

WINGSPAN BIRD TOURS

Bird – Watching Holiday

To

LAKE KERKINI

MAY 6TH – May 13th 2019



TRIP REPORT

PLACES VISITED

DAY 1 - Monday 6th

**FLIGHT LONDON TO THESSALONIKI TRANSFER TO LAKE KERKINI
WITH A STOP AT KALACHORI ESTUARY AND LAGOON**

DAY 2 - Tuesday 7th

VIRONIA QUARRY – RIVER STRYMONAS – MANDRAKI JETTY

DAY 3 - Wednesday 8th

**HIMAROS QUARRY – MAVROUNI HILLS – KERKINI QUAY – LIVADIA
QUAY**

DAY 4 - Thursday 9th

**VRONDOUS MOUNTAINS – LAILIAS SKI RESORT – PALEOKASTRO
QUARRY**

DAY 5 - Friday 10th

**PROMACHONAS WOODS – SIDIROCASTRO CASTLE – RIVER
STRYMONAS – MANDRAKI JETTY**

DAY 6 - Saturday 11th

LAKE KERKINI BOAT CRUISE – LAKE DOIRANI – VIRONIA QUARRY

DAY 7 - Sunday 12th

**ANO POROJA WOODLAND - VERONIA WOODLANDS -
SIDIROCASTRO QUARRY – ACHLADOCHORI MOUNTAIN ROAD**

DAY 8 - Monday 13th

TRANSFER FROM LAKE KERKINI TO THESSALONIKI AIRPORT

TOUR LEADER: BOB BUCKLER

TOUR BIRD GUIDE: IORDAN HRISTOV (DANCHO)

PARTICIPANTS: MIKE & LORNA TAYLOR, MARGARET AND TERRY YEOMANS, JEANNE VITKOVSKIS, ROB PARSONS, DOREEN HUTCHINS, FRED FOURACRE, LIZ LAMBERT & HANNAH RIGBY.

SUMMARY

What a difference a year makes. Last year we saw about 1 million Nettle Tree Butterflies and we had a huge influx of **Rose-coloured Starlings**. This year we saw one individual Nettle Tree Butterfly and no **Rose-coloured Starlings**. Our species count around Lake Kerkini was roughly the same, but for this year we added a visit to the huge Kalachori Coastal Lagoon where we saw an extra 17 species of waders including a **Terek Sandpiper**, which was voted as bird of the trip.

Beauty with tranquillity are the words that I would use to describe Lake Kerkini, it is a truly wonderful place to visit and you feel relaxed the whole time you are there. Very little traffic, no tourism as such and a serenity befitting the landscape. Everyone loved this trip, the boat cruise was the highlight, a magical experience, I can't wait to return next year.

DAY 1 MONDAY 6TH MAY 2019

FLIGHT LONDON TO THESSALONIKI TRANSFER TO LAKE KERKINI WITH A STOP KALACHORI ESTUARY AND LAGOON

WEATHER: cloudy, but hot and dry. Rain early evening, 23C

What a fantastic start to our Lake Kerkini birding holiday, everyone turned up on time from two UK destinations, we all met up outside the arrival's hall in Thessaloniki and after a delay collecting the buses we were off.



We had noted **Common Shelduck** from the plane as we landed and we soon added both **Common** and **Pallid Swifts**, **Common Kestrel**, **Red-rumped** and **Barn Swallows** to the list as we left the terminal buildings.

We stopped after a short while to buy picnic supplies and to stock up with water, during that stop we saw **Eurasian Hoopoe**, **Yellow-legged Gull**, **Hooded Crow** and we heard a **Cetti's Warbler**.

Slender-billed Gulls

A 40-minute drive found us at the coast a little south-west of Thessaloniki, we drove through a huge industrial estate and came out on a large marshland, with a lagoon that was covered in birds. Over the next hour we saw an amazing 17 different species of wader, 5 species of terns and some terrific **Slender-billed Gulls**.

Large numbers of **Curlew Sandpipers** were joined by equally large numbers of **Ruff** and a good quantity of **Spotted Redshank**. We also found several large groups of Little Stints with fewer numbers of **Dunlin**, **Marsh Sandpipers**, **Common** and **Little Ringed Plovers**, **Kentish Plovers** and **Ruddy Turnstones**. But, the most amazing find was that of a **Terek Sandpiper**, this bird was quite distant but it flew towards us and landed much nearer, it was a lifer for all of the group, what a bird.



The enigmatic **Terek Sandpiper**

White Winged and **Black Terns** covered the far side of the lagoon, we also saw **Little**, **Common** and **Whiskered Terns** all perched below us and the **Slender-billed Gulls** were just stunning.

We made several stops around the lagoon and the open marsh adding more species to the growing list, **Glossy Ibis**, **Eurasian Spoonbill**, **Black Stork**, **Marsh Harrier**, **Woodchat Shrike** and the beautiful **Black-headed Yellow Wagtail** were all seen well. Herons, grebes, egrets and a few ducks including the unexpected **Northern Pintail** we also added. We left the area around 5pm and I'm so glad that we added this venue to our current itinerary.



It clouded over and we drove through rain showers as we approached our hotel on the shores of Lake Kerkini. It was too late for birding on arrival but we scoped the lake from our hotel balconies where lots of Pelicans, herons, egrets, storks and waders could be seen.

Dinner was taken at 7:30pm we called the bird-log just before we ate and noted that our list for the three hours or so this afternoon came to 72 species! What a fantastic start.

