

Lesbos

Naturetrek Tour Report

27 April - 4 May 2013

Report compiled by Reg Thorpe



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Introduction

Although the weather was hot and settled and the numbers of migrants lower than average this was an excellent week on this wonderful island. We made three trips to the west coast in search of migrants, one trip to the north coast where a very confiding Ruppell's Warbler was the star attraction, single visits to the Napi Valley, and down the east side of Kalloni Bay and the Platani Valley. The Kalloni Salt pans were frequently visited and these paid off with some fine wader-watching as well as a few scarce species.

Day 1

Saturday 27th April

The plane from Gatwick to Mytiline arrived 30 minutes earlier than scheduled and after tour leader and participants met each other, sorted out baggage and other essentials we headed westwards across the island reaching the Pasiphai Hotel in Skalla Kallonis in about 50 minutes. After checking in and getting optics etc unpacked, the group ventured out and our first destination was the school in Papiana where single roosting adult Long-eared and Scop's Owls showed well along with at least two Long-eared Owl chicks – a good start to the trip.

Next stop were the sheep fields at the Kalloni Salt pans. Here, and on the drive to the fields, we encountered our first typical Lesbos birds - Crested Larks, Spanish Sparrows, Black Storks, Great White and Little Egrets. We also had a nice flock of about 30 Glossy Ibis fly over and a single Red-throated Pipit and a few Black-headed and Blue-headed Wagtails. It was only a quick visit, but the birds and conditions were excellent. We returned early to the hotel to finish unpacking and to get ready for our meal.

Day 2

Sunday 28th April

The group were up bright and early and out to Metochi Lake. Although a little misty to start with, the sun soon burnt the mist off. Although Little Crakes were seen, none showed really well, but the 8 Little Bitterns were on show and active throughout. Also present were 13 Night Herons of various ages, singing Great Reed Warblers, and a couple of fine Black-headed Buntings.

The main part of the birding day started with a drive to Polychnitos Salt pans. Here, although few waders were present on the salt pans, a small muddy pool held a female Citrine Wagtail, several Black-headed and Blue-headed Wagtails and some fine summer plumaged Red-throated Pipits.

After the Salt pans we travelled to the Achledri Pine forest and enjoyed views of both male and female Kruper's Nuthatches at their nest site. Also here we were led a merry dance by two Short-toed Treecreepers, but eventually they showed reasonably well.

Lunch was had in Skalla Kallonis and then we headed up to the Napi Valley but stopped on the way to admire a pair of Rock Nuthatches feeding young in their nest. In the Napi Valley a pleasant walk through olive groves produced our first Black-eared Wheatear (a female), a fine song-fighting Subalpine Warbler and 2 Middle Spotted Woodpeckers feeding young at a nest in a dead tree. It was already getting late so a quick look at the Kalloni Salt pans was all that was possible as we headed back to the hotel.

Day 3

Monday 29th April

The early risers went to the east side of the Kalloni Salt pans before breakfast. The walk along the track produced a few familiar but new birds for the trip – Mallard, Curlew and Redshank for example. A Zitting Cisticola advertised its presence in typical song-flight fashion, but then showed well perched at the top of some rushes. A Collared Pratincole gave some nice flight views, but failed to land.

After breakfast we headed westwards and the first stop was just before the Lardia Valley when a singing Eastern Bonelli's Warbler was heard and after stopping it showed extremely well. In the Lardia Valley 2 Rock Sparrows, a brief Blue Rock Thrush and a Long-legged Buzzard provided the interest. Moving onto the Eresos junction a fine female Red-backed Shrike, a Hobby and 2 Isabelline Wheatears were all seen well.

The next stop was Ipsilou Monastery and we walked up the south side and some went to visit the monastery itself while the remainder walked down the north side road (and then collected the others from the top). Although there were few migrants, a fine low-flying Griffon Vulture, several Cinereous and a Cretzschmar's Bunting, 2 Sombre Tits and another Eastern Bonelli's Warbler were all appreciated.

After lunch in Sigri we went to Fanaromeni and walked up into a side valley. Here 3 Cuckoo's, several female Collared Flycatchers (but only one brief male) and a fine male Masked Shrike were found. After a brief look at the Upper Ford (a Little Bittern and a female Pied Flycatcher present there) we headed for home – with a couple of Bee-eaters flying beside the vehicle being the highlight of the trip back to Skalla Kallonis.

Day 4

Tuesday 30th April

Before breakfast we visited Metochi Lake and this time a female Little Crake did perform for us and good views were obtained. Only 3 Little Bitterns were present, but a fine close adult Night Heron was admired by all. Good views of both Great Reed and Cetti's Warbler were also had.

