

Spring in Northern Greece

Naturetrek Tour Report

25th April – 2nd May 2025



Great Spotted Cuckoo



Lesser Kestrel



Dalmatian Pelican



Spoonbill

Tour report by Richard Lansdown, photos by Chris Hayes



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Summary

The week was epitomised by amazing avian spectacles, from the majestic towers of migrating Great White Pelicans to the flock of Greater Flamingos catching the sunlight over the sea and the thousands of Great and Pygmy Cormorants over Lake Kerkini, as well as the stunning richness and variety of species seen, plus vast quantities of food, particularly wonderful fresh salads.

Day 1

Friday 25th April

Most of us caught the early flight from Gatwick and arrived at Thessaloniki airport shortly after 11.00, where we met Judith and John who were already in Thessaloniki. The flight arrived 20 minutes early, which surprised us all and gave us time to sort ourselves out, as well as watching the Rose-ringed Parakeets and House Sparrows on the lights in front of the airport, with Common and Pallid Swifts overhead, while we waited briefly while Giorgos organised the vehicles.

Once we had met up with Giorgos and loaded up our bags we made a short trip to a local bar called Everest, where we had coffee and a light lunch, before driving for a couple of hours to a small lagoon at Ofriniou for a brief stop. On the way we saw the usual Hooded Crows, Starlings, Collared Doves and House Sparrows, with occasional Red-rumped Swallows and frequent Barn Swallows in the villages and Buzzards in the wilder areas. As we descended toward Koroneia Lake, we passed through a light shower and then we saw a most remarkable sight of clouds of insects, probably Chironomid flies, hanging above the fields and the roadside. These were so dense that they obscured the view and looking downhill toward the lake, resembled mist.

Just before Ofrinio Giorgos found a nearly 2m long Caspian Whip-snake dead on the road, while in the village Crested Larks fed along the roads and Red-rumped Swallows flew down to collect mud for their nests from the fields. We drove along dirt tracks to a small lagoon to the west of Ofriniou and stopped to look over the lake and its margins, where there was a flock of about 40 Greater Flamingos, as well as small numbers of Yellow-legged Gulls and Grey Herons, and a Marsh Harrier hunted over the reed beds. We had excellent views of Woodchat Shrike, Sardinian Warbler and Common Whitethroat feeding in scrub, while a large flock of House Martins were collecting mud in the margin.

We then headed to the Nestos Delta, our home for the next two nights, where as we entered the delta we started to see White Storks on their nests along the roadside, accompanied by the Spanish Sparrows which share their nests. After a quick break to refresh ourselves, during which some people saw a Syrian Woodpecker in the olive grove next to the hotel and two Great White Pelicans flying slowly past, most of us went for a short walk along the track from the hotel through typical Mediterranean maquis and a small oak wood. The area was very rich, with two Stone-curlews and Crested Larks in a field near the hotel, Cuckoos, Golden Orioles and a Whitethroat among the trees and large flocks of Mediterranean Gulls passing overhead advertising their presence by their curious barking calls. Tim also found a single Spur-thighed Tortoise sleeping in the grass which we all saw but did not disturb. Throughout the walk we were pursued by hordes of mosquitoes which formed clouds around our heads and encouraged us to return to the hotel reasonably early.

We then returned to the hotel, where no mosquitoes entered, for an excellent dinner and bed.

Day 2

Saturday 26th April

During breakfast, the hotel owner pointed out a male Golden Oriole sitting in a nearby tree, but which only a few of us saw before it disappeared into the foliage. After breakfast a pair of Great Spotted Cuckoos was found a short way along the track from the hotel apparently monitoring a Magpie nest; they were eventually photographed mating by many of the group. The first few to see them also saw a pristine male Red-backed Shrike on the same tree. Up to thirty Turtle Doves were also seen in the olive grove next to the house

We then headed into the Nestos Delta, to a large complex of open woodland and grassland. On the way we stopped to get excellent views watching a pair of Rollers and a Nightingale singing from the roadside telephone wires, while a flock of Bee-eaters fed over a recently ploughed field and those in the front car saw a Golden Jackal cross the road. At the park, we spent most of the time along a short length of track where we had excellent views of a pair of Black Woodpeckers feeding on poplars, with brief views of Middle Spotted and Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers, the latter feeding young in a nest but only giving a brief view. This was particularly frustrating for Richard (J.) who had never managed to see this species before. Further along the track, two Eastern Olivaceous Warblers were having a territorial dispute which meant that we had endless frustrating glimpses of them darting through the vegetation but nobody really got a good view. While we were trying to get a good view of the Eastern Olivaceous Warblers, John glanced toward the cars and saw a Golden Jackal crossing the track behind us. We moved on slowly through the site and heard a Grey-headed Woodpecker calling close by, which Giorgos spotted perched on a nearby tree, where it stayed for a while, continuing to call before flying over our heads to drum on a large poplar.

