

Lesvos

Thursday 5th May - Thursday 12th May 2011

Leaders:

Rebecca Nason
Philip Harris

Driver:

Philip Harris
Rebecca Nason (airport runs)

Introduction

Thank you all for making the 2011 Lesvos trip such a successful and enjoyable experience this year, Lesvos never fails to reward us with exciting birding highlights and this year was certainly the best to date! We thoroughly enjoyed your good company throughout the week and would happily have stayed on a lot longer if we had had the chance, we really did not want the trip to end! We hope to see you all again on trips with us in the not-too-distant future. Please do not hesitate to contact us again either via email or through the Travelling Naturalist Head Office.

The Travelling Naturalist Lesvos itinerary was undertaken with the utmost success this year and many additional 'excursions' were also added and proved very fruitful and enjoyable. Again, with a small group and two leaders with a small minibus, areas were visited which would be otherwise inaccessible in a larger vehicle, adding a huge bonus to the trip with numerous visits to the Inland Lake and access to the Upper East River and Napi Valley. Phil proved an exceptionally considerate driver throughout. The fact that everyone on the trip chose to come out on every single optional excursion gives testimony to the enthusiasm and the stamina of the group! There were also keen photographers in the group this year, so more time was spent where possible when good photographic opportunities presented themselves, particularly at the salt pans in that wonderful light!

The total bird species seen on the trip was a high 152. It is always difficult to predict when the 'best time' is to visit Lesvos in Spring, it certainly varies year to year by a week or two as to when the bigger 'numbers' start to arrive and migrate through the island and when several much sort-after 'breeding species' arrive back on territory. This year we were lucky to just catch the best active passerine migration of any trip to date, particularly evident in the visits to Ipsilou on the West coast where active warbler 'falls' had occurred. We were also lucky to catch the tail end of the main Tern passage through the Island and a good number of raptor species.

This year was the latest we have run the trips and we coincided with a large arrival of top Lesvos migrant birds, previous weeks having struggled apparently with both numbers and species with it being such a 'late' season. Indeed although we were lucky with the majority of migrants and 'wanted' species, including a few rarer species we had not recorded on previous Lesvos trips, we were surprised to see the absence of a couple of migratory breeding species, these being Olive-tree Warbler and Rufous Bushchat which were very late back on territory. They had not returned even by the end of our week on 12th May (there was the first report of a Rufous Bushchat on the evening of the 11th).

As well as being exceptionally lucky with the birds we caught up with during our week we also timed it perfectly for the plant life, with excellent finds of several Orchids and numerous species added to the plant list throughout the week, we had never seen Lesvos in such full bloom! The trip to Agiasos was just superb

with carpets of Orchids and Anemones amongst many other species.

The picnic lunches were a real success this year and were greatly enjoyed, as were the 2 Taverna lunches and 2 Taverna dinners which enabled us to sample a little local atmosphere and taste some culinary Lesvos delights. The culinary highlight however came with the finding of the black cherries at the breakfast buffet which became the focus of many of us during our pre-breakfast walks – the morning when we arrived at breakfast to an empty cherry bowl was not a good one! Until next time – thank you!

Best wishes,

Rebecca Nason and Phil Harris - May 2011.

Diary

Thursday 5th May

Mytilini Airport, Kalloni Saltpans (briefly), Kalloni Bay Hotel check-in, West River.

Weather: Warm and overcast, a few drops of rain later in the evening.

Phil and I met up with Ged and Margaret at Gatwick airport at 4.30 am before we had a much needed early breakfast in the departure lounge. After a pleasant flight and meal, we arrived at Mytiline airport on time and sorted out our hire vehicles before settling into a nearby Taverna for a refreshing drink. The rest of the group, John, Pam, Trevor and Angie arrived an hour later on the Manchester flight. Once we were all together and the car had been filled with luggage, we headed off in convoy through the harbour area and town of Mytiline and onward towards Kalloni, stopping for fuel close to the airport en-route. Before arrival and check in at our hotel we could not resist a quick welcome stop at the fabulous Kalloni Saltpans for our first 'Lesvos Taster!'. . . .and what a good start, we were soon observing a male and female **Montagu's Harrier** over the fields, **3 Red-footed Falcons** (2 males and a female) on overhead wires, a **Marsh Harrier**, **1 Common Kestrel**, **7 White-winged Black Tern**, **3 Black Tern**, **30+ Whiskered Tern**, several **Common Tern** and **Little Tern** and a surprise flyover of **4 Mediterranean Gulls!** Further down the saltpan road at the first big corner we came face to face with several waders amongst the **Black-winged Stilts** and **Avocets**, namely **8 Curlew Sandpiper**, **2 Ruff**, a couple of **Wood Sandpiper** and **1 Temminck's Stint**. Also amongst **40+ Little Egret** and **8 Great White Egrets**, was a lone and uncommon Lesvos **Cattle Egret!** An **Olivaceous Warbler** sang from a large Tamarisk (the Tamarisks were all in full smoky pink bloom) and over **30 Ruddy Shelduck** grazed nearby fields along with a couple of **Common Shelduck**.

We tore ourselves away and made our way to the Kalloni Bay hotel to check in and settle in to our rooms. The Kalloni Pool adjacent to the hotel was not teeming with life but it was not totally dry either thankfully. A scan of the vegetation and open water produced a **Moorhen** whilst **Common Nightingales** sang heartily in the hotel grounds and surrounding area where a few **Spanish Sparrow** were also noted. A quick visit to the West River produced over **40 Greater Flamingo**, something we'd never seen before only ever having had Flamingo's on the saltpans. Other birds observed included **1 Greenshank**, **12 Black-headed Gulls** and **2 Blue Tit**. We had our first hotel buffet meal together and over a beer, discussed the next day's agenda and general plans for the trip before retiring after a long day. Late that night we heard a very strange call out in the Kalloni Pool which we soon realised was the call of a female **Water Rail**, we'd never heard that call before.

Friday 6th May

East River Mouth, Derbyshire, Achladeri, Kalloni Saltpans, East & West River

Weather: A little windy, 100% cloud cover, 17oC max temp.

