



*Field Guides Tour Report*

**Classical Greece 2014**

Apr 25, 2014 to May 9, 2014

Megan Edwards Crewe

*For our tour description, itinerary, past triplists, dates, fees, and more, please [VISIT OUR TOUR PAGE](#).*



*Pied Avocets were among the most common -- and the most visually striking -- of the tour's shorebirds. (Photo by participant Cliff Hence)*

The lovely Old World countryside of Greece provides a wonderful backdrop for a spring birding adventure. Vast groves of olive trees lap like dusty seas at the foot of brooding mountains. Blood-red poppies stain newly-green farm fields. Hazy distant islands float on azure-blue seas. Wildflowers grow everywhere, waving gaily in the omnipresent breezes. Remnants of the country's long human history -- ruined watchtowers, crumbling but still-graceful bridge spans, tumbled remains of once-strong walls, scattered pillars and arches and stone lions -- litter the hillsides. And everywhere, we had birds to enjoy.

A pair of Masked Shrikes hunted from olive trees near our picnic tables one lunchtime. A Wood Lark sat atop a little spruce, pouring his liquid song into the warming morning air. A female Montagu's Harrier pounced on some unsuspecting creature, then devoured it in a nearby field. Slender-billed Gulls floated in salty impoundments. A tornado of White-winged Terns circled over our heads. A pair of Crested Tits flicked through a pine tree. A Syrian Woodpecker perched atop a nearby telephone pole, arranging his feathers between bouts of excavating a nest hole in a tree behind our hotel. A pair of Little Owls bounced across a red-tiled roof, peering under eaves while keeping a wary eye on us. Clouds of brightly colored European Bee-eaters flashed after insects from wires and treetops. Cinereous Vultures stood spread-eagled on a ridgetop while two Egyptian Vultures joined a rising kettle of Eurasian Griffons. Dozens of Collared Pratincoles swirled over a plowed field, flashing rusty-brown underwings. A quartet of Black Storks probed for tidbits in a flooded farm field. A Levant Sparrowhawk circled over our Kerkini hotel. Great Crested Grebes waggled shaggy crests at each other. Eurasian Marsh-Harriers hunted low over waving reedbeds. Hundreds of Curlew Sandpipers probed the shallow edges of salt pans. Common and Pallid swifts rocketed past in great screaming flocks, and Common Cuckoos shouted from scrubby hillsides. A dapper Rueppell's Warbler sang challenges from a nearby bush.

But, of course, it wasn't just the birds that dazzled us. We spent a fascinating day with Eleni in Athens, scaling the massive bulk of the Acropolis and touring the Parthenon and its fabulous new museum. At the wonderful new museum in Vergina, we entered the burial mound of Phillip II (father of Alexander the Great) and marveled at the fantastic collection of grave goods found there -- and at the still-impressive painted marble friezes that decorated the outside of the tombs. With our local guide Cristina providing commentary, we wandered through the sprawling ruins of Delphi, reading inscriptions still sharp thousands of years after they were written. And we finished at the monastery of Loukas, where gilded mosaics still glitter 800 years after their creation.

Of course, the camaraderie of a delightful group of fellow travelers added greatly to the mix. Thanks to all of you for joining me; I hope to see you in the field again, somewhere, someday! -- Megan

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**KEYS FOR THIS LIST**

One of the following keys may be shown in brackets for individual species as appropriate: \* = heard only, I = introduced, E = endemic, N = nesting, a = austral migrant, b = boreal migrant

## BIRDS

### Anatidae (Ducks, Geese, and Waterfowl)

**GRAYLAG GOOSE** (*Anser anser*) – One pair flew past, calling, while we birded along a causeway at the north end of Lake Kerkini, and a second pair foraged on one of the little islands around a few of the drowning trees there. Most of this overwintering species head far to the north to breed, but a few have begun to stay year round.

**MUTE SWAN** (*Cygnus olor*) – Particularly common on the Evros delta, where we saw dozens scattered across some of the larger impoundments.

**COMMON SHELDUCK** (*Tadorna tadorna*) – Easily the most common of the tour's waterfowl species, with particularly nice scope studies of several small groups on the Evros delta. We had others on every wet spot around Fanari, and on Lake Kerkini.

**MALLARD** (*Anas platyrhynchos*) – Small numbers on scattered days, including a drake resting on a little island near the monastery of St. Nicholas, near Porto Lagos.

**COMMON POCHARD** (*Aythya ferina*) – A pair floating on Lake Kerkini were the last remnant of the thousands that overwinter on the reservoir; most have headed north by the time of our tour.

### Gaviidae (Loons)

**ARCTIC LOON** (*Gavia arctica*) – One flew past while we watched the shags and cormorants on the rocky islet just offshore from Ptelea Lagoon.

### Podicipedidae (Grebes)

**LITTLE GREBE** (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*) – One leapt out of a bed of reeds near the north shore of Lake Kerkini, looking almost like it had been launched by a catapult. It took one look at us, and danced back into the reedbed nearly as quickly as it had come out.

**GREAT CRESTED GREBE** (*Podiceps cristatus*) – Regular in the middle of the tour, including a pair doing their charming mirror dance on one end of Lake Mitrikou and dozens floating on Lake Kerkini. This is Europe's largest grebe.

### Phoenicopteridae (Flamingos)

**GREATER FLAMINGO** (*Phoenicopus roseus*) – Our best views came near Porto Lagos, where a gaggle of gangly gray youngsters -- and a few more colorful adults -- rested in one of the salt pans. We saw others in flight (where they're far more impressive) on the Evros delta, and a pink cloud of them on the far side of the Kitros salt pans.

### Procellariidae (Shearwaters and Petrels)

**LEVANTINE SHEARWATER** (*Puffinus yelkouan*) – Two floated on the Aegean, fortunately not too far from a quartet of Greater Cormorants we could use as markers. And when they flew off, another pair dropped in beside a convenient pair of Yellow-legged Gulls. This was formerly considered to be a subspecies of the Mediterranean Shearwater.

