



ORIOLE BIRDING



TOUR REPORT LAKE KERKINI 25TH APRIL – 1ST MAY 2016

www.oriolebirding.com

oriolebirding@gmail.com

[twitter](#) 

MONDAY 25TH APRIL – *Calm with sunny spells, occasional heavy showers, 21C*

We arrived on time into Thessaloniki after our very early flight from London Gatwick and after a smooth transition of the airport and collection of our hire vans, we were soon on our way north towards Kerkini Lake and our first proper birding stop at Lithotopos. We of course saw the first White Storks, Corn Buntings and Crested Larks on our way there, and Spanish Sparrows were nesting noisily in the poplars by the dam itself. Looking north across the lake, a feeding frenzy of Great Cormorants could be seen, involving many hundreds of birds, which were associating with a feeding group of **Dalmatian Pelicans** in the shallows. In fact we saw a couple more Dalmatian Pelicans at close range from the embankment too – a species which we would be very familiar with by the end of the week! Common Terns were resting on the fencing in the water and Great Crested Grebes were present in astronomical numbers – literally hundreds upon hundreds strewn across the water as far as the eye could see, including many displaying pairs. We had to keep one eye on the wooded hills beyond the lake, as many raptors could be seen moving along on the warm thermals – two **Lesser Spotted Eagles** came past reasonably close, and a **Short-toed Eagle** was hanging more distantly high above the hilltop. A female **Levant Sparrowhawk** made two passes across the valley which was a nice bonus, and a female **Red-backed Shrike** was perched in the scrub keeping watch for prey. An **Eastern Olivaceous Warbler** taunted us from the dense bushes while we ate our excellent lunch and coffee, provided al fresco by our host Stergios! Eventually the warbler showed well, and a male **Cirl Bunting** also obliged in the bushes close by.

Heading up the western shore of Lake Kerkini, we picked up five Turtle Doves by the roadside in a weedy field, and a **Black Stork** circled low overhead just before we reached Korifoudi Marshes. Here the light was fantastic, and right away a **Great Reed Warbler** was croaking out its song, and perched right in the open on the top of a reed. At least three were present in a small reedbed, and dapper **Black-headed Wagtails** were also seen. An incredible spectacle along this road was a congregation of Sand Martins, many thousands strong, which were massing together on the wires, hawking over the fields, high in the sky, and out across the lake – it could have easily been five figures, quite an amazing sight indeed. Along the lake shore, a flock of sixteen **Wood Sandpipers** in beautifully spotted summer plumage, were picking along the waters edge, and a great many Little Egrets, **Pygmy Cormorant** and **Squacco Heron** could also be easily seen. Great Crested Grebes were again notable by their number – hundreds is no exaggeration! Raptors featured again here – a Peregrine was heading across the lake, mobbed by a Eurasian Hobby, and a pale phase **Booted Eagle** and two more **Lesser Spotted Eagles** were over the hills behind. A little further on, we stopped again at a spot where two **Eurasian Spoonbills** were feeding in unison, and a **Black Stork** was shading the water with its wings in the fashion of the Black Egret of West Africa. A **Night Heron** stood stock still at the water's edge, another group of **Wood Sandpipers** was seen, and all around the air reverberated to the song of **Common Nightingales**. Our final bird along this stretch was a smart **Lesser Grey Shrike**, perched up on the overhead wires.



Great Reed Warbler & Black Stork, Korifoudi 25th April

Next we drove on to Ano Poroia, our base for the next six nights, and checked in to our rooms before heading straight out again to the northern side of the lake and Mandraki harbour. This is a superb place for viewing waterbirds up close, and at this time of day the light was just magical. **Squacco Herons** were the order of the day here, with many dozens dotted around the sheltered bay by the harbour. A **European Scop's Owl** was a surprise, calling away unseen from the Poplars, and mobbed by a pair of **Eurasian Golden Orioles**. Other waterbirds included throngs of Little and Great White Egrets, two **Purple Herons** flying by, massed ranks of breeding **Dalmatian Pelicans** on the offshore artificial islands and many nesting Common Terns. On the new pelican island, a large flock of presumably non-breeding **White Pelicans** were resting, breaking their migration north – beautifully salmon-flushed in the afternoon sun. A **Glossy Ibis** was a good spot, feeding among the trees at the back, and even better were the migrating party of five **Montagu's Harriers** migrating high along the Belles Mountain ridge. A truly magnificent number and variety of top birds, and it was only our first afternoon! The day was well and truly rounded off by a migrant party of seven **Red-footed Falcons**, sitting on the overhead wires by the road back to Livadia. They took flight when we stopped to view them, but a single adult male returned and perched for scope views – a stunner! We were all very weary after our early start, and retired early after an excellent meal at the hotel.



