

Ikaria, Greece

- a few notes on birding, July 2025

Ikaria is an island in the eastern part of the Aegean Sea, west of Samos. I first visited it as a child on summer vacation with my family in 1990, and we returned each year for many years after that. In my later teens I decided to go elsewhere, and I haven't been back since. My parents however have continued to visit almost yearly. This year I had an opportunity to join them for a week in July - my first time back in 25 years!

On the way down I flew from Athens, and on the way back I took the ferry to Piraeus (and then onwards with metro to the airport – which was convenient). I stayed overnight each way in Avra Hotel in Rafina. It was a comfortable, clean hotel with free shuttle to the airport; and Rafina was an agreeable town with plenty of restaurants and a small stream where I did some birding on the first morning (Yellow-legged Gull, Common- and Alpine Swifts, Moorhen, Barn Swallow and House Martin were seen among others).

In Ikaria I stayed in Evdilos in an apartment I found on Booking.com (The Icarian resort "Dourediko" - a great place!). My parents rented a car from Aventura Car & Motorbike Rental.

This wasn't a birding trip, and summer isn't a great time for birding in the Mediterranean. Bird activity were low, and the species list wasn't impressive (all in all 30 species with 3 only seen in Rafina [Moorhen, Magpie and Hoopoe]). But since it was ages since I visited Greece, and the first time abroad since I got kids, I was more than happy to see something out of the ordinary. I didn't bring my scoop, and also decided last minute to not bring my camera - hence no pictures.

Before I travelled I had done some casual googling about birding in Ikaria, but there is not much information out there and the only useful resource I found were <https://www.slideshare.net/slideshow/20231224-birds-of-ikaria-new-versionpdf/264929158> and <https://www.visitikaria.gr/en/discover/habitats>

Around habitation House Sparrow, Feral Pigeon and Collared Dove were common. Sardinian Warbler were ubiquitous in roadside shrubbery. Hirundines were abundant with Red-rumped Swallows the default species with smaller numbers of Barn Swallows and House Martins. Alpine- and Common Swifts could be seen in a lot of places (and I had 1-2 candidates for Pallid Swift at the Estuary of river Myrsonas at Meskati beach near Gialiskari, but conditions - and lack of camera - precluded certain identification). Eleonora's Falcon was seen en route from the airport (actually I saw the first one while waiting for my luggage), as were two Short-toed Eagle. There were also several Eleonora's Falcons in the valley just east of Evdilos (above Fles and Keramio beach).

Yellow-legged Gull could be seen in small numbers along the coast. From the ferry to Athens both Scopoli's and Yelkouan Shearwater were abundant, and I also saw a presumed loggerhead turtle, but unfortunately no dolphins.

On two mornings I walked along the road eastward from Evdilos to Kerame and back. The valley above Keramio beach were lush and green with cultivations and water still flowing, and seemed promising from a birding perspective. I had a Blue Rock Thrush just outside Evdilos, and among the cultivations in Kerame I saw Olivaceous Warbler and Cirl Bunting (plus plenty of Blue Tit and Chaffinch). I had a quick encounter with a beech marten on the second morning, and on the way back I had a distant view of 5 (probable) Shags fishing in the sea.

At the Estuary of river Myrsonas (at Meskati beach near Gialiskari) there were some swifts, and lots of turtles in the water. I only visited during the day, but a morning visit would probably have been more productive. There is also fresh water at Kampos beach (Estuary of torrent Voutsides), but I did not have time to visit.

I spent one early morning going (with my dad as driver) to Lake Pezi - thinking the water would attract birds during the summer. I was wrong, as the lake and its surroundings were virtually devoid of life. We then went to Lake Vathes which had more character of a natural lake with some vegetation and so on. There were lots of insects, frogs, fishes and some turtles - and I even saw a snake swimming across it! But besides some Sardinian Warblers, Blue Tits and Chaffinches around it there were not any birds present. On the drive back to the coast however we saw an adult Honey Buzzard that flew up from the road. (A few words on driving: to Lake Pezi the road was paved all the way. From Lake Pezi to Lake Vathes we drove on dirt roads. They were manageable with a small, ordinary car but road conditions in the interior of Ikaria can sometimes be challenging. Cell phone reception was spotty. Bring extra water, some snacks and let somebody know where you are going. DO NOT trust Google maps! It frequently wanted to send us down literal foot path and other undriveable roads. Also, there are lots of roads crisscrossing the interior of Ikaria, and it's not always easy to figure out which one is more driveable or leading to your destination - get a sense of where you should be going before heading out. With that being said, the main roads along the coast and to the major inland locations are in good condition with clear signage).

Ikaria is a fantastic place and a lovely island away from the main tourist tracks in Greece. I'm sure a longer stay and/or a visit during migration would produce more bird (as evident in the first link above). I hope these short notes can facilitate further birding in Ikaria!

Any questions or comments? Feel free to contact me at adam.oscarson@gmail.com!