

LESVOS
SPRING MIGRATION
11TH – 18TH MAY
2013



ORIOLE BIRDING

Tour Leader

Steve Cale

Participants

Mike & Fiona Shanks

John & Pat Everett

11TH MAY

The group met up on Saturday morning with the group leader Steve Cale at Gatwick airport, ready to begin our tour and at 5.50 we flew Monarch Airlines to Lesvos. We arrived at Lesvos at around 11.50am where the sun was shining and it was 22 degrees. After meeting our ground agent Elaina and picking up our mini bus we were soon on our way to our base for the week, the comfortable Aegeon Hotel at Skala Kalloni. We made one stop on route for a few minutes where we saw our first Wood Sandpiper, Ruff Black winged Stilt and Dark Spread wing Damselfly. Once at the hotel, we settled into our rooms, then while waiting for lunch looked at the wildlife in the hotel grounds. There were five European Bee-eaters that gave good views along with a Scarce Swallowtail Butterfly and our first Lesser Spotted Fritillary. After a late lunch, we headed off to the Kalloni East River where we birded the rest of the afternoon. This proved to be a good start to our trip and we were soon watching our first Whiskered Terns mixed with six Common Terns that gave a super comparison and excellent views. We also saw Black-headed Bunting at close quarters, our first Little Bittern and a very nice Temminck's Stint feeding along the edge of a gravel patch in the river. At one point it was joined by a lone Little Stint and a Little Ringed Plover. We also saw our first Small Pincertail Dragonfly of the trip;- a female.

12TH MAY

It was bright, warm and sunny day today, beautiful. By evening a light southerly breeze had picked up. At 08.30 we began birding for the day outside our hotel on the salt flats at the mouth of the West River. Here we saw four nice Kentish Plovers, three Ruff, two Little Stints and a lone Black-headed Yellow Wagtail. As we set off for the day, a pair of Black Storks did a fly by. We drove to the Salt Pan channel and made a series of brief stops around the Kalloni Salt Pans, birding as we went. Here we spent most of the morning, working our way down to the Sheep Fields area and there were plenty of birds to keep us occupied. The salt Pans had over a hundred Greater Flamingos, around one hundred and twenty Pied Avocets and six pairs of Black-winged Stilts were incubating on a small island at the start of the channel. Terns were very good here today and we saw five species. These terns included seven White-winged Black, two Whiskered, eight Common, four Little and a very nice Gull-billed which eventually gave very close views as it hunted for food. There were also sixteen White Storks, five more Black Storks flew inland, eighty Little Stints, twelve Curlew Sandpipers, ten or so Wood Sandpipers and a really nice male Squacco Heron. Butterflies were also good here and we saw our first Southern Comma and Balkan Marbled White. The Sheep Fields had few birds today save for Crested and four Greater Short-toed Larks, but we did see six more Lesser Spotted Fritillaries, six Southern Skimmers and one Small Darter Dragonflies, as well as two unidentified yellow Scorpions. Just as we finished our lunch, we had a good sighting of a nice male Rufous-bush Robin, singing and holding territory. We worked our way back around to the start of the Salt Pan Channel and here we had a brilliant sighting of three Short toed Eagles all hunting together. At one point one came quite low, right over our heads, giving tremendous views! We worked our way back to Kalloni taking in a tavern en route. Late in the afternoon we searched an area where a pair of Long-eared Owls had been breeding but no joy with them. We did however see a superb Persian Squirrel very close and most of the group saw a very close Eurasian Scops Owl. After our main meal this evening, we saw six nice Turkish Gecko's on the walls outside the hotel restaurant to finish the day.

