

Lesvos Birding 2 May - 16 May 2015

Getting there

Our last trip to Lesvos was in the Autumn of 2009; we had visited the Island in spring on 3 previous occasions, each of these were very memorable in their own right and are posted on several birding web sites. If we have one complaint about birding in spring it is the amount of like-minded people who visit the island at the same time, this can make birding a little difficult at times. Although most people don't mean to disturb the birds, the amount of folk visiting the same recognised sites can cause unintentional disturbance. A good example of this is the Inland Lake (Matochi); we have made the effort to be there at first light on many occasions, only to have a birding group arrive and disgorge its human contents out of the mini-bus onto the banks of the pool. The resulting disturbance pushes all the birds deep into cover and this can be very frustrating.

This is where birding in autumn scores highly; there are very few birders to disturb the birds - but there is a downside; there are very few birds to disturb. The contrast between spring and autumn is stark in the extreme, salt pans that held many hundreds of birds in spring are almost totally devoid. An over-wintering flock of *Flamingos* and *Avocets* is about all that is left. Terns, waders, gulls, ducks and egrets are mostly gone. An influx of *Black Storks* and the errant *White Pelican* creates some interest. All the habitats that were so vibrant with bird life are now silent and devoid of many of the birds encountered in spring. We have only visited Lesvos once in autumn and our comments should be taken in that context, however the difference between spring and autumn is so stark that we can confidently predict that most birders who have visited the island in spring would find autumn's offering very disappointing.

Enough about the negatives of birding Lesvos in the autumn: with two poor weeks birding in the Isles and Highlands of Scotland in the spring of 2014 and two very barren weeks birding Mallorca in the autumn of the same year we decided to return to Lesvos for some productive birding in the spring of 2015.

Having established itself as a premier birding location some dozen or more years ago we hoped many of the early birders have moved on, leaving the island a little less congested, hopefully making for less frenetic birding.

Flight

We booked our flight through **Thomas Cook**, leaving Birmingham at the ungodly hour of 05-10 on the 2/05/2015. Total cost for the two of us £675. Both outbound and inbound flights were early, arriving in Lesvos some 25mins ahead of schedule, and arriving back in Birmingham 15mins early.

Accommodation

Our chosen hotel was the **Aeolian Gaea**; a hotel we have stayed at before and one we would highly recommend. Our choice of room was a Junior Suite, details of all types of accommodation at the Aeolian Gaea can be found on their web site. Total cost for two weeks approx. £1,470 based on a bed and breakfast basis. This is very much at the higher end of Lesvos accommodation, more modest hotels in Skala Kalloni can be obtained at a more modest cost.

Contacting the hotel on aeoliangaea@gmail.com will allow you to book a stay at the hotel. Booking directly with the hotel will result in obtaining a reduced rate.

Hire car

Having birded Lesvos previously we would recommend a vehicle with as high a ground clearance as you can afford. Our choice was a Suzuki "Jimny", we have hired one previously on Lesvos and it worked well: this was hired from Avis through Thomas Cook. Total cost £456-52.



Total cost of holiday excluding airport parking and spending

£2,601-52.

Literature etc

Both Richard Brooks's and Steve Dudley's books are worth taking; Steve's updates give the very latest information on any new sites and bird distribution. We also prefer his book because of the layout. Richard's seems to us to be a little disjointed, his site directions are interspersed with copious amounts of waffle; all the information is there it's just dispersed throughout the paragraph, very frustrating when used in the field. Steve Dudley also gives updates on his web site which can be very helpful prior to departure. A daily sightings board is also situated in the reception area of the Pacify Hotel. Near neighbours of ours - Brian and Brenda - were also be on the Island as was our old birding chum Frances Gatens. Frances has been on the Island during all of our spring trips, so entertaining evening meals and leg pulling were the order of the day.