### Ciconiidae (Storks)

**BLACK STORK** (*Ciconia nigra*) – Reasonably common on the first half of the trip, with especially nice views of a quartet foraging in a wet field along the road into the town of Dadia. In flight, this species is primarily black, though it does show a white belly and inner wing.

**WHITE STORK** (*Ciconia ciconia*) – Very common everywhere except around Delphi. The Greeks believe that having a stork nest on your property is lucky; given the density of nests we saw in the village of Kerkini, that must be an extraordinarily lucky place! [N]

### Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants and Shags)

**GREAT CORMORANT** (*Phalacrocorax carbo*) – Abundant in wetlands throughout, including thousands floating on (or flying over) Lake Kerkini. The subspecies found in Europe shows a lot of white on the face in breeding plumage.

**EUROPEAN SHAG** (*Phalacrocorax aristotelis*) – A good number roosted on one end of a rocky islet just offshore from Ptelea Lagoon, looking small and dark compared to a nearby Great Cormorant.

**PYGMY CORMORANT** (*Phalacrocorax pygmaeus*) – Quite common on the Evros delta, including a few drying their wings in little trees near the first bridge we stopped at, with others scattered around Lake Kerkini. This species is considerably smaller in length (i.e. more than a foot shorter) than the Great Cormorant.

### Pelecanidae (Pelicans)

**GREAT WHITE PELICAN** (*Pelecanus onocrotalus*) – The big mass of pelicans gathered on the sand piles at the north end of Lake Kerkini included some in striking pink-faced breeding plumage. With practice, the starkly two-toned underwing of this species made it easy to separate from the Dalmatian Pelican.

**DALMATIAN PELICAN** (*Pelecanus crispus*) – Very common on Lake Kerkini, where they floated in their hundreds along the north shore. We saw scores of others circling high over the Evros delta, headed north. This species has a grayish underwing, with a slightly paler central stripe.

### Ardeidae (Herons, Egrets, and Bitterns)

**LITTLE BITTERN** (*Ixobrychus minutus*) – Best seen on Lake Kerkini, where we found a few creeping through reedbeds along the north shore. We saw others on the Evros delta, and along the causeway near Lake Mitrikou.

**GRAY HERON** (*Ardea cinerea*) – Regular in wetlands (including the pond outside of Sofia's guesthouse) where they reminded us of Great Blue Herons.

**PURPLE HERON** (*Ardea purpurea*) – One hunting along the back edge of a wet field on the Evros delta allowed great scope studies; what a long beak! We saw others in flight along the causeway near Lake Mitrikou, and at Lake Kerkini.

**GREAT EGRET** (*Ardea alba*) – A few rested on the fringes of one of the ponds on the Evros delta. This is only a winter visitor to most of Greece.

**LITTLE EGRET** (*Egretta garzetta*) – Very common in ponds, lakes, estuaries and salt pans along the northern coast, with nice scope studies of several of them showing their "golden slippers" as they stepped along a wooden beam at the St. Nikolas monastery near Porto Lagos.

**SQUACCO HERON** (*Ardeola ralloides*) – Dozens sprinkled along the lagoons and channels of the Evros delta, with others around Porto Lagos and Lake Kerkini. It was amazing how they turned from butterscotch to white when they flew.

**BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON** (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) – A handful (including a dark second summer bird) snoozed in small trees along a

stream at the start of our day on the Evros delta, and a couple of adults winged away along the causeway on the east side of Lake Kerkini.

#### Threskiornithidae (Ibises and Spoonbills)

**GLOSSY IBIS** (*Plegadis falcinellus*) – Surprisingly common this year, especially on the Evros delta. We also saw a big group mixing with a mob of Little Egrets along the causeway around Lake Mitrikou.

**EURASIAN SPOONBILL** (*Platalea leucorodia*) – We had a few fly past on the Evros delta, but our best views came at Lake Kerkini, where we found some feeding in the shallow waters of the north end. One was close enough we could even see the yellow "C" at the tip of its black bill -- when it lifted it up out of the water, that is!

#### Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)

**EGYPTIAN VULTURE** (*Neophron percnopterus*) – Two adults circled over the remains of the carcass pile at the Dadia raptor station, part of a rising spiral of vultures, and another adult soared over the open fields around the visitor's center there later in the day.

**CINEREOUS VULTURE** (*Aegypius monachus*) – Numbers of these big, hulking vultures around the carcass pile at the Dadia raptor station, including several with their massive wings outstretched to catch the morning sun. All told, we probably saw some 30% of the birds left in Greece.

**EURASIAN GRIFFON** (*Gyps fulvus*) – Probably the most common vulture species of the tour, with good numbers seen around -- and over -- the carcass pile at the Dadia raptor station. The unfeathered head and neck of this species allow the birds to reach deep inside a carcass without creating plumage problems.

**SHORT-TOED EAGLE** (*Circus gallicus*) – Seen on scattered days throughout the tour, including several pairs soaring over Dadia forest, and one with a snake (which it dropped) near the gas station where we took our pit stop on Mount Parnassos.

**LESSER SPOTTED EAGLE** (*Clanga pomarina*) – A single bird soared past the Dadia visitor's center, one of the first raptors we saw that day. The pale spots in its upperwing, and its pale U-shaped rump patch, are distinctive.

**BOOTED EAGLE** (*Hieraetus pennatus*) – One soared past carrying a snake while we birded near the little concrete bridge in Dadia forest at the end of the day.

**GOLDEN EAGLE** (*Aquila chrysaetos*) – An adult over the road out of the Dadia forest emptied the bus "one last time", as we checked to make sure it wasn't an Imperial Eagle.

**EURASIAN MARSH-HARRIER** (*Circus aeruginosus*) – Very common along the coast, including dozens seen quartering over the marshes on the Evros delta. This species is larger and broader winged than the other harriers, and lacks a pale rump patch.

**MONTAGU'S HARRIER** (*Circus pygargus*) – A little group of them flew past as we walked a causeway on the north end of Lake Kerkini. One female dropped down into nearby bushes and came up with some small creature, which she carried into a field to devour -- allowing us the chance for extended scope studies.

