

Trip Report: Lesvos 25 April – 6 May 2000

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Introduction

The Greek island of Lesvos has grown in popularity among European birdwatchers during the past ten years or so and has earned a deserved reputation as one of the eastern Mediterranean's most rewarding birding destinations. The island is Greece's third largest and its position close to the Turkish coast makes it a natural staging post for many migrant species in spring and autumn, in addition to which it hosts a wide variety of breeding birds. Its rugged scenery and excellent beaches, and that fact that it remains virtually untouched by large-scale development, have enabled Lesvos to retain much of its genuine Greek charm and make it an ideal destination for 'green' tourism.

The island is the best – indeed the only – place in Europe to see Cinereous Bunting and Krüper's Nuthatch, whose closest breeding grounds are in Turkey. Eastern species like Citrine Wagtail, Spur-winged Plover and Pallid Harrier are regular migrants in early to mid spring, while Levant Sparrowhawk and large numbers of Red-footed Falcons and turn up in early May, followed by Rose-coloured Starling later in that month. The list of breeding birds includes Olive-tree, Orphean and Rüppell's warblers, Sombre Tit, Western Rock Nuthatch, Cretzschmar's Bunting, Isabelline Wheatear, Lanner, Eleonora's Falcon, Bonelli's Eagle and Long-legged Buzzard.

Worth knowing

Lesvos, or Lesbos as it is sometimes spelt, is also known to locals as Mytilene (alternatively Mytilini), which is the name of the island's capital and largest town and is that most commonly used by airlines and travel agents. The best time of year to visit is in April and the first half of May, the peak spring migration period. Late spring and autumn (August-October) can also be rewarding but observer coverage is much thinner at these times.

Weather conditions during the spring can be remarkably changeable, varying from hot (25°C+) and sunny to decidedly chilly and rainy. My ten-day stay coincided with unseasonably poor weather consisting cold northerly and westerly winds and frequent showers interspersed with a few more settled sunny periods. For much of the time it was definitely not beach – or even shorts – weather, so be advised to pack a rain coat and warm fleece or jumper and stout shoes to keep the elements at bay if necessary.

Getting there

Swedish charters to Lesvos do not commence until the second half of May, by which time bird migration has peaked and visits will therefore be less productive from an avian perspective. I'm told that a few charters run from the UK in the first weeks of May but they do not really get underway until the latter part of the month, which is also the case for Swedish charters. This means that birders wishing to maximise the potential of a spring visit must be prepared to travel by scheduled flight and to book their accommodation separately.

Alternatively, Richard Brooks, a UK birder and photographer who has done much to popularise Lesvos, organises competitively-priced package tours to the island. However, as far as I know these originate solely in the UK and are thus likely to be of limited interest to Scandinavia-based birders.

I booked my trip through Olympic Airlines in Stockholm. The itinerary was Arlanda-Copenhagen (SAS), Copenhagen-Athens and Athens-Mytilene (Olympic), costing a total of SEK 4,657 round trip, including airport taxes. Note that the change at Athens airport requires you to transfer from the international terminal to the domestic terminal.

The flying time from Copenhagen to Athens is about four hours and the Athens-Mytilene stretch takes 50 minutes. A cheaper way to get from Athens to Mytilene is to take a ferry. This is somewhat cheaper but takes much longer (about 24 hours).

Accommodation

Skala Kalloni, a small beachside town situated about midway across the island, is unquestionably the best base from a birding point of view. Apart from being close to the pre-eminent bird site on the island, the Kalloni Salt Pans, Skala Kalloni's central location makes it possible to reach anywhere on the island on a day trip by car.

One alternative is the picturesque town of Eressos on the western side of the island. Although excellently placed for western sites like Sigri, Eressos is a good hour's car journey from the Kalloni area, where the best all-round birdwatching is to be had. Other possible bases include the towns of Vatera, Petra and Molivos. All have certain advantages and ready access to good birding areas but none can rightfully compete with the breadth and quality available in the Kalloni area.

I spent my entire stay in Skala Kalloni, starting off at the Kalloni II Hotel, which has the advantage of overlooking the Kalloni Pool, an excellent small wetland that literally teems with birds during migration periods. Unfortunately my room was on the ground floor and on the wrong side of the hotel for viewing the pool and after five days I moved to the nearby Malemi Hotel, where I gained a larger room with a better view for the same price – 10,000 drachmas a night (about SEK 260). Three other hotels, of a similar standard to Malemi and Kalloni II, are in the same area.

Expect to pay 10,000-14,000 for a single room with en-suite bathroom in Skala Kalloni during the April-May period. Somewhat cheaper pension-style accommodation is also available in Skala Kalloni. A useful web address for further information and contact numbers for accommodation is <http://www.aegean.travel-greece.com/aegean/listales.html>

Getting about

If in the Kalloni area for a couple of days it is possible to visit the prime sites either on foot or by bicycle (these can be rented in Skala Kalloni). But getting to grips with the area properly and reaching sites outside Kalloni requires a car. Vehicles can be rented through international hire car companies such as Hertz or, usually more cheaply, through local companies. I used Payless, a local hire firm based in Mytilene, and paid approximately SEK 2,800 for ten days. The car was available at the airport on my arrival and I was able to leave it there at the end of my stay. I was impressed by the service, which included providing me with an on-the-spot replacement vehicle within one hour of my car breaking down in the mountains in the northern part of the island. The telephone number to Payless is +30 251 43555/43558/42853

One word of caution: hire car drivers travelling to and from the airport must brave Mytilene's notorious one-way system, which is poorly signposted in parts and difficult to negotiate for the inexperienced. This is especially so if you arrive at night, as I did. The key is to have a good map, to study it carefully before setting out and – above all – to have plenty of time on your hands in case you take a wrong turn.

Literature

My 'bible' was 'Birding on the Greek Island of Lesbos' by Richard Brooks. This highly detailed guide to the island and its avifauna, complete with an array of excellent maps and site descriptions, was invaluable. I ordered it from Books for Birders (www.birdingworld.co.uk) at a cost of £17.95 excluding postage. I also took along Brooks's 'Lesvos Update Spring '99', which provided up-to-date supplementary information and tips. My other books were the 'Macmillan Guide to European & Middle Eastern Birds' (Harris et al) and the 'Collins Bird Guide' (Svensson and Grant).

