

Lesbos in Autumn

Naturetrek Tour Report

17th – 24th September 2025



Krüper's Nuthatch



Broad-billed Sandpiper



Violet Dropwing



Slender-billed Gull

Tour report by Mike Crewe



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Summary

Lesbos provided us with a week packed full of exciting birding, warm weather and some lovely Greek seafood and local cuisine. Based in the centre of the island, much of our time was spent relatively close to the hotel, and the local agricultural fields provided plenty of opportunity to enjoy good numbers of Red-backed Shrikes, Spotted Flycatchers and an array of wheatears, chats and wagtails. The nearby salt pans provided a rapid turnover of birds, with each visit producing something different. Greater Flamingoes and huge Dalmatian Pelicans dominated the scene, but other treats included two juvenile Little Gulls, a very obliging Broad-billed Sandpiper, and a nice range of other waders, gulls, egrets and herons. Further afield, we enjoyed Western Rock Nuthatches, Eastern Black-eared Wheatears and Cirl Buntings on the oak-strewn, rocky slopes, wonderful little Krüper's Nuthatches in the cooler Calabrian Pines, and spectacular Eleonora's Falcons hanging in the wind and harassing Crag Martins. A steady trickle of birds of prey came our way and peaked with the sight of a Golden Eagle being mobbed by six Ravens, and all topped off with an ice-cream finale!

Day 1

Wednesday 17th September

Mike and Andy were ready with the vehicles as the group arrived from the UK, having spent the previous week on the island with an earlier Naturetrek party. Getting started was therefore straightforward, and we were soon heading for our hotel at Skala Kalloni, meeting up with our arrivals from Manchester and tucking in to our first taverna lunch. After a short siesta during the hottest part of the day, we headed out to the Kalloni salt pans, where Greater Flamingoes and Pied Avocets were much in evidence, and where the feeder channel soon provided us with two very smart juvenile Little Gulls and a very obliging Broad-billed Sandpiper. This channel also held Wood and Curlew Sandpipers, Dunlin, Little Stint, Little Ringed Plover and Redshank, and we enjoyed some close views of juvenile Slender-billed Gulls. It had been a pretty good start to the week.

Day 2

Thursday 18th September

After the first of our daily breakfasts by the pool, we set off for the east side of the extensive Kalloni salt pans complex. With the sun behind us, we had commanding views across the open water, while nearby fields also had much to offer. The salt pans offered up an array of herons and egrets, Black Stork, Eurasian Spoonbills and enormous Dalmatian Pelicans loafing on the bunds. Ten or so Black-necked Grebes fed in one of the pans, and long-billed Eurasian Curlews were found. In the fields, Woodchat and Red-backed Shrikes were on the fences and we scoped Tawny Pipits, the latter rapidly diving for cover when a juvenile Peregrine stooped at high speed, right out of the sun.

We headed for a shady spot for our picnic lunch, choosing a favoured spot in the Calabrian Pine woods where birds come to drink. As we ate, we were soon treated to great views of several Krüper's Nuthatches, as well as the local form of Coal Tit and a busy party of the lovely *tephronotus* race of Long-tailed Tits, with their little black moustaches. Our afternoon siesta during the hottest part of the day was followed by a drive out to the Potamia valley, where we found Little Grebes and Coots, a couple of Moorhens and some noisy Cetti's Warblers at the reservoirs.

Day 3

Friday 19th 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, while Eurasian Sparrowhawk and Honey Buzzard passed by. On arrival, we soon found a Sombre Tit, though it disappeared all too quickly, but it was a good omen and the winding track up behind the hill proved to be very busy with parties of songbirds, including many finches, tits, Cirl Buntings and Willow Warblers, as well as some Persian Squirrels. Two Eastern Black-eared Wheatears were on the slopes below us, and we stopped at some drinking troughs that provided us with great views of Common Redstart, Lesser Whitethroat, Blackcap and yet more finches, Cirl Buntings and Willow Warblers. A coffee stop was made in Antissa to celebrate such a busy start to our day.

