

# Lesvos, Greece: Migration! | Species List

## April 22 – 29, 2023 | with Naturalist Journeys



**With local guide Stylianos, host guide James and guests: Cassie, Dawn, Deb, Dick, Kathy, Martha, Marie, Mike F., Mike W. and Monique.**

Compiled by James P. Smith

A delightful, single-base tour to the beautiful Greek Island of Lesvos. Situated in the eastern Aegean Sea, the island has long been a premier destination for birders attracted by the many migrant birds and a number of regional specialties. We did rather well seeing most of the latter, with Sombre Tit, Krüper's Nuthatch, Rüppell's Warbler and Cinereous Bunting as well as Laughing Dove, the most recent addition to the island's breeding birds. While seasoned island birders may have reported fewer migrants than usual, we could hardly tire of watching Red-footed Falcons, European Bee-eaters, Cretzschmar's and Black-headed Buntings and the many other delightful species that captivated us during the week. Highlights included finding all four possible wagtail species as well a magnificent Dalmation Pelican and the diminutive, bobbing Jack Snipe that generated so much interest.

This was such a fun tour to be part of with great group camaraderie and warm-hearted banter throughout the week. Special thanks go to Stylianos, our local guide, and to the Sunrise birding team for unflinching support throughout. We'll back next year!

This species list and the checklist used on the tour follow the IOC World Bird Names version 9.2.

**BIRDS:** (145 species including one heard only, and five that were leader-only observations)

### **DUCKS, GEESE AND SWANS: Anatidae (4)**

**Common Shelduck** *Tadorna tadorna* – Up to 45 regularly around the Kalloni salt pans on six days of the tour.

**Ruddy Shelduck** *Tadorna ferruginea* – A most attractive goose-like duck seen on every day of the tour in a wide variety of habitats. Most easily found around the Kalloni salt pans, but other sites included the meadows at Limonosa Monastery and the barrens of the Meladia Valley where we saw a female with chicks on the 23<sup>rd</sup>.

**Mallard** *Anas platyrhynchos* – Found on just three days with pairs and singles around the Mesa marshes.

**Ferruginous Duck** *Aythya nyroca* – A fine male resting on a pool and watched from the Mesa overlook on the 24<sup>th</sup>. A scarce species on the island and excellent bird for this tour.

### **PARTRIDGES and PHEASANTS: Phasianidae (2)**

**Chukar Partridge** *Alectoris chukar* – Super views of a pair initially spotted by Mike W. at the roadside in the Petrified Forest National Park on the 25<sup>th</sup>.

**Common Pheasant** *Phasianus colchicus* (HO) – One called several times at the Limonos Monastery during the commotion around the Long-eared Owl sighting on the 23<sup>rd</sup>.

### **GREBES: Podicipedidae (2)**

**Little Grebe** *Tachybaptus ruficollis* – Great views of this smart, “little” grebe in breeding plumage at the Mesa marshes and the old Potamia Reservoir, all on the 24<sup>th</sup>.

**Great Crested Grebe** *Podiceps cristatus* – What was probably the same full breeding-plumaged bird showed well on the Tsiknias River on the 22<sup>nd</sup> and the 27<sup>th</sup>.

### **FLAMINGOS: Phoenicopteriformes (1)**

**Greater Flamingo** *Phoenicopterus roseus* – Seen every day in the area of Kalloni Bay, and especially at the salt pans where up to 350 were present.

### **HERONS, STORKS and IBISES: Ciconiiformes (10)**

**Black Stork** *Ciconia nigra* – A beautiful stork when seen in good light, with greenish-purple sheen and a bright red bill, eye-ring and legs. The Kalloni salt pans and Alykes Wetlands offered some of the best views, although we encountered a few in more remote areas such as the Meladia Valley. Noted on four days.

**White Stork** *Ciconia ciconia* – Generally fewer seen than Black Stork, though most were nesting in towns and villages at this time, but pairs and singles could be found at the Alykes Wetlands and Kalloni salt pans area.

**Eurasian Spoonbill** *Platalea leucorodia* - Two small migrant flocks seen at the Kalloni salt pans on two dates; five on the 22<sup>nd</sup> and eight on the 24<sup>th</sup>. Both groups spent all their time roosting!

**Little Bittern** *Ixobrychus minutus* – A nice male watched in beautiful evening light at the old Potamia Reservoir on the 24<sup>th</sup>.

**Squacco Heron** *Ardeola ralloides* – A small rather cryptic heron, creamy-buff and tan in color. One showed brilliantly well at the Kalloni salt pans on the very first afternoon of the trip, and others were seen at the Kalloni pool outside the hotel and on the Tsiknias River. Transformed into a white heron in flight when the white wings and tail gave the bird a completely different appearance....wow!

**Western Cattle Egret** *Bubulcus ibis* – As we watched several colorful European Bee-eaters perched in a fig tree near the Tsiknias River, a Cattle Egret flew up from a sheep pen and disappeared to the east. The bee-eaters generated most of the excitement, but the egret was actually quite a rarity on the island, and Stylianos dutifully placed it on the local hotline.

**Grey Heron** *Ardea cinerea* – Small numbers (usually less than five) often found roosting around the Kalloni salt pans or foraging at the wetlands close by. Noted on four days.

**Great Egret** *Ardea alba* – Scattered singles and pairs seen on four days around the Kalloni salt pans, Alykes Wetlands and Mesa marshes.