Weather

During our 14 day trip the temperatures hovered between 74°C and 82°C, no rainfall was recorded. During the second week the breeze stiffened during the late afternoon requiring a jumper pulled over the shoulders when dining out in the evenings.

Day 1

As stated previously our flight left on time at the ungodly hour of 05-10 and with an extremely strong tail wind, we arrived on the island of Lesvos 25min ahead of schedule. With ours being the only plane in, our bags were very soon spotted and retrieved from the carousel, things had run particularly well so far, but were about to go downhill badly. Picking up a hire car from the airport has never been easy and we should have known better; our experience this time surpassed all others - a full description on the debacle can be found in "Moans Groans & Memorable Moments". With time running out due to our delay at the airport, little time was left for meaningful birding. Having checked into our hotel and dumped our luggage, we met up with B&B for a light lunch at their hotel. The rest of the day was spent showing them the local patch with the

emphasis on local shops, the harbour and favoured eateries. Our evening was concluded with a splendid meal at the Caprice Kitchen Bar, a taverna we were to favour for most of our evening meals. Several meals were taken at the Sea Horse which were well cooked and very good value for money. The problem was that several of our group had a sweet tooth and the Sea Horse didn't do puddings.

Day 2

We started the day with a quick walk around Skala Kalloni pool, which due to the wet spring held some open water, so some birding interest was maintained. The pool is still badly overgrown with reeds and rushes and the encroachment of bushes from the eastern end. Then down to the harbour calling in at the little bakery for a couple of their fresh apple turnovers for lunch, delish. With B&B joining us after breakfast we proceeded to restrict ourselves to birding sites around Kalloni. Through the back lanes to the east river, then into the salt pans, lunch was taken at the goat track up-stream of the East River, a quick ice cream stop and then a mid-afternoon visit to the Inland Lake. We ended the day at the Sea Horse restaurant where we were given the most royal of welcomes, the sort Greeks keep for honoured friends. A very good evening meal completed the day.

Birds of Day 2

Little Grebe, Cormorant, Purple Heron, Great Egret, Little Egret, Squacco Heron, Little Bittern, Black Stork, Glossy Ibis, Greater Flamingo, Mallard, Little Crake, Moorhen, Avocet, Black-winged Stilt, Common Sandpiper, Turnstone, Little Stint, Temminick's Stint, Ruff, Yellow-legged Gull, Little Tern, Whiskered Tern, White-winged Tern, Black Tern, Collared Dove, Barn Owl, Common Swift, Crested Lark, Swallow, House Martin, Yellow Wagtail, Black-eared Wheatear, Cetti's Warbler, Olivaceous Warbler, Great Tit, Western Rock Nuthatch, Red-backed Shrike, Jay, Hooded Crow, Raven, House Sparrow, Spanish Sparrow, Corn Bunting, Greenfinch, Siskin, Goldfinch and Black-headed Bunting.



- Subsequently all birds highlighted in red are newly seen that day.

It is not my intention to repeat very common birds after every days report, only new or the more significant sightings will be recorded. A full list of species seen can be found at the end of this report.

Day 3

Today started similar to the day before, a quick walk around the Kalloni pool along the bay to the harbour then a visit to the other bakery where today's lunch was purchased. Brian had had his car delivered, so took on the mantle of chauffeur. Our plan of action was to visit the west of the island taking in Parakilla, Agra and Tavari, ending up at Ipsilou Monastery. Things started to go downhill at Tavari when a long term tummy problem flared again. After dragging myself up the steep road and then back down again at Ipsilou it was time to cut

short our time in the field and return to our hotel.