We then left the park and headed north and on the way we stopped where some people saw two Pheasants, remnants of a scarce local native population. At the same site, a Short-toed Snake Eagle and a Hobby were seen overhead, while a Little Egret was flushed from a roadside ditch. Driving through the villages, almost every telephone line seemed to hold a flock of Bee-eaters.

After another wonderful lunch in a taverna toward the northern end of the delta, we stopped briefly for coffee near the river at a site which is popular with local people, some of whom were swimming or at least sunbathing along the river. Jackdaws and Swifts were flying along the cliffs over the river, while a Nightingale sang from the top of a tree in the car park, trying to make itself heard over the music played by the DJ!

We then drove to a viewing area high over the Nestos Gorge, giving amazing views over the gorge and out across the delta. Giorgos soon found a Short-toed Snake Eagle near its nest in a tree above the gorge, whilst another two flew east overhead. A little later we saw a series of dots over one of the nearby hill tops, which resolved themselves into six Griffon Vultures which stayed in the same area for a while but unfortunately didn't come any closer.

The scrub and open grassland around the viewpoint supported a bewildering array of flowers, including Peacock Anemone - grading in colour from bright pink to almost white, swards of Grape Hyacinths, Early Purple and one of the Bee Orchid complex, the diminutive but beautiful Ground Pine and a large aromatic Thyme, as well as a pair of Woodlarks collecting food for their young and a singing male Cirl Bunting. A roadside stop a little way down the hill yielded a pair of Eastern Black-eared Wheatears and a singing Eastern Subalpine Warbler which refused to show itself, while George searched the hillsides for Rock Partridge without success.

After that it was home for dinner and bed.

Day 3

Sunday 27th April

The day dawned bright, but a little windy and the wind developed throughout the day. There was no morning walk, apart from Chris who took the hotel dogs along the track to listen to the Golden Orioles. Today was the day when we moved to the next hotel, so we had breakfast and loaded up the vans before leaving, but not before the hotelier insisted on her husband taking a photograph of her with the whole group.

Our first stop in what turned out to be an amazing day was the beach at Porto Lagos, which initially appeared to have only a few birds scattered on sand banks. However, over the next couple of hours we watched Common Little, Sandwich, two Whiskered and two White-winged Terns feeding in shallow water and resting on the sand banks, which they shared with small numbers of waders including Ruddy Turnstones resplendent in their summer plumage, as well as Sanderling, Whimbrel, Greenshank, Oystercatchers, Curlew, Kentish Plover, Grey Plovers and a single Little Stint, while small flocks of Mediterranean and Slender-billed Gulls flew in off the sea. A Hobby flew low over the area and Giorgos spotted a Syrian Woodpecker feeding on trees around a nearby garden, allowing most of us good, although slightly distant views.

We then moved on to an area of salt-pans, which initially appeared to support good numbers of Black-winged Stilts and Yellow-legged Gulls but little else. However, while we were there two stunning adult Little Gulls flew over and small flocks of waders moved in or through the area, including Little Stints, Common Ringed Plover, Kentish Plovers and a small flock of Curlew Sandpipers, many of which were resplendent in their striking and beautiful summer plumage. We crossed the salt-pan complex and moved to an area of arable fields on a low hill, where small numbers of Calandra Larks and Greater Short-toed Larks were feeding and displaying and a Lesser Grey Shrike was seen sitting on scrub. After this it was time for lunch in a local taverna, in a picture postcard perfect village near the port.

After another wonderful (and enormous) lunch mainly involving vast piles of seafood, we moved on, briefly stopping at Lake Vistonida, although by now the wind was pretty strong and all we saw was a line of Pygmy Cormorants on posts leading out into the lake. We then moved to the beach near Fanari where we watched for a while but the only new species were Black Tern and a single distant Arctic Skua.

We then drove to Lake Ismarida, a large lake surrounded by extensive reedbeds and areas of marshland grading into Tamarisk scrub and woodland. We initially stopped on the side of the road where there were flocks of Bee-eaters, and Andrew heard a Bittern boom twice, then we moved to a small hide (giving a little very welcome shelter from the wind) on the top of a low hill from which we could see over the whole lake complex. From here we could see occasional Mute Swans and Great Egrets feeding in the margins, flocks of White-winged Terns and Glossy Ibis moving over the lake and a Hobby slowly passed only a few metres above our heads. Remarkably, Andrew then spotted a Golden Jackal foraging in open grassland on the far side of the lake and just before we left, two Wild Boar ran from the lake margin into dense reeds below us.

It was then time for the glorious finale. We drove to the far side of the lake and then along through pasture and arable fields, stopping occasionally to look at things of particular note. Birds were abundant throughout, with large numbers of Calandra Larks displaying and feeding among the Crested Larks and Skylarks throughout the area,

with Bee-eaters on and around Tamarisk scrub and Collared Pratincoles mainly overhead, but also occasionally to be seen resting in bare fields. Giorgos then spotted the Golden Jackal feeding in the grassland and most people were able to get good views. As we drove along, we found ourselves in a flock of 7-8 feeding Red-footed Falcons, with a few Common Kestrels, then a Montagu's Harrier swept through, low over the fields.