**Little Egret** *Egretta garzetta* – The most common heron on the trip. Seen at many wetland sites on at least five days with the most impressive concentrations around the Kalloni salt pans where up to 15 could be found.

**Glossy Ibis** *Plegadis falcinellus* – We saw up to four on two days of the trip and had excellent views at the Tsiknias River on the 27<sup>th</sup>.

### **PELICANS: Pelicanidae (1)**

**Dalmation Pelican** *Pelecanus crispus* – How fortunate we were to be on the island when this magnificent beast showed up and gave the most fabulous flight views over the Kalloni salt pans on the 26<sup>th</sup>. A rare but increasing visitor to Lesvos, though still “near-threatened” within its limited European breeding range. A most welcome life bird for many in our group!

### **CORMORANTS: Phalacrocoracidae (2)**

**European Shag** *Phalacrocorax aristotelis* – A white-breasted immature of the Mediterranean race *desmarestii* resting on the pilings just offshore, south of the Kalloni salt works, on the 24<sup>th</sup>. Ironically these were the first views of any cormorant species on the trip though we’d ultimately see good numbers of Great Cormorants on the salt pans later the same day.

**Great Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax carbo sinensis* – Up to 35 recorded on three consecutive days between the 24<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup>, most of them on the Kalloni salt pans, but at least one flock of nine heading east over Skalla Kalloni on the 25<sup>th</sup>.

**OSPREY: Pandionidae (1)**

**Osprey** *Pandion haliaetus* – Good views of one over the eastern berm of the Kalloni salt pans on the 24<sup>th</sup>. Though a regular migrant through Lesvos, this was, somewhat surprisingly, the only Osprey of the tour.

**BUZZARDS, HAWKS, HARRIERS AND EAGLES: Accipitridae (6)**

**Short-toed Eagle** *Circaetus galliscus* – Plenty of sightings of this large, pale eagle, most often seen hovering or soaring over barren hillsides during our days out to the western peninsula, but also good views of about four over the Potomia Valley on the 28<sup>th</sup>. A breeding bird and a migrant on Lesvos.

**Eurasian Sparrowhawk** *Accipter nisus* – A migrant sparring with a Long-legged Buzzard over the Meladia Valley on the 23<sup>rd</sup> shortly after we'd just enjoyed watching a male Citrine Wagtail on the river!

**Western Marsh-Harrier** *Circus aeruginosus* – Frequent sightings of birds hunting between the Tsiknias River, Lotzaria Track, Kalloni salt pans and the Mesa marshes. All were cream-crowned females or immatures with up to five seen on each day of the trip. One of the most frequently seen raptors on the tour.

**Montagu's/Pallid Harrier** *Circus pygargus/macrouros* – An immature Mon/Pal appeared all too briefly by the Lotzaria track on the 24<sup>th</sup> before dropping down into the longer grasses and out of view. Identification of this species pair can be difficult, usually requiring prolonged views and decent photos. Brief sightings such as this one are best left unidentified.

**Long-legged Buzzard** *Buteo rufinus* – We had reasonably good views of this fine *buteo* in the Meladia Valley, Faneromeni and Agra. Common Buzzards were sometimes at hand for comparison, and that was particularly gratifying.

**Common Buzzard** *Buteo buteo* – Many sightings throughout the island. A vagrant **Steppe Buzzard** (*Buteo buteo vulpinus*) was observed at the Mesa marshes on the 24<sup>th</sup> and identified retrospectively from photos showing it to be a well-marked rufous morph, apparently an individual that's been present on the island for some time. Buzzards showing intermediate characteristics between Common and Steppe have given rise to the term "Island Buzzard," but further study is required to establish whether these might be hybrids, variants or genuine migrant Steppe Buzzards.

**RAILS, COOTS AND ALLIES: Rallidae (4)**

**Little Crane** *Porzana parva* – A fine male spent some time around the fringe of the old Potamia Reservoir on the 24<sup>th</sup> providing a nice scope study.

**Spotted Crane** *Porzana porzana* – A scarce migrant, this Sora-like *rallid* showed pretty well to our group on the Tsiknias River on the evenings of the 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup>.

**Common Moorhen** *Gallinula chloropus* – Up to three at the Mesa marshes, seen from the Old Bridge on the 24<sup>th</sup> and another heard calling from the Tsiknias River on the 26<sup>th</sup>.

**Eurasian Coot** *Fulica atra* – Quite plentiful at the Mesa marshes, with at least eight seen and several more at the old Potamia Reservoir, including one nest building, all of them observed on the 24<sup>th</sup>.

**SHOREBIRDS: Charadriiformes (17)**

**Black-winged Stilt** *Himantopus himantopus* – One of the more charismatic shorebirds often creating beautiful reflections with a mirror-like quality in the calm shallows of the Kalloni salt pans and canal. Rather common with up to 30 noted on at least five days, and others feeding/resting around the Christou River mouth close to our hotel on the 27<sup>th</sup>.

**Pied Avocet** *Recurvirostra avosetta* – A striking species readily identified and usually visible on the salt pans anytime we drove past. Up to 130 birds at the Kalloni salt pans and a few regularly at the Christou River mouth.

**Grey (Black-bellied) Plover** *Pluvialis squatarola* – A small push of northbound migrants, most of them in transitional plumage, with five on the berms at the eastern side of the Kalloni salt pans on the 26<sup>th</sup>, and another at the Christou River mouth on the 27<sup>th</sup>.