**LEVANT SPARROWHAWK** (*Accipiter brevipes*) – Our best view came right after breakfast one morning at Lake Kerkini, when we found one circling for several minutes over our hotel. It was certainly an improvement over our "disappearing into the distance" first sighting!

**EURASIAN SPARROWHAWK** (*Accipiter nisus*) – Scattered individuals throughout, including a soaring bird being mobbed by Eurasian Crag-Martins over Iasmos Gorge, and a briefly perched male spotted by Susan right beside the road on the Evros delta.

**BLACK KITE** (*Milvus migrans*) – Several on the Evros delta, including one perched in a snag near the road and several soaring over the fields, showing their distinctively forked, mobile tails.

**COMMON BUZZARD** (*Buteo buteo*) – Regular throughout; as we saw, they come in a variety of color morphs.

#### Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots)

**EURASIAN MOORHEN** (*Gallinula chloropus*) – A few on Lake Kerkini showed especially well as they chugged back and forth across a narrow arm of water on the north shore. We saw others on the Evros delta and near the St. Nikolas monastery in Porto Lagos. This species was recently split from North America's Common Gallinule.

**EURASIAN COOT** (*Fulica atra*) – A few foraged on Lake Mitrikou, others paddled across the lagoon near the St. Nikolas monastery, and dozens floated on Lake Kerkini. Unlike the American Coot, this species lacks white undertail coverts.

#### Recurvirostridae (Stilts and Avocets)

**BLACK-WINGED STILT** (*Himantopus himantopus*) – Small numbers in various wetlands, including a close pair at the Kitros salt pans that allowed us to see the browner back of the female.

**PIED AVOCET** (*Recurvirostra avocetta*) – Hundreds dotted the edges of Ptelea Lagoon, and a handful of others foraged in the salt pans near Porto Lagos and Kitros.

#### Haematopodidae (Oystercatchers)

**EURASIAN OYSTERCATCHER** (*Haematopus ostralegus*) – Small numbers in wetlands all along the coast, including scope studies of several on the Evros delta, a few flying past Ptelea Lagoon (showing those flashy black and white wings) and a pair snoozing on an islet in the Kitros salt pans.

#### Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)

**SPUR-WINGED PLOVER** (*Vanellus spinosus*) – Fine views of several pairs before lunch on the Evros delta. This is primarily an African species, which just edges into Europe in the very southeastern corner of Greece.

**KENTISH PLOVER (KENTISH)** (*Charadrius alexandrinus alexandrinus*) – One distant bird among the greenery on a little islet in Ptelea Lagoon, and several much closer pattering along the edges of a lagoon near the Kitros salt pans. This species was recently split from North America's Snowy Plover.

**LITTLE RINGED PLOVER** (*Charadrius dubius*) – One huddled on a gravel bar along the river near the bridge in Iasmos Gorge was an effective "Where's Waldo" puzzle -- it was surprising how tough it was to find it among the pebbles! Seen in the scope, its yellow eye ring was distinctive.

#### Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)

**COMMON SANDPIPER** (*Actitis hypoleucos*) – Regular along streams, channels and the edges of lagoons. This species is in the same genus as North America's Spotted Sandpiper, and has the same stiff-winged flight, and the same teetering, butt-wagging habits.

**SPOTTED REDSHANK** (*Tringa erythropus*) – Best seen at Ptelea Lagoon, where several dozen of these long-legged birds -- some already well into

breeding plumage -- foraged around several little islets. We had a handful of others on the Evros delta.

**COMMON GREENSHANK** (*Tringa nebularia*) – Among the most common shorebirds on the Evros delta, including a group of some 15-20 just beyond where we had lunch.

**WOOD SANDPIPER** (*Tringa glareola*) – A flock of a dozen or so rummaged on a heavily vegetated mudflat just outside of Fanari, showing well their white superciliums. We saw a few others showing their distinctive white rump patches while in flight at the Porto Lagos salt pans.

**COMMON REDSHANK** (*Tringa totanus*) – A couple of these slightly taller shorebirds foraged among the Wood Sandpiper flock just outside Fanari, seen on our way into town that first afternoon. As we saw, this species has a distinctive white wedge on the trailing edge of its wings when it flies.

**EURASIAN CURLEW** (*Numenius arquata*) – One flew past, calling, near our lunch spot on the Evros delta.

**RUFF** (*Calidris pugnax*) – A handful with the Wood Sandpipers near Fanari played hard to get, ducking in and out of vegetation -- until one took a bath and stood up on a little mound of mud to get all its feathers back in order. Some of the group spotted others on the Evros delta and at the Kitros salt pans.

**CURLEW SANDPIPER** (*Calidris ferruginea*) – Great views of several foraging along the edge of Ptelea Lagoon (seen from our perch among the orchids) with hundreds of others seen near the Kitros salt pans. Most were already sporting their handsome breeding plumage.

**DUNLIN** (*Calidris alpina*) – A few among the Curlew Sandpipers, where their black bellies helped us to pick them out -- though the ones flying past were easiest to spot!

**LITTLE STINT** (*Calidris minuta*) – Dozens scurried along the edges of Ptelea Lagoon, while others foraged in the Porto Lagos salt pans. But our best views came at the Kitros salt pans, where many rummaged among the Curlew Sandpipers.

#### Glareolidae (Pratincoles and Coursers)

**COLLARED PRATINCOLE** (*Glareola pratincola*) – Our experience with a swirling mob of birds over the causeway near Lake Mitrikou was rather like standing in a pratincole snow globe! They were numerous and low and close -- so close we could clearly see their rusty brown underwings and the white trailing edge on their upperwings.

#### Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)

**SLENDER-BILLED GULL** (*Chroicocephalus genei*) – Dozens floated on the salt pans at the Kitros saltworks, allowing fine scope studies.

**BLACK-HEADED GULL** (*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*) – Particularly common on Lake Kerkini, where dozens of birds of all ages rested on posts and pilings or flapped past over the water. We saw a handful of others on the Evros delta and at the Kitros saltworks.

