

North East Greece, 5th-19th May 2004, Ian Kinley

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Introduction

As our last few birding trips had all been to Spain, we felt it was time for a change and after discussing several options we plumped for North East Greece. It proved a good choice with highlights including spectacular views of an adult White-tailed Eagle at point blank range, displaying Eastern Imperial Eagles, stunning close views of Spur-winged Plovers, a flock of 20 Broad-billed Sandpipers and a Red-necked Phalarope. However, much of the enjoyment came from seeing lots of really good birds at close range to the almost constant accompaniment of singing Nightingales, Olivaceous Warblers and Black-headed Buntings, with background vocals provided at many sites by Mediterranean Gulls passing overhead.

We were surprised how little information was available on the birds of the area. The only guide we managed to unearth was Gosney's *Finding Birds in Greece* and there were just a handful of trip reports available on the internet (the one we found most useful was that by Ray Thorneycroft of a trip in May 2003 <http://www.birdtours.co.uk/tripreports/greece/mainland5/NE-may03.htm> Nevertheless, we felt confident we were visiting a bird-rich area with lots of potential; we were certainly not disappointed.

It is something of a mystery why so few British birders visit this area; the birding is excellent, flights to Thessalonika are readily available, car hire is reasonable, the main sites are all within easy driving distance and accommodation is plentiful and quite cheap as is food and drink. Though few spoke English, the people were invariably friendly and helpful. Even the police, the military and the Border Police with whom we came into contact on several occasions (as birders tend to do in these sort of areas) were unfailingly courteous and friendly: expect to be investigated several times - we were. Though we had read several comments on the difficulty in navigating around the roads we had no real problems (apart from countless circuits of Dadia on one occasion when trying to find the right way out of the village). Road signs were in both Cyrillic and English, thus corresponding with the maps.

In retrospect, we might have been better going a week or two earlier. Apart from flocks of Bee Eaters passing overhead, we saw no evidence of passerine migration, wader numbers declined during our trip and the few flocks of marsh terns we came across were dominated by Black Terns (the English birder we met at Lake Ismarida told us that the ratio of ten Black Terns to one White-winged Black that we found would have been the exact opposite a week earlier - as British birders we know which we'd prefer!). That said, the weather is obviously a major influence and things may be entirely different another year.

Weather

Heavy rain of biblical proportions on our first day caused flooding on the roads around Thessalonika. Thereafter, the weather was ideal for birding most of the time with cool early mornings and evenings and warm sunny days, albeit rather breezy on occasions, that were never too hot. A few showers on several days at Kerkini and severe thunderstorms there on 17th did little to hamper our birding though they did produce fresh snow on the nearby mountaintops.

Travel

We flew from Manchester to Thessalonika with Thomsons/Britannia (£160 per person return). At Thessalonika airport, we picked up a hired Ford Focus from Hertz (£320 booked over the internet with HolidayAutos www.holidayautos.co.uk and very smooth and efficient though the compound in a muddy, pot-holed car-park without even an office was more suited to some little back-street outfit than a big multi-national like Hertz). Within a couple of hours of leaving the airport, we witnessed a fatal accident involving a large truck and an unfortunate car. This acted as a sobering reminder of the perils of driving abroad and certainly made us more cautious about birding whilst driving at speed!

Accommodation

We pre-booked our first night at Asprovalta (probably unnecessarily but it's always reassuring to know you've got a bed for the night especially if your flight is delayed) and also our one night at Dadia. Both were done over the internet. Otherwise, we had no problems just turning up and finding somewhere. There seemed to be ample choice of accommodation in most areas even though the holiday season had obviously not really got underway. Saturday nights may be the only problem time; the Hotel Erodios could only manage one twin-bedded room for us on the Saturday we were there (though they kindly found accommodation for the other two in a nearby pension for one night) but there was a wedding on and that may have been a one-off.

We stayed at the following: -

Pansion Maria at Asprovalta mariap4@otenet.gr One night at 40 euros per night per twin-bedded room. Comfortable and reasonable value. No restaurant but there was plenty nearby.

Small establishment on the seafront at Fanari with a "Rooms to Let" sign Three nights at 60 euros per night for an apartment with two twin-bedded rooms. A bit small and basic but comfortable enough and very cheap. Plenty of restaurants nearby.

Hotel Park at Alexandroupolis 456 Dimokratias str. Tel. 05510 28607 Fax 05510 31002 Four nights in total at 40 euros per night for a twin-bedded room. Very comfortable and good value. Again though there was a bar there was no restaurant in the hotel but plenty nearby. A Scop's Owl calling from the park opposite the hotel was clearly audible from our balcony each night as was the traffic though we did soon get used to this.

Dadia Ecotourist Lodge <http://ecoclub.com/dadia/lodge.html> One night at 50 euros per night for a room with four beds and including a very good buffet style breakfast. Slightly cramped with four beds in what was really only a double room but excellent value. Bar/restaurant doesn't serve hot meals but there are several excellent restaurants in the nearby village. A Scop's Owl could be heard from our room at night.