**Little Ringed Plover** *Charadrius dubious* – Two in flight over the Alykes Wetlands may have been the same two seen at the eastern side of the Kalloni salt pans on the 24<sup>th</sup>. We enjoyed much more satisfactory views of one on a sandbar in the middle of the Tsikinias River on the 26<sup>th</sup> showing off its bright yellow eye-ring and distinctive attenuated posture.

**Kentish Plover** *Charadrius alexandrinus* – Up to five flying around and occasionally displaying on the salt flats of the Christou River mouth on the 27<sup>th</sup>. These were seen through the scope and not especially easy to see in the blustery conditions that day.

**Eurasian Curlew** *Numenius arquata* – We had a wonderful migration moment as five calling curlews flew in from the Gulf of Kalloni looking for a place to settle on the eastern side of the Kalloni salt pans on the 26<sup>th</sup>.

**Black-tailed Godwit** *Limosa limosa* – An early start to the tour proved crucial with our only sighting of this species on the first afternoon of the trip, a single bird on the 22<sup>nd</sup> at the Kalloni salt pans.

**Ruff** *Calidris pugnax* – One of the most common migrant shorebirds, we came across flocks of up to 55 on the Kalloni salt pans and Alykes wetlands as well as a several singles in the channel around the periphery of the salt pans. Noted on at least five days.

**Curlew Sandpiper** *Calidris ferruginea* – Northbound migrants began to appear towards the end of the tour with three on the Christou River on the 27<sup>th</sup>, and at least 25 on the Kalloni salt pans on the 28<sup>th</sup>, most of them resplendent in full breeding plumage.

**Temminck's Stint** *Calidris temminckii* – A single bird seen with Wood Sandpipers on the channel by the Kalloni salt pans on the afternoon of the 22<sup>nd</sup>.

**Little Stint** *Calidris minuta* – Quite scarce with two at the Kalloni salt pans on the 24<sup>th</sup> and distant scope views of about six at the Christou River mouth on the 27<sup>th</sup>.

**Common Snipe** *Gallinago gallinago* – We had beautiful views two evenings in a row on the Tsikinias River on the 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup>.

**Jack Snipe** *Lymnocyptes minimus* – An island rarity shrouded in mystique as the species has been reported by hunters in the winter months, but almost never seen by birders! All that changed in April 2023 when this denizen of inaccessible bogs and marshes in Northern Europe showed brilliantly to birders gathered on the banks of the Tsikinias River on the evening of the 27<sup>th</sup>. Not only was it a new “island bird” for Lesvos regulars, but a rare opportunity to observe this cryptic species feeding out in the open - a complete triumph all round!

**Common Sandpiper** *Actitis hypoleucos* – Unobtrusive and easily overlooked with singles noted along the channels around the periphery of the Kalloni salt pans on three days of the tour.

**Wood Sandpiper** *Tringa glareola* – In terms of frequency, this was easily the most common shorebird seen during the week, found pretty much at every wetland site whether it be saline, brackish or fresh water. Close studies were enjoyed by the group at the Kalloni salt pans, Alykes Wetlands and the Tsikinias River.

**Common Greenshank** *Tringa nebularia* – After distant views of one at the Mesa marshes, the remainder of our observations came from the Kalloni salt pans with three on the 22<sup>nd</sup>, and seven on the 26<sup>th</sup>.

**Collared Pratincole** *Glareola pratincole* – A graceful, tern-like shorebird first seen hawking insects high over the Alykes wetlands when three were found on the 24<sup>th</sup>. That particular flock drifted west, but four days later we had the great fortune to see three resting on a freshly plowed field by the Lotzaria track on the last afternoon, making for a lovely finale to the trip.

## **GULLS AND TERNS: Laridae (6)**

**Mediterranean Gull** *Ichthyaeetus melanocephalus* – An adult and sub-adult, both showing fully black hoods, at rest on the eastern side of the Kalloni salt pans on the 24<sup>th</sup>. A scarce migrant and a nice addition to the trip.

**Yellow-legged Gull** *Larus michanhellis* – This handsome gull is perhaps underrated due in no small part to its abundance on the island. With the exception of pine woodland, we found them just about everywhere, and in

numbers, from the low-lying cultivated fields around Kalloni Bay to the barren, windswept uplands of the western peninsula.

**Gull-billed Tern** *Gelochelidon nilotica* – A flock of 23 adults arrived at the eastern Kalloni salt pans on the afternoon of the 26<sup>th</sup>, all of them in pristine breeding plumage and scope views were thoroughly enjoyed by all!

**Sandwich Tern** *Thalasseus sandvicensis* – Two foraged close to shore along Kalloni Bay just beyond the “Race Track” on a blustery afternoon on the 27<sup>th</sup>.

**Little Tern** *Sternula albifrons* – Up to 15 along the eastern side of the Kalloni salt pans offering nice size comparisons with Common Terns when resting, and excellent “busy” flight views when foraging. Noted on four days.

**Common Tern** *Sterna hirundo* – Numbers increased towards the end of our week, most regularly seen around the eastern Kalloni salt pans, but five migrants, observed to the north over the Upper Napi Valley in poor weather on the 27<sup>th</sup>, were far less expected. Noted on four days.