Trip account

April 27

My mid-morning flight from Arlanda arrived in Copenhagen at lunchtime in good time for the connection to Athens, where I arrived in late afternoon. An irritating 1½-hour delay at Athens airport before boarding the internal flight to Mytilene resulted in my arriving at nightfall. As it was my first visit to the island I was slightly concerned about how to negotiate my way alone through Mytilene's one-way system in the dark but the man from the hire car firm kindly drove ahead of me, kindly guiding me through the maze of ill-lit back-streets. Once clear of Mytilene, the 50km or so to Skala Kalloni were straightforward to negotiate, the total journey taking about an hour and a half. I arrived at my hotel at 10pm local time.

April 26

Wandered outside the hotel at 7am to explore Kalloni Pool, a small wetland just inland from Skala Kalloni beach that attracts excellent numbers and diversity of herons, egrets, waders and other waterbirds especially during the spring migration, when water levels are optimal. A short stroll along the western perimeter revealed several **Glossy Ibis** as well as **Squacco Heron**, **Purple Heron** and a fine male **Little Bittern**. The first of many **Black-Headed Wagtails** seen during the trip were in evidence, along with ubiquitous **Crested Larks** and singing **Cetti's Warbler**, **Corn Bunting** and **Common Nightingale**. An incessant chatter emanated from a large colony of **Spanish Sparrows** nesting in trees in the grounds of the Kalloni II Hotel.

After breakfast a short drive along the coast road from the hotel and through Skala Kalloni town square led to a track heading eastwards towards the mouth of Kalloni East River. Here, a pair of **Little Owls** perched on telephone poles around a small farmstead a couple of hundred metres before the river. The vegetation around the left riverbank held several **Short-toed Larks** and one or two **Stone-curlews** were seen along the beach. A few **Little Ringed Plovers** showed at the river mouth and a probable **Slender-billed Gull** flew east over the sea.

Along the left bank of the river, a singing **Olivaceous Warbler** showed well in the rank waterside vegetation, with an immature **Night Heron** and three **Squacco Herons** seen nearby. As the temperature rose, a **Black Stork** and two distant **White Storks** were seen soaring further up the valley, along with half a dozen distant falcons that almost certainly were Red-footed. Moving on, large numbers of **Wood Sandpipers** were seen probing the shallows along with a few **Little Stints**.

Continuing north along the river beyond the road bridge, several **Cirl Buntings** were noted on the rocky hillsides as the valley narrowed and a hunting **Eurasian Sparrowhawk** was seen carrying prey. At this point the skies opened, forcing me to take refuge in the car. As soon as the rain abated a small movement of raptors took place. A hawk dashing up the valley was probably a Levant Sparrowhawk but it passed too quickly for certain identification. It was followed by a

male **Marsh Harrier** and a **Hobby** both heading north, while the first **Long-legged Buzzard** of the trip drifted slowly by, affording excellent views.

A stop at the end of the track by a small ford yielded two singing **Cretzschmar's Buntings**, another Cirl Bunting and three stunning male **Black-Eared Wheatears** of the black-throated form. At least 30 **Little Egrets** were on the river here and a pair of **Ruddy Shelduck** was seen in flight. The return trip along the track produced a calling **Hoopoe**, a second Long-legged Buzzard and a flock of 21 **Bee-eaters** in the vicinity of some steel grain silos.

In late-afternoon I made my first of many trips to the Kalloni Salt Pans, the premier site for birds on Lesvos. Here, three **Red-Footed Falcons** were seen on telephone lines, along with three **Montagu's Harriers** and a Marsh Harrier. More than 100 **Greater Flamingos** fed in loose clusters on the lagoons, along with good numbers of **Avocets**, **Black-winged Stilts**, **Wood Sandpipers**, **Little Stints** and a lone **Knot**. A flock of 30 **Collared Pratincoles** flying in to roost brought the day to a close.

April 27

Out of the hotel at 8am, I again took the track beginning behind Skala Kalloni square to drive along the East River. This time, I crossed it at the first concrete ford, admiring a party of five Squacco Herons, before turning sharply right along the river bank and then almost immediately onto a track heading east through fields. This track is an excellent way to access the salt pans from Skala Kalloni, taking you through prime birding habitats en route. Today it produced two singing male **Black-headed Buntings**, a species that traditionally arrives at the very end of April, and several Marsh and Montagu's Harriers. At the salt pans themselves, a flock of 8-10 Bee-eaters hawked insects and the track running eastwards parallel to the salt workings' perimeter fence produced **Woodchat Shrike** and Collared Pratincole. Small numbers of breeding plumaged **Red-throated Pipits**, a **Tawny Pipit** and a few Short-toed Larks were seen and further on a water channel hosted **Great White Egret**, **Purple Heron** and **Little Tern**.

Next on the itinerary was Kalloni Inland Lake, a small wetland about 2km outside Kalloni. Persistent scanning of the lake's reedy fringes from the car finally brought reward in the form of an adult male **Little Crake** and good views were also had of a White Stork. Continuing on to the Potamia Valley, the weather began to close in as it had done the previous day. Birds seemed to be in short supply here although a **Sombre Tit** and a party of three **Golden Orioles** enlivened proceedings and a Long-legged Buzzard gave good views as it patrolled a nearby ridge.

By mid-afternoon the weather had improved somewhat and I backtracked through Kalloni, past the salt pans behind and took the road inland signposted to Agia Paraskevi (turn off by the Shell petrol station that overlooks the salt pans) that eventually leads to an attractive valley extending north of a village called Napi. The valley, only recently "discovered" by visiting birders, is an excellent area for birds, especially raptors. At different stops along the valley I noted singing **Orphean Warbler**, **Subalpine Warbler**, **Hawfinch**, **Turtle Dove**, Hoopoe and Sombre Tit. The head of the valley, where the road swings sharply right after a short incline, is the best spot for migrating raptors and here a flock of 30+ Red-Footed Falcons lingered, as well as a first-summer male **Lesser Kestrel**, plus a **Peregrine** soaring overhead and singing Cirl Bunting. Following the road past the outlook point, a **Western Rock Nuthatch** was observed around a disused stone cottage on the left-hand side of the road.