Our first early morning optional excursion first saw us gather overlooking Kalloni Pool. A total of **5 Squacco Heron** were seen half hidden by grasses along with 1 smart male **Little Bittern** and numerous **Barn Swallows** and **Sand Martins**. We boarded our new Hertz, spacious minibus and headed out to the East River. At the river mouth **4 Black-headed Gulls** could be seen sat on the mud banks along with a **Curlew**. Further down the track we had an amazing **6 Black-headed Bunting** and a male **Red-backed Shrike**. The reed-lined banks housed several **Reed, Sedge** and the larger and louder **Great Reed Warbler**. **Swifts** were evident along with numerous **Whinchat**, several **Spotted Flycatcher, Corn Bunting, 2 Marsh Harrier, 2 Mediterranean Gulls** and a **Common Kestrel**. There were clearly good numbers of migrants in and we all returned to the hotel for breakfast excited about what we had just seen and what might this May 2011 Lesvos week might hold for us!

After breakfast we headed out to a local site called 'Derbyshire', where we took a slow walk down a dirt track bordered by shallow water on the right and a scrubby hillside on the left. **2 Mallard** rose from the pool as we passed by and hundreds of **Southern Emerald Damselflies** were perched up in the poolside rushes along with a **1 Red Veined Darter**. Other birds noted included **5 Turtle Dove, 5 Glossy Ibis, 2 Little Bittern, 4 Ruff**, a **Purple Heron** and hundreds of **Barn Swallows**. The area was also a haven for a variety of plants including **Small Flowered Tongue Orchid – *serapias parviflora*, Salsify – *Tragopogon porrifolius*, French Lavender – *Lavandula stoechas*, Winged Sea Lavender – *Limonium sinuatum*, Pink Hawksbeard – *Crepis rubra*, Common Asphodel – *Aspodelus aestivus*, Greater Broomrape – *Orabanche rapum-genistae*, Cornflower – *centaurea cyanus* and numerous clumps of Cretan Cistus – *Cistus creticus* on the hillsides. **Small-flowered Catchfly – *Silene gallica*, Forked Catchfly- *Silene nicaeensis*, Corn Marigold – *Chrysanthemum segetum*, Tordyledum – *Tordylium apulum*, Star Clover – *Trifolium stellatum*** were also observed during this first proper walk. Near the small-holding at the end of the first section of track, we observed **8+ European Bee-eater**, a **Spotted Flycatcher, 10+ Whinchat** and a **Blackcap**.**

Next we headed to Achladeri which is famous for it's Kruper's Nuthatches. Although there was not an active nest evident, we soon located **2 Kruper's Nuthatch** in the Pines, one of which came extremely close at one point allowing excellent views to all. It was a delight to find the **Violet Birds Nest Orchids** this year as they were still out in flower and allowed for good photographic opportunities (so often these gorgeous big orchids are nearly over when we arrive!). We also spotted our first **Short-toed Treecreeper** of the trip as well as a single **Wood Warbler**, a **Pied Flycatcher** and several **Spotted Flycatcher**. We had our Greek-style picnic lunch under the Pines, observing at least **5 Masked Shrikes** in the vicinity and a brief **Hoopoe**.

We returned to the Kalloni Salt pans after lunch and scanned the channels for waders and photographic opportunities in the afternoon light. We had **30 Curlew Sandpipers** fairly close in, **1 Common Sandpiper** and numerous **Little Stints, 2 Black Tern, 1 Common Kestrel, 2 Montagu's Harrier, 1 Marsh Harrier** and 2 cracking **Short-toed Lark**. After popping back to the hotel we again went out on an optional trip to the West River. There was not too much present here but **15 Greater Flamingo, 1 Greenshank, 2 Mediterranean Gulls** and a **Kentish Plover** were amongst the birds noted here.

Saturday 7th May

Inland Lake, Kalloni Soccer Pitch Site, Ipsilou Monastery, Faneromeni

Weather: Cloudless, clear skies, sunny, warm, 19oC max temperature, breezy in afternoon.

Our pre-breakfast itinerary took us to the wonderful Inland Lake this morning, always a good place to watch in the early mornings. We were soon getting good scope views of **4 Little Bittern** sat up in reeds on the adjacent lakeside and a juvenile **Night Heron** and adult **Purple Heron** were roosting on the far right bank. **2 Little Grebe** were noted out on the lake and **Cetti's Warblers, Sedge Warbler, Reed Warbler** and **Great Reed Warbler** were also present. It became clear that a couple of **Great Reed Warblers** were occasionally showing very well within feet of the track as they climbed the reeds to sing. We had not seen **Great Reed Warbler** showing so well and so close on previous years visits. The vocal **Cetti's Warbler** was also uncharacteristically exposed as it sang loudly from a nearby Tamarisk. **2 Alpine Swits** were seen very high

up by some of the group and a **Jay** put in an appearance. The **Jay** here is the attractively black-crowned race *Garrulus glandularius atricapillus*. Of particular note however was our first sighting of a female **Little Crane** and not long after a **Dice Snake** which swam past!

After our black cherry, Greek yoghurt, scrambled egg, toast etc breakfast feast, we headed off to Kalloni Soccer Pitch, a small area next to the road which is a good site for Scop's Owl. We were not to be disappointed and were soon all staring up at a partially obscured but wonderful little **Scops' Owl** against a Eucalyptus tree. We then headed off towards Ipsilou, stopping along the way for a couple of brief sorties from the vehicle. **2 Common Buzzard** and a male **Blue Rock Thrush** were noted as we photographed an abundance of **Giant Fennel – *Ferula communis***. Other plants discovered and identified on our stops towards Ipsilou included **Weld/Dyer's Rocket – *Reseda luteola***, **Scarlet Pimpernel – *Anagallis arvensis*** (blue flower variety), **Large Venus Looking Glass – *Legousia speculum-veneris*** and **Toadflax – *Linaria arvensis***. We also saw several tussocks of *Astragalus balearicus* along the rocky roadside vegetation at Ipsilou.