### **PIGEONS AND DOVES: Columbidae (5)**

**Rock Dove** *Columba livia* – Found in small numbers just about anywhere on the island with habitation.

**Common Wood-Pigeon** *Columba palumbus* – This heavyweight pigeon was seen well in flight in the Upper Napi Valley on the 27<sup>th</sup>. We were high enough up to be able to look down on the pigeon as it flew below with great views of the broad white bands across the upperwings (similar to White-winged Dove). A scarce resident on the island recorded on only a handful of Lesvos tours.

**European Turtle-Dove** *Streptopelia turtur* – Stylianos mentioned hearing the soft crooning purr of this species several times, but it wasn't until we reached the secret pond at Filia that we finally pinned one down, a perched male that could be heard and watched singing.

**Eurasian Collared-Dove** *Streptopelia decaocto* – Seen daily in towns, villages and other spots around habitation.

**Laughing Dove** *Streptopelia senegalensis* – A recent addition to the breeding avifauna of Greece. The first confirmed nesting record came from Lesvos in September 2021, found by none other than our local guide Stylianos! The narrow, cobbled streets of Loutra provided the venue for this event, and our visit on the 27<sup>th</sup> included two or three Laughing Doves scattered about the village as well as one nesting on a narrow window ledge.

### **CUCKOOS: Cuculidae (2)**

**Great Spotted Cuckoo** *Clamator glandarius* – A super find just after wrapping up a tasty al fresco lunch by the Chapel in the Meladia Valley on the 25<sup>th</sup>. Stylianos spotted this one as it flew across a meadow landing in a Tamarisk and settling for prolonged scope views. A scarce migrant on the island and another solid addition to our trip.

**Common Cuckoo** *Cuculus canorus* – Nice views of an adult flying along a fennel-covered slope at Faneromeni on the 23<sup>rd</sup> and then perching for some time in a Giant Fennel. A super study of a shy species much more often heard than seen.

### **OWLS: Strigiformes (3)**

**Eurasian Scops-Owl** *Otus scops* – Great views of one roosting against a thick Eucalyptus trunk on the outskirts of Kalloni on the 22<sup>nd</sup>. The first notable bird of the tour, a great way to start the trip!

**Little Owl** *Athene noctua* – We had to wait until the last afternoon of the tour to find a pair on a farm building just north of the Kalloni salt pans, but we did have fabulous views and this perky little owl was well worth the wait.

**Long-eared Owl** *Asio otus* – We got lucky with close views of one in flight by the parking lot at Limonos Monastery on the 23<sup>rd</sup>. The poor thing was then pursued by Hooded Crows across a meadow until it found refuge by diving inside a derelict farm building!

### **SWIFTS: *Apodidae* (2)**

**Common Swift** *Apus apus* – Seen on at least four days, sometimes over the villages and settlements, but the best views came in the evenings from the Tsiknias River where we often had close views in perfect light.

**Pallid Swift** *Apus pallidus* – Perhaps half-a-dozen or more sweeping low over the exposed rocky hillsides along the Sigri – Eressos Road on the 23<sup>rd</sup>. Lesser Kestrels and Short-toed Eagles were also in view at the same time!

### **BEE-EATERS: *Meropidae* (1)**

**European Bee-eater** *Merops apiaster* – “When you’re tired of bee-eaters, you’re tired of life,” or so the saying goes. This most charismatic, colorful species treated us to great looks near the Alykes Wetlands on the 24<sup>th</sup> and the Tsiknias River on the 27<sup>th</sup>. Flyover migrants were usually picked out by their liquid calls and included one large flock of 30 northbound birds high over the Kalloni salt pans on the 28<sup>th</sup>.

### **HOOPOES: *Upupidae* (1)**

**Eurasian Hoopoe** *Upupa epops* – Hoopoes were much talked about on the trip, but sadly this much-desired species was only seen briefly flying across a road near Vatoussa on the 25<sup>th</sup>.

### **WOODPECKERS: *Picidae* (1)**

**Middle Spotted Woodpecker** *Dendrocoptes medius* (LO) – The only species of woodpecker breeding on the island proved remarkably difficult to find. Late April is apparently deep inside the breeding cycle for this species, and they seemed to be especially secretive at this time. JPS saw one fly across the Vougalis River at Perivolis Monastery on our first full field day on the 23<sup>rd</sup>. Stylianos felt there would be chances for more during the week but, alas, this elusive woodpecker never came our way.

### **FALCONS: *Falconidae* (6)**

**Lesser Kestrel** *Falco naumanni* – This tricky species appeared to prefer the barren environment of the western peninsula during our visit. Three or four were noted hovering and gliding low over the rocky slopes along the Sigri-Eressos Road on the 23<sup>rd</sup> and the 25<sup>th</sup>.

**Common Kestrel** *Falco tinnunculus* – This normally widespread falcon wasn’t so “common” on the island, with a thin scatter of singles at sites such as the Meladia Valley and the Kalloni salt pans on four dates.

**Red-footed Falcon** *Falco vespertinus* – A gregarious, enigmatic falcon found on three days beginning with a single, northbound male over Faneromeni on the 23<sup>rd</sup>, and followed by a loose gathering of up to a dozen hunting over the sheep fields south of the Kalloni salt pans on the 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup>. Most were males, some offering fantastic views.

**Eleonora’s Falcon** *Falco eleonora* – Stylianos and Mike W. had the great fortune to be looking skyward when one of these beauties flew north over the Petrified Forest Natural History Museum on the 25<sup>th</sup>.

**Eurasian Hobby** *Falco subbuteo* – An adult showed wonderfully well as it chased swallows and martins over the Tsiknias River during the Jack Snipe evening on the 27<sup>th</sup>.

