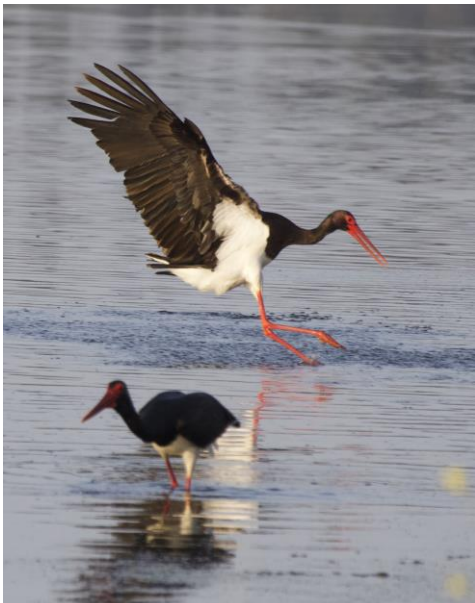


Lesvos Greece | Trip Report

April 28 – May 7, 2019 | Written by Peg Abbott



Guides Gina Nichol and Steve Byrd, Naturalist Journeys host Peg Abbott and 10 participants: Lise, Jean, Pat, John, Kelly, Bob, Freddy, Glenn, Steve, and Lori



This was a splendid trip to a special place, a Greek island where scenic beauty and a sense of being away from the world with all its complex issues prevailed. We had a very compatible group that experienced a lot of fun while being diligent and enthusiastic in the field work, with the result being many good bird and wildlife sightings. Prominent in the “favorite” list at the trip’s end was the Krüper’s Nuthatch as this year seemed such a difficult one to find it and our persistence paid off in about an hour and a half, with some magical time spent in a mature pine forest where trees had once been tapped for turpentine. Other highlights included fabulous scope views (for the whole group) of a singing Olive Tree Warbler, found at a sight with a park-like spread of large olive trees on a rocky slope leading down to the sea, decorated by a carpet of flowers. Spring rains had been strong this year, resulting in a great show of flowers across the island, and with Bob and Kelly along (both professional botanists) we had a heyday identifying them. The Hoopoe was a favorite for many, and we were lucky to find a second one after a brief first sighting when, despite “a scramble of arms and legs” in the vans some had missed it. Seeing multi-colored European Bee-eaters almost daily was a treat, posing Little Owls kept our photographers happy, and golden light on Little Bitterns and Little Crakes one morning at Metochi Lake was memorable. Two birds passing us on the wing were much appreciated, one an Audouin’s Gull with its “lipstick red” bill flying along the North Coast and two a Lesser Kestrel feeding and dining on the wing eye-level with us at the curve of a mountain pass. Watching flocks of Greater Flamingoes flying in sunlight at the Salt Pans kept us inspired, while sorting out all the smaller birds and their “Fifty Shades of Brown” has us at times perplexed. Gina’s fabulous picnics at the southern coast at Vatera gave us the background for our group photo.



Day to Day Highlights

Pre-tour: Many of our group added time ahead to the tour, exploring more of Greece in either Athens or Mytilene while resting up from travels. The Athens airport is really an easy one, with a Sofitel Hotel just a crosswalk away for a night's good rest. Those going into Athens enjoyed a view of the Acropolis from rooftop restaurants of their city hotels. In Mytilene four enjoyed an historic hotel, the Pyrgos and a chance to look around town. This was the Greek Orthodox Easter weekend, and Easter in Greece is a BIG holiday, so all early arrivers had a cultural bonus at the start.

Sunday, April 28 | Mytilene Airport / Skalla Kallonis Pool and Marsh by the Hotel

The flight from Athens got in mid-afternoon, so Steve picked up at the hotel and took Peg back in to get her van at the airport. Peg, Bob and Kelly had spent some days in Molivos, and she returned their rental car. Our flock was soon assembled, and we headed off to the Kalloni Bay Resort about 45 minutes away. This part of the island has some of the oldest rock found, upon which grows a lush deciduous forest of oaks. We had grand views back to the sea over the several valleys as we wound our way through the hills to the very large bay of Kalloni. Near the salt pans we saw our first Greater Flamingoes, feeding avidly, and showing off their pink best when in flight.