As we watched these, a line of White Pelicans appeared, joined by another probably totalling a little over a hundred birds, which then started to circle over the lake - as we were watching these, Giorgos spotted a distant Purple Heron over the lake, but when Leo looked for the Heron, he instead found a stunning Black Stork which drifted slowly north, then a Lesser Spotted Eagle appeared circling overhead in the company of a single Western Marsh Harrier and all the while, the pelicans circled overhead, gradually rising higher. While this was going on, not only were the Collared Pratincoles still constantly zipping past but flocks of Glossy Ibis, egrets and various waders fed in pools near the lake and the Red-footed Falcons continued to hunt over the fields. For a while it was difficult to know where to look.

Unfortunately it was now getting late and time to head for the hotel, stopping briefly at the village of Kalamokastro to check a water tower where Lesser Kestrels normally nest, with no luck. We checked in at the hotel in Komotini and then walked a short way for dinner in a local restaurant.

Day 4

Monday 28th April

The day was dominated by strong winds, which affected everything we did, although at least there was bright sunshine with clear skies all day, which meant that it was not too cold. We again visited the Lesser Kestrel colony in Kalamokastro but there was no sign of the birds, so we carried on back to the area around Lake Ismarida where we drove slowly along the road, stopping occasionally to scan for notable birds. At our first stop, all the birds on the lake took off and we spotted a White-tailed Eagle flying low over the lake, carrying prey but giving us only poor views as it was frequently obscured by vegetation and eventually flew out of sight near the river. We then walked along a track towards the lake, seeking shelter from the wind behind the low tamarisk bushes wherever possible, toward an area of shallow water, where large numbers of Ruff and Wood Sandpipers were feeding with a few Black-winged Stilts, Greenshank and a flock of Glossy Ibis, but the small numbers of Little Egrets and Squacco Herons were just standing hunched and looking miserable trying to keep out of the wind, only moving when Western Marsh Harriers approached too close for their comfort. Just before we left to head back to the minibuses, the White-tailed Eagle returned, flying the length of the lake in front of us and giving excellent views, while in the distance we saw a flock of nearly 200 Great White Pelicans take off and start to circle gaining height to move north.

We then moved on to the bunds along either side of a nearby river in the hope of finding sheltered areas where we might see passerines, but the strong winds meant that there was little visible, although the singing Nightingales, Blackcaps and Chiffchaff showed that there were birds there. We stopped at a bridge over the river which gave good views over the channel and margins, where a few Moorhens were feeding, frogs (of the edible frog complex) called from the shallows and a line of European Pond Terrapins sunned themselves on a dead tree. For a while, the only bird which we saw was a Reed Warbler, feeding in vegetation below the bridge, although John had excellent views of a Golden Jackal in a field nearby. Eventually, the White-tailed Eagle appeared over the trees, two female Common Kestrels started hunting over the fields and three Hobbies flew over, then we spotted movement in a willow tree below the bridge, which turned out to be a Penduline Tit, collecting nesting material.

It flew over us and into a large poplar where it could be seen trying to work on its nest, which was hanging from the tip of a long branch and waving around wildly in the wind. At one point it sat on a branch watching its nest fly past, appearing to be judging the best moment to make the leap onto it. We then moved off toward our lunch destination.

We had lunch in another wonderful taverna, this time in a village on a hill where there was a Lesser Kestrel colony. After another amazing lunch, with home-made desserts and another photograph with the owner, we were beginning to make our way to a café for coffee, when we saw a stunning male Lesser Kestrel fly low overhead, then land on a nest box on the end wall of a school building. In front of the school there was an information board explaining how Lesser Kestrels are the “farmer’s friend” because they feed on insect pests. This is part of an initiative throughout the area, to increase nesting sites for Lesser Kestrels and appears to be having some success with a number of nest boxes on the school and a nearby church occupied, as well as some birds nesting in more traditional sites, such as holes in buildings. As the birds are accustomed to people we were able to remain close to the colony while the birds visited the nest boxes, giving exceptional views.

After coffee where we sat in the garden while Lesser Kestrels and Short-toed Snake Eagles flew overhead, it was difficult to know where to go where birds might be active in spite of the strong winds, so Giorgos took us back past Lake Ismarida to a nearby beach and on the way we had good views of a male Montagu’s Harrier struggling to hunt over the barley fields. At the beach we were surprised to see a large flock of a few hundred Greater Flamingos swimming on the sea, with a much smaller flock on the beach to the east. It appears that the strong winds made it impossible for them to stand in the shallow water or margins, presumably because they were vulnerable to damage from waves. Unfortunately, flamingos are not good at swimming, as they lack webbed feet and so the wind simply pushed them along parallel to the shore. When they found themselves too far west, they all flew back east to where the rest of the flock were on the beach, providing a stunning sight. While all this was going on, there were large numbers of terns, mainly Little with smaller numbers of Common and Sandwich, feeding offshore and occasionally right in front of us.

