



Sunrise Birding LLC

LESVOS

April 28 - May 6, 2017

Report & Photos by Gina Nichol & Steve Bird



Photos: Subalpine Warbler, Krüper's Nuthatch, Cretzschmar's Bunting, Temminck's Stint, Long-eared Owl.



Sunrise Birding LLC

LESVOS

Trip Report

April 28 – May 6, 2017

Leaders: Steve Bird & Gina Nichol

The Greek Island of Lesvos, also known as Lesbos, is renowned for its ancient history, incomparable natural beauty and tradition of hospitality. Known as the Princess of the Northwest Aegean Sea, this stunning island is known by birders as one of the best locations in Europe to witness spring migration. Our base in the small fishing village of Skala Kalloni was perfectly located beside the sea and some wonderfully bird rich habitats, including a reed-fringed pool right next to our hotel. From here, the rest of the island with its varied countryside, historic villages and friendly people, was explored. We found and saw well the island's special birds, such as Kruper's Nuthatch and Cinereous Bunting, as well as a host of other eastern European specialties and a few rarities. Our congenial group was captivated by the charm of Lesvos and its stunning beauty and wealth of resident and migrant birds. By all accounts this tour was a great success!



Photos: White-winged Tern, Landscape at Sigri. Below, Squacco Heron

Day 1: April 28

Everyone had arrived in Lesvos by this afternoon and made their way to the small fishing village of Skala Kalloni and our hotel overlooking a small reed-filled wetland against the backdrop of the Gulf of Kalloni to the south. Though weary from travel, several people couldn't resist the temptation to check the pool and had their first Squacco Herons, Black Stork, Wood Sandpipers, Black-winged Stilts and Glossy Ibis. We had a brief orientation before dinner celebrated our arrival in Lesvos with some delicious Greek specialties at the hotel.



Day 2: April 29, 2017

This morning we were up at sunrise to check the Alykes wetlands which were covered with open water for the first time in years. In the beautiful morning light, we watched and photographed Greater Flamingos, Garganey, Ruff, Temminck's and Little Stints, Wood Sandpipers, Black-winged Stilts, a rare Black-headed Gull, Yellow-legged Gull, Spotted Redshanks, and Little and Whiskered Terns. We moved on to the beach and found Great Crested Grebes and an Eared Grebe just offshore. Meanwhile our first European Bee-eaters were seen and we ticked our first Little Owl perched on a power line.



We headed back to the hotel for breakfast and then to Achladeri Forest to look for Krüper's Nuthatch. The park was quiet for a Saturday so at first we had the place to ourselves. As soon as we arrived, we had European Greenfinch and after a short walk we were watching nesting Krüper's Nuthatches feeding young every few minutes. From a respectful distance we watched the adults come in several times bringing food and taking out fecal sacs. The chicks were poking their open beaked up to the nest hole and the whole scene was a joy to watch. Also in the forest we found Short-toed Treecreeper and had great views of European Chaffinch and European Goldfinch.

We moved on admiring the bright red fields of Corn Poppies and then headed to the Tsiknias River noting a distant Red-backed Shrike along the way. Our first Little Bittern was seen in the reeds near the ford, an area we would become very familiar with over the next days.

Since we were close to the hotel, we decided to have our picnic there which was a fortuitous decision offering nice tables and chairs in the shade and a surprise Barn Owl that flew over our heads as we sat in front of the hotel. After lunch we went to the Potamia Reservoir and watched Little Grebe and chicks, a few Night Herons including one eating a frog and a couple of Little Crakes. Back to the Tsiknias River in the afternoon we had our first views of Common Nightingale, Great Reed Warbler, Yellow Wagtail (the black capped *feldegg* subspecies).

In the evening we went to the Kalloni salt pans and enjoyed our first views of the elegant Pied Avocets. We stopped by the sheep fields and watched a flock of Red-throated Pipits picking caterpillars out of the blankets of yellow Brass Button flowers. A Greater Short-toed Lark on the way back was dull in comparison but a good find for the day. As we made our way back toward the hotel, we encountered our first “sheep jam” as a local farmer moved his stock across the ford and down the road in front of us. This was rush hour in Lesvos!



Day 3: April 30, 2017



Before breakfast we went to Metochi Lake. We scanned the reeds and had varying views of male and female Little Crake, several very cute Little Grebes, **Little Bittern**, a very close and vocal Cetti's Warbler and some low flying Common Swifts.