Birding at Korifoudi, 25th April



Squacco Herons, Mandraki, 25th April

TUESDAY 26TH APRIL – NW breeze and sunshine, 20C

We awoke to gale force winds, blasting in across the Belles Mountains and sounding like the roof was going to come off the hotel! It didn't seem to bode well for birding, but as is often the case here, the wind is extremely localised, and amazingly once we had dropped down a couple of kilometres, it had largely abated. At the drinking trough on the road down to Livadia, a couple of Common Whitethroats and several **Common Nightingales** were singing, and we also picked up singles of Lesser Whitethroat and Northern Wheatear. A cracking male Marsh Harrier, clearly exhausted, was sitting in a crop field by the side of the road where it had quite probably spent the night before tackling the mountain crossing to the north. We spent the morning exploring a number of excellent tracks south of the village of Vironia, where mixed Poplar and Willow woodland borders reeds and small marshy pools. Common Cuckoo were calling all around here and we had several good views of them, and our first perched up **European Hoopoe** was calling from the top of a dead tree. The first track was quiet, but a superb **Booted Eagle** circled low overhead and a **Hawfinch** was noted flying over calling. Back at the van though the temperature had begun to rise and with it visible passage – thousands of House Martins were passing, seemingly having attempted and aborted the mountain crossing due to the low cloud persisting there. Among them were several **European Bee-eaters**, **Red-rumped Swallows** and three cracking **Alpine Swifts**, and then the raptors started! First an **Osprey**, which circled low over, then a **Lesser Spotted Eagle** and best of all, a corking male **Levant Sparrowhawk**!

The second track produced more Cuckoo and Hoopoe sightings, **Cetti's Warblers** and **Common Nightingales** which were singing from every patch of scrub. Two **Pied Flycatchers** were found in some Willows, and we had a chance to scrutinise them through the scope and rule out [sadly!] the two scarcer species! A **Penduline Tit** was gathering nest material nearby, and showed at point blank range – fantastic views! A male **Eurasian Golden Oriole** was less obliging, but was certainly singing beautifully from the adjacent poplars. Overhead, visible migration continued with about 150 **White Pelicans** thermalling directly above us, looking to make their passage north towards Bulgaria.

Next stop was the Strimon Bridge, a perfect place to have coffee and cake, while watching **European Bee-eaters**. A walk along the embankment to the east produced another pair of **Levant Sparrowhawks**, which we seemed to be doing very well for – they provoked quite a reaction from the local Hooded Crows, Jackdaws and Common Kestrels! A male **Eurasian Golden Oriole**, singing from the adjacent trees, popped out superbly onto a dead tree for everyone to get scope views, and two more **Alpine Swifts** came bombing down to drink from the river.



Osprey & European Hoopoe, Vironia, 26th April

At Megalachori, we took the embankment running down the eastern side of Lake Kerkini and began enjoying the many wetland birds on offer from this superb vantage point. Two **Red-backed Shrikes**, both males, were seen from here and three **Purple Herons** were feeding out in the open on the flooded fields. At least eight **Eurasian Spoonbills** were sweeping in amongst the waterlogged willows and a **Pallid Swift** passed overhead, looking nice and sandy against the mountain backdrop. Keeping an eye to the sky was constantly paying dividends, with constant movements of **Dalmatian Pelicans**, a Peregrine, another **Lesser Spotted Eagle** and a superb **Black Kite** which circled right in front of us. **Eurasian Hobbies** were the stars of the show here, with two hunting dragonflies low over the marsh often passing right in front of us. **Squacco Herons** and Little Egrets were incredibly numerous along this stretch, with 21 of the former counted on one island! Of course many herons were coming and going between the colonies in the drowned forest, and pelicans were also resting in large groups out on the edge of the lake – this included a super flock of **White Pelicans**, their bright red facial skin clearly visible. A **Cattle Egret** in breeding plumage was also seen from this spot and careful scanning of the flooded areas produced at least twenty **Wood Sandpipers**, thirty Ruff, Little-ringed Plover and two Northern Lapwing. A pair of **Garganey** were also here, initially very distant, but the drake was seen much better later on while scoping two breeding plumaged **Spotted Redshanks**! Three **Black Storks**, a Peregrine and a constant backdrop of **European Bee-eaters** were also noted. Star birds here though were a pair of **Spur-winged Plovers**, a real surprise as they are rare at Kerkini and normally occur only on the coast. They were in suitable breeding habitat, so were maybe more than just the passage migrants they appeared to be – stunning birds and a real treat to bump into.