Our hotel, home for the week, sits adjacent to a wetland marsh, so once settled, we decided to just walk close by. A Great Bittern had been sighted by several groups over the last few days. It stayed hidden to most of us bar a few who got a just a glimpse, but we all had super views of Squacco Heron, Gray Heron, Purple Heron and Little Bittern, all in the scopes – off to a good start! We also found a very cooperative Subalpine Warbler and were welcomed by two stray, but very friendly, pups on the beach who hoped we'd feed them.

The hotel was two stories, with rooms facing the marsh and sea. We found our rooms simple but comfortable, and the public area most welcoming with a great bar and tables to gather for tallying up our bird and other species list. Steve and Gina put up sighting identification charts and a board to report sightings, so we quickly could assess what was in the area. So many exciting species, and what a great welcome to arrive at a hotel that welcomes the crazy habits of birders. Steve did charts of dragonflies, large insects, butterflies, and reptiles, many of which we hoped to see. This would be a nice roost for us to return to each day when field time was done.

Monday April 29 | AM: Kalloni Salt Pans / Alykes Wetland / Kalloni Mini Football Pitch (Scops Copse) PM: Parakila Beach / Tsiaknias River Ford / Kalloni Salt pans

We wanted to get out to the Kalloni Salt Pans early today, so did a short drive out there before breakfast. The morning light was just stunning on a frenzy of birds feeding we found in the channel going in, a mix of Black Storks, Little Egret, Great Egret, Common Tern and a few Little Terns. We got out to watch and photograph and were able to see breeding-plumaged Curlew Sandpiper alongside the more numerous Wood Sandpiper. This long channel would prove interesting to check with each visit. A sharp corner gave a vantage point of some rocky bits where several elegant Black-winged Stilts were feeding, reflected in the blue water surrounding them. In the more distant salt ponds, we spied many Greater Flamingoes, and feeding with them, Pied Avocets.

We returned to a buffet breakfast and we all found favorite treats we would continue to savor during the week, sesame cookies with tahini, brown bread with fig jam, rich creamy Greek yoghurt, and a variety of hot dishes.



Fortified, we headed back out driving up the same channel at the Kalloni Salt Pans but continuing farther, walking into the sheep fields and some smaller ponds known as the Alykes Wetland area. We took it at a leisurely pace, out for a couple of hours, enjoying scenic views of high peaks, the water, and at our feet, a rhapsody of color from all the wildflowers, including two species of orchids. We scanned the far pools with scopes, picking up Dunlin, one lone Eurasian Spoonbill, two species of shelducks and a few Mallards, and many flamingoes. We were quickly distracted by Crested Lark, Greater Short-toed Lark, and Red-throated Pipit. Turning to the open waters of the bay, Gina spied two lovely Great-crested Grebes. Freddy made friends with the donkeys grazing at liberty, and Lori found a Stripe-necked Terrapin, our first. The flowers were great, and Kelly started the trend of sitting right down among them, taking a close look.

We had our picnic back at the hotel, sitting outside by the pool. It gave us a chance for a break before heading out again mid-afternoon.

We had a tip on a nest of Middle-spotted Woodpeckers we wanted to check out. On the way, we stopped at a former soccer field/school with large trees by it to search out a Scops Owl. It was not immediately easy to see but in time one flushed as Peg walked the edge of the main road to get a different angle. We got the scopes on it and between branches a view, not photo ops this day but great to see it. An adorable puppy came out and quickly won the heart of several of our group. The woodpeckers proved challenging! It seems that they had just fledged young, and were quite vocal, moving about, all at speed. With patience and a lot of pointing, we got views as the adults flew from one olive tree to another. Best views were close to the ground on trunks of olive trees. Of course, when Peg and Steve returned to pick up the vans, they had settled down a bit and were visible on the phone wires, large cicada-like insects in their mouths ready to feed their very large young. Following down towards the beach, we had a short walk on which we found some songbirds.