**Peregrine Falcon** *Falco peregrinus* – Seen on at least four days, though most were high-flyers, often hanging/drifted over exposed upland areas such as the Meladia Valley, Agra and Charamida.

### **SHRIKES: *Laniidae* (3)**

**Red-backed Shrike** *Lanius collurio* – Seen on three dates with the best views in the Meladia Valley on the 23<sup>rd</sup> including good looks at a female by the Chapel.

**Woodchat Shrike** *Lanius senator* – The abundance of this shrike did not detract in any way from its striking beauty, and we found them in many habitats all over the island, but most often around cultivated fields and olive groves. Seen on every day of the tour.

**Masked Shrike** *Lanius nubicus* – Another beautiful shrike only slightly less common than the Woodchat. Fabulous views were enjoyed in several spots including Achladeri, Filia and the Potamia Valley, and we were treated to a female building a nest right over the track at the latter site!

#### **ORIOLES: Oriolidae (1)**

**Eurasian Golden-Oriole** *Oriolus oriolus* – A small arrival of orioles took place on the western peninsula on the 23<sup>rd</sup>, with several passing through the fields at Faneromeni and the upper Meladia Valley. These birds were fast-moving migrants and surprisingly difficult to spot despite their gaudy plumage.

#### **CROWS: Corvidae (4)**

**Eurasian Jay** *Garrulus glandarius* – The black-crowned subspecies *atricapillus* is resident and quite widespread on the island. We found them in a wide variety of habitats every day.

**Western Jackdaw** *Coloeus monedula* – Sigri, in the far west, was the only spot we found this underrated *corvid* with up to 60 seen in small flocks on the 23<sup>rd</sup> and the 25<sup>th</sup>. The Lesvos birds showed a well-marked white collar, a notable characteristic of the east European subspecies *soemmerringii*.

**Hooded Crow** *Corvus cornix* – The most common crow on the island found in many habitats but especially around villages and cultivated areas. Frequently seen in pursuit of large, broad winged raptors especially Common Buzzards!

**Northern Raven** *Corvus corax* – Ravens were seen almost every day, usually at the higher elevations with the most during our visits to the western peninsula; the Petrified Forest, Agra and the Lardia Valley were all good spots to see them. Formerly scarce, this species has apparently increased as a breeding bird in recent years.

#### **TITS: Paridae (3)**

**Sombre Tit** *Poecile lugubris* – A key species for the tour, we had prolonged views of one alongside a Cretzschmar's Bunting in a small bush at Agra on the 25<sup>th</sup>, and JPS had "leader-only" drive-by views of another in the Upper Napi Valley on the 27<sup>th</sup>.

**Eurasian Blue Tit** *Cyanistes caeruleus* – Fairly widespread including around the Kalloni Bay Hotel. A treat to watch when seen well, such as the views we had in the Achladeri Forest and the nesting pair along the farm track at Filia.

**Great Tit** *Parus major* – Fairly common and widespread, though heard more often than seen. Noted regularly throughout the tour including on the grounds of the Kalloni Bay Hotel.

#### **LARKS: Alaudidae (3)**

**Woodlark** *Lullula arborea* – Nice views of at least one pair on the Sigri-Eressos Road after a couple of distant males were heard singing at Ipsilou Monastery, all on the 23<sup>rd</sup>.

**Crested Lark** *Galerida cristata* – Common throughout the island, though perhaps most frequently heard and seen around the Kalloni salt pans and Lotzaria track. The 'crested' appearance of this species is distinctive as are the pleasant melodic calls and we found them on each day of the tour.

**Greater Short-toed Lark** *Calandrella brachydactyla* (LO) – Two birds flew over the track by the Alykes wetlands calling as they headed towards the Kalloni salt works.

#### **SWALLOWS AND MARTINS: Hirundinidae (5)**

**Sand Martin (Bank Swallow)** *Riparia riparia* – Migrants poured through in the last three days of the tour with gatherings of up to 150 over the Tsiknias River in early evening where they offered fabulous views, and the air was alive with their "buzzy" calls.

**Barn Swallow** *Hirundo rustica* – Seen daily throughout the trip and found over much of the island. The largest concentrations were over the Tsiknias River, Lotzaria track and Kalloni salt pans during the last two days.

**Eurasian Crag Martin** *Ptyonoprogne rupestris* – A good trip for views of this discreet *hirundine* seen at close range on three consecutive days in the Lardia Valley, Agiassos and the Meladia Valley.

**Common House Martin** *Delichon urbicum* – Difficult to miss being seen every day at the Kalloni Bay Hotel with many pairs under the eaves of the building.

**Red-rumped Swallow** *Cecropis daurica* – A most attractive swallow seen on five days, the first over the river at Perivolis Monastery and the Meladia Valley on the 23<sup>rd</sup>. This species appeared to be most at home around farm buildings.

### **WARBLERS: Sylviidae (16)**

**Cetti's Warbler** *Cettia cetti* – The explosive song of this species was often the only giveaway to its presence, but some in our group did particularly well finding one at the Mesa marshes on the 24<sup>th</sup>. Otherwise, singles were recorded as “heard-only” by the Tsiknias River and the Kalloni Pool by our hotel.

**Eastern Bonelli's Warbler** *Phylloscopus orientalis* – Though by no means easy, we managed to get the whole group onto a calling Bonelli's Warbler feeding in the oaks along the Filia farm track on the 28<sup>th</sup>.

