

NORTHERN GREECE

June 2014

Wildlife Notes

Anne and I visited Northern Greece between 2nd and 16th June 2014. We took a package via Thomson's Small and Friendly brochure staying Bed and Breakfast at The Country Inn, Kallithea. Whilst there we hired a car for a week and during that time had a day around the Kassandria peninsula, a day in northern Halkidiki near Poligiros, and five days in Lake Kerkin National Park.

The Country Inn is located on top of coastal cliffs, a 10 minute walk from Kallithea and a 30 minute walk from Afitos. The lane to Kallithea was overgrown with brambles in flower which were alive with butterflies. We saw 18 species in this area supplemented by birds including Nightingale, Eastern Olivaceous Warbler, Sardinian Warbler and Red-backed Shrike.

We hired a car from Avis in Kallithea. A group A car through the Thomson rep. at a discounted rate (also from Avis) was E260. By booking direct it cost E219. We were allocated a Citroen C1 which was fine although a little underpowered on the hills having a one litre engine. On motorway inclines and hills we sometimes needed to drop down 2 gears and turn the air conditioning off! The up-side was that we did 795 kilometres and only used E77.69 of fuel. Petrol prices varied but averaged about E1.68 a litre. Diesel was cheaper at around E1.35 a litre but hire cars were petrol.

At Lake Kerkin we stayed for four nights at the Viglitoras Traditional Hotel in Ano Porroia, a charming village about 7kms from the lake and elevated on the lower slopes of Mount Kerkin. A superior room cost E70 a night B&B with a superb breakfast and a most helpful host, Stelios. We had some super recommendations for tavernas for our evening meals. We also met his wife, Philly, who is an English teacher so language wasn't an issue.

We experienced a wide range of weather during the two weeks. We started with overcast skies leading to 24 hours of steady rain. As the skies cleared the weather was then very pleasant with clear skies and warm nights. Daytime temperatures were in the high 20's. When we moved to Kerkin the temperature rose and during the day built to mid 30's by early afternoon. Here the evenings were very pleasant in the high teens. We finished as we started as on our last full day we had a tremendous thunder and lightning display before the heavens opened with a heavy downpour lasting five hours.

For wildlife research we used Steve Mills excellent site guide 'Birdwatching in Northern Greece' visiting most of the sites covered around the lake. We also used the internet, visiting www.birdwing.eu, and looked at various trip reports.

Highlights were:

A boat trip across Lake Kerkin into the mouth of the Strimonas River past the flooded forest. We were surrounded by thousands of Great and Pygmy Cormorants, Grey and Squacco Herons, Little Egrets, Great Crested Grebes and Spoonbills but the highlight was close encounters with both Dalmation and White Pelicans. We chose a trip from Kerkin Harbour and we had the boat to ourselves at a cost of E40.

We found a glade just out of Ano Porroia. We passed it after dinner as it was getting dark and found it alive with Fireflies sparkling everywhere. We even had one land on the windscreen continuing to flash it's light signal. Overhear Tawny Owls were calling and a Scops Owl was calling nearby. A magical moment but equalled when we drove past the same dell the following morning and the ground looked as though it was moving. We stopped to watch hundreds of Nettle-tree Butterflies on the ground and in the nettles at the edge of the glade.

Views from the lower slopes of Mount Kerkini were wonderful and in the open, flowery areas butterflies were superb. Good finds included Balkan Marbled White, Balkan Clouded Yellow and Eastern Baton Blue.

The flooded lakeside meadows between Kerkini and Lithotopas gave excellent views of Cormorants, Heron and Egrets in good light and reasonably close. We also found both Gargany and Ferruginous Duck here.

Last but by no means least was the lane from our Kallithea hotel to the village for the vast array of butterflies.

One lasting memory is that wherever we travelled we were accompanied by the constant singing of Nightingales. There must have been hundreds of them and all the nicer because they don't range as far north as our home in North Yorkshire.