Hotel Erodios at Lithotopos (Lake Kerkini) <http://hotel-erodios.gr> e-mail erodios@ser.forthnet.gr Five nights at 60 euros per night for a twin-bedded room (reduced from the original 65 euros quoted after a bit of tooth-sucking and grimacing on our part!) including an excellent breakfast (sufficient to also provide a decent picnic lunch when extra rations were smuggled surreptitiously out of the

dining room!). More expensive than the places we normally choose but it came highly recommended in an ideal location with superb views over the southern end of Lake Kerkini. Sadly it failed to live up to expectations with a general air of half-hearted apathy and sloppiness e.g. lukewarm water at best in the showers. It should have been brilliant but we thought it over-priced and not good value for money (even though we saw pelicans, Pygmy Cormorants, Night Herons etc from our balcony and could hear Scop's Owl at night!).

Itinerary

5th May Thessalonika Airport to Asprovalta. A few hours' birding at Lake Koronia, Lake Volvi and Asprovalta. Overnight at Asprovalta.

6th May Asprovalta to Fanari. Birding at Strymon Delta, road across Mount Pangeo, Nestos Delta and Porto Lagos. Overnight at Fanari

7th May Birding at Porto Lagos and Lake Ismarida. Overnight at Fanari

8th May Birding at Lake Ismarida. Overnight at Fanari.

9th May Birding at Porto Lagos and Evros Delta. Overnight at Alexandroupolis.

10th May Birding at Evros Delta, Potamos RR Station and Avas Gorge. Overnight at Alexandroupolis.

11th May Birding at Evros Delta, Loutros Hill and Loutros Valley. Overnight at Alexandroupolis.

12th May Birding at Evros Delta, en route to Dadia and Dadia Forest. Overnight at Dadia.

13th May Birding at Dadia Forest and between Dadia and Loutros. Overnight at Alexandroupolis.

14th May Some birding on journey from Alexandroupolis to Lake Kerkini and then at Lake Kerkini itself. Overnight at Lithotopos

15th May Birding at Lake Kerkini, woodland etc in Promachonas/Procom centre area and hills near Fea Petra. Overnight at Lithotopos.

16th May Birding at Lake Kerkini and in hills towards Bulgarian Border. Overnight at Lithotopos.

17th May Birding at Lake Kerkini. Overnight at Lithotopos.

18th May Birding at Lake Kerkini and woodland etc in Promachonas/Procom centre area. Overnight at Lithotopos.

19th May Journey from Lithotopos to Thessalonika airport. No birding done.

Main Sites Visited in chronological order

Lake Koronia and Lake Volvi

These two large lakes lie alongside the main road between Thessalonika and Kavala. We spent just a few hours on the first day of our trip birding from the main road - much of the time sheltering from the heavy rain - but the species we saw (including Pygmy Cormorant, Dalmatian Pelican, Great White Egret, Purple Heron, Squacco Heron, Long-legged Buzzard, Red-footed Falcon, Gull-billed, Black and White-winged Black Tern) suggested further investigation of the area would be worthwhile.

Strymon Delta

This is another site where we spent just a few hours but seemed worthy of more time. In our brief visit, we managed Little Gull, Whiskered Tern and Alpine Swift.

Nestos Delta:

An unattractive area that was nevertheless well worth visiting (especially if you haven't got a permit to enter the Military Zone of the Evros Delta which was the only other site where we found Spur-winged Plovers). The Spur-winged Plovers were seen pretty much where Gosney indicates on his map. Despite the insalubrious surroundings of dung heaps, marble dumps and a gypsy encampment the birds themselves were superb, giving views down to a few metres if you stay in the car.



Spur-winged Plovers on the Nestos Delta (Ronnie Irving)

We failed to get among the wader pools etc mentioned by Gosney but did also see Squacco Heron, Gull-billed Tern and lots of Med Gulls here.

PortoLagos:

This extensive area of lagoons, saltpans and shoreline is still pretty much as outlined in Gosney. Though large areas of water appeared pretty birdless at times, we still managed to find, amongst other things, Pygmy Cormorant, Eleanora's Falcon, Broad-billed Sandpiper, Red-necked Phalarope, Slender-billed Gull, Gull-billed, Black and Whiskered Tern, and Lesser Grey Shrike.

LakeIsmarida (formerly known as LakeMitrikou)

An English birder currently living in Greece whom we met here said this would be the single best site that we would visit on our trip. He may well have been right! Despite the difficulties reported in several previous trip reports and the rather vague nature of the directions in Gosney, this really is an easy site to find. The villages are all named and as shown on the map and the lake itself is signposted from Pagouri. The main approach track referred to by Gosney is now a tarmac road. Views from this road do tend to be a bit distant however. The "track to the

left" referred to by Gosney and shown on his map gets you right into the heart of the area but it is rather rutted in places. If it proves impassable, as is likely after heavy rain, then continue on the tarmac road round the east side of the lake to access the same track from the seaward end. We were unable to drive the track from this end because of encroaching vegetation but even if the track itself is still undriveable, the raised banking offers superb views of an excellent area.

This really is a superb site and birds we enjoyed here included Black-throated Diver, Pygmy Cormorant, Dalmatian Pelican, Little Bittern, Squacco Heron, Purple Heron, Great White Egret, Spoonbill, Glossy Ibis, Ferruginous Duck, Red-crested Pochard, White-tailed Eagle, Collared Pratincole, Gull-billed, Whiskered, Black and White-winged Black Tern and Roller.