13TH MAY

Overnight a huge thunderstorm raged and it was still pouring with rain at first light so we cancelled the pre-breakfast walk. Thankfully, after breakfast the rain had passed and we headed to the Salt Pans after a tip off and almost as soon as we arrived we located a fine pale phase adult Eleonora's Falcon sitting on wires. The views were super but after only a few minutes the bird flew to the opposite end of the Salt Pans. Unfortunately the bird flew again before we could get very good views. We saw other good birds here including a female Red-footed Falcon, a singing male Great Reed Warbler, a male Red-backed Shrike and no less than seven Black Storks feeding in a rough field with a flock of Sheep. We had to go briefly back to the hotel where we got a coffee and while around the hotel we saw a singing male Common Nightingale very well indeed. We drove west into the hills to Limonas Monastery above Dafia where we birded for an hour or so and here we saw a fine pair of Middle Spotted Woodpeckers taking food to a nest. A fine Eurasian Scops Owl let us watch him at very close range and a Little Owl gave good views while at roost in a hole in the monastery wall. Also here we saw ten Red-rumped Swallows obviously nesting close by and a pair of Long-legged Buzzards. From here we headed west, making various stops, but staying one step ahead of the rain almost all day. Our stops proved very fruitful. We picked up Black-veined White and Ilex Hairstreak Butterflies along with Cirl, Corn and Black-headed Buntings, Subalpine Warblers, Common Stonechats and another super pair of Short toed Eagles. Our lunch stop in the Canyon East of Vatousa produced Crag Martin, Blue Rock Thrush, Masked Shrike and Black-eared Wheatear. We could see the rain slowly approaching from the east so again we headed west and birded our way right down to Sigri. Our bag for the day included three more Short toed Eagles bringing our days total to five. At least seven Eurasian Jays of the eastern race *atricapilus*, four Cretzschmar's Buntings, ten Lesser Kestrels, five Isabelline Wheatears, six Woodchat and three more Red-backed Shrikes, two Eastern Orphean Warblers, two Turtle Doves, a Spotted Flycatcher and a brief view of an Olive-tree Warbler. A fine days birding done, we headed for the hotel, but not before two Rufous-bush Robins flew across the road and landed in front of us. We watched them from the bus as they displayed and sang to each other in what looked to be some sort of territorial dispute between two males, making for a great way to end the day.

14TH MAY

Before breakfast we headed for the Inland Lake for an early morning walk. We saw fifteen House Martins, a few Common Swifts and a couple of Sand Martins feeding over the lake, whilst the reeds had no less than five of the hoped for Little Bittern, and all showed very well. There were also Cetti's, Reed and Eastern Olivaceous Warblers around the lake and two Little Grebes. After breakfast, we headed east today, again firstly via the East River. Again we saw Little Bittern and Whiskered Terns, and at the river mouth another male Rufous-bush Robin was singing. We had a very close flyby of a White Stork collecting nesting materials & along the river we picked up Wood Sandpiper and Little Ringed Plover. We checked the northern and eastern ends of the Salt Pans and here we picked up three adult Grey Plovers in breeding plumage, as well as Black and two White Storks and ten Common Terns along with the more regular species here. We next checked out Kalami coastal pool and the Mesa Marsh areas. Here we saw eight Black Storks including two juveniles, ten Little and a Great White Egret, ten Grey Herons, two Common Shelduck and fourteen Ruddy Shelduck. We also saw our only Black headed Gull of the trip and a single Black-headed Yellow Wagtail. Also here were single female Red-backed and Woodchat Shrikes. Next, we drove to Achladeri Woods where we spent the next couple of hours. We saw the Krupers Nuthatch pair that were nesting here as soon as we arrived, already staked out by other birders and we had fantastic views of these superb little birds coming and going to the nest. We wandered up into the woods. There was lots of bird song but the birds were hard to see. Blackbirds were everywhere as were Chaffinch. There were also several Eurasian Serin and after much hunting we finally located one. We found five or six Odalisque Damsel fly, Snake eyed Lizard, two different species of Praying Mantis, one of which was busy eating a bee, head first and eventually a pair of Short-toed Treecreepers. After a late picnic lunch, we drove to Polichnitos Salt pans, which at first glance appeared to have little but as we searched we found quite a lot.

Here we saw no less than forty eight Curlew Sandpipers, ten Little Stints, three Ruddy Turnstone, a Common Sandpiper, three Ruff, two hundred Yellow-legged Gulls, five Whiskered, two White winged Black, ten Common and twelve Little Terns along with a probable single Black Tern picked up flying away that just kept going. There were also two White Wagtails, a single Black-headed Yellow Wagtail and two Kentish Plovers. We headed back towards the hotel satisfied with our days birding, calling in for a drink at a lovely sea side tavern at Achladeri en route. The end of another super day.

