

FIELD REPORT

NORTHERN GREECE

MAY 14–26, 2022

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AND LOCAL GUIDES
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Over the last eighteen years, VENT has operated many tours to Greece. Most of these departures were “Birds & History” themed cruises, and, using several distinct itineraries, operated without exception in the southernmost part of the country. It is that region of Greece with which most travelers—especially Americans—are familiar. Southern Greece is the Greece of our imaginations, a land of postcard-perfect, sun-splashed Aegean islands, and Athens, with its gleaming monuments of marble—all surrounded by a wine-dark sea as timeless as the myths it inspires. But, for those willing to look a little deeper, to delve a little further, there is another Greece, a very different side of this enchanting country no less rich in historical wonders, captivating scenery, and opportunities for high quality birding: Northern Greece.

On this tour, VENT’s first-ever visit to Northern Greece, we presented a journey of discovery that featured birding in a remarkable diversity of settings, infused with time at important historical sites. From Athens to Thessaloniki, then east to Alexandroupoulos, we ran a long and fascinating route through regions of Greece each of us was seeing for the first time.

I emphasize that Greece’s richest birding areas are all in the north of the country. The deltas of the Axios and Evros rivers are standout locations not just within Greece, but within all of Southeastern Europe. We spent time in both sites, and, to our great delight, were treated to a fine assortment of shorebirds, wading birds, gulls, terns, and landbirds. Among the prizes were Common and Ruddy shelducks, Greater Flamingo, Spur-winged Lapwing, Common Redshank, a rare Terek Sandpiper, Yellow-legged Gull, Little Owl, Common Cuckoo, and Pallid Swift.

North of Thessaloniki, expansive, scenic Lake Kerkini appeared as a vision of sapphire amid emerald hills. Famous among birders, Kerkini is a premier birding site that would provide lasting memories from our two-day stay. From an afternoon boat trip from the lakeside village of Mandraki to a morning bird walk along the Strymanos River channel where the river enters the lake, it was birds, birds, birds at all times. Close encounters with Ferruginous Duck, Dalmatian and Great White pelicans, Great and Pygmy cormorants, Northern Lapwing, Eurasian Green Woodpecker, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Eleonora’s Falcon, and Eurasian Penduline-Tit were satisfying. Away from the lake, excursions into the surrounding foothills yielded prizes such as Golden and Lesser Spotted eagles, Levant Sparrowhawk, Masked and Woodchat shrikes, Eastern Orphean Warbler, and Eastern Black-eared Wheatear, among many others.

Farther east, amid the verdant fields and shoreline of Lake Ismarida, we spent an afternoon dazzled by a parade of spectacular birds. Handsome Black Storks soared overhead; wonderful European Rollers, European Bee-eaters, and Black-headed Buntings perched on power poles and fence lines; and Calandra Larks and Eurasian Skylarks engaged in display flights over sand flats. In the ensuing days we spent a day in the Dadia Forest and another day in and around the Evros Delta. Totally unforgettable was our trip to the hilltop blind in the Dadia Forest where we observed Cinereous Vulture, Eurasian Griffon, Egyptian Vulture, and White-tailed Eagle at a feeding site. Around the village of Loutros, we spent part of our last afternoon delighting to sightings of Short-toed Snake-Eagle, Woodchat Shrike, Olive-tree Warbler, and Ortolan Bunting.

As mentioned, this trip contained important elements of history and culture, particularly toward the front end. Our journey from Athens to Kalambaka in central Greece included a stop at the battlefield site of Thermopylae, site of an epic battle in 480 B.C. between an invading Persian

army and a smaller alliance of Greek city-states. At Kalambaka, we spent part of a day touring the remarkable medieval monasteries of Meteora, built atop towering rock spires that afforded fine views of the plain of Thessaly. From Meteora, our journey north included a stop to view iconic Mount Olympus before reaching Pella, ancient capital of the kingdom of Macedon and birthplace of Phillip II and his son Alexander the Great in the fourth century B.C. Our time in Thessaloniki included an afternoon driving and walking tour of the historic city. With our superb guide we visited a series of sites that offered clear reminders of the city's complicated past, one that spanned Roman, Byzantine, and Ottoman eras.

The wonderful success of this trip was due in very large part to our local guides. On the birding front, Lefteris Stavrakis and George Spiridakis imparted their considerable knowledge of Greece geography and birds. On the cultural and historical side, could we have asked for a better guide than Demetra Potsika? Of all the cultural guides I've worked with in Greece, Demetra stands alone for her massive knowledge of her country—of which she is infinitely proud—and her love of sharing the richness of Greece with her travelers.

ITINERARY:

May 14 – Participants departed home today for Athens, Greece.

May 15 – Arrival in Athens with transfer to Divani Acropolis Hotel; evening orientation and meeting, with dinner at a lovely rooftop restaurant offering tremendous views of the Acropolis at sundown.

May 16 – With Athens situated in southern Greece, we knew this day would be largely one of travel as our first major destination, Meteora, is situated squarely in the center of the country, about 4–5 hours to the north. Departing Athens around 9:00, we settled into our comfortable coach and embarked on the journey. For all of the times VENT has operated tours to Greece, never have our programs taken us any real distance north of Athens. This meant that almost everything we saw today was a first for any of us. A stop to break up the journey included a visit to the famous battlefield site of Thermopylae and the Leonidas monument, about 90 minutes north of Athens, where in 480 B.C. a vastly outnumbered Greek army under Leonidas I held off an invading Persian army for a week before succumbing. We arrived in the town of Karditsa for a late and very sumptuous lunch, followed by an enjoyable walk through the town and with a bit of birding. Thereafter, our journey north continued for another hour and a half toward the scenic village of Kalambaka. A short distance south of town, we stopped at the community of Theopetra for late-day birding in the vicinity of an important paleolithic cave site known locally at least as Theopetra of Kalambaka. We arrived at the hotel a short time later, followed by dinner at a street-side café.

May 17 – Kalambaka sits at the south end of a valley of the same name at the edge of the plain of Thessaly. A progression of towering rock spires and domes lines the valley's eastern side and is the source of the area's scenic renown. Atop some of these spires sit a remarkable complex of six medieval monasteries (of an original 24) known as Meteora. Our entire morning was dedicated to an exploration of Meteora, with guided visits to two of the monasteries: St. Stephen

and Varlaam. Whereas the morning's activities were primarily historically oriented, the afternoon was given entirely to birding. For this, we traveled a short distance northeast of Kalambaka to Gavros, a small settlement surrounded by field and forest and with a stream nearby. The birding here was superb, the highlight of which was a sighting of the very local Semi-collared Flycatcher.

May 18 – This morning we departed Kalambaka as our journey north continued. Our ultimate destination was Thessaloniki, but first came a roadside stop for tremendous views of Mount Olympus, Greece's highest mountain at 9,752 feet, and a visit to the historical site of Pella, the ancient capital of the Kingdom of Macedon and birthplace of Alexander the Great. After an excellent guided tour of the site and a visit to the on-site museum, we continued on toward Thessaloniki. South of the city, we made our first visit to Axios Delta National Park, where we birded for an hour or so at Kalochori Lagoon. Despite the very windy conditions, the birding was very productive, as demonstrated by the sighting of a rare Terek Sandpiper.