Potamos Railway Station and Avas Gorge

One of the few disappointments of the trip was our failure to get Eagle Owl in the Avas Gorge despite hanging on till well after dark. Some compensation was provided by Black Stork, Egyptian Vulture, Short-toed Eagle, Long-legged Buzzard, Scop's Owl, Blue Rock Thrush, Black-eared Wheatear, Subalpine Warbler and Orphean Warbler.

Evros Delta:

Much of this vast area is now very cultivated and criss-crossed with drainage channels and dirt roads. Though it must be a shadow of its former glory, it nevertheless remains a tremendous birding area with some extensive lagoons and areas of marsh still in place. Gosney's map gives a good idea of the site though some of the signposts he mentions no longer exist. For a small fee, Richard Brooks email@richard-brooks.co.uk kindly organised our permits to enter the Military Zone and much to our surprise following what we'd been told about the organisation of these things they were waiting for us at the visitor centre on arrival. Richard's website www.richard-brooks.co.uk gives some information on visiting the area, including accommodation and travel. The Military Zone proved by far the most bird-rich part of the delta and we would strongly recommend getting a permit (there's no chance of entering this area without one). The Drana lagoon which is accessible without the permit, held only small numbers of birds, perhaps due to the water levels, though a small lagoon nearby did hold a flock of 20 Broad-billed Sandpipers. However, without the necessary permit, we would have missed out on many of the waterbirds.

In the course of several visits, birds seen on the Evros included White and Dalmatian Pelicans, Purple Heron, Squacco Heron, Night Heron, Black Stork, Garganey, Red-crested Pochard, White-tailed Eagle, Goshawk, Hobby, Spur-winged Plover, Temminck's Stint, Broad-billed Sandpiper, Collared Pratincole, Gull-billed, Black, White-winged Black and Whiskered Terns, Tawny Pipit, Lesser Grey Shrike and Isabelline Wheatear.



The Evros Delta viewed from Loutros Hill with Black-eared Wheatear in foreground (Ronnie Irving)

Loutros Hill:

The track to the top though a bit steep in places is easily driveable and well worthwhile. Superb panoramic views of the Evros Delta were enhanced by close views of overhead raptors including a magnificent adult White-tailed Eagle that filled the bins and cameras. In just a few hours, species recorded here included Black Stork, White-tailed Eagle, Lesser Spotted Eagle, Lanner Falcon, Honey Buzzard, Long-legged Buzzard, Egyptian Vulture, Roller, Woodlark, Black-eared Wheatear and Blue Rock Thrush. The raptors appeared to be riding the breeze along the edge of the ridge; this may be a regular event so time spent here is advisable.

DadiaForest:

The major attraction here is the vulture feeding station where a hide overlooks a cleared area where carcasses (cows and pigs on our visit) are provided for the vultures. The feeding area is c600m from the hide; fine for 'scope views and digiscopers but too distant for "normal" photography and, thankfully, too distant for the stench to reach your nostrils. You can walk the two miles or so to the hide or travel in a minibus from the information centre which then drops you an optimistic 150m (according to the sign) walk up an at times rather steep track to the hide itself. We used the minibus in the afternoon when we first arrived (for which we were charged three euros each) and then again at 09.00 next morning (no charge presumably because we'd stayed overnight). Despite repeated

requests, we were assured that 09.00 was the earliest minibus available which was disappointing when the centre states that the best times to view the spectacle is between 08.00 and 09.00! The afternoon visit was disappointing with relatively few vultures present, none of which were actually feeding. Next morning was a different story, there were more vultures present, more activity and other species to be enjoyed as well.



Vulture Feeding Station at Dadia (Ronnie Irving)

From the hide species seen included Black Stork, Black, Griffon and Egyptian Vultures, Bonelli's, Booted and White-tailed Eagle, Syrian Woodpecker, Eastern Bonelli's Warbler, Red-backed and Woodchat Shrike. Other species seen near the visitor centre included Little Ringed Plover, Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, Black-eared Wheatear and Masked Shrike.

A brief stop en route to Dadia in a river valley by the road from Lifokos had produced some excellent birding including good views of Black Stork, Lesser Spotted Eagle, Eastern Imperial Eagle, Short-toed Eagle, Little Ringed Plover and Red-backed Shrike. In hindsight, we should have spent more time birding this sort of habitat.

Lake Kerkini

This huge lake holds large numbers of birds and is easily accessible for much of its circumference by either tarmac roads or driveable tracks on raised embankments. The carpet of water lilies favoured by Whiskered Terns referred to in Gosney no longer exists though in general his directions remain accurate. The best area we found was on the northeast shore and accessed from Vironeia. Here we were able to drive along a narrow spit with the lake on one side and a marshy area on the other giving super close views of a variety of waterbirds.



Lake Kerkini viewed from the Hotel Erodios (Ronnie Irving)

Species seen on or close to the lake included Pygmy Cormorant, White and Dalmatian Pelicans, Great White Egret, Little Bittern, Night, Squacco and Purple Herons, Spoonbill, Glossy Ibis, Garganey, Osprey, Lesser Spotted Eagle, Black Kite, Levant Sparrowhawk, Hobby, Little Gull, Black Tern, Grey-headed Woodpecker, Penduline Tit, Lesser Grey Shrike, plus Nightjar and Scops Owls calling after dark.