**Wood Warbler** *Phylloscopus sibilatrix* – One appeared briefly in the same oaks as a male Blackcap at Ipsilou Monastery on the 23<sup>rd</sup>.

**Great Reed Warbler** *Acrocephalus arundinaceus* – Two fairly brief sightings: one close to Eurasian Reed Warblers at the Tsiknias River ford in late afternoon on the 22<sup>nd</sup>, and another close to Olive-tree Warblers in the lower Potamia Valley on the 28<sup>th</sup>.

**Sedge Warbler** *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus* – A single showed pretty well alongside wagtails and sandpipers in the reeds along the Tskianas River on the 26<sup>th</sup>.

**Common Reed Warbler** *Acrocephalus scirpaceus* – The best views were at the Tsiknias River ford on the first evening, but we also found a handful at the Mesa marshes and the old Potamia Reservoir.

**Eastern Olivaceous Warbler** *Iduna pallida* – A rather nondescript warbler most often heard singing from deep within flowering Tamarisks. Occasionally, one would sing out in the open as Stylianos and his travel companions experienced several times on the Lotzaria Track. Noted on five days.

**Olive-tree Warbler** *Hippolais olivetorum* – This hulking *hippolais* is not only scarce but also a late spring arrival, so it certainly came as a surprise to hear several singing in the lower Potamia Valley on the evening of the 24<sup>th</sup>. We returned to the same spot on a chilly morning later in the week and had views of a few singing males in the olive groves, and Mike F. even captured a photo!

**Eurasian Blackcap** *Sylvia atricapilla* – A lone male (replete with black cap) in the small oaks at Ipsilou Monastery on the 23<sup>rd</sup>.

**Barred Warbler** *Sylvia nisoria* (LO) – A fully-barred male first detected by its warbling song in the olive groves of the lower Potamia Valley on the 28<sup>th</sup>. Unfortunately, only the leaders obtained convincing views of this skulker as it rapidly moved along a hedgerow.

**Lesser Whitethroat** *Sylvia curruca* – A fairly unobtrusive migrant, quite easy to overlook, with one or two seen at Faneromeni on the 23<sup>rd</sup>, Charamida on the 26<sup>th</sup> and at the “secret pond” at Filia, where we had the best views on the 28<sup>th</sup>.

**Eastern Orphean Warbler** *Sylvia crassirostris* – This large, dark-headed *Sylvia* showed briefly in the Meladia Valley on the 23<sup>rd</sup>, and much better in the olive groves of the lower Potamia Valley on the 28<sup>th</sup>.

**Common Whitethroat** *Sylvia communis* – Singles in the Meladia Valley on the 23<sup>rd</sup> and the 25<sup>th</sup>, but excellent views at the “secret pond” at Filia on the 28<sup>th</sup>.

**Eastern Subalpine Warbler** *Sylvia cantillans* – The first was a singing male downriver from Perivolis Monastery on the 23<sup>rd</sup>, but this species came into its own at Filia on the 28<sup>th</sup> where we had multiple views of males and females at the secret pond and surroundings. A very handsome *Sylvia* warbler when seen well.

**Sardinian Warbler** *Sylvia melanocephala* – Singing males were eventually seen pretty well at Charamida on the 26<sup>th</sup>, with others noted at the lower Potamia Valley and Filia on the 28<sup>th</sup>.



**Rüppell's Warbler** *Sylvia ruppeli* – A much sought-after *Sylvia* warbler, not only localized on Lesvos, but also within its limited breeding range in Greece and Turkey. After some searching, we were treated to excellent views of several males in the coastal scrub near Charamida on the 26<sup>th</sup>.

### **NUTHATCHES: Sittidae (2)**

**Krüper's Nuthatch** *Sitta krueperi* – We were fortunate to have Stylianos at the helm of this year's tour as a few days prior to the group's arrival he located a nesting pair of Krüper's Nuthatches with young. Though our first attempts to view the nest were thwarted due to inclement weather over the Achladeri Forest, we returned a few days later and were treated to fabulous scope views of the active nest, the young clearly visible inside. In addition, Mike W. saw a single Krüper's Nuthatch at the forested picnic site just up the road on the same day. A big attraction for the island's visiting birders, Lesvos being the only location in Europe where the species can be readily seen.

**Western Rock Nuthatch** *Sitta neumayer* – A single bird teed-up and scoped on the boulder-strewn slopes of Agra on the 25<sup>th</sup> was the only sighting of the week.

### **TREECREEPERS: Certhiidae (1)**

**Short-toed Treecreeper** *Certhia brachydactyla* (LO) – Stylianos mentioned hearing several calling in the Achladeri Forest as we walked over to the Kruper's Nuthatch nest site on the 26<sup>th</sup>.

### **THRUSHES: Turdidae (2)**

**Common Blackbird** *Turdus merula* – The pleasant song of this species was a fairly common sound throughout the island, but came mostly from lowland areas, farms and villages. Blackbirds could also be seen and heard daily in the gardens of the Kalloni Bay Hotel.

**Mistle Thrush** *Turdus viscivorus* (LO) – One flew across the road in front of the second vehicle as we drove through the rain and into the Achladeri Forest to view the Kruper's Nuthatch nest site on the 24<sup>th</sup>.

