

## **MACEDONIAN GOLD Birds and History Report**

### **Leaders:**

Stephanie Coghlan West Yorks  
Gareth Trewartha, Greece

### **DIARY**

The party from Gatwick were delayed and arrived at 8.00. We drove in the glow of a lovely sunset to the hotel and had dinner (Stuffed vine leaves, Salad and Moussaka) overlooking the gulf. We had a brief planning meeting and retired.

#### **Tuesday 30th August 2011**

#### **Hot and Sunny**

We enjoyed a breakfast spread and a lovely view over the Thermaikos Gulf in the cool of the morning and then packed the bus and drove into Thessaloniki to visit the Macedonian Gold Museum at the Archaeological Museum. This gave us an overview of the wealth of treasures uncovered as well as showing us life in earlier times. We had time for coffee under the shade of the Oriental Plane trees before driving around the old town to set the scene and then heading off north to Lake Doriani, where we found flocks of Sand and House Martins as well as shrikes and warblers on migration and a Syrian Woodpecker at the picnic site. We headed along to Ano Poroia in the heat of the afternoon and had a break before exploring the village and its traditional houses. We held the checklist in the garden and had dinner outside. Wonderful home cooking as usual, but very large portions. We set Gareth the challenge of negotiating smaller ones.

#### **Weds 31st August 2011**

#### **Sunny and high Cumulus. Hot**

We had breakfast out doors after seeing Swallows and House Martins gathered on the wires and enjoyed a leisurely breakfast of local delights before we heading off into the region to visit Kerkini Lake. We began at Mandraki harbour and enjoyed two hours of excellent birding with new discoveries such as a Water Rail family. A Squacco Heron feeding on a very large frog was the sighting of the morning. We did not know whether to champion the frog or the heron. We headed back to the hotel for a break and then went up to walk in the Plane forests of Mt Bellis, where we found good numbers of new butterflies and some flowers like the first cyclamen and Autumn Crocus. We lunched in the forest and heard Nuthatch and Jay as well as Green Woodpecker before we walked back down to the hotel for a siesta in the heat of the afternoon. We then went out again to explore the western embankment and found many Spoonbills as well as many Golden Orioles and the Bee eaters, which we had heard in the morning but only saw in the afternoon. We returned for drinks and held the checklist before we had dinner again in the garden and retired to dream of all the new birds we had seen. There was distant thunder in the night.

#### **Thursday Sept 1st 2011**

#### **Sunny, clear and Hot**

We awoke to clear blue skies and the yesterday's threatening clouds had rolled away. We had a delicious breakfast in the garden and then drove to Kerkini village to explore the west and southern shores. Several hundred swallows and martins cruised over the east of the village as we left and down at the lake we soon found some Bee eaters, many Little Egrets, Grey Heron and ducks. In a pool alongside the road we found a roost of Egrets, Grey Heron, Spoonbills and 4 Black winged Stilt. The Lake was dotted with Dalmatian Pelicans and roosts of Mallard and Coot but among them were a selection of ducks. We called at Lithotopos for coffee and a break and then explored over the dam to the embankments. Here there were long lines of Dalmatian Pelicans, Spoonbills and Little

Egrets and the whole southern end of the lake was full of bird so we were recording new species of waders, herons and terns until we came to the picnic site in welcome shade and the heat of the afternoon brought a very exciting days bird watching to a close. We drove back to Ano Poroia glimpsing yet more Red backed Shrikes and Bee-eaters before we had a welcome siesta.

Some of the party explored the village later and found a House Sparrow roost. We held the checklist and another ate delicious home cooked dinner.