Rounding off the day, a **Middle-Spotted Woodpecker** (a species that is surprisingly easy to see on Lesvos) was observed in a roadside olive grove on the outskirts of Kalloni. A pre-dusk stroll around Kalloni Pool brought close views of an adult White Stork, as well as Glossy Ibis and Little Bittern.

April 28

A mid-morning start on the East River produced Middle-Spotted Woodpecker, lots of Olivaceous Warblers and a flock of 20 or so **Whiskered Terns** and **White-winged Black Terns** hawking over the river either side of the main road bridge. Moving on to the salt pans, two **Lesser Grey Shrikes** perched obligingly on the telephone wires near the works' entrance, where several **Red-rumped Swallows**, Northern Wheatear, Tawny Pipit, Kentish Plover, Marsh Harrier and Great White Egret were also seen.

Next on the agenda was a trip to Makara ford, a shallow coastal watercourse some distance SW of Kalloni. The highlight here was two Little Crakes at very close range and a good westerly passage of **Yelkouan Shearwaters** with a few **Cory's Shearwaters** mixed in. A few **Shags** were seen offshore, while small numbers of **Alpine Swift** and Lesser Kestrel were noted over the nearby headland. A brief roadside stop near Apothikes, on the return journey to Kalloni, yielded Bee-eater and Golden Oriole, while farther on 'Devil's Bridge' – another roadside site – hosted singing Cretzschmar's Bunting, with Orphean Warbler and a party of about 10 Alpine Swifts nearby.

After continuing on via Kalloni and past the salt pans, my next stop was 'Derbyshire', a marshland that apparently derives its name from the UK's Derbyshire 'Peak District'. Here, distant views were obtained of an adult **Slender-billed Gull** that had frequented the area for a couple of weeks. Also in evidence were Little Stint, Little Ringed Plover, Ruff, Little Tern, Wood Sandpiper and a pair of Ruddy Shelducks.

A few kilometres farther up the road, Achladeri is the premier site on Lesvos to see **Krüper's Nuthatch**. During the breeding season the area is much frequented by birders, increasing the chances of seeing this rather unobtrusive species. When I arrived in mid-afternoon a group of birders was already watching a pair of Krüpers coming and going at their nest-hole in a decaying tree, just a couple of hundred metres north of the road. Connecting with the birds could hardly have been easier. A stroll around the site also produced a pair of **Masked Shrikes**, a male **Red-backed Shrike**, **Serin**, Orphean Warbler and Olivaceous Warbler as well and Woodchat Shrike and Spotted Flycatcher.

Returning to Kalloni via the coast road, a brief stop at a marshy area between 'Derbyshire' and the Salt pans produced a pair of **Stonechats**, a singing **Fan-tailed Warbler** – the only one of the trip – and numerous Black-headed Buntings. During an evening stroll around Kalloni Pool a **Spoonbill** flew over in company with a Great White Egret.

April 29

An entire day spent exploring the western part of the island began with a Squacco Heron at a roadside pool between Apothikes and Agra. A stop at a small valley a few kilometres before Agra gave views of Wood Warbler and Cirl Bunting. Golden Oriole and Hoopoe were heard calling, while riverside bushes held three **Collared Flycatchers**, including a resplendent male, Common Nightingale and Olivaceous Warbler.

A chance stop beside a whitewashed shack on the right hand side of the road about 2km outside Agra proved an inspired move because it soon became evident that a fall of migrant passerines had taken place. A male Collared Flycatcher, Masked Shrike and Barred Warbler shared the same tree, with a Wood Warbler close by. Best of all, an unfamiliar bunting song turned out to come from a **Cinereous Bunting**, which soon showed well in a narrow gully beside the road. An area of hedgerow bordering sandy pools on the Eressos Plain brought brief views of two or three elusive Barred Warblers as well as Orphean Warbler, Bee-eater, Turtle Dove, a female Red-backed Shrike and another Collared Flycatcher.

The beach at Skala Eressos, a small beach resort, held Kentish Plover and Olivaceous Warbler, in addition to which two White-winged Terns and several distant parties of Yelkouan Shearwaters passed offshore. Heading north from Eressos towards Ipsilou monastery, the roadside gullies held small falls of migrants including, at one stop, a **Marsh Warbler**, Collared

Flycatcher, Pied Flycatcher, Blackcap, Subalpine Warbler and Black-headed Bunting. Cretzschmar's Buntings, common on Lesvos in areas of rocky hillside, and Cinereous Bunting were also observed.

On reaching Ipsilou monastery, one of the island's best sites for migrant passerines, late in the afternoon it was soon obvious that a huge fall of common migrants had occurred, reflecting the large numbers of birds I'd seen during the day. Likely forced down by bad weather the previous night and a cold westerly wind, hundreds – possibly thousands – of warblers and flycatchers had taken shelter on the eastern slopes beneath the monastery. Most numerous were Collared Flycatchers, of which I saw at least 30, along with many Blackcaps, Spotted Flycatchers and Wood Warblers.

As daylight faded, a stop at the Sigri-Andissa-Eressos road junction, one of the most reliable sites on the island for breeding **Isabelline Wheatear**, produced good views of this species. Just pull in at the lay-by and look back across the road: the birds are usually not far away and generally easy to see, especially early in the breeding season.

April 30

My now regular ritual of driving out to the salt pans via the East River today produced a Lesser Grey Shrike on wires and the usual assortment of Squacco Herons and Little Egrets on the river. At about 9am a flock of 28 **Dalmatian Pelicans** (the largest group of this species ever recorded on Lesvos and only the fifth confirmed record) in company with 1-2 **White Pelicans** flew slowly westwards over the Salt pans and gave close views over East River before gaining height and heading off west. At the salt pans a few Tawny Pipits, Short-toed Larks and Red-throated Pipits showed near the works entrance, plus a flock of 100+ White-winged Black Terns and Whiskered Terns over the salt workings.