Ipsilou was rather windy upon arrival. We parked at the bottom and started to walk gently up the more sheltered roadside towards the monastery. Immediately we were confronted with our first **Isabelline Wheatear** along with a few **Black-eared Wheatear**. A little further along the track saw a cracking **Rock Nuthatch** nest with 2 adults close by. A **Cinereous Bunting** could be heard but it was a few minutes before it was picked up singing on top of a large boulder – a great bird to get and the first of several seen. Soon afterwards a subtly plumaged **Rock Sparrow** was scoped by all as it perched up on nearby rocks. However it was not until we moved further up the track that the situation really hit us – there had obviously been a big Warbler fall along the West coast and the tree's around us were dripping with warblers! We counted **40+ Wood Warbler, 50+ Spotted Flycatcher** (the 2 main species evident) **4+ Pied Flycatcher, 1 female Collared Flycatcher, 3 Lesser Whitethroat, 2 Common Whitethroat, 6 Blackcap, 2 Garden Warbler, 2 Icterine Warbler** and a **Chiffchaff**, all flitting about in the tree canopy. Other species noted included a **Common Cuckoo, 2 male Golden Oriole, a Peregrine** and **Long-legged Buzzard** – quite a birding hotspot!! Also a **Cream-spot Tiger** moth on roadside rocks added a splash of colour to an eventful morning! Phil collected the vehicle from the bottom and picked us up half way up the hill, informing us of a **Chukar** he had seen in front of the minibus on his way to collect us. We dined al-fresco with our picnic lunch at Ipsilou monastery, overlooking Turkey and a wonderful panoramic backdrop. It was here we had a superb fast flying **Levant Sparrowhawk** (spotted by toilet Trevor!) and heard several **Woodlark**. The wonderful **Sombre Tit (2)** and several **Starred Agama** were also noted.

Our next port of call was the Faneromeni area. A highlight was surely the **Little Owl** which stayed perched up on a fence post and then rocks right next to the vehicle en-route as well as more **Woodchat Shrikes, Spotted Flycatchers** and **50+ European Bee-eaters**. On arrival at Faneromeni we had excellent views of a female **Collared Flycatcher, 2 Little Bittern, 2 Purple Heron, 7 Lesser Kestrel**, good numbers of **Whinchat** and over **60 Yellow Wagtails**. At the road end we scoped our first **Yelkouan Shearwaters**, very distantly and a **Peregrine** flushed from a nearby Tamarisk. We shared some chocolate before heading off, stopping only a short distance away for an illusive but fantastic **Spur-winged Plover**, followed swiftly by a dark phase **Eleanora's Falcon**. Further along the road a **Hobby** was seen feasting on prey in the middle of a ploughed field. It was a long but very satisfying day as we made our way back to Kalloni (a Fox was seen on the way back too).

Sunday 8th May

Inland Lake, Raptor Viewpoint, Road to Petra Bridge stop, Panoramic Viewpoint, Skala Sikaminias, Kalloni Salt pans.

Weather: Warm, clear skies, 20oC max temperature, v light winds.

Our optional pre-breakfast excursion on this sunny and clear morning was to the Inland Lake again. Before long we had all got good scope views of a very showy female **Little Crane** which quite uncharacteristically sat out preening in the open for some time on the opposite lakeside. There were also **2 Little Bittern** showing in the sunlit reedbed fringes as well as the usual warblers, **Reed, Sedge and Great Reed Warbler**. The photographers in the group enjoyed staking out several **Great Reed Warblers** which again, allowed very close approach as they climbed up to very exposed, tall reed stems to sing. Passing vehicles and the appearance of other photographers did hamper the otherwise great opportunity somewhat, however I think we all came away with pretty good shots of these large Acros! A **Black Stork** flew past the minibus and along the West River on our return for a much needed breakfast and black cherry fix.

Our first stop post-breakfast was the Raptor watchpoint in the hills. John and I looked for Orchids briefly along the roadside and saw several Red and Black Striped Shieldbugs (*Graphosoma italicum*) ? in the grass. Distant raptors were soon noted, namely **3 Short-toed Eagle** and **3 Common Buzzard**. Other species present in the hillside scrub included **Subalpine Warbler, Orphean Warbler, Cirl Bunting, Rock Nuthatch, Cretzchmar's Bunting** and a **Black-eared Wheatear**. A **Common Cuckoo** whizzed past us and **3 Starred Agama** were also noted here!

On the Petra road we stopped briefly but apart from a **Subalpine Warbler** and a good few **Orange Tip** Butterfly, all was quiet with no Middle-spotted Woodpeckers evident. We continued to the Panoramic Viewpoint. After a time looking out at the coastal scrub habitat and a showy **Subalpine Warbler** near the road, we walked up a steep track adjacent to the coastal road and found our first **Ruppell's Warbler** of the trip! At least one was singing as we walked up the hill, but it was at the top around a bend that one male really did show himself off to us. With the heat of the day kicking in, we then headed off after our success, to a delightful harbour-side Taverna in the picturesque village of Sikaminias where we relaxed in the shade and tucked into a much needed Greek lunch of salads, local fish and fried calamari.

We stopped along the coast briefly on our way back to the Kalloni Salt pans and had **Great Tit, Spur-thighed Tortoise** and several **Jay** sightings. The salt pans were visited in the late afternoon and produced **2 Grey Plover, 30+ Whiskered Tern, 1 Black Stork, 2 White Stork, 1 Ringed Plover** and a **Marsh Harrier**. As we left the salt pans, a short drive along the road to the right, after a tip-off, saw a beautiful **Spur-winged Plover** in full view! What an end to a fine day!

Monday 9th May

Kalloni Salt pans, Napi Valley, Upper East River, Kalloni Salt pans.

Weather: Sunny, hot, clear skies, 20oC, slight breeze.

Before breakfast on a calm and sunny morning, we headed for the Kalloni Salt pans, via the East River route (bumpy! **1 Black Stork**) which were teeming with Waders, **Greater Flamingo's** and Marsh Terns. We counted **30+ Whiskered Tern, 2 White-winged Black Tern, 80+ Little Stint, 60+ Curlew Sandpiper** and **20+ Ruff**, many in wonderful light! A highlight was seeing our only **Spoonbill** of the trip come flying over the pans. Other birds noted included a **White Stork, Grey Plover, Kentish Plover** and **Common Sandpiper**.

