



Sunrise Birding LLC
LESVOS
April 25 – May 2, 2015
Trip Report &
Species List



Photos (top to bottom): Great Bittern, Black-eared Wheatear, Black Stork, Wood Sandpiper, Barn Swallow, Little Crake, Black-headed Bunting, Squacco Heron by Gina Nichol.



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www.sunrisebirding.com

LESVOS: Spring Migration TRIP REPORT

April 25 – May 2, 2015

Leaders: Gina Nichol & Steve Bird

HIGHLIGHTS (Rarities, specialties, or simply a group favorite):

- Demoiselle Crane (first for Lesvos!)
- Pallid Harrier
- Pied Avocet
- Scops Owl
- Great Bittern
- Eleanora's Falcon
- Spur-winged Plover
- Hoopoe
- Golden Oriole
- Curlew Sandpiper
- Little Bittern
- Krüper's Nuthatch
- Cinereous Bunting
- Rüppell's Warbler
- White-winged Terns
- Collared Pratincole
- Little Crake
- Short-toed Eagle
- Blue Tit
- Greater Flamingo
- Lesser Grey Shrike

SUMMARY:

Lesvos is the third largest of the Greek Islands with an area of 630 square miles and nearly 200 miles of coastline. This year, the magical island of Lesvos lived up to its reputation as a superb spring migration birding destination and offered many of the expected migrants as well as a few fabulous surprises. A first for Lesvos Demoiselle Crane was seen on the second day of the trip and took the prize as the bird of the trip. In addition, the two star birds of Lesvos, Krüper's Nuthatch and Cinereous Bunting were easily seen, and a wealth of other sought after species duly obliged. We enjoyed superb views of most of the species recorded on this trip and the tour was enriched by the camaraderie of our fellow birders. We will return again next year to see what wonderful surprises await us.



Day 1 – April 25

Most of our group arrived mid-day in Lesvos and after working our way through the narrow and one way streets of Mytilini, we were on our way toward to small fishing village of Skala Kalloni. By early afternoon we had settled into our lovely hotel, enjoyed a delicious lunch and were ready to start birding. We met in front of the hotel to survey the Kalloni Pool which held Glossy Ibis, Squacco Heron, Purple Heron and several Common Moorhens. An Osprey flew over and a Garganey dropped in but it was the Great Bittern that caused a frenzy as it popped into view in the middle of the marsh. We scoped it and some saw a second Bittern beyond the first one confirming that indeed there were two of these birds in the marsh. The explosive call of Cetti's Warbler caught our attention and we studied the House Martins and Barn Swallows that were winging over the marsh. On our way back to get the vehicles a Reed Warbler came up on the phragmites close to us offering good views.

From here we moved to the Tsiknias River (East River). Some Common Terns were roosting on the river edge and we had our first of countless views of Crested Lark. Looking down toward the river mouth we had distant views of Yellow-legged Gulls and Cormorants. Up the river we found another prize, a gorgeous Spur-winged Plover. The bird posed for us and we enjoyed great views of along with Wood Sandpiper and Little Ringed Plover. Steve spotted a Long-legged Buzzard on a post and we stopped to see it. Above the ford, we watched a Penduline Tit build its nest and had views of Common Whitethroat, more Reed Warblers, Eurasian Jay, Common Nightingale, Collared Flycatcher, and Spotted Flycatcher. We studied a roster of Bank and Barn Swallows perched on a line with House Martins.

A group of Night Herons flew toward the salt pans as if to beckon on there so we moved on. There we marvelled at the nearly 100 Greater Flamingos and at least 350 Pied Avocets and scoped some Black-tailed Godwits and a few Spotted Redshank. In a pool across the road, we had Marsh Sandpiper, Common Greenshank, Wood Sandpiper and a lone Ruff among the many Black-winged Stilts. Further along the road, we had Common Shelduck and a couple of Little Terns flying up the channel. As we walked the road, we noted the song and looked at a Corn Bunting, a very common bird that was seen daily for the rest of the trip. A Western Marsh Harrier flew past being followed (chased?) by Common Swifts. Down at the corner near the pump house, we had good views of Eurasian Goldfinch and a flock of Spanish Sparrows. An adult Montagu's Harrier coursed over a distant field and there were 15 Red-footed Falcons hunting from tops of the farm fences in the same area. Renee saw the first of several Little Owls that were coming out in the evening light and a Common Kestrel flew through. Two Temminck's Stints were working the shoreline and a nice **feldegg (Black-headed) Yellow Wagtail** was flitting along the water's edge. The daylight was waning so we returned to the hotel to have our first dinner together and review the sightings from our first wonderful day on Lesvos.