Moving on to Napi Valley, three **Short-toed Eagles** were the first of the trip, along with several flocks of Red-footed Falcons, Long-legged Buzzard and Common Buzzard, Peregrine, Hobby, no less than six Masked Shrikes, Alpine Swift, Bee-eater and roughly the same mix of passerines seen on my first visit.

May 1

Three **Temminck's Stints** on the salt pans were the best birds of the morning there and two **Levant Sparrowhawks** soaring above a ridge at the start of the Napi Valley were a welcome bonus. Driving on past the valley and through the town of Mandamados, you eventually come to the north coast of the island. Here, near the beachside town of Skala Sikimmia, a large raft of shearwaters offshore contained many Yelkouan as well as a few Cory's. A few Shags were seen along the coast and migrating raptors at nearby Eftalou included **Honey Buzzard** and Eurasian Sparrowhawk.

Further west along the coast, just outside the town of Molivos, is the island's best-known site for **Rüppell's Warbler**. These birds can be tricky to find, especially if you arrive – as I did – in mid-afternoon. Thankfully, though, I was in luck. After parking the car in a lay-by just south of a large nightclub I climbed a hillside path and before long managed to locate a singing male some distance away. Fortunately singing males habitually sing from the top of small bushes, making them relatively easy to observe during the early part of the breeding season.

May 2

The sight of steady drizzle and an unwelcoming northerly wind persuaded me to take a late breakfast and forego my usual pilgrimage to the salt pans. I decided instead to head west again in the hope of finding migrants grounded by the bad weather. The western coast of Lesvos is best for migrant passerines in spring, according to Lesvos aficionados. En route I was treated to the spectacular sight of hundreds of Alpine Swifts lingering around Skalochori in the rain, along with large numbers of Common Swifts and hirundines. At the ambitiously named 'Grand Canyon', a

small gorge near Vatoussa, the main attraction were several **Crag Martins**, with a supporting cast of **Blue Rock Thrush**, Red-rumped Swallow and Hawfinch.

My ultimate destination, a site just north of the town of Sigri called Faneromeni ford, held good numbers of common migrants and among them a **Red-breasted Flycatcher**, several Golden Orioles and Red-backed Shrike and Lesser Grey Shrike. Alas I just missed a Roller, a species I seemed to keep missing and never did manage to catch up with. Nevertheless, I found a **Spotted Crake** on the river by the ford, though the Great Snipe seen there a few days before had moved on. Other birds in the area included Glossy Ibis, Montagu's Harrier, Black-headed Bunting, Great Reed Warbler and a singing **River Warbler**. **Eleonora's Falcon** is a specialty of the area and breeds on offshore islands. After much scanning out to sea I was rewarded with a distant individual over the water, followed by closer views of a dark morph bird which came in from the sea and flew inland.

May 3

Driving rain and a biting wind, hardly the weather I'd expected on an Aegean island in May, occasioned a late breakfast for the second day running. The inclement conditions persuaded me not to venture too far from Kalloni so I drove to the Inland Lake, where birding could be conducted from the comparative warmth of the car. The main feature here was a good cast of warblers: River, Great Reed, Cetti's, Reed and Olivaceous all making themselves heard or seen. Other species included two Night Herons, male and female Little Crakes, Masked Shrike and White Stork.

At Kalloni Salt Pans, good numbers of waders were noted and so too at my subsequent stop, Skala Polichnitos Salt Pans, further along the coast. Here, six Greater Flamingos were seen along with Stone-curlew, approximately 100 Little Stints and a few White-winged Black Terns.

Later that evening, after warming myself with a glass of Metaxa over dinner, an owl watch in Skala Kalloni square resulted in flight views of the resident **Barn Owl** near the church tower and a Little Owl perched atop a nearby building.

May 4

An early morning visit to Napi Valley to check for newly-arrived Olive-tree Warblers (the valley is one of the best sites on the island for this elusive species) was in vain, probably partly due to the unseasonably cold weather, though two Red-footed Falcons were seen along with the usual selection of birds. Heading up to the north coast, I had the good fortune to have three single observations of adult **Audouin's Gulls** along the coastal road west of Skala Sikimmia. This stretch of road is the probably the best place on the island for this otherwise scarce. Other birds along here included Shag and a party of about 15 Mediterranean Shearwaters lingering offshore.

On reaching Petra, the next town west of Molivos, I drove inland a short distance to Petra Dam, where a Finsch's Wheatear had been reported the previous day. Unfortunately no wheatear was evidence; in fact remarkably few passerines seemed to be in the area, with only the Yellow-legged Gulls on the reservoir and a flock of Alpine Swifts to liven up proceedings. I decided anyway to walk anti-clockwise around the reservoir, which proved an inspired move. On reaching a rocky outcrop on the northern side an impressive movement of raptors began with a distant small hawk migrating north over a nearby ridge that was probably a Levant Sparrowhawk. In the space of 45 minutes Peregrine, Honey Buzzard, several Lesser Kestrels, and eight Red-footed Falcons passed through, while Long-legged Buzzard, Common Buzzard and three Short-toed Eagles were also observed. Best of bunch was a second-year **Lesser Spotted Eagle** which passed within 20 metres at head height and was joined three more just south of the reservoir. Presumably the eagles, which were heading south, had just come in from Turkey.

Late in the day a visit to East River revealed that large numbers of birds were still coming in. I noted four Temminck's Stints, good numbers of Little Stints and Ruffs and masses of Wood Sandpipers along with 4 Black Storks, a White Stork and 48 Glossy Ibis alongside the usual

supporting cast of Little Egret, Squacco Heron and Night Heron. A **Scops Owl** was heard calling at dusk by the water tower in Papiana near Skala Kalloni town centre.

May 5

This, my last day on the island, began with a drive to Agiassos, whose sweet chestnut wood is one of the few reliable sites on the island for **Eastern Bonelli's Warbler**. I failed to locate this species but added **Short-toed Treecreeper** and Chiffchaff to the trip list, while a Middle-spotted Woodpecker gave good views. The next stop was the headland south of Mytilene airport, regarded as the most reliable site on Lesbos for two localised species, **Sardinian Warbler** and **Chukar**. Sure enough, several of the former were in evidence in roadside bushes and two Chukar were also seen in a roadside pull-in. A short distance further on, at a village called Agios Giorgios, a short seawatch produced some 15 Cory's and around 30 Yelkouan Shearwaters, with a female Levant Sparrowhawk in-off. A chance stop at the Star Beton cement plant near Agia gave excellent views of a **Pallid Swift** in company with two Common Swifts, with Cretzschmar's Bunting and Sardinian Warbler nearby.