15TH MAY

Hot and sunny today. The marsh in front of the hotel was excellent this morning with lots of shorebirds with most clearly being migrants stopping of for a feed. Here we saw twenty Little Stints, twenty nine Curlew Sandpipers, a Ruff, a Kentish Plover and twelve Ringed Plovers, as well as a lone Purple Heron. At 09.00, we set off west towards Ipsilou. En route we made a number of very good stops looking for wildlife and recorded the following:- two Balkan Green Lizards, a Starred Agama, Masked, Red-backed and Woodchat Shrikes, Subalpine Warblers, Holy Orchid and a stunning Southern White Admiral Butterfly. We spotted a female Red Fox with a cub watching us from a den among rocks, Cirl and Cretzchmar's Buntings and Ilex Hairstreaks. We arrived at Ipsilou where we walked most of the way up to the monastery, birding as we went. We found a pair of Rock Sparrow, whose nest we found out later had been plundered by a snake just after we left, a pair of Rock Nuthatch feeding young at a nest. Six Crag Martins, two Alpine Swifts, a Blue Rock Thrush and a pair of Common Ravens, one of which took what looked to be a young bunting. Butterflies were also good with Scarce and Southern Swallowtail, Southern Comma, Southern White Admiral, Eastern Festoon, Small Coppers and more. Also a male Broad bodied Chaser and a species of yellow Scorpion. We ate lunch at the top by the monastery and here we saw our second Cinereous Bunting of the day. After lunch we headed for Sigri seeing Northern, Isabelline and Black-eared Wheatears in numbers. Once at Sigri we turned south, along the old coastal road to Eresos and again birded as we went making numerous stops. We saw masses, no hundreds of Balkan Marbled White and Small and Levantine Skippers, as well as two Little Owls, Black-headed Buntings, eight Linnets and a juvenile Peregrine. Also a troop of nine baby Chukar crossing the track in front of us presumably mum had crossed moments before we rounded the bend in the road? At the small chapel we made a more prolonged and productive stop to search the small copse of trees for migrants. Here we saw two Spotted and a female Collared Flycatcher, a lone Eastern Olivaceous Warbler, Wood and a Willow Warbler. The Willow was one of the rather grey northern birds, most interesting. By the ford there were more birds, including Red-backed Shrikes, Whinchat, Black-eared Wheatears, a Little Bittern and also our first Common Coot of the trip. Dragonflies included a Small Pincertail; Broad Scarlet and Broad-bodied Chaser. It was now evening and we headed back to Eresos but all the way back we saw Common Stonechats, Cretzchmar's Buntings, two Common Kestrels, a Long-legged Buzzard and a juvenile Short toed Eagle.

16TH MAY

An early morning trip to the Salt Pans showed there to be a lot of Curlew Sandpipers and we counted approximately fifty, as well as twenty four Ruff and seventy Little Stints but just one Wood Sandpiper. From the hide, we had super views of a pair of Stone Curlew, the male of which caught what looked to be a small crab and presented it to the female. On our way back we picked up a pair of Common Whitethroat and on the sea 4 European Shag flew east. After breakfast we headed into the Napi Valley again making various stops looking for wildlife. It was very hot and humid today. The valley itself gave us not as much as we had hoped for. We saw three Sombre Tits, two Long-legged Buzzards, Subalpine Warblers and a Turtle Dove. We also saw Thread Lacewings which were nice, Eastern Festoon again and some very nice Scarce Swallowtails. We did however pick up on some other good insects. We saw Oriental Marbled Skipper and Sloe Hairstreaks. An Odalisque Damselfly, a male Small Pincertail, several Broad bodied Chasers and a male Southern Skimmer along with a brief view of a Grass Snake. By mid day we decided to move on. We drove north to the coast road at Mandamados where we found a superb small roadside pool.

