

Birdwatching trip report - Greece

Period: 2.5.2011-10.5.2011

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Key sites visited: Lake Kerkini, Nestos Gorge, Dadia forest, Evrosdelta, Porto Lagos

In this report I will use the names of the sites, mentioned in the book 'Birdwatching in Northern Greece, written by Steve Mills'.

On May 2 my wife and I left home at 02:00 a.m. to drive to the airport of Köln-Bonn (Germany). We were scheduled to fly at 06:25.

We chose to fly from this airport so we could be at Lake Kerkini as early as possible. At 12:30 we arrived at Hotel Erodios in Lithotopos. From the terrace of our room we could see the pelicans.

We went for a walk by the lake and to check-out the area behind the Lithotopos dam (Site 6). We had dinner in a local taverna and went to bed early.

On May 3 I was at daybreak in the area where the Strimonas River enters the Lake Kerkini. In the book this place is called the 'Glossy Ibis strip' (site 3). There was a large group of White Pelicans, Pigmy Cormorants and egrets. It was very impressive. I drove back to Lithotopos along the eastern embankment (Site 4).

After breakfast we went for a drive in the direction of Kerkini. Our plan was to drive along the lake that day, but heavy rain changed our plans. Because of the bad weather we went to the big outlet store near Promachonas for some shopping. When we went back to the hotel the rain finally stopped and we drove along the Strimonas River (track f) to the bridge at Vironia. I saw there my first Tawny Pipit. We moved on to the Glossy Ibis Strip (site 3). My wife wanted to go back to the hotel and I went to Himarros (site 7) and took another look behind the Lithotopos dam (site 6). We ended this day with an excellent dinner in the restaurant of the hotel. The best meal we had during our vacation.

On May 4, after breakfast, we went to the Vironia tracks (site 2). A beautiful place with lots of birds. We saw Grey-headed Woodpecker there, Hoopoe and Spoonbill. We then went to Mandraki harbour (site 1). The sun was shining, it was warm and we stayed there for about an hour.

After buying something for lunch in a shop at Vironia we drove to our next destination Toxotes, where we booked a room in hotel Filoxenia. On our way to Toxotes we had again some heavy showers. After dinner in a local taverna we went to sleep early.

On May 5 we went for a walk in the Nestos Gorge (Site 1 of the Nestos Area). It was very beautiful. We then drove on to Dadia, where I had booked a room for two nights at the Dadia centre. The plan was to go to the vulture feeding station early next morning.

When we arrived at Dadia we had to change our plans again, because the hotel, shop and cafe at Dadia Forest were closed since May 1 because of funding problems as part of Greece's financial difficulties. Guiding services and the bus to the feeding station were also suspended. We had to look for another place to stay. We decided to walk first to the hide, where we could watch the feeding station (site 5). It was a beautiful walk through the forest, where we saw two species of tortoises.

When we arrived at the hide, there were no vultures. We waited for about one hour, but they didn't show. We did see a Red Fox at a few metres from the hide.

We then drove to Tichero, where I knew was a nice hotel, but it was full. The lady at the

hotel, who spoke very good German, arranged a stay in a bungalow near Lefkimi.

On May 6, after breakfast, we went to Kapsalo Radio Mast (site 4). There was a strong wind and it was very cold up there.

A little lower on the mountain I waited a while and saw three Griffon Vultures. At 10:30 we went to Traianoupoli and at the visitor centre we picked up our permits for the restricted area of the Evros Delta. With some help from Steve Mills we arranged these in advance (Thanks Steve !). The lady in the visitor centre advised us to go to the Anthia Marshes (site 7). There was a lot of water in the marshes and a lot of birds. Unfortunately there was also a lot of water on the tracks, so with our car we could not see all of the place. After dropping my wife at the hotel, I went to the Drana Lagoon (site 1) and drove along the irrigation canal to the Isabelline flats (site 5). There I saw for the first time a Roller. At the same spot were also two Stone Curlews. After dinner in the taverna near our hotel (Hotel Isidora) we went for a walk along the Loutros River. Because it was my birthday I received several messages from our relatives in Holland.

On May 7 we saw opposite the taverna where we had breakfast, at close range, a Syrian Woodpecker on a dead tree with a nesthole in it. After breakfast we went to the restricted area of the delta. The lady at the visitor centre advised us to take the track along the Spurwing flats (site 17) and the Swan lakes (site 15), so we did. Among others we saw a lot of Spurwing Plovers, Curlew Sandpipers, Marsh Harriers and two adult White-tailed Eagles. We then went to the city of Alexandroupoli, because my wife wanted to see something else than birds. When we came back to the hotel I went alone to Loutros Hill (site 9).