En route back to Kalloni, a final, late-afternoon visit to Napi Valley produced the memorable sight of a flock of more than 50 Red-footed Falcons, with another smaller flock also seen. Three Honey Buzzards flew over as I made a final attempt to see **Olive-tree Warbler**, undoubtedly the most difficult species to connect with on the trip. An English birder informed me he had both heard and seen one bird at the head of the valley a few minutes before I arrived, so it was just a matter of waiting, or so I hoped. Eventually, after almost two hours, an individual of this notoriously skulking species began to sing near the road and I managed to obtain brief views as it sat well concealed in an oak tree.

All the same, it was a new bird for me and a fitting finale to a marvellous trip to a truly first-class birding destination.

Trip species list

- 1) **Little Grebe**, *Tachybaptus ruficollis*, 1 Kalloni Pool 26/5
- 2) **Cory's Shearwater**, *Calonectris diomedea*, <15 off Agios Giorgios 5/5
- 3) **Mediterranean Shearwater**, *Puffinus yelkouan*, <30 off Agios Giorgios 5/5
- 4) **Shag**, *Phalacrocorax aristotelis*, small numbers offshore from Makara ford 28/4
- 5) **White Pelican**, *Pelecanus onocrotalus*, 1, possibly 2, with Dalmatian Pelicans at East River 30/5
- 6) **Dalmatian Pelican**, *Pelecanus crispus*, 27 or 28 over East River 30/5
- 7) **Little Bittern**, *Ixobrychus minutus*, ones or twos on several occasions at Kalloni Pool and Kalloni Inland Lake
- 8) **Night Heron**, *Nycticorax nycticorax*, 1 imm. East River mouth 26/4, 1 imm. Kalloni Inland Lake 28/4, 1 ad. + 1 imm. Kalloni Inland Lake 3/5, 1 ad. East River 4/5
- 9) **Squacco Heron**, *Ardeola ralloides*, seen daily on Kalloni Pool and East River (max. 11 there on 3/5), 1 on roadside pool north of Apothikes 29/5, 1 imm. near Achladeri 30/5
- 10) **Little Egret**, *Egretta garzetta*, seen daily around East River and Kalloni Salt Pans with <40 on Upper East River 26/4
- 11) **Great White Egret**, *Egretta alba*, singles seen daily at Kalloni Salt Pans, 1 Kalloni Pool 28/4
- 12) **Grey Heron**, *Ardea cinerea*, ones or twos at Kalloni Salt Pans on several dates
- 13) **Purple Heron**, *Ardea purpurea*, 2 Kalloni Salt Pans 27/4
- 14) **Black Stork**, *Ciconia nigra*, 1 Lower East River 26/4, 4 Upper East River 4/5, 1 near 'Derbyshire' 5/5

- 15) **White Stork**, *Ciconia ciconia*, 1 Kalloni Pool throughout, 2 Lower East River 26/4, Kalloni Inland Lake 27/4, 1 Upper East River 4/5
- 16) **Glossy Ibis**, *Plegadis falcinellus*, seen daily Kalloni Pool (max. <25 28/4), 2 Faneromeni ford 2/5, 48 Upper East River 4/5
- 17) **Spoonbill**, *Platalea leucorodia*, 1 Kalloni Pool 28/4
- 18) **Greater Flamingo**, *Phoenicopterus ruber*, seen daily at Kalloni Salt Pans, where 100+ present
- 19) **Ruddy Shelduck**, *Tadorna ferruginea*, 2 Upper East River 26/4, 2 'Derbyshire' 28/4 and 30/4, 1 near Achladeri throughout
- 20) **Mallard**, *Anas platyrhynchos*, 1♂ Kalloni Pool 26/4
- 21) **Garganey**, *Anas querquedula*, 1♂ seen on Kalloni Pool on several dates
- 22) **Honey Buzzard**, *Pernis apivorus*, 1 Eftalou 1/5, 1 Petra Dam 4/5, 3 Napi Valley 10/5
- 23) **Short-toed Eagle**, *Circaetus gallicus*, frequent around Upper East River, Napi Valley and N. and W. of island
- 24) **Marsh Harrier**, *Circus aeruginosus*, 1 or 2 seen almost daily at Kalloni Salt Pans
- 25) **Montagu's Harrier**, *Circus pygargus*, seen on several dates at Kalloni Salt Pans (max. three individuals – 2 ringtails and 1 1st-summer ♂ 26/4), 1 ringtail and 1 1st-summer ♂ Sigri 2/5
- 26) **Eurasian Sparrowhawk**, *Accipiter nisus*, 1♀ carrying prey at Upper East River 26/4, 1 Eftalou 1/5
- 27) **Levant Sparrowhawk**, *Accipiter brevipes*, 1 prob. Upper East River 26/4, 2 Napi Valley 1/5, 1 prob. Petra Dam 4/5, 1 in-off sea Agios Giorgios 5/5
- 28) **Common Buzzard**, *Buteo buteo*, 2 between Messotopos and Eressos 29/4, 2-3 Napi Valley 30/4, 1 Napi Valley 1/5 and 4/5, 1 Eftalou 1/5, 1 Petra Dam 4/5
- 29) **Long-legged Buzzard**, *Buteo rufinus*, widespread and surprisingly common especially around Upper East River, Napi Valley and north of Eressos
- 30) **Lesser Spotted Eagle**, *Aquila pomarina*, 1 + 3 migrating south (commuting from Turkey) Petra Dam 4/5
- 31) **Lesser Kestrel**, *Falco naumanni*, widespread on passage, especially in hilly areas, in small numbers e.g. 2 Napi Valley 22/4 and 3 Makara ford 28/4
- 32) **Red-footed Falcon**, *Falco tinnunculus*, widespread migrant seen daily (biggest flocks >30 Napi Valley 27/4, >30 Napi Valley 30/4, 16 Kalloni Salt Pans 3/5, 53 Napi Valley 5/5)
- 33) **Hobby**, *Falco subbuteo*, 1 Upper East River 26/4, 1 Napi Valley 30/4
- 34) **Eleonora's Falcon**, *Falco eleonora*, 2 Sigri and 1 Vatoussa 2/5
- 35) **Peregrine Falcon**, *Falco peregrinus*, 1 Napi Valley 27/4, 1 East River bridge 28/4, 2 Molivos cliffs 3/5
- 36) **Chukar**, *Alectoris chukar*, 2 on headland south of Mytilene airport 5/5
- 37) **Spotted Crake**, *Porzana porzana*, 1 Faneromeni ford 2/5
- 38) **Little Crake**, *Porzana parva*, 1♂ Kalloni Inland Lake 27/4, 1♂+ 1♀ Makara ford 28/4, 1♂ + 1♀ Kalloni Inland Lake 3/5
- 39) **Moorhen**, *Gallinula chloropus*, seen at Kalloni Pool, Parakila Marsh, East River, Kalloni Inland Lake and Faneromeni ford
- 40) **Coot**, *Fulica atra*, seen at Kalloni Pool on several dates
- 41) **Black-winged Stilt**, *Himantopus himantopus*, easily seen at e.g. Kalloni Pool, Kalloni Salt Pans and Parakila Marsh
- 42) **Avocet**, *Recurvirostra avosetta*, large (possibly three-figure) numbers on Kalloni Salt Pans throughout
- 43) **Stone-curlew**, *Burhinus oedipnemus*, 1-2 East River Mouth 26/4, 1 Skala Polichnitos
- 44) **Collared Pratincole**, *Glareola pratincola*, approx. 30 Kalloni Salt Pans 26/4, 2 there on 27/4 and 15 on 30/4
- 45) **Little Ringed Plover**, *Charadrius dubius*, seen at 'Derbyshire' (max. 4 on 30/4), Makara ford, near Achladeri, Faneromeni ford and Kalloni Salt Pans
- 46) **Ringed Plover**, *Charadrius hiaticula*, 1 Skala Polichnitos Salt Pans 3/5