Day 2 – April 26

This morning we visited the Alykes Wetlands “sheep fields” on our pre-breakfast walk. The sea was flat calm making it easy to pick out two Great Crested Grebes just offshore. A couple of Greater Short-toed Larks were seen on the ground and also display flighting. Other birds here included Common Shelduck, Grey Heron, and White Wagtail. A Black Stork flew by and a Red Fox was seen moving along the distant ridge. A Pallid Harrier flew through offering good views. A quick stop at another wetland area offered Ruff, Little Egret, Glossy Ibis, a Western Marsh Harrier flying in the background.

On the way back for breakfast we got news that a Demoiselle Crane had been seen in the Christou (West) River area so we shot over there and walked briskly down a path to see this stunning bird feeding with some White Storks in a field behind a house. The views were through the tall grasses but that did not deter the delight of many birders who were sharing in this rare opportunity. We took in this exquisite bird for several minutes knowing that it was a special treat, before heading back to the hotel for breakfast.



After breakfast, we headed to the Kalloni Soccer Pitch where there were several cars and people milling around. Some friendly birders pointed out two roosting European Scops Owls to us and we enjoyed great view of these little beauties. On word of a Middle Spotted Woodpecker, we walked toward on olive grove and found the bird perched on a power pole. A couple of Short-toed Eagles were flying high in the clouds so we decided to check the Kalloni Raptor Watch Point and this was an excellent move. Short-toed Eagles were here as well, some passing over, and one perched. At one point a pair flew very close overhead giving superb views. A Common Buzzard was seen as well and in addition to raptors, we had great views of Cretzchmar's Bunting, Subalpine Warbler, Orphean Warbler, Woodchat Shrike, Black-eared Wheatear, and Cirl Bunting.

We continued on to Achladeri Forest for a picnic lunch and as we finished eating a Krüper's Nuthatch came in and foraged in the pines above us. We walked up to the nest site and had fabulous views of the male and female Krüper's going in and out of the nest obviously feeding young. After having our fill, we moved toward the main trail and noted several Alpine Swifts flying overhead. We walked down the main track and found Chaffinch, Serin, Short-toed Treecreeper, and a few interesting flowers later identified as Barbary Nut Iris and Violet Limodore.

Later on we visited a chapel on the hill where we found Blue Tits nesting in a metal fence post. An Orphean Warbler was seen and a Western Rock Nuthatch was interacting with a Black-eared Wheatear just below us. A distant Grey Heron was seen and there were

several Red-rumped Swallows around. Returning to Kalloni, we checked on the Demoiselle Crane and found it in the same field.

We continued on to the Salt Pans, stopping above the Tsiknias River ford to look at 23 Collared Pratincoles in a newly cultivated farm field. At the salt pans we were treated to the sight of 75 Whiskered Terns newly arrived as well as Black-tailed Godwit, Spotted Redshank, Greater Flamingo, Pied Avocet, **Black-winged Stilt** and Common Sandpiper. A Peregrine Falcon flew over and put up all of the Whiskered Terns and a group of Pied Avocets. Watching the Avocets fly was a sight to behold as they moved in sync showing off their back patterns as they turned. As the sun was setting, we headed back to the hotel for dinner and to review our list. What a day!