Promachonas area

The trip report by Ray Thorneycroft put us onto this area northeast of Lake Kerkini where we birded the woodland near the PROCOM centre (which looked some big cash and carry type place) and visited the small quarry with a colony of Rollers. The woodland proved excellent with Lesser Spotted, Middle Spotted and Green Woodpeckers, Masked Shrike, Hawfinch and a range of commoner species. Perhaps many other woods would prove equally rewarding but this was easily accessible and well worthwhile. The nearby quarry held at least three pairs of Roller as well as Bee-eaters, Kestrel, Little Owl and Jackdaws plus our one and only Sombre Tit.

Other areas near Lake Kerkini

We spent a little time venturing up into the hills north of Lake Kerkini, stopping at sites mentioned in trip reports or just wherever we spotted something or an area that looked worthwhile. These included the War Memorial alongside the road up to the Bulgarian Border between Loutra Sidirokastro and Promachonas and the gorge near Fea Petra mentioned by Ray Thorneycroft. Birds seen included Golden Eagle, Eastern Imperial Eagle, Long-legged Buzzard, Levant Sparrowhawk, Little Ringed Plover, Crag Martin, Alpine Swift, Black-eared Wheatear, Black Redstart, Blue Rock Thrush, Orphean Warbler and Eastern Bonelli's Warbler.

For details and directions to all the main sites we visited we used Gosney's *Finding Birds in Greece*. As with most of the Gosney guides, the bird information is often very dated but the directions remain largely accurate. Extra information was gleaned from trip reports available on the internet.

We used 1:250,000 ROAD Editions maps of Thrace and Macedonia. Since publication a number of new roads have been built, not necessarily where proposed new routes are indicated on the map!

Species List

We recorded a total of 187 species, listed below. The figures in brackets represent the number of days each species was recorded e.g. (4/14) means that a species was seen on four days during our 14 day trip (bearing in mind that the first day involved just a few hours birding and disregarding the last day when no birding at all was done) and gives a crude indication of how easy each species was to see. These figures might not be quite as accurate as usual since our main recorder DT lost his notebook somewhere in the Military Zone on the Evros Delta on 12th May; if anyone finds it please return it to the address on the inside cover - there's a hefty reward (RI, IK, DMcA) Oh no there isn't! (DT). More details are given of the rarer or more interesting species.

Black-throated Diver *Gavia arctica* A summer-plumaged bird flying round above Lake Ismarida on 8th was a bit of a surprise (1/14)

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis* (3/14)

Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus* Especially numerous at Lake Kerkini (11/14)

Black-necked Grebe *Podiceps nigricollis* A flock of 14 at Porto Lagos on 7th; 1 at Lake Ismarida on 7th; 2 on the Evros Delta on 11th (3/14)

Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* Especially numerous at Lake Kerkini with some huge feeding flocks seen (12/14)

Pygmy Cormorant *Phalacrocorax pygmeus* 1 at Lake Volvi on 5th; 2 at Porto Lagos on 7th; 1 at Lake Ismarida on 7th; c15 at Lake Ismarida on 8th; 2 at Porto Lagos on 9th; 2 in the Military Zone of the Evros Delta on 10th; seen in good numbers every day at Lake Kerkini (10/14)

White Pelican *Pelecanus onocrotalus* 2 flocks (24 & 14) in flight on the Evros Delta on 11th with the flock of 24 seen again later from Loutros Hill; present in good numbers at Lake Kerkini often giving super views with birds also visible distantly on nesting platforms at the north end (5/14)

Dalmatian Pelican *Pelecanus crispus* 14 at Lake Koronia on 5th; 2 in flight at Lake Ismarida on 8th; 1 briefly on the deck and 5 in flight in the Military Zone of the Evros Delta on 10th; 2 in flight at Loutros Hill on 11th; present in good numbers at Lake Kerkini and often seen at close range (8/14)

Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus* Singles seen in flight at Lake Ismarida on 8th and Lake Kerkini on 16th and 17th (3/14)

Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax* A flock of 9 in flight at the Evros Delta on 9th; a flock of 15 in flight plus close views of 2 perched adults in the Military Zone of the Evros Delta on 10th; an adult in the Military Zone of the Evros Delta on 12th; common at Lake Kerkini and often active throughout the day (8/14)

Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides* 1 at Lake Koronia and several at Lake Volvi on 5th; 1 on the Nestos Delta on 6th; 4 at Lake Ismarida on 7th; found to be numerous at Lake Ismarida on 8th; quite common in the Military Zone of the Evros Delta on 10th and 12th; common and approachable at Lake Kerkini (11/14)

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta* Widespread usually in small numbers, most numerous at Lake Kerkini (13/14)

Great White Egret *Ardea alba* 2 at Lake Koronia on 5th; 2 at Lake Ismarida on 8th; 1 at Lake Kerkini on 14th; 3 at Lake Kerkini on 16th (4/14)

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea* (13/14)

Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea* Several at Lake Koronia and at Lake Volvi on 5th; several at Lake Ismarida on 7th and 8th; small numbers in the Military Zone of the Evros Delta on 10th and 12th; small numbers at Lake Kerkini (8/14)

Black Stork *Ciconia nigra* All our sightings involved birds in flight - 2 in the hills en route from Porto Lagos to Alexandroupolis on 9th; 4 in the Military Zone of the Evros Delta on 10th; 1 in the Avas Gorge on 10th; 2 seen from Loutros Hill on 11th; 4 in river valley between Lifoki and Dadia on 12th; 2 from the hide at Dadia on 12th and 4 there next morning; 1 at Lake Kerkini on 16th; 2 at Lake Kerkini and 2 singles near Promachonas on 18th (7/14)