Moving further along the bank, we stopped by a lovely marshy channel to check for crakes, finding instead a super female **Little Bittern** which eventually showed right out in the open. Both Pied and Spotted Flycatchers were in the overhanging willows, where another **Penduline Tit** was gathering material for its elaborate nest. We stopped a bit further on to photograph three stunning **European Bee-eaters** by the side of the track, and then two **Black Kites** were observed at close range, initially resting in a bare field. Our final stop of the day by the pumping station added another **Penduline Tit**, this time in its nest, three **Great Reed Warblers**, a Cuckoo and an obliging **Black-headed Wagtail**. A typically action-packed days birding around Lake Kerkini!



Spur-winged Plover and European Bee-eaters, Lake Kerkini, 26th April

WEDNESDAY 27TH APRIL – *Calm and sunny, 23C*

We woke to a beautiful sunny morning, quite in contrast to yesterday, and it was with renewed enthusiasm that we headed to the drinking trough to see what if any new migrants had appeared. A male **Red-backed Shrike** was perched beautifully on the hedge as we arrived, which boded well! An **Eastern Olivaceous Warbler** was seen briefly, and a flock of 21 **European Bee-eaters** migrated North overhead, while a **Tree Pipit** was seen briefly by the side of the road. A cracking **Ortolan Bunting** was the best bird, just as we were pulling away, perched on a rock in superb light right by the side of the road. Two **Woodchat Shrikes** a little further on were the first of the trip – it was going to be a good day!

The quarry above Vironia was our main destination for the morning, a fantastic area which also has the added benefit of spectacular views of Lake Kerkini. There wasn't too much around the parking area, but a pair of **Eurasian Golden Orioles** showed quite well in the Plane trees by the stream. Over the ridge, three **Montagu's Harriers** were migrating high, two females and a male – it is so amazing to watch these elegant raptors on their journey north, and this was our second flock of the trip. Once we walked up the track through the hillside scrub, we began to see many butterflies – Small Heath, Painted Lady, Green Hairstreak and Small Copper. An **Eastern Orphean Warbler** was rattling from the bushes close to the path and over the next twenty minutes, we eventually all pieced together some pretty good views of at least three different birds. A **Eurasian Sparrowhawk** drifted along the

ridge, and there were several **Cirl Buntings** about – two more **Golden Orioles** flew over too and another was signing nearby. **Eastern Black-eared Wheatear** is a bit of a speciality at this spot, and we scoped two stunning males up on the hillside, one sharing a bush with a migrant **Spotted Flycatcher**! Another was seen in the quarry itself, singing from a bare bush right in front of us, and a couple of **Crag Martin** were floating around too. There were a lot of **House Sparrows** in the quarry, but initially we couldn't see anything else – but then a ringing fluted song signalled the presence of a **Western Rock Nuthatch**. We had some great views of it going to and fro and up and down the rock face, never sitting still for long but perching regularly so that everyone got great scope views. We even found its nest, high up in a shaded crevice on the rock face. We were not expecting to eclipse this, but then a medium sized brown passerine appeared in view – a female **Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush**! Clearly a migrant, as their breeding areas are much higher above the tree line, we watched her for some time, carefully pulling small worms from the patches of thin soil between the rocks. A really beautiful thrush and even a lifer for some! Just when we thought it could not get better, a pair of **Sombre Tits** flew in and landed in full view in a bush next to us – what a morning! We wandered back down through the scrub, trying to photograph some of the trickier butterflies, and then enjoyed coffee and cake back at the vans. A **Golden Eagle** circled the ridge and a **Syrian Woodpecker** showed pretty well in a tree by the cemetery – it really had been quite a breathless session.



Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush and Sombre Tit, Vironia 27th April

Promachonas was our next stop, a short drive up the motorway towards the Bulgarian border. Woodpeckers were the main target here, but we knew it would be difficult given the time of day and amount of foliage. Nevertheless, we managed a very good view of a **Grey-headed Woodpecker**, albeit it fairly briefly, and we did hear Syrian, Lesser Spotted, Green and Great-spotted Woodpeckers calling. Two male **Pied Flycatchers** were seen, but remained tricky to get onto among the leaves, and we also saw a great many butterflies – **Grizzled Skipper**, **Scarce Swallowtail**, **Turquoise Blue** and **Glanville Fritillary** being the highlights. We lunched here, picking up a **Short-toed Eagle** overhead, and then it was time to start making our way back down to the lake and along to Kerkini village for our afternoon boat trip.