DAY 2 – TUESDAY 7TH MAY 2019

VIRONIA QUARRY – RIVER STRYMONAS – MANDRAKI JETTY

WEATHER: cloudy and rain for most of the morning, broken sunshine and windy in the afternoon

Our early morning walk around the gardens of the hotel was abandoned because of heavy rain, what a shocker when we got up, especially after yesterday's lovely sunshine. So, our first outing was after breakfast, we left the hotel around 8am. The rain eased off and had all but stopped by the time we reached our first destination, which was a disused quarry situated up in the mountains above the village of Vironia.



We walked through open scrub and viewed the valley below us from several vantage points before walking along a track up to the quarry face. Bird song was prolific, it came from all directions with **Common Nightingale** being the loudest. Some of our first sightings included: **Hawfinch, Golden Oriole, Eurasian Hoopoe, Levant Sparrowhawk** and lots of common species.

The view of the Belles Mountains

Walking along the track to the quarry we found a good variety of species, **Subalpine Warblers** showed well, so did

Common Whitethroat, we had brief views of **Eastern Olivaceous Warbler** but saw **Long-tailed Tit** well. At the quarry we found **Blue Rock Thrush, Black-eared Wheatear, Crag Martin, Cirl Bunting** and we heard a **Black Redstart**.

‘Hard core’ birders, sipping coffee

Other interesting encounters we made of a **Marsh Warbler** (we heard it singing but it failed to show), **Common Raven** and a second **Levant Sparrowhawk**. As the morning wore on so the light improved and the clouds began to clear, it got warmer too. Birds of prey began to appear on the thermals along the ridge above us. We saw **Marsh Harrier, Common** and **Honey Buzzards** and then the big boys came out to play. Several sightings of **Lesser Spotted Eagle** were made and a single **Golden Eagle** joined them at one stage, we then found a **Golden Eagle** perched high on the mountainside.



After stopping in the village of Vironia for a coffee and to buy lunch we drove the short distance to the river Strymonas, where we spent a good deal of time watching water birds in the channels beside the river and passerines in the surrounding scrub. After eating our lunch in a nice picnic site, we began our walk along a long channel than ran parallel to the river.

In the channel we found a lot of birds, **Little Bittern** (5), plenty of **Squacco Herons, Dalmatian Pelicans, Grey and Purple Herons, Great and Pygmy Cormorants** and lots of grebes, coots and moorhens. There were plenty of other birds in the scrub to keep us on our toes, **Red-backed, Lesser Grey and Woodchat Shrikes, European Bee-eaters, Common Cuckoos, Eastern Olivaceous Warbler** and we saw our first **Short-toed Eagle**, also **Hobby** and many more **Lesser Spotted Eagle** sightings were made.

We tried a couple more areas where reedbeds filled the channel and where the scrub was a little more dense around the edges. There we searched for ‘crakes’ without success, but we did find **Syrian Woodpecker, Penduline Tit, Eastern Olivaceous Warbler, Levant Sparrowhawk** and more **European Bee-eaters**.

For our final birding session of the day we drove to the Jetty at Mandraki where we had our first encounter with the shores of Lake Kerkini. It was very windy down there but we had an enjoyable time watching the thousands of birds going about their daily chore of keeping alive and breeding.

Red-rumped Swallow seen at our hotel

There were literally thousands of birds out there, the number of **Great Crested Grebes** was astronomical, the same goes for **Great Cormorants, Sand Martins, Grey Herons, Little Egrets** and a host of other species, it was teeming with life. We found a single **Garganey** out on the lake feeding amongst the grebes, also a single **Slender-billed Gull** with the **Black-headed Gulls** and dozens of **Common Terns**.



In the reedbed we found a male **Golden Oriole**, an odd place for an Oriole to be, but there it was, we also saw **Great Reed Warbler** and another **Little Bittern**. It was a wonderful experience and the sun came out too! We left the Jetty at 5:30pm and set off for the hotel which was just 5 minutes away, it was almost the end of another day – some of the group assembled on the terrace for a beer as soon as we got back and they found our first **Black-headed Bunting** of the trip singing in the gardens.

DAY 3 – WEDNESDAY 8TH MAY 2019

HIMAROS QUARRY – MAVROUNI HILLS – KERKINI QUAY – LIVADIA QUAY

WEATHER: chilly start but bright sunshine all day. Ma temp 24C



Little Bittern

What a contrast to yesterday's rainy start, we had a clear bright morning which developed into a lovely sunny day with very little wind. Our pre-breakfast jaunt down to the Jetty at Mandraki produced a good number of nice sightings and we heard a **Savi's Warbler** calling and at least one of the group had a glimpse of it. We saw all the usual waterfowl, herons and egrets, pelicans (White and Dalmatian), as well as **Sedge** and **Great Reed Warblers**. The lake and the surrounding landscapes looked stunning in the morning light.

We spent the whole morning walking along a track that led us to a large open quarry, we walked past disused gravel pits, reedbeds, open scrub and olive groves. It was a fabulous walk, we saw many species and once it warmed up we amassed quite a good butterfly list too.

Our main target species were warblers but birds of prey featured heavily in our morning sightings, we added **Booted Eagle** to the list and we also saw **Short-tod Eagle**, **Honey Buzzard**, **Lesser Spotted Eagle**, **Common Buzzard** and **Marsh Harrier**. In the scrub we saw **Red-backed** and **Woodchat Shrikes**, **Eastern Olivaceous** and **Subalpine Warblers**, **Common Whitethroat** and a few **Goldfinches** and **Greenfinches**.