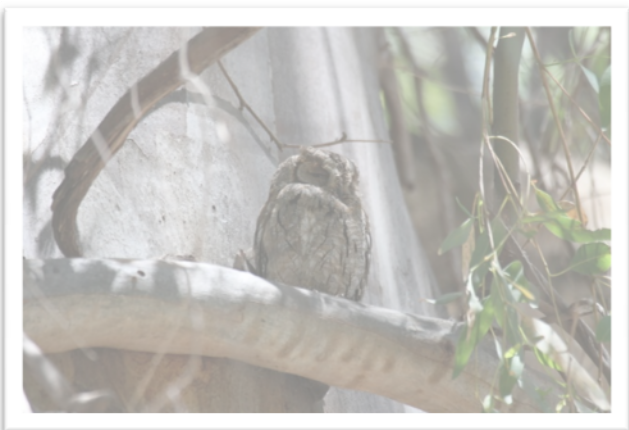
*Black-eared Wheatear, **Linnet** and **Cinereous Bunting**.*

Birds of Day 3

*Little Bittern, **Honey Buzzard**, **Short-toed Eagle**, **Eleanora's Falcon**, **Hoopoe**, **Wood Lark**, **Red-rumped Swallow**, **Song Thrush**, **Stonechat**, **Northern Wheatear**,*

Day 4

Not wishing to push our luck, tummy-wise, today we decided not to stray too far. We left our hotel at 05-50 and headed straight for the salt pans returning to our hotel for breakfast through the back lanes. We met up with B&B at our hotel at 09-30 when again we returned to the pans, only this time Brian was carefully writing down the directions, this was to aid him in birding independently.

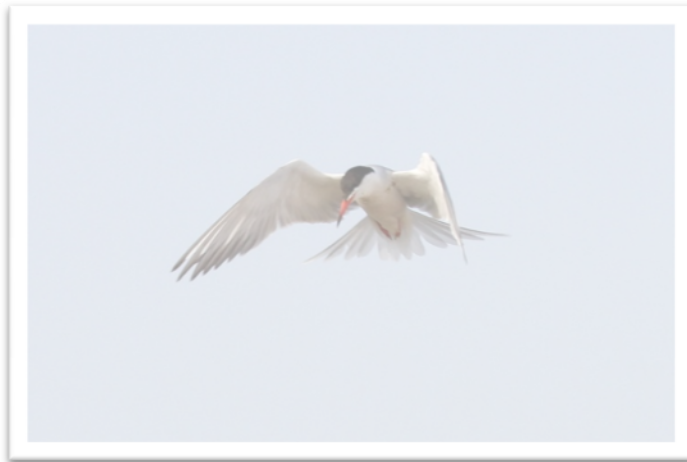


From the salt pans we made our way to the Scops Owl roost, now known as the "Scops copse", where we were soon viewing one of the 3 owls roosting there.

A brief trip to the bottom of the Potamia Valley, which was fairly quiet and unproductive, saw us return to our hotel for a beer and a well-earned rest.

Birds of Day 4

Grey Heron, Purple Heron, Little Egret, Squacco Heron, Black Stork, Greater Flamingo, Ruddy Shelduck, Shelduck, Avocet, Black-winged Stilt, Golden Plover, Marsh Sandpiper, Wood Sandpiper, Terek Sandpiper,



Common Sandpiper, Little Stint, Temminck's Stint, Curlew Sandpiper, Ruff, Common Tern, Little Tern, Whiskered Tern, White-winged Tern, Scops Owl, Hoopoe, Middle-spotted Woodpecker, Blackbird, Yellow Wagtail, Black-eared Wheatear, Cetti's Warbler,

Olivaceous Warbler, Blue Tit, Woodchat Shrike, Chaffinch and Black-headed Bunting.

Day 5

Birding on our own today and the tummy settled, we visited the salt pans at first light, only this time viewing them from the eastern end (this is best in the early mornings as you have the sun behind you) returning to our hotel for breakfast. Again lunch was purchased from the bakery as we did every day apart from when we left the hotel very early and did not return for breakfast. Sites visited today were Akladeri, Polichnitos Salt pans, Inland Lake and the bottom of the Potamia Valley.