May 19 – Today was spent entirely around Thessaloniki. Our day began with a full morning of birding back at Axios Delta National Park, specifically in the vicinity of the mouth of the Gallikos River. After lunch in Thessaloniki, we redirected our focus to the cultural and historical heritage of the city. Among the many sights we enjoyed during our city tour were the Byzantine ramparts of the Upper City, White Tower of Thessaloniki, Arch of Galerius, and the Church of St. Demetrios. Our day concluded with a short final stop at the statue of Alexander the Great.

May 20 – This morning we departed Thessaloniki for our next major destination, Lake Kerkini, situated an hour and half or so north of Thessaloniki and a short distance south of the Greece border with Bulgaria. Our birding began outside the village of Lithotopos at the southwest corner of the lake, from which we ventured into the hills for birding through the duration of the morning. From there we worked our way north along the west side of the lake. After lunch we birded in the vicinity of Xiropotamos before finishing the day around the Vironia Quarry on the lower slopes of Mount Belles.

May 21 – On this, our second full day in the Kerkini area, we started with a full morning of birding in the vicinity of the Strymanos River Delta. This area was close to the hotel and encompasses the riverine forest that lines the river (channeled) and the actual location where the river enters the lake. Habitats here included scattered marshes, emergent vegetation and exposed mud, and stretches of open water. The birding here was outstanding. After lunch we traveled to Mandraki on the western embankment where we enjoyed a two-hour boat trip on the lake, highlighted by close encounters with large numbers of pelicans, cormorants, grebes, terns, and other birds.

May 22 – This day marked our departure from Kerkini to points east, a relocation effort that produced a great deal of variety. Exiting Kerkini after breakfast, we drove for a while before stopping in a region our local guides called the Serva Fields, basically an agricultural area with remnant native grassland, trees, and shrubs. We spent almost two hours at this location as the birding was excellent. Chief among the highlights were very good views of Eurasian Thick-knees, European Rollers, and Calandra Larks. We then traveled southeastward toward the coast where we enjoyed a seaside lunch in the small town of Keramotí, followed by a bit of birding

along the nearby coast. In the midafternoon we reached the Nestos River, a locally well-known location featuring the Nestos River where it weaves its way through a canyon of limestone, high cliffs, and riparian forest. We took a walk along the river to get a feel for the area before returning to our vehicle for a view of the river gorge from high above. Our route wound immediately above the river to Gamila Peak, where, in addition to the lofty views, we took a short walk to enjoy birds such as Red-backed Shrike, Woodlark, and Linnet. We reached the town of Xanthi late in the day.

May 23 – No question, this day was special. Although another transfer day (with Alexandroupolis our final destination), we took our time moving eastward, making several productive stops for birding before enjoying a grand finale conclusion in the afternoon at Lake Ismarida. Departing Xanthi after breakfast, our first stop was along the coast at Porto Lagos, where we discovered a few late migrating shorebirds, before continuing on to expansive Lake Vistonida. After lunch in the area, we birded the marshlands and shrublands at the eastern reaches of Lake Vistonida before arriving at Lake Ismarida late in the day. Something of a miracle of a location, Lake Ismarida has to be one of the top birding sites in northern Greece. Here, in a fairly compact area, a variety of habitats come together, all of which support a marvelous assortment of birds. Among the prizes were some of Europe's most beautiful and remarkable birds including Black Stork, European Bee-eater, European Roller, and Black-headed Bunting to name a few. If time allowed, we would have spent much more time here. We finished the day with a late afternoon arrival in Alexandroupolis.

May 24 – Located about an hour east of Alexandroupolis, the Dadia Forest is one of the most important habitat areas in all of Greece, if not all of Europe. A national park, it is a place of expansive mountains, all covered in pine-oak forest and, save for small areas of agriculture, is largely free of urban development. Consequently, the birding renown of the area stems from the high diversity of raptors that can be seen here during the breeding season. The chief attraction of the forest is a hilltop observation point where a blind allows for unobstructed views of several species of vultures and eagles that are attracted to dead livestock placed for their consumption by the park staff. Ensconced in the blind for more than an hour, we watched in wonder at the progression of large birds that visited the feeding station, the likes of which included Cinereous Vulture, Eurasian Griffon, Egyptian Vulture, and White-tailed and Lesser Spotted eagles. Upon departing the blind, most of the group then walked back to the visitor center, a leisurely downhill hike that saw us descend through more than a mile of pine forest and oak woodland. Following lunch in the nearby village, we spent the remainder of our birding time visiting a handful of sites in other parts of the park. Especially memorable was a walk along the river at Diavolorema, where, against a gathering storm, we watched a Short-toed Snake-Eagle make several passes overhead in dramatic fashion.

May 25 – Our final day of the tour centered almost entirely on sampling the many habitats of Evros Delta National Park. For those who really know Greece and its top birding locations, an argument could easily be made that Evros Delta is the single-most productive and important birding location in the country. The Evros River itself flows into the Aegean Sea not far from the Greece border with Turkey, but it is the mosaic of habitats that form the greater ecosystem that provide almost limitless opportunities for exploration. Our day began with a visit to the Anthia Marshes and nearby beach, where we spent the duration of the morning. We then retreated to the

village of Loutros for a rest and a walk along the river, followed by lunch. After lunch we birded our way up to the top of “Loutros Hill,” where the birding was superb (Ortolan Bunting, Olive-tree Warbler, Levant Sparrowhawk, and more). We wrapped up our day with a visit to the Apalos Beach Area. From there we returned to Alexandropoulis for an early dinner, followed by a transfer to the airport in time for a night flight back to Athens. Upon arrival in the Greek capital, we received transfer to the Divani Acropolis Hotel.

May 26 – Those not continuing on to the cruise departed Athens for home.

BIRDS:

Taxonomy follows eBird/Clements, Cornell Lab of Ornithology version 2022.

Ducks, Geese & Waterfowl (*Anatidae*)

Mute Swan (*Cygnus olor*) – Seen at two sites: Axios Delta National Park on the 19th and at Lake Vistonida on the 23rd.

Ruddy Shelduck (*Tadorna ferruginea*) – A couple in the Anthia Marshes at the Evros River Delta on the morning of the 25th. Being much more common in Asia, this species occurs only locally in southeastern Europe, and Greece is probably the best place on the continent to see it.

Common Shelduck (*Tadorna tadorna*) – Seen on three days of the trip: at the Axios Delta on the 18th and 19th, and at the Evros River Delta on the 25th. The latter sighting occurred in close proximity to the above species.

Garganey (*Spatula querquedula*) – A lone drake in the Strymanos River Delta at the north end of Lake Kerkini on the morning of the 21st was a special find. This species is not rare in this area in the winter months, but the presence of a lone male in breeding plumage this late into the spring seemed a bit unusual. Another individual was seen in the Anthia Marshes at the Evros River Delta on the 25th.

Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*) – The Mallard, familiar to all, also occurs widely in Europe. We saw this species on three days of the trip: at the Axios Delta on the 19th, Lake Kerkini on the 21st, and at the Evros Delta on the 25th.

Common Pochard (*Aythya ferina*) – Several were seen at the north end of Lake Kerkini during our morning walk on the 21st.

Ferruginous Duck (*Aythya nyroca*) – We enjoyed good scope views of a lone male bird at the Strymanos River Delta on the morning walk on the 21st. Ferruginous Duck is an uncommon and highly localized bird of southeastern and southwestern Europe. We felt fortunate to see this handsome species.

Pheasants, Grouse & Allies (*Phasianidae*)

Ring-necked Pheasant (*Phasianus colchicus*) – This species was seen by only one or two fortunate participants on a pre-breakfast walk at Lake Kerkini on the 21st.

Flamingos (*Phoenicopteridae*)

Greater Flamingo (*Phoenicopus roseus*) – Seeing Greater Flamingos in Greece presents one of

the joys of birding in this country. This species does not breed in the areas where we saw them, but they overwinter, with numbers lingering deep into the spring. We were treated to observations of these beautiful birds on four days of the tour. We enjoyed superb views of birds at the Axios River Delta on the 18th and 19th, at Lake Kerkini on the 21st, and more in the vicinity of Porto Lagos/Lake Vistonida on the 23rd.

Grebes (*Podicipedidae*)

Little Grebe (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*) – A couple of individuals in the Strymanos River channel at Lake Kerkini on the 21st.

Great Crested Grebe (*Podiceps cristatus*) – We enjoyed good views of multiple individuals on both days at Lake Kerkini (May 20 and 21) and others more distantly on Lake Vistonida on the 23rd.

Eared Grebe (*Podiceps nigricollis*) – Several were seen on the boat trip on Lake Kerkini on the afternoon of the 21st. This is the same species that occurs in North America, but a different race.

Pigeons & Doves (*Columbidae*)

Rock (Feral) Pigeon (I) (*Columba livia*) – Common and seen every day of the trip.

Common Wood-Pigeon (*Columba palumbus*) – This bird is something of an enigma in that it is ridiculously common as a city bird in some parts of Europe, while existing as a scare and occasionally seen resident in other areas. In Greece, this bird is not so easy to see, as evidenced by the fact that we saw it only as a fly-by at Lake Kerkini on the 21st.

European Turtle-Dove (*Streptopelia turtur*) – This lovely bird is a fairly common spring and summer resident in central and northern Greece. We enjoyed sightings on many days of the trip, including birds at Gavros, near Meteora, on the 17th, both days at Lake Kerkini on the 20th and 21st, Lake Ismarida on the 23rd, Dadia on the 24th, and the Evros River Delta on the 25th.

Eurasian Collard-Dove (*Streptopelia decaocto*) – A very common bird seen on every day of the trip.

Cuckoos (*Cuculidae*)

Common Cuckoo (*Cuculus canorus*) – We saw this species on three days of the trip and recorded it as “heard only” on three others. Without doubt, our top sighting occurred on the morning of the 19th when we located a bird sitting on a power line at Axios Delta National Park, that afforded lengthy scope views.

Swifts (*Apodidae*)

Alpine Swift (*Apus melba*) – This striking bird was seen best in the Kalambaka area on the 17th. At home around the sheer canyon walls and promontories at Meteora, we watched a number of individuals streaking past us and below us at high speed. Others were seen in the city of Thessaloniki on the 19th and around the village of Xanthi on the 22nd.

Common Swift (*Apus apus*) – A common and highly visible bird in both urban and natural habitats, we saw this species almost every day of the trip.

Pallid Swift (*Apus pallidus*) – This species is highly similar to the above species, but is more coastal in terms of habitat preference. We saw it on only one day of the trip, at the Axios Delta on the 18th, in appropriate coastal habitat.

Rails, Gallinules & Coots (*Rallidae*)

Eurasian Moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus*) – A few individuals seen at the Axios Delta on the 19th; many more at Lake Kerkini on the 21st.

Eurasian Coot (*Fulica atra*) – As with the above species, a few were seen at the Axios Delta on the 19th; others at Lake Kerini on the 21st.

Thick-knees (*Burhinidae*)

Eurasian Thick-knee (*Burhinus oedicnemus*) – This highly-sought bird was seen well on two days of the trip: in the Serva Fields east of Lake Kerkini on the 22nd, while we were en route to Xanthi, and others on the flats at Lake Ismarida on the 23rd.

Stilts & Avocets (*Recurvirostridae*)

Black-winged Stilt (*Himantopus Himantopus*) – This attractive bird was seen well on five days of the trip: at the Axios Delta on the 18th and 19th; Lake Kerkini on the 21st; in the Porto Lagos/Lake Vistonida area on the 23rd; and the Evros River Delta on the 25th.

Pied Avocet (*Recurvirostra avosetta*) – One of the most beautiful of European shorebirds, we saw this species on only one day of the trip, in the Porto Lagos/Lake Vistonida area on the 23rd.

Oystercatchers (*Haematopodidae*)

Eurasian Oystercatcher (*Haematopus ostralegus*) – Good views of this species occurred on four days of the trip: at the Axios River Delta on May 18 and 19, the beach at Porto Lagos on the 23rd, and at Apalis Beach in the Evros River Delta on the afternoon of the 25th.

Plovers & Lapwings (*Charadriidae*)

Black-bellied Plover (*Pluvialis squatarola*) – A couple of individuals seen among the other shorebirds in the large lagoon at Axios Delta National Park on the afternoon of the 18th. These were the only ones seen.

Northern Lapwing (*Vanellus vanellus*) – Northern Lapwing is an uncommon breeder at this relatively low latitude; however, we did find a couple of active pairs at Lake Kerkini on the morning of the 21st, in the Strymanos River Delta. Other birds were noted around Lake Ismarida on the afternoon of the 23rd, and a couple more at the Anthia Marshes in the Evros Delta on the 25th.

Spur-winged Lapwing (*Vanellus spinosus*) – Like Ruddy Shelduck, this species is really more of an Asian bird whose range extends into Europe only in the southeast corner of the continent. In Greece, it is most often encountered in the Evros Delta region, but occurs sparingly farther west. We were surprised to find a couple of birds at Lake Kerkini on the 21st. Others were seen while en route to Xanthi on the 22nd, and still others at the Evros Delta on the 25th.

Kentish Plover (*Charadrius alexandrines*) – This sharp-looking little shorebird was seen best at the large lagoon at Axios Delta National Park on the afternoon of the 18th. Others at Apalis Beach in the Evros Delta on the 25th.

Common Ringed Plover (*Charadrius hiaticula*) – One or two late-migrating individuals were on the beach at Porto Lagos on the 23rd.