**MEDITERRANEAN GULL** (*Ichthyaeetus melanocephalus*) – Lovely views of these handsome gulls around Fanari, where their distinctive "yow" calls were a regular part of the tour soundtrack.

**YELLOW-LEGGED GULL** (*Larus michahellis michahellis*) – Very common throughout -- including dozens flying over the forest on Mount Parnassos, where they seemed a bit out of place! One preening on a post near the St. Nikolas monastery gave us particularly fine views of those yellow legs.

**LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL (HEUGLIN'S)** (*Larus fuscus heuglini*) – A third-year bird resting in a grassy field north of Lake Kerkini didn't look particularly well. This is normally a winter visitor to Greece.

**LITTLE TERN** (*Sternula albifrons*) – Regular along the coast and at Lake Kerkini, with especially nice studies of close birds over the ponds (and resting on the bunds between the ponds) at the Porto Lagos saltworks. This species looks very like North America's Least Tern.

**GULL-BILLED TERN** (*Gelochelidon nilotica*) – A quartet of birds flew past our perch amid the orchids and proceeded to the north end of Ptelea Lagoon, where they hunted back and forth over the water. This species is primarily an insect eater.

**CASPIAN TERN** (*Hydroprogne caspia*) – A single bird flew past while we birded on the Evros delta, its large red beak obvious against the sky.

**BLACK TERN** (*Chlidonias niger*) – Scores flashed to and fro over Lake Mitrikou, looking more uniformly dark than the next species, which was also present.

**WHITE-WINGED TERN** (*Chlidonias leucopterus*) – Best seen at the Porto Lagos saltworks, where a little tornado of migrating birds swirled past, flashing their distinctively pale upperwings and dark underwings. There were others at Lake Mitrikou.

**WHISKERED TERN** (*Chlidonias hybrida*) – Fine studies of several hunting right beside us at Lake Mitrikou, showing well their white "whiskers".

**COMMON TERN** (*Sterna hirundo*) – Especially common on the Evros delta, where we had courting pairs calling around our lunch spot. We saw others at Ptelea Lagoon (including several males attempting to present small fish to their chosen females) and near the Apollonia tower.

#### Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)

**ROCK PIGEON** (*Columba livia*) – Feral flocks were abundant throughout, with a handful of "wild type" birds seen nesting on the rocky cliff where we found our Rock Petronias.

**COMMON WOOD-PIGEON** (*Columba palumbus*) – A half dozen or so flapped past our clifftop perch early on our day up Mount Olympus, showing their large size and distinctive white wing patches.

**EUROPEAN TURTLE-DOVE** (*Streptopelia turtur*) – Regular on the first half of the tour, including multiple small flocks in the scrubby areas of the Evros delta and several perched on roadside wires in the Dadia forest. The purring call of a courting male serenaded us during our final picnic lunch at Osios Loukas. This species is declining precipitously all over Europe (no thanks to a spring hunting season on Malta) so it was nice to see as many as we did!

**EURASIAN COLLARED-DOVE** (*Streptopelia decaocto*) – Ubiquitous, seen daily in just about every conceivable habitat. It's hard to believe they only arrived in Europe in the past century!

#### Cuculidae (Cuckoos)

**COMMON CUCKOO** (*Cuculus canorus*) – The well-known "cuckoo clock" song of this species was certainly a regular part of the tour soundtrack! We had fantastic views of one singing male wagging his tail just above our picnic lunch spot near Lake Mitrikou, with another seen well near the wryneck spot on Mount Parnassos.

#### Strigidae (Owls)

**LITTLE OWL** (*Athene noctua*) – Gratifyingly common this year, with the pair bouncing across the rooftop at Fanari before breakfast one morning proving especially photogenic. We saw another pair ferrying mouthfuls -- including a fearsomely large centipede -- to some out-of-sight chicks in a



crack in a cliff near Delphi one morning.

#### Apodidae (Swifts)

**ALPINE SWIFT** (*Apus melba*) – Nice studies of several dozen winging over the acropolis in Athens on our first morning, with others zooming around the headland where we found our Levantine Shearwaters. Both the huge size (a two-foot wingspan!) and white belly of this species are distinctive.

**COMMON SWIFT** (*Apus apus*) – Daily, including screaming groups rocketing past over the roofs of Delphi on our final morning.

**PALLID SWIFT** (*Apus pallidus*) – A handful among the previous species over Lithchoro were a bit of a challenge to pick out, but a few close by fliers were satisfactorily seen by most. This species is browner than the Common Swift (which typically looks black), with a bigger white throat patch and a subtly broader, blunter wing.

#### Alcedinidae (Kingfishers)

**COMMON KINGFISHER** (*Alcedo atthis*) – One flashed back and forth across a little stream near the start of the road through the Evros delta, perching for a few too-brief seconds on a concrete wall near the bridge we watched from.

#### Meropidae (Bee-eaters)

**EUROPEAN BEE-EATER** (*Merops apiaster*) – Regular through the first part of the tour, with especially nice encounters on the Evros delta and the causeway near Lake Mitrikou, where whirling flocks flashed after insects. What fabulously colorful birds!

#### Coraciidae (Rollers)

**EUROPEAN ROLLER** (*Coracias garrulus*) – A few hunted from trees and wires along the road through the Evros delta, and we saw others along roadsides in the northeastern part of the country. The brilliant turquoise wings of this species are certainly eye-catching!

#### Upupidae (Hoopoes)

**EURASIAN HOOPOE** (*Upupa epops*) – Some fine encounters, including good views of a male singing from a dead snag, his purplish air sac clearly visible due to some feather loss.

#### Picidae (Woodpeckers)

**EURASIAN WRYNECK** (*Jynx torquilla*) – The last new bird of the trip was one singing from atop a big spruce tree on Mount Parnassos -- great spotting, Gayle! According to the old legends, this is what European witches rode, rather than brooms.

**LESSER SPOTTED WOODPECKER** (*Dendrocopos minor*) – A single calling bird moved through some tall pines along the road near our snack stop on Mount Olympus, perching occasionally in the open where we could see its small size and the lack of red on its vent.