We then made a pass by the Tsiaknias River Ford, getting out to bird before crossing it. An Eastern Olivaceous Warbler teed up and sang in full view. Two Nightingale were quite cooperative, and down on the river shore we had our first Yellow Wagtail, and a pair of very cooperative Eurasian Reed Warblers. Then a dozen European Bee-eaters came into view – wow!



Steve led the way as we drove our vans through the water at the ford. This road passed through fields of tall grasses, ending up at the Kalloni Salt Pans again. Here we found many of the same species a bit farther out. But each day there were some new species. At the corner we found Eurasian Greenfinch and European Goldfinch, alongside a Masked Shrike – all nice views!

Tuesday, April 30 | AM: Metochi Lake / Mikri Limni Pine Forest / Vatera Coastal Headland / PM: Polichnitos Salt pans / Mesa Pool / Pyrro Village (beer stop) / Kalloni Salt pans

This morning we woke early to go to Metochi Lake, a lovely small lake surrounded by dense reeds. We set up in an open area with good view up and down the water. The first species we noted was Little Grebe, spotting several individuals in breeding plumage and calling. A Black-crowned Night Heron occupied a rock along the shore, sharing it with turtles. Right away we spotted Little Bittern, one pair was chasing other avidly and in all we saw a half a dozen or so around the pond. Both Great and Eurasian Reed Warblers put on a good show. Very special was scope views of Little Crake, four in total. As we went to leave, breakfast hunger was calling, Gina heard a European Hoopoe at a distance, giving us hope for a future sighting.

After breakfast we drove south, eventually reaching the southern coast, but first walking through lush pine woodlands in search of perhaps the top bird on Lesbos to see, Krüper's Nuthatch. This year they have been proving very difficult to see. Most year's someone finds a nest, but this year so far none had been found. Steve has heard a pair in an area by a small lake the week before, so with patience in mind we set off to see it. Many of the trees had old taps in them from the days of harvesting turpentine. There was a lovely fresh pine smell but overall the woods were quiet, save for the calls of a couple pair of Great Tit. We started to spread out and wander when Peg heard one about a quarter mile up from where most of the group waited. A fast sprint to tell the group and we all headed up to where she's heard it cross the road. Bingo, Steve had it spotted, and for several minutes we all had good looks watching it feed. It was calling to a second bird, but we never got onto



that one. Still we were happy to see this rascal today! Walking out we also got good views of a Short-toed Treecreeper, another species of the pine habitat areas.

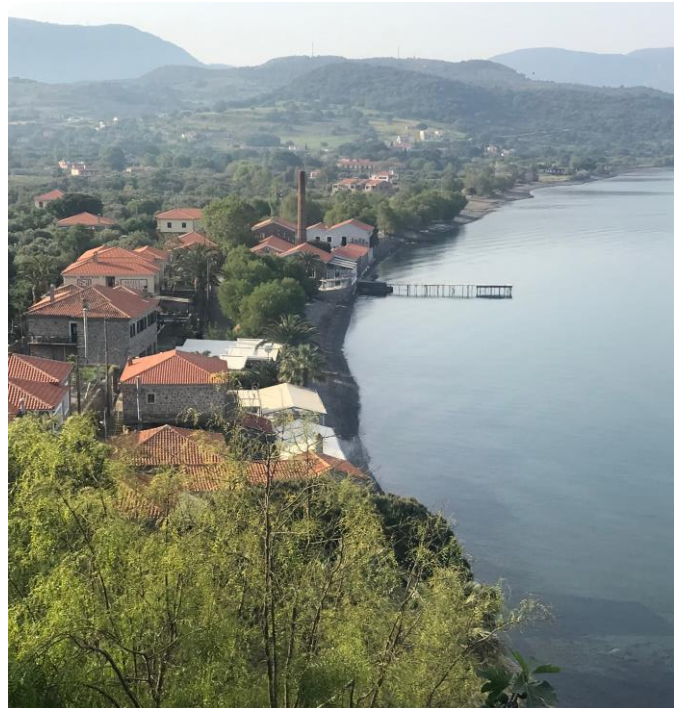
We continued, stopping to view an old well from centuries past, and some lovely orchids. In a wooded clearing we made a loop walk, finding Bee Orchids and other floral delights. Here we found an avian prize too, a singing male Sardinian Warbler, yeah!