At the quarry we searched the rock face for **Eagle Owl** without success, but we did find **Black-eared Wheatear**, **Masked Shrike** and in the trees along a nearby stream we found **Spotted Flycatcher** and we heard both **Wood Warbler** and **Marsh Warbler**.

By the time we set off back towards the bus it was very warm and many butterflies were on the wing, sightings included Southern White Admiral, Queen of Spain Fritillary, Lesser Spotted Fritillary and Knapweed Fritillary, also Black-veined White, Small Heath, Brown Argus and few others were added to the list. Half-way back to the bus we heard an **Olive Tree Warbler** singing from an olive grove and before long we all had good views of one. A pair of **Masked Shrikes** also showed very well in the olive trees.

After stopping in the town of Himaros to buy lunch we drove to the dam at the southern tip of the lake and ate our picnic. From our picnic benches we watched many species on or over the lake, we had great views of **Hobby**, **Levant Sparrowhawk**, more **Lesser Spotted Eagles** and a **Booted Eagle**.

As we worked our way north along the shore of the lake we stopped several times to scan reedbeds and open water hoping for new species. A walk into the Mavrouni Hills produced very few birds, I can recall seeing **Cirl Bunting**, **Subalpine Warbler** and the very common **Eastern Olivaceous Warbler** and not



much else. Two or three of the group saw a **European Roller** in flight and we had great views of a small number of raptors. A few more butterflies were added to the list, Green Hairstreak, Dingy Skipper, Nettle Tree Butterfly and.....

Scarce Swallowtail.

We spent the rest of the afternoon visiting inlets and quays along the lake shore, we added **Wood Sandpiper** to our trip list and saw several **Little Bitterns** at one spot, lots of **Great Reed Warblers**, **Sedge Warbler** and **Yellow Wagtails**, both *feldegg* and *flava* subspecies. A

couple of **Penduline Tit** sightings were appreciated by the group but we all really enjoyed the sheer number of birds out on the lake, it had been another great day out.

DAY 4 – THURSDAY 9TH MAY 2019

VRONDOUS MOUNTAINS – LAILIAS SKI RESORT – PALEOKASTRO QUARRY

WEATHER: cloudy all day with some sunny spells, cold all morning in the mountains but warmer later. 15C

With a complete change of habitat we saw a great deal of new species and spent almost all day above 1800 meters. We set off early in order to get into the mountains at dawn but it was quite cold when we arrived. We set off at 5:30am with our breakfast in a bag and coffee in flasks, it took just over an hour to drive up to the Vrontous Mountains.



What a fantastic place with stunning scenery great light and no wind, just great birding weather. We parked at the side of the road where we had superb panoramic views of the rocky hillside below us, this was perfect habitat for the elusive **Rock Partridge** which was our main target species. As we stepped from our minibuses bird song filled our ears, **Woodlarks** were singing from several places, **Northern Wheatears** joined in and several other species added to the crescendo of noise. **Common Cuckoo** and **Eurasian Hoopoe** called constantly in the background and despite all this we could still hear the call of a distant **Rock**

Partridge.

We searched along the road for about 40 minutes for the Partridge without success, but we did find **Sardinian Warbler, Subalpine Warbler, Common Whitethroat, Woodlark, Northern & Black-eared Wheatears, Linnet, Hawfinch** (flyovers), **Common Raven, Common Kestrel, Woodchat** and **Red-backed Shrikes.**

Our decision to drive back down the mountainside to scan an area where the Partridge call was coming from was a rewarding one because after 5 minutes we inadvertently flushed a **ROCK PARTRIDGE**. We watched it in flight and then had some short views of it as it walked amongst rocks and scrub, everyone got to see it well except for Mike who had disappeared behind a bush.

Next, we drove even higher and parked at the roadside where we hoped to find **Common Rock Thrush**, it took 5 minutes to locate a female and then an extra few minutes to see the beautiful male. We then went on to see **Eastern Orphean Warbler, Cirl Bunting, Black Redstart, Booted Eagle** and a **Hobby** shot passed us at a very low level, so low that we could hear the wind passing through its wing feathers, wow!!

A little further up the hill we stopped again, this produced a very close encounter with a **Lesser Whitethroat**, it sang constantly whilst we were there and in full view. We notched more **Black Redstarts, Mistle Thrush, White Wagtail** and **Common Starlings.**

Another 5 kilometers further along the road took us up to nearly 2000 meters, we parked up and took a forest track through some pine trees which lead us to a large rock face. We had a great time along this track, the light improved, we were sheltered from the very cold breeze and lots of birds were seen.

Female Common Rock Thrush

Common Crossbills flew over us several times, we did eventually see a couple perched but not for long. We spent a good hour along that track and found several excellent species including: **Tree Pipit**, **Rock Bunting**, **Firecrest**, **Lesser Whitethroat**, **Crested Tit**, **Coal Tit**, **Eurasian Nuthatch** and we heard **Short-toed Treecreeper** without finding it.



At the Lailias Ski Resort we sat at picnic benches and ate our lunch, during which, we found **Willow Tit**, another **Black Redstart** and further **Tree Pipits** sightings were had. A short walk afterwards failed to produce much and our search for **Black Woodpecker** in the beech woods drew a blank. On the way down the mountainside we stopped to look at **Serins** which showed well and whilst we were there, we found an **Eastern Bonelli's Warbler** which took a while to see despite calling constantly very close to the road!