The day was spent in the famous Napi Valley which never fails to produce fine natural history encounters. It runs for 14km into the middle of the Island and it a favoured spot for both breeding and migratory species. We stopped near a cattle grid after seeing our first **Woodlark** and a couple of **Woodchat Shrikes** and **Masked Shrikes** and gently walked up and along the dirt track which had rather a lot more pot holes than in previous years! We birded and botanised contentedly for sometime. Of particular note were the **5 Common Cuckoo** seen, being the attractive 'rufous' form! Good views were also obtained of **Hoopoe** in flight with at least 2 seen on several occasions as we attempted to identify more plants. We added **Pale Flax – *Linum bienne***, **Cotton Ball Clover – *Trifolium pilulare***, **Woolly Trefoil – *Trifolium tomentosum*** and **Star of Bethlehem – *Ornithogalum umbellatum***, **Clary – *Salvia sclarea*** and **Viper's Bugloss – *Echium vulgare***

to the ever increasing trip list! Some of the group saw a **Persian Squirrel**, whilst other birds seen included **2 Sombre Tit, 4 European Bee-eater, an Orphean Warbler, 1 Middle-spotted Woodpecker, 2 Golden Oriole, 2 Cirl Bunting, 1 Lesser Kestrel** and a **White Stork**. We enjoyed our picnic lunch back at the cattle grid and had several raptors over, both **Common** and **Long-legged Buzzard, Marsh Harrier** and **Short-toed Eagle**. There was no sign that there were any Olive-tree Warblers back in yet (none had been reported in Lesvos) though the calls of Masked Shrikes got us interested a couple of times until we located the birds – they sound so similar!

After our picnic lunch we headed briefly to the West side of the Napi Valley where we had **Middle-spotted Woodpecker** at the nest and great views of a **Short-toed Treecreeper**. We also potted about photographing stunning red **Peacock Anemones – *Anemone pavonina*, Barbary Nut – *Gyncindiris sisyrinchium* (small purple/blue Iris) and Cornflowers – *Centaurea cyanus***. An ornithological highlight was a striking **Ortolan Bunting** which was seen by all from the minibus, singing on top of a bush as we made our way back to the road and back towards the hotel.

Our optional evening excursion was to the Upper East River before dinner which everyone joined us for. Here, the large **Starred Agama's** were showing well as they soaked up the last of the days heat on roadside rocks. Also noted were a **Sparrowhawk, Short-toed Eagle, Orphean Warbler, 2 Woodchat Shrikes** and **3 black-headed Bunting**.

After freshening ourselves up, we had dinner at a local Taverna in Skala Kalloni, enjoyed by all!

Tuesday 10th May

Inland Lake, Vatousa Gorge, Ipsilou Monastery, Sigri – Eresos (Meladia Valley).

Weather: Sunny, partially cloudy, steady wind.

Our early optional morning excursion was again to the Inland Lake. Here we encountered **2 Little Bittern, 1 Night Heron** and a lot of hirundines perched up in the reedbed to the back of the lake. There was an opportunity again for the photographers amongst the group to concentrate on **Great Reed Warbler** photography whilst the others tried to stake out more active Crakes but to no avail. However the **Great Reed Warblers** showed well, as did **Olivaceous Warbler**, the usual **Reed** and **Sedge Warblers** and a flock of **13 European Bee-eater** which flew overhead.

It was a slightly less breezy day which was to benefit our next stop at Vatousa gorge. We were soon following several **Crag Martin** and **Red-rumped Swallows** feeding on the wing over the gorge and scoping a stunning male **Blue Rock Thrush** on the rocky outcrop adjacent to us. A **Long-legged Buzzard** was spotted perched up on distant rocks, a **Raven** flew past very vocally and a **Black Stork** was followed as it cruised down into the gorge. A close male **Black-eared Wheatear** and male **Cirl Bunting** were noted along with **2 Subalpine Warblers** in the thicket below us and across the road.

Ipsilou was our next port of call for a much wanted second visit. We parked at the top at the monastery overlooking Turkey and a superb panoramic landscape. We gently walked down the sheltered side of the road after lunch and were soon immersed again in a large 'fall' of warblers – surely one of the main highlights of the whole trip! Here we just did not have a chance to put our binoculars down as the trees were dripping with **Wood Warblers** and **Spotted Flycatchers** and several **Icterine Warblers** sang loudly from the leaf-covered trees. We noted **4 Pied Flycatcher, 1 Barred Warbler**, an extra delight for Becca and Phil as it was a Lesvos first as was a **Red-breasted flycatcher** (female) found later in the walk. Also observed were **3 Lesser Whitethroat, Garden Warbler, Common Whitethroat, 5 Blackcap**, and **3 Sombre Tit**. The area is well known for its **Cinereous Buntings** and we were not to be disappointed again with 4 individuals seen and even photographed along with a **Cretzchmar's Bunting!** Phil collected the vehicle and picked us up in it, just managing to see our passing RBFly (thankfully - or we'd have had a grumpy man all week!). **2 Short-toed Eagles** were also noted during our stop at Ipsilou, before we departed for Meladia valley mid-afternoon.

On our way along the coast we had several **Jackdaw, Lesser Kestrels** hanging over the breezy hillsides

and a good few **Spotted Flycatcher** and **Whinchat** just before we stopped at Sigri for lunch. We had a super lunch all the more authentic as we were served by a larger than life, 'no messing' Greek waiter, clearly the owner of the Taverna too. Later, we were full and on the move with more **Lesser Kestrels**, a **Peregrine** with prey, **Woodchat Shrike** and **Red-backed Shrike**. At one stop before the ford, we encountered one of the largest and most colourful uncommon birds through Lesvos, a stonking **European Roller** which was enjoyed through the scope by all. Phil also caught a gorgeous **Ladybird Spider** which was briefly photographed as it made a dash for cover! Several **Whinchat** and **Stonechat** were noted, along with **Linnets**, **Black-headed Buntings**, **Spotted Flycatcher**, **Short-toed Eagle** and a smart **Pallid Harrier**! We then stopped near a roadside chapel where we had **2 Golden Oriole**, a **Marsh Harrier** and **Wood Warbler**. A **Goldfinch** nest hung in branches over the road and several **Meadow Brown** butterflies, a lone **Amanda's Blue** and a new species of Broomrape, **Branched Broomrape** – *Orobanche ramosa* were noted. We had a short walk up the track near the ford and a brief coffee stop before heading away along the valley and back towards Kalloni late afternoon. However, birding highlights were still to come as Phil spotted a male **Collared Flycatcher** from the road next to a small chapel near Eresos. Before long we were all enjoying excellent views of this stunning bird in an Olive grove. Phew, what a day!