We admired the boats in harbor at Vatura, then drove up a short steep incline to reach the headlands at Agios Fokas. This held the ruins of the Temple of Dionysos dating to the first century and a stunning view out to sea. Out of our van came tables and chairs and a delicious picnic from the hotel. The sun was bright, little wind, just a perfect day! We gathered for a group photo and then turned our scopes to the sea, getting a distant view of several Yelkouin Shearwaters. A tame Black-eared Wheatear posed for us, and a few European Goldfinch were in the short trees around a chapel.

From here we packed up and headed for the Polichnitos Saltpans. Overall, they were quiet today, we got good looks at Pied Avocets, Black-winged Stilt, Yellow-legged Gulls. We walked at one end of the ponds and found a stunning Thread Lacewing, just a jewel! We also stopped to photograph a beautiful Greek Orthodox church at Polichnitos, admiring the intricate rock work.

Freddy suggested we stop for a beer and we did, fun! It was a bayside restaurant at Pyrrho Village that had a nice view of the water and mountains. Fortified, we headed back, stopping at Messa Pool where we spied a couple of Caspian Tern among the Common Tern, a good find for Lesvos.

We then made the obligate run around the Kalloni Salt Pans on our way home, this time we picked up a couple of Common Greenshank and Marsh Sandpiper in with the more common Wood Sandpiper and Ruff.





Back to dinner, a happy hour at the hotel, an event tonight with free ouzo for local birders, fun! Checklist and conversation then off to bed.

Wednesday, May 1 | Full Day: North Coast Kavaki Headland / Molivos (Gelato at 9AM) / Perasma Reservoir and Sheep Farm / North Coast Road - Efthalou to Skala Sikaminias / Taverna lunch / Napi Valley - Platania Valley and on to Home / Optional Quick pass by Kalloni Salt Pans

On this May Day, we made a grand circle, seeing a lot of scenery of the island as well as some great birds. Memorable this day were locals picking armfuls of flowers, our taverna lunch, and before that a 9 AM gelato stop in Molivos.

We left right after an early breakfast and were up at the north coast at the Kavaki Headland by 7 AM or so. This was a great stop with views out to see and our first views of Yelkouan Shearwater and European Shag. The sea was choppy from the wind and shone a deep blue with jade and aqua edgings.

The hillside was covered in flowering shrubs, remarkable variety. Our quest was for two species of warblers and in time we were successful at seeing Eastern Orphean Warbler and the very local Rüppell's Warbler, a male singing atop a long row of shrubs. We had a Peregrine circle overhead, and a couple of Northern Ravens joined the ubiquitous Hooded Crows. A Chaffinch male sang from the phone wires posing for photos, and a walk between rest stops let us stretch our legs.

By 9 AM we needed a pit stop, what better place than the local gelato store! Right at the entry to picturesque Molivos town, staring up at the castle, we enjoyed every bite alongside some coffees. Then it was a short drive up to Parasma Reservoir where we found several broods of Ruddy Shelduck guarding their just-hatched broods. Though the reservoir was quiet, we did hear a Chukar, but we soon drove on, up the hill towards a sheep farm. We got stopped in our tracks by a sheep jam, but the man herding them skillfully headed the mob between our two vans and into the pasture he desired. Up on the ridge by the farm buildings we hoped to see a Common Cuckoo, and while it did not show, we had good looks at European Greenfinch, and a pair of circling Short-toed Snake Eagles. Steve turned over some rocks and was elated to find two adults and a brood of baby Worm Snakes. The group huddled around the pink squirming earthworm-like mass in wonder. The farmer came up with a wagon of sheep, all business as he opened the gate and probably wondering what on Earth we had found. It was time for us to head on to the North Coast road from Efthalou (a place of hot springs) to Skalla Sikaminias, where we looked forward to lunch.