This proved to be an excellent spot. We saw lots of dragonflies including three male Violet Dropwings, two Emperor Dragonfly, a female Southern Darter, eight Black-tailed Skimmers and many Broad-bodied Chasers. There were also two Grass Snakes hunting frogs, Levant Water Frogs, and both Stripe-necked and Balkan Terrapins. At our lunch stop in the hills we found Cleopatra and Amanda's Blue Butterflies, and while driving, Persian Squirrel, Long-legged Buzzard and Red-rumped Swallows. We called in at Molivos Reservoir but saw very little at all here. We added Red-veined Darter to our dragonfly list, a male here but other than Common Coot, Grey Heron and around five hundred Yellow-legged Gulls there was little. We went into Molivos for an hour or so as the heat of the afternoon subsided. There were lots of Swifts overhead but no definite Pallid could be found. Our last stop of the day was early evening when we stopped at the coastal headland at Kavaki north of Petra. It took us about half an hour to get views of the hoped for Ruppell's Warbler, but we did get some nice views in the end, so well worth the wait. While here also we saw Turtle Dove, Orphean Warbler briefly and a pair of Subalpine Warblers. We headed for the hotel and en route a Middle Spotted Woodpecker flew in front of the bus.

17TH MAY

Overnight there had been thunder again and some rain. We again set off for the Napi Valley but this time we headed west along the tracks before Napi. We still did not locate Olive-tree Warbler but did see some nice birds in the process of looking. We saw at least ten Sombre Tits in a couple of family groups and we all had some good views. We had good view of a super pair of Orphean Warblers, the male of which sat on the top of an Oak singing for five minutes. We had nice views of two Masked Shrikes but better views of a pair of Woodchats at a nest in the same Oak as the Orphean had been. We also saw some nice views of Cirl Buntings and another nice male Violet Dropwing. At about 11.30 we decided to move on and we headed west of Skala Kalloni and birded our way along the Coast road from Parakila right down to the southern tip of this leg of the island at Makara. We spent the afternoon doing this and had superb views of no less than ten different Rock Nuthatches. Also lots of nice Cretzschmar's Buntings and an Eleonora's Falcon. As we neared Makara the weather had changed drastically and closed in on us. The wind got up from the south, the temperature dropped and it began raining. We took a long picnic lunch sheltering in the bus overlooking the small offshore islet of Garbias. Once the rain eased we could see there were birds over the Islet including over one hundred Alpine Swifts. Also here we could see a couple of hundred Yellow-legged Gulls clearly a nesting colony and at least fifty Western Jackdaws coming and going. On the rocks were fifteen European Shags and two Squacco Herons. Higher up were six Rock Doves and we saw around five Lesser Kestrels and a second Eleonora's Falcon. The Fields here had a few birds including three singing male Black-headed Buntings, a White Wagtail, Common Moorhen, a pair of Black-eared Wheatears and Eastern Olivaceous Warblers. The wind was now quite strong and almost the last birds of the day turned out to be shearwaters, both Scopoli's and Yelkouan with five and fifteen respectively passing offshore. Three of the Scopoli's and one Yelkouan came in reasonably close and gave better views. This was topped off by nine Alpine Swifts right over our heads as we were about to board the bus at the end of the day. As it was approaching evening now so we headed off back towards the hotel. En route we saw Black Stork again, also Ruddy Shelduck and Grey Heron.

18TH MAY

This was our last morning. Before breakfast we birded the East River and Kalloni Salt Pans again. The bird numbers had dropped drastically with most of the migrants having moved on. We did however see two more Whiskered and two more White-winged Black Terns. Along with these the Common Terns were up to fifteen and Little Terns to ten. There were very few waders now save for the lone Wood Sandpiper still in the channel, three Little Stints and five Ruff. Also presumably the same eight Black Storks we had seen previous days nearby. We also saw six European Bee-eaters at close range. On our way back the Common Whitethroats were now up to four at the same spot we had seen them previously, and Woodchat Shrike and a Spanish Sparrow were also present. Along the East River we saw another Squacco Heron and our last view of the singing male Rufous-bush Robin. We set off for the airport for our flight back to the UK after breakfast.

