

BirdWING Newsletter

Volume 1 Issue 2 Autumn/Winter 2008

In this issue news from:

- *Dadia Forest*
- *The Evros Delta*
- *Wetland Kerkini*
- *Lake Mikri Prespa*
- *The Axios Wetland*



Bird Watching In Northern Greece

The BirdWING Newsletter

...brings you regular news about work being undertaken by staff at Visitors' Centres across Northern Greece. It aims to raise awareness about birds and habitat across the region.

The newsletter is published in English and Greek and is distributed via email. Copies can be freely given out at Visitors' Centres. To subscribe, please email info@birdwing.eu or contact us at www.birdwing.eu

What a summer it was!

Following our visit to the British Birdwatching Fair and through online exposure, many new



people have signed up for the Birdwing newsletter and expressed their support for the cause. **Welcome to all newcomers!**

We already have nearly 150 supporters and have sold many copies of the Birdwing Book from which all money raised goes towards conservation projects. Thanks also to R C for his generous donation to Birdwing and to those of you who took part in the Birdwing Sponsored Birdwatch, which helped to raise nearly £400.

We'd be very grateful to all of you if you could take a few minutes to complete our **Birdwing questionnaire** (see page 7). We are keen to hear your suggestions as to how you think we can best help the birds of Northern Greece.

The more members we have the stronger our voice so please forward this newsletter to any friends you think may be interested.

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WWF Greece project at Dadia

Since the 1970s, the Evros region has been well known by foreign naturalists and scientists as a place featuring rare ecosystems and fauna species. At that time, Dadia Forest was often visited by the Dutch biologists Ad Wittgen and Ben Hallmann. The biologists' initiatives, notably Ben Hallmann's, resulted in the mobilization of international organizations (IUCN and WWF International), which funded an ecological study of Dadia Forest by Hallmann. The declaration of the area as 'Protected' by a Common Ministerial Decision in 1980 was based on this.

Since 1992 WWF Greece has supported the monitoring of the birds of prey and in particular the vultures. Furthermore, it has produced a range of reports and management studies and has contributed to the creation of the ecotouristic infrastructure in Dadia and to information and public awareness.

WWF Greece implemented the LIFE – Nature project "Conservation of birds of prey in the Dadia Forest Reserve, Greece" from 2002 to 2005 and in October 2006 the area was designated as the "National Park of Dadia-Lefkimi-Soufli" through a Common Ministerial Decision that includes determination of land use and building regulations and restrictions.

Nowadays, after 16 years of permanent presence and activities, WWF Greece continues working in the area supporting:

1. the monitoring of **Black Vultures** (*Aegypius monachus*) by:
 - monitoring pairs' breeding activity
 - monitoring individuals by means of radio-telemetry and satellite telemetry
 - ringing chicks in the nest
 - monitoring vultures at the feeding site

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Evros Delta bird ringing news

A group of volunteers led by **Dirk De Mesel** was involved in a marathon bird-ringing effort on the Evros Delta during August and September. Working every day for a month, beginning on August 15th, the team ringed an incredible total of **11 200** birds of 52 species!

Two species new for Evros were caught in August - a Common Rosefinch (*Carpodacus erythrinus*) on the 30th and two Paddyfield Warblers (*Acrocephalus agricola*), one on the 17th with a second on the 18th.



Other highlights included seven Levant's Sparrowhawks (*Accipiter brevipes*), three juvenile Masked Shrikes (*Lanius nubicus*) and over 140 Quail (*Coturnix coturnix*). A Corncrake (*Crex crex*) was also spotted but refused to give itself up.

Twelve birds were caught with foreign rings. Nine of these were Reed Warblers (*Acrocephalus scirpaceus*) with seven from Hungary, one from Serbia and one from Jordan. One Sedge Warbler (*Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*) had been ringed in Estonia and two Marsh Warblers (*Acrocephalus palustris*) came from Belgium.

It was clear from Day One, on August 15th, that migration was in full flow. The totals from the mornings of the first three days were 325, 450 and 375 respectively, while the morning of the 18th brought an unbelievable 1350 birds, with a further 300 caught in the evening!

The highest number of Great Reed Warblers (*Acrocephalus arundinaceus*) was caught on the first morning, suggesting that the migration peak of this species had perhaps already taken place.



Of some concern, most Reed Warblers (*Acrocephalus scirpaceus*) were very thin, as was the case last year, with some weighing only 8-9 grams, which is very low for this species which typically weighs around 11.5 grams in the breeding season.

In addition, a Black Vulture (*Aegypius monachus*) was seen over the delta in September, the first for several years.

Dirk De Mesel

Congratulations – to all those who entered last issue's quiz...

Hans Jeretrupp
Johannes Laber
Zoe Smith and Baptiste Doutau
Colin and Sue Turvey
Dave Peters

Well done for correctly identifying this bird as a Lesser Spotted Eagle (*Aquila pomarina*)



See page 6 for this issue's quiz!



Prespa – new developments

Information Centre in Zagradec, Albania.

In 2005, the Society for the Protection of Prespa (SPP) acquired a building in Zagradec to transform it into an Information Centre. At the same time, the SPP supported and trained local people, becoming the NGO “Women’s Association of Micro Prespa” for the operation of the Information Centre and the implementation of new projects in the region.

