Polichnitos salt pan complex is difficult to view, but we chose a few vantage points here and there and turned up a nice range of species. Greater Flamingoes and Pied Avocets dominated the scene, but there were also smart Slender-billed Gulls present, along with a large number of Sandwich Terns. Both Common and Little Ringed Plovers were checked, and eventually we found the hoped-for Kentish Plovers. It was time for lunch, and we took a short drive into a nearby village to enjoy the delights of a lovely little beachside taverna in the shade of the tamarisk trees.

In the afternoon, we continued our journey, heading inland and up through the pinewoods to the higher wooded hills, dominated by old, gnarled specimens of Sweet Chestnut. The woods here were rather quiet for birds (not surprising given the time of year), but we did find a very vocal Collared Flycatcher, and it was nice to find the wonderful flowers of the impressive Bivon's Meadow Saffron, as well as some nice clumps of Greek Cyclamen.

Day 6

Monday 15th September

Having not quite achieved all of our goals the last time we headed out west, we took the more southerly route to Eresos today, passing a number of impressive volcanic plugs, old lava fields and hexagons of basalt. The largest reservoir on Lesbos sits in the hills above Eresos, and we drove up the steep slope to view the water from the main dam. Fortune smiled upon us as, almost immediately, we found three Eleonora's Falcons, masters of the air, patrolling the area and keeping the assembled Crag Martins and dragonflies on their toes. As well as admiring these spectacular birds, we found Little Grebes and even a few Mallards on the water, while Short-toed Snake Eagles gave us wonderful views.

We set up our picnic under the shady Oriental Planes in a peaceful little spot near the Perivolis Monastery. A walk around the area was very productive, with at least two Common Redstarts and a Sardinian Warbler noted, while birds coming in to drink at the small pools included Cirl Buntings, Common Whitethroat and parties of Greenfinches and Goldfinches. Middle Spotted Woodpeckers can be elusive at this time of the year, but most of the group caught up with them here too. After a short siesta, we cruised around the edge of the salt pan complex and found two smart, juvenile Little Gulls, some very obliging Slender-billed Gulls, and nice range of waders that included Ruff, Little Stints, Dunlins and Curlew Sandpipers.

Day 7

Tuesday 16th September

With so many great birding locations available to us on the island, even on our last full day we were able to enjoy new birds, new locations and more fabulous scenery. Heading north, we drove through fields and olive groves to

the sixteenth-century Kremastis Bridge. After admiring this famous structure, we walked the roadside and found Middle Spotted Woodpeckers, Eurasian Nuthatches and Sombre Tits among the trees, while Ravens patrolled overhead. Continuing our journey, we paused at a small pond where various terrapin species were loafing, and Little Egret and Grey Heron patrolled the shrinking margins for stranded fish. By late morning we had arrived at the raptor watchpoint near Argenos, where there are commanding views across the water to Turkey. While we ate lunch here, we were perfectly placed to watch for any raptors on the move; our tally included a Goshawk, four Honey Buzzards, several Short-toed Snake Eagles and 'Steppe' Buzzards, and two Eurasian and three Levant Sparrowhawks, the latter being particularly appreciated. A Tree Pipit was a nice find here, too.

Later, we paid a brief visit to the reservoir near Petra, but we found it to be completely dry, so we took the unanimous decision to head for Molyvos and a well-earned ice-cream break!

Day 8

Wednesday 17th September

Despite it being our day for packing up and preparing for the airport, there was great interest in a final, early morning walk around the block, so we took a warm stroll down to the bay and as far as the Christou River on the west side of town. We were rewarded with nice views of Kentish Plovers and the discovery of our second Lesser Grey Shrike for the week. The local Red-rumped Swallows escorted us back for breakfast, and it was soon time to head back to the airport for our flight home. It had been a great week, filled with the excitement of migration, a nice suite of local birds, and a supporting cast of butterflies, dragonflies and even some late-season flowers. What a week!

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Species lists

Birds (H = Heard only)

Common name	Scientific name	September 2025							
		10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>					5			
Ruddy Shelduck	<i>Tadorna ferruginea</i>				4				
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>						5		
Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>	1							
Feral Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>			1					
European Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>	2	1						
Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Laughing Dove	<i>Spilopelia senegalensis</i>			2					
Water Rail	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>				H				
Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>		1		1			2	
Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>				10				
Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>				25		✓		
Greater Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>				45	✓	✓		
Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>		2						
Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>		1			1			
Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>		3		4		4		
Kentish Plover	<i>Anarhynchus alexandrinus</i>					4			5
Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>		1		1			1	1
Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>				2	2	1		1
Marsh Sandpiper	<i>Tringa stagnatilis</i>		1						
Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>					1			
Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>		4		1	5	✓		
Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>		2		1	1	5		
Ruff	<i>Calidris pugnax</i>						1		
Curlew Sandpiper	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>						2		
Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>						3		
Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>		6		2	1	4		
Caspian Tern	<i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>		1						
Sandwich Tern	<i>Thalasseus sandvicensis</i>					150			
Little Gull	<i>Hydrocoeleus minutus</i>						2		
Slender-billed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus genei</i>		3		✓	✓	✓		
Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>		3		✓	✓	✓		✓
Mediterranean Gull	<i>Ichthyaetus melanocephalus</i>					✓			
Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Black Stork	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>		3		3	3			
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	1	✓		✓	✓	✓		
European Shag	<i>Gulosus aristotelis</i>			1	7	✓			
Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>		15						
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	1	✓		✓	✓	✓	1	✓
Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>		4		1			4	2
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	1	✓	2	✓	2	✓	1	
Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>							1	
Dalmatian Pelican	<i>Pelecanus crispus</i>		15		✓				