The road was at first steep, then made a winding path always in view of the sea. We stopped at several valleys along the way that held taller shrubs and trees. At one tree, a Nightingale sang loudly and persistently. A Wryneck flew by calling loudly, we were startled, and it took a moment for the sound recognition to kick in as they are not commonly encountered on the island. No mistaking that raucous sound though!

At one stop we sampled the thermal water, from a small stream that ran into the sea. We had good looks at Great Tit and Subalpine Warbler, but the bird of the day on this route was an adult Audouin's Gull, new for almost all in the group. With luck, it circled several times within a decent range of shore, and we all got good looks.



Nearing the village, we enjoyed watching strikingly-patterned, Red-rumped Swallows picking up mud at a small stream that crossed the road. A small chapel sat perched on rocks of the small harbor and on a corner of the town local art was on display, fun to see and purchase. A colorful local character put on a one-man fashion show (how does he do those heels on cobblestone!). Lunch was fresh squid, fresh fish, fresh mussels, all nicely prepared.

Parking was a challenge here, so we climbed the hill to where our drivers had placed our respective vans after lunch, and then headed on to a very nice wooded area near the head of the Napi Valley. We found good activity, European Jay, some very good looks at European Serin in some pines, European Goldfinch, a Nightingale in the scope, and both Great and Eurasian Blue tits. John was starting to sort out the sounds and really enjoyed this location. Further on, in an area of mature olive trees, some spied a Masked Shrike that the rest would catch up to a few days later.



At the pond by "home", Skala Kallonis Pool, we found the regulars to be in place, Gray Heron, Purple Heron, Great Egret and Squacco Heron. A few of the group went to check the Kalloni Salt Pans and found the usual suspects.

We checked Steve's chart to id our various butterflies, dragonflies, and lizards we had spied over the course of the day. A grand loop to the north and back, it had been a very satisfying day.

Thursday, May 2 | Road near Agra / Erressos (coffee stop) / Meladia Valley / River Ford / Sigri

/ Faneronemi / Ipaslou / Skalla Kallonis Pool and Marsh at hotel

We started the day on a high road at Agra, open on both sides with long-ranging vistas of sheep fields, rock walls, craggy crests of ridgelines reaching on out to the sea. To the sound of grazing sheep bells, we picked up

songs of several specialties we wanted to find, including Cinereous Bunting and Woodlark. A pair of Western Rock Nuthatch alerted us with their calls, and we got repeated good scope views of them, a favorite of the day for many. A pair of Cretzschmar's Buntings had a nest in a Thorny Burnett bush just off the road; we watched them come in time after time with large green and brown larva, feeding their young. One could not help to pause and marvel at the miles and miles of perfect stone walls, all dry-stacked as settlers cleared the fields, some of them now standing for centuries. The feeling of space in this windswept high country was wonderful to behold. Plus, we enjoyed this feeling of a little bird "explosion"! After this great start to the day we stopped for a coffee, sitting with locals at a corner café, at Erossos.

This high road led us to the start of the Meladia Valley, a magical place with scattered lone trees and groups of shrubs that acted like magnets for birds. Around a small chapel we found Red-backed Shrike, Chaffinch, Great Tit and both Spotted and Collared Flycatchers. We called one of the trees the "Magic Tree" and enjoyed views there of a pair of Golden Orioles and an active Masked Shrike. In shrubs around an abandoned house we had good looks at Eurasian Blackcap, Common Whitethroat, and Eastern Olivaceous Warbler. From the vans, eagle-eyed Steve spotted an Icterine Warbler which stuck around for surprisingly good views.

We had our lunch at a river crossing. A pair of Ruddy Shelduck had their young hidden in an upstream pool but kept watch over them from perches on the surrounding slope. Scoping the adult, we picked up a sighting of European Hare, not common at this time on the island. The stream was a good spot to find Eurasian Blackcap, Willow Warbler, Spotted Flycatcher, Common Nightingale, and more.