Little Ringed Plover (*Charadrius dubius*) – Unlike most of the other shorebirds we saw, this

species has a predilection for freshwater habitats inland. As such, the only birds we saw were a pair along the braided river bottom at Diavolorema in the Dadia Forest on the 25th.

Sandpipers & Allies (*Scolopacidae*)

Whimbrel (*Numenius phaeopus*) – A single late-migrating individual on the beach at Porto Lagos on the morning of the 23rd was the only one seen.

Eurasian Curlew (*Numenius arquata*) – A single late-migrating individual on the beach at Porto Lagos on the morning of the 23rd was the only one seen.

Bar-tailed Godwit (*Limosa lapponica*) – Seen at the Axios River Delta on the morning of the 19th. The sighting of this bird was unexpected given that Black-tailed Godwit is the more likely of the two godwit species here.

Curlew Sandpiper (*Calidris ferruginea*) – A few on the beach at Porto Lagos on the morning of the 23rd.

Little Stint (*Calidris minuta*) – Several were seen among the other shorebirds in the lagoon at the Axios Delta on the afternoon of the 18th. Others were noted in the Porto Lagos area on the 23rd.

Terek Sandpiper (*Xenus cinereus*) – Our local guides explained that this Asiatic species was a regular but rare migrant in the spring in northern Greece. Sure enough, we located two or three individuals among the other shorebirds in the lagoon at the Axios Delta on the afternoon of the 18th. A prize find, for sure.

Common Redshank (*Tringa tetanus*) – This species breeds fairly commonly around the Axios Delta. We had many wonderful views of breeding birds perched atop fence posts and power poles during our visit to the delta on the morning of the 19th.

Pratincoles & Coursers (*Glareolidae*)

Collared Pratincole (*Glareola pratincole*) – We enjoyed outstanding views of a number of birds at Lake Ismarida on the afternoon of the 23rd. These birds were likely breeding locally as they were seen perched and flying over the salt flats along the lake edge.

Gulls, Terns & Skimmers (*Laridae*)

Slender-billed Gull (*Chroicocephalus genei*) – Several were seen on the salt flats in the Porto Lagos area on the 23rd. This species is locally distributed in salty, coastal habitats across southernmost Europe. Always gratifying to see this lovely bird.

Black-headed Gull (*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*) – Probably the likeliest gull species to be expected at any given time. We recorded many individuals at the Axios Delta on the morning of the 19th, many at Lake Kerkini on the 21st, and a few others in the Porto Lagos/Lake Vistonida area on the 23rd.

Little Gull (*Hydrocoloeus minutus*) – A single bird seen by some of the group at the Axios Delta on the afternoon of the 18th was a surprise find and the only one seen. This species winters in the area, but most birds had long since departed for more northerly breeding locations.

Mediterranean Gull (*Ichthyaeetus melanocephalus*) – A couple of late-migrating birds were still at the Axios Delta region on the afternoon of the 18th. This is a lovely bird, appearing almost entirely white save for the red bill and dark eye-patch (indicating non-breeding plumage).

Audouin's Gull (*Ichthyaeetus audouinii*) – Several individuals on a nearshore sandbar at Apalis

Beach on the afternoon of the 25th were a surprising but welcome find, in addition to being one of the last new birds we recorded for the trip.

Yellow-legged Gull (*Larus michahellis*) – The most commonly encountered gull. Seen every day of the trip but one, and at almost all locations.

Gull-billed Tern (*Gelochelidon nilotica*) – An individual in the Porto Lagos/Lake Vistonida area on the morning of the 23rd was the only one seen.

Caspian Tern (*Hydroprogne caspia*) – One or two birds on the beach at Porto Lagos on the 23rd represented our only sighting of the trip.

Black Tern (*Chlidonias niger*) – Black Tern occurs in this region as a passage migrant. Numbers were seen along the open water of the Thermaic Gulf adjacent to Axios Delta National Park on the afternoon of the 18th. We also noted a sizeable flock over Lake Kerkini during our boat trip on the afternoon of the 21st. Others were noted in the Porto Lagos/Lake Vistonida area on the 23rd.

Common Tern (*Sterna hirundo*) – Common Tern is a widespread nesting species in the region and thus was the most frequently encountered tern of the trip. Seen with ease at the Axios and Evros river deltas.

Sandwich Tern (*Thalasseus sandvicensis*) – A few individuals were seen at the lagoon at the Axios Delta on the 18th, and others were at the Evros River Delta on the 25th.

Storks (*Ciconiidae*)

Black Stork (*Ciconia nigra*) – This beautiful bird was seen on seven days of the tour in myriad locations. Our “best” sighting was perhaps the two birds circling in front of us and right overhead at Lake Ismarida on the 23rd. Other sighting occurred at Lake Kerkini, Dadia Forest, and the Evros Delta. Black Stork is a localized forest breeder in eastern Europe. Always a treat to see.

White Stork (*Ciconia Ciconia*) – A common nesting species in northern Greece, this lovely bird was seen on every day of the trip but one.

Cormorants & Shags (*Phalacrocoracidae*)

Pygmy Cormorant (*Microcarbo pygmaeus*) – This species was seen in all the major aquatic habitats we visited (Axios River Delta, Lake Kerkini, Evros River Delta), but was far and away most common at Kerkini, where we saw many hundreds of individuals on May 20 and 21. Our boat trip on the 21st was especially memorable as we were able to approach birds on their nests.

Great Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*) – The notes for this species are similar to those for the above bird. We saw them far and wide in northern Greece, but nowhere were they as common as at Lake Kerkini.

European Shag (*Gulosus aristotelis*) – A few individuals were seen along the waterfront at Porto Lagos.

Pelicans (*Pelecanidae*)

Great White Pelican (*Pelecanus onocrotalus*) – One of the great highlights of the trip was the sight of hundreds of Great White Pelicans on the water at Lake Kerkini. We enjoyed many fine views of birds fishing, swimming, and at rest. They were also seen in close company to the next species.

Dalmatian Pelican (*Pelecanus crispus*) – This highly-sought species enters Europe only in the far

eastern side of the continent. The only places where it is common is the Danube River Delta in Romania and Bulgaria and some of the lakes of northern Greece and the Balkan Peninsula. We enjoyed fabulous side-by-side views of this species during our afternoon boat trip on Lake Kerkini on May 21.

Hérons, Egrets & Bitterns (*Ardeidae*)

Gray Heron (*Ardea cinerea*) – This handsome bird was common and conspicuous across the full length of our tour route. It was seen on every day of the trip.

Purple Heron (*Ardea purpurea*) – This bird was seen on three days of the trip: an immature seen during the boat trip on Lake Kerkini on the afternoon of the 21st; during the afternoon at Lake Ismarida on the 23rd; and at the Evros River Delta on the 25th.

Great Egret (*Ardea alba*) – Individuals were spotted at the Strymanos River Delta at Lake Kerkini on the 21st and at the Evros River Delta on the 25th.

Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*) – A common wading bird seen on every day of the trip but one.

Squacco Heron (*Ardeola ralloides*) – This unusually marked and somewhat odd little heron was noted on three different days: at the Axios River Delta on the 19th; Lake Kerkini on the 21st (during our afternoon boat ride); and at the Evros River Delta on the 25th.