After a coffee and fuel stop in Serres we had time to visit a series of disused quarries just outside of the town called Paleokastro. It was quite warm by then and a lot of birds were singing, we saw **Common**



Nightingale out in the open and several **Black-headed Buntings** sang from the tops of bushes. A good number of **European Bee-eaters** perched on the power lines and the ubiquitous **Olivaceous Warbler** sang from several places. In one of the quarries a **Spotted Flycatcher** was seen and then just after we found an **Icterine Warbler** which was another great find for the trip list.

It was 5:30pm by the time we got back to the hotel, we had been out for 12 hours, it had been a long and tiring day but an immensely rewarding one.

PROMACHONAS WOODS – SIDIROKRASTRO CASTLE – RIVER STRYMONAS – MANDRAKI JETTY

WEATHER: a great bright start, mostly sunshine, cloudy later. 20C

So far we have recorded 155 species which does not leave too many to find, it has been an amazing trip so far and we are very pleased with our findings. So today we set off to see some woodland species missing from our list.

At 8am we drove from Lake Kerkini northward towards Bulgaria, in fact, we were just 1km from the border when we turned off the motorway. We visited a large deciduous woodland near the town of



Promachonas, as usual the air was alive with bird song and it wasn't long before we were watching one of our 'wanted' species. As we got out of the buses a **Middle Spotted Woodpecker** started calling very close to the road, we eventually saw it before it flew off over the top of us.

Masked Shrike taken by Fred Fouracre

We searched for the woodpecker where we thought it had landed but could not relocate it. A short way into the forest we stopped to survey a number of mature Black Poplar trees and over about 30 minutes we saw: **Short-toed Treecreeper, Long-tailed Tit, Eurasian Nuthatch, Jay** and a **Spotted Flycatcher**.

Walking deeper into the wood we heard both **Great Spotted** and **Green Woodpeckers**, lots of **Common Starlings**, we then saw a **Green Woodpecker** fly in front of us, also sighted was a **Blackcap** and then a **Great**

Spotted Woodpecker landed in a tree nearby. To our great delight a **Semi-collared Flycatcher** was seen a few times, Dancho picked it up on call, a smashing bird for the group to see.

Back out on the road the sun began to warm us up and a few butterflies took to the air, we saw Iolas and Holly Blue, Speckled Wood, Small Heath, Clouded Yellow and a few Black-veined Whites. We tracked down a **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** from its call and saw it in flight, a **Roller** flew over us and we saw a distant **Black Stork** up on the thermals. Both **Short-toed Eagle** and **Honey Buzzard** circled high up and we found Herman's Tortoise and a few dragonfly species.

A brief stop in a disused quarry proved fruitless, it was quite devoid of birds but we did find more butterflies and a couple of Praying Mantis. We then drove to the town centre of Sidirokastro where we sat and enjoyed a coffee and afterwards we bought our lunch.

The Byzantine Castle at Sidirocastro sits on a huge rocky outcrop that looms over the town giving panoramic views of the surrounding countryside and beyond to Lake Kerkini. We ate our picnic lunch sitting on rocks whilst admiring the terrific view and then we walked around the castle ruins looking for **Rock Sparrows** but finding none.

We did see **Black-eared Wheatear**, **Blue Rock Thrush** and a **Common Cuckoo** which was sitting out on a rock being chaperoned by two **Cirl Buntings**. A few raptors appeared high up in the sky, we saw **Honey Buzzard**, **Common Buzzard**, **Black Kite**, **Levant Sparrowhawk** and **Short-toed Eagle**.



The view from the Byzantine Castle ruins at Sidirocastro

For the next part of the afternoon we drove down to the river Strymonas and walked along a track running parallel to it, we were high up on a bank and had good views of the river and all the birds sitting on shale banks. We saw **Golden Oriole** in the bushes, hundreds of **Yellow-legged Gulls** on the islands, a few **Little Ringed Plovers**, **Common Sandpipers**, **Great Cormorants** and **Grey Herons**. It was quite windy down there and our sightings of passerines in the scrub were few. We found **Linnets**, **Green** and **Goldfinches**, a few **Whinchats**, **Crested Larks**, **Corn** and **Black-headed Buntings** and one of the group photographed a **Tawny Pipit**.

The last hour was spent at the Jetty at Mandraki, it was wonderful there, no wind and perfect light. We had a leisurely time enjoying the thousands of birds on display. The hundreds of pair of **Great Crested Grebes** were settling down to build their nests whilst a huge raft of **Cormorants** and **Pelicans** could be seen out in the middle of the lake fishing. We saw **Great Reed Warbler**, **Little Bittern**, **Black-crowned Night Herons**, **Squacco Herons** and dozens of **Little Egrets**, **Grey Herons** and countless **Sand Martins**.

Dinner was served at the usual time of 7:30, we called the bird log which now has an impressive 157 species in total.

LAKE KERKINI BOAT CRUISE – LAKE DOIRANI – VIRONIA QUARRY

WEATHER: a fabulous day with little wind and hazy sunshine/ temp 25C

The boat trip around Lake Kerkini was the highlight of this tour, it was fabulous, we had perfect weather for it. A bright morning and no wind, the lake was like a mill pond and the scenery was absolutely stunning. We arrived at the Jetty at 8am a full hour before the boat trip so that we could enjoy the birds in the reedbeds, trees and marshy area. As usual birds were everywhere and bird song came from the all directions, the **Great Reed Warblers** were making the most noise of course.