- 47) **Kentish Plover**, *Charadrius alexandrinus*, seen daily at Kalloni Salt Pans, with max. at least 12 on 3/5; also seen at Skala Polichnitos Salt Pans
- 48) **Grey Plover**, *Pluvialis squatarola*, 1 at Kalloni Salt Pans (date uncertain)
- 49) **Knot**, *Calidris canutus*, 1 at Kalloni Salt Pans 26/4
- 50) **Little Stint**, *Calidris minuta*, widespread in suitable wetland habitat, max. of approx. 100 at Kalloni Salt Pans 3/5
- 51) **Temminck's Stint**, *Calidris temminckii*, 2 near 'Derbyshire' 30/4, 3 Kalloni Salt Pans 1/5
- 52) **Dunlin**, *Calidris alpina*, 1 Kalloni Salt Pans 3/5
- 53) **Curlew Sandpiper**, *Calidris ferruginea*, 3 Kalloni Salt Pans 3/5
- 54) **Ruff**, *Philomachus pugnax*, frequent in reasonable numbers at East River and Kalloni Salt Pans, also seen at Skala Polichnitos Salt Pans
- 55) **Common Snipe**, *Gallinago gallinago*, 1 Faneromeni ford 2/5
- 56) **Black-tailed Godwit**, *Limosa limosa*, 6 at Kalloni Salt Pans 3/5
- 57) **Spotted Redshank**, *Tringa erythropus*, 4 at 'Derbyshire' 30/4, 1 Kalloni Salt Pans 3/5
- 58) **Greenshank**, *Tringa nebularia*, 1 or 2 Kalloni Salt Pans 3/5
- 59) **Green Sandpiper**, *Tringa ochropus*, Parakila Marsh 29/4
- 60) **Wood Sandpiper**, *Tringa glareola*, common in suitable habitat, especially on East River
- 61) **Common Sandpiper**, *Actitis hypoleucos*, 1 on roadside pool near Achladeri 30/4
- 62) **Slender-billed Gull**, *Larus genei*, 1 probable flying east past mouth of East River 26/4, 1 at 'Derbyshire' on 28/4 and several other dates
- 63) **Audouin's Gull**, *Larus audouinii*, 3 adults between Eftalou and Molivos 4/5
- 64) **Yellow-legged Gull**, *Larus cachinnans*, widespread and common
- 65) **Common Tern**, *Sterna hirundo*, seen at Kalloni Salt Pans, East River mouth and 'Derbyshire'
- 66) **Little Tern**, *Sterna albifrons*, small numbers at East River mouth, Kalloni Salt Pans, 'Derbyshire' and Skala Polichnitos Salt Pans
- 67) **Whiskered Tern**, *Chlidonias hybridus*, 18 East River Bridge and 15-20 Kalloni Salt Pans 28/4, with at least 30 (probably more) there on 30/4 and 27 on 3/5; also seen on East River and Kalloni Pool on several other dates
- 68) **White-winged Black Tern**, *Chlidonias leucopterus*, approx. 20 East River Bridge 28/4, 2 Skala Eressos 29/4, 40+ Kalloni Salt Pans 30/4, 6 at Skala Polichnitos Salt Pans and 34 at Kalloni Salt Pans 3/5; also seen at Kalloni Pool and Lower East River on several dates
- 69) **Rock Dove**, *Columba livia*, 3 at Sigri 2/5
- 70) **Woodpigeon**, *Columba palumbus*, 1 migrating north at Napi Valley 4/5
- 71) **Collared Dove**, *Streptopelia decaocto*, common and widespread
- 72) **Turtle Dove**, *Streptopelia turtur*, frequently heard and seen, especially around olive groves
- 73) **Cuckoo**, *Cuculus canorus*, heard on half a dozen occasions at different sites
- 74) **Barn Owl**, *Tyto alba*, one seen in flight at dusk Skala Kalloni Square 3/5
- 75) **Scops Owl**, *Otus scops*, 2 calling on Molivos road outside Kalloni 1/5, 1 heard Papiana 4/5
- 76) **Little Owl**, *Athene noctua*, 1 pair near East River mouth 26/4, 1 near Apothikes 28/4, 1 Kalloni Salt Pans 1/5
- 77) **Common Swift**, *Apus apus*, abundant
- 78) **Pallid Swift**, *Apus pallidus*, 1 with Common Swifts near Agia 5/5
- 79) **Alpine Swift**, *Apus melba*, frequent in hilly areas; large numbers (100+) near Skalohori 2/5
- 80) **European Bee-eater**, *Merops apiaster*, seen almost daily with max. of 21 Upper East River 26/4; also regular at Kalloni Salt Pans
- 81) **Hoopoe**, *Upupa epops*, frequently heard in areas with scattered trees, particularly mixed oaks and olives e.g. in Napi Valley; 3 observed between Skoutaros and Skalochori 4/5
- 82) **Middle Spotted Woodpecker**, *Dendrocopos medius*, widespread and fairly common, especially around olive groves