Since then, the Women’s Association has implemented several new projects, including the creation of information panels and a bird-watching spot near the village, where visitors can appreciate the richness of the area, while in early summer one can watch feeding Dalmatian Pelicans (*Pelicanus crispus*), Pygmy Cormorants, (*Phalacrocorax pygmeus*) Great Crested Grebes (*Podiceps cristatus*) and Common Terns (*Sterna hirundo*) among other wetland species in the open water areas, which are full of yellow water lilies (*Nuphar lutea*).

SPP has also trained three young graduates of the University of Korca, for eco-guiding, who are now able to guide organized groups and schools in and around the Centre, and material for environmental education is being prepared.

From April 2008 the Centre has been open every Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday from 9:00 am to 5:00 pm.

Francois Doleson – fdoleson@yahoo.fr

Substitution of dangerous electrical wires in Prespa, Greece

One of the main threats for large aquatic bird species has been the collision with electrical wires during foraging flights along the isthmus that connects Lake Mikri Prespa to Lake Megali Prespa. In the 1990’s the Public Electricity Company (PAC) had substituted parts of the hanging electrical wires with insulated ones and for years there had been very few incidents. However, due to the increase of the pelican breeding population and the stabilization of other waterbird colonies, flight directions increased and seven deaths from electrocution were recorded in May 2005 alone, including several Dalmatian Pelicans (*Pelicanus crispus*).

The SPP asked for the additional substitution of 1.2 km of dangerous wires and the PAC responded positively and proceeded with the substitution in August 2008. It is anticipated that deaths by electrocution will stop being a threat to waterbirds in the area and SPP applauds the initiative of the PAC.



The SPP website is at www.spp.gr

Irene Koutseri – i.koutseri@spp.gr

WWF at Dadia

(Continued from page 1)

2. The monitoring of the breeding success of the Griffon Vulture (*Gyps fulvus*) population, both inside and outside the National Park
3. The monitoring of the impact of windfarms on populations of vultures and other big birds of prey. This is implemented through searching for dead birds from collisions as well as the bird-use surveys at the windfarms. At policy level a proposal was put forward to ensure the correct planning of windfarms in Thrace
4. Transborder cooperation with Bulgarian environmental NGO’s

5. Participation in the Board of the Management Body of the area
6. Collection of injured birds and sending to Rehabilitation Centre
7. Implementation of the European Voluntary Service. This programme supports the international voluntary service of young people in Europe and is managed by the Youth Institute and funded by the European Commission

It is worth mentioning that during all these years Evros Prefecture has been a constant supportive collaborator of WWF Greece.

Yannis Marinos - ecodadia@otenet.gr



An unexpected visitor at Axios

An adult dotterel (*Charadrius morinellus*) was spotted by birdwatchers, on the coast at Halastra, a few kilometres east of the Axios river mouth. Dotterels are beautiful and very tame birds, so several people had the opportunity to observe and photograph it. The area of Axios and Kalohori proves once more that it is a fascinating birding spot so close to the city of Thessaloniki.

Bug life for the attention of children of all ages

The Management Authority of Axios-Loudias-Aliakmonas Delta has initiated project "MICROCOSMOS", a new environmental education programme that puts bugs under scrutiny.

Children of all ages are introduced to the magic world of things that usually go unnoticed. They collect their own samples from nature and with the help of entertaining guidance they try to identify their bug, through microscopes and stereoscopes. The aim of the project is to bring children closer to nature, make them aware of the extent of the biodiversity around us and help them get acquainted with the magic world of insects and other small living creatures.

The project was prepared by Gordon Ramel and Sylvia Zakak and it is taking place at the thematic kiosk of the Axios-Loudias-Aliakmonas Management Authority, in Agathoupoli.

For more information on how to participate call (+30) **2310 794811**.

Maria Panayiotopoulou

For more on Axios see: www.axiosdelta.gr

Request for information

Do you have any news for our next issue?

Let us know about birds in your part of Northern Greece. Whether you are working at an Information Centre or whether you just have a story you wish to share, please let us know and we shall try to include it in our next issue. Email: info@birdwing.eu

Other highlights

A pair of Red-necked Phalaropes (*Phalaropus lobatus*) spent some time at the Evros Delta during August and September...



In September a record 2500 Greater Flamingos (*Phoenicopterus roseus*) were at Lake Kerkini, together with over 1000 mixed pelicans and 9 Cattle Egrets (*Bubulcus ibis*).

In October, at Kerkini, 6 Spotted Eagles (*Aquila clanga*), 120 Ferruginous Duck (*Aythya nyroca*) and 1 Red-crested Pochard (*Netta rufina*) were seen.

Reports from Lake Ismarida indicate that a pair of Mute swans (*Cygnus olor*) bred for the first time this spring/summer. We hope to have more news from Porto Lagos/Nestos/Ismarida in our next issue.

Have you anything to advertise?

Want to promote an event in your area?

Need volunteers?

This could be your advert in the next issue!



Contact: hils@birdwing.eu

Messages of support!

Thanks to Moses Kandie of the Birding Club of Lake Baringo in Kenya! Good luck with your aims to construct marshland and efforts to raise awareness for the environment. Thanks for your support.

Focus on the Lesser White-fronted goose (*Anser erythropus*)



The geese are back at Kerkini!

On 3rd November 30-34 Lesser White-fronted geese (*Anser erythropus*) were observed at Lake Kerkini by Theodoros Naziridis. This was the first observation for Greece this autumn and the birds were seen in a flock of 39 geese.

On the 10th November 34 Lesser White-fronts, 40 Greater White-fronts (*Anser albifrons*) and 8 