







LESVOS Greece

TRIP REPORT April 26 – May 3, 2012



# **SPRING MIGRATION MAGIC!**





Sunrise Birding LLC LESVOS Spring Migration April 26 – May 3, 2012

#### HIGHLIGHTS: Either for rarity value, excellent views or simply a group favorite.

**TRIP REPORT** Leaders: Gina Nichol & Steve Bird

- Krüper's Nuthatch
- Dalmatian Pelican
- Collared Pratincole
- Red-breasted Flycatcher
- Scopoli's Shearwater
- Sombre Tit
- Isabelline Wheatear
- Baillon's Crake
- Lesser Grey Shrike
- Western Rock Nuthatch
- Red-footed Falcon
- Roller
- Rüppell's Warbler

- Cinereous Bunting
- Collared Flycatcher
- Citrine Wagtail
- Eleanora's Falcon
- Middle Spotted
  Woodpecker
- Yelkuoan Shearwater
- Black-headed Bunting
- Little Crake
- Masked Shrike
- Thrush Nightingale
- Long-eared Owl
- Scops Owl
- Eurasian Nightjar

- Inky Skipper
  - Eastern Festoon
- Holy Orchid
- Violet Bird's Nest Orchid
- Orphanides' Orchid
- Goblet-market
  Damselfly
- Dark Spreadwing
- Broad-bodied Chaser
- Black-tailed Skimmer
- Spur-thighed Tortoise
- Persian Squirrel
- Glass Lizard
- Starred Agama

#### SUMMARY:

The island of Lesvos truly is a magical place, enriched with culture that hasn't changed for centuries and a beautiful scenic countryside that we hope stays that way for many years to come. If you add to this rare butterflies, dragonflies, orchids and flowers plus a profusion of wonderful birds, it's no wonder people come back time and time again. Our tour was once timed to produce a good variety of the spring migrants heading north from their wintering grounds. We were not disappointed and enjoyed superb views of most of the birds we saw. The two star birds. **Krüppr's Nutbatch** and

The two star birds, Krüper's Nuthatch and

**Cinereous Bunting** were easily seen and a wealth of other sought after species duly obliged. Several rarities such as **Dalmatian Pelican** and **Baillon's Crake** showed well and, all in all, it was a wonderful tour enriched by the camaraderie of many of our fellow birders. We intend to return next year to see what wonderful surprises await us!

#### 26<sup>th</sup> April 2012

Most of our group arrived before the official start day so we were all ready to go shortly after breakfast on our first day. The weather had been clear a sunny for several days and consequently no big falls of birds but there were plenty of interesting species around to keep us busy. As we finished our breakfast, we heard the news that a **Dalmatian Pelican** had been seen on the Kalloni Salt Pans. This added a sense of urgency to our departure and we were soon on our way to try and see this rare bird.

We arrived on the scene and sets up our scopes to zoom in on the pelican which was floating on a distant pool. Over time, it moved more into the open offering great, albeit distant views. There were, of course, plenty of other species to look at including 60+ **Greater Flamingos, Common Shelduck, Gull-billed, Common** and **Little Terns**, a flock of **Ruff** with several **Curlew Sandpipers** in the salt pans. We enjoyed views of **Greenshank, Kentish Plover**, two **Grey Plovers, Black-winged Stilts,** many elegant looking **Pied Avocets**, and a few **Little Stints**. What a morning and great start to our trip!



We departed the area and a few minutes later Judy S. spotted a Little Owl perched on a post near the road. We got out and enjoyed superb views of the little gem. In a nearby dyke, we had good looks at a Dark Spreadwing, (damselfly) while opposite we heard, and then found a Stone Curlew resting on a sandbar. Overhead, our first of many Black Storks flew over as we boarded the vehicles to continue on along the edge of the salt pans. As we traveled, the very common Crested Larks and Corn Buntings were easily seen (as was the case every day of the trip) and an Eastern Olivaceous Warbler sang from the top of a Tamarisk Bush. A small patch of boggy water held **Wood Sandpipers** and some nice Black-headed Wagtails. At another spot overlooking some wet pools we had Ruddy Shelduck, Glossy Ibis, a Purple Heron, Ruff and a White Stork. Further along a female Pochard took flight as a Marsh Harrier cruised through. A Sedge Warbler was heard and eventually seen rummaging around a Tamarisk on the corner. We

continued on to some sheep fields we saw **Whinchat and** a few **Greater Short-toed** Larks and nearby a **Black-necked Grebe** was seen just offshore.