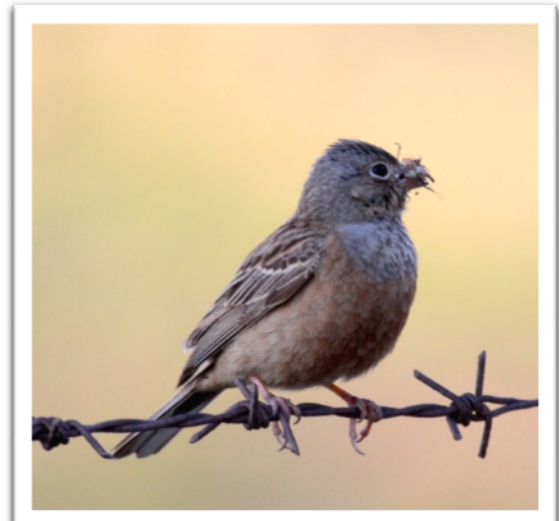
Birds of Day 5

Purple Heron, Squacco Heron, Black-crowned Night Heron, Black Stork, Glossy Ibis, Spoonbill, Greater Flamingo, Garganey, Short-toed Eagle, Long-legged Buzzard, Avocet, Black-winged Stilt, Stone Curlew, Ringed Plover, Kentish Plover, Marsh Sandpiper, Wood Sandpiper, Little Stint, Curlew Sandpiper, Dunlin, Turtle Dove, Little Owl, Red-rumped Swallow, Tawny Pipit, Citrine Wagtail, White Wagtail, Whinchat, Stonechat,

Olivaceous Warbler, Krüper's Nuthatch, Short-toed Treecreeper, Red-backed Shrike, Lesser Grey Shrike, Woodchat Shrike, Cirl Bunting and Black-headed Bunting.

Day 6

This was one of those days when we left before breakfast and before the bakery was open, so buttered toast was made for later. We were on the road by 06-15 taking the rough track from Eresos to Sigri. There was a warning on Steve Dudley's bulletin that the Sigri end of this track was particularly rough and not suitable for non-4x4's. The track appeared to us to be of the same standard throughout its entirety, and no worse than previous trips. From Sigri we visited both upper and lower fords at Faneromini, returning via the shorter route across the island taking in a quick visit to Perivoli Monastery. We returned to our hotel in the early afternoon as temperatures climbed above 80°C. We made a late afternoon visit to the small chapel at the area called "Devils Bridge" in Brooks's book. None of the sites we visited today were as productive as we remember from previous trips, indeed this can be said for the whole of the trip.



Birds of Day 6

Little Bittern, Black Stork, Greater Flamingo, Ruddy Shelduck, Lesser Kestrel, Avocet, Little Ringed Plover, Wood Sandpiper, Little Stint, Ruff, Little Owl, Alpine Swift, Hoopoe, Red-rumped Swallow, Whinchat, Stonechat, Black-eared Wheatear, Whitethroat, Subalpine Warbler, Sombre Tit, Western Rock Nuthatch, Red-backed Shrike, Lesser Grey

*Shrike, Woodchat Shrike, **Ortolan Bunting**, **Cretzschmar's Bunting**, Cirl Bunting and Black-headed Bunting.*

Day 7

We started today as we have started many during our 4 previous trips to Lesvos, with a walk around the Kalloni pool, then along the bay to the harbour, before turning inland past the eastern end of the pool, back to our hotel for breakfast. With the pool drained and filled with rushes, reeds and bushes it doesn't have the same appeal that would make you jump out of bed at first light as it did when 75% was open water, but it still contains some little gems that at times can be glimpsed through the emergent vegetation. Ibis, herons, crakes and assorted warblers were all reported during our stay. After breakfast we were again joined by B&B; our plan of action was to spend the morning at the Napi Valley, but because the birding was so slow we cut our stay short and proceeded to the forest at Akladeri where we had lunch, then onto the salt pans at Polichnitos, ending the day on the upper east river.