SYSTEMATIC LIST

- 1/Little Grebe
- 2/Scopoli's Shearwater
- 3/Yelkouan Shearwater
- 4/Great Cormorant
- 5/European Shag
- 6/Grey Heron
- 7/Purple Heron
- 8/Black-crowned Night Heron
- 9/Squacco Heron
- 10/Little Bittern
- 11/Little Egret
- 12/Great White Egret
- 13/Greater Flamingo
- 14/Black Stork
- 15/White Stork
- 16/Mallard
- 17/Ruddy Shelduck
- 18/Common Shelduck
- 19/Short-toed Eagle
- 20/Marsh Harrier
- 21/Common [Steppe] Buzzard
- 22/Long-legged Buzzard
- 23/Common Kestrel
- 24/Lesser Kestrel
- 25/Red-footed Falcon
- 26/Eleonora's Falcon
- 27/Peregrine
- 28/Chukar
- 29/Common Moorhen
- 30/Common Coot
- 31/Stone Curlew
- 32/Ringed Plover
- 33/Little Ringed Plover
- 34/Kentish Plover
- 35/Ruddy Turnstone
- 36/Grey Plover
- 37/Black-winged Stilt
- 38/Pied Avocet
- 39/Ruff
- 40/Little Stint
- 41/Temminck's Stint
- 42/Curlew Sandpiper
- 43/Common Sandpiper
- 44/Wood Sandpiper
- 45/Black-headed Gull
- 46/Yellow-legged Gull
- 47/Common Tern
- 48/Little Tern
- 49/Gull-billed Tern
- 50/White-winged Black Tern
- 51/Whiskered Tern
- 52/Rock Dove
- 53/Turtle Dove
- 54/Collared Dove

55/Common Cuckoo [H]
56/Little Owl
57/Eurasian Scops Owl
58/Common Swift
59/Alpine Swift
60/House Martin
61/Sand Martin
62/Crag Martin
63/Barn Swallow
64/Red-rumped Swallow
65/Crested Lark
66/Greater Short-toed Lark
67/White Wagtail
68/Black-headed Yellow Wagtail
69/Red-backed Shrike
70/Woodchat Shrike
71/Masked Shrike
72/Common Stonechat
73/Whinchat
74/Blackbird
75/Blue Rock Thrush
76/Common Nightingale
77/Rufous-bush Robin
78/Cetti's Warbler
79/Reed Warbler
80/Great Reed Warbler
81/Ruppell's Warbler
82/Subalpine Warbler
83/Eastern Orphean Warbler
84/Eastern Olivaceous Warbler
85/Olive-tree Warbler
86/Wood Warbler
87/Willow Warbler
88/Blue Tit
89/Great Tit
90/Sombre Tit
91/Short-toed Treecreeper
92/Western Rock Nuthatch
93/Krupers Nuthatch
94/Hooded Crow
95/Common Raven
96/Western Jackdaw
97/Eurasian Jay
98/Greenfinch
99/Goldfinch
100/Chaffinch
101/Linnet
102/Eurasian Serin
103/House Sparrow
104/Spanish Sparrow
105/Cirl Bunting
106/Black-headed Bunting
107/Cinereous Bunting
108/Cretzchmar's Bunting
109/Corn Bunting

Mammals

Persian Squirrel
Red Fox
Hedgehog

Butterflies

Cleopatra
Small White
Black veined White
Southern Comma
Scarce Swallowtail
Southern Swallowtail
Eastern Festoon
Red Admiral
Painted Lady
Cardinal
Lesser Spotted Fritillary
Southern White Admiral
Levantine Skipper
Small Skipper
Orbed Red Underwing Skipper
Oriental Marbled Skipper
Small Copper
Ilex Hairstreak
Sloe Hairstreak
Amanda's Blue
Common Blue
Long-tailed Blue
Balkan Grayling
Eastern Grayling
Turkish Meadow Brown
Persian Meadow Brown
Small Heath

Dragonflies

Dark Spreadwing
Odalisque
Small Pincertail
Emperor Dragonfly
Broad-bodied Chaser
Black-tailed Skimmer
Small Skimmer
Southern Skimmer
Broad Scarlet
Southern Darter
Red-veined Darter
Violet Dropwing

Reptiles

Starred Agama
Turkish Gecko
Balkan Green Lizard
Snake Eyed Lizard
European Glass Lizard
Stripe-necked Terrapin

European Pond Terrapin
Levant Water Frog
Eastern Spadefoot
Grass Snake
Sand Boa