Day 3 - April 27

Our early morning birding had us at the inland Metochi Lake just after sunrise. There was a thick mist over the lake that slowly burned off revealing a clear blue sky. We scanned the reeds and found a Little Crake which crossed a waterway and moved in the open for a few minutes allowing good views. During the course of our excursion there were at least three more Little Crakes that skulked along the edges of the reeds. A Little Bittern was seen at close range perched on a tree in the narrow part of the lake and in all we had views of at least five more of these birds and the sun burned off the morning mist. A small group of Squacco Herons flew off and a Long-legged Buzzard flew overhead close. A Little Grebe offered a challenge but eventually we all had good views. We also had great views of Cetti's Warbler and found Sedge, Reed and Great Reed Warbler among the reed-lined lake.



After breakfast, we headed west to the Grand Canyon of Lesvos where we had views of numerous Crag Martins flying around. A Blue Rock Thrush perched on one of the peaks a few times allowing good views by most and by scanning the rock faces and peaks we found Rock Sparrow and Renee had a quick view of a Wren. Further on we stopped for a pair of Eleanor's Falcons that were flying over a valley. They moved off quickly but we were able to scope them over a ridge. At the same spot, we found Woodchat Shrike, Black-eared Wheatear, Isabelline Wheatear, and Short-toed Eagle. A pair Northern Wheatears were cavorting by the side of the road and we studied the females to differentiate them from the Black-eareds. We also studied Common Kestrel and Lesser Kestrel to distinguish them.

A coffee stop in Sigri was much enjoyed as we witnessed a fresh fish delivery to the local



restaurant. The coffee was particularly delicious and we sat overlooking the bay watching a Shag and then checked shoreline shallows to see the sea urchins and red sea stars.

We moved on to Farenomeni Beach stopping at a shallow pool to look at a **Citrine Wagtail**. There was also Little Ringed Plover, plenty of Barn Swallows and a couple of Red-rumped Swallows gathering mud for their nests. We enjoyed our picnic

lunch on the beach at the big marble rock overlooking the sea and did a little seawatching though the birds were very far offshore. To Henrietta's delight there were a few more Shags around and we scoped some very distant Yelkouan Shearwaters.

The next stop was Farenomeni Ford where a number of birds were crossing back and forth over the river. It took some effort to see the birds as they would disappear on either side but here we logged Yellow Wagtails (both blue headed and black headed), Pied Flycatcher, Spotted Flycatcher, Collared Flycatcher and lots of Blackcaps. At our feet, were thousands of **tadpoles** in the shallow waters of the river.

Heading back toward Sigri, we saw some Jackdaws and when we stopped for a Zitting Cisticola (Fan-tailed Warbler) and got distracted by Marsh Sandpipers, Little Stints, Squacco Heron and Little Egret in a marshy area just off the road. We had better views of Lesser Kestrel and Steve pointed out the longer central tail feathers that are distinctive and not well illustrated in the field guide.

We drove back toward Kalloni stopping near the Petrified Forest for two Chukars that walked across the road. We got good views before they disappeared over the bank and also heard their catlike calls. We made another stop for Isabelline Wheatear and spent some time getting to grips with difference between that and Black-eared Wheatear. A Black-headed Bunting appeared on top of the only green tree around and some of us couldn't help but watch the herd of sheep cross the valley and head up to their home for the night. Those that continued to bird had good views of Cretchmar's Bunting.



We drove the winding mountain roads back to Kalloni and made a quick pit stop at the hotel before heading to the Kalloni Salt pans for the evening viewing. Here we logged a White Wagtail, Little, Common and Whiskered Terns, and elegant Pied Avocets. The group of Greater Flamingos in the far pool caught our attention as there was a lot of wing

flapping and posturing going on. This was leading to other things and we saw some of the birds mating which was an amazing sight. At one point a Peregrine Falcon came through causing all of the Avocets to fly at once, another awesome sight. In the background there were at least 29 Common Shelduck and on the way back to the hotel, we saw a Spur-winged Plover again. We checked the marsh in front of the hotel and saw the Great Bittern, a wonderful end to another great day.