On the way to the harbour, we stopped by a reed-fringed pond – a **Penduline Tit** was gathering nest material right in front of us, and two **Little Bitterns** were seen including a nice male. A **Whinchat**

was in the fields, and a snipe which caused some excitement, hiding in the grass at the edge of a pool, turned out to be just a Common Snipe. We met Nikos, our boatman and resident birder, at the harbour, and were soon motoring out across the calm crystal waters of the lake, framed by the perfect backdrop of the Belles Mountains. It was a superb afternoon to be out here, and my goodness we didn't half see some birds! First up was a spectacular feeding frenzy of Great Cormorants, **White** and **Dalmatian Pelicans**, with the numbers having to be seen to be believed! Then we visited the new artificial breeding island and nesting platforms for the pelicans – mainly **Dalmatian**, but with many **White Pelicans** on the new island too – they have not bred at Kerkini before but it seems likely they will do soon. The views again, were simply amazing, and we filled our boots with these magnificent birds. Nearby, a couple of dapper **Whiskered Terns** were feeding, often passing very close to us, and other new trip birds were Common Pochard and Common Shelduck. Next was the riparian forest, where vast colonies of cormorants and herons nest and we were able to glide among the edge of the trees and get super close views of hordes of birds. **Night Herons** were very common, standing statue-like at the base of every tree, and often allowing very close approach by our boat. **Squacco Heron**, **Great White** and **Little Egrets**, **Pygmy** and **Great Cormorants** and **Eurasian Spoonbills** were all nesting here and the sight and sound combined was quite memorable. A party of **White Pelican** were corralling a shoal of fish in among the submerged willows, and we were able to watch them up-ending in unison to round up their catch. Finally by the river mouth, we added Northern Shoveler and Northern Pintail, plus two European Oystercatcher. We motored back to Kerkini harbour, all feeling a bit spell-bound by the whole experience!



Little-ringed Plover and Scarce Swallowtail, Lake Kerkini 27th April

We rounded off the day at Korifoudi Marshes, where the perfect evening light was making for some spectacular views across the lake to the mountains. Another **Woodchat Shrike** was seen, and a **Turtle Dove** was purring away, while the sky here was again full of Sand Martins – thousands of them! A smart **Little Stint** was down on the shore, along with an obliging pair of Little-ringed Plovers, **White Wagtail** and about fifteen Common Sandpipers. All in all, not a bad haul but it was approaching 1900 and reluctantly, we had to get back for dinner! After dark, a **Eurasian Scops Owl** was calling close by and we had a super view of it perched right above our heads just outside the hotel entrance – what a way to end the day!

THURSDAY 28TH APRIL – Calm and sunny, 25C

Another beautiful day, and we had some nice views of **Pallid Swifts** overhead as we loaded the vans for the days birding. There were also more new migrants at our morning stop near Ano Poroia, at a drinking trough by lightly wooded farmland. Four **Whinchat** were new in, including a couple of stunning males, a Tree Pipit flew over and another was perched nicely in a dead tree. Three **Red-backed Shrikes**, Northern Wheatear, two Spotted Flycatchers and 22 **European Bee-eaters** flew north. Frustratingly, three **Black-headed Buntings** which dropped into the fields with some sparrows, did not show and instead took flight and headed high west – the first of the trip so hopefully more would follow.

Sidirokastro was our next stop, at a ruined Byzantine castle atop the craggy hill overlooking the town. A pair of **Eastern Black-eared Wheatears** greeted us by the parking spot, the first of at least four seen, and the males were truly dazzling – often making spectacular display flights right across the valley, flashing their white tails as they went. **Cirl Bunting** was seen at close quarters, and looking across to a big crag we succeeded in adding a male **Blue Rock Thrush**, and another **Western Rock Nuthatch** bouncing around and occasionally bursting into song. Common Raven and Crag **Martin** were seen overhead, and a pair of **European Serin** around the parking area included a displaying male.

The bulk of today was spent heading into the mountains north of Serres, and after successfully [just!] negotiating our way through the town, we were soon making our way up the winding road to Mount Vrontou and the Laillas ski station. Once we emerged from the valley and climbed up, we began to pass through beautiful rocky hillside vegetated lightly with Juniper and dotted with large boulders. Perfect habitat for **Rock Partridge**, but we have never managed to find one on any of our previous visits – that was about to change! A brilliant spot from the rear of the bus saw us screeching to a halt, and by carefully walking back down the road we were all able to see the **Rock Partridge**, which peeked out from behind a rock before taking flight and heading away down the valley – we could see its white throat and blue-washed back as it went. A great result! A **Woodlark** was flushed in the process, and a Lesser Whitethroat was rattling away from the top of one of the adjacent pines. A couple of hundred metres on, we stopped for a coffee break and then walked the track a short way to look for more hillside birds. A male **Red-backed Shrike** obliged, and a **Northern Goshawk** drifted past carrying prey, its white undertail coverts fluffed out in typical fashion! About ten minutes drive further on, we reached Laillas, and explored the area immediately around the ski huts. A **Woodlark** was foraging in the open on the ski slope, and a **Black Redstart** was singing from the pines, the female popping in and out of a hole in one of the wooden huts. In the surrounding trees, Coal Tit, Wren, Mistle Thrush and Chaffinch – all scarce birds at low elevations – were easily added. Great-spotted Woodpecker, European Nuthatch and two pairs of Marsh Tit were seen in the Beech woodland just a short way back along the road, and in the same spot as last year we then had superb views of a pair of **Black Woodpeckers**. The male was drumming, and the female was giving the strange anvil-like call, both birds eventually flying low over the road and even perching for scope views in the open. A superb way to round off the morning!