We headed out to Achladeri Forest and enjoyed our first of several picnic lunches serenaded by the ubiquitous **Chaffinch**. As we finished eating, Gina and Steve heard an interesting call from the back of a pine tree. We investigated and found a **Krüper's Nuthatch** foraging in the top of the pine. We enjoyed great views of this specialty and were amazed that it presented itself to us so easily! The bird eventually flew off into the forest. We walked up into the pine forest and found a lovely looking **Violet Bird's Nest Orchid** growing on the forest floor. A little further on, we staked out the nest hole of a

pair of **Krüper's Nuthatches**. We had a short wait before the first adult appeared with food and over the next 45 minutes we enjoyed fantastic views of the birds as they came into the nest with food for their hungry chicks and carried out waste. On the way back down toward the cars, we heard a **Short-toed Treecreeper** and **Subalpine Warbler** and Judy F found that a rather large **Stick Insect** had hitched a ride on her shoulders. As we got back to the vehicles a **Short-toed Eagle** flew over and we began to get to grips with the field marks of this massive bird in flight.

We continued on with a quick roadside stop for **Red-backed Shrike**. Further on along the coast, we had **Little Ringed Plover** and at the bridge over the Vouvaris River, we checked the marsh and found **Squacco Heron** and **Stonechat**, while a **Common Kestrel** flew over the distant fields.



Some members of the group wanted to rest so we dropped them back at the hotel and drove to the lower section of the Tsiknias River where a Black Stork was exhibiting nicely. Our first Black-headed Bunting showed well and we picked up three Temminck's Stints, several Yellow Wagtails, Greenfinch, Eastern Olivaceous Warbler, Reed and Sedge Warbler, and a showy Nightingale. We continued out toward the salt pans stopping for some close **Red-throated Pipits**. At the saltpans, we had 31 Collared Pratincoles flying overhead some very close and lit up by the afternoon sun showing their chestnut underwings. Whiskered, Gull-billed and White-winged Terns also looked

great in the afternoon light. We headed back to the hotel for a nice dinner and review of the sightings of the day.

#### 27<sup>th</sup> April 2012

A few of us were up and out to check the Kalloni Pond just outside our hotel before breakfast. **Squacco Herons** were present as were **Yellow-legged Gulls** and a few **Barn Swallows** flying around. A **Reed Warbler** was seen and the loud, explosive song of the **Cetti's Warbler** helped us get this confiding bird in our sights. **Common Swifts** were seen flying over Skala Kalloni village and we saw **White Wagtails, Common Terns,** and **Black-winged Stilts** around the pond.

After breakfast, we made our way along the Kalloni-Petra Road up to the Kalloni Raptor Watch Point. A singing **Cretzschmar's Bunting** greeted us and our first **Cirl Bunting** and **Black-eared Wheatear** showed very well. Raptors included **Eurasian Sparrowhawk**, two distant **Goshawks** and two **Red-footed Falcons** seen flying over



the distant ridges. **Short-toed Eagles** soared above the hills as well offering the chance to practice our identification skills with that and **Long-legged** versus **Common Buzzard**. A lone **Eurasian Bee-eater** flew over the valley in front of us.

We continued on toward the north coast of the island, past Petra to Kavaki where some **Rüppell's Warblers** eventually showed amazingly well for us. While we were waiting for the **Rüppell's**, a **Blue Rock** 

Thrush made an appearance and we saw three **Mediterranean Gulls** flying just offshore. A **Black-eared Wheatear** posed for photos on top of a very close shrub as camera shutters clicked like mad. A **Long-legged Buzzard** flew over and there was a tussle between a **Collared Dove** and a **Turtle Dove** on the power line behind us. At the last minute, the **Rüppell's Warbler** returned to the same shrub as the **Wheatear** allowing stonking views and photos!

We continued along the coast to Efthalou and then eastward toward Skala Sikaminias. The landscape was stunning here and we could see Turkey a few miles away across the Aegean. We stopped to watch a feeding frenzy of at least 600 **Yelkouan Shearwaters** moving west down the channel. There were a few dolphins in with them as well as a few larger **Scopoli's Shearwaters**. It was quite an exhibition!