At the same time there was a constant passage of hirundines, dominated by Sand Martins, with smaller numbers of Barn Swallows coming in off the sea, while small flocks of Mediterranean Gulls moved along the coast in front of us, another flock of Great White Pelicans circled slowly along the coast and Leo spotted a lone female Red-footed Falcon which gave wonderful views before heading inland.

We decided to return to the steppic habitats around Lake Ismarida before heading back to the hotel. We tried driving down a couple of the dirt tracks leading off the main road, in case these gave us a chance to see something different, but every time we got out, the dust made it almost impossible to watch for long. Apart from good views of some of the larks, the only real bonus from following the tracks was when a flock of Collared Pratincoles appeared to decide that one of the minibuses was a good source of shelter from the wind and approached the parked minibus to within a few metres, giving fantastic views and an opportunity for photographs. We had been hoping that the tracks would join up with the road on the bunds along the river, but they turned out to be dead ends, meaning that we either had to turn around on the ploughed fields or reverse for hundreds of metres, trying to avoid the deeper potholes.

Eventually we called it a day and headed back to the hotel for a very welcome hot shower, before heading out for another enormous meal. As we left the taverna, two Scops Owls were calling from the main square.

Day 5

Tuesday 29th April

Today was dominated by the move from Komotini to Kerkini, where we were to stay for the rest of the tour. The group had unanimously agreed that we would like to stop on the way above the tree line on a mountain near our route and this was our only site for the day. We left the hotel as usual, and followed the highway a little way beyond Kavala seeing only the ubiquitous Barn and Red-rumped Swallows, Hooded Crows and Collared Doves, as well as occasional small groups of migrating White Storks, before heading inland on smaller roads. We stopped briefly at a fantastic bakery to pick up sandwiches for lunch, as well as to get fuel for the vans, then started the long drive uphill. The road, which varied from asphalt to concrete and in places was mainly pot-hole, took us from about 200 to 1600 m altitude, passing initially through typical Mediterranean maquis, then tall downy oak forest, then beech woodland reminiscent of the Cotswolds or Chilterns, then a narrow zone of conifers leading up to the open subalpine zone. Driving up was like going back in time, as we left the late spring heat of the lowlands, then the lower forested zones in full leaf, but in the upper parts of the beech wood the leaves had yet to open and at the top, only a few species of plant such as Cowslips were flowering, typical of Britain in March.

We saw little on the way up the mountain, but could hear snatches of song, initially from Nightingales, then Blackbirds, Chiffchaffs and Robins and finally Coal Tits and Chaffinches in the conifers. As we rounded a corner, we came to a series of water troughs and Giorgos spotted a pair of Rock Partridges which had been drinking but rapidly walked up the slope into the trees, giving good views only to a few people. We parked the car under some conifers and walked out onto a promontory in the hope of seeing more Rock Partridges, but these eluded us. On the way back to the cars we did see three Lesser Whitethroats in the conifers, a normal habitat for this species in Greece, but very different from their typical habitat of lowland farmland and hedgerows in the UK.

We then moved to park near the treeline and spent some time walking along the road. The subalpine zone is characterised by open grassland with low scattered bushes, occasional trees and frequent rock outcrops. Initially, it appeared to be devoid of animal life, but it is a habitat where it is necessary to learn to see the birds. As we walked, we gradually started to see occasional movement and began to pick out birds such as Ortolan Buntings, Rock Thrush, Black Redstart and Northern Wheatears, feeding and displaying among the rock outcrops. We had our lunch on a bend looking out over the mountains to the coast and Mount Athos in the distance, but the only bird that we saw here was a lone Raven. After lunch we moved to the end of the road and the abandoned ski station, where we saw a Water Pipit feeding alongside the road and a male Rock Thrush singing from the wooden posts remaining from the abandoned ski station, while Northern Wheatears and Black Redstarts fed from rock outcrops. We went for a short walk into the woodland, but saw only a single Robin, a Wren and a couple of Tree Pipits, but to our surprise, when we returned to the minibuses, there were two Hooded Crows feeding on the slope - very unusual at this altitude.

We then made the long drive back down the hill and north to our hotel, which has amazing views looking out over Lake Kerkini. Dinner was in the hotel, with the now normal array of wonderful salads, followed by main courses mainly featuring the local water buffalo.

Day 6

Wednesday 30th April

The day again dawned bright and sunny, but this morning it was absolutely still. After breakfast, during which we admired both Great White and Dalmatian Pelicans on the lake, as well as a White Stork which came to feed in the field next to the restaurant, we headed out to the nearby canal.