Birds of Day 7

*Little Egret, Little Bittern, **White Stork**, Glossy Ibis, Greater Flamingo, Ruddy Shelduck, Garganey, Short-toed Eagle, **Marsh***



***Harrier**, **Goshawk**, Avocet, Black-winged Stilt, Ringed Plover, Wood Sandpiper, **Gull-billed Tern**, Common Tern, Little Tern, Barn Owl, **Long-eared Owl**, Common Swift, **European Bee-eater**, Hoopoe, White Wagtail, Yellow Wagtail, Black-eared Wheatear, Subalpine Warbler, Sombre Tit, **Long-tailed Tit**, Krüper's Nuthatch, Red-backed Shrike, Woodchat Shrike, **Masked Shrike**, Cirl Bunting and Black-headed Bunting.*

Day 8

We left the hotel at 06-30 and birded the east track at the salt pans and took our birding chum Frances to the Long-eared Owl site after breakfast. We returned to the salt pans with B & B via the back lanes, and spent the rest of the morning and early afternoon birding. We all returned to our hotel for a light



lunch, spending the rest of the afternoon processing Brian's photos on the laptop. Back out at 17-45 to catch up with a very obliging Spur-winged Lapwing.

Birds of Day 8

Purple Heron, Little Egret, Squacco Heron, Black Stork, White Stork, Glossy Ibis, Greater Flamingo,

*Ruddy Shelduck, Marsh Harrier, Avocet, Black-winged Stilt, **Spur-winged Lapwing**, Little Ringed Plover, Marsh Sandpiper, Wood Sandpiper, Little Stint, Temminck's Stint, Ruff, Common Tern, Little Tern, Whiskered Tern, White-winged Tern, Barn Owl, Long-eared Owl, **Red-throated Pipit**, **Rufus Scrub Robin**, Cetti's Warbler, **Reed Warbler**, Olivaceous Warbler, Lesser Grey Shrike, Greenfinch and Black Headed Bunting.*

Day 9

A lay-in this morning, not starting our pre-breakfast walk until 07-00. Having done all of the main birding sites at least once we decided to go to our least favourite site, the chestnut woods of Agiassos. We have visited this site at least once every trip and it has never failed to disappoint. This visit was no exception, with the red letter bird being a Robin, our fist for the trip. With birding being almost non-existent we entertained ourselves trying to take photos of the butterflies passing by on a very noticeable migration. This being Brenda and Brian's first visit we felt it



incumbent on us to visit all the main birding spots, and this included Agiassos. We returned back to our hotel by early afternoon for a deserved rest.

We were back out by late afternoon for a quick trip to the salt-pans. Having missed out on photographing the Rufus Scrub Robin earlier in the trip we spent most of our time at the bottom of the East River trying to reconnect with it, which we comprehensively failed to do. However we did manage to snap a very vocal territorial Olivaceous Warbler.



Birds of Day 9

Little Egret, Squacco Heron, Black Stork, White Stork, Greater Flamingo, Ruddy Shelduck, Avocet, Black-winged Stilt, Little Ringed Plover, Wood Sandpiper, Ruff, Common Tern, Little Tern, Common Swift, Hoopoe, Robin, Olivaceous Warbler, Lesser Grey Shrike, Spanish Sparrow and Black-headed Bunting.

Day 10



Out at 06-15 we visited the east track of the salt pans, parking at the bird hide and walking in. It was refreshing to do a bit of old fashioned birding where the scope took preference instead of the camera and long lens. Using the scope enabled us to find an immature Dalmatian Pelican in

with the Flamingo at the furthest end of the pans, the first reported during our trip. After breakfast we visited the north of the island, taking in Petra and Molivos, calling in at the Scops Copse on our return. We managed to see 3 of the 5 owls roosting there. We returned to the salt pans and the east river in the late afternoon; still no sign of the elusive Rufus Scrub Robin.