We checked several valleys along the Efthalou Road and it was very quiet. Still the scenery was worth the drive and soon we arrived at the lovely fishing village of Skala Sikaminias. We enjoyed our picnic lunch on the waterfront and had some time to look around the quaint village. Then we drove up toward Mount Lepetimnos stopping for **Subalpine Warbler** along the way. We stopped at a pool full of gulls and found a **Lesser Black-backed Gull** (*fuscus* subspecies) among the many **Yellow-legged Gulls**. A **Grey Heron** standing in the back of the pond got little notice and then a **Raven** flew over. A **White Wagtail** flitted around on top of the rocks on a little island and we had lovely scope views of this little beauty. In Mandamados, we stopped to look at an active **White Stork** nest on a chimney on the edge of town.

We continued toward the top of the Napi Valley stopping along the road in an area overlooking some hills that turned out to be quite productive. Among the trees and up on the hillsides we saw **Woodchat Shrike**, **Masked Shrike**, at least three **Golden Orioles**, a **Hoopoe**, and a **Rock Nuthatch**. At one point, a **Eurasian Sparrowhawk** flew over the ridge carrying prey and all at once a **Eurasian Hobby** came through and in mid-flight stole the prey from the Sparrowhawk! Nina discovered a **Middle Spotted Woodpecker** on a tree and we scoped our first views of this beautiful bird. There were several **Eurasian Jays** around and we enjoyed birding the area for an hour or so before

heading back toward Kalloni. Along the road, we passed several locals walking north to get to a weekend festival.

We, however, headed in the opposite direction to end the day at the Kalloni Salt Pans. The afternoon light was gorgeous there and lit up **White-winged** and **Whiskered Terns** extremely well. **Little Stints** were seen as were **White** and **Black Storks** and we once again admired the rufous colored **Ruddy Shelducks** on the ground while a **Common Shelduck** flew over. Our last stop of the day was to see a **Baillon's Crake** that performed very well allowing great views as it foraged along the edge of a pond.



#### 28<sup>th</sup> April 2012

A pre-breakfast visit to Metochi Lake yielded Dan's life Little Crake perched high up in a bush soaking up the warmth of the morning sun. Common Swifts were flying low over the pond while a Little Grebe was diving for food. Several Great Reed Warblers, Sedge Warblers and showy Cetti's Warblers were seen in the reeds surrounding the pond and a nice Masked Shrike looked great in the morning light as it perched up on top of a small tree at the edge of a field. In the trees between the fields, we had Spotted Flycatcher and in the next field a Pied Flycatcher was seen.

After breakfast we set off heading west along the coastal road. A roadside stop produced a **Rock Nuthatch** and a nice **Cinereous Bunting** in addition to **Red-backed Shrike**, **Spotted Flycatcher**, **Pied Flycatcher**, and a quickly disappearing **Tree Pipit**. Keith found a nice **Loose Flowered Orchid** just before a **Long-legged Buzzard** flew



overhead carrying prey. Also overhead were a couple of **Alpine Swifts** and further on a pair of **Short-toed Eagles** were seen.

At Skala Eresou we had several glimpses and eventually nice views of **Common Nightingale** as well as **Eastern Olivaceous** and **Cetti's Warblers**. At one point, a **Hobby** flew low overhead and there were several **Red-rumped Swallows** around. Continuing on, we stopped in the middle of a bee swarm to look at a

**Black-headed Bunting**. We moved up the road to avoid the swarm and there Julie spotted the fifth **Little Owl** of the morning. Some **European Bee-eaters** flew over perhaps attracted by the bee swarm but they never came in close.

We moved on and stopped at Ipsilou Monastery where we set up lunch on the overlook and scanned for birds as we ate. On the large boulders down the hill, we scoped a **Rock Nuthatch** going in and out of its nest. Above it, on the top of the boulder, there was a singing **Rock Sparrow** which stayed for several minutes allowing good scope views, and also seen were **Blue Rock Thrush, Common Raven, Wood Warbler**, and

Black-eared Wheatear. Up at the monastery itself, Mike saw a Persian Squirrel and except for a Woodlark singing down the hill, it was pretty quiet so we pressed on.