After breakfast we headed northwards to the Kavaki Headland between Petra and Molivos. Here a very confiding male Ruppell's Warbler sang above our heads on several prolonged occasions – fantastic views were enjoyed of this striking Sylvia warbler. We then moved on to the north coast to look for shearwaters and although a single Cory's and 6 Yelkouan were seen, the views were poor. By this time the temperature was rising and a stop for coffee and shelter was required.

After this a visit to the Perasma Reservoir provided more good views of Red-rumped Swallow and Ruddy Shelduck, but it was now even hotter. We headed back to Skalla Kalloni with a stop at the "bandstand" above Kalloni, which produced a few Buzzards, 2 Short-toed Eagles and a distant Honey Buzzard.

After lunch with the temperature in the low 30's we opted for a siesta before going out to the Mesa Wetlands – nice views of male Red-backed Shrikes and Great Reed Warbler, before visiting Kalloni Saltpans and beach in search of Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin – which unfortunately was not present!

Day 5

Wednesday 1st May

The early morning outing was to the beach at the Kalloni Saltpans and a brief look at the saltpans themselves. Yet again the Scrub Robin eluded us, but we did see a fine Marsh Harrier, Purple Heron and a nice flock of Curlew Sandpipers with a few Ruff and Little Stints.

The main part of the day was spent at Sigri and Fanaromeni, where a welcome sea breeze made the weather much more conducive to birding than yesterday. On the way over the island we had close views of 2nd year Pallid Harrier from the minibus and as we dropped into Sigri a roadside stop produced a fine male Scrub Robin which showed very well as well as a brief Lesser Grey Shrike. Moving onto Fanaromeni we had the first of three Red-footed Falcons overhead and a scattering of migrants. Highlights from the morning were 2 Temminck's Stints and a Red-breasted Flycatcher on the beach. After lunch in Sigri we returned to Fanaromeni, but this time walked to the upper ford and beyond. Highlights from this part of the day was a lovely flock of Bee-eaters and both male and female Collared Flycatchers.

On leaving Sigri we stopped again at the site where the Scrub Robin had been and this time had 2 fine Rollers. We then headed to the Petrified Forest, but were not successful in locating the White-throated Robin, but did have a Red-footed Falcon, Hobby and singing Cretzschmar's Bunting and our best views of Eastern Orphean Warbler.

Day 6

Thursday 2nd May

Before breakfast a small group of us had a short walk at the reservoir in the Platania Valley and then visited Metochi Lake where Little Crakes, Little Bitterns and Night Herons were still all on show.

The remainder of the time before lunch was spent walking through the beautiful Platani Valley. This lovely walk produced more views of Masked Shrike, Rock Nuthatch and the first views for some of Sombre Tit. We returned to Skalla Kalloni along the Tsiknias River, where 2 fine Turtle Doves showed well alongside 4 Temminck's Stints and a Little Bittern.

After lunch and a short break we headed to the Kalloni Saltpans where we were greeted by a large arrival of waders. A couple of hundred Ruff, 20 Black-tailed Godwits, 2 Spotted Redshanks and single Grey Plover and Turnstone were among those seen. Also our first marsh terns – both Whiskered and White-winged Terns hunted over the pans with a Spoonbill and Little Gull also being new for our trip. A passing birdwatcher told us of a Calandra Lark on the sheep fields and we caught up with this very easily, along with a single Short-toed Lark and 2 Tawny Pipits.

Day 7

Friday 3rd May

The first hour and half of the day was spent at the Kalloni Saltpans enjoying the wader flocks, adding Black-headed Gull to the trip list and seeing 2 Rufous-tailed Scrub Robins.

Next on the agenda was a further trip to the west coast. We stopped en route for a couple of Eleonora's Falcons and Crag Martins, but arrived in good time. There were fewer birds around than on the last visit, but the quality was excellent and we enjoyed walks to both upper and lower fords and the beach. Everyone caught up with Lesser Grey Shrike, saw a close Spotted Crake out in the open, had prolonged views of a Nightjar roosting on a branch and most saw a Great Snipe at 25m range. Add to that loads of Red-backed Shrikes, overhead Bee-eaters and a variety of Yellow Wagtails and you get an idea what a good and colourful day it was.

We headed back east relatively early, but stopped en route for more views of Isabelline Wheatear and Eastern Bonelli's Warbler. We arrived back at the Pasiphae just before 7pm with the temperature still around 30 degrees.

Day 8

Saturday 4th May

The final early morning trip was to the Saltpans (both east and west tracks). We added Ringed Plover to the trip list and enjoyed some excellent views of waders in the superb early morning light. On our return to the hotel we drove down the Tsiknias River getting our final views of Bee-eaters, Little Bittern, Black-headed Buntings and Black-headed Wagtail – a nice way to end our birding holiday. After this it was packing and a drive across the island to the airport in Mytiline, and onwards to Gatwick...