On May 8 we went early to Dadia for a second attempt to see vultures and this time we were very lucky. When we arrived at the hide at 09:00 there were 14 Black Vultures, 7 Griffon Vultures and 3 Egyptian Vultures at the feeding station. After an hour in the hide we left for our next destination, Porto Lagos, where we arrived at 13:30 and booked a room at the hotel Porto Vistonis.

After a cup of coffee I walked to the beach and to the West Wood (site 11). There were a lot of different gulls and terns on the sandbanks. I saw my first Caspian Tern there.

On May 9 I went up early to go to the Saltworks (site 7), Lafrouda Lagoon (site 2) and Avdira Marshes (site 3), but this was a bit disappointing. At the saltworks a lot of the pans were dry. At the other areas the birds were too far away to see well.

After breakfast we visited the Monastery of Porto Lagos. We then drove to the ancient town Filippi, which was very interesting.

Then we went to Kavala and visited the old town and the castle.

Because we had to fly back home the next day, we drove on to Thessaloniki and booked a room in hotel Iris, near the company where we had to deliver our hired car the next morning.

On May 10 we were at the Thessaloniki Airport at 11:30. We had to fly at 15:30 and landed at the airport of Köln-Bonn at 17:15.

After picking up our car, we came in a huge traffic jam. We were finally at home at 22:00.

We had a great vacation, despite of the cool weather and rain. We saw a lot of birds, other animals and flowers. We met a lot of very friendly people.

We birds we saw (the ones written in italics where new species for me):

Avocet, Barn Swallow, Black Kite, Black Stork, Black Tern, Blackbird, Black-eared Wheatear, Black-headed Bunting, Black-headed Wagtail, Black-winged Stilt, *Caspian Tern*, Cetti's Warbler, Chaffinch, Cirl Bunting, Collared Dove, Common Buzzard, Common Coot, Common Cuckoo, Common Greenshank, Common Kestrel, Common Nightingale, Common Redshank, Common Sandpiper, Common Shelduck, Common Starling, Common Tern,

Common Whitethroat, Corn Bunting, Crag Martin, Crested Lark, Curlew Sandpiper, *Dalmatian Pelican*, *Egyptian Vulture*, Eurasian Black Vulture, Eurasian Curlew, Eurasian Jackdaw, Eurasian Jay, Eurasian Skylark, Eurasian Sparrowhawk, Eurasian Spoonbill, European Bee-eater, European Greenfinch, *European Roller*, Garganey, Glossy Ibis, Golden Oriole, Goldfinch, Great Cormorant, Great Crested Grebe, Great Reed-warbler, Great Ringed Plover, Great Tit, Great White Egret, Greater Flamingo, *Grey-headed Woodpecker*, Grey Heron, Grey Plover, *Griffon Vulture*, Gull-billed Tern, Hooded Crow, Hoopoe, House Martin, House Sparrow, Isabelline Wheatear, Lesser-spotted Eagle, Lesser Whitethroat, Little Bittern, Little Egret, Little Grebe, Little Owl, Little Ringed Plover, Little Stint, Little Tern, Magpie, Malled, Marsh Harrier, Masked Shrike, Mediterranean Gull, Moorhen, Mute Swan, Night-heron, Northern Lapwing, Olivaceous Warbler, Oystercatcher, Penduline Tit, Peregrine Falcon, Pied Flycatcher, Pied Wagtail, *Pigmy Cormorant*, Purple Heron, Red-footed Falcon, Red-rumped Swallow, Ruff, Sandwich Tern, Sedge Warbler, Short-toed Eagle, Short-toed Lark, Slender-billed Gull, Spanish Sparrow, Spotted Flycatcher, Spotted Redshank, Squacco Heron, Spur-winged Plover, Stone-curlew, Subalpine Warbler, *Syrian Woodpecker*, *Tawny Pipit*, Tree Pipit, Tree Sparrow, Turtle-dove, Whinchat, White Pelican, White Stork, White-tailed Eagle, Wood Sandpiper, Woodchat Shrike, Yellow-legged Gull, Yellow Wagtail (*M. flava* and *M. thunbergi*).

Other animals we've seen:

Balkan Green Lizzard, European Pond Terrapin, Green Toad, *Hermann's tortoise*, Red Fox, Spur-thighed tortoise.

More information of birdwatching in Northern Greece you can find on www.birdwing.eu and in the book 'Birdwatching in Northern Greece, written by Steve Mills'.



Lake Kerkini



Nestos gorge



Kapsalo radio mast



Vulture feeding station at Dadia



White pelicans at Lake Kerkini



Pigmy Cormorants at Lake Kerkini



Dalmatian Pelicans at Lake Kerkini



Black-headed Wagtail at Evros Delta



Corn Bunting at Evros Delta



Spur-winged Plover at Evros Delta



Black-winged Stilt at Evros Delta



Squacco Heron at Evros Delta