As we travelled toward the west coast, we stopped to watch four **Lesser Kestrels** catching insects in a field. They put on quite a performance, kiting and searching the ground for prey and then descending on it. Then they'd lift up and eat on



the wing making for a nice show! Our next stop was Faneromeni Ford where a fairly unperturbed **Little Bittern** was seen at very close range near to where our vehicles were parked. An adult male and three female **Citrine Wagtails** were seen foraging along the stream bed and we had great views of them. The Ford also offered **Little** 

## Egret, a couple of Little Ringed Plovers, the perpetual Wood Sandpiper, and a Black-crowned Night Heron.

On the other side of the ford, a flock of 30 or more **Yellow Wagtails** descended on the stream and proceeded to bathe creating a fabulous spectacle as we studied them to determine which subspecies were in attendance. It turned out there were *feldegg, thunbergi, flava* and *superciliaris*, plus a *superciliaris* with a yellow not white stripe above the eye (?).

Once the flock disbanded, a lone **Spotted Flycatcher** was left behind. Then a **Little Bittern** walked out of the reeds on the left and as we watched it, a **Spotted Crake** came out behind it and quickly disappeared back into the reeds. Over the course of the afternoon, the crake appeared several times, even allowing a few photos. Amazing! As we got ready to leave, a few **Eurasian Goldfinches** descended on the Ford, perhaps to drink or bathe. Heading back toward Kalloni, we added **Cirl Bunting** for the day and picked up a nice **Isabelline Wheatear**. Another great day!

#### 29<sup>th</sup> April 2012

This morning we were out to witness the gorgeous red sunrise over the Salt Pans. The

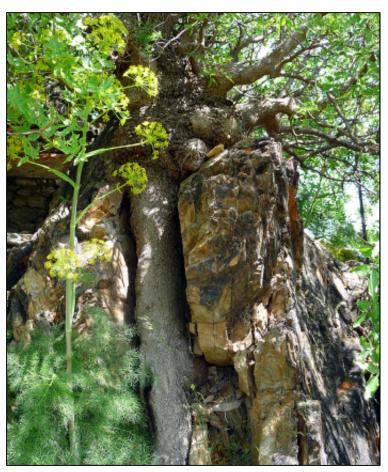
Black Stork was once again in the Tsiknias River below the ford as we travelled to the sheep fields next to the Salt Pans. A Great Cormorant flew along the sea coast and a pair of Common Shelducks winged by. We walked into the sheep fields and immediately found Greater Short-toed Larks feeding on the grasses on the right. Looking toward the Salt Pans, we found **Glossy Ibis** and a pair of **Stone** Curlews and a Common Kestrel surveyed from above. There were a few Red-throated Pipits around, as well as Yellow Wagtails, Kentish Plovers, and of course, Wood Sandpipers.

We moved back to the wetlands adjacent to the salt pans and were greeted by two **Eastern Olivaceous Warblers** as we parked the vehicles.



The wetlands held **Glossy Ibis, Black Storks, Grey Herons**, several **Squacco Herons**, and **Black-winged Stilts**. The stars of the morning, though, were two superb **Garganey** lit up perfectly by the morning sun.

After breakfast, we drove to the "Grand Canyon" where several Craq Martins were seen as well as male and female **Blue Rock** Thrush which showed well. We continued on and stopped in the shadow of Ipsilou Monastery to get good views of **Isabelline** Wheatear. We then continued on to Faneromeni Ford where we once again got close views of male and female Citrine Wagtails, a Little Bittern, and Cetti's Warbler. It was quiet so we walked up the track which held little more than a **Pied** Flycatcher and a quickly disappearing Collared Flycatcher. We then took a side track to find several samples of petrified wood and a good sized tree growing out of a large piece of petrified wood.



#### It was time for lunch so we

moved over to Faneromeni Beach and set up our picnic next to a large outcrop of quartz. A **Little Ringed Plover** foraged on the beach and after we ate we scanned the offshore waters for **Scopoli's Shearwater** and **Yelkouan Shearwater**, both of which were present. A female **Red-footed Falcon** cruised along the shoreline and as we were getting ready to leave, Ann spotted a flock of 20+ **European Bee-eaters** heading our way. They came in and performed their aerobatics for us and then landed on the power lines for superb scope views. It seems no matter how many times you see these birds; they always seem to evoke awe and wonder.