We eventually pulled ourselves away from this enchanting valley and headed in to Sigrí, a coastal fishing town with tightly-spaced cottages topped by terracotta tile roofs which faced the local harbor. Rock reefs here shone turquoise and jade in the sun, while way out to sea several huge tankers were streaming north and south in a busy shipping channel. Yellow-legged Gulls were numerous here, we spied a European Shag and we got a view of a flock of Jackdaws flocking overhead.





Sigri is home to a museum focused on geology and a notable Petrified Forest, one of Europe's fascinating Geoparks. It is a modern museum with outstanding exhibits of fossils found in the area and its displays provide an overview of the evolution of the Aegean Sea. We watched a short film, enjoyed a coffee, and some picked up local natural history books or specialty food items in the gift store. It was a nice break, from which we made a quick pass north to the fertile fields just outside of town at Faneromeni.

We got good views of Red-backed Shrike, and a bonus bird for the trip, a Spur-winged Plover, spotted here for several days now. Today it put on a good show close to the vans.

On the return, we stopped briefly at the junction of the road up to Ipsalou Monastery (we would return later in the week). It was windy, but we spied a Short-toed Snake Eagle flying with prey – a snake! We had two road sightings as we returned home. The first was a Common Cuckoo and the second caused Lise to climb over two seats of the van, her seat mates called it “goat yoga” to get a better look at a flyby European Hoopoe. Luckily, we'd find them again another day! We also had a roadside mammal sighting, one of the islands bushy-tailed Persian Squirrels.

Back to dinner, checklist tally and bar time. We could get into this island birding rhythm now.

Friday, May 3 | AM: Kalloni Salt Pans / Potamia Valley / Ipsalou Monastery (windy!) / Sigri PM: Napi Valley / Platania Track / Olive Groves

We went early to the Kalloni Salt Pans and were able to watch again the feeding frenzy of Little Egrets, Black Stork, and today, a White-winged Tern joining Little and Common, for a total of three species of terns. The White-winged Tern flew through for good views, what a stunning bird! Greater Flamingoes fed voraciously in the distance, a few in photo range kept their heads down, sifting for invertebrate prey. We made a pass at the back fields looking for Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin, not to be found today.

After breakfast, we headed out to walk along a quiet rural road in the Potamia Valley, birding there for a couple of hours. Almost right out of the vans we spotted a falcon and it turned out to be Eleanor's – our first of the trip and a thrill. We walked leisurely with time to study Woodchat Shrike, Lesser Gray Shrike, Greenfinch, European Goldfinch and both Blue and Great Tits. Eurasian Jays came into view and a Common Sandpiper was seen feeding along a small stream. We had good looks at Levant Water Frogs below us from a bridge, one puffing up his tympanum. We found Lesvos Bush Crickets, and watched as a Dice Snake swam in its aquatic home.



For lunch today, Gina and Steve took us to one of their favorite restaurants on the bay in town close to our hotel. We slurped up fresh seafood, cold beers and had fun. A few of the group went up to visit the local monastery and were really impressed with the buildings and grounds. Others rested, showered, and caught up on trip notes.

At about 4 PM we headed up to the Napi Valley, the Platania track and then an olive grove our chosen stops. The Platania track had some sporting driving up and down rocky hillsides. We found both Northern and Black-eared Wheatear, a Sobre Tit which was singing, Subalpine Warbler, and we chased a calling pair of European Hoopoe, not getting good views this day.

From here, we headed to a beautiful hillside olive grove, with a distant view of the water gap between Lesvos and Turkey. These were old trees, still bearing fruit. We were really very lucky to hear singing Olive Tree Warbler just as we got out of our vans, in an area Steve hoped to find them. Accompanying them and making similar sounds, was a pair of Masked Shrike we also trained our scopes on. This duo of Olive Tree Warblers was most obliging, allowing us rare scope views. Gina got her scope on with enough time for almost everyone to get a grand view, and we got a second one on as well. Steve said it was the most cooperative sighting in 20 years! Shortly after, a European Hoopoe made an appearance at a road curve, we chased it a bit but only had good flight views.