**Friday September 2nd 2011.**

**Sunny and Hot**

We left after another breakfast in the garden and set off across the plains past fields of maize, cotton and tobacco back to Thessaloniki. We crossed the five rivers of the delta glimpsing a few Egrets before calling at the Park in Nea Agathoupolis, where we telescoped down the coast to a roost of Gulls, Herons, Spoonbills and White Pelicans. We moved on to the ancient city of Dion and amongst the ruins we found Syrian Woodpecker, Little Egret and Grey Heron in the Sanctuary of Isis founded by Alexander the Great and plenty of Dragonflies, butterflies and Marsh Frogs. While we enjoyed a cooling drink we also found European Sousliks grazing nearby. For lunch we drove up onto the slopes of Mt Olympus and saw flocks of Crag Martin, Alpine Swifts and heard Bee-eaters. A flowery lay-by was full of a great range of butterflies. We reluctantly dragged ourselves away and returned to the plain and drove up to Naoussa a famous wine region and on to Mt Vermion. We walked in the park and under the many plane trees and saw Grey Wagtail, Nuthatch and Continental Dipper. Dinner was taken outside with a meze spread of starters followed by local trout.

**Sat 3rd Sept 2011**

**Very Hot Sunny and clear**

We had an early morning walk by the river and saw Grey Wagtail, Syrian Woodpecker and heard Wren before we had breakfast on the terrace. We drove to Vergina as the temperature rapidly rose, so we were glad of the air-conditioned cool of the Museum dome to learn about the treasures of the Macedonian kings and particularly the Philip II treasures. We had a coffee break in a garden under an olive tree before heading for Mieza and Aristotle's School, where the young Alexander was tutored. We lunched in the shade of walnut trees and listened to cool water nearby. Then we headed north again to Edessa and explored the waterfalls and cool parks in the centre of town before stopping at Argas wetland, here we found Pochard, Kingfisher and Ferruginous duck and a Greek wedding party in all its finery, before we headed over to Lake Vegoritida and our final stops on the lake shore before heading to Hotel Bella Toumba. We had beers on the terrace while we did the checklist and we had a lovely but generous meal of local specialities before retiring under a newish moon.

**Sun 4th Sept**

**Sunny and clear. Hot**

We had an earlier breakfast than usual to try to avoid some of the continuing unusual heatwave and set off after some birdwatching in the garden and carpark, where Tree Sparrows were busy and the Syrian Woodpeckers looked silly perched on thin trunks of newly planted shade trees, to Florina and the Prespa Lakes. We stopped at the viewpoint overlooking Micri Prespa but we could only see a few Pelicans. However we found six Prespa Greylag Geese in a field, The most southerly breeding population and definitely small, darker and sleeker than Northern birds. We spent the morning exploring the causeway and the river Little Stint, Black necked Grebe, Short-toed Eagle and Whinchat were added to the list. We had a cool drink at the shore side. Here we saw Red rumped swallows as well as Pygmy Cormorant and Black-headed Gulls roosting on a platform. We had a brief stop to look at the island causeway before heading to the dried Bean shop for the famous Prespa beans. Then at Mikri Limni we had a delicious taverna lunch by the lake to try the local

specialities, including those beans, and fish from the lake. In late afternoon we drove back over the hills to Panteleimonas for a rest and some evening pottering before dinner.

### Mon Sept 5th

### Sunny and Hot

We set off after the usual large spread for breakfast to visit the Bear sanctuary at Nymphaon. We were met by Georgios who introduced us to the concepts behind the work of Arcturos and we saw bears ambling through the woods and returning from feeding or having a bathe. We discovered that new identification system throughout Greece, using giant scratching posts had found bears more widespread than previously thought. We walked back to the village passing lots of butterflies and had a coffee stop before calling briefly at the information centre in the old school. We went up into the beech woods above the village. Here in deep shade we found some new birds, flowers and butterflies while Gareth made our last picnic. Then it was time to set off down the mountain and across the plain past the Argas wetland and Edessa to Thessaloniki. We arrive just before 5pm in time to check in. Our final birds were Swifts feeding around the Terminal buildings.