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Species Lists

Birds (✓ = recorded but not counted; h = heard only)

	Common name	Scientific name	April/May							
			27	28	29	30	1	2	3	4
1	Ruddy Shelduck	<i>Tadorna ferruginea</i>		3	10	5	8	3	4	2
2	Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	2	1	1		4	2	2	2
3	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>			1	1		3		4
4	Cory's Shearwater	<i>Calonectris diomedea</i>								2
5	Yelkouan Shearwater	<i>Puffinus yelkouan</i>				6			100	
6	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>				10		10		
7	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>		10				1		
8	Greater Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i>	250		100		150	180	100	60
9	Black Stork	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>	8	6	10	6	3	6	20	6
10	White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	2	2		5		2	3	
11	Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>	35	1	1				1	
12	Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>						1		
13	Little Bittern	<i>Ixobrychus minutus</i>		10	1	3		6		1
14	Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>		13		10		10		
15	Squacco Heron	<i>Ardeola ralloides</i>	6	6		4	1	6	8	
16	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>			1		2		3	1
17	Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>	1	1			1	1	2	
18	Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>	1	1	2			1		
19	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	25	40	45	40	50	40	50	25
20	Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>			1		1	1	1	1
21	European Shag	<i>Phalacrocorax aristotelis</i>		5		1				1
22	Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>			1					
23	European Honey Buzzard	<i>Pernis apivorus</i>				1				
24	Short-toed Snake Eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>		3	4	4		1	4	
25	Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>			1	1	1			
26	Pallid Harrier	<i>Circus macrourus</i>					1			
27	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>		3	6	6		4	6	
28	Long-legged Buzzard	<i>Buteo rufinus</i>			1				1	
29	Lesser Kestrel	<i>Falco naumanni</i>			10		15		12	
30	Red-footed Falcon	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>					4	1		
31	Eleonora's Falcon	<i>Falco eleonora</i>							2	
32	Eurasian Hobby	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>			1		1			
33	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>			2					
34	Little Crane	<i>Porzana parva</i>		3		2		1		
35	Spotted Crane	<i>Porzana porzana</i>							1	
36	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>		15		15		20	10	
37	Eurasian Stone-Curlew	<i>Burhinus oedicnemus</i>					1h	1		
38	Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>					1			
39	Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	50	55	40	30	25	45	40	25
40	Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>	35	25	70	40	60	70	80	60
41	Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>						1		3
42	Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>								18
43	Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>		2		1	2	3	5	1
44	Kentish Plover	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>		2	1	1	1	3		4
45	Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>						1		
46	Great Snipe	<i>Gallinago media</i>							1	
47	Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>						18	1	

	Common name	Scientific name	April/May							
			27	28	29	30	1	2	3	4
48	Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>			1				1	1
49	Spotted Redshank	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>						2		
50	Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>			1					
51	Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>		2	1			1	2	
52	Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>								
53	Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>	60	60	70	150	40	100	160	75
54	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>		2						
55	Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>		3	6		25	70	25	60
56	Temminck's Stint	<i>Calidris temminckii</i>					2	5		
57	Curlew Sandpiper	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>			1		25	10		
58	Ruff	<i>Philomachus pugnax</i>					3	250	200	150
59	Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>						1		10
60	Collared Pratincole	<i>Glareola pratincola</i>			1					
61	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>							1	1
62	Mediterranean Gull	<i>Ichthyaeetus melanocephalus</i>				2				
63	Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus cachinnans</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
64	Little Gull	<i>Hydrocoloeus minutus</i>						1		
65	Sandwich Tern	<i>Thalasseus sandvicensis</i>		1						
66	Little Tern	<i>Sternula albifrons</i>	2	6	6		6	12	20	12
67	Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>	20	30	40	30	30	35	60	50
68	Whiskered Tern	<i>Chlidonias hybrida</i>						30	25	12
69	White-winged Tern	<i>Chlidonias leucopterus</i>						25	30	35
70	Rock Dove /Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia 'feral'</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
71	European Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>			3	2	3	4	6	
72	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
73	Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>		1h	3			1h		
74	Eurasian Scops Owl	<i>Otus scops</i>	1							
75	Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>			1					
76	Long-eared Owl	<i>Asio otus</i>	1							
77	European Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus europaeus</i>							1	
78	Alpine Swift	<i>Tachymarptis melba</i>					2		6	
79	Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>		30	40	25	30	45	40	6
80	Pallid Swift	<i>Apus pallidus</i>								
81	European Roller	<i>Coracias garrulus</i>					2		1	
82	Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>								
83	European Bee-Eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>		15	4		20	8	15	2
84	Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>		2h	1	2h		2		
85	Eurasian Wryneck	<i>Jynx torquilla</i>								
86	Middle Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos medius</i>		2		1		2		
87	Red-backed Shrike	<i>Lanius collurio</i>			6	12	25	1	25	
88	Lesser Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius minor</i>					1		1	
89	Woodchat Shrike	<i>Lanius senator</i>		3	12	8	8	6	10	
90	Masked Shrike	<i>Lanius nubicus</i>			2		1	2		
91	Eurasian Golden Oriole	<i>Oriolus oriolus</i>		1h	1					
92	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>		4	6	6	10	6	6	
93	Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>			40		3		2	
94	Hooded Crow	<i>Corvus cornix</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
95	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		1	8	2	2	2		
96	Sombre Tit	<i>Poecile lugubris</i>			2			6		
97	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>		6	5	5	10	10	6	2