**GREAT SPOTTED WOODPECKER** (*Dendrocopos major*) – One chased a Green Woodpecker through some poplars along a causeway on the north end of Lake Kerkini, seen by some of the group. We got better views of one hanging from the side of a trunk near our picnic spot later the same day.

**SYRIAN WOODPECKER** (*Dendrocopos syriacus*) – One excavating a nest hole in a tree behind our Fanari hotel proved very accommodating, preening for long minutes atop nearby phone poles. [N]

**BLACK WOODPECKER** (*Dryocopus martius*) – One flashed across the road several times in the Dadia forest, then called loudly from somewhere out of sight. Another flew past, then called (and called and called) from the backside of a trunk just uphill from the road on Mount Olympus, but we just couldn't find it before a passing truck scared it off.

**GREEN WOODPECKER** (*Picus viridis*) – One in a poplar grove near Lake Kerkini proved too elusive for most, but another perched briefly atop a dead snag on Mount Parnassos (and flew back and forth and back and forth across the big clearing where we searched for our wrynecks). We certainly all heard them well!

#### Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)

**LESSER KESTREL** (*Falco naumanni*) – Super studies of these handsome little falcons along the causeway near Lake Mitrikou, where a half dozen or so hawked insects. The underwing of this species is distinctively pale, with only a small bit of black at the very tip.

**EURASIAN KESTREL** (*Falco tinnunculus*) – Common and widespread, seen nearly every day of the tour -- including a trio chasing each other across the cliff face near Delphi, and a hunting female missing a lot of feathers in one wing (nearly killed by a bullet, perhaps?) in Fanari.

**RED-FOOTED FALCON** (*Falco tinnunculus*) – Several small groups -- including one gang of a dozen arrayed like beads on a telephone wire -- hunted the fields on the Evros delta. We saw a handful of others over the Dadia forest.

**MERLIN** (*Falco columbarius*) – A brown female streaked past while we walked near the Porto Lagos saltworks. This is a winter visitor to Greece; most are long departed by the time of our tour.

**EURASIAN HOBBY** (*Falco subbuteo*) – Two hunted dragonflies over our picnic site near Lake Mitrikou, occasionally perching for a minute or two in a nearby dead tree.

**PEREGRINE FALCON** (*Falco peregrinus*) – A big female flew along a cliff face beyond the Delphi ruins site, attracting the worried attention of several resident species.

#### Laniidae (Shrikes)

**RED-BACKED SHRIKE** (*Lanius collurio*) – Small numbers on many days, including a pair along the edge of a field on Mount Parnassos, a male sitting high in a leafless tree on the outskirts of Delphi and another hunting from a shrub on the rolling hills outside Doriskos.

**MASKED SHRIKE** (*Lanius nubicus*) – Best seen around our lunch tables at Doriskos, where two hunted among the olive trees; we saw another after fording a little stream further down the valley. This small shrike gets no further west into Europe.

**WOODCHAT SHRIKE** (*Lanius senator*) – Quite common throughout, with several seen very well as they perched atop trees and shrubs. This was the largest of the shrikes we saw.

#### Oriolidae (Old World Orioles)

**EURASIAN GOLDEN ORIOLE** (*Oriolus oriolus*) – We heard the loud, rolling song of this handsome species for several days before we finally caught up with the singers. Our best views came near Lake Mitrikou, where we found a trio -- two males and a female -- bouncing through a hedgerow, occasionally sitting right in the open long enough for scope studies.

#### Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies)

**EURASIAN JAY** (*Garrulus glandarius*) – Singles on several days, often in flight. Our best views came on a pre-breakfast walk at Lake Kerkini, when one perched for a minute or so on a roadside wire. This species is considerably shyer than are jays in North America!

**EURASIAN MAGPIE** (*Pica pica*) – Abundant and widespread, seen on every day of the tour. This species was recently split from North America's Black-billed Magpie.

**YELLOW-BILLED CHOUGH** (*Pyrrhocorax graculus*) – It took some luck with the weather (darn that fog!) but we finally got good views of at least four (including two carrying big mouthfuls of nesting material) over a ski area on Mount Parnassos. [N]

**EURASIAN JACKDAW** (*Corvus monedula*) – Common throughout, typically in big, noisy groups. The birds around the church in Ferres were particularly obliging, sitting up on roofs and chimney pots, allowing us to study them carefully.

**HOODED CROW** (*Corvus cornix*) – Also very common, seen on all but a couple of days on the tour -- and we were probably just not looking carefully enough those days!

**COMMON RAVEN** (*Corvus corax*) – A growing number gathering at the Dadia raptor station's carcass pile had us all remembering the playground scene in Hitchcock's "The Birds". It was amazing how small they looked compared to the vultures!

#### Panuridae (Bearded Reedling)

**BEARDED REEDLING** (*Panurus biarmicus*) – A couple of males bounced along the edge of a reedbed on the Evros delta, flitting into and out of view. This was a first-time species for a Field Guides Greece tour.

#### Alaudidae (Larks)

**CALANDRA LARK** (*Melanocorypha calandra*) – One hovered, singing, high above a plowed field near the Porto Lagos saltworks, its blackish underwings clearly visible against the blue sky. With the scope, we could even see the white trailing edge on the back of the wings.

**GREATER SHORT-TOED LARK** (*Calandrella brachydactyla*) – A couple along the roadside on the Evros delta showed their somewhat rusty caps and heavier bills reasonably well before flitting off into the distance -- nice spotting, Gayle!

**CRESTED LARK** (*Galerida cristata*) – Common on the first half of the tour, with great views of multiple pairs scuttling along the roads on the Evros delta.

**SKY LARK** (*Alauda arvensis*) – One hung high in the sky above the Evros delta, singing his challenges to the world. He was in the same place for so long that we all had multiple views in the scope -- though he was still a pretty small dot even then!

**WOOD LARK** (*Lullula arborea*) – Super scope studies of one perched atop a nearby spruce on Mount Parnassos, with the lovely song of others raining down from the sky there.