Dropping lower down the valley, we listened at two or three places to see if we could find any of the other scarcer species reportedly present in these forests. We did have superb views of a pair of **Firecrests**, but that was about it, so we headed for a track running off into the trees by a drinking fountain, where we had found some decent birds in the past. There were several Tree Pipits along this trail, in full song flight and perching on the top of the pines, and at the end of the main track we stopped to drink in the amazing views across the mountains. A pair of **Crested Tits** appeared in a pine right in front of us at eye level, and gave lovely views as they foraged among the lichen-clad branches. Two **Common Crossbill** flew in too, a streaked juvenile and a red male, and perched up long enough for everyone to scope them. We had again hoped to bump into one of the more unusual woodland inhabitants here – Nutcracker are known to be present – but we weren't lucky. Time was ticking on, and so we headed down to Serres and on to our last stop.

After the cool of the mountainside, it felt hot at Paleokastro where we explored a dry ravine hoping to find breeding European Rollers. We had found several here last year, but there was absolutely no sign of any at all today, but we did see another male **Red-backed Shrike**, several **European Bee-eaters**, **Black-headed Wagtail**, a distant **Calandra Lark**, good views of **Syrian Woodpecker** and a calling **Common Quail**. From here, it was back to base – it had been a long day again and everyone was feeling weary! We had another excellent dinner and cold beer to look forward to though to round it off.



Cirl Bunting & Red-backed Shrike, Sidirokastro 28th April

FRIDAY 29TH APRIL – *Light rain, occasionally heavy, 16C*

Today was our full day exploring the wetlands around the bay of Thessaloniki, but sadly we did not have the best of weather – it rained all day! This meant we had to revise our usual plan of visiting the Axios Delta, as the dirt tracks around the coastal route there would be impassable to our vehicles in the wet conditions. So instead we headed further west around the bay, to the salt pans at Aliki Kitros. Parking by the small harbour and walking into the saltworks entrance, we were soon adding species to the list – **Pied Avocets**, **Black-winged Stilts** and a pair of **Stone Curlews**, roosting on a bund and looking very soggy! Migrants were clearly being grounded by the weather, with a small flock of **Blue-headed Wagtails** dropping into the dunes, and eight **Whiskered Terns**, two **Great White Egrets** and a **Eurasian Spoonbill** coming in off the bay. **Little Terns** were a highlight, fishing in the channel around the edge of the pans and diving into the water just a few metres in front of us. Sandwich Tern was new too, with a brace passing overhead, and a flock of breeding plumaged **Curlew Sandpipers** were buzzing around the pans looking for a place to settle. Another two groups came in off the sea, and here we also had fantastic views of **Slender-billed Gulls** – perhaps one hundred passed by while we were watching, but half a dozen were feeding on the water really close to the beach, salmon-washed on the breast and looking very smart. We could see a large flock of **Greater Flamingo** on the largest salt pan in the distance, but they were a long way away – we decided to head around to a track on the south side, to try and get closer.

Taking the rough track along through cultivated fields we soon reached the edge of the saltmarsh. Eight **Calandra Larks** were feeding on the track, allowing superb close approach in the vehicles, and

a **Short-toed Lark** was in song flight high above. A couple of **Collared Pratincoles** flew across the track, and we attempted to get closer to their resting area by going on foot through the dunes. From here we had point blank views of **Wood Sandpipers** and **Ruff**, and distantly could see **Kentish Plovers** in the grass and also the pratincoles again, flying around occasionally. Returning along the same track, a **Collared Pratincole** dropped in right in front of us, and we were able to nudge up to within ten metres of it in the vans – amazing views! A little further on, another **Short-toed Lark** was on the road, and a male **Red-backed Shrike** perched up in a tamarisk, while a pair of **Tawny Pipits** briefly on the track were a good list addition. We drove around to the west side of the salt pans, and from a gate we could see a bit more of the water – thirty **Curlew Sandpipers** were feeding on the first pan, and several **Slender-billed Gulls** were in close again, but the highlights were both fly-overs. Firstly five **Red-footed Falcons**, including two silver-winged males, and then the harsh call of **Gull-billed Tern** alerted us to two flying low over us and out across the pans.