On our arrival, we were greeted by Bee-eaters feeding on all sides, together with the sound of Great Reed Warblers and the local variant of the Edible Frog complex vying for volume from stands of Common Reed along the sides of the canal. As we got out of the cars, a pair of Little Bitterns dashed between reed clumps, but were seen by only a few people as most were still coming to terms with the Pygmy Cormorants, Grey Herons and occasional Black-crowned Night Herons overhead, Bee-eaters, Cuckoos, Golden Orioles and a brief glimpse of a Syrian Woodpecker in the trees and, of course, the frogs! We walked alongside the canal for a while, getting excellent views of the Great Reed Warblers, Bee-eaters and frogs on the way, as well as seeing a few other species such as a Little Owl on a barn roof, Golden Orioles high in the poplars and some Coypu in the canal, then slowly drove along the full length of the canal in the hope of seeing more Little Bitterns, but without success.

We then drove to a nearby stream and watched a Penduline Tit working on its current nest hanging in the branches of a poplar over a small stream, including re-cycling material from previous nests which remained around it in the same tree. While we were watching it, a Grey-headed Woodpecker flew past.

We moved on to the upstream end of Lake Kerkini, where the inflowing river and parts of the lake form a large area of shallow inundated grassland, with pools, before expanding into the main body of the lake. When we arrived, the area supported scattered Pygmy and Great Cormorants, Great White and Dalmatian Pelicans, Grey Herons, Squacco Herons and Little Egrets. Suddenly a flock of thousands of Great and Pygmy Cormorants started to pass, flying upstream, the flock was so large that it took some minutes to pass, making an amazing spectacle. This is apparently normal behaviour for the approximately 15,000 birds which nest in the lake as they move between feeding areas. We walked on for a little while hearing the usual species such as Grey-headed Woodpecker, Golden Oriole and Common Cuckoo in scrub alongside the lake, although time was short as we had to head for lunch, suddenly Richard J spotted the two Spur-winged Lapwings which we had been hoping to see, as they were on Andrew's short target list of "lifers". We had excellent views of the two birds, as well as a curious-looking hybrid between a Purple and Grey Heron, feeding nearby which has been known from the area for three years.

We then went for an excellent lunch in the former railway station at Vironia, while Eurasian Tree Sparrows chirped in the trees and Richard J managed, at last, to get a good enough view of a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker to feel happy with it. After quite a long but delicious lunch, where we found ourselves sitting at a table next to another Naturetrek group, we headed to the lake shore to take a boat out onto the lake. Once on the boats, we headed slowly out through marginal reedbeds, initially along the drowned former railway line and then along the original course of the river, out onto the lake. Throughout the trip, we were surrounded by Great-crested Grebes making their odd, guttural call, as we passed sunken trees emerging from the water, many still alive and supporting nesting Spoonbills and Great Cormorants and all the time being passed by lines of Great White and Dalmatian Pelicans, silently majestic over the water. Every one of a line of posts in the water had a Whiskered or Common Tern on top and there were birds everywhere and most largely ignored us, except when we got too close and they would swim or reluctantly struggle into the air and fly away.

Most of the trees in the water were fairly small and supported only a few nests, but a number of the trees on dry ground supported hundreds of cormorant nests, with the trunks and branches white from the guano, contrasting with the black of the birds. As we approached the former river banks, we saw a Golden Jackal trotting away from us through the grass, having been searching for young birds that had fallen from the nests. On our way back to the shore, we were passed by large flocks of Whiskered and White-winged Terns, with occasional Black Terns.

Once we returned to the shore, we made our way back to the hotel where we had dinner looking out over the lake.

Day 7

Thursday 1st May

This morning we had an early start, partly to enable us to get into the field before the crowds of holidaymakers arrived for their May Day holiday and partly to try to see more birds before the heat haze made it difficult to see and identify them at a distance. We had breakfast at six thirty, then headed back to the upstream end of the lake, which we had visited during the previous evening. As we moved onto the road along the embankment, we spotted a Purple Heron standing in the reeds, which turned out only to be the most visible of a flock of eight which had clearly arrived during the night and were resting before moving on and while we were watching, first one then all the others took off and flew north. Behind us, a Syrian Woodpecker flew into a group of trees, where it fed for a while, occasionally drumming, before moving to the lower parts of tree where we could see it excavating its nest hole.

As was the case the previous day, there were birds throughout the complex of pools, bays and wet grassland, Great White Pelicans, Dalmatian Pelicans, Great Cormorants, Pygmy Cormorants and Great-crested Grebes, one of which was on a nest, fished in the shallow water, while Grey and Purple Herons, Little and Great Egrets, Squacco Heron and a single Black Stork fished from the margins. There were small flocks of waders, mainly Wood Sandpipers with a few Ruff, two full summer plumage Spotted Redshank, a single Little Stint and the two Spur-winged Plovers, as well as small numbers of Greylag Geese, Mallard, Pochard, Pintail and Shoveler. While we were scanning through these, a Black Kite flew overhead, while behind us in the line of trees, we heard the ubiquitous Nightingales, Golden Orioles and Hoopoes, as well as occasional Willow, Sedge and Cetti's Warblers, as well as both Green and Grey-headed woodpeckers, enabling us to hear the difference between the calls of the latter two.