Dalmatian Pelicans on Lake Kerkini

Once on the boat we set off for the centre of the lake where we saw our first **Black-necked Grebes** of the trip and ahead of us were dozens of both **Black** and **White-winged Terns**, none of which could be seen from the shore. The lake was covered in **Great Crested Grebes** I have never seen so many, thousands of pairs are nesting here, **Cormorants** number in tens of thousands and **Pelicans** too are in huge numbers.

Our trip took us along a river mouth where hundreds of **Sand Martins** were breeding in the banks, we passed through the nesting colonies of the **Cormorants**, both **Great** and **Pygmy**, they were joined by hundreds of Egrets and Herons. We saw **Little**, **Great** and our first **Cattle Egrets** (there are now 3 pairs nesting in the colony), these were joined by **Eurasian Spoonbills**, **Squacco** and **Black-crowned Night Herons**, it was colourful, noisy and a bit smelly! But still an amazing experience!

We added **Greater Flamingo** to our list as we drifted past just three of them, the last remnants of a wintering flock. We saw **Lesser Spotted Eagle** perched on a dead tree, **Marsh Harrier**, **Common Buzzard** and **Levant Sparrowhawk** flew over us.

Our trip lasted 3 hours and it went by in a flash, our cameras were red hot and we were ready for lunch, but what a great experience, a truly magical encounter with wildlife.

Anything else we achieved today would be a little underwhelming, but we soldiered on. We bought our lunch in the village of Kerkini, we sat and had coffee near the main square and we ate our lunch at the 'port' of Kerkini. A brief stop at some small reed-fringed ponds just after lunch produced **Little Bittern** and a possible **Moustached Warbler** but we didn't get a good enough view of the warbler.

For the rest of the afternoon we visited another large Lake on the border with Macedonia about 40 kilometers away. This lake is deeper and the water much cooler so that the number of breeding birds is very much lower. We saw the usual species, but our main efforts were directed at searching the reedbeds and scrub for warblers and such-like. We found a **Penduline Tit's** nest, a beautifully constructed ball

of fluff! The nest was active and we had great enjoyment watching the parents bringing food to the chicks hidden inside.

One stop was made to look at our first **Northern Lapwings** and in the same area we saw **Black Stork**, **Whinchat**, **Black-headed Yellow Wagtail**, **Lesser Grey** and **Red-backed Shrike**, **Turtle Dove** and **Eastern Olivaceous Warbler**.

Grey Heron with our hotel in the background – taken from the boat



A reedbed held singing **Reed Warbler** and one of the group wandered off and came back with a report of a calling **Savi's Warbler** but it never called whilst we all looked and listened for it. We walked along a concrete walkway very close to the border and scanned the lake, we added a few species that were seen over the border in Macedonia such as **Black Tern**, **Pygmy Cormorant** and **Great Crested Grebe**. We found **Sedge Warbler** and **Tree Sparrows** along the walk.

Our journey home was uneventful, we arrived back at the hotel at 5:30pm and had an hour's siesta before setting off out again for an early evening jaunt to a nearby quarry. An **Eagle Owl** had been reported in the quarry quite early in the evening last night so we thought we would give it a shot.



We arrived at the quarry at 7pm, it was still quite light, we found **Black-eared Wheatear**, **Blue Rock Thrush**, **Cirl Bunting** and not much else. We scanned the quarry for the better part of an hour when some other birders turned up, they pointed us in the direction of last night's sighting but still the owl did not show.

At 8pm we were leaving when Dancho our local guide found the owl, a **Jay** was mobbing it and that drew his attention to a rocky area quite high up. We all had superb views of this giant of an owl, a great bird to end our perfect day.

DAY 7 SUNDAY 12TH MAY 2019

ANO POROJA WOODLAND - VERONIA WOODLANDS - SIDIROASTRO QUARRY – ACHLADOHORI MOUNTAIN ROAD

WEATHER: A change today, it was cooler with more cloud. Temp 20C

The deciduous woodlands above the village of Ano Poroja are a good site for woodpeckers especially the **Black Woodpecker** so we set off straight after breakfast and made the journey in under 20 minutes. We passed through open meadows and stopped to search for **Barred Warbler** which was still missing from our list, but without success. We did plenty of other birds out in the meadows, namely **Black-headed Bunting**, **Red-backed Shrike**, **Eastern Olivaceous Warbler** and plenty of **Corn Buntings**.

The woodlands were much quieter than we expected, in fact it was like walking in an English woods, we heard **Robin**, **Wren**, **Song Thrush** and **Chaffinch** and we saw **Grey Wagtail** along a stream. We did hear both **Green** and **Grey-headed Woodpeckers** but we had no sightings of them.



Eastern Festoon

We left the woodland after less than an hour and set off to Veronia to try some riparian woods where we had a chance to look for water birds at the same time as looking for woodpeckers. About 3km along the road Dancho pulled over quickly and stopped the leading bus, he had seen a falcon on a telegraph wire and on inspection we saw that it was our first

Red-footed Falcon of the trip, a smashing, colourful female bird.