We had a picnic lunch in the shade of the riverside trees at Perivolis Monastery, where a good range of passerines continued to delight us as they came down to drink. Continuing westward, we took a look at some of the petrified wood recently uncovered by road-widening work, then headed down into Eresos. Unfortunately, the Laughing Doves gave us the slip, but we had much better luck at the nearby reservoir, where up to five spectacular Eleonora's Falcons were enjoying the breezy conditions and putting on a fabulous display. We returned to the hotel via the more southerly route from Eresos, which took us through an amazing landscape of ancient lava flows, volcanic plugs and basalt columns.

Day 4

Saturday 20th September

After checking the mouth of the Tsiknias river, we drove the Lotzaria area, appreciating the gathered Red-backed Shrikes, Spotted Flycatchers, Whinchats and other migrants. Completing our circuit, we drove through to the saltpans and picked up a nice mix of birds along the feeder channel. The Broad-billed Sandpiper was still present, as were the two Little Gulls, all as obliging as before, while a Common Sandpiper was new for our trip.

We headed north and set ourselves up for a raptor watch at Argenos, with views north to Turkey. As we ate our picnic lunch, raptors passed by, with Honey Buzzard, 'Steppe' Buzzard and Short-toed Snake Eagles all showing up. A very smart juvenile Black Kite was great to see; this is a scarce bird on the island. Our afternoon siesta provided a welcome break from the heat, before we headed back out for some more exciting birding. A short drive to the saltpans area, armed with some local knowledge, soon had us enjoying a post-breeding gathering of 34 Stone-curlews, all blending in perfectly with their stony background. Here, too, we chanced across a late Isabelline Wheatear. On the way back to base, we circled round via the Christou River and found three recently-arrived White Storks out on the marsh.

Day 5

Sunday 21st September

It was time for another day further afield, and we took a route along the side of the Kalloni Lagoon and down to the saltpans at Polichnitos. Our route took us past the Kalloni saltpans, so we took another look at the Stone-curlews for those who had taken time out the day before. On our drive, we paused at various places along the way, the first stop revealing a male Sardinian Warbler and a flighty Kingfisher. Further on, two Hoopoes were feeding on the ground with a number of Crested Larks, and an assortment of Yellow Wagtails busied themselves as they searched for lunch. A small harbour provided us with another Kingfisher, as well as 'Mediterranean' Shags and Mediterranean Gulls resting on the rocks.

Much of the Polichnitos saltpan 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 were the commonest species, but there were also smart Slender-billed Gulls present, along with a number of Sandwich Terns. Both Common and Little Ringed Plovers were checked, and eventually we found the hoped-for Kentish Plovers while Common Shelducks were new for the week. 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.

As we headed back the way we had come, a Levant Sparrowhawk startled us when it rocketed skyward from the roadside with prey; it was all too brief and too close for prolonged appreciation, unfortunately. Nearer to home, we cruised around the Kalloni salt pans, where our Broad-billed Sandpiper was still feeding happily along the water's edge, and Slender-billed Gulls gave great views. Near the saltworks, we came across a very obliging Lesser Grey Shrike, and rounded the day off with an Osprey perched on a phone pole.

Day 6

Monday 22nd September

After a brief look at the gathered gulls and waders at the mouth of the Tsiknias river, we decided we needed more exercise today, so we parked and took a circular walk around the Lotzaria area. This proved to be a great move, as much of the walk was packed with Red-backed Shrikes, Spotted Flycatchers, Whinchats, Northern Wheatears, Tree and Tawny Pipits, and Yellow Wagtails. Bee-eaters were frequently to be seen on the wires, and a Peregrine put on a great display. There was a nice range of butterflies, too, especially Long-tailed and Lang's Short-tailed Blues, and Clouded Yellows. A Dalmatian Pelican display team cruised quietly by, looking for all the world like flying boats!