Kalochori Lagoon would be our destination for the rest of the afternoon, a truly spectacular area busting with waders, gulls and terns that would provide us with ample entertainment! On the first small pool, a **Marsh Harrier** flew by and flushed up three **Stone Curlew** which started calling and flying around in front of us! Fifty **Curlew Sandpipers** in brick red plumage were mingled with scores of **Ruff**, three **Little-ringed Plovers**, twenty **Wood Sandpipers** and nine superb **Temminck's Stints**. These were a real bonus, as we had not found any at Kerkini so far, and great to compare with the numerous **Little Stints** dotted around the pools! Two **Woodchat** and a **Red-backed Shrike** in the bushes were a reminder that grounded migrants were possible anywhere here. A nearby muddy track led us to some marshy pools where a mixed flock of around one hundred **Black and White-winged Black Terns** were dancing over the water, with a couple of the latter working their way along a channel close to our vehicles. Two **Hoopoes**, another **Woodchat Shrike** and hundreds of **House Martins** were noteworthy too, hawking around the cattle in the rain. A large colony of **Mediterranean Gulls** were nesting just beyond this area, and the birds were flying over calling constantly – what a noise! Four more **Gull-billed Terns** flew in off the gulf, and two **Common Greenshanks** flew by calling. **Black-winged Stilts**, **Black-headed Wagtails**, **European Reed** and **Great Reed Warblers** and **Slender-billed Gulls** were the supporting cast.



Black & Caspian Terns, Kalachori Lagoon, 29th April

Finally we hit the main lagoon- we had our work cut out here! We literally did not know where to look next! At least three hundred **Mediterranean Gulls** were resting on the mud, interspersed with a few **Little Gulls**, and three stonking **Caspian Terns**. Approximately 50 **Dunlin**, 50 **Little Stint**, 300 **Ruff**, 100 **Curlew Sandpipers**, 4 **Ruddy Turnstone**, 2 **Common Ringed Plovers**, 10 **Kentish Plovers**, 50 **Wood Sandpipers**, 6 **Common Greenshanks**, 1 **Spotted Redshank** and 2 **Grey Plover** made up the throng of waders here! Sorting carefully through these, we picked out a single **Broad-billed Sandpiper** among the **Dunlin**, and were able to watch it for some time, noting the overall dark colouration, small size and white mantle and crown stripes. A small island by the side of the track hosted about 30 **Black Terns**, resting between bouts of dancing over the water with **Little Gulls**. Amazing to see them so close, especially when joined by a single **White-winged Black Tern** for comparison. Over the back of the lagoon, against a backdrop of downtown Thessaloniki, about 300 **Greater Flamingo** were noisily resting, at one point taking spectacularly to the air and circumnavigating the pool before settling again. A **Great Bittern** was booming from the reedbed at the back, and a **Eurasian Hobby** cruised by sending all the small waders skyward. Our day had been action-packed again, but was about to go one better – two **Terek Sandpipers** were found on a small muddy island while having one last look at the resting **Black Terns**! What stunning birds! They showed really well before moving back to the far shore and feeding among **Ruff**, where we were able to secure a couple of decent photos by walking around and along the bund at the back. Almost in exactly the same spot as last year! From here we made the 1.5hr journey back to Ano Poroia, where the Greek Orthodox Easter celebrations were taking place and hence we enjoyed a particularly excellent dinner!



Terek Sandpiper and Greater Flamingoes, Kalachori Lagoon 29th April

SATURDAY 30TH APRIL – Hot and sunny, 25C

Perhaps the warmest day of the trip so far, as we spent our final full day trying to mop up on a few species missing from the already very healthy trip list! Starting at our morning stop off near Ano Poroia, we achieved the better views of **Black-headed Bunting** we were after – a nice male perched on the top of the bushes, fairly distant but in great light. A single **Whinchat** remained from yesterdays arrival, and there was the usual clutch of **Red-backed Shrikes**, **Woodchat Shrike**, **Golden Oriole** and a nice female **Red-footed Falcon** on the wires. Taking the scenic route down the west side of the

lake, we stopped briefly at Korifoudi where another target was instantly met – a perched up **Lesser Grey Shrike**, only the second one we had seen. Two more **Red-backed Shrikes** and seven **Turtle Doves** were also noted, before we reached our main birding site for the morning.