### Birds seen 29th August – 5th September 2011

#### Bird Report

**Greylag Goose** *Anser anser anser* 6 in a field at Prespa were the smaller, darker southerly race on 4th Sept. Prespa is the southern most breeding site for Greylag.

**Gadwall** Recorded on 31st Aug and 1st Sept at Lake Kerkini.

**Mallard** 100+ at Kerkini meadows on 31st Aug and 1st Sept. and on 3rd at Argas wetland.

**Shoveler** 2-3 at Kerkini on 1st Sept.

**Garganey** 4+ on 31st Aug and 1st Sept at Kerkini.

**Teal** 10 seen on 31st Aug at Kerkini meadows lagoons.

**Pochard** 50+ 1st Sept at Kerkini Lake and 2+ on 3rd Sept at Lake Vegoritis.

**Ferruginous Duck** At least 3 seen at Argas wetland on 3rd.

**Tufted Duck** Several on 3rd at Lake Vegoritis.

**Pheasant** Heard at Ano Poroia

**Little Grebe** Lake Kerkini and all wetlands,

**Great Crested Grebe** Lake Kerkini and all lakes and wetlands we visited.

**Black-necked Grebe** 3 on Megalo Prespa on 4th Sept.

**Great Cormorant** Seen daily. Common at all wetlands

**Pygmy Cormorant** Seen daily. Common at all wetlands

**White Pelican** Seen at Nea Agathoupolis and at Megalo Prespa.

**Dalmatian Pelican** Seen at Lake Kerkini, and Prespa Lakes

**Night Heron** Seen at Lake Kerkini on 31st Aug and 1 Sept.

**Squacco Heron** Seen on 31st at Mandraki harbour and around the lake on 1st Sept.

**Little Egret** Common seen daily on good numbers.

**Great White Egret** Only one seen at Kerkini on 31st Aug.

**Grey Heron** Seen almost daily in small numbers.

**Black Stork** 31st August at 1 at Kerkini

**Glossy Ibis** Seen at Kerkini on 31st Aug and on the Thessaloniki delta.

**Spoonbill** Many seen at Kerkini on 31st Aug and 1st Sept.

**Short-toed Eagle** One seen well on 4th Sept at Prespa

**Sparrowhawk** 2 seen on 1st Sept

**Buzzard** Common seen daily.

**Kestrel** Common seen daily

**Water Rail** 3 at Mandraki Harbour possibly 2 adults and a juvenile.  
**Moorhen** Common at wetlands  
**Coot** Common at wetlands  
**Black-winged Stilt** 4 in roost at Lake Kerkini  
**Avocet** 50+ in flock on Lake Kerkini.  
**Little Stint** 1 at Megalo Prespa 4th Sept.  
**Dunlin** Small flock at Kerkini on 31st Aug.  
**Grey Plover** Seen on 2nd Sept at Agathoupolis beach.  
**Little Ringed Plover** Flock 50 seen at Lake Kerkini 1st Sept and 1+ at Megalo Prespa on 4th Sept.  
**Kentish Plover** 2+ at Megalo Prespa on 4th Sept.  
**Common Snipe** 3+ at Mandraki harbour on 31st Aug.  
**Curlew** 2 on beach at Nea Agathoupolis on 2nd Sept.  
**Redshank** Seen on 2nd Sept at Nea Agathoupolis beach.  
**Greenshank** One on Kerkini Lake on 1st Sept.  
**Green Sandpiper** Small numbers seen daily at Kerkini.  
**Wood Sandpiper** Small numbers seen daily at Kerkini and a single at Prespa.  
**Black-headed Gull** Recorded daily but no large flocks.  
**Yellow legged Gull** 500 plus at the tip below Litochoro.  
**Gull-billed Tern** 3+ at Kerkini on 31st Aug and 1st Sept.  