#### Hirundinidae (Swallows)

**BANK SWALLOW** (*Riparia riparia*) – Seen especially well at Lake Kerkini, where small numbers zoomed over the flooded fields or zipped into nest holes in a sandy bank, with others around Fanari and over the Kitros saltworks. European field guides call this species "Sand Martin". [N]

**EURASIAN CRAG-MARTIN** (*Ptyonoprogne rupestris*) – Several dozen swirled over Iasmos gorge, and a handful of them dropped down onto the gritty slopes, looking for nesting material. [N]

**BARN SWALLOW** (*Hirundo rustica*) – Daily, often in sizeable numbers. We found active nests on just about every hotel we stayed at. [N]

**RED-RUMPED SWALLOW** (*Cecropis daurica*) – Common and widespread, but seen especially well around Delphi, where we had a couple perched conveniently side by side with the previous species on an unfinished building.

**COMMON HOUSE-MARTIN** (*Delichon urbicum*) – Very common throughout, including scores whirling over the Iasmos gorge, where they were nesting under the new bridge. [N]

#### Paridae (Chickadees and Tits)

**SOMBRE TIT** (*Poecile lugubris*) – A pair of these appropriately dull-plumaged chickadees flitted around a building in Delphi before breakfast one morning, and another sat atop a little juniper just downhill from the cliff where we found our Rock Petronias.

**MARSH TIT** (*Poecile palustris*) – One on Mount Olympus was decidedly uncooperative, always landing just out of sight behind leaves as it flicked through the beeches overhead. Sadly, only a few folks caught a glimpse of its distinctively small bib (more a moustache than a bib!) before it flitted off up the hill.

**COAL TIT** (*Pariparus ater*) – Seen well on both Mount Olympus and Mount Parnassos, including a pair apparently nesting in a hole in the bank near the road on Olympus. [N]

**CRESTED TIT** (*Lophophanes cristatus*) – A couple hopped through pines near one of the overlooks on Mount Olympus. This species is generally found at higher altitudes.

**GREAT TIT** (*Parus major*) – Easily the most common and widespread of the country's tits, seen nearly every day.

#### Remizidae (Penduline-Tits)

**EURASIAN PENDULINE-TIT** (*Remiz pendulinus*) – A male nest-building along a channel near Lake Kerkini was a treat; we watched as he wove strands into the first loop, even lying on his back to tamp the "ceiling" into order. We also saw a finished nest -- a fluffy white bundle, complete with an entrance tunnel -- on the other side of the bridge. [N]

#### Sittidae (Nuthatches)

**EURASIAN NUTHATCH** (*Sitta europaea*) – Our best views came on Mount Parnassos, where a singing male hitched his way to the top of a dead snag just down the hill from the foggy ski station. We saw another on Mount Olympus.

**ROCK NUTHATCH** (*Sitta neumayer*) – Regular around Delphi, including several bringing mouthfuls of food to jar-shaped nests stuck to the ruins -- one on the Athens treasury building, the other on the Roman stoa. [N]

#### Certhiidae (Treecreepers)

**SHORT-TOED TREECREEPER** (*Certhia brachydactyla*) – Our best views came high on Mount Parnassos, where we found one territorial little bird singing in several trees (including a dead snag it shared with a Eurasian Nuthatch) right near the road, just below the foggy sky area. We had others on Mount Olympus, and in the Dadia forest.

#### Troglodytidae (Wrens)

**EURASIAN WREN** (*Troglodytes troglodytes*) – One chortled from roadside bush just up the hill from the Prionia parking lot on Mount Olympus, giving us outstanding views. This species was recently split from the Winter Wren -- and is the only wren species found in all of Europe and Asia!

*Cinclidae (Dippers)*

**WHITE-THROATED DIPPER** (*Cinclus cinclus*) – Arg! One bounced along the edge of the stream below the bridge at Prionia on Mount Olympus, then flew past below us and landed briefly upstream. Unfortunately, after only a few seconds, it flew off upstream and around the corner before everyone found it.

*Regulidae (Kinglets)*

**FIRECREST** (*Regulus ignicapilla*) – Especially nice views of one flashing its fiery crest near the stream below the monastery on Mount Olympus, with others seen very well in the spruces on Mount Parnassos.

*Cettiidae (Bush-Warblers and Allies)*

**CETTI'S WARBLER** (*Cettia cetti*) – We heard the loud, abrupt songs of this species far more frequently than we saw the singers, but we did have fine views of several on our first morning on the Evros delta. Hormones are a wonderful thing, bringing these normally skulking birds into the open to shout challenges to their rivals.

*Phylloscopidae (Leaf-Warblers)*

**WILLOW WARBLER** (*Phylloscopus trochilus*) – A single bird flitted through a bush in a backyard in Fanari, part of a little group of migrants that had dropped in overnight.

**COMMON CHIFFCHAFF** (*Phylloscopus collybita*) – At least two flitted along the edge of the pond near Sofia's guesthouse, seen near our first Eurasian Penduline-Tits on a pre-breakfast walk. They regularly dipped their tails, which is a useful behavioral trait to help separate them from the previous species.

**EASTERN BONELLI'S WARBLER** (*Phylloscopus orientalis*) – It took a bit of effort -- and a scramble up a steep hill in the Dadia forest -- but we finally spotted one of the many singers we heard among the pines there.

*Acrocephalidae (Reed-Warblers and Allies)*

**EASTERN OLIVACEOUS WARBLER** (*Iduna pallida*) – One singing from a series of bushes beside a littered parking lot in Fanari eventually showed well, and we spotted another on our walk down the hill from our Kerkini hotel before breakfast one morning.

**SEDGE WARBLER** (*Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*) – One flitted -- skulking -- through the reeds at the edge of the pond near Sofia's guesthouse; fortunately, its hormones eventually drove it repeatedly into the open to sign -- and check for potential rivals.

**EURASIAN REED-WARBLER** (*Acrocephalus scirpaceus*) – One on the Evros delta worked its way closer and closer as it investigated a reed-lined ditch near our picnic lunch spot. This species is smaller -- and less likely to sit right out in the open -- than the next.