At the riparian woodland near the village of Veronia we immediately heard the call of a **Grey-headed Woodpecker** as soon as we stepped out of the buses and within a couple of minutes we had all seen it in the scope, fantastic! We saw a **Green Woodpecker** virtually in the same place! All this happened before we even began our walk along a track that ran parallel to a small marsh and through a wooded area

Before long we were watching a pair of **Great Spotted Woodpeckers** bringing food to a nest hole where we could hear the sound of noisy chicks begging for food. A **Common Cuckoo** showed well, followed by a **Common Nightingale**, we also saw some nice butterflies, the Eastern Festoon went down particularly well with the group.

A second part to our walk produced fewer birds, but a noisy pair of **Levant Sparrowhawks** kept us entertained for a while before we drove back into town for a coffee and a cake. We then drove to a picturesque ravine near the main quarry at Sidiroastro to eat our picnic lunch whilst sitting at a large sheltered picnic table.

During lunch we saw many **Jackdaws**, **Common Raven**, **Honey Buzzard** and a distant falcon which we decided was most probably a **Eleonora's Falcon**. Several butterflies went onto the day list including: **Ilex Hairstreak**, **Queen of Spain** and **Lesser Spotted Fritillary**, **Small Copper** and plenty of **Clouded Yellows**. We scanned the cliff faces of the ravine looking for **Rock Nuthatches** but only found **Blue Rock Thrush** and **Black-eared Wheatears**.



We then drove into the nearby gorge to an old quarry workings from where we had much better views of the main rock face. After a short while we found an 'active' nest of the **Rock Nuthatch**, the parents were delivering food parcels to their youngsters on a regular basis, so we all had distant, but reasonable views of them.

For the last two hours of the day we drove much further up the valley towards the village of Achladochori, we turned onto an old mining track and went a few kilometers into the hills. Our target birds of **Short-toed Lark** and **Tawny Pipit** were in the bag after a few minutes of scanning the scrub- strewn mountainside.

We spent time scanning higher up for the **Ortolan Bunting** and found a **Golden Eagle**, it was carrying prey. Then we witnessed some extraordinary behaviour of the **Golden Eagle**, the prey it was carrying was in fact a Tortoise!!! The eagle soared higher and higher, it then dropped the poor tortoise from about 100 meters up and both the eagle and the tortoise dropped like a stone. The eagle then fed on the smashed remains. I had heard of such behaviour but none of us, except for Dancho, had ever seen it.

Shortly after the Eagle experience I drove my bus up the hill with one passenger, I intended to scan a different area but stopped at a drinking trough that had several birds bathing and drinking in it. Two of the birds were **Ortolan Buntings**, wow, our target bird in sight and the group were down the hill. I quickly fetched the whole group up and yes, you guessed it, the buntings had gone.

We watched the trough for a while, whilst **Greenfinches**, **Linnets**, **Cirl Buntings**, **Chaffinches** and **Stonechats** turned up to drink, but not the bunting. We did find a consolation bird in the shape of a **Little Owl**, our first of the trip. It was time to go so we drove back to the hotel arriving just before 6pm. The tour was over there would be no time for birding tomorrow we have to leave early for the airport.



A bit of excitement took place at the hotel as some of us were watching the lake from our balconies. Suddenly a falcon appeared then another and another. Pretty soon we had 14 falcons in view. Most of them were **Red-footed Falcons** but there were at least 3 **Eleonora's Falcons** too. A little later more falcons flew past one was much closer and was definitely an **Eleonora's Falcon**, we saw 19 falcons in all.

The birdlog was called after dinner, we had recorded 172 species, a great total, and an endorsement of how good this area is. A vote for 'Bird of the Trip' left us in no doubt of how significant the finding of a **Terek Sandpiper** was.

DAY 8 – MONDAY 13TH MAY 2019

TRANSFER TO THESSALONIKI AIRPORT

We had no time for birding today. Breakfast was at 7am and we left immediately afterwards for the airport. The journey was uneventful, we arrived on time at 9:30am, Dancho and I dropped the group at the departure terminal, the trip was finally over. It had been a very productive trip and everyone had enjoyed themselves, We had listed 172 species, the weather wasn't too bad and the scenery was fantastic.



Peaceful and beautiful – goodbye Lake Kerkini for another year

Dancho and I dropped off our minibuses and returned to Lake Kerkini to collect Jeanne before driving into Bulgaria. It was a very scenic drive, we arrived in Sofia late afternoon when Dancho dropped Jeanne and I at a hotel and he went home. Tomorrow the 8-day Tour of Bulgaria begins!!