White Stork *Ciconia ciconia* Widespread in relatively small numbers, often seen on nests (14/14)

Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus* 10+ at Lake Ismarida on 8th; 20 at Lake Kerkini on 16th with 19 there on 17th (3/14)

Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia* 1 at Lake Ismarida on 7th; several at Lake Ismarida on 8th; 11 at Lake Kerkini on 16th, 13 there on 17th; 3 flying up valley of River Strymon and 4 at Lake Kerkini on 18th (5/14)

Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus roseus* 30 at Lake Koronia on 5th; an immature at Porto Lagos on 6th; 30 at Porto Lagos on 7th (3/14)

Mute Swan *Cygnus olor* (5/14)

Greylag Goose *Anser anser* 2 at Lake Kerkini on 16th (1/14)

Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna* (8/14)

Gadwall *Anas strepera* Seen at Lake Ismarida and Lake Kerkini (3/14)

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos* (12/14)

Garganey *Anas querquedula* Pair at Lake Volvi on 5th; 3 males at Porto Lagos on 6th; 3 or 4 at Lake Ismarida on 8th; a drake in the Military Zone of the Evros Delta on 10th; a drake at Lake Kerkini on 17th (5/14)

Shoveler *Anas clypeata* 1 at Lake Ismarida on 8th (1/14)

Red-crested Pochard *Netta rufina* 1 at Lake Ismarida on 8th; a drake in the Military Zone of the Evros Delta on 10th (2/14)

Pochard *Aythya farina* Seen at Lake Ismarida (3/14)

Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca* c10 at Lake Ismarida on 8th (1/14)

Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula* (1/14)

Honey Buzzard *Pernis apivorus* 2 seen from Loutros Hill on 11th; 1 en route from Alexandroupolis to Lake Kerkini on 14th (2/14)

Black Kite *Milvus migrans* 1 at the Evros Delta on 9th; 1 en route from Alexandroupolis to Lake Kerkini on 14th; most numerous around Lake Kerkini where up to 10 a day were seen (6/14)

White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla* At Lake Ismarida on 8th, we had views of an adult perched in a dead tree with the same bird then seen both in flight and perched more distantly followed later in the day by a sighting of two adults soaring together; brief flight views of an adult in the Military Zone of the Evros Delta on 10th; stunning views of an adult flying over our heads at Loutros Hill on 11th; an adult in flight in the Military Zone of the Evros Delta on 12th; an immature bird was present at the vulture feeding station at Dadia on 12th and 13th, relegated to the periphery by the more dominant vultures and giving excellent views when perched in a tree for long periods and occasionally flying down to snatch a titbit from the less favoured carcasses (5/14)

Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus* 1 juv in the Avas Gorge on 10th; an adult at Loutros Hill on 11th; 2 from the hide at Dadia on the afternoon of 12th and 7 there next morning (4/14)

Black Vulture *Aegypius monachus* 2 from the hide at Dadia on the afternoon of 12th and 40 there next morning (2/14)

Griffon Vulture *Gyps fulvus* 22 from the hide at Dadia on the afternoon of 12th and 30 there next morning (2/14)

Short-toed Eagle *Circaetus gallicus* 1 in the hills en route from Porto Lagos to Alexandroupolis on 9th; 2 in the Avas Gorge on 10th; 2 at Loutros Hill on 11th; 2 in river valley between Lifoki and Dadia on 12th; 1 from the hide at Dadia on 13th; 2 in hills between Dadia and Loutros on 13th; 1 north of Loutra on 15th; 1 at Lake Kerkini on 16th (7/14)

Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus* 2 at Lake Volvi on 5th; several on the Strymon Delta and the Nestos Delta on 6th; seen in small numbers at Porto Lagos, common at Lake Ismarida and at the Evros Delta (9/14)

Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus* A ringtail at Porto Lagos on 7th (1/14)

Goshawk *Accipiter gentiles* 1 in flight in the Military Zone of the Evros Delta on 10th (1/14)

Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus* (3/14)

Levant Sparrowhawk *Accipiter brevipes* Single males on west side of Lake Kerkini and near War Memorial north of Loutra on 15th; a male on west side of Lake Kerkini, a pair near Iraklia and a male near War Memorial in Strymon Valley on 18th (2/14)

Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo* (10/14)

Long-legged Buzzard *Buteo rufinus* 1 at Lake Volvi on 5th; several including a pair at a nest in the Avas Gorge on 10th; frequent sightings including a pair with a nest at Loutros Hill on 11th; 1 in hills between Dadia and Loutros on 13th; 1 en route from Alexandroupolis to Lake Kerkini on 14th; 1 near Sidirokastro on 15th (7/14)

Lesser Spotted Eagle *Aquila pomarina* Prolonged views of a single from Loutros Hill on 11th (what was presumed to be the same bird seen from the village of Loutros later the same day); good views of one in river valley between Lifoki and Dadia on 12th; good, prolonged views of a pair on the west side of Lake Kerkini on 16th (3/14)

Eastern Imperial Eagle *Aquila heliaca* Prolonged views of a displaying pair in river valley between Lifoki and Dadia on 12th; a pair soaring near War Memorial in Strymon Valley on 18th (2/14)

Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos* A single then a pair over hills north of Lake Kerkini on 16th (1/14)

Booted Eagle *Hieraaetus pennatus* A light-phase bird from the hide at Dadia on 13th; a pair displaying in hills between Dadia and Loutros on 13th (1/14)

Bonelli's Eagle *Hieraaetus fasciatus* A displaying pair seen from the hide at Dadia on 13th (1/14)

Osprey *Pandion haliaetus* One perched in a tree at Lake Kerkini on 17th (1/14)

Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* (12/14)

Red-footed Falcon *Falco vespertinus* 3 at Lake Volvi on 5th (1/14)

Hobby *Falco subbuteo* 1 at Porto Lagos on 6th; 1 perched in a dead tree on the edge of the Evros Delta on 10th; 1 in the Loutros Valley, near Nipsa on 11th; 1 at Lake Kerkini on 16th (4/14)

Eleonora's Falcon *Falco eleonora* A light-phase bird carrying prey at Porto Lagos on 7th (1/14)

Lanner Falcon *Falco biarmicus* Brief flight views of a bird at Loutros Hill on 11th (1/14)

Peregrine *Falco peregrinus* One on west side of Lake Kerkini on 18th (1/14)

Quail *Coturnix coturnix* Heard at Lake Volvi on 5th and at Porto Lagos on 7th and 9th (3/14)

Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus* 2 heard at Lake Ismarida on 8th; 1 heard in the Military Zone of the Evros Delta on 10th (2/14)

Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus* (3/14)

Coot *Fulica atra* (9/14)

Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus* (5/14)

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus* Several at Lake Koronia on 5th and at Porto Lagos on 7th and 9th; small numbers in the Military Zone of the Evros Delta on 10th and more numerous there on 12th (5/14)

Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta* 20+ at the Evros Delta on 9th; c30 in the Military Zone of the Evros Delta on 10th; small numbers on the Evros Delta on 11th (3/14)

Collared Pratincole *Glareola pratincola* 3 at Lake Ismarida on 7th with c50 there on 8th; 50+ in the Military Zone of the Evros Delta on 10th; several on the Evros Delta on 11th; c6 in the Military Zone of the Evros Delta on 12th (6/14)

Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius* (6/14)

Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula* (5/14)

Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus* (7/14)

Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola* (5/14)

Spur-winged Plover *Vanellus spinosus* c6 on the Nestos Delta on 6th including stunning close views of a pair mating and seeing off a third bird; lovely views of 10-12 breeding pairs in the Military Zone of the Evros Delta on 10th and 12th (3/14)

Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus* (3/14)

Little Stint *Calidris minuta* Records included 50+ at Porto Lagos on 7th; c30 at Lake Ismarida on 8th; c100 at Porto Lagos on 9th; 50+ at the Evros Delta on 9th; 500+ in the Military Zone of the Evros Delta on 10th; c100 in the Military Zone of the Evros Delta on 12th (7/14)

Temminck's Stint *Calidris temminckii* Super close views of 6 in the Military Zone of the Evros Delta on 10th with 5 in the same spot on 12th (2/14)

Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea* Records included 50+ at Porto Lagos on 7th; c30 at Lake Ismarida on 8th; c100 at Porto Lagos on 9th; 50+ at the Evros Delta on 9th; 1000+ in the Military Zone of the Evros Delta on 10th; c200 in the Military Zone of the Evros Delta on 12th; 5 at Lake Kerkini on 17th (8/14)

Dunlin *Calidris alpina* (3/14)

Broad-billed Sandpiper *Limicola falcinellus* We were delighted to find a single bird at Porto Lagos on 9th then totally amazed to discover a flock of 20 on the Evros Delta later the same day; there were 8 on the same lagoon on 11th (2/14)

Ruff *Philomachus pugnax* 50+ at Lake Ismarida on 8th; c50 in the Military Zone of the Evros Delta on 10th but just small numbers there on 12th (3/14)

Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa* 2 in the Military Zone of the Evros Delta on 10th (1/14)

Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus* 3 at Porto Lagos on 9th (1/14)

Curlew *Numenius arquata* (4/14)

Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus* c100, mostly in full breeding plumage, in the Military Zone of the Evros Delta on 10th (1/14)

Redshank *Tringa tetanus* (2/14)

Greenshank *Tringa nebularia* Small numbers at Lake Ismarida and the Evros Delta (4/14)

Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola* 10 at Lake Ismarida on 8th; 2 in the Military Zone of the Evros Delta on 10th (2/14)

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos* (3/14)

Turnstone *Arenaria interpres* (4/14)

Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus* A female associating with a flock of Curlew Sands at Porto Lagos on 7th (1/14)

Mediterranean Gull *Larus melanocephalus* Summer-plumaged adults were present in good numbers at many sites with their constant calling providing a pleasant background to much of our birding. Most sightings involved adults except at Asprovalta where records included 37 1st-summer birds on the beach on 6th. (8/14)

Little Gull *Larus minutus* 2 1st-summer on the Strymon Delta on 6th; 2 1st-summer at Lake Ismarida on 7th; an adult and 2 1st-summer at Lake Ismarida on 8th; 1 1st-summer in the Military Zone of the Evros Delta on 10th; 2 (adult and 1st-summer) at Lake Kerkini on 17th (5/14)

Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus* (8/14)