SIGHTINGS

S = Seen. H = Heard

Ha = Halkidiki. K = Kerkini

Birds

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis* S K
Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus* S K
Dalmation Pelican *Pelecanus crispus* S K
White Pelican *Pelecanus onocrotalus* S K
Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* S K
Pygmy Cormorant *Phalacrocorax pygmaeus* S K
Shag *Phalacrocorax aristotelis* S Ha
Squacco Heron *Ardeola rallies* S K
Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax* S K
Little Egret *Egretta garzetta* S Ha,K
Great Egret *Ardea alba* S K
Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea* S K
Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea* S K
White Stork *Ciconia ciconia* S K
Black Stork *Ciconia nigra* S K
Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus* S K
White Spoonbill *Platelea leucorodia* S K
Common Shelduck *Tadorna Tadorna* S Ha
Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos* S K
Garganey *Anas querquedula* S K
Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca* S K
Black Kite *Milvus migrans* S K
Booted Eagle *Hieraetus pennatus* S K
Bonelli's Eagle *Hieraetus fasciatus* S K

Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus* S K
Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo* S Ha,K
Lesser Kestrel *Falco naumanni* S K
Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* S K
Hobby *Falco subbuteo* S Ha
Eleonora's Falcon *Falco eleonora* S Ha
Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus* S K
Coot *Fulica atra* S K
Yellow-legged Gull *Larus michahellis* S Ha,K
Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus* S K
Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybrida* S K
Common Tern *Sterna hirundo* S K
Feral Pigeon *Columba livia* 'feral' S Ha,K
Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur* S Ha,K
Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto* S Ha,K
Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus* S K
Scops Owl *Otus scops* H K
Tawny Owl *Strix aluco* H K
Common Swift *Apus apus* S Ha
European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster* S Ha,K
Hoopoe *Upupa epops* S Ha,K
Syrian Woodpecker *Dendrocopos syriacus* S K
Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis* S K
Calandra Lark *Melanocorypha calandra* S Ha
Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla* S Ha
Crested Lark *Galerida cristata* S Ha,K
Skylark *Aluada arvensis* S Ha
Sand Martin *Riparia riparia* S K
Crag Martin *Ptyonoprogne rupestris* S K
Red-rumped Swallow *Hirundo daurica* S Ha,K
Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica* S Ha,K
House Martin *Delichon urbica* S Ha,K
Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea* S K
White Wagtail *Motacilla alba alba* S K
Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos* S Ha,K
Stonechat *Saxicola torquata* S K
Blackbird *Turdus merula* S Ha,K
Zitting Cisticola *Cisticola juncidis* S Ha
Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus* H K
Great Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus arundinaceus* S K
Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla* S Ha
Sardinian Warbler *Sylvia melanocephala* S Ha,K
Eastern Subalpine Warbler *Sylvia cantillans albistriata* S K
Eastern Olivaceous Warbler *Hippolais pallida* S Ha,K
Collared Flycatcher *Ficedula albicollis* S K
Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata* S Ha
Great Tit *Parus major aphrodite* S Ha,K
Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio* S Ha
Masked Shrike *Lanius nubicus* S K
Lesser Grey Shrike *Lanius minor* S K
Jay *Garrulus glandarius* S Ha,K

Magpie *Pica pica* S Ha,K
Jackdaw *Corvus monedula* S Ha,K
Hooded Crow *Corvus cornix* S Ha,K
Raven *Corvus corax* S Ha
Starling *Sturnus vulgaris* S Ha,K
Golden Oriole *Oriolus oriolus* S K
House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* S Ha,K
Spanish Sparrow *Passer hispaniolensis* S K
Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus* S K
Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs* S Ha,K
Serin *Serinus serinus* S Ha
Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris* S Ha,K
Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis* S Ha,K
Linnet *Carduelis cannabina* S Ha
Crossbill *Loxia curvirostra* S Ha
Cirl Bunting *Emberiza cirlus* S Ha,K
Black-headed Bunting *Emberiza melanocephala* S Ha,K
Corn Bunting *Emberiza calandra* S Ha,K