For our picnic, we headed out west to the little village of Tavari, passing two White Storks along the way. We called in at a regular drinking spot for birds and had great views of a Woodlark, as well as a male Spanish Sparrow and a typically boisterous Western Rock Nuthatch. We served up the picnic at a little shaded table right on the beach and adjacent to a patch of lantana flowers that was alive with insects, including a Hummingbird Hawk-moth and several Millet Skippers. Our regular afternoon siesta was followed by a walk around the block from the hotel. Spotted Flycatchers and Red-backed Shrikes were ever-present, and a nice addition to the list came in the shape of a Wood Warbler, hover-gleaning in an olive tree.

Day 7

Tuesday 23rd 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 northward, we chanced across a couple of Blue Rock Thrushes at Napi, and followed this with a return to the raptor watchpoint near Argenos, again arriving for the late morning movement of birds. Honey Buzzards put on a particularly good show today, with perhaps fifteen passing by, but the highlight came when a large raptor flew in from the west, a raptor big enough to demand the attention of the local Ravens, six of which were harassing it as it approached. It turned out to be a fine Golden Eagle; presumably the same bird put in a second appearance later.

There was really then only one thing left to do to round off the week: a drive along the north coast to Molyvos for a well-earned ice-cream break!

Day 8

Wednesday 24th September

Flights times meant a departure not long after breakfast today, so we settled for a quick goodbye to the flamingoes as we passed the salt pans, and headed to Mytilene for our flights home. Many thanks to all for a fabulous week in the sun.

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Species lists

Birds (H = Heard only)

Common name	Scientific name	September 2025							
		17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>					5			
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>		4	5					
Feral Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>			3					
European Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>		2			1	2		
Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>		2						
Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>		✓						
Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>		✓	✓					
Black-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>		10						
Greater Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Eurasian Stone-curlew	<i>Burhinus oedicnemus</i>				34	4			
Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>	✓	✓		1	✓			
Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	1				2			
Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>	4			4	6			
Kentish Plover	<i>Anarhynchus alexandrinus</i>					12			
Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>		4		2		H		
Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>				1	1			
Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>				1				
Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>	1							
Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	4	✓		✓	✓			
Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	4	2		1	6			
Ruff	<i>Calidris pugnax</i>					1			
Broad-billed Sandpiper	<i>Calidris falcinellus</i>	1			1	1			
Curlew Sandpiper	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>	2			2				
Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>	4	6			12			
Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>	2	4		1	20			
Sandwich Tern	<i>Thalasseus sandvicensis</i>		1		1	35			
Little Gull	<i>Hydrocoloeus minutus</i>	2				2			
Slender-billed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus genei</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓			
Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓			
Mediterranean Gull	<i>Ichthyaeus melanocephalus</i>					✓			
Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Black Stork	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>		4	1		2	1		
White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>				3		2		
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
European Shag	<i>Gulosus aristotelis</i>		2		1	✓		1	
Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>		20			✓			
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	1	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	
Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>	1	6		1	✓	1		
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>		✓	1	✓	✓	2		
Dalmatian Pelican	<i>Pelecanus crispus</i>		19			✓	2		
Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>					1			
European Honey Buzzard	<i>Pernis apivorus</i>	1		1	1			15	
Short-toed Snake Eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>	1	1	8	✓		2	1	
Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>							1	
Levant Sparrowhawk	<i>Tachyspiza brevipes</i>					2			