Black-crowned Night-Heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) – A few seen from the boat trip at Lake Kerkini on the 23rd.

Ibises & Spoonbills (*Threskiornithidae*)

Glossy Ibis (*Plegadis falcinellus*) – This bird was seen in the Strymanos River Delta at Lake Kerkini on the 21st; closer views were enjoyed at the Evros River Delta on the 25th.

Eurasian Spoonbill (*Platalea leucorodia*) – This striking bird was seen on six days of the trip in appropriate aquatic habitat, including the Axios River Delta, Lake Kerkini, Porto Lagos/Lake Vistonida, and the Evros River Delta.

Hawks, Eagles & Kites (*Accipitridae*)

Egyptian Vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*) – The plight of this species in southeastern Europe is not a happy one. Once fairly common in northern Greece, it is now down to only a few pairs. Illegal poisoning is largely to blame for the bird's steep decline, but other factors are involved. Thankfully, the bird persists in the Dadia Forest of far northeastern Greece. We were treated to the sight of a couple of birds from the observation blind during our morning visit of the 24th.

European Honey-buzzard (*Pernis apivorus*) – This bird breeds fairly commonly in northern Greece and only sparingly down into central Greece. Our first sighting caused a minor stir when we saw an individual at the Theopetra of Kalambaka on the 16th, as it was unexpected so far south. Others were seen soaring over the ridge near Mount Belles above Lake Kerkini on the 20th. Still others were seen over the Dadia Forest on the 24th.

Cinereous Vulture (*Aegypius monachus*) – Outstanding views of perched and soaring birds from the viewing blind at the Dadia Forest on the 24th. This magnificent bird maintains a toehold in northern Greece, particularly in the area of the Dadia Forest.

Eurasian Griffon (*Gyps fulvus*) – We saw griffons on two days, but unquestionably, our top sighting occurred on our visit to the Dadia Forest on the 24th. We enjoyed great views of many of these huge birds from the viewing blind, among the other raptors present.

Short-toed Snake-Eagle (*Circaetus gallicus*) – This beautiful raptor was seen on our first

morning in the Kerkini area (in the foothills southwest of Lithotopos) on the 20th. We enjoyed even better views, and, frankly, our best views of the trip, at Dadia Forest on the 23rd with a bird sailing right overhead in the afternoon along the river, and views of a more distant bird perched atop a power pole at Loutros Hill near the Evros Delta on the 25th.

Lesser Spotted Eagle (*Clanga pomarine*) – We had nice views of soaring birds on two days; in the foothills southwest of Lake Kerkini, near Lithotopos, on the morning of the 20th, and from the viewing blind at Dadia Forest on the 24th. This species enters Europe only in the far eastern side of the continent.

Booted Eagle (*Hieraaetus pennatus*) – We had superb views of a light morph bird right over the visitor center and café at the Dadia Forest on the morning of the 24th.

Golden Eagle (*Hieraaetus pennatus*) – Thanks to the knowledge of local guide George, we spied two distant Golden Eagles over Mount Belles above Lake Kerkini on the afternoon of the 20th. This is a known nesting area for the birds, and it was only due to George's expertise that we got to see them.

Eurasian Marsh-Harrier (*Circus aeruginosus*) – This handsome raptor was fairly common and seen on most days of the trip.

Levant Sparrowhawk (*Accipiter brevipes*) – The furtive Levant Sparrowhawk was seen well on two days: first was a perched individual in the foothills west of Lithotopos, near Lake Kerkini, on the 20th; second was a bird in flight atop Loutros Hill near the Evros Delta on the 25th.

Eurasian Sparrowhawk (*Accipiter nisus*) – Only two seen, the first soaring over the hill at the Theopetra of Kalambaka, near Kalambaka, on the 16th, and another soaring over an open field in the foothills west of Lake Kerkini, near Lithotopos, on the 20th.

Black Kite (*Milvus migrans*) – A couple of birds were seen at the Dadia Forest on the morning of the 24th. The birds were hanging around the edge of the large vulture gathering on the mountaintop across from the viewing blind.

White-Tailed Eagle (*Haliaeetus albicilla*) – A spectacular sighting was the single bird that came to the hilltop feeding station with the other raptors on our morning in the Dadia Forest on the 24th.

Common Buzzard (*Buteo buteo*) – The most commonly seen and widespread bird of prey in Greece, we saw Common Buzzards almost every day of the trip.

Owls (*Strigidae*)

Eurasian Scops-Owl (*Otus scops*) – Scops-owls were “heard only” on three nights of the trip: on the grounds of the hotel in Kalambaka on the 16th and 17th, and on the grounds of the hotel at Kerkini on the 21st.

Little Owl (*Athene Noctua*) – We enjoyed fine views by day of a perched Little Owl on a power pole at the Axios River Delta on the 19th. We could not have known at the time, but this individual was the only one we would see.

Hoopoes (*Upupidae*)

Eurasian Hoopoe (*Upupa epops*) – This handsome bird was seen on almost every day of the trip. Always a crowd-pleaser, hoopoes breed throughout Greece and were seen with ease at most locations visited.

Kingfishers (*Alcedinidae*)

Common Kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*) – Somewhat surprising was the fact that only one individual kingfisher was seen, a lone bird darting around in the Strymanos river channel at Lake Kerkini on the morning of the 21st.

Bee-eaters (*Meropidae*)

European Bee-eater (*Merops apiaster*) – One of the beautiful of European birds, and a fairly common breeder and passage migrant across northern Greece. We saw this wonderful bird on seven days of the trip. Our first ones were at the Axios River Delta on the 19th. Thereafter, we saw birds at Lake Kerkini, in the Serva Fields en route to Xanthi on the 22nd, Lake Ismarida on the 23rd, Dadia Forest on the 24th, and at the Evros River Delta on the 25th.

Rollers (*Coraciidae*)

European Roller (*Coracias garrulus*) – This bird ranks right up there with the bee-eater in terms of beauty and bearing. Rollers, elegant in their mostly cyan coloration, were seen on seven days of the trip, with the best views occurring in the Serva Fields east of Kerkini on the 22nd, and at Lake Ismaria on the 23rd, glowing in the afternoon light.

Woodpeckers (*Picidae*)

Great Spotted Woodpecker (*Dendrocopos medius*) – Superb scope views of a single bird in a poplar tree along the Strymanos river channel at Lake Kerkini on the 21st.

Syrian Woodpecker (*Dendrocopos syriacus*) – A single bird in the riparian forest near Lake Ismarida on the 23rd was the only seen, and even there, not seen well by all.

Eurasian Green Woodpecker (*Picus viridis*) – As with the Great-spotted Woodpecker, a single bird was seen in the trees along the Strymanos river channel at Lake Kerkini on the morning of the 21st. This bird is another beautiful European species.