Butterflies

Swallowtail *Papilio machaon* Ha,K
Scarce Swallowtail *Iphiclides podalirius* Ha,k
Large White *Pieris brassicae* Ha,K
Small White *Artogeia rapae* Ha,K
Southern Small White *Artogeia manni* K
Eastern Bath White *Pontia edusa* Ha
Clouded Yellow *Colias crocea* K
Balkan Clouded Yellow *Colias caucasica* K
Cleopatra *Gonepteryx cleopatra* Ha,K
Eastern Wood White *Leptidea duponcheli* K
Small Copper *Lycaena phlaeas* Ha,K
Geranium Bronze *Cacyreus marshalli* Ha
Long-tailed Blue *Lampides boeticus* K
Lang's Short-tailed Blue *Leptotes pirithous* K
Holly Blue *Celastrina argiolus* Ha,K
Eastern Baton Blue *Pseudophilotes vicrama* K
Brown Argus *Aricia agestis* Ha,K
Common Blue *Polyommatus icarus* Ha,K
Nettle-tree Butterfly *Libythea celtis* K
Southern White Admiral *Limenitis reducta* K
Camberwell Beauty *Nymphalis antiopa* Ha
Peacock *Aglais io* K
Large Tortoiseshell *Nymphalis polychloros* K
Red Admiral *Vanessa atalanta* Ha,K
Painted Lady *Vanessa cardui* Ha,K
Queen of Spain Fritillary *Issoria lathonia* K
Comma *Polygonia c-album* K
Southern Comma *Polygonia egea* K
Cardinal *Argynnis pandora* K
Silver-washed Fritillary *Argynnis paphia* K
Spotted Fritillary *Melitaea didyma* Ha

Balkan Marbled White *Melanargia Larissa* K
Meadow Brown *Maniola jurtina* Ha,K
Small Heath *Coenonympha pamphilus* Ha
Speckled Wood *Pararge aegeria* Ha
Lattice Brown *Kirinia roxelana* K
Wall Brown *Lasiommata megera* Ha,K
Large Wall Brown *Lasiommata maera* Ha
Mallow Skipper *Carcharodus alceae* Ha,K
Lulworth Skipper *Thymelicus acteon* Ha
Essex Skipper *Thymelicus lineola* K
Small Skipper *Thymelicus sylvestris* K

Mammals

Eastern Hedgehog (road kill) Ha
Common Pipistrelle Bat Ha
European Roe Deer K

Butterflies and Damselflies

Beautiful Demoiselle K
Common Bluetail K
Small Pincertail K
Black-tailed Skimmer K
Keeled Skimmer Ha
Southern Skimmer K
Common Darter K
Broad Scarlet Ha,K

Reptiles and Amphibians

Frog sp. H Ha,K
Common Toad Ha
Hermann's Tortoise K
Kotschy's Gecko K
Balkan Green Lizard K

Moths

Hummingbird Hawkmoth Ha
Four Spotted Ha
Double-striped Pug Ha
Mullein Wave K
Silver Y K
Brown China-mark K

Other Insects and things of note

7-spot Ladybird *Coccinella 7-punctata* Ha
Garden Spider *Araneus diadematus* Ha,K
Ladybird Spider *Eresus ruficapillus* Ha
Red Soldier Beetle *Cantharis livida* Ha
Glow-worm larva *Lampyrus noctiluca* Ha
Crab Spider *Xysticus cristatus* Ha
White-tailed Bumblebee *Bombus lucorum* Ha,K
Honey Bee *Apis mellifera* Ha,K

Ground Bug *Lygeus equestris* Ha
Chafer *Oxythyrea funesta* Ha
Chafer *Cetonia aeruginosa* Ha
Cicada *Cicada orni* Ha
Harlequin Ladybird *Harmandia axyridis* K
Firefly *Luciola lusitanica* K
Great Green Bush-cricket *Tettigonia viridissima* K
Spoon Wing *Nemoptera sinuata* K
Egyptian Grasshopper *Anacridium aegyptium* K
Squash Bug *Corizus hyoscyami* K
Cardinal Bug *Trichodes apiarius* K
Violet Carpenter Bee *Xylocopa violacea* K
Shield Bug - sloe Bug *Dolycoris baccarum* K
Bush-cricket *Saga Pedo* K