On leaving the lake, we headed up into the nearby hills, passing groups of people setting up tables and barbecues alongside the river and even on the abandoned railway tracks. The area where Giorgos had originally planned to park was occupied by another group of people firing up their barbecue, so we carried on a little further up the hill to a site where Giorgos knew of a nesting pair of Lesser-spotted Woodpeckers. We parked in the shade of a large mulberry tree and waited for the birds to appear, but almost immediately Giorgos spotted a Golden Eagle circling over a nearby hill and high above it a pale phase Booted Eagle. The woodpeckers soon appeared and visited the nest, but we were distracted by passing raptors, including another Booted Eagle, Hobby, a single Marsh Harrier which annoyed the Ravens which were nesting on the cliffs opposite us and a male Levant Sparrowhawk which flew rapidly past along the line of the hills, as well as by birds singing among the bushes around us, particularly Orphean Warbler and Sombre Tit, which we heard but were unable to see.

The Golden Eagle reappeared, clearly carrying prey which Rebecca's photographs showed was probably a Great Cormorant. It circled for a while and then disappeared high above the hills. We spent a little while watching birds

among the bushes, including Linnets, Greenfinches and Cirl Buntings, one of which was feeding young in the nest, and a pair of Red-backed Shrikes. We stayed there to eat our lunch.

After lunch we headed for coffee in the town of Sidirokastro which lies at the base of a high cliff topped by a ruined Byzantine fortress. After the very welcome coffee, we walked along the base of the cliff to a point where we could see the whole outcrop fairly well and we could see a pair of Western Rock Nuthatches dropping down to the cliff base to collect material with which to line their mud nest, looking so proud of themselves every time that they appeared on the shelving rock that they used before going to the nest. We sat for a while watching Crag Martins feeding along the cliff and a pair of Common Kestrels at their nest hole, as well as explaining what we were doing to occasional curious passers-by. Just before we decided to move to the top of the site to look for the Blue Rock Thrushes, a fine intense blue male Blue Rock Thrush swooped along the length of the cliff to land in a small dead tree about halfway up, allowing us perfect views and photographs, as well as making it clear that it was carrying a caterpillar to a nest.

The obliging Blue Rock Thrush had saved us some time, so Giorgos decided to head to an agricultural area, where we drove slowly along dirt tracks, passing scattered pairs of Red-backed Shrikes, as well as Corn Buntings and flocks of mixed House and Spanish Sparrows. We stopped at a junction where we could hear the song of a Black-headed Bunting which we tried but failed to see, until we moved a little down a track and turned to face where it was, at which point it flew up onto telephone wires where we had excellent views, although in poor light, before it flew off to chase another bird. A male Common Quail then started calling from an adjacent field of lucerne and Giorgos tried to flush it, without success. We carried on along the track, until two large raptors flew past, which turned out to be a Lesser Spotted Eagle, followed by a Long-legged buzzard. The buzzard disappeared but the eagle flew back toward us then spent about ten minutes circling overhead, displaying and calling.

We moved on a little while and spotted another Long-legged Buzzard near the river, so we turned off towards it down an even smaller track. We parked in sight of the buzzard, but almost as soon as we got the telescope on it, it flew off. However, scanning the skies, we could see a tower of Great White Pelicans rising over the mountains in the distance, small flocks of White Storks and a single Black Stork, Common Kestrels, a Hobby and two Short-toed Snake Eagles, all in the air at the same time, while Bee-eaters called from the sand-banks in the alluvial plain. We made our way along a complex of very dusty dirt tracks toward the main road, but as we did, we spotted a superb Long-legged Buzzard sitting on a hay bale watching over recently harvested hay fields.

We then moved to a site near the hotel for the final part of the day, where Giorgos wanted to show us Eurasian Eagle Owl. The track up the hill ran alongside a broad, shallow river which was white with the flowers of a Water-crowfoot, among which small numbers of Wood Sandpipers were feeding. We arrived at the quarry, where we spent a while watching birds, included an Eastern Black-eared Wheatear, Ortolan Bunting and what we initially thought to be a Woodchat Shrike, but Chris' photographs showed to be our only Masked Shrike of the trip, all sitting in the tops of small trees at the top of the quarry. Another Lesser Spotted Eagle flew overhead and a Hawfinch flew low over our heads, disappearing from view in a large poplar. We then searched a nearby cliff for the Eagle Owls, which we found, however a short rain shower and poor light made them difficult to see at times.

We then returned to the hotel in time for our last dinner, this time at a taverna in the village.

Day 8

Friday 2nd May

This morning, most of the group went out for another attempt to see the Little Bitterns at the canal, but although one bird was glimpsed, they were unable to get a good view. However, compensation came in the form of two Golden Jackals and a brief sighting of a Wild Cat running along the road. After breakfast, we loaded up our bags and headed to the airport, where we left Giorgos to return the vehicles and we turned to check-in for our return flight.