Day 4 – April 28

Our early morning excursion today was to the Alykes Wetlands “sheep fields” near the Kalloni Salt Pans. As we made our way along the farm road, we came upon Killian Mullarney watching a female **Pallid Harrier** perched on a nearby fence post. This was both a rare bird and a rare opportunity to see this species at close range and after watching it for a few minutes from the



vehicles we decided to get out and set up the scopes. This was risky as the bird was so close that we could easily flush it. So we quietly got out of the van and positioned ourselves and the scopes for better views. We enjoyed the bird for about 15 minutes before it finally flew and were commended by Killian for our fieldcraft and taking care not to flush the bird. On to the sheep fields, we found six Red-throated Pipits, four Kentish Plovers, and seven Black Storks. From the numbers of birds and species on show, it was clear migration was starting to build.

After breakfast, we headed out on the west coast road toward Sigri, a journey that took most of the day with many very productive roadside stops. The first was for a perched Red-backed Shrike and as we looked at it, we found several other birds in the immediate vicinity (several in the same tree!) including Sombre Tit, Woodchat Shrike, Western Rock Nuthatch, and Orphean Warbler. We were just about ready to move on when Steve found a Great Spotted Cuckoo and we all got decent views.

At our next stop, a pair of Cinereous Buntings, a pair of Stonechats feeding young, Black-headed Bunting, and a close, singing Cretzschmar's Bunting were all seen well. A Short-toed Eagle drifted over the ridge above and hung in the air for the entire time we were there allowing scope views of the bird that was seemingly not moving, but floating in mid-air.



We headed out toward Tavari on the coast and found a café for a break and a cup of coffee. The owner welcomed us with open arms and even set up some tables and chairs for us overlooking the sea. In the next half hour or so, we enjoyed our drinks and capuchinos; we scoped more than 1000 Yelkoun Shearwater traveling over the water and at least 10 Scopoli's Shearwaters.

We continued on to Meladia, ate our picnic lunch and then tried to see a Marsh Warbler that was singing near the ford but the bird only offered flight views. Eleanora's Falcons however were much easier to see as they flew right over us. There were a few Lesser Kestrels and Black-headed Bunting numbers were increasing. At the Sanitorium we had three Red-backed Shrikes, 11 Lesser Kestrels, and 10 Black-headed Buntings as the wind started to pick up. We continued on to Sigrí where we had 20 Ruddy Shelduck feeding in a wheat field, two Rollers hanging on for dear life in the wind, 10 Bee-eaters that flew by and a Lesser Grey Shrike. After a fabulous day, we headed back toward Kalloni and our hotel, enjoyed another delicious dinner and reviewed our list for the day.



Day 5 – April 29

Before breakfast we headed back for another session at the Kalloni salt pans. As we turned the corner for the East River, an Olivaceous Warbler showed well in a tamarisk bush. At the salt pans, we had good views of Pied Avocets and Flamingos, Little Terns, Black-winged Stilts, one Ruff and a Black-tailed Godwit.

After breakfast, we headed north and made a stop at the Kalloni Soccer pitch where there were no less than five **Scops Owls** visible in the eucalyptus trees. A Middle Spotted Woodpecker came into its nest in the parking area but would not emerge with the crowd of birders there.

On toward Molivos we stopped at a spot to look for Rüppell's Warbler. Our spot was scenic overlooking the sea and we struggled for a bit but found a surprise Sardinian Warbler and a few Subalpine Warblers in the surrounding vegetation. We persisted and finally got great views of Rüppell's Warbler singing from a power line – another victory.



The North Coast Road from Eftalou to Skala Sikminias was rough driving but the scenery was particularly beautiful with clear blue sky, quiet seas, and a sprawling view of Turkey across the Mytilini Strait. One stop offered a couple of **Masked Shrikes** close and further on we had Red-backed Shrike, Little Owl, Stonechat, and Whinchat.



We enjoyed an excellent taverna lunch at **Skala Sikminias** under the 130 year old mulberry tree at *Taverna I Mouria Tou Mirivili* overlooking the harbor. This was a welcome treat as we took in the charm of the fishing village while dining al fresco. After lunch we headed to the interior of the island on our journey back to Kalloni and found a handsome Roller that was perched on a wire eating a grasshopper. Renee and Janet spotted a Lesser Gray Shrike from the van and we stopped and scoped it. There were more Masked Shrikes and then Betty found a Hoopoe that eventually showed well at the top of a tree against the sky. This was fitting as it was Betty's birthday and she has a particular fondness for this bird. So, of course, we were all wishing her a Hoopoe Birthday.