Wednesday 11th May

Kalloni Salt pans, Sheepfields, Agiasos, Kalloni Salt pans.

Weather: Sunny, partially cloudy, a little breezy, 17°C.

Our pre-breakfast excursion to the Sheepfields at the Kalloni Salt pans produced **2** stunning **Stone Curlew** near the perimeter fence and we enjoyed close scope views. On the drying mud areas we observed **3 Kentish Plover** (including a nest with eggs!) and a **White Wagtail**. **7 Little Stints** and a **Little Ringed Plover** flew in and landed at a small pool and **2** smart **Black-headed Wagtails** called from nearby rush tussocks. After a good scan, we found a bird we were hoping for in the vicinity, **3 Red-throated Pipit**, which although mobile, proved scopeable. A female **Montagu's Harrier** hunted over back of the pans, towards the bay. We stopped briefly at the Salt pans before heading back for breakfast and noted the **2 Grey Plover** still present, **2 Black Storks** and a **Great White Egret**. A **Marsh Harrier** was seen back at Kalloni Bay Hotel.

After breakfast we ventured up into very different territory, through the narrow streets of Agiasos and into the famous Sweet Chestnut woods, losing the lower Pine belt behind us. Several **Common** and **Long-legged Buzzard** were seen from the vehicle on the way up. A little way on from the Sanatorium, we parked up and soon lost ourselves in a wonderful botanical wonderland! This year, without doubt, was the best to date botanically as we had hit the main flowering time of many species which on previous visits, had not been out yet! Along the roadside we had our first taste of Orchids with whitish **Provence Orchid** – *Orchis provincialis* and purple-coloured **Green Winged Orchids** – *Orchis morio* in full bloom as well as a pair of very vocal male **Serins** and a **Wren**. **Narrow-leaved Helleborines** were just starting to come into flower. We had a couple of little sorties along woodland tracks, but the roadside verges and a couple of small botanically rich, overgrown fields kept our attention for most of the morning and well into lunchtime. Highlights included **Toothed Orchids** - *Orchis tridentata*, **Pyramidal Orchids** – *Anacamptis pyramidalis*, **Yellow Bee Orchid** - *Ophrys lutea* and a subspecies of **Woodcock Orchid** – possibly *Ophrys scolopax heldreichii* or similar.

The fields were full of **Crown and Peacock Anemones** - *Anemone coronaria* & *Anemone parvonina* and **Pontic Fritillaries** – *Fritillaria pontica* which were enthusiastically photographed. Attractive **Orange Wild Tulips** – *Tulipa orphanidea* and **Spotted Rockrose** – *Tuberaria guttata* were also noted. We decided to have our picnic lunch along the roadside where a white fountain structure also provided welcome seating for all. Our lovely lunch in dappled sunlight was only interrupted by the sound of **2 male Kruper's Nuthatch** which showed well. A post lunch highlight was the discovery, under a sheltered and secluded spot, of **2 Peony specimens**, thought to be possibly *Paeonia coriacea* (but with 3 follicles not the usual 2). These stunning plants had enormous bright pink flower heads and were really at their best, a real treat! Other birds of note included **3 Hoopoe** and **1 Short-toed Treecreeper**.

By mid-afternoon we were botanically satisfied and headed back down towards sea-level, taking a few photographs of the beautiful town of Agiasos, nestled below Mount Olympus on our way down. Our last port of call was Kalloni Salt pans again (after seeing an adult Black-crowned Night Heron at the bridge on the way!). Here we ventured into the 'just opened' seasonal Café on the beach for refreshment and a little relaxation after our time in the hills. We later wine and dined at the very pleasant local Taverna in Skala Kalloni as it was our last night!

Thursday 12th May

Inland Lake, Kalloni Salt pans, Mytilini Airport, Home.

Weather: Warm, clear skies, slight breeze, 16oC.

The day of our departure we enjoyed an early morning excursion to the Inland Lake, one of our favourite spots, where although the Crakes did not put in an appearance, we did have a nice **Hobby**, 2 very high **Alpine Swift**, and a **Marsh Harrier**, as well as the usual **Sedge Warblers**, **Reed & Great Reed Warblers**. Back at the hotel we tucked into our last breakfast together how we will miss those black cherries and Greek yoghurt! After paying our various bills and saying our farewells to the reception staff for another year, we loaded up the minibus and car and headed off to Kalloni Salt pans. Near the back of the pans, we noted **2 White Stork**, **2 Black Stork** and best of all, **2 Collared Pratincoles**, the first of the trip! It was a treat to end the trip with a visit to the pans for one last time, with new birds appearing, it was a place we had to drag ourselves away from.

We arrived at Mytilini airport & after handing back the vehicles and checking in for our Manchester & Gatwick flights, we made for the little Taverna a short walk away from the airport for pre-flight refreshments and some sea-watching from the window! We were soon tracking good numbers of **Yelkouan Shearwaters** and **Cory's Shearwaters** through our bins which were distant but closer than other years due to the prevailing winds. A fine end to a fantastic trip – what a shame it had to end! Thank you Ged and Margaret, John, Pam, Angie and Trevor.

With thanks, fond memories and best wishes to you all,

Rebecca Nason and Phil Harris - May 2011

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P.S

Please do see the Lesvos 2011 profile on the Travelling Naturalist – Facebook pages! This has been set up to see, share and add images taken by the group on our trip (as well as other trips). We thought you might like to add some of your Lesvos 2011 images to this site, any contributions welcome. . . .

Rebecca Nason, May 2011

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SPECIES LIST

BIRDS:

Chukar Partridge: Phil saw one in front of the minibus on the 7th at Ipsilou.

Yelkouan Shearwater: 100's seen from Faneromeni on the 7th. A few seen from Sigri on the 10th and good numbers seen from the airport Taverna on the 12th.