Himarros is a beautiful location where a track heads up into the forested hills and gives the opportunity to find many species scarce in other areas around the lake. We actually met our first car load of British birders here, and it was nice to finally get to swap some 'gen' – there certainly are no crowds when birding at Lake Kerkini! Singles of **Booted and Short-toed Eagle** drifted low over while we were chatting, and then a cracking male **Levant Sparrowhawk** which spiralled up and began to display over the track – it reminded us all of a European Nightjar with its deliberate slow, flaps on long wings. Further down the track, we parked by the river in the shade of the Plane Trees and began birding the bushy slopes to the north, excellent for a variety of warblers. **Eastern Olivaceous Warbler** was common here [but difficult to see!] and **Eastern Subalpine Warblers** were also easily seen, including an obliging song-flighting male. Better still was an **Eastern Orphean Warbler**, which perched up on high twigs two or three times, as it sang its rather subtle and unobtrusive song – good views in the scope for those who were quick enough each time, before it dropped back out of sight. A pair of **Sombre Tits** moved through the bushes, and several **Woodchat Shrikes** were about, while over the ridge behind a pair of **Lesser Spotted Eagles** were displaying with their slow rollercoaster flight. Our main target here was **Masked Shrike**, and we soon found a stunning male perched up along the edge of the track. He was flighty, but thankfully the female appeared and was anything but! We eventually found ourselves standing ten feet away from it, as it kept watch for passing beetles from a low perch – amazing! An **Icterine Warbler** was singing in the wooded stream, but we only managed glimpses of it in the canopy – a migrant no doubt on its way to Scandinavia or Eastern Europe. Our coffee and cake stop has on most days been interrupted by something good – today it was a **Northern Goshawk**, drifting over our heads carrying prey.



Masked Shrike, Himarros, 30th April

Our plan for the early part of the afternoon was to head back to Lithotopos, and wind our way up the east side of Lake Kerkini, via the embankment. The rough track made for slow progress, but we soon reached a good stopping place where **European Bee-eaters** were all around us, perching on low branches and prospecting the sandy bank below. Common Cuckoo were also numerous along this stretch, including a superb rufous phase female, and another **Turtle Dove** obliged on the track. At another spot a White Stork was feeding in some marshy pools really close to the bank [with another twenty one following a tractor nearby] and three **Purple Herons** came out of the ditch. **Red-backed Shrike** were very common, and a **Penduline Tit** was gathering nest material among the reeds. It was, as predicted, taking rather longer than planned to make our way towards Megalachori! Once we reached our lunch spot, it was clear that the level of the lake was being raised – there was a significant increase in water since our visit a few days ago and this had produced optimum conditions for feeding waders. A quite amazing spectacle involved a minimum of 700 Ruff and Wood Sandpipers, feeding in the shallow water, and the pair of **Spur-winged Plovers** were still here too – perhaps thinking they might stay to nest. Curlew Sandpipers were dotted amongst the throng, two **Black-winged Stilts**, six Common Greenshanks, single Black-tailed Godwit, the **Cattle Egret** again and of course many distant pelicans and **Pygmy Cormorants** could also be seen.



European Bee-eater & Little Bittern, Lake Kerkini, 30th April

Tearing ourselves away from this magical spot, we continued along the bank, reaching Megalachori, where the narrowing north-east arm of the lake contains four reed islands. A quite amazing spectacle here was provided by **Little Bitterns** – we counted at least fifteen in one small area, but there could have been double that number. While scanning the reed edge, counting the bitterns, we found two **Little Crakes** – neither of which showed for very long, but enough for most people to get something on them. Overhead, two Eurasian Hobby were hawking, joined briefly by another female **Red-footed Falcon**.

It was by now already 1600, so our idea of spending the afternoon in the Belles Mountains had kind of evaporated. However, we did drive up the track north of Neo Petritsi for about 8km, through wonderful virgin oak woodland, to a spot which afforded spectacular views back across the valley. A **European Honey Buzzard** drifted over as we got out of the vans, and as we scoped it up, it began wing-clapping over the forest before drifting distantly away – a fantastic sight. A second bird was

seen a little further along the track, so presumably they must be breeding in the area. Other species noted included Grey Wagtail, **Red-rumped Swallow**, **Red-backed Shrike**, Green Woodpecker, two Marsh Tits, a perched **Golden Oriole** and a stunning Short-toed Eagle which circled low over the ridge. Winding our way back to Neo Petritsi, we headed back towards base, making one more short stop at the edge of Ano Poroia to look for Rock Bunting. Our walk failed to produce the bunting [though we saw a couple of Cirls], but we had superb views of several **Eastern Subalpine Warblers**, and two more **Levant Sparrowhawks** including a male which circled and displayed right in front of us – a superb way to end another awesome day.



Lake Kerkini from Ano Poroia, 30th April

SUNDAY 1ST MAY – *Hazy sunshine, 23C*

Basically a travelling day, as we packed up early and headed back to Thessaloniki. We had one final chance to bid farewell to the singing **Common Nightingale**, **Cirl Bunting**, Tree Sparrow and overhead **Pallid Swifts** at the hotel, before making the one and a half hour journey back to the airport. A male **Red-footed Falcon** was the highlight en route, as well as the usual uncountable numbers of Corn Buntings, **Red-backed** and **Woodchat Shrikes**. We arrived in good time to the car hire drop off, and enjoyed a routine passage back to London.