We continued to the hotel for a pit stop and checked the marsh which held Squacco Herons, Purple Heron, Glossy Ibis, and two Little Bitterns. We went back to the sheep

fields and found Kentish Plovers and watched Steve as he assisted a local farmer with his horses.

In the evening, we celebrated Betty's birthday with wine thanks to Bernie and Ginny. Our beloved bar man, Vangelos lowered the lights and played a Greek birthday song and we enjoyed a delicious Greek version of Black Forest Cake. Betty was surprised by all of the fan fare and appreciated it. It was a great end to another wonderful day.

Day 6 – April 30

Before breakfast we visited the inland lake again and saw eight Little Crakes, a few Little Bitterns, a Little Grebe and some elegant looking **Squacco Herons**. A hen Mallard led her eight young ducklings along the edge of the reeds and suddenly frantic sounds erupted from the reeds. At the end of it, there was one less duckling and it looked like the culprit might have been a Little Bittern hidden in the reeds.

After breakfast, we headed toward the salt pans at Polichnitos. On the Achladeri Road, we stopped at a poppy field to take photos and while we were enjoying the scene we found a perched Short-toed Eagle up on a rock and a Common Buzzard not far away. A Red-backed Shrike was also in attendance and as we continued on we crossed paths with a Mistle Thrush on the road. We stopped briefly to look at a Eurasian Sparrowhawk from the road and continued on down to the salt pans. They were characteristically quiet but we did find a Kentish Plover with two fluffy chicks, several Ruff, some Little Stints and a few Little Ringed Plovers. Zitting Cisticolas were calling and flying all around but that was about it.



We had our picnic lunch right at the port in the village and then drove back toward Kalloni. We stopped at the Salt Pans mid-afternoon and were pleasantly surprised with views of a pair of Garganey and a congregation of shorebirds which included Ruff, Spotted Redshank, a Ruddy Turnstone (uncommon), three Curlew Sandpipers and some Little Stints. We scoped these as best we could with the help of the step stool from the van to see over the grass.

Later on, we checked the Upper East River and found some Eastern Orphean Warblers, European Goldfinches, Blackbirds and a Common Whitethroat. Once again the antics of the sheep distracted us and as the sun set; we headed back to the hotel for the night.

Day 7 – May 1

Our last full day on Lesvos was spent mostly on the western side of the island. We ate breakfast early and then departed for Ipsilou Monastery perched on the highest point in western Lesvos. There were a lot of Black-eared Wheatears around but not much



else but we enjoyed the views from our high perch. We walked up to the monastery which dates back to 800 AD and took some time exploring it and the museum. In the meantime, Golden Orioles and Hoopoes were calling and there were a lot of Wall Brown butterflies around. On our way out, we stopped for a perched Wood Lark and beyond that Gina spotted a Eurasian Griffon Vulture that was soaring up on the morning thermals. We scoped the bird and got views before it drifted away into the blue.

We continued on to Sigri where we found at least six Golden Orioles and with patience and scopes we got great views of them. There was also a female Pied Flycatcher, Spotted Flycatcher, several Red-backed Shrikes, Lesser Grey Shrike, and Woodchat Shrike. A Black-headed Bunting perched and sang right above us as we looked for the Orioles as if to command some attention.

We enjoyed a nice taverna lunch in Sigri village and then returned to Kalloni in the afternoon. We went to the Kalloni Salt Pans for one final time and got great views of 35 White-winged Terns, Little Terns, Whiskered Terns, Common Terns, one Black Tern, and Spotted Redshank. We checked the sheep fields for one last time and had a few Greater Short-toed Larks and a quickly disappearing Sedge Warbler.

We returned to the hotel and enjoyed our final dinner of the tour, reviewed our sightings for the day and for the trip. We reminisced about our week on this magical island and all of the wonderful sights and tastes. It will be a trip long remembered!