Cory's Shearwater: Noted in good numbers along with Yelkouan's on the 12th from the airport Taverna.

Little Grebe: 1 & 2 noted on 5 days with a pair at the Inland Lake. Noted with young on 11th.

Grey Heron: 2 noted on 5th, 6th and 11th.

Purple Heron: Individuals noted on 6th, 8th and 9th. 3 seen on 7th with 1 at Inland Lake and 2 at Faneromeni.

Black-crowned Night Heron: 1 on 7th & 10th at Inland Lake. An adult was noted on the 11th at the bridge near Achladeri.

Great White Egret: Seen every day bar the 10th when we were Inland. 8 seen at the salt pans on 5th, 4 on 6th and 11th. All at the salt pans area.

Little Egret: Noted every day with highest counts of 50+ on the 5th and 6th at the salt pans.

Cattle Egret: 1 on arrival at the salt pans on the 5th.

Squacco Heron: Noted every day bar the 10th when we went West and Inland. Highest counts were 20 on the 6th and 12 on the 7th.

Little Bittern: Noted daily in small number apart from the 9th. High of 5 on the 7th.

Eurasian Spoonbill: 1 flew over the salt pans on the 9th.

Greater Flamingo: Noted daily at the Salt pans with over 300 present. Also seen in smaller numbers at the West River near the hotel.

Black Stork: Noted on 6 days in small numbers, max of 4 seen on the 9th. More Black than White seen during trip.

White Stork: Noted on 4 days, 2 maximum daily count.

White Pelican: 1 juvenile noted in flight whilst driving past the salt pans on the 11th.

Glossy Ibis: Individuals seen on the 5th and 11th. 7 seen on the 6th at Derbyshire.

Ruddy Shelduck: Noted daily apart from 10th. A grazing flock were noted on the salt pans on every visit containing between 20 and 40 birds.

Common Shelduck: 2 noted on 5th, 6th and 8th at the salt pans. 15 on the 11th flew in.

Mallard: 1 noted on 5th. 2 on the 6th at Derbyshire.

Garganey: A male on the 6th.

European Shag: 1 noted on the 9th.

Short-toed Eagle: Noted in small numbers each day (1-4).

Western Marsh Harrier: Noted in small numbers each day (1 or 2).

Eurasian Sparrowhawk: 2 on the 6th, 1 on the 8th and 9th.

Levant Sparrowhawk: 1 flew over our heads whilst having lunch at Ipsilou. On 7th.

Common Buzzard: Small numbers noted on 4th days.

Long-legged Buzzard: More Common than C. Buzzard, with 8+ on the 10th when at Ipsilou/Sigri/Eressos road. 6+ on 9th, 4 on 6th and 7th, 2 on the 11th.

Pallid Harrier: 1 female on the 10th in Meladia Valley.

Montagu's Harrier: 1-2 seen on 5 days, mainly at the Salt pans.

Lesser Kestrel: 6 noted on the 7th at Ipsilou/ Faneromeni 2 on the 9th in the Napi and 8+ on the 10th on the West coast.

Common Kestrel: Individuals noted most days.

Red-footed Falcon: 2 males and a female noted on wires at the salt pans on arrival on the 5th and were still present on the 6th. 1 seen on our last visit to the pans on the 12th.

Eleonora's Falcon: 1 dark phase bird seen on the 7th near Faneromeni

Hobby: 1 on the 7th consuming prey in a ploughed field near Faneromeni

Peregrine: 2 on the 7th, 1 on the 10th.

Little Crane: 1 female at the Inland Lake on the 7th and 8th.

Water Rail: 1 female heard calling at the Kalloni Pool on the night on the 5th and 6th.

Common Moorhen: Noted in v small numbers each day.

Black-winged Stilt: Noted in good numbers at the Salt pans on all visits.

Pied Avocet: Noted in good numbers at the Salt pans on all visits.

European Stone Curlew: Heard at the Salt pans on the 5th and 6th. 2 seen on the 9th and 11th both at the Salt pans. Good views on the 11th.

Spur-winged Plover: 1 on the 7th near Faneromeni, 1 near the Salt pans on the 8th and a close individual at the salt pans on the 11th.

Grey Plover: 2 at the Salt pans on the 8th, 1 on the 9th and 4 on the 11th.

Ringed Plover: 1 at the salt pans on the 8th.

Little Ringed Plover: Small number noted on 3 days with highest count of 3 on the 7th on our Faneromeni day.

Kentish Plover: 2 on the 6th at the salt pans and the 11th, in sheepfields with nest. 1 on the 9th.

Common Greenshank: 2 on the 6th, 1 on the 9th.

Eurasian Curlew: 1 on the 6th at th East River mouth.

Wood Sandpiper: Noted most days at the Salt pans in small numbers.

Common Sandpiper: Individuals noted on 4 days, 2 noted on the 11th.

Green Sandpiper: 1 on the 10th.

Little Stint: Seen in moderate numbers at the Salt pans daily, max of 80+ on the 9th.

Temminck's Stint: Just 2 noted at the Salt pas on our first visit on the 5th.

Curlew Sandpiper: Good numbers at the salt pans. Noted on 6 days, 100+ on the 6th.

Dunlin: 10+ at the Salt pans on the 9th.

Ruff: 2 on the 5th, 5 on the 6th, 50+ on 9th, 100+ on 11th all at the Salt pans.

Collared Pratincole: 2 on our last visit to the salt pans on the 12th.

Yellow-legged Gull: Seen daily in good numbers.

Black-headed Gull: 12 on the 5th, 2 on the 6th, 20+ on the 7th an 1 on the 11th.

Mediterranean Gull: 4 on the 5th at the Salt pans, 7 on the 6th including 2 at the East River Mouth.

Common Tern: Noted in small numbers daily.

Gull-billed Tern: 1 on the 6th at the Salt pans.

Whiskered Tern: Noted in good numbers at the Salt pans, 40-60+ on 5 days.

White-winged Black Tern: 7 on the 5th, 2 on the 9th an 7 on the 11th at the Salt pans.

Black Tern: 3 at the Salt pans on the 5th and 6th.

Little Tern: Noted in small numbers on every visit to the Salt pans.

Rock Dove/Feral Pigeon: Noted each day.