**Whiskered Tern** Single at Kerkini on 31st Aug.  
**Sandwich Tern** Flock on the shore at Mandraki harbour 31st Aug.  
**Common Tern** Small number daily at Kerkini, Aug 31st and 1st Sept.  
**Rock Dove/Feral Pigeon** Common recorded almost daily  
**Collared Dove** Common recorded daily  
**Little Owl** Heard at Ano Poroia.  
**Swift** Seen above Thessaloniki on 30th, one over Vergina and feeding around the Terminal at the airport.  
**Alpine Swift** 50+ on 2nd Sept on Mt Olympus.  
**Kingfisher** Singles on Argas wetland and at Prespa.  
**Bee-eater** Small flocks almost daily heard and seen.  
**Hoopoe** 4+ around Thessaloniki and at Lake Doirani on 30th Aug and around Kerkini on 1st Sept.  
**Green Woodpecker** Heard above Ano Poroia woods, at Dion and Hotel Vermion.  
**Syrian Woodpecker** Seen almost daily  
**Red-backed Shrike** 1-3 seen almost daily.  
**Lesser Grey Shrike** Seen as we travelled on 2nd Sept.  
**Woodchat Shrike** Seen at Lake Doirani on 30th Aug.  
**Golden Oriole** Seen at Ano Poroia on 31st and there were 100+ on the western embankment of Lake Kerkini. Small flocks there on 1st Sept. Also heard at Hotel Belle Toumpa.  
**Eurasian Jay** Common recorded daily.  
**Magpie** Common recorded daily.  
**Jackdaw** Seen on way from Thessaloniki and near Lake Kerkini.  
**Hooded Crow** Common.  
**Raven** Only recorded near Mikri Limni and near Nymphaeon.  
**Bluetit** Seen at Ano Porroia and at Nympheon.  
**Great Tit** Seen almost daily in small numbers.  
**Bearded Tit** Heard in the reeds on the shore of Megalo Prespa.  
**Sand Martin** 100 seen on 30th at Lake Doirani and seen over Kerkini, Argas and Prespa.  
**Crag Martin** Seen on 2nd on the slopes of Mt Olympus.  
**Barn Swallow** Seen daily in small flocks.  
**Red-rumped Swallow** Pair at 1st Sept at Ano Poroia and at Hotel Belle Toumpa.  
**Cetti's Warbler** Heard on 2nd Sept.

**Long tailed Tit** A flock seen at Dion on 2nd.

**House Martin** Common seen daily. 100+ in large flock at Lake Doirani.

**Crested Lark** 24 in a farmyard on 1st Sept and 3rd-5th La Bella Toumpa Hotel.

**Chiffchaff** Heard on 2nd and 5th in the hills.

**Lesser Whitethroat** Seen at Lake Doirani in mixed flock and on Prespa shore.

**Whitethroat** Seen at Lake Doirani in mixed flock and at Prespa and Bella Toumpa.

**Nuthatch** Heard above Ano Poroia and on Mt Olympus, Hotel Vermion and Aristotle's school, Meiza.

**Wren** Heard in the woods above Ano Poroia and at Hotel Vermion.

**Starling** Common in small flocks.

**Blackbird** Recorded daily

**Robin** Seen above Ano Poroia and Near Nymphaion

**Nightingale** Seen in a mixed flock at Lake Doirani on 30th

**Whinchat** Seen near Megalo Prespa.

**Northern Wheatear** Seen around Kerkini on 1st and around Prespa and Belle Toumpa on 4th and 5th.

**Spotted Flycatcher** Singles seen almost daily from Hotel Royal, Lake Doirani, Ano Poroia, Dion, Hotel Vermion, Vergina, Meiza, Hotel Bella Toumpa, and Nymphaeon.