Falcons & Caracaras (*Falconidae*)

Lesser Kestrel (*Falco numanni*) – This species was seen on three days of the trip: in the town of Karditsa on the 16th, at the archaeological site at Pella on the 18th, and at the Serva Fields while en route to Xanthi on the 22nd. Our highest quality sighting was of the birds in Karditsa, which were nesting in the buildings in town and were seen swooping over the buildings and streets, all while we were eating lunch!

Eurasian Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*) – A common and widespread species that we saw on every day of the trip but one. Many good views.

Eleonora's Falcon (*Falco eleonora*) – We were somewhat surprised to have recorded this wonderful bird on five separate days of the trip. This falcon has an unusual life cycle in that it breeds in the late summer on sheer cliffs near the sea, but spends its springs hunting dragonflies and birds in inland locations. We saw Eleonora's at several locations, and usually in flight overhead, but our best sighting was of a single bird perched in a dead tree along the Strymanos River at Lake Kerkini on the morning of the 21st.

Eurasian Hobby (*Falco subbuteo*) – A couple of hobbies were seen flying over the hotel at Lake Kerkini on the morning of the 21st, but our best view was at the Dadia Forest on the morning of the 24th. There, a pair of birds circled overhead as we made our way down the hill from the observation blind. Superb views.

Old World Orioles (*Oriolidae*)

Eurasian Golden Oriole (*Oriolus oriolus*) – A single male bird was seen in the trees (somewhat near the Strymanos River Delta) at Lake Kerkini, from the hotel grounds on a morning walk on the 21st. A dazzling bird to be sure.

Shrikes (*Laniidae*)

Red-backed Shrike (*Lanius collurio*) – The first of four shrike species we would see on the trip, and a beautiful bird to boot. Our first individual was at the Axios River Delta on the 19th. From there we recorded individuals on many days thereafter. Perhaps our best views were of a couple of birds below the parking area at Gamila Peak, above the Nestos River Gorge, on the 22nd.

Lesser Gray Shrike (*Lanius minor*) – Two individuals were seen: one at Lake Ismarida on the afternoon of the 23rd, and another at Loutros Hill at the Evros River Delta on the 25th. This is a species of eastern Europe. Always nice to get.

Masked Shrike (*Lanius nubicus*) – A single bird in the foothills near Lithotopos, west of Lake Kerkini, on the morning of the 20th was the only seen. As this bird is most numerous in eastern Europe in this region, our recording only one bird was somewhat of a surprise.

Woodchat Shrike (*Lanius senator*) – Another beautiful bird, Woodchat Shrikes were seen at Vironia Quarry above Lake Kerkini on the 20th, at the Dadia Forest on the 24th, and at Loutros Hill in the Evros Delta on the 25th.

Crows, Jays & Magpies (*Corvidae*)

Eurasian Jay (*Garrulus glandarius*) – A striking and handsome bird, Eurasian Jays were seen on five days of the trip, namely in the Kalambaka and Kerkini areas.

Eurasian Magpie (*Pica pica*) – Common and seen daily.

Eurasian Jackdaw (*Corvus monedula*) – This little Corvid was noted on seven of the trip's first eight days. Perhaps most memorable was the colony we "discovered" in Karditsa while walking through the town after lunch.

Rook (*Corvus frugilegus*) – A small colony of Rooks were seen in Karditsa in the same place as the above species. Our local guides were impressed as the presence of these birds seemed unexpected. Rooks are not exactly common anywhere in Greece in the warmer months, but nevertheless, here they were.

Hooded Crow (*Corvus cornix*) – Common and seen every day of the trip.

Common Raven (*Corvus corax*) – Seen on four days of the trip in a variety of locations. Birds were most visible among the cliffs and monasteries at Meteora, but also in the Dadia Forest on the 24th.

Tits, Chickadees & Titmice (*Paridae*)

Eurasian Blue Tit (*Cyanistes caeruleus*) – This widespread and otherwise common resident was actually seen on only one day, at Meteora on the 17th. The paucity of sightings probably reflects the lack of time we spent among large shade trees on this trip, where this species is most likely encountered.

Great Tit (*Parus major*) – This species can be seen at almost any location in almost any habitat. We recorded it on four days. A very lovely bird.

Penduline-Tits (*Remizidae*)

Eurasian Penduline-Tit (*Cyanistes caeruleus*) – This bird was seen well on two occasions, at Lake Kerkini on the 21st and in the vicinity of Lake Ismarida on the 23rd. It was the Kerkini bird that stole the show. Upon returning to the dock following our boat trip on the lake, several of us discovered a penduline-tit engaged in active nest-building. We watched for almost 10 minutes as the bird moved around the reed beds and large trees overhead searching for nesting material. Many beautiful and lasting views were had by all.

Larks (*Alaudidae*)

Calandra Lark (*Melanocorypha calandra*) – The large (relatively speaking) Calandra Lark was seen well on two days: our first sighting was in the Serva Fields on the 22nd when we stopped for some birding while traveling to the Xanthi area from Lake Kerkini. The second sighting was in the afternoon at Lake Ismarida on the 23rd, where we had very good views of birds in flight and on the ground at close range.

Wood Lark (*Lullula arborea*) – Woodlarks were seen on two days: at Gavila Mountain above the Nestos river gorge on the 22nd; and again at the Evros Delta on the 25th. In particular, the bird near the parking area on Gavila Mountain was seen (and heard) the best. There, we enjoyed nice views.

Eurasian Skylark (*Alauda arvensis*) – Several skylarks were seen at close range on the flats at Lake Ismarida on the afternoon of the 23rd. This species winters in larger numbers in northern Greece, but also breeds locally in small numbers. Our birds at Ismarida made for a pleasant and unexpected discovery. Separated in flight from other species by the white trailing edge of the wing

Crested Lark (*Galerida cristata*) – Of all the lark species that occur in the southern tier of Europe, this one is far and away the most widespread, adaptable, and commonly seen. We had good views of this bird on many days of the trip.

Reed Warblers & Allies (*Acrocephalidae*)

Eastern Olivaceous Warbler (*Iduna pallida*) – This species is among the most common and widespread of the various warblers that breed in Greece. Sightings occurred on four days with the bird having been heard on three others. Eastern Olivaceous warblers are fairly drab and furtive birds, but easily detected by their loud incessant singing.

Olive-tree Warbler (*Hippolais olivetorum*) – Our first brush with this bird occurred on the morning of the 20th when we had one as “heard only” during our foothill birding west of Lithotopos at Lake Kerkini. Our second encounter was very satisfying as we located a singing male bird in a small oak tree atop Loutros Hill near the Evros Delta on the 25th. Along with Great Reed Warbler, these two species are the largest of the European warblers. Fun stuff.

Eurasian Reed Warbler (*Acrocephalus scirpaceus*) – We enjoyed fantastic scope views of a singing male bird perched in the open in the reed beds at Lake Vistonida on the 23rd.

Great Reed Warbler (*Acrocephalus arundinaceus*) – We were able to enjoy this species on two occasions: on our trip to the Axios River Delta on the morning of the 19th and during our boat trip at Lake Kerkini on the afternoon of the 21st.