SYSTEMATIC LIST

1. Little Grebe
2. Great Crested Grebe
3. Black-necked Grebe
4. Mute Swan
5. Great Cormorant
6. Pygmy Cormorant
7. White Pelican
8. Dalmatian Pelican
9. Cattle Egret
10. Great White Egret
11. Little Egret
12. Little Bittern
13. Great Bittern [H]
14. Glossy Ibis
15. Eurasian Spoonbill
16. Greater Flamingo
17. Grey Heron
18. Purple Heron
19. Night Heron
20. Squacco Heron
21. Black Stork
22. White Stork
23. Greylag Goose
24. Common Shelduck
25. Garganey
26. Mallard
27. Northern Pintail
28. Northern Shoveler
29. Common Pochard
30. Rock Partridge
31. Common Quail [H]
32. Black Kite
33. European Honey Buzzard
34. Short-toed Eagle
35. Marsh Harrier
36. Montagu's Harrier
37. Eurasian Sparrowhawk
38. Levant Sparrowhawk
39. Northern Goshawk
40. Osprey
41. Common Buzzard
42. Booted Eagle
43. Golden Eagle
44. Lesser Spotted Eagle
45. Common Kestrel
46. Red-footed Falcon
47. Peregrine
48. Eurasian Hobby
49. Common Moorhen
50. Common Coot
51. Water Rail [H]
52. Little Crake
53. Stone Curlew

54. Black-winged Stilt
55. Pied Avocet
56. Eurasian Oystercatcher
57. Little-ringed Plover
58. Common Ringed Plover
59. Kentish Plover
60. Grey Plover
61. Northern Lapwing
62. Spur-winged Plover
63. Collared Pratincole
64. Common Snipe
65. Common Sandpiper
66. Wood Sandpiper
67. Terek Sandpiper
68. Little Stint
69. Temminck's Stint
70. Broad-billed Sandpiper
71. Dunlin
72. Black-tailed Godwit
73. Common Greenshank
74. Common Redshank
75. Spotted Redshank
76. Ruff
77. Ruddy Turnstone
78. Yellow-legged Gull
79. Black-headed Gull
80. Slender-billed Gull
81. Mediterranean Gull
82. Little Gull
83. Sandwich Tern
84. Little Tern
85. Common Tern
86. Black Tern
87. White-winged Tern
88. Whiskered Tern
89. Gull-billed Tern
90. Caspian Tern
91. Woodpigeon
92. Collared Dove
93. Turtle Dove
94. Common Cuckoo
95. Little Owl
96. European Scops Owl
97. Common Swift
98. Pallid Swift
99. Alpine Swift
100. Common Kingfisher
101. Great-spotted Woodpecker
102. Syrian Woodpecker
103. Green Woodpecker
104. Grey-headed Woodpecker
105. Black Woodpecker
106. Eurasian Hoopoe
107. European Bee-eater
108. Calandra Lark

109. Crested Lark
110. Woodlark
111. Short-toed Lark
112. Crag Martin
113. House Martin
114. Sand Martin
115. Barn Swallow
116. Red-rumped Swallow
117. Tawny Pipit
118. Tree Pipit
119. White Wagtail
120. Grey Wagtail
121. Yellow Wagtail
122. Wren
123. European Robin
124. Common Nightingale
125. Black Redstart
126. Whinchat
127. Northern Wheatear
128. Eastern Black-eared Wheatear
129. Blue Rock Thrush
130. Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush
131. Blackbird
132. Mistle Thrush
133. Zitting Cisticola
134. Cetti's Warbler
135. Great Reed Warbler
136. European Reed Warbler
137. Sedge Warbler
138. Eastern Subalpine Warbler
139. Eastern Orphean Warbler
140. Eastern Olivaceous Warbler
141. Icterine Warbler
142. Blackcap
143. Lesser Whitethroat
144. Common Whitethroat
145. Common Chiffchaff
146. Firecrest
147. Spotted Flycatcher
148. Pied Flycatcher
149. Long-tailed Tit
150. Blue Tit
151. Great Tit
152. Crested Tit
153. Coal Tit
154. Marsh Tit
155. Sombre Tit
156. Penduline Tit
157. European Nuthatch
158. Western Rock Nuthatch
159. Eurasian Golden Oriole
160. Red-backed Shrike
161. Lesser Grey Shrike
162. Masked Shrike
163. Woodchat Shrike

- 164. Black-billed Magpie
- 165. Western Jackdaw
- 166. Common Raven
- 167. Hooded Crow
- 168. Rook
- 169. Eurasian Jay
- 170. Common Starling
- 171. House Sparrow
- 172. Spanish Sparrow
- 173. Tree Sparrow
- 174. Chaffinch
- 175. European Serin
- 176. Common Crossbill
- 177. Greenfinch
- 178. Goldfinch
- 179. Hawfinch
- 180. Cirl Bunting
- 181. Ortolan Bunting
- 182. Black-headed Bunting
- 183. Corn Bunting

All images copyright Oriole Birding