**Pied Flycatcher** One seen on 3rd Sept.

**White throated Dipper** Glimpsed above Ano Poroia and seen at Hotel Vermion.

**House Sparrow** Common daily and a roost of 100+ in Ano Poroia Square.

**Tree Sparrow** A flock of 30 at Hotel Bella Toumpa on 4th Sept.

**Yellow Wagtail** Seen around Lake Kerkini, only small numbers.

**Grey Wagtail** Seen on stream 2nd/ 3rd Sept at Hotel Vermion and above Nymphaeon.

**White Wagtail** Recorded at Kerkini and at Prespa.

**Chaffinch** Recorded in the second half of the week from Mt Olympus onwards in woodland.

**Goldfinch** Common small flocks recorded daily.

**Yellowhammer** 3+ at Bella Toumpa on 5th Sept.

**Cirl Bunting** Seen in a mixed flock at Lake Doirani

**Corn Bunting** Heard at Kerkini and a flock seen as we returned to Thessaloniki on 2nd Sept.

#### MAMMALS:

**Bat sp:** A large unidentified bat flew around the dining room at Bella Toumpa on 3rd.

**Common Pipistrelle** 30th Aug and 1st Sept at Ano Porroia

**Souslik** 2+ at Dion on 2nd Sept

**Brown Bear** 6+ at Arcturos Bear Sanctuary, Nymphaion on 5th.

**Water Buffalo** Seen on 1st at Lake Kerkini

**Fallow Deer** A small captive flock seen at a farm, one with a frog sitting on its back!

**Badger** Dead on the road at Kerkini

**Red Squirrel** A black form (*melanistic*) seen at Dion on 2<sup>nd</sup>

#### REPTILES and AMPHIBIANS

**Stream Frog** Seen above Ano Poroia

**Marsh Frog** Recorded at Lake Kerkini and other wetlands.

**Hermann's Tortoise** 31st Aug, 4th Sept and 5th Sept

**Turkish Gecko** Heard in the garden at Ano Poroia and seen in the rooms.

**Common Wall Lizard** Common seen almost daily

#### BUTTERFLIES

**Small White** Common

**Orange Tip** 31st Aug.

**Bath White** 1st Sept  
**Clouded Yellow** 31st Aug, 2nd Sept, 4th Sept and 5th Sept.  
**Brimstone** 2nd Sept  
**Wood White** Seen on 31st Aug in the woods above Ano Porroia  
**Southern White Admiral** 31st Aug, above Ano Porroia 5th Sept at Nymphaeon.  
**Small Copper** 31st Aug.  
**Southern Comma** 30th Aug, 1st Sept and 5th Sept.  
**Painted Lady** 30th Aug and 2nd Sept  
**Red Admiral** 30th and 31st Aug  
**Silver washed Fritillary** 31st Aug and 5th Sept.  
**Queen of Spain Fritillary**  
**Cardinal** 31st Aug, 2nd Sept, 4th/5th Sept.  
**Great banded Grayling** 5th Sept.  
**Meadow Brown** Common  
**Southern Speckled Wood** Common  
**Small Copper** 4th Sept  
**Scarce Copper** 2nd Sept.  
**Lang's short-tailed Blue** 2nd Sept.  
**Macedonian Chalk-hill Blue** 2nd Sept  
**Common Blue** 31st Aug and 4th Sept.  
**Large Skipper** 2nd Sept  
**Dingy Skipper** 31st Aug.  
**Grizzled Skipper** 31st Aug.  
**Speckled Yellow** 31st Aug  
**Hummingbird Hawk Moth** 30th Aug and 1st Sept.

**INSECTS:**

**Common Red Darter** *Sympetrum striolatum* 31st Aug- 1st /2nd Sept, 4th Sept.  
**Beautiful Demoiselle** *Calopteryx virgo* 2nd Sept  
**Broad bodied Chaser** *Libellula depressa* 2nd Sept  
**4 Spot Chaser** *Libellula quadrimaculata* 2nd Sept  
**Southern Skimmer** *Orthetrum brunneum* 2nd Sept  
**Violet Carpenter Bee** 30th Aug, 1st and 3rd Sept.

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A selection of photographs from Arthur Floyd.