CHECKLIST OF SPECIES

	Common name	Scientific name	May							
			6 th	7 th	8 th	9 th	10 th	11 th	12 th	13 th
1.	Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	X		X		X	X		
2.	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>		X	X		X	X		
3.	Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	X							
4.	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	X	X	X		X	X		
5.	Northern Pintail	<i>Anas aya</i>	X							
6.	Garganey	<i>Anas querquedula</i>		X						
7.	Rock Partridge	<i>Alectoris graeca</i>				X				
8.	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	X	X	X			X		
9.	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	X	X	X		X	X		
10.	Black-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>						X		
11.	Black Stork	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>	X	X	X		X	X	X	
12.	White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
13.	Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>	X	X			X	X		
14.	Little Bittern	<i>Ixobrychus minutus</i>		X	X		X	X		
15.	Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>			X		X	X		
16.	Squacco Heron	<i>Ardeola ralloides</i>	X	X	X		X	X		
17.	Great Egret	<i>Ardea albus</i>	X		X			X		
18.	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
19.	Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>	X	X	X			X		
20.	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
21.	Cattle Egret	<i>Bulbulcus ibis</i>						X		
22.	Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>	X	X				X		
23.	Greater Flamingo	<i>Pheonocopterus roseus</i>						X		
24.	Great White Pelican	<i>Pelecanus onocrotalus</i>		X	X		X	X	X	
25.	Dalmatian Pelican	<i>Pelecanus crispus</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
26.	Pygmy Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax pygmeus</i>	X	X	X		X	X	X	
27.	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	X	X	X		X	X	X	
28.	Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>			X		X	X	X	
29.	Short-toed Snake Eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>		X	X		X	X		
30.	Booted Eagle	<i>Aquila pennata</i>			X	X				
31.	Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
32.	Montagu's Harrier	<i>Circus pygargus</i>			X					
33.	Levant Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter brevipes</i>		X	X	X	X	X	X	
34.	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>		X	X	X	X	X	X	
35.	Honey Buzzard	<i>Pernis apivorus</i>		X	X	X	X		X	
36.	Lesser Spotted Eagle	<i>Aquila pomarina</i>		X	X		X	X		
37.	Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>		X					X	
38.	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
39.	Red-footed Falcon	<i>Falco vespertinus</i>							X	
40.	Eleonora's Falcon	<i>Falco eleonora</i>							X	
41.	Hobby	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>		X	X	X			X	
42.	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>		X	X		X	X		
43.	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X		
44.	Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	X							
45.	Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	X							
46.	Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>	X							
47.	Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>	X		X		X			
48.	Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	X							
49.	Kentish Plover	<i>Charadrius alexandrius</i>	X							
50.	Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	X							

	Common name	Scientific name	May							
			6 th	7 th	8 th	9 th	10 th	11 th	12 th	13 th
51.	Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>	X							
52.	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>	X							
53.	Curlew Sandpiper	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>	X							
54.	Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>	X							
55.	Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>	X							
56.	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	X		X		X	X		
57.	Terek Sandpiper	<i>Xenus cinereus</i>	X							
58.	Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	X							
59.	Spotted Redshank	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>	X							
60.	Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	X							
61.	Marsh Sandpiper	<i>Tringa stagnatilis</i>	X							
62.	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	X	X	X		X	X		
63.	Slender-billed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus genei</i>	X	X						
64.	Mediterranean Gull	<i>Larus melanocephalus</i>	X							
65.	Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
66.	Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>	X	X	X		X	X		
67.	Little Tern	<i>Sternula albifrons</i>	X							
68.	Whiskered Tern	<i>Chlidonias hybrida</i>	X							
69.	White-winged Tern	<i>Chlidonias leucopterus</i>	X					X		
70.	Black Tern	<i>Chlidonias niger</i>	X					X		
71.	Rock Dove/Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
72.	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>		X	X		X	X	X	
73.	European Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>		X	X		X	X	X	
74.	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
75.	Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
76.	Eurasian Scops Owl	<i>Otus scops</i>				H				
77.	Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>							X	
78.	Eurasian Eagle Owl	<i>Bubo bubo</i>						X		
79.	Alpine Swift	<i>Tachymarptis melba</i>		X					X	
80.	Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>	X	X	X	X	X		X	X
81.	Pallid Swift	<i>Apus pallidus</i>	X							
82.	European Bee-eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
83.	European Roller	<i>Coracias garrulus</i>			X	X	X			
84.	Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>	X	X	H	X	X	H	H	
85.	Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos minor</i>					X		X	
86.	Middle Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos medius</i>					X			
87.	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>				H	X		X	
88.	Syrian Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos syriacus</i>		X		X	X			
89.	European Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>		X		X	X		X	
90.	Grey-headed Woodpecker	<i>Picus canus</i>							X	
91.	Red-backed Shrike	<i>Lanius collurio</i>		X	X	X	X	X	X	
92.	Lesser Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius minor</i>	X	X	X	X		X	X	
93.	Woodchat Shrike	<i>Lanius senator</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
94.	Masked Shrike	<i>Lanius nubicus</i>			X		X		X	
95.	Eurasian Golden Oriole	<i>Oriolus oriolus</i>	H	X	X		X	X	X	
96.	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
97.	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
98.	Hooded Crow	<i>Corvus cornix</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
99.	Western Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>	X			X	X		X	
100.	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		X		X	X		X	
101.	Willow Tit	<i>Poecile montanus</i>				X				
102.	Sombre Tit	<i>Poecile lugubris</i>		X	X		X			
103.	Coal Tit	<i>Periparus ater</i>				X				