Birds of Day 10

*Little Grebe, **Yelkouan**
Shearwater, Cormorant, **Shag**,
Dalmatian Pelican, Purple Heron,
Little Egret, Squacco Heron,
Greater Flamingo, Ruddy
Shelduck, Shelduck, **Water Rail**,
Avocet, Black-winged Stilt, Ringed
Plover, Kentish Plover, **Black-
tailed Godwit**, Wood Sandpiper, Temminck's Stint, Curlew Sandpiper, Dunlin,
Ruff, Common Tern, Little Tern, White-winged Tern, Turtle Dove, Scops
Owl, Alpine Swift, Common Swift, **Lesser Short-toed Lark**, **Crag Martin**,
Red-throated Pipit, **Blue Rock Thrush**, **Spotted Flycatcher**, **Zitting**
Cisticola, **Rüppell's Warbler**, Red-Backed Shrike and Raven.*



Day 11

Out before 06-00 a strong breeze had sprung up overnight: with heavy cloud cover, we decided to visit the east track at the salt pans again and our hope was that the change in the weather may have brought stuff in, especially as several distant rainbows were evidence indicating heavy rain, possibly over Turkey. It turned out to be the opposite with the pans being the quietest of the whole trip. The rest of the day was spent doing the local patch and taking in the Panaghias Monastery, a site we have often passed but never entered.

Birds of Day 11

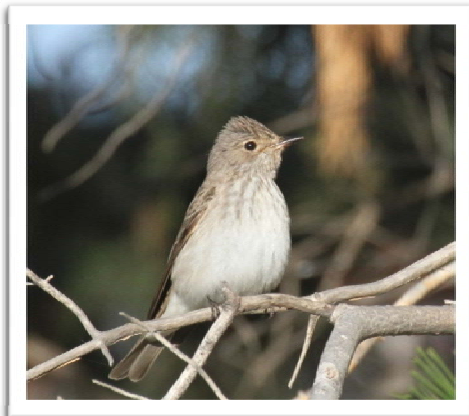
*Little Grebe, Cormorant, Purple Heron, Little
Egret, Squacco Heron, Black Stork, White
Stork, Glossy Ibis, Spoonbill, Greater
Flamingo, Ruddy Shelduck, Shelduck, Mallard,
Peregrine Falcon, Water Rail, Avocet, Black-
winged Stilt, Spur-winged Lapwing, Ringed
Plover, Little Ringed Plover, Black-tailed
Godwit, Wood Sandpiper, Little Stint, Curlew
Sandpiper, Dunlin, Ruff, Common Tern, Little Tern, White-winged Tern,
Little Owl, Long-eared Owl, Yellow Wagtail, Black-eared Wheatear, Zitting*



Cisticola, Olivaceous Warbler, Red-backed Shrike and Black-headed Bunting.

Day 12

Today we were up by 05-30 and out by 05-50 for our second trip to Sigri and Faneromeni via the rough track from Eresos through the Maladia valley. We are not sure whether it was the strong winds and distant storms the previous day, but the saying "dripping with birds" was not an overstatement. Once we had entered the valley floor the whole area was alive with Red-backed Shrike and Black-headed Bunting, these were supplemented with various warblers, flycatchers and buntings, a sprinkling of both Lesser Grey Shrike and Woodchat Shrike helped to swell the numbers, Lesvos as we remembered it!. Both the fords at Faneromeni were as quiet as our earlier visit, although it was good to catch up with a few Bee-eater, birds much scarcer than on previous trips



Birds of Day 12

*Cormorant, Ruddy Shelduck, **Buzzard**, Lesser Kestrel, **Kestrel**, Little Ringed Plover, Wood Sandpiper, Whiskered Tern, White-winged Tern, European Bee-eater, **Sand Martin**, Swallow, House Martin, Red-rumped Swallow, Stonechat, Black-eared Wheatear, Spotted Flycatcher, **Collared Flycatcher**, **Willow Warbler**, **Blackcap**, **Lesser Whitethroat**, Red-backed Shrike, Lesser Grey Shrike, Woodchat Shrike, **Jackdaw**, Spanish Sparrow, Cretzschmar's Bunting and Black-headed Bunting.*