**GREAT REED-WARBLER** (*Acrocephalus arundinaceus*) – Dozens chortled from reed stems on the Evros delta, and in the wetlands around Lake Mitrikou and Lake Kerkini, hitching themselves high up to project their scratchy, jumbled songs.

*Sylviidae (Sylvids)*

**BLACKCAP** (*Sylvia atricapilla*) – Surprisingly scarce this year, with only a few in the Dadia forest (including one singing loudly along the road near our picnic lunch spot). Our best view came before breakfast near Sofia's guesthouse one morning, when we found a singing male right beside the lake.

**LESSER WHITETHROAT** (*Sylvia curruca*) – One real skulker flitted through bushes all around us on Mount Parnassos, but never came out where everyone could get a good look. Some saw him well, some saw him flying past, and some never really saw him at all. We found another skulking pair near our Red-backed Shrikes on Mount Parnassos our final morning.

**EASTERN ORPHEAN WARBLER** (*Sylvia crassirostris*) – One led us on a merry chase up and down the road near Iasmos gorge before finally sitting up in an olive tree for a good look around.

**RUEPPELL'S WARBLER** (*Sylvia rueppelli*) – Spectacular looks at a couple of singing birds on a hillside near Delphi; that bold white moustache (and red-ringed eye) is striking against its dark face.

**SUBALPINE WARBLER** (*Sylvia cantillans*) – Our first was a male singing in several small trees on a hillside near Doriskos; it started in bad light, but eventually worked its way closer and lower, allowing reasonable studies even though the sun was behind it. We had another west of Delphi, flitting through some shrubby growth very close to the ground down the hill from the switchbacks we were birding on.

**SARDINIAN WARBLER** (*Sylvia melanocephala*) – Especially nice views of a male at eye level in some bushes in the Agora, just through the fence from the sidewalk where we stood. We had another male near Doriskos (while searching for the Isabelline Wheatear), and a pair along the hillside where we found our Rueppell's Warbler.

**GREATER WHITETHROAT** (*Sylvia communis*) – A male singing in the thickets near the lake at Sofia's was tough to find in the fog! With some persistence, we finally tracked it down, and scoped it singing atop a sprig. We had another on the edge of Mount Parnassos, singing from below us on the hillside.

*Muscicapidae (Old World Flycatchers)*

**SPOTTED FLYCATCHER** (*Muscicapa striata*) – Relatively common throughout, which was nice since the species is declining over much of Europe. One hunting from a fence near a couple of Pied Flycatchers allowed good comparison with that species, and we had fine views of others in Delphi and on Mount Olympus.

**EUROPEAN ROBIN** (*Erithacus rubecula*) – Our best views came at Prionia on Mount Olympus, where one sang from a branch not far from our singing Eurasian Wren. We had others in Dadia Forest.

**COMMON NIGHTINGALE** (*Luscinia megarhynchos*) – Very common everywhere except Athens and Delphi, with far more heard than seen; their loud, ringing songs were a regular part of the tour soundtrack most places. One on the Evros delta and another beside the lake at Sofia's were particularly cooperative, sitting for several minutes on open branches.

**EUROPEAN PIED FLYCATCHER** (*Ficedula hypoleuca*) – Two hunted from fences in Fanari, part of a little group of migrants we found just around the block from our hotel.

**BLACK REDSTART** (*Phoenicurus ochruros*) – It took some effort -- and a lot of padding around in the fog -- but we finally located an adult male near

one of the ski areas on Mount Parnassos. He bounced around on the ground near one of the buildings, chasing insects and quivering that namesake red tail.

**BLUE ROCK-THRUSH** (*Monticola solitarius*) – Several singing (and making occasional parachuting display flights) from crags in Iasmos gorge were followed by others on television antennas, cliffsides and ancient ruins around Delphi.

**WHINCHAT** (*Saxicola rubetra*) – One, showing its striped face nicely as it hunted from weed stems near Dadia, with another on Mount Parnassos our final morning.

**EUROPEAN STONECHAT** (*Saxicola rubicola rubicola*) – A bright male sitting atop a snag near the wryneck spot on Mount Parnassos was a treat; nice spotting, Gayle!

**NORTHERN WHEATEAR** (*Oenanthe oenanthe*) – Probably best seen on Mount Parnassos, where we had both males and females at our first stop (at the edge of the massif, where we could see the Gulf of Corinth in the distance); it was particularly nice to see them in close comparison with the next species there. We had others in Dadia forest, Doriskos and Delphi.

**BLACK-EARED WHEATEAR** (*Oenanthe hispanica*) – Great studies of a male hunting from a rounded bush at Doriskos, with others on the hillside we climbed outside Delphi and on Mount Parnassos. We saw some with narrow black masks, and others with much broader black cheek patches.

#### Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)

**EURASIAN BLACKBIRD** (*Turdus merula*) – A male singing from an Italian Cypress tree near our Delphi hotel showed particularly well. We saw another male hunting in a grassy field along the main road up Mount Parnassos, and both males and females on the Evros delta.

**MISTLE THRUSH** (*Turdus viscivorus*) – One flashed across the road in front of us as we started up Mount Parnassos towards the ski areas, but most of the group only heard its lovely song echoing from the rocky forest.

#### Sturnidae (Starlings)

**EUROPEAN STARLING** (*Sturnus vulgaris*) – Common and widespread everywhere except Delphi.

#### Motacillidae (Wagtails and Pipits)

**WESTERN YELLOW WAGTAIL (BLACK-HEADED)** (*Motacilla flava feldegg*) – Regular in small numbers on the first half of the tour, including a fair number on the Evros delta, and a couple along the little river outside Dadia. This is generally the most common subspecies of Western Yellow Wagtail found on the tour, as it's the only one that breeds in Greece.

**GRAY WAGTAIL** (*Motacilla cinerea*) – One along the river in Prionia on Mount Olympus played hard to get, showing well for some and not at all for others. It's the longest tailed of the wagtails found on our tour, and the only one with a white belly and a yellow vent.

**WHITE WAGTAIL (WHITE-FACED)** (*Motacilla alba alba*) – An adult and a couple of very plain youngsters in the parking lot beside the little harbor on Lake Kerkini showed very nicely, and we had others in Athens (right at the start of our walking tour) and Litochoro.