Slender-billed Gull *Larus genei* Lovely views of 2 1st-summer birds at Porto Lagos on 9th (1/14)

Common Gull *Larus canus* A single near Lake Koronia on 5th (1/14)

Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus* A 3rd-summer probably *heuglini* or *fuscus* at Lake Kerkini on 17th (1/14)

Yellow-legged Gull *Larus cachinnans* (14/14)

Gull-billed Tern *Sterna nilotica* 2 at Lake Volvi on 5th; several on the Nestos Delta on 6th; 12 at Lake Ismarida on 8th; 2 at Porto Lagos on 9th; 6 in the Military Zone of the Evros Delta on 10th (5/14)

Sandwich Tern *Sterna sandvicensis* (4/14)

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo* (8/14)

Little Tern *Sterna albifrons* (7/14)

Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybrida* 11 on the Strymon Delta on 6th; 1 at Porto Lagos on 7th; 1 at Lake Ismarida on 7th; c10 at Lake Ismarida on 8th; c20 in the Military Zone of the Evros Delta on 10th (5/14)

Black Tern *Chlidonias niger* 7 at Lake Volvi on 5th; 8 at Porto Lagos on 7th; c90 at Lake Ismarida on 7th; c100 at Lake Ismarida on 8th; two flocks of 24 and 15 dropped in briefly to a lagoon in the Military Zone of the Evros Delta on 12th; 10 at Lake Kerkini on 16th (6/14)

White-winged Black Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus* 10 at Lake Volvi on 5th; 10 at Lake Ismarida on 7th; 10+ at Lake Ismarida on 8th; 2 in the Military Zone of the Evros Delta on 10th (4/14)

Feral Pigeon *Columba livia* (14/14)

Woodpigeon *Columba palumbus* (1/14)

Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto* (14/14)

Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur* (12/14)

Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus* (11/14)

Scops Owl *Otus scops* Heard each night from the Hotel Park in Alexandroupolis; singles also heard in the Avas Gorge on 10th and from our room at Dadia on 12th; up to 3 heard each night at Lithotopos (Lake Kerkini) (11/14)

Little Owl *Athene noctua* 1 on the Evros Delta on 11th; 1 in quarry near Promachonas on 15th and 18th (3/14)

Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus* One heard churring after dark at Lithotopos (Lake Kerkini) on 14th and 15th (2/14)

Common Swift *Apus apus* (10/14)

Pallid Swift *Apus pallidus* Widespread in small numbers with especially good views at Thessalonika airport and the Hotel Park, Alexandroupolis (7/14)

Alpine Swift *Apus melba* 2 on the Strymon Delta on 6th; 3 over Keramoti (Nestos Delta) on 6th; 2 en route from Alexandroupolis to Lake Kerkini on 14th; 2 near Fea Petra on 15th; 2 near Promachonas on 18th (5/14)

Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis* Seen only at Lake Kerkini and near Promachonas (4/14)

Bee-eater *Merops apiaster* Widespread and numerous. Several flocks migrating overhead in the first few days. Birds also seen excavating nest holes at several sites (13/14)

Roller *Coracias garrulus* 1 at Porto Lagos on 7th; 1 at Lake Ismarida on 8th; 2 in the Military Zone of the Evros Delta on 10th; 1 seen from Loutros Hill on 11th; 4 en route from Alexandroupolis to Lake Kerkini on 14th; at least three pairs in small quarry near Promachonas on 15th and 18th, giving lovely views as they perched outside nest holes. (7/14)

Hoopoe *Upupa epops* Widespread and common (14/14)

Grey-headed Woodpecker *Picus canus* 1 seen and heard on west side of Lake Kerkini on 15th; 2 heard near Lithotopos on 16th; 1 near Iraklia on 18th (3/14)

Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis* (4/14)

Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopus major* (1/14)

Syrian Woodpecker *Dendrocopus syriacus* 1 near Keramoti (Nestos Delta) on 6th; 1 at Porto Lagos on 7th; 3 at Porto Lagos on 9th; 2 in the hills en route from Porto Lagos to Alexandroupolis on 9th; 1 near the hide at Dadia on 12th; 1 at Lake Kerkini on 18th (6/14)

Middle Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopus medius* At least 2 in wood near Promachonas on 18th (1/14)

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopus minor* 1 near Dadia on 13th; 1 in wood near Promachonas on 15th with 4 or 5 there on 18th (3/14)

Calandra Lark *Melanocorypha calandra* Seen in small numbers at Porto Lagos, Lake Ismarida, the Evros Delta and en route from Alexandroupolis to Kerkini (9/14)

Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla* Seen in ones and twos at Porto Lagos and the Evros Delta (5/14)

Crested Lark *Galerida cristata* (14/14)

Woodlark *Lullula arborea* 1 in the hills en route from Porto Lagos to Alexandroupolis on 9th; 1 on Loutros Hill on 11th (2/14)

Sand Martin *Riparia riparia* (11/14)

Crag Martin *Hirundo rupestris* Half a dozen in gorge near Fea Petra on 15th (1/14)

Swallow *Hirundo rustica* (14/14)

Red-rumped Swallow *Hirundo daurica* (14/14)

House Martin *Delichon urbicum* (12/14)

Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris* 1 at Lake Ismarida on 7th; 1 singing and display-flighting at the Evros Delta on 9th and 11th (3/14)

Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava* All the birds that we positively identified were of the Black-headed race *feldegg* which were widespread and quite common (11/14)

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea* (2/14)

White Wagtail *Motacilla alba alba* (3/14)

Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos* Abundant. At times seemed to be singing from every available bush. (14/14)

Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros* A female in gorge near Fea Petra on 15th (1/14)

Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus* 1 near Keramoti (Nestos Delta) on 6th (1/14)

Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra* (3/14)

Isabelline Wheatear *Oenanthe isabellina* Superb views of a pair at the Evros Delta on 9th and 11th (virtually where shown on Gosney's map) (2/14)

Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe* (4/14)

Black-eared Wheatear *Oenanthe hispanica* Several in the Avas Gorge on 10th; a pair on Loutros Hill on 11th; a male from the hide at Dadia on the afternoon of 12th and again next morning; 1 or 2 near Fea Petra on 15th; single males on the west side of Lake Kerkini and near War Memorial in Strymon Valley on 18th (6/14)

Blue Rock Thrush *Monticola solitarius* 2 or 3 in the Avas Gorge on 10th; 1 on Loutros Hill on 11th; 2 or 3 in gorge near Fea Petra on 15th (3/14)

Blackbird *Turdus merula* (8/14)

Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti* (12/14)

Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus* (3/14)

Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus* (9/14)

Great Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus arundinaceus* Numerous wherever habitat was suitable (13/14)

Eastern Olivaceous Warbler *Hippolais pallida* It took us a couple of days to recognize the song but once we did it soon became obvious how widespread and numerous this species really was. The commonest warbler of the trip. (12/14)

Subalpine Warbler *Sylvia cantillans* 2 singing males from road across Mount Pangeo on 6th and a singing male in the Avas Gorge on 10th (2/14)

Orphean Warbler *Sylvia hortensis* 1 female from road across Mount Pangeo on 6th; prolonged close views of a female in the Avas Gorge on 10th; 1 in the Loutros Valley, near Nipsa on 11th; 1 near Fea Petra on 15th (4/14)

Whitethroat *Sylvia communis* (10/14)

Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla* (3/14)

Eastern Bonelli's Warbler *Phylloscopus orientalis* 2 or 3 singing near the hide at Dadia on the afternoon of 12th and again next morning; heard near Fea Petra on 15th (3/14)

Common Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita* (2/14)

Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa sriata* (10/14)

Bearded Tit *Panurus biarmicus* 10+ at Lake Ismarida on 8th (1/14)

Marsh Tit *Parus palustris* (2/14)

Sombre Tit *Parus lugubris* Surprisingly, one near Promachonas on 18th was the only we saw all trip (1/14)

Blue Tit *Parus caeruleus* (2/14)

Great Tit *Parus major* (11/14)

Nuthatch *Sitta europaea* (2/14)

Treecreeper sp. *Certhia* Brief views of a silent bird in wood near Promachonas on 15th; (1/14)

Penduline Tit *Remiz pendulinus* Common at Lake Kerkini where birds could be heard calling every couple of hundred metres from overgrown ditches alongside the embankment on the east and north sides of the lake. Usually seen when we made the effort to locate them, especially enjoyable was watching a pair working on a partially built nest (4/14)

Golden Oriole *Oriolus oriolus* Widespread and quite common. Mostly heard but we had plenty of sightings including a female repeatedly collecting bits of string from a tree at Lake Kerkini while the male looked on supervising (11/14)

Red-backed Shrike *Lanius colluria* Widespread and common in places (10/14)

Lesser Grey Shrike *Lanius minor* 1 at Porto Lagos on 6th; a pair at the Evros Delta on 9th; especially good views of a pair on the west side of Lake Kerkini on 17th and 18th (4/14)

Woodchat Shrike *Lanius senator* Widespread in small numbers (11/14)

Masked Shrike *Lanius nubicus* Prolonged views of a pair in the Loutros Valley, near Nipsa on 11th; a pair near Dadia on 13th; a pair at edge of wood near Promachonas on 15th and 18th (4/14)

Jay *Garrulus glandarius* (6/14)

Magpie *Pica pica* (13/14)

Jackdaw *Corvus monedula* (7/14)

Hooded Crow *Corvus cornix* (14/14)

Raven *Corvus corax* (5/14)

Common Starling *Sternus vulgaris* (11/14)

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* (14/14)

Spanish Sparrow *Passer hispaniolensis* Widespread in small numbers including a small nesting colony in the grounds of the Hotel Plotini near the Evros Delta (9/14)

Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus* (3/14)

Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs* (11/14)

Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris* (8/14)

Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis* (12/14)

Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes* 1 at Lake Koronia on 5th; several in the hills en route from Porto Lagos to Alexandroupolis on 9th; 1 in wood near Promachonas on 15th and 7 there on 18th (4/14)

Cirl Bunting *Emberiza cirius* Seen and heard in small numbers in the hills en route from Porto Lagos to Alexandroupolis, in the Avas Gorge and in hills above Lake Kerkini (5/14)

Rock Bunting *Emberiza cia* 1 from road across Mount Pangeo on 6th (1/14)

Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoenicus* (2/14)

Black-headed Bunting *Emberiza melanocephalus* Very common, at times seemed to be singing from every available perch. Least numerous in higher inland areas e.g. Lake Kerkini area (14/14)

Corn Bunting *Emberiza calandra* (14/14)