European Turtle Dove: Noted in small numbers each day with a max on 5 on the 6th.

Eurasian Collared Dove: Noted each day.

Common Cuckoo: Individuals seen on 3 days, max of 6 on the 9th (rufous) in the Napi.

Eurasian Scop's Owl: 1 seen near Kalloni on the 7th.

Little Owl: 1 superb individual next to the minibus on the 7th on our way to Faneromeni.

Alpine Swift: 2 on the 7th, 2 on the 12th.

Common Swift: Noted every day.

European Roller: 1 superb bird in the Meladia Valley on the 10th.

European Bee-eater: Seen in good numbers most days, high count of 50+ on the 7th and 60+ on the 10th.

Hoopoe: Seen in v small numbers on 3 days, at least 2 in the Napi valley showed well on 9th. 3 on the 11th in Agiasos.

Middle-spotted Woodpecker: 2 on the 9th, 1 at nest hole in Napi.

Greater short-toed Lark: 2 on the 6th at the Salt pans.

Crested Lark: Noted each day. Numerous.

Woodlark: Heard at Ipsilou on the 7th, 1 seen on the 9th in the Napi.

European Sand Martin: Noted each day.

Eurasian Crag Martin: 4 at Vatousa on the 10th.

Barn Swallow: Noted each day.

Red-rumped Swallow: Noted every day in small numbers.

Common House Martin: Noted each day.

Western Yellow Wagtail: 60+ on the 7th near Faneromeni.

White Wagtail: 1 on the 6th and 2 on the 11th.

Black-headed Wagtail: Small numbers on the 5th and 6th at the Salt pans and 3 on the 11th (Sheepfields).

Red-throated Pipit: 3 at the sheepfields on the morning of the 11th.

Tawny Pipit: 1 on the 5th at the salt pans.

Red-backed Shrike: Individual males seen on the 6th and 7th, 3 males on the 10th on our Meladia Valley excursion.

Masked Shrike: Seen on 4 days with a max count of 10+ on the 9th in the Napi. (The 6 at Achladeri on the 6th showed well).

Woodchat Shrike: 3 on the 7th, 8+ on the 9th in the Napi, 2 on the 10th.

(Winter) Wren: Heard on 2 days but only seen on the 11th in Agiasos.

Blue Rock Thrush: 1 on the 7th on way to Ipsilou. 3 on the 10th at Vatousa, 1 on the 11th.

Common Blackbird: Noted every day in small numbers.

Mistle Thrush: 1 on the 7th towards Faneromeni.

Common Nightingale: Noted in small numbers on most days.

Whinchat: Noted in very good numbers most days.

Common Stonechat: Noted on 4 days in small numbers.

Northern Wheatear: 2 on the 10th at Ipsilou.

Black-eared Wheatear: Good numbers on 4 days, max 30+ on 7th Ipsilou- Faneromeni.

Isabelline Wheatear: 1 on the 7th at Ipsilou.

Cetti's Warbler: Heard and brief views most days, 1 at Inland Lake very showy.

Sedge Warbler: Noted on 4 days at the Inland Lake in small numbers.

Eurasian Reed Warbler: Noted on 4 days at the Inland Lake in small numbers.

Great Reed Warbler: Seen very well at the Inland Lake on 4 days. Max count 3 at any visit.

Eastern Olivaceous Warbler: Noted every day in small numbers.

Willow Warbler: Heard on the 7th at Ipsilou, 2 seen at Ipsilou on the 10th.

Common Chiffchaff: 1 at Ipsilou on 7th.

Wood Warbler: 1 on the 6th at Achladeri, 50+ Ipsilou on 7th, 25+ on the 10th at Ipsilou.

Lesser Whitethroat: 2 on 7th and at least 2 on 10th at Ipsilou.

Western Orphean warbler: 2 on 9th in Napi.

Barred Warbler: 1 on the 10th at Ipsilou.

Ruppell's Warbler: 1 male on the 8th near the Panoramic Viewpoint.

Subalpine Warbler: Seen in small numbers most days, with a max on 8th of 6 birds.

Eurasian Blackcap: 1 on the 6th. 6 on the 7th and 10th at Ipsilou.

Garden Warbler: 2 on the 7th, 1 on the 10th at Ipsilou.

Common Whitethroat: 2 on the 7th, 1 on the 10th at Ipsilou.

Icterine Warbler: 3 on the 7th, 30+ on the 10th at Ipsilou.

Spotted Flycatcher: Very good numbers seen most days, 100's on 7th at Ipsilou.

Collared Flycatcher: 2 on the 7th and a gorgeous male on the 10th in Meladia Valley.

Pied Flycatcher: A male on the 6th. 4 on the 7th and 5 on the 10th – Ipsilou.

Red-breasted Flycatcher: 1 female at Ipsilou on the 10th.

Short-toed Treecreeper: 1 on the 6th at Achladeri and 1 on the 8th.

Sombre Tit: A pair on the 7th, 2 on the 9th and 10th.

Great Tit: Noted daily.

Blue Tit: Noted daily.

Western Rock Nuthatch: Individuals seen on the 7th, 8th and 9th. A nest found at Ipsilou and Upper East River

Kruper's Nuthatch: 2 on the 6th at Alchladeri and 2 on the 11th at Agiasos.

Eurasian Jay: Noted in small numbers most days.

Hooded Crow: Noted every day.

Jackdaw: 6 on the 7th on way to Ipsilou. 10 on the 10th. – Sigri.

Common Raven: Small numbers on 3 days.

Golden Oriole: 4 on 7th, 4+ on 9th in Napi, 3+ on 10th Sigri-Eresos.

Corn Bunting: Noted every day.

Cinereous Bunting: 10 at Ipsilou on the 7th, 2 on the 10th.

Cretzschmar's Bunting: 5 on 7th, 1 on 10th, Ipsilou route.

Ortolan Bunting: 1 on the 9th Napi Valley.

Cirl Bunting: Small numbers noted most days.

Black-headed Bunting: Good numbers every day, max of 30+ on 7th.

Common Chaffinch: Noted in small numbers every day.

European Greenfinch: A few on 5th and 6th, 1 on 9th.

European Goldfinch: Noted in small numbers every day.