Martins & Swallows (*Hirundinidae*)

Bank Swallow (*Riparia riparia*) – Seen on two days: a couple of birds swooping around the

archaeological site at Pella on the 18th; others in the Kerkini area on the 20th.
Eurasian Crag-Martin (*Ptyonoprogne rupestris*) – Crag-martins were recorded on two days: the first, and best, sighting was of birds flying at close range around the cliffs and monasteries of Meteora on the 17th. One or two more were seen at Vironia quarry in the hills above Lake Kerkini on the afternoon of the 20th.
Barn Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*) – Common and widespread; seen every day of the trip.
Red-rumped Swallow (*Cecropis daurica*) – This bird is something of a specialty species in southern Europe, and we were treated to sightings on a near-daily basis. Seen commonly and in an array of locations.
Common House-Martin (*Delichon urbicum*) – Another abundant bird seen commonly daily. Many great views obtained.

Leaf Warblers (*Phylloscopidae*)

Eastern Bonelli's Warbler (*Phylloscopus orientalis*) – One “heard only” bird was detected in the pine woodland at the Dadia Forest on the afternoon of the 24th. Despite our dedicated effort, we simply were not able to locate one for the group.
Common Chiffchaff (*Phylloscopus collybita*) – A couple were seen in the pine-oak woodland below the observation blind as we made our way down the mountain and back toward the visitor center.

Bush Warblers & Allies (*Scotocercidae*)

Cetti's Warbler (*Cettia cetti*) – In its rust, gray, and dun plumage, Cetti's Warbler is a surprisingly attractive bird, but one that is heard far more often than seen. True to form, although we recorded the species on three days, it wasn't until we reached the Evros Delta on the last day of the tour that we finally were able to lay eyes on it. And did we ever! We enjoyed superb views of an individual in a small treeline along the roadside during our visit to the Anthia Marshes.

Long-tailed Tits (*Aegithalidae*)

Long-tailed Tit (*Aegithalos caudatus*) – A group of these lovely birds were spotted along the road while making our way to the Vironia quarry in the hills above Lake Kerkini on the afternoon of the 20th. This species is always fun to see.

Sylviid Warblers, Parrotbills & Allies (*Sylviidae*)

Eastern Orphean Warbler (*Carruca crassirostris*) – A single Orphean was seen in the scope, singing atop a bare tree, in the foothills near Lithotopos west of Lake Kerkini on the morning of the 20th. This bird can often be difficult to see, but on this morning, we enjoyed success. Gray above, white below, and sporting a dark mask and top of head, this bird is remarkably attractive.
Sardinian Warbler (*Carruca melanocephala*) – Typically common and widespread, we only saw this species once, on our visit to the Dadia Forest on the 24th.
Eastern Subalpine Warbler (*Carruca cantillans*) – The only individual of the trip was a dapper dandy male bird on territory during the afternoon birding walk at Gavros on the 17th. This area was just outside Kalambaka. Scope views for all.
Greater Whitethroat (*Carruca communis*) – Greater Whitethroats were seen beautifully on two

different days: a couple of individuals were seen among the small trees and along the road near Lake Isamrida on the afternoon of the 23rd; others were seen displaying at Apalis Beach in the Evros Delta on the 25th.

Nuthatches (*Sittidae*)

Eurasian Nuthatch (*Sitta europaea*) – One individual seen well in the open grove of trees during the afternoon bird walk at Gavros, near Meteora, on the 17th. This sighting was the only one of the trip.

Starlings (*Sturnidae*)

European Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*) – A common bird seen every day of the trip.

Rosy Starling (*Pastor roseus*) – Rosy Starling is essentially an Asian species, in terms of its breeding distribution, and an African species during the winter months. Interestingly, the northward migration route in the spring sees the bird wander through eastern Europe in small flocks. We encountered such flocks on three days of the trip: at Lake Kerkini on the 21st, en route to Xanthi (literally from the vehicle) on the 22nd, and in the area of Porto Lagos/Lake Vistonida on the 23rd.

Thrushes & Allies (*Turdidae*)

Song Thrush (*Turdus philomelos*) – A single bird seen by some of the group in the Dadia Forest on the 24th was the only seen.

Eurasian Blackbird (*Turdus merula*) – This bird is generally a common species across most of its European range, yet in northern Greece it seems a bit less conspicuous. It was recorded on about half of the days of the trip.

Old World Flycatchers (*Muscicapidae*)

Spotted Flycatcher (*Muscicapa striata*) – Spotted Flycatcher is both a passage migrant and breeding bird in northern Greece. We saw the bird on two days. The first sighting was on the morning of the 21st at the Strymanos River Delta at Lake Kerkini; the second sighting was at the Dadia Forest on the 24th. The latter clearly represented a breeding bird.

European Robin (*Erithacus rubecula*) – The only robins seen were a couple of individuals in the pine-oak woodland at the Dadia Forest on the 24th. Most of us enjoyed fine views of a singing bird in the forest as we made our way downhill from the hilltop observation blind.

Common Nightingale (*Luscinia megarhynchos*) – Nightingales were either seen or heard on every day of the trip except for two. It could easily be argued that our top sighting was of the singing bird located in a willow stand near Gavros on the afternoon of the 17th, a sighting that produced scope views for all.

Black Redstart (*Phoenicurus ochruros*) – A single bird in the trees around the back courtyard at the St. Stephen Monastery at Meteora on the 17th was the only seen. Interestingly, our local guide seemed a bit surprised. The late spring is not typically a time for this bird in this location. But there it was.

Semicollared Flycatcher (*Ficedula semitorquata*) – It took the dedication and expert knowledge of our local guide to track down this very localized and uncommon spring and summer resident. Semicollared Flycatchers inhabit a comparatively small range in southeastern Europe. The preferred habitat seems to be open woodland in the vicinity of rivers and streams. An issue with finding this bird is that they breed fairly early in the spring and

then disperse, so that even by late May, they can become hard to find. With patience and a bit of work, we located a prime plumaged male bird atop a sycamore tree near the village of Gavros, outside Meteora, on the 17th. A true southeastern European specialty bird.

Blue Rock-Thrush (*Monticola solitarius*) – This species was seen on three days of the trip, with our sighting among the cliffs and monasteries of Meteora on the 17th probably yielding our best views. Others were seen at Vironia quarry above Lake Kerkini on the 20th.

Eastern Black-eared Wheatear (*Oenanthe melanoleuca*) – This species was seen on four days of the trip, with excellent scope views available at the Theopetra of Kalambaka on the 16th, at Vironia quarry above Lake Kerkini on the 20th, at Dadia Forest on the 24th, and at Loutros Hill near the Evros River Delta on the 25th.

Old World Sparrows (*Passeridae*)

House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) – Common and seen on every day of the trip.

Spanish Sparrow (*Passer hispaniolensis*) – Spanish Sparrows have the interesting habit of using the nests of White Storks for their communal nesting sites. Though found across the region, they are most in evidence when White Storks are in the vicinity. Seen almost daily from the region of Lake Kerkini to Alexandroupolis.