- 83) **Short-toed Lark**, *Calandrella brachydactyla*, 3 East River mouth 26/4, 4 Kalloni Salt Pans 27/4 and small numbers there on several other dates
- 84) **Crested Lark**, *Galerida cristata*, very common almost everywhere
- 85) **Woodlark**, *Lullula arborea*, 1 singing at Eressos-Andissa road junction 29/4, 2-3 singing on headland south of Mytilene airport 5/5
- 86) **Sand Martin**, *Riparia riparia*, noted daily in Kalloni Pool-East River-Salt Pans area
- 87) **Crag Martin**, *Ptyonoprogne rupestris*, 2 at 'Grand Canyon' on 2/5
- 88) **Red-rumped Swallow**, *Hirundo daurica*, small numbers regular at Kalloni Salt Pans and in hilly areas in western part of island e.g. 'Grand Canyon', Sigri, near Agra
- 89) **House Martin**, *Delichon urbica*, common, seen daily sometimes in large numbers
- 90) **Tawny Pipit**, *Anthus campestris*, 1 Kalloni Salt Pans 27/4 and 28/4, 3 there on 30/4, 1 by road between 'Derbyshire' and Achladeri 30/4
- 91) **Red-throated Pipit**, *Anthus cervinus*, <10 Kalloni Salt Pans 27/4, 1 fly-over Skala Eressos 29/4, 3 Kalloni Salt Pans 30/4
- 92) **Yellow Wagtail**, *Motacilla flava*, seen daily in small numbers at Kalloni Salt Pans and East River, and noted at several other coastal sites
- 93) **White Wagtail**, *Motacilla alba*, 1 seen from 27/4-4/5 at East River bridge with a second there at turn of month
- 94) **Wren**, *Troglodytes troglodytes*, 1 at Agiassos 5/5
- 95) **Robin**, *Erithacus rubecula*, 1 singing at Agiassos 5/5
- 96) **Common Nightingale**, *Luscinia megarhynchos*, common and widespread
- 97) **Whinchat**, *Saxicola rubetra*, 1 Sigri 2/5 was the only one I noted in my notebook (!) but it is presumably commoner
- 98) **Stonechat**, *Saxicola torquata*, 1 pair between Kalloni Salt Pans and 'Derbyshire' 28/4
- 99) **Isabelline Wheatear**, *Oenanthe isabellina*, 2 at Eressos-Andissa junction 29/4 and 1 on 2/5
- 100) **Northern Wheatear**, *Oenanthe oenanthe*, 1 'Derbyshire' 28/4 and 30/4
- 101) **Black-eared Wheatear**, *Oenanthe hispanica*, very common
- 102) **Blue Rock Thrush**, *Monticola solitarius*, frequent on rocky slopes, especially in western part of island e.g. seen at 'Grand Canyon', near 'Devil's Bridge' and in Napi Valley
- 103) **Blackbird**, *Turdus merula*, 1 in sweet chestnut wood near Agiassos 5/5
- 104) **Mistle Thrush**, *Turdus viscivorus*, 1 between Skamioudi and Vassilika 3/5
- 105) **Cetti's Warbler**, *Cettia cetti*, frequent in damper areas
- 106) **Fan-tailed Warbler**, *Cisticola juncidis*, 1 between Kalloni Salt Pans and 'Derbyshire' 28/4
- 107) **River Warbler**, *Locustella fluviatilis*, 1 heard near Faneromeni ford 2/5 and 1 heard Kalloni Inland Lake 3/5
- 108) **Marsh Warbler**, *Acrocephalus palustris*, 1 migrant in wooded valley between Eressos and Andissa 29/4
- 109) **Reed Warbler**, *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*, 1 Kalloni Inland Lake 3/5
- 110) **Great Reed Warbler**, *Acrocephalus arundinaceus*, singles near Faneromeni ford 2/5 and Kalloni Inland Lake 3/5
- 111) **Olivaceous Warbler**, *Hippolais pallida*, common in rank vegetation near watercourses
- 112) **Olive-tree Warbler**, *Hippolais olivetorum*, 1 heard and seen in Napi Valley 5/5
- 113) **Subalpine Warbler**, *Sylvia cantillans*, common and widespread in scrubby habitat
- 114) **Sardinian Warbler**, *Sylvia melanocephala*, several seen south of Mytilene airport 5/5
- 115) **Rüppell's Warbler**, *Sylvia rueppelli*, 1 at regular site near Molivos 1/5
- 116) **Orphean Warbler**, *Sylvia hortensis*, surprisingly common in olive-oak woodland and scrub with scattered trees e.g. Napi Valley, near 'Devil's Bridge', Eressos Plain
- 117) **Barred Warbler**, *Sylvia nisoria*, 1 by roadside 2km west of Agra and 2-3 Eressos Plain 29/4
- 118) **Lesser Whitethroat**, *Sylvia curruca*, 1 Eressos Plain 29/4 and 2 Ipsilou monastery 29/4
- 119) **Common Whitethroat**, *Sylvia communis*, 1 Sigri 2/5