Common name	Scientific name	September 2025							
		10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
European Honey Buzzard	<i>Pernis apivorus</i>						1	4	
Short-toed Snake Eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>		4	1	1	2	3	6	
Levant Sparrowhawk	<i>Tachyspiza brevipes</i>							3	
Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>			1				2	
Eurasian Goshawk	<i>Astur gentilis</i>							1	
Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	1	1		1	1	2		
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	1	2	2			4	10	
Eurasian Scops Owl	<i>Otus scops</i>				1				
Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>		1		2	2		1	
Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>				3				
European Bee-eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>	11	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Middle Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocoptes medius</i>		H	H		H	2	4	
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	1			2	1			
Eleonora's Falcon	<i>Falco eleonora</i>						3		
Lesser Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius minor</i>				1				1
Woodchat Shrike	<i>Lanius senator</i>	1	3	6	4	1			1
Red-backed Shrike	<i>Lanius collurio</i>	10	10	15	10	✓	6	6	✓
Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	1	1	H	2	4	✓	✓	
Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	30	H	50			✓	H	1
Hooded Crow	<i>Corvus cornix</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		1	✓	2	✓	✓	✓	
Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>				1				
Sombre Tit	<i>Poecile lugubris</i>				2	H		H	
Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Greater Short-toed Lark	<i>Calandrella brachydactyla</i>				6	10			
Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>	3		✓	2				
Eurasian Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>				1		25	2	
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Western House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
European Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Cecropis rufula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>				1	1			
Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>				1	H	2		
Sedge Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>		1						
Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>		4		2		✓		
Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>					1		H	
Lesser Whitethroat	<i>Curruca curruca</i>			1					2
Sardinian Warbler	<i>Curruca melanocephala</i>			1			2		
Common Whitethroat	<i>Curruca communis</i>		1	1	1				
Krüper's Nuthatch	<i>Sitta krueperi</i>				5				
Western Rock Nuthatch	<i>Sitta neumayer</i>		2	2	1		✓	H	
Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>						H	2	
Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>				2	1			
Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

		September 2025							
Common name	Scientific name	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
European Pied Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i>				1				
Collared Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula albicollis</i>					1			
Common Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>						2	1	
Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>			5					
Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>	4	10	✓	10	✓	2		
European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>		5	1		2		1	
Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>	4	✓	✓	✓	✓	2	1	
Isabelline Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe isabellina</i>		1						
Eastern Black-eared Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe melanoleuca</i>		3	✓			2	1	
Rock Sparrow	<i>Petronia petronia</i>			50					
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Western Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>						2		
Tawny Pipit	<i>Anthus campestris</i>				2				
Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>							1	1
Eurasian Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>			✓			2		
Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>		✓	✓	✓			H	
European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓
Cirl Bunting	<i>Emberiza cirlus</i>			✓			✓	✓	

Mammals

		September 2025							
Common name	Scientific name	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
Persian Squirrel	<i>Sciurus anomalus</i>							2	

Amphibians & reptiles

		September 2025							
Common name	Scientific name	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
Levant Water Frog	<i>Pelophylax cf. bedriagae</i>		1		✓			✓	
Turkish Gecko	<i>Hemidactylus turcicus</i>			✓		✓	✓	✓	
Snake-eyed Lizard	<i>Ophisops elegans</i>			1	✓		2	✓	
Balkan Terrapin	<i>Mauremys rivulata</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
Red-bellied Turtle	<i>Pseudemys rubriventris</i>							1	

Butterflies

		September 2025							
Common name	Scientific name	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
Common Swallowtail	<i>Papilio machaon</i>	1	✓		✓			✓	
Millet Skipper	<i>Pelopidas thrax</i>	2							
Clouded Yellow	<i>Colias croceus</i>		1						
Large White	<i>Pieris brassicae</i>			1		1			
Small Copper	<i>Lycaena phlaeas</i>						1	1	
Lang's Short-tailed Blue	<i>Leptotes pirthous</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		
Long-tailed Blue	<i>Lampides boeticus</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		
Geranium Bronze	<i>Cacyreus marshalli</i>			4					

Common name	Scientific name	September 2025							
		10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
Holly Blue	<i>Celastrina argiolus</i>			1		1			
Brown Argus	<i>Aricia agestis</i>	1							
Cardinal	<i>Argynnis pandora</i>							2	
Painted Lady	<i>Vanessa cardui</i>	✓						1	
Red Admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>	1							
Freyer's Grayling	<i>Hipparchia fatua</i>		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	
Eastern Rock Grayling	<i>Hipparchia syriaca</i>		✓		✓				
Great Banded Grayling	<i>Brintesia circe</i>							2	
Levant Meadow Brown	<i>Maniola telmessia</i>		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	

Moths

Common name	Scientific name	September 2025							
		10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
Hummingbird Hawkmoth	<i>Macroglossum stellatarum</i>	✓	✓	✓					
Silver-Y	<i>Autographa gamma</i>				✓				

Dragonflies

Common name	Scientific name	September 2025							
		10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
Blue Emperor	<i>Anax imperator</i>			✓					
Red-veined Darter	<i>Sympetrum fonscolombii</i>		✓	✓		✓			
Common Darter	<i>Sympetrum striolatum</i>	✓		✓					
Violet Dropwing	<i>Trithemis annulata</i>		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	

Other insects

Common name	Scientific name	September 2025							
		10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
European Praying Mantis	<i>Mantis religiosa</i>				1	1			
a mantis	<i>Iris oratoria</i>				1				
a mantis	<i>Hierodula transcaucasica</i>			1					