After breakfast, we traveled north to Kavaki where a handsome Rüppell's Warbler was perched on its favorite bush singing. Here we also had Sardinian Warbler and a Subalpine Warbler came in offering nice, close views. Down on the water, a group of Yelkouan Shearwaters were feeding

on a fish shoal very close to shore allowing good views as well. A quick break at an amazing coffee/pastry shop overlooking the sea was much enjoyed!

Our next stop was the Parasma Reservoir where we quickly found an adult Audouin's Gull, not always easy to see here. But this one was well seen among the many Yellow-legged

Gulls. There were a few Ruddy Shelduck on the shores of the reservoir and one female Common Pochard, another unusual bird for Lesvos.

We drove the north coast road to Skala Sikaminias and found Masked Shrike, **Sombre Tit**, and Cretzschmar's Bunting. A deserted refugee camp reminded us of the crisis that had ensued just two years earlier and yet the camp was now dismantled and abandoned. We stopped at Megala Therma, a geothermal field area where hot waters well into the sea. Right at the shore, there was steam coming off the sea and the water was too hot to touch. Continuing on we arrived in the scenic village of Skala Sikaminias and enjoyed an excellent fresh fish lunch at "under the tree". We drove back through the scenic Napi Valley and had our first Hoopoe that got away before most saw it.



A late afternoon visit to the Kalloni Saltpans offered Pied Avocets, Flamingos, Ruff, a handsome Eurasian Spoonbill, and some nice looking Curlew Sandpipers in their breeding plumage. We enjoyed the magical afternoon light to study the waders in the pans and noted that across the road was a close Kentish Plover. There were a few fly over Red-footed Falcons which had just arrived on the island.

At the Alykes Wetlands, there was a lone Collared Pratincole and while we were watching that a flock of eleven Glossy Ibis dropped in. After another fine day, we headed back to the hotel for dinner and to review our list for the day.

Day 4: May 1, 2017

Before breakfast we birded the ford and the saltpans. The Alykes Wetlands were drying up and many of the birds had cleared out. A **Pallid Harrier** was a highlight and the Little Owl was out in the morning sun on top of his barn.

After breakfast we drove to the Grand Canyon of Lesvos, between Andissa and Vatoussa. Here we had Crag Martin, Blue Rock Thrush, Rock Sparrow, and Black-eared Wheatear. Next stop was Pervoli Monastery which was quiet except for a nice Short-toed Eagle. Continuing on we spent some time around Mount Ordinnos and found Isabelline Wheatear and our first Cinereous Bunting. There was already a party going on near the lovely church where we had our picnic and we were invited to join in but we had birding to do. Below the fiesta we had good views of Bonelli's Warbler and there were a few Eurasian Jays around.

We continued on making a stop at the base of the volcanic dome at Ipsilou Monastery. Here Steve found a Checkered Scorpion and there was a Western Rock Nuthatch feeding young and another Cinereous Bunting. On the way back we had **Little Owl** and more Rock Nuthatches. We had a short break at the hotel and then went out to the mouth of the



Tsiknias River where we had Tawny Pipit, five Great Crested Grebes and good views of Eastern Olivaceous Warbler.

The Alykes Wetlands offered the standard Wood Sandpipers, and Mediterranean Gull and White-winged Terns were new at the saltpans.



Day 5: May 2, 2017

This morning on the way through the ford, Gina spotted a Little Crane and as we watched it, we spotted a second one. The regular suspects were at the Alykes Wetlands and as we scanned the shorebirds, eight Mediterranean Gulls flew over toward the Saltpans.

After breakfast we headed toward Polchinitos which was quiet except for a Red-footed Falcon and Peregrine Falcon. We moved on to Vatera where we organized lunch and then went to a wetland area where some **Sardinian Warblers** were vying for territory. A handsome Woodchat Shrike was seen and there were a few Linnets and Eurasian Goldfinches around.

When we got back to the village there was a lovely table set up overlooking the sea and we enjoyed another delicious lunch. Always with her eye on the scope, Gina spotted a Bottle-nosed Dolphin jumping out of the water far offshore but it never reappeared.

After lunch we headed back toward Skala Kalloni and made a stop near Achladeri Forest where a Middle Spotted Woodpecker was tending to a nest feeding chicks. Continuing on we had Red-footed Falcons perched on wires and another Short-toed Eagle. At the Kalloni salt pans there were White-winged Terns, Flamingos flying, and an Osprey with fish being chased by gulls. We were mesmerized by the White-winged Terns and attempted photos but were distracted by the overhead show of ten **Black Storks**, three Short-toed Eagles, a Long-legged Buzzard, and Red-footed Falcons.