- 120) **Blackcap**, *Sylvia atricapilla*, 1 between Eressos and Antissa and 20+ at Ipsilou monastery 29/4, 3 Napi Valley 30/4, 2 Sigri 2/5
- 121) **Wood Warbler**, *Phylloscopus sibilatrix*, several by road between Apothikes and Messotopos and 20+ Ipsilou monastery 29/4
- 122) **Chiffchaff**, *Phylloscopus collybita*, 2 heard Agiassos sweet chestnut wood 5/5
- 123) **Willow Warbler**, *Phylloscopus trochilus*, 2 at Ipsilou monastery 29/4
- 124) **Spotted Flycatcher**, *Muscicapa striata*, 10+ at Ipsilou monastery 29/4 and smaller numbers seen at several other sites on different dates
- 125) **Red-breasted Flycatcher**, *Ficedula parva*, 1 Faneromeni ford 2/5
- 126) **Collared Flycatcher**, *Ficedula albicollis*, 1 2km west of Agra, 2 near Messopotos, 1 Eressos Plain, 5 between Eressos and Andissa and 30+ at Ipsilou monastery 29/4, 1 Malemi hotel Skala Kalloni 2/5
- 127) **Pied Flycatcher**, *Ficedula hypoleuca*, 15+ at Ipsilou monastery 29/4 and small numbers seen at scattered locations on various dates
- 128) **Sombre Tit**, *Parus lugubris*, seen regularly in areas of open woodland, e.g. Napi Valley and Potamia Valley
- 129) **Blue Tit**, *Parus caeruleus*, common in wooded areas
- 130) **Great Tit**, *Parus major*, common
- 131) **Krüper's Nuthatch**, *Sitta krueperi*, 1 pair seen at known nest site Achladeri 28/4 and 1/5
- 132) **Eurasian Nuthatch**, *Sitta europea*, 1 in oak-olive woodland between Skoutaros and Skalochori 4/5
- 133) **Western Rock Nuthatch**, *Sitta neumayer*, encountered frequently around rocky hillsides e.g. Upper East River, Napi Valley, north of Eressos, 'Devil's Bridge'
- 134) **Short-toed Treecreeper**, *Certhia brachydactyla*, 2-3 seen and heard south of Agiassos 5/5
- 135) **Golden Oriole**, *Oriolus oriolus*, 3 Potamia Valley 27/4, 1 near Apothikes 28/4, 1 near Agra 29/4, 1 Napi Valley 1/5, 2 Sigri 2/5
- 136) **Red-backed Shrike**, *Lanius collurio*, 1♂ Achladeri 28/4, 1♂ and 1♀ Eressos Plain 29/4, 1♂ 'Derbyshire' 30/4, 1♀ Napi Valley 1/5, 1♀ Sigri 2/5
- 137) **Lesser Grey Shrike**, *Lanius minor*, 2 Kalloni Salt Pans 28/4, 1 Lower East River 30/4, 1 Sigri 2/5
- 138) **Woodchat Shrike**, *Lanius senator*, frequent in open areas; 4 just north of Achladeri on 28/4 was largest single-site total
- 139) **Masked Shrike**, *Lanius nubicus*, 2 at Achladeri 28/4 and thereafter seen daily. Napi Valley an especially good area
- 140) **Jay**, *Garrulus glandarius*, 1 Napi Valley 1/5
- 141) **Jackdaw**, *Corvus monedula*, 8 near Makara ford 28/4 and also seen around Sigri 2/5
- 142) **Hooded Crow**, *Corvus corone*, widespread
- 143) **Raven**, *Corvus corax*, 2 Napi Valley 1/5
- 144) **House Sparrow**, *Passer domesticus*, abundant
- 145) **Spanish Sparrow**, *Passer hispaniolensis*, widespread; large breeding colony at Kalloni II hotel
- 146) **Chaffinch**, *Fringilla coelebs*, common in woodland, especially pine
- 147) **Serin**, *Serinus serinus*, several Achladeri on several dates, 1 over 'Derbyshire' 30/4
- 148) **Greenfinch**, *Carduelis chloris*, relatively widespread
- 149) **Goldfinch**, *Carduelis carduelis*, common
- 150) **Linnet**, *Carduelis cannabina*, 2 East River mouth 26/4, 1 'Derbyshire' 30/4
- 151) **Hawfinch**, *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*, 2 at head of Napi Valley 27/4 and 1 there 30/4
- 152) **Cirl Bunting**, *Emberiza cirlus*, common and seen daily
- 153) **Cinereous Bunting**, *Emberiza cineracea*, 1 2km west of Agra 29/4; also heard at 'Devil's Bridge', Napi Valley, Ipsilou monastery and above Eressos
- 154) **Cretzschmar's Bunting**, *Emberiza caesia*, common on rocky hillsides

- 155) **Black-headed Bunting**, *Emberiza melanocephala*, common and males seen daily after 27/4
(first ♀ seen 3/5)
- 156) **Corn Bunting**, *Emberiza calandra*, abundant in suitable habitat

Missed targets

As everyone knows, you cannot see everything and this is especially so when birding alone.

Among other species that with a bit of luck I could have hoped to see, but which I missed, were:

Great Spotted Cuckoo (a long-staying pair at Kalloni Salt Pans disappeared the day I arrived)

Roller (which everyone else seemed to find quite easily!)

Rock Sparrow (others also had difficulty with this rather local species)

Bonelli's Eagle (local breeder mainly in the north)

Gull-billed Tern (a scarce but regular on passage)

Marsh Sandpiper (scarce but regular on passage)

Lanner (breeds in very small numbers on Lesvos but requires luck to see)

Eastern Bonelli's Warbler (Agiassos is a fairly reliable site)

Rufous Bush Robin (the first one or two appeared at the end of my stay)

Citrine Wagtail (scarce but regular migrant, first half of April is best)

Pallid Harrier (scarce but regular migrant, first half of April is best)

Spur-winged Plover (scarce migrant, Kalloni Salt Pans the best site)

In addition, I narrowly missed Calandra Lark and White-tailed Plover. Among other species seen during my stay, but which I missed, were Finsch's Wheatear, Isabelline Shrike, Great Snipe, Rock Thrush and Semi-collared Flycatcher.