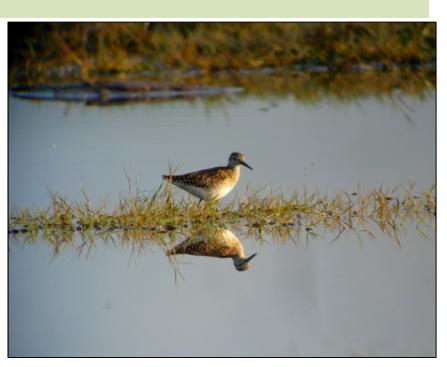
We made our way around Sigri to the coast road where a naked man on the beach earned the name "Willy Wagtail". Not letting ourselves get too distracted, we found **Redbacked Shrike**, **Whinchat**, **Stonechat**, and a nice male **Northern Wheatear**. **Blackheaded Buntings** were now common and a **Woodlark** was seen close to the road while a **Lesser Grey Shrike** delighted us as it perched on a power line and hunted insects in a field. **Pied** and **Spotted Flycatchers** were seen as we moved along the road out of the barren landscape of the west to a fig orchard. As we arrived, a **Sombre Tit** was seen flying back into the fig trees. This oasis produced a **Red-breasted Flycatcher**, another **Lesser Grey Shrike**, **Pied Flycatcher**, **Golden Oriole**, **Tree Pipit**, and a quickly disappearing **Icterine Warbler** seen only by Judy S and Steve.

We continued on passing another **Red-breasted Flycatcher**, and several **Cretzschmar's Buntings** close to the road. On a big, hairpin bend overlooking a sprawling valley, we got out to look for **Cinereous Bunting** which we soon found

singing on a lichen covered rock. As we were about to get the scope on it, an **Eleanora's Falcon** flew through quickly diverting our attention temporarily. We got good views of the **Cinereous Bunting** and much discussion ensued about the attendant **Stonechats** and **Black-eared Wheatears**. Heading back along the Kalloni gulf coast, an amazing six **Little Owls** were seen!

#### 30<sup>th</sup> April 2012

Before breakfast, we made another attempt at seeing Scop's Owl, this time near the Kalloni School. This time we were in luck and one was seen on its regular perch on a tree along the road and Julie found a second in a Eucalvotus tree on the other side. Pleased with our victory, we worked our way back along the Tsiknias River which held at least five **Temminck's** Stints. numerous Wood Sandpipers, two Little Bitterns, Eastern **Olivaceous Warbler**,



Black-headed Bunting, Whinchat, and Little Ringed Plover.

After breakfast, we headed back toward the pool in meadow by salt pans. On the way, Steve spotted a female **Montagu's Harrier** coursing over a field. Another flock of **European Bee-eaters** entertained us, this time flying close to us picking up the morning light and a **Marsh Harrier** made an appearance. At the marsh, the two **Garganey** were showing well and there was a smart, breeding plumage **Spotted Redshank** in attendance. Two **Marsh Sandpipers** were also seen among the many **Ruff** and there were **Greenshank, Little Stints**, at least ten **Collared Pratincoles**, and several **Whitewinged Terns**. We continued on to the Achladeri area to admire and photograph the brilliant red poppy fields. Above us in the evergreens were several **Serins** and, with patience, we finally got views of one out in the open! We drove to Vatera and found another charming spot for lunch on the coast. A small beachside park offered shade and seats and a lovely view of the sea. A **Shag** was spotted on the water and finally made it on to our trip list. Just as we were getting lunch set up, a pod of **Bottle-nosed Dolphins** swam by close to shore offering great views as they porpoised along.

During lunch, Steve heard **Sardinian Warblers** nearby so we investigated and soon found a male and female in a bush close to the road. A nearby **Greenfinch** paled by comparison and even the **Goldfinches** were ignored for this thinly distributed species. Then Steve heard what he thought was a **Thrush Nightingale** singing. It came from deep within a bush and when Steve investigated it was indeed a **Thrush Nightingale** 



which flew into the tree right in front of us offering fairly good views of this legendary skulker. Remarkable!

A quick beach stop produced another Willy Wagtail and an ice cream stop produced numerous smiles! We headed back to Kalloni and checked the Minisoccer field site and got great views of a single **Scop's Owl** perched out in the open. In the late afternoon, we drove up Napi Valley where we found **Inky Skipper** and **Masked Shrikes**. The rough road took its toll on one of the vehicles which required rescue, with a broken chassis! No problem, while we waited we scanned the trees and found **Middle Spotted Woodpecker, Hoopoe, Alpine Swift** and a few others.

#### 1<sup>st</sup> May 2012

This morning we checked the Kalloni School again. This time, Steve found a **Long-eared Owl** perched high against a pine trunk. This bird showed exceptionally well and was the subject of many photos. Then we drove to the Tsiknias River which offered up **White Stork, Wood Sandpiper,** several **Squaccos, Eastern Olivaceous Warblers, Spanish Sparrows, Little Bitterns**, and **Common Nightingale**. Most extraordinary was the **Spotted Crake** which skulked along the shore and then climbed up to an open branch to take in the morning sun! It was a wide open view for us and much appreciated.