Descending to our bayside hotel, Gina spied a Cattle Egret overhead and called it out as they are not common on the island. This one had been around a few days but only with sparse sightings. It was very close to the hotel, a nice tick to end our day.

We had dinner at the hotel, local fish tonight was a nice change of menu. Each evening we did our checklist in the bar with a few libations.



Saturday, May 4 | AM: Lardia Valley (“Grand Canyon”) / Mt. Ordimnos (Windmill Hill) / Ipsalou Monastery / Sigri Harbor and Petrified Forest / Faneromeni Beach / Kalloni Saltpans / Tsiagman River Mouth

We left right after an early breakfast for a full but amazing day. The Lardia Valley and its “Grand Canyon” view is both a scenic stop and an important bird stop, as here Crag Martins cavort with the more common House Martins. We got excellent views of this species, and of Blue Rock Thrush, though distant in the scopes we could see it well. Common House Martins hung with the less-common Crag.

We drove into Ordimnos Hill where the wind was howling, the location of windmills here no accident. But we were able to find good views of Isabelline, Northern and Black-eared Wheatears, European Stonechat and Cretzschmar’s Bunting. A Eurasian Hobby flew along the high ridgeline.

The wind was still strong as we visited Ipsalou Monastery, so we had time to go in and see the totally amazing collection of religious artifacts and textiles housed there. A single monk watched over us as we slowly worked our way through the cases of treasures, worrying about their future but very moved to see them in the place of their use. From the balcony we had a splendid view all the way to the West Coast. We also saw Common Kestrel, a Short-toed Snake Eagle, and Common Buzzard, a good day for raptors in flight. Walking down, we were able to



spot Cinereous Bunting, Black-headed Bunting, and near the parked vans, Steve turned over a rock to reveal to us good views of a Medium Chequered Scorpion, feeding on a cricket. Driving down through rocky habitat, the road cutting deep into a bank, we had good views of Rock Sparrow, well-named and very cryptic.

We worked our way down to Sigri, passed logs of petrified trees in the volcanic sediments, descending on curving switchbacks with great views of centuries-old stone walls around mountain sheep pastures. The sense of time seemed put on hold here, just rock, sky, and what seemed like an ancient route to the sea. We spied a couple of Chukar, and at a windy stop watched a Common Cuckoo struggle to hold on to its perch.

It was so windy we took refuge at the visitor center for the Petrified Forest Museum in their coffee shop, bringing our lunch but also enjoying treats and coffee. This was a great place to buy local food products for souvenirs. Outside a Crested Lark posed on a particularly beautiful tall piece of petrified wood while Chaffinch sang from the back garden. Now that we knew the island well, the geologic map at this facility made much more sense and was fascinating to study. We had time to go out back where there was a specimen of petrified roots of a huge tree, very impressive.



From there we went north to Faneromeni Beach. At the beach, we found a nice sheltered spot against some rocks to set up the scope to view Yelkouan and Scopoli's Shearwaters flying offshore. We were elated when two Eleonora's Falcons flew above us, distant but good views for some time. The geology of the area was fascinating, and the beach inviting several of the group to wander, take it all in, look for shells and driftwood. Driving back to town, near the harbor we had good views of European Shag and driving back to some watered fields we found the Spur-winged Plover again, in lovely plumage feeding among bright flowers. Close to this spot a flock of Western Jackdaw flew over a couple of times, they seem to hang in the Sigri area.



Time to return, back over the mountain, and down into the Kalloni Bay area. We all went for a last spin to the Kalloni Salt Pans, with news of a few more species we hoped to see, we went directly back to the sheep fields. While we could not walk in this time, from the gate we had fine views of White Wagtail, and distant views of other water-associated species including both shelducks, the Great-crested Grebes, Curlew Sandpiper, both Common Ringed and Kentish Plovers and more. Gina picked up a small group of Mediterranean Gull among the far more plentiful Yellow-legged. Along the channel leading out we got good views of Little and Temminck's Stints for good comparison.