### **FLYCATCHERS, NIGHTINGALES, REDSTARTS, WHEATEARS: Musciapidae (11)**

**Spotted Flycatcher** *Muscicapa striata* – Good numbers seen on the western peninsula on the 23<sup>rd</sup> indicating a small fallout, with several at Pervilos Monastery, Ipsilou Monastery, Faneromeni and the Meladia Valley. Virtually absent in the days that followed, with just the one seen on the 24<sup>th</sup>.

**European Pied Flycatcher** *Ficedula hypoleuca* – This species, too, was associated with the flycatcher fallout on the western peninsula on the 23<sup>rd</sup> with perhaps as many as 12 seen throughout the day at Pervilos Monastery, Ipsilou Monastery and Faneromeni.

**Collared Flycatcher** *Ficedula albicollis* – Over a dozen (including some fine males) during the flycatcher fallout of the 23<sup>rd</sup>, and all of them in the extreme west: Faneromeni, Sigri-Eressos Road and the Meladia Valley.

**Common Nightingale** *Luscinia luscinia* – The most beautiful of singing passerines was heard in many lowland spots on the island including daily at the Kalloni Bay Hotel. While this species will always be devilishly difficult to see, Kathy got extremely lucky when a fellow birding guest showed her a nightingale singing in the Kalloni Bay gardens on the 25<sup>th</sup>!

**Common Redstart** *Phoenicurus Phoenicurus* – Two singles seen rather briefly and in similar circumstances: one along the Sigri-Eressos Road on the 23<sup>rd</sup>, and another while driving through the Petrified Forest National Park on the 25<sup>th</sup>. Thankfully the distinctive, rusty-red tail of this species is an extremely useful identification feature when seen briefly.

**Blue Rock Thrush** *Monticola solitarius* – Scope views of perched males in the Lardia Valley on the 23<sup>rd</sup> and Agra on the 25<sup>th</sup>, plus one flying past a coastal headland near Charamida on the 26<sup>th</sup>.

**Whinchat** *Saxicola rubetra* – A beautiful chat, and one of the more familiar passage migrants seen on the tour, most often found perched on low plants and bushes around the Alykes Wetlands, Lotzaria track, Tsiknias River and the Kalloni salt pans.

**European Stonechat** *Saxicola rubicola* – Only noted in the western peninsula on the 23<sup>rd</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup>, where we found them in the Meladia Valley, Sigri and Ipsilou Monastery. Presumably an early breeder on the island, as we saw several families with fully fledged young scattered about the boulder scree.

**Northern Wheatear** *Oenanthe oenanthe* – Another wheatear perfectly at home in the barren uplands and boulder-scrree of the western peninsula. First noted below Ipsilou Monastery with others in the Petrified Forest National Park and the upper Meladia Valley on the 23<sup>rd</sup> and the 25<sup>th</sup>.

**Black-eared Wheatear** *Oenanthe hispanica* – One of the more striking breeding species on the island, we saw this beauty almost every day and in a wide variety of habitats. A fairly common, yet highly variable species, with males of both pale-throated and black-throated forms present and no two birds looking exactly alike!

### **SPARROWS: Passeridae (3)**

**House Sparrow** *Passer domesticus* – Daily fare around the Kalloni Bay Hotel, and more or less anywhere with habitation, as well as in scrub and cultivated areas.

**Spanish Sparrow** *Passer hispaniolensis* – Inclined to form large, swirling flocks and usually found in agricultural fields, farms and riverbeds. Seen on at least five days with good views at Faneromeni and the Tsiknias River.

**Rock Sparrow** *Petronia petronia* – A good tour for seeing this declining species, with fine views of a singing male on a rooftop at Ipsilou Monastery on the 23<sup>rd</sup>, and a pair visiting a nest hole in rock wall in the Meladia Valley, also on the 23<sup>rd</sup>. Several males were heard singing from a small cliff face in the Meladia Valley on the 25<sup>th</sup>.

### **PIPITS AND WAGTAILS: Motacillidae (6)**

**Western Yellow Wagtail** *Motacilla flava* – Great views of males of the Black-headed race (*M.f. feldegg*) and the Blue-headed race (*M.f. flava*), plus Mike W. saw a male of the Grey-headed race (*M.f. thunbergi*) at the Tsiknias River on the 27<sup>th</sup>. Intergrades between races and females were best left unidentified. The largest flocks occurred in the west with 35+ in the meadows at Faneromeni and 55+ on the Sigri-Eressos Road, both on the 23<sup>rd</sup>.

**White Wagtail** *Motacilla alba* – Most wintering birds had departed before the tour began, but we did find single males at the Kalloni salt pans on the 22<sup>nd</sup>, and in the Meladia Valley on the 23<sup>rd</sup>.

**Citrine Wagtail** *Motacilla citreola* – A stunning male feeding among the stones and boulders below the ford along the Tsihiondas River in the Meladia Valley on the 23<sup>rd</sup>.

**Grey Wagtail** *Motacilla cinerea* – A pair collecting food in the stream by the averna in Agiassos on the 24<sup>th</sup>, evidently nesting under the bridge there. This beautiful species rounded out all the possible wagtails on Lesbos, with Grey Wagtail being the rarest of all, seen on very few tours.

**Tawny Pipit** *Anthus campestris* – Three in the dune system by the “Race Track” close to Kalloni salt works on the 27<sup>th</sup>. We would have spent more time with these had the wind not been blowing a gale that afternoon.