Day 13

With most of the recognised birding sites done at least once, we were beginning to run out of sites we felt would offer the chance of something new, especially as the weather remained warm and settled throughout. With the salt pans offering the best chance of new birds, we again visited them prior to breakfast. After consultation with B & B we decided to visit the inland lake first, then take a slow walk up the Potamia Valley. Completing this by early afternoon we decided



to revisit the Scops Copse, not one of our best decisions as there was a school of 50-70 children using the site as a playground. A quick return to the pans completed the day's birding. Earlier we had found a very obliging Kentish Plover near the side of the road; as Brian hadn't got Kentish this trip, we returned. No Kentish, but a single Collared Pratincole, the first for the trip.

Birds of Day 13

*Grey Heron, Little Egret, Squacco Heron, Black Stork, Glossy Ibis, Greater Flamingo, Ruddy Shelduck, Marsh Harrier, Buzzard, Little Crake, Avocet, Black-winged Stilt, **Collared Pratincole**, Ringed Plover, **Bar-tailed Godwit**, Wood Sandpiper, Little Stint, Temminck's Stint, Curlew Sandpiper, Dunlin, Ruff, Gull-billed Tern, Common Tern, Little Tern, White-winged Tern, Black Tern, Long-eared Owl, Common Swift, Red-rumped Swallow, White Wagtail, Yellow Wagtail, Zitting Cisticola, Red-backed Shrike, Woodchat Shrike and Black-headed Bunting.*



Day 14

Today was our last full day of birding and we started it as we did on many previous occasions, both during this trip and previous ones, out by a little after 06-00 we walked around Kalloni pool with its ever diminishing open water, saying our good mornings to other like-minded birders. Down along the bay to the harbour, then turning inland for our hotel arriving back as the eggs & bacon were being put out. Fatigue was setting in, so again we plumbed for the local patch which was extended to take in the Polichnitos Salt Pans. We finished off our birding parked on the bridge leading into the salt works, trying to get action shots of Common and Little Tern as they fed on surface-feeding midges.

If we are honest this was more to do with filling in time. No new birds were encountered, the first time this had happened this trip; "time to go home".

Our return journey home was uneventful again our plane left a little early arriving in Birmingham 15mins ahead of schedule.

Summary

Consensus of opinion was that this year was a quiet one bird-wise and certainly we would concur. We had 135 species, which was par for the course for our previous spring visits, but overall numbers of birds encountered were less than previously. Although Lesvos had had a wet spring we would estimate water bird numbers were at least 30% down and we would not argue if a figure of 50% was put forward. Passerine numbers were also well down. Steve Dudley said that meaningful passage of passerines finished during his second week on the island and he arrived in late March. Several reasons were put forward for this which included the spring equinox being early, settled weather encouraged birds to continue migrating without needing to refuel, very strong prevailing winds pushed birds over the island, the Maltese have shot over 3 million passage birds, the amount of birders on Lesvos is having a detrimental effect on the birds. We are not sure what the reason is, but this does seem to be a trend we have encountered at several locations throughout Europe including our own east coast. The weather was dry throughout, with temperatures ranging from the low 70's to the mid 80's. The cost of living has moderated as you would expect; we

used "Caprice" for most of our evening meals which is more expensive than most, even so we could have a 3 course meal for between £15 to £20.

Moans, Groans and Memorable Moments.