Steve wanted to save time to return to the mouth of the Tsiknias River, to give sighting a Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin one last try. We just had one van continue there, as many had packing on their minds, but it was a rewarding last try. Along the river we had good views of Little Bittern and Common Moorhen, then in the shrubby area Freddie spotted the scrub-robin for scope views, yeah! Peg wandered a bit and picked up the only Black-headed Gull of our trip, resting on the riverbank. Driving back the route of the fields and river ford, we saw a Red Fox, fun!

Back to clean up, enjoy drinks in the bar, a final dinner together and recounting our favorite sightings after the checklist. We asked the group to recount favorite moments and species and there was a wide range of answers rather than one unified opinion. Scenic beauty of the island was described as 'jaw-dropping', several mentioned the flowers and orchids so ever-present, and for Kelly the Bee Orchid rang true. Pat reminded us of the picnic spot on the South Coast, John commented on the overall diversity for a small island, and Glenn smiled to list Lise's laugh – we had bonded as a group and recognized each other's calls! Bob added Worm Snakes and Audouin's Gull, and our eye-to-eye views of hunting Lesser Kestrel. Kelly loved the frenzy of feeding with storks and terns, our success in finding Krüeper's Nuthatch while Jean commented on the beauty of White-winged Terns and so many flamingoes. She liked the diversity of shrikes, the sweet nature of Blue Tits, and seeing the Short-toed Snake eagle go over with a snake in its talons. The friendly hotel staff and 9AM made the list and Lori and Steve keyed in on the Hoopoe, Golden Oriole, and Little Owl. They also remembered the dawn beauty of Methochi Lake. So much to savor!

Sunday, May 5 | Departure Day, Local Birding

Several of the group had early flights, so Peg headed out with her van shortly after breakfast. This is such a great size airport to check in to. All went smoothly, and we were on our way. Steve took a few others out to catch up on yesterday's Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin as they passed through the Kalloni Salt Pans, holding our usual suspects. Bob and Kelly picked up one more species on the drive to the airport, a Great Cormorant.

What a great trip, in no small part due to having a group that all participated, eyes to the sky, eyes to the ground. Finding flowers, herps, insects and birds filled our days in a beautiful place and for a week we were able to tune out this complicated world and the daily barrage of news. It was so rejuvenating! `

Photo Credits:

Black-headed Bunting, Peg Abbott (PA); Black Stork Kalloni, PA; Cretzschmar's Bunting, PA; Chaffinch, PA; Subalpine Warbler, Steve Bird (SB); Little Bittern, SB; Spotted Flycatcher, PA; Blue Wildflower, PA; Giant Fennel, PA; Poppy Cluster, PA; Wildflower (1,2) PA; Alykes Wetland Orchid viewing, PA; Orchids Alykes Wetland (1,2) PA; Agios Fokas group photo, PA; Agios Fokas well, PA; Metochi Lake AM birding, PA; Agios Fokas coast, PA; Polichnitos Church, PA; Polichnitos Salt pans walk, PA; Pyrro Village beers, PA; Vatera Harbor, PA; Platania Valley birding, PA; Kavaki view of coast, PA; Platania Valley birding, PA; Audouin's Gull, SB; Bee Orchid, SB; Cinereous Bunting, SB; Little Owl, SB; Spur-winged Plover, SB; Sigri coastal views, PA; Sigri homes on the coast, PA; Corn Bunting in Giant Fennel, PA; Group birding road by Rock Sparrow, PA; Olive Tree Warbler Search, PA; Steve, Gina & Peg Faneronomi Beach, PA; Group birding Faneronomi beach, Group birding Lardia Valley, PA; Ipsalious Monastery Scenics, PA; White-winged Tern, SB; Western Marsh Harrier, SB; Subalpine Warbler, SB, Typical lunch, PA.