	Common name	Scientific name	April/May							
			27	28	29	30	1	2	3	4
98	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>		4	2	8	8	5	6	
99	Calandra Lark	<i>Melanocorypha calandra</i>						1		
100	Greater Short-toed Lark	<i>Calandrella brachydactyla</i>			1			1	2	
101	Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
102	Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>			2h			1		
103	Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>			1		2		1	
104	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	40	60	80	50	70	80	75	25
105	Eurasian Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>				1			6	
106	Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	30	50	70	50	50	40	50	20
107	Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Cecropis daurica</i>		2	12	15	30	6	12	
108	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>		4	2h	3	5	4	5	1
109	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>					1			
110	Eastern Bonelli's Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus orientalis</i>			3		1h		1	
111	Wood Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus sibilatrix</i>					1			
112	Great Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus arundinaceus</i>		3	1	6	2	2	3	
113	Sedge Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>		6		8		4	1	
114	Eurasian Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>		8		5		2		
115	Eastern Olivaceous Warbler	<i>Iduna pallida</i>				2	8	5	12	5
116	Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>			1					1
117	Lesser Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia curruca</i>			4					
118	Eastern Orphean Warbler	<i>Sylvia crassirostris</i>					4	3	2	
119	Common Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis</i>							1	
120	Subalpine Warbler	<i>Sylvia cantillans</i>		1	3	6	2	3	2	
121	Rüppell's Warbler	<i>Sylvia ruppelli</i>				2				
122	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>							1h	
123	Krüper's Nuthatch	<i>Sitta krueperi</i>		2						
124	Western Rock Nuthatch	<i>Sitta neumayer</i>		2	2			2		
125	Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>		2						
126	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>		10	12	10	6	10	12	5
127	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>			1					
128	Common Nightingale	<i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i>	2	15	12	10	12	10	12	6
129	Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin	<i>Erythropygia galactotes</i>					1		2	
130	Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>	1				4			
131	European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>		1	2		10		10	
132	Isabelline Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe isabellina</i>			2		1		6	
133	Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>					2			
134	Black-eared Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe hispanica</i>		1	20	8	10	8	25	
135	Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>			2				2	
136	Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>			3		6			
137	European Pied Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i>			1				1	
138	Collared Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula albicollis</i>			8		2			
139	Red-breasted Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula parva</i>					1			
140	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
141	Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>	50	20	50		200	30	100	
142	Rock Sparrow	<i>Petronia petronia</i>			4					
143	Blue-headed Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava flava</i>	2	8			10	4	20	4
	Grey-headed Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava thunbergi</i>								
	Black-headed Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava feldegg</i>	4	10	2	3	6	6	12	4
144	Citrine Wagtail	<i>Motacilla citreola</i>		1						
145	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>		1	1		2	1	3	

	Common name	Scientific name	April/May							
			27	28	29	30	1	2	3	4
146	Tawny Pipit	<i>Anthus campestris</i>						2		
147	Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>					2			
148	Red-throated Pipit	<i>Anthus cervinus</i>	1	6						
149	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		12	10	12	10	20	12	
150	European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>								
151	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>		5				1	2	
152	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	3	10	6	6	12	6	12	4
153	Common Linnet	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>					3	2		
154	Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
155	Cinereous Bunting	<i>Emberiza cineracea</i>			3					
156	Cretzschmar's Bunting	<i>Emberiza caesia</i>			4		1			
157	Cirl Bunting	<i>Emberiza cirlus</i>		1	6		2	5		
158	Black-headed Bunting	<i>Emberiza melanocephala</i>		3	8	2	20	6	20	5

Other Taxa

1	Terrapin		✓	✓						
2	Clouded Yellow			✓	✓					
3	Painted Lady			✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
4	Red Admiral			✓			✓			
5	Orange tip sp			✓						
6	Small Heath type			✓						
7	Agama Lizard				✓		✓	✓		
8	Tortoise				✓					
9	Persian Squirrel				✓		✓		✓	
10	Swallowtail				✓	✓				
11	Small Copper					✓				
12	Locust							✓		
13	Water Snake								✓	
14	Glass Lizard								✓	
15	Hare								✓	
16	Dolphin									✓