Alpine Swift

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Species lists

Birds (H = Heard only)

I = Introduced		April - May 2025							
Common name	Scientific name	25	26	27	28	29	30	1	2
Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>						✓	✓	
Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>			✓	✓		✓	✓	
Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	✓		✓	✓			✓	
Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>							✓	
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	
Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>							✓	
Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>						✓		
Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>						✓	✓	
Common Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>		✓						
Common Quail	<i>Coturnix coturnix</i>							H	
Rock Partridge	<i>Alectoris graeca</i>					✓			
Alpine Swift	<i>Tachymarptis melba</i>					✓		✓	
Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Pallid Swift	<i>Apus pallidus</i>	✓				✓			
Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>	✓	✓	H		✓	✓	✓	
Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>			✓					
Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
European Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	
Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>				✓		✓	✓	
Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>			✓	✓		✓	✓	
Greater Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i>	✓		✓	✓				
Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>				✓		✓	✓	
Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>			✓	✓		✓	✓	
Black-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>						✓		
Eurasian Stone-curlew	<i>Burhinus oedicnemus</i>	✓							
Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>		✓	✓	✓				
Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	
Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>			✓	✓				
Spur-winged Lapwing	<i>Vanellus spinosus</i>						✓	✓	
Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>			✓					
Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	✓		✓					
Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>	✓						✓	
Kentish Plover	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>			✓	✓				
Eurasian Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>			✓					
Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>			✓					
Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>			✓					
Ruff	<i>Calidris pugnax</i>			✓	✓		✓	✓	
Curlew Sandpiper	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>			✓					
Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>			✓					
Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>	✓		✓				✓	
Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>				✓		✓		
Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>			✓	✓			✓	
Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>	✓			✓		✓	✓	
Spotted Redshank	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>							✓	
Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>			✓	✓				
Collared Pratincole	<i>Glareola pratincola</i>			✓	✓				

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Little Gull	<i>Hydrocoloeus minutus</i>			✓					
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>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Arctic Skua	<i>Stercorarius parasiticus</i>			✓					
Gull-billed Tern	<i>Gelochelidon nilotica</i>			✓					
Caspian Tern	<i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>							✓	
Sandwich Tern	<i>Thalasseus sandvicensis</i>	✓		✓	✓				
Little Tern	<i>Sternula albifrons</i>	✓		✓	✓				
Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>			✓	✓		✓	✓	
Whiskered Tern	<i>Chlidonias hybrida</i>			✓	✓		✓		
White-winged Tern	<i>Chlidonias leucopterus</i>			✓	✓		✓		
Black Tern	<i>Chlidonias niger</i>			✓			✓		
Black Stork	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>			✓				✓	
White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Pygmy Cormorant	<i>Microcarbo pygmaeus</i>			✓			✓	✓	
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>			✓	✓		✓	✓	
European Shag	<i>Gulosus aristotelis</i>			✓	✓				
Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>			✓	✓				
Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>			✓			✓	✓	
Eurasian Bittern	<i>Botaurus stellaris</i>			H					
Little Bittern	<i>Ixobrychus minutus</i>						✓		
Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>						✓	✓	
Squacco Heron	<i>Ardeola ralloides</i>				✓		✓	✓	
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>			✓	✓		✓	✓	
Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>	✓		✓	✓			✓	
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
Great White Pelican	<i>Pelecanus onocrotalus</i>	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	
Dalmatian Pelican	<i>Pelecanus crispus</i>					✓	✓	✓	
Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>		6						
Short-toed Snake Eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>		✓	✓	✓			✓	
Lesser Spotted Eagle	<i>Clanga pomarina</i>			✓				✓	
Booted Eagle	<i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i>							✓	
Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>							✓	
Levant Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter brevipes</i>							✓	
Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>		✓						
Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>						✓	✓	
White-tailed Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>				✓				
Long-legged Buzzard	<i>Buteo rufinus</i>							✓	
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>		✓				✓	✓	
Eurasian Scops Owl	<i>Otus scops</i>				H				
Eurasian Eagle-Owl	<i>Bubo bubo</i>							✓	
Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
European Roller	<i>Coracias garrulus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓			
Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>						✓		
European Bee-eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
Middle Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocoptes medius</i>		✓						