Moan Our hire car was obtained through Avis booked through the Thomas Cook site; we had booked a Suzuki Jimny to be picked up at the airport. Avis has no office at the airport so you have to wander around the car-park trying to identify the agent. Having finally found ours, our papers were processed and we were informed our vehicle was on its way and would be with us within 10 minutes. After many enquires a vehicle was produced after we had stood on the car-park for 2hrs. This vehicle was a wreck, the driver's seat was badly ripped with the stuffing hanging out, the back of the seat was broken away from the frame. The boot was covered in what looked like builders rubbish, the tyres were badly worn and of different makes. Although we had requested a hard-top we were presented with a soft-top, again many of the securing studs were either missing or badly rusted, leaving it to flap. We flatly refused the vehicle and with no other car to offer us, we were put in a taxi and delivered to our hotel. A Suzuki Vantara was delivered the next day and although it was better than the first vehicle it was still not anywhere near the standard you would get anywhere else in the world.

Groan We had hoped that the popularity of the island would have waned by now, with birders moving on to other locations; well the opposite was true, there were far more birders on the island than we had experienced in our previous 4 trips. Europe has also discovered Lesvos with birders from Switzerland, France, Holland and Denmark swelling the numbers. On one trip to the Inland Lake we encountered over 50 birders lining its banks.

Moan The long lens brigade have proliferated beyond belief, with 500mm lenses outnumbering telescopes by 10 to 1. Although most are well behaved, there is a significant number who must get the shot at any cost. This could be to the detriment of either birds or birders. It was commonplace to find your passage blocked by a vehicle with several lenses sticking out. Many of these were reluctant to move until confrontation took place; not what you need when birding on such a lovely island.

Groan To emphasise the previous point, a Penduline Tit's nest was discovered 20 metres upstream of the lower ford on the East River prior to our arrival on the island. This was staked out every day of our 14 day trip from dawn to dusk. According to Steve Dudley's daily blog some photographers were crossing the river to get as near to the nest as possible. Many of these photographers wouldn't know the difference between a Collared Dove and a Collared Pratincole. Indeed, I heard one enquire when pointing his lens at a Little Bittern, "Do I already have one of these?" Unfortunately with cameras and long lenses becoming more affordable, this proliferation will only continue; why buy a 500mm lens if you have to be within a metre to get the shot required.

Memorable Moments Our welcome and stay at the Aeolian Gaea Hotel, nothing was too much trouble; their happy, smiling attitude did not change from dawn till dusk. It is a family owned and run hotel and should we return to the island this would undoubtedly be our choice of hotel.

Memorable Moments Being serenaded every morning, whilst we breakfasted on the sun terrace, by a very adjacent Nightingale.

Memorable Moments Whilst sitting on the wall at Molivos lay-by waiting for Rüppell's Warbler we noticed that something was pushing bait fish up to the surface; many dozens of gulls, shags, cormorants, and shearwaters were all competing for the spoils. We had scanned the sea from shore to horizon just a few minutes previously and did not see a single shearwater! And yet there they were, almost flopping into the sea rather than elegantly plunge diving like Gannets.

Memorable Moments The amount of birds encountered in the Maladia Valley on our second visit. Everywhere you looked there appeared to be birds; the total numbers of Red-backed Shrike seen in approximately 5 kilometres would have been in excess of 100.

Memorable Moments We have to mention the stoicism of the Greek nation, who to a man when questioned about their nation's finances would just smile and shrug their shoulders.

Memorable Moments The friends and associates we spent time with, or met whilst out in the field who helped make this trip a memorable one.

Memorable Moments Although not a memorable moment, the island has barely changed since our last visit 6 years ago, unlike Mallorca whose infrastructure changes, sometimes dramatically, from one year to the next. The Greeks appear to respect and appreciate what they have and unlike our Spanish friends, who appear to want to develop every piece of open ground even if it does mean destroying very valuable habitat in the process.

Memorable Moments Finally, our early morning visits to the bakery, from where we would return to our hotel with our lunch of bread and pastries which were almost too hot to handle. On arrival at the bakery we would be ushered into the back where the ovens were situated, to see what delights had been baked that morning and make our selection. If you want to get a healthy appetite for breakfast, visit a bakery first.

Pat & Judy Hayes