Further downstream, we had **Temminck's Stint**, **Black-crowned Night Heron**, **Black-headed Bunting**, **Eastern Olivaceous Warbler** and a female **Blackcap**. After breakfast, we went up to the Raptor Watch Point which was quite busy when we arrived with **Cirl Bunting**, **Chaffinch**,



and **Subalpine Warbler**. Raptors, however, were in short supply except for a **Short-toed Eagle** so we moved on up to Eftalou and drove the bumpy track along the coast. **Subalpine Warblers** seemed to be everywhere as were **Cretzschmar's Buntings**, **Corn** and **Black-headed Buntings**, and **Black-eared Wheatears**. We made our way to Skala Sikaminias for lunch and this time the town was buzzing with visitors off for the May Day holiday. We had a short break after lunch during which Nina and Ann walked beyond town and found a **Common Kingfisher**.

Later on, we continued on up over the mountain and found Red-backed Shrike, Hoopoe, a few **Alpine Swifts, Rock** Nuthatch, Cirl Bunting and Turtle Dove. It was mid-day and quiet so we stopped at a little pond off the road to look for dragonflies and butterflies. There were a few dragons and damsels present including **Broad-bodied** Chaser, Black-tailed Skimmer. Common



Bluetail and Goblet-marked Damselfly. As we worked back toward the vehicles, Ann was motioning us to look at a power pole which indeed had an active nest of a Middle Spotted Woodpecker. We enjoyed scope views of the bird bringing food in and then poking its head out of the hole. Continuing on we picked up a Hobby flying over the hills and down by a stream we had Collared Flycatcher and Red-footed Falcons. On the way back toward Kalloni, we stopped for a flock of European Bee-eaters perched in a tree. It was the best views yet and we took it in via scopes and cameras.

#### 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2012

This morning before breakfast we bid farewell to Judy S and Dan who were heading back to California. We said our goodbyes and then went and checked for **Long-eared Owl** again and Julie found it high in a eucalyptus. We then continued onto the Tsiknias River where we found **Black** and **White Stork** and the **Spotted Crake** was in exactly the same spot as yesterday. Judy F. spotted a **Common Snipe** alongside several **Temminck's Stints**. Two **Black-crowned Night Herons** flew in and we saw five **Little Bitterns** although not so showy as previous days. Driving back for breakfast, we got



some very close **Black-headed** Buntings.

After breakfast we drove to the salt pans passing several very nice **European Bee-eaters** perched close on the fence. At the flooded meadow, we had superb light and enjoyed perfect conditions as we watched a flock of **Ruff** mixed in with forty **Little Stints**, several **Glossy Ibis**, three **Garganey**, and many **Squacco Herons**. A few **Whiskered Terns** hawked over the water right in front of us and at least four **White-winged Terns** performed the same. We then headed up into the hills stopping near Filia and a small patch of Oak forest. **Subalpine Warblers** gave us our best views ever as they sang from wires and a pair collected gossamer to build a nest. On to Andissa, we checked several hairpin turns for orchids with no luck. On the final hairpin turn, Keith and Mike found a gorgeous **Orphanides' Orchid** and an **Eleanora's Falcon** was seen.

Our lunch today was at the famous Petrified Forest, the world's largest dating back 20,000,000 years. Needless to say, Nina was in her element here. The barren landscape even offered a few birds including **Willow Warbler** and **Eastern Orphean** 



Warbler. Heading back, we stopped at the Sigri Sanatorium where Nina spotted a gorgeous Roller perched on a distant rock. There was a tree full of Blackheaded Buntings, a Golden Oriole, Woodlarks doing their flight songs, several shrikes and a Spotted Flycatcher. Steve found another Thrush Nightingale which promptly hid from everyone else and then he came across a European **Nightjar** in the dried up stream bed, which flew up and landed in the open for scope views and photos. We then took the coast road back to Skala Kalloni.

### 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2012

After an early breakfast we set off to Mytilini airport for our flights home. It was a great week full of good birds, butterflies and orchids, good food, picturesque villages and some wonderful sunshine!

We can't wait to return.

Steve & Gina



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Photos by Gina Nichol & Steve Bird. Tour operated by Zoothera Global Birding in association with Sunrise Birding LLC.