**Red-throated Pipit** *Anthus cervinus* – Success was limited to several birds calling “pssst” as they flew over the Alykes Wetlands on the 24<sup>th</sup>, and another over the eastern berm of the Kalloni salt pans on the 26<sup>th</sup>.

### **FINCHES: Fringillidae (5)**

**Common Chaffinch** *Fringilla coelebs* – Attractive, common and seen in a wide variety of situations throughout the island, especially in the Achladeri Forest where we had some friendly birds right at our feet at the nuthatch nesting area, and at the picnic site on the same day.

**European Greenfinch** *Chloris chloris* – Seen primarily around orchards and cultivated areas such as the taverna stop at Agiassos and the lower Potamia Valley, but also around the Kalloni Bay Hotel. Noted on four days.

**Common Linnet** *Linaria cannabina* – Noted on our two days out west with a male by the roadside below Ipsilou Monastery on the 23<sup>rd</sup>, and a pair by the track above Eressos on the 25<sup>th</sup>.

**European Goldfinch** *Carduelis carduelis* – The Kalloni Bay Hotel, Limonos Monastery and Perivolis Monastery were among the locations where we encountered this beautiful finch, its presence usually given away by its tinkling song and flight calls. Seen on at least four days.

**European Serin** *Serinus serinus* – An impromptu taverna stop in Agiassos on the 24<sup>th</sup> worked like a charm when a serin was heard singing from the neighboring orchard and was subsequently found teed-up for views, even engaging in song flights! We lingered in the area for a while watching Grey Wagtails and Eurasian Crag Martins and noticed that as many as three European Serins were actively singing in the valley.

### **BUNTINGS: *Emberizidae* (5)**

**Corn Bunting** *Emberiza calandra* – One of the most frequently seen passerines, found just about anywhere with cultivated fields and rank grasses. The “jangling keys” song was a near-constant sound at spots such as the Lotzaria track and Kalloni slat pans. Often perched in the open when singing and noted on every day of the tour.

**Cinereous Bunting** *Emberiza cineracea* – A species with a limited breeding range and, as such, a major attraction for visiting birders. Lesvos hosts most of the Greek breeding population concentrated in the barren western uplands of the island. It proved inconspicuous and difficult to find during our week, but on the 25<sup>th</sup> we did have scope views of a singing male at Agra, and the folks in Stylianos’s vehicle had brief but close views of another in the Petrified Forest National Park below Ipsilou Monastery.

**Cretzschmar’s Bunting** *Emberiza caesia* – Found in similar habitat to Cinereous Bunting, but far more common and widespread. We had good views of males at Ipsilou, Sigri, the Meladia Valley and Agra as well as the coastal slopes near Charamida.

**Cirl Bunting** *Emberiza cirlus* – A handsome bunting with a male being seen by the road at Achladeri on the 22<sup>nd</sup>, and another male carrying food to a nest (or fledged young) in the Upper Napi Valley on the 27<sup>th</sup>.

**Black-headed Bunting** *Emberiza melanocephala* – Males appeared to arrive on the island in good numbers from the 25<sup>th</sup> onwards, and we enjoyed watching them perched up and singing in many spots, especially Meladia Valley and Tsiknias River. The black bonnet, bright yellow underparts and unstreaked, rufous-brown mantle made this species a joy to behold -- one of the highlights of the trip.

### **MAMMALS: (3 species)**

**Persian Squirrel** *Sciurus anomalus* – Seen two days out west including at Perivolis Monastery on the 23<sup>rd</sup>.

**Red Fox** *Vulpes vulpes* – Mike W. saw one near the beach at Kalloni Bay on a few mornings during the week.

**Lesser White-toothed Shrew** *Crocidura suaveolens* – A single noted on the 24<sup>th</sup>.

### **REPTILES AND AMPHIBIANS: (4 species)**

**European Glass Lizard** *Pseudopus apodus* – Two sunning themselves on rock piles by the track at Faneromeni on the 23<sup>rd</sup>. Alas, we only saw these weird legless lizards at the last minute as they slithered between the stones and out of view despite Stylianos’s best efforts to grab one!

**Levant Water Frog** *Pelophylax bedriagae* – Commonly heard and seen near most freshwater habitats with an especially memorable chorus at Perivolis Monastery on the 23<sup>rd</sup>.

**Stripe-necked Terrapin (Western Caspian Turtle)** *Mauremys rivulata* – Found on three days by fresh water with the first at the Mesa marshes on the 24<sup>th</sup>.

**Starred Agama** *Laudakia stellio* – Noted in the boulder scree of the western peninsula on the 23<sup>rd</sup> and the 25<sup>th</sup>.

### **BUTTERFLIES: (5 species recorded)**

**Scarce Swallowtail** *Iphiclides podalirius* – Noted on the 23<sup>rd</sup> and the 28<sup>th</sup>.

**Large White** *Pieris brassicae* – Seen on the 23<sup>rd</sup>.

**Orange Tip** *Anthocharis cardamines* – Seen on the 24<sup>th</sup>.

**Red Admiral** *Vanessa atalanta* – Noted on the 23<sup>rd</sup> and the 27<sup>th</sup>.

**Painted Lady** *Vanessa cardui* – Seen with a Red Admiral and Scarce Swallowtail at Fameromeni on the 23<sup>rd</sup>.

### **SPOONWINGS: *Nemopteridae* (1 species)**

**Thread Lacewing** *Nemoptera sinuata* – Seen on the 28<sup>th</sup>.