Eurasian Tree Sparrow (*Passer montanus*) – Tree Sparrows are fairly common, but less conspicuous than the related House Sparrow. They are also a bit more rural in their habitat preference, as opposed to the urban tendencies of House Sparrows. We recorded this species on the first five days of the trip, but none thereafter.

Wagtails & Pipits (*Motacillidae*)

Gray Wagtail (*Motacilla cinerea*) – The only one seen was a bird on the rocks along the Nestos River (where in appropriate habitat) during our visit to the river gorge on the afternoon of the 22nd.

Western Yellow Wagtail (*Motacilla flava*) – This species was seen on four days of the trip across a diversity of locations: at the Axios River Delta on the morning of the 19th, Strymanos River Delta at Lake Kerkini on the morning of the 21st, Lake Ismarida on the afternoon of the 23rd, and the Evros River Delta on the 25th. All of these birds were of the southeast European race *feldeggii*, recognized by the intensely yellow breast and black on the head. This race is perhaps the most beautiful within this highly variable species.

White Wagtail (*Motacilla alba*) – This handsome bird was seen on two days during the trip: on the first two days (16th and 17th) while we were in central Greece, and on the last two days when we visited the Dadia Forest area (24th) and along the river channel in the village of Loutros, during our drink break, on the 25th.

Tawny Pipit (*Anthus campestris*) – A single bird along the dirt track near Apalis Beach (Evros River Delta) on the last afternoon of the tour was the only one seen. This bird was probably breeding locally.

Finches, Euphonias & Allies (*Fringillidae*)

Common Chaffinch (*Fringilla coelebs*) – A fairly common bird seen well on three days of the trip and “heard only” on two others. We enjoyed a number of good views of the species, but perhaps best were the birds near the parking area below Gavila Mountain on the afternoon of the 22nd.

European Greenfinch (*Chloris chloris*) – Our first encounter with this lovely bird and fine songster was on our day at Meteora on the 17th, where a number of the group enjoyed fine views of birds in the trees around the monasteries. Other sightings occurred from May 23–25 at places from Lake Kerkini to Alexandroupolis.

Eurasian Linnet (*Linaria cannabina*) – The only birds seen were a pair below the parking area at Gavila Mountain above the Nestos River Gorge on the afternoon of the 22nd. Although this species certainly is not rare, it can be flighty, nervous, and difficult to see. It took some doing, but most of the group had good views of the pair foraging on the ground.

European Goldfinch (*Carduelis carduelis*) – Fairly common and seen on most days of the trip.

Old World Buntings (*Emberizidae*)

Black-headed Bunting (*Emberiza melanocephala*) – An amazing, beautiful bird, Black-headed Buntings were seen on every day of the trip from May 20–25. A breeding species of southeastern Europe, northern Greece is within the stronghold region of the bird's range. As such, we enjoyed perfect scope views of singing males at the hotel at Lake Kerkini (20th and 21st), Lake Ismarida on the 22nd, Dadia Forest on the 23rd, and at the Evros Delta region on the 25th.

Corn Bunting (*Emberiza calandra*) – Common and seen every day over the second half of the trip.

Ortolan Bunting (*Emberiza hortulana*) – We caught up with this bird on the last day of the trip, with two singing males located near the top of Loutros Hill on the afternoon of May 25. It took some time, but the wait was worth it!

MAMMALS:

Taxonomy arranged in accordance with *Mammals of Europe*, by David W. Macdonald and Priscilla Barrett, Princeton Field Guides; Princeton University Press, 2002.

Nutria (*Myocastoridae*)

Nutria (*Myocastor coypus*) – Introduced non-native rodent from South America. Several were seen on floating mats of vegetation in the Strymanos River Delta at Lake Kerkini on the 21st.

Squirrels (*Sciuridae*)

Eurasian Red Squirrel (*Sciurus vulgaris*) – This often scarce little animal was seen in a tree near the parking area for the walk to Vironia quarry above Lake Kerkini on the 20th. Excellent views.

Dogs (*Canidae*)

Red Fox (*Vulpes vulpes*) – A single animal was seen in the Serva Fields, east of Lake Kerkini, while en route to Xanthi on the 22nd.

Golden Jackal (*Canis aureus*) – As luck would have it (and considerable luck at that), a jackal of this species darted across the road in front of our tour van while we were traveling from Lake Vistonida to Lake Ismarida after lunch on May 23rd. This experience was a bonafide great sighting.

REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS:

Taxonomy arranged in accordance with *Field Guide to the Amphibians & Reptiles of Britain and Europe*, by Jeroen Speybroeck, Wouter Beukema, Booby Bok, Jan Van Der Voort and Ilian Velikov, Bloomsbury Nature Guides; Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016.

NOTES: Due its great diversity of topographic features and habitats, Greece is among Europe's richest countries for reptiles and amphibians. Although birding was the primary focus of the tour, a wonderful assortment of frogs, toads, tortoises, terrapins, lizards, and snakes greatly enhanced our adventures in natural history. The majority of the frogs and snakes were seen in the Lake Kerkini area, while the tortoises and lizards were most in abundance farther east, such as in the region of the Dadia Forest and Evros River Delta. However, we were always on the lookout for new species throughout our travels, and it is to the great credit of our local guide George Spiridakis that we were able to identify all that we saw.

Frogs & Toads (*anura*)

Green Toad (*Bufotes viridis*)

Common Tree Frog (*Hyla arborea*)

Marsh Frog (*Pelophylax ridibundus*)

Turtles, Tortoises & Terrapins (*Testudines*)

Hermann's Tortoise (*Testudo hermanni*)

Spur-thighed Tortoise (*Testudo graeca*)

European Pond Terrapin (*Emys oribicularis*)

Balkan Terrapin (*Mauremys rivulata*)

Lizards (*Sauria*)

Eastern Green Lizard (*Lacerta viridis*)

Glass Lizard (*Pseudopus apodus*)

Snakes (*Serpentes*)

Dahl's Whip Snake (*Platyceps najadum*)

Four-lined Snake (*Elaphe quatuorlineata*)

Grass Snake (*Natrix natrix*)

Dice Snake (*Natrix tessellate*)

BUTTERFLIES:

Taxonomy arranged in accordance with *Butterflies of Europe*, by Tom Tolman and Richard Lewington; Princeton Field Guides, Princeton University Press, 1997.

Scarce Swallowtail (*Iphiclides podalirius*)

Small White (*Artogenia rapae*)

Eastern Bath White (*Pontia edusa*)

Clouded Yellow (*Golias crocea*)
Lattice Brown (*Kirinia roxelana*)
Grizzled Skipper (*Pyrgus malvae*)

DRAGONFLIES:

Taxonomy arranged in accordance with *Europe's Dragonflies*, by Dave Smallshire and Andy Swash; *WILDGuides*, Princeton University Press, 2020.

Blue Chaser (*Libellula fulva*)
Ruddy Darter (*Sympetrum sanguineum*)
Broad Scarlet (*Crocothemis erythraea*)