Common Linnet: Noted on 3 days, max 8 on 10th.

European Serin: 2 on 11th in Agiasos.

House Sparrow: Noted every day.

Spanish Sparrow: Noted every day.

Rock Sparrow: 1 on 7th and 1 on 10th at Ipsilou.

MAMMALS:

Persian Squirrel: 1 on the 7th and 10th.

Red Fox: 1 on the 7th and 10th.

AMPHIBIANS:

Marsh Frog: Noted & heard most days.

REPTILES:

Starred Agama: Noted on 4 days, max 10+ on 9th in Upper East River area.

Turkish Gecko: 1 at hotel on the 11th.

Balkan Terrapin: Noted on 4 days, mainly at the Inland Lake.

Balkan Wall Lizard: 1 on the 7th.

Balkan Green Lizard: 1 juvenile on the 9th.

Spur-thighed Tortoise: 1 on the 8th

Dice Snake: 2 on the 7th.

Balkan Whip Snake: Phil held one on the 8th !

BUTTERFLIES & MOTHS:

Eastern Festoon: 1 briefly on the 9th and 11th.

Orange Tip: Seen every day.

Clouded Yellow: Seen in small numbers most days.

Small Copper: 4 on the 7th, a few on the 8th.

Large White: A few noted on the 8th.

Small White: A couple noted on the 8th.

Eastern Dappled White: 1 noted on the 9th.

Red Admiral: Noted on 2 days.

Amanda's Blue: 1 noted on the 10th.

Painted Lady: A few seen on 2 days.

Small Heath: Observed only on 1 day on the 8th.

Large Wall Brown: 1 noted on 1 day.

Meadow Brown: Seen only on the 10th.

Cream-spot Tiger: 1 noted on the 7th at Ipsilou.

DRAGONFLIES AND DAMSELFLIES:

Southern Emerald Damselfly: Noted on the 6th at Derbyshire in big numbers.

Red-veined Darter: 1 at Derbyshire on the 6th.

OTHER INSECTS:

Egyptian Grasshopper: Noted on the 8th.

Violet Carpenter Bee: Noted on the 8th.

Ladder-backed Bush Cricket: Noted on several days.

Roman Snail: Noted on several days.

Ladybird Spider: 1 seen in Meladia Valley on the 10th.

PLANTS:

Many of the plants seen are listed in the separate Plant List sent out to the Group members before the trip from past Lesvos tours. Below are a few of the plants identified on this tour. The following is to be continued – any records most welcome!! Please email!

Malva sylvestris	Common Mallow
Cistus creticus	Cretan Cistus
Cistus salvifolius	Sage-leaved Cistus
Tamarisk spp.	Tamarisk
Lysimachia atropurpurea	Purple Loosestrife
Echium plantagineum	Purple Viper's Bugloss
Verbascum sinuatum	Greek Mullein
Phragmites communis	Common Reed
Anemone coronaria	Crown Anemone
Anemone pavonina	Peacock Anemone
Umbilicus rupestris	Navelwort
Daucus carota	Wild Carrot
Tordylium apulum	Tordylium
Laburnum anagyroides	Laburnum
Spartium junceum	Spanish Broom
Glaucium flavum	Yellow Horned Poppy
Papaver rhoeas	Common Poppy
Ficus carica	Fig
Castanea sativa	Sweet Chestnut
Quercus ilex	Holm Oak
Pinus brutia	Calabrian Pine
Pinus pinea	Stone Pine
Urtica atrovirens	Stinging Nettle

Briza maxima	Large Quaking Grass
Platanus orientalis	Oriental Plane
Anthemis arvensis	Corn Camomile
Anchusa officinalis	Alkanet
Prasium majus	Prasium
Sarcopoterium spinosum	Spiny Burnet
Crataegus monogyna	Hawthorn
Euphorbia dendroides	Tree Spurge
Euphorbia helioscopia	Sun Spurge
Euphorbia characias	Large Mediterranean Spurge
Olea europaea	Olive
Campanula rapunculus	Rampion Bellflower
Centaurea cyanus	Cornflower
Lavandula angustifolia	Common Lavender
Lavandula stoechas	French Lavender
Limonium sinuatum	Winged Sea Lavender
Medicago sp	Small Medick?
Medicago orbicularis	Large Disk Medick
Tragopogon porrifolius	Salsify
Crepis rubra	Pink Hawksbeard
Ornithogalum nutans	Large Star of Bethlehem
Gladiolus orientalis	Oriental Iris
Gynandrisis sisyriuchium	Barbary Nut
Dracunculus vulgaris	Common Dragon Arum
Arum conophalloides	Eastern Arum
Aspodelus aestivus	Common Asphodel
Orabanche rapum-genistae	Greater Broomrape
Orobanche ramosa	Branched Broomrape
Limodorum abortivum	Violet Bird's Nest Orchid
Serapias parviflora	Small-flowered Tongue Orchid
Orchis provincialis	Provence Orchid
Orchis morio	Green Winged Orchid
Cephalanthera longifolia	Narrow-leaved Helleborine
Orchis tridentata	Toothed Orchid
Anacamptis pyramidalis	Pyramidal Orchid
Ophrys lutea	Yellow Bee Orchid
Ophrys scolopax heldreichii	Woodcock Orchid ssp (or similar)
Silene gallica	Small-flowered Catchfly
Silene nicaeensis	Forked Catchfly
Chrysanthemum segetum	Corn Marigold
Trifolium stellatum	Star Clover
Reseda luteola	Weld/Dyer's Rocket
Anagallis arvensis	Scarlet Pimpernel (red and blue)
Legousia speculum-veneris	Large Venus Looking Glass
Linaria arvensis	Toadflax
Tulipa orphanidea	Orange Wild Tulip
Astragalus balearicus	
Linium bienne	Pale Flax
Trifolium pilulare	Cotton Ball Clover
Trifolium tomentosum	Woolly Trefoil
Ornithogalum umbellatum	Star of Bethlehem
Salvia sclarea	Clary
Echium vulgare	Viper's Bugloss
Tuberaria guttata	Spotted Rockrose
Fritillaria pontica	Pontic Fritillaries
Paeonia coriacea	A Peony sp (to be confirmed)