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Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dryobates minor</i>		✓				✓	✓	
Syrian Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos syriacus</i>	✓		✓			✓	✓	
Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>		✓						
Black Woodpecker	<i>Dryocopus martius</i>		✓						
European Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>		H			✓		H	
Grey-headed Woodpecker	<i>Picus canus</i>		✓				✓	H	
Lesser Kestrel	<i>Falco naumanni</i>				✓	✓			
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
Red-footed Falcon	<i>Falco vespertinus</i>			✓	✓				
Eurasian Hobby	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Rose-ringed Parakeet - I	<i>Psittacula krameri</i>	✓							
Red-backed Shrike	<i>Lanius collurio</i>		✓					✓	
Lesser Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius minor</i>			✓				✓	
Woodchat Shrike	<i>Lanius senator</i>	✓	✓		✓		✓		
Masked Shrike	<i>Lanius nubicus</i>							✓	
Eurasian Golden Oriole	<i>Oriolus oriolus</i>	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	
Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>							✓	
Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	
Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>				✓				
Hooded Crow	<i>Corvus cornix</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		✓			✓		✓	
Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>					✓			
Sombre Tit	<i>Poecile lugubris</i>							H	
Marsh Tit	<i>Poecile palustris</i>					✓			
Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>							✓	
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	
Eurasian Penduline Tit	<i>Remiz pendulinus</i>				✓		✓		
Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>		✓						
Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>			✓	✓				
Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Greater Short-toed Lark	<i>Calandrella brachydactyla</i>			✓	✓				
Calandra Lark	<i>Melanocorypha calandra</i>			✓	✓				
Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓			
Eurasian Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>							✓	
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Cecropis daurica</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>		H	✓	H		H	H	
Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>		✓						
Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>							H	
Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>		H		H	H			
Great Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus arundinaceus</i>		H				✓		
Sedge Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>							H	
Eurasian Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>		H		✓				
Eastern Olivaceous Warbler	<i>Iduna pallida</i>	✓	✓	H				✓	
Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>		H		H	H			
Lesser Whitethroat	<i>Curruca curruca</i>					✓			
Eastern Orphean Warbler	<i>Curruca crassirostris</i>							H	
Sardinian Warbler	<i>Curruca melanocephala</i>	✓							
Eastern Subalpine Warbler	<i>Curruca cantillans</i>		H						

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Common name	Scientific name	25	26	27	28	29	30	1	2
Common Whitethroat	<i>Curruca communis</i>	✓	✓	✓				H	
Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>					✓			
Western Rock Nuthatch	<i>Sitta neumayer</i>							✓	
Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>					✓			
Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>					H			
Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		
Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>		✓						
European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>					✓			
Common Nightingale	<i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i>	H	✓	H	✓	H	✓	✓	
Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochrurus</i>					✓			
Common Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola saxatilis</i>					✓			
Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>							✓	
Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>		✓		✓			✓	
Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>					✓			
Eastern Black-eared Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe melanoleuca</i>		✓					✓	
Eurasian Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>			✓			✓		
Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Western Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>			✓	✓		✓	✓	
Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>		✓						
Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>					✓			
Water Pipit	<i>Anthus spinoletta</i>					✓			
Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		✓			✓	H	✓	
Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>							✓	
European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>	H						✓	
Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>					✓		✓	
European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	
Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
Ortolan Bunting	<i>Emberiza hortulana</i>					✓		✓	
Cirl Bunting	<i>Emberiza cirlus</i>		✓				✓	✓	
Black-headed Bunting	<i>Emberiza melanocephala</i>							✓	
hybrid Purple × Grey Heron							✓		

Other vertebrates

I = introduced, E = endemic D=dead		April - May 2025							
Common name	Scientific name	25	26	27	28	29	30	1	2
AMPHIBIANS & REPTILES:									
European Pond Turtle	<i>Emys orbicularis</i>				✓				
Spur-thighed Tortoise	<i>Testudo graeca</i>	✓	✓						
Hermann's Tortoise	<i>Testudo hermanni</i>							✓	
Caspian Whipsnake	<i>Dolichophis caspius</i>	D							
MAMMALS:		25	26	27	28	29	30	1	
Eastern European Hedgehog	<i>Erinaceus concolor</i>					D			
European Wildcat	<i>Felis silvestris</i>							1	
Red Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>		✓			✓			
Caucasian Badger	<i>Meles canescens</i>							D	

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Common name	Scientific name	25	26	27	28	29	30	1	2	
Coypu - I	<i>Myocastor coypus</i>				✓		✓			
Golden Jackal	<i>Canis aureus</i>		2	1	1		1			

Butterflies

Common name	Scientific name
Southern Festoon	<i>Zerynthia polyxena</i>
Scarce Swallowtail	<i>Iphiclides podalirius</i>
Swallowtail	<i>Papilio machaon</i>
Southern Small White	<i>Pieris mannii</i>
Small White	<i>Pieris rapae</i>
Orange Tip	<i>Anthocharis cardamines</i>
Clouded Yellow	<i>Colias crocea</i>
Berger's Clouded Yellow	<i>Colias alfacariensis</i>
Cleopatra	<i>Gonopteryx cleopatra</i>
Ilex Hairstreak	<i>Satyrium ilicis</i>
Holly Blue	<i>Celastrina argiolus</i>
Eastern Baton Blue	<i>Pseudophilotes vicrama</i>
Brown Argus	<i>Arica agrestis</i>
Common Blue	<i>Polyommatus icarus</i>
Small Tortoiseshell	<i>Aglais urticae</i>
Red Admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>
Painted Lady	<i>Vanessa cardui</i>
Queen of Spain Fritillary	<i>Issoria lathonia</i>
Speckled Wood	<i>Pararge aegeria</i>
Mallow Skipper	<i>Carcharodus alceae</i>
Large Copper	<i>Lycaena dispar</i>