Common name	Scientific name	September 2025							
		17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>				3		1	5	
Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>		2	1	1		1	2	
Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>				1				
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>		1	3	✓	3	3	4	
Eurasian Scops Owl	<i>Otus scops</i>			H		H	H		
Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>					2			
Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>				1	2			
European Bee-eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>			1	✓		✓		
Middle Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocoptes medius</i>			✓		1		3+	
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>		3	1	3	2	2	1	
Eleonora's Falcon	<i>Falco eleonora</i>			5					
Eurasian Hobby	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>						1		
Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>		1	1	1		1	1	
Lesser Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius minor</i>					1			
Woodchat Shrike	<i>Lanius senator</i>		2						
Red-backed Shrike	<i>Lanius collurio</i>	1	6	✓	✓	✓	30	✓	✓
Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	1	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>						3		
Hooded Crow	<i>Corvus cornix</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>		1						
Sombre Tit	<i>Poecile lugubris</i>			2				3	
Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>						1		
Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Greater Short-toed Lark	<i>Calandrella brachydactyla</i>				1	2			
Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>	3			1		5+		
Eurasian Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>		1	✓				2	
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Western House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>		2		✓	✓	✓	✓	
European Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Cecropis rufula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>		5	3					
Wood Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus sibilatrix</i>						1		
Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>					1		H	
Lesser Whitethroat	<i>Curruca curruca</i>			3					
Sardinian Warbler	<i>Curruca melanocephala</i>		H			1			
Common Whitethroat	<i>Curruca communis</i>		2	1	H	3	6	1	
Krüper's Nuthatch	<i>Sitta krueperi</i>		3						
Western Rock Nuthatch	<i>Sitta neumayer</i>		H	✓			1	3	
Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>			2				1	
Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>			1					
Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>			3			1	1	
Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>							2	
Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>		4		6	✓	✓	✓	
European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>			1	2	1		2	
Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>	2	6	3	✓	✓	✓	✓	

		September 2025							
Common name	Scientific name	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
Isabelline Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe isabellina</i>				1				
Eastern Black-eared Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe melanoleuca</i>			2				2	
Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>						2	1	
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Western Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>	2	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>			1	2		✓		
Tawny Pipit	<i>Anthus campestris</i>		7		4	2	3		
Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>				✓	2	✓	H	
Eurasian Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>			4			2		
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	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
Persian Squirrel	<i>Sciurus anomalus</i>			2				✓	
Günther's Vole	<i>Microtus guentheri</i>			1					

Amphibians & reptiles

		September 2025							
Common name	Scientific name	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
Levant Water Frog	<i>Pelophylax cf. bedriagae</i>		H						
Mediterranean House Gecko	<i>Hemidactylus turcicus</i>		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	
Turkish Snake-eyed Lizard	<i>Ophisops elegans</i>		✓						
Western Starred Agama	<i>Laudakia stellio</i>							2	
Balkan Terrapin	<i>Mauremys rivulata</i>		✓	✓		✓	✓		
Red-bellied Turtle	<i>Pseudemys rubriventris</i>							1	

Butterflies

		September 2025							
Common name	Scientific name	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
Common Swallowtail	<i>Papilio machaon</i>					1	1		
Millet Skipper	<i>Pelopidas thrax</i>						6		
Clouded Yellow	<i>Colias croceus</i>						3		
Large White	<i>Pieris brassicae</i>			1					
Small White	<i>Pieris rapae</i>			1	1		1		
Lang's Short-tailed Blue	<i>Leptotes pirithous</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓		
Long-tailed Blue	<i>Lampides boeticus</i>						✓		
Common Blue	<i>Polyommatus icarus</i>				2		3		
Cardinal	<i>Argynnis pandora</i>			1	1			1	
Painted Lady	<i>Vanessa cardui</i>					1	10	1	
Red Admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>					1			
Freyer's Grayling	<i>Hipparchia fatua</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Great Banded Grayling	<i>Brintesia circe</i>							2	
Levant Meadow Brown	<i>Maniola telmessia</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	

Moths

		September 2025							
Common name	Scientific name	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
Hummingbird Hawkmoth	<i>Macroglossum stellatarum</i>		✓		1		✓	✓	
Silver Y	<i>Autographa gamma</i>				✓				

Dragonflies

		September 2025							
Common name	Scientific name	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
Blue Emperor	<i>Anax imperator</i>						1		
Red-veined Darter	<i>Sympetrum fonscolombii</i>		✓	✓			✓	✓	
Violet Dropwing	<i>Trithemis annulata</i>		✓	✓					

Other insects

		September 2025							
Common name	Scientific name	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
European Praying Mantis	<i>Mantis religiosa</i>				1		1		
A mantis	<i>Iris oratoria</i>						2		
Mole Cricket	<i>Gryllotalpa sp.</i>				H				
American Cockroach	<i>Periplaneta americana</i>	1							