**TAWNY PIPIT** (*Anthus campestris*) – A couple of these plain, pale pipits scurried around on the road through the Evros delta after lunch, allowing nice scope views.

#### Emberizidae (Buntings and New World Sparrows)

**CIRL BUNTING** (*Emberiza cirrus*) – Quite common around Delphi and Mount Parnassos, including one singing from a flower-strewn meadow just up the hill from our Delphi hotel before breakfast one morning, and others singing from short trees near our wryneck spot.

**ORTOLAN BUNTING** (*Emberiza hortulana*) – A rather distant bird sang from the same bush that our Hawfinch sat in -- against the light and not particularly easy to see, but his song was distinctive. For the most part, he showed us his streaky back, though his pale moustache stripe was visible when he turned his head.

**CRETZSCHMAR'S BUNTING** (*Emberiza caesia*) – The one we found outside Delphi seemed a bit of a conundrum; it was singing the proper song, in the proper habitat, but appeared to have a pale moustache and eyering. A bit of internet research reveals some first-year males (like ours, presumably) show a white -- rather than pink -- moustache stripe their first year, but sing the proper song. So count that bad boy, if you haven't already done so!

**BLACK-HEADED BUNTING** (*Emberiza melanocephala*) – Our first was a handsome bird bathing in a puddle along the path edging the Porto Lagos salt pans. We found another singing in a weedy overgrown field in Fanari.

**REED BUNTING** (*Emberiza schoeniclus*) – We spotted a dozen or more on the Evros delta -- something of a surprise, given that we've only recorded it on one other Greece tour! Presumably, they were a bit late departing this year, as they're mostly winter visitors to the area.

**CORN BUNTING** (*Emberiza calandra*) – Very common and widespread, at least until we got to Mount Olympus and Delphi. By tour's end, I think everybody had learned their tinkling "broken glass" song.

#### Fringillidae (Siskins, Crossbills, and Allies)

**COMMON CHAFFINCH** (*Fringilla coelebs*) – Common through much of the tour, with nice views of a female building a nest over the path near the raptor blind and good studies of several pairs along the river paths on Mount Olympus. [N]

**EURASIAN BULLFINCH** (*Pyrrhula pyrrhula*) – A little gang of a half dozen or so in the pines around the parking lot at the monastery on Mount Olympus were a treat; this species is quite rare in Greece.

**EUROPEAN GREENFINCH** (*Chloris chloris*) – Quite common throughout, including one wheezing from a treetop near the entrance to the St. Nikolas monastery, and others bounding around Delphi each morning. The subspecies found in Greece (*aurantiiventris*) is considerably more yellow below than are subspecies found further north in Europe.

**EUROPEAN GOLDFINCH** (*Carduelis carduelis*) – Regular throughout, with especially nice studies of several on telephone wires outside the visitor's center at Dadia forest. The tinkling songs and calls of this species were a regular part of the tour soundtrack.

**EURASIAN LINNET** (*Carduelis cannabina*) – A pair bounded around on a hillside at Doriskos, eventually giving everybody a scope view or two. We saw others on Mount Parnassos. This species is typically found in areas with little or no tall vegetation.

**EUROPEAN SERIN** (*Serinus serinus*) – A bright male in a bush near the little river outside Dadia didn't stay long enough for everyone to see him in the scope. Fortunately, we spotted another in a dead snag on Mount Parnassos (the same one that attracted our Green Woodpecker a few minutes later) -- and heard the scratchy songs of others nearby.

**HAWFINCH** (*Coccothraustes coccothraustes*) – One sitting on a leafless branch up the slope from the Doriskos picnic area was a bit distant but recognizable -- thanks to that massive beak!



Passeridae (Old World Sparrows)

**HOUSE SPARROW** (*Passer domesticus*) – Everywhere. Though this species is declining across much of Europe, it doesn't seem to be having problems in Greece.

**SPANISH SPARROW** (*Passer hispaniolensis*) – Those nesting in the stork nest at Doriskos gave us particularly good views. We saw others on the Evros delta and around Fanari.

**EURASIAN TREE SPARROW** (*Passer montanus*) – Our best views came near the little harbor on Lake Kerkini, where several males mingled with a gang of House Sparrows in the parking lot. We saw another pair near the bus in Vergina, as we got ready to leave.

**ROCK PETRONIA** (*Petronia petronia*) – Four or five perched atop some small pines below the cliffs near Delphi, their broad pale eyebrows and streaky chests obvious in the scope.

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## **MAMMALS**

**EUROPEAN RED SQUIRREL** (*Sciurus vulgaris*) – A dark one along the edge of the road up Mount Olympus was seen by some folks on the right side of the bus.

**RED FOX** (*Vulpes vulpes*) – One sniffed its way across a grassy hillside on Mount Parnassos, completely unconcerned by our presence.

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## **ADDITIONAL COMMENTS**

**EUROPEAN POND TURTLE** (*Emys orbicularis*): A few of these big dark-shelled turtles basked in a marshy area north of Lake Kerkini, the yellow spots on their heads and necks clearly visible.

**HERMANN'S TORTOISE** (*Testudo hermanni*): All of the tortoises we got near enough to check were this species, which has two (rather than one) scutes over the tail.

**EUROPEAN GREEN TOAD** (*Bufo viridis*): A big one along the edge of a causeway at the north end of Lake Kerkini.

**MARSH FROG** (*Pelophylax ridibundus*): These were the spotty green frogs we found in the little puddles on the hillside at Doriskos, and the ones calling loudly from all of the wetlands around Kerkini.

**EUROPEAN GREEN LIZARD** (*Lacerta viridis*): This was the bright green lizard with a bluish head, seen by some of the group in Iasmos gorge.

**ERHARD'S WALL LIZARD** (*Podarcis erhardii*): These were the small brown lizards with the yellow stripes along their sides, seen by some of the group around Lake Kerkini.

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**Totals for the tour: 177 bird taxa and 2 mammal taxa**