Day 6: May 3, 2017

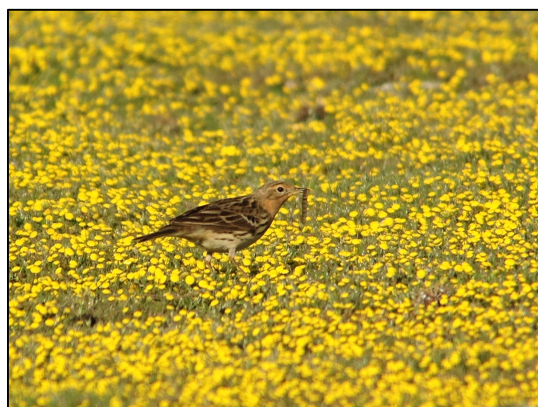
Today we had an early breakfast and headed west out to Sigri area for the day. We arrived at Faneromeni and went immediately to the ford which was quiet except for a very vocal Common Nightingale. An Eleanor's Falcon flew overhead showing fairly well and then we moved on to the beach which had a few European Bee-eaters and some Yelkouan Shearwaters offshore. Back at the orchard, there were numbers of Whinchat, Black-headed Buntings, our first Common Redstarts, Tree Pipit, Collared Flycatcher and Spotted Flycatcher. A River Warbler called from some thick cover and try as we may, we could not see the bird. We went on to visit the Tower Hotel and enjoyed a coffee, a tour of the lovely rooms of the hotel and a female Red-backed Shrike in the parking lot. The painted Chapel was impressive as was the hotel itself we almost lost Marlana who was hatching a plan to live there.



We attempted lunch at the Petrified Forest which was closed so we birded our way out toward the main road. We stopped at a small pond near the road where a bird was bathing and thanks to Mary Lou's photos, it was later identified as an Ortolan Bunting. At the end of the road, we had nice views of a **Chukar** perched up on some rocks.



We headed into Sigri for a quick coffee and then through the Meladia Valley where we found Common Whitethroats, Stonechats, Black-headed Buntings, Red-backed Shrikes, Woodchat Shrike, and Masked Shrike. An Icterine Warbler was a nice find at the Sanatorium and there were Lesser Kestrels around. A stop at the Fig Orchard offered more Spotted Flycatchers and further on, we had great views of Golden Orioles. A Harrier came through and was later identified as a 2nd year Montagu's Harrier from photos. There were many Black-eared and Northern Wheatears around as well as Cretzschmar's Bunting, Rock Nuthatches, and Little Owls. Masses of Yellow-legged Gulls were in the hillsides waiting for insect hatches.



That night we had dinner with Steve Dudley and Paul Manning and enjoyed pleasant and lively conversation about nature and life on the island.

Day 7: May 4, 2017

Early morning at the Sheep fields we found **Red-throated Pipits**, a White Wagtail, 5 Great Crested Grebes, and a Kentish Plover. After breakfast we went to the Olive Groves near Vasilikas where Olive

Tree Warbler was difficult to say the least but a couple of Masked Shrikes cooperated. We returned to the east side of the Salt pans and climbed up into the hide to see Grey/Black-bellied Plovers, Common Greenshank, Curlew Sandpipers, Ruddy Turnstones, and Greater Flamingos. We had lunch at Dionysus in Skala Kalloni and then went up to the Napi Valley in the afternoon. Here we had great views of Hoopoe, Middle Spotted Woodpecker, found



a pair of Olive Tree Warblers building a nest. We headed back via the Salt pans where the Flamingos looking nice in the evening light. The White-winged Terns were hawking insects over the fields and then moving up the pans allowing pictures if you were quick.

On the way back to hotel, Gina stopped the car for a **Spur-thighed Tortoise** near the track and Marlana moved it to a safer location. Once again there was a **sheep jam** on the road next to the river making for another memorable ride home.



Day 8: May 5, 2017

Our last full day started at Metochi Lake where the Little Grebes were very active. After breakfast we drove up to Ipsilou Monastery and enjoyed the views of the western side of the island. From the top of the monastery we had Alpine Swifts and another Pallid Harrier. We had lunch at Sigri Beach in the company of **Red-rumped Swallows** and Bee-eaters and then we drove back through the Meladia Valley where we had quick views of Eastern Orphean Warbler and found a Corpse Plant in bloom. We had one final evening at the Saltpans and then went back to enjoy our last meal and trip wrap up at the hotel.



Day 9: May 6, 2017

Early this morning we were up and heading to the airport in the dark for the early flight out. In Athens, we went our separate way but will stay bonded by our wonderful week and experience of Spring Migration Magic on Lesbos.



Photos: Montagu's Harrier, Black-eared Wheatear, Isabelline Wheatear, Flamingo