	Common name	Scientific name	May							
			6 th	7 th	8 th	9 th	10 th	11 th	12 th	13 th
104.	European Crested Tit	<i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>				X				
105.	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>		X	X	X	X	X	X	
106.	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>		X			X			
107.	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>		X		X	X		X	
108.	Eurasian Penduline Tit	<i>Remiz pendulinus</i>		X	X		H	X		
109.	Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
110.	Greater Short-toed Lark	<i>Calandrella brachydactyla</i>							X	
111.	Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>				X			H	
112.	Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>	X	X	X		X	X		
113.	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
114.	Eurasian Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>		X		X		X	X	
115.	Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
116.	Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Cecropis daurica</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
117.	Savi's Warbler	<i>Locustella luscinioides</i>		H						
118.	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>	H	H	H			X	H	
119.	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>				X				
120.	Eastern Bonelli's Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus orientalis</i>				X				
121.	Great Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus arundinaceus</i>	X	X	X		X	X	X	
122.	Eurasian Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>			X			H		
123.	Marsh Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus pulustris</i>		H						
124.	Sedge Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenbaenus</i>					X	X		
125.	Eastern Olivaceous Warbler	<i>Iduna pallida</i>		X	X	X	X	X	X	
126.	Icterine Warbler	<i>Hippolais icterina</i>				X				
127.	Olive-tree Warbler	<i>Hippolais olivetorum</i>			X					
128.	Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>		H	X		X	H		
129.	Lesser Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia curruca</i>				X				
130.	Eastern Orphean Warbler	<i>Sylvia crassirostris</i>				X			X	
131.	Common Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis</i>		X	X	X		X		
132.	Eastern Subalpine Warbler	<i>Sylvia cantillans</i>		X	X	X	X		X	
133.	Sardinian Warbler	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>		H		X				
134.	Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>				H	H		H	
135.	Common Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapilla</i>				X				
136.	Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>				X	X			
137.	Western Rock Nuthatch	<i>Sitta neumayer</i>							X	
138.	Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>				H	X		H	
139.	Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
140.	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>		X	X	X	X	X	X	
141.	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>			H	X	H		H	
142.	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>				X				
143.	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>				X			H	
144.	Common Nightingale	<i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i>	H	H	X	X	X	H	X	H
145.	European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>				X			X	
146.	Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>					X	X		
147.	Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>				X	X			
148.	Black-eared Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe hispanica</i>		X	X	X	X	X	X	
149.	Common Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola saxatilis</i>				X				
150.	Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>		X			X	X	X	
151.	Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>		X	X	X	X	X	X	
152.	Semi-collared Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula semitorquata</i>					X			
153.	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
154.	Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>		X	X		X	X	X	
155.	Eurasian Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>	X			X	X	X	X	
156.	Black-headed Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava feldegg</i>	X		X		X	X		

	Common name	Scientific name	May							
			6 th	7 th	8 th	9 th	10 th	11 th	12 th	13 th
157.	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla m. alba</i>	X			X				
158.	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>							X	
159.	Tawny Pipit	<i>Anthus campestris</i>					X		X	
160.	Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>				X				
161.	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		X		X	X		X	
162.	European Greenfinch	<i>Carduelis chloris</i>			X	X	X	X	X	
163.	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>		X	X	X	X	X	X	
164.	Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>				X	X		X	
165.	Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>				X	X			
166.	Red Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>				X				
167.	Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>		X		X			X	
168.	Ortolan Bunting	<i>Emberiza hortulana</i>							X	
169.	Cirl Bunting	<i>Emberiza cirlus</i>		X	X	X	X	X	X	
170.	Black-headed Bunting	<i>Emberiza melanocephala</i>		X	X	X	X	X	X	
171.	Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
172.	Rock Bunting	<i>Emberiza cia</i>				X	H			

Butterflies

	Common name	Scientific name	May							
			6 th	7 th	8 th	9 th	10 th	11 th	12 th	13 th
1.	Eastern Festoon	<i>Zerynthia cerisyi</i>							X	
2.	Scarce Swallowtail	<i>Iphiclides podalirius</i>			X		X			
3.	Large White	<i>Pieris brassicae</i>			X		X		X	
4.	Black-vined White	<i>Aporia crataegi</i>			X		X		X	
5.	Small White	<i>Pieris rapae</i>			X					
6.	Eastern Bath White	<i>Pontia edusa</i>	X		X				X	
7.	Orange Tip	<i>Anthocharis cardamines</i>					X			
8.	Eastern Wood White	<i>Leptidea duponcheli</i>				X				
9.	Clouded Yellow	<i>Colias crocea</i>		X	X	X	X		X	
10.	Green Hairstreak	<i>Callophrys rubi</i>			X					
11.	Ilex Hairstreak	<i>Satyrrium ilicis</i>							X	
12.	Holly Blue	<i>Celastrina argiolus</i>					X		X	
13.	Green-underside Blue	<i>Glaucopsyche alexis</i>			X					
14.	Iolas Blue	<i>Iolana iolas</i>					X			
15.	Brown Argus	<i>Arica agrestis</i>			X		X			
16.	Common Blue	<i>Polyommatus icarus</i>					X		X	
17.	Duke of Burgundy	<i>Hamearis lucina</i>					X			
18.	Southern White Admiral	<i>Limenitis reducta</i>			X		X			
19.	Small Tortoiseshell	<i>Aglais urticae</i>			X	X				
20.	Red Admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>			X		X		X	
21.	Painted Lady	<i>Vanessa cardui</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
22.	Nettle-Tree Butterfly	<i>Libythea celtis</i>			X					
23.	Eastern Knapweed Fritillary	<i>Melitaea ornata</i>			X					
24.	Pearl-bordered Fritillary	<i>Boloia euphrosyne</i>					X			
25.	Lesser Spotted Fritillary	<i>Melitaea trivia</i>		X	X		X		X	
26.	Queen of Spain Fritillary	<i>Issoria lathonia</i>			X		X		X	
27.	Speckled Wood	<i>Pararge aegeria</i>					X		X	
28.	Small Heath	<i>Coenonympha pamphilus</i>			X		X		X	
29.	Wall	<i>Lasiommata megera</i>					X			
30.	Lattice Brown	<i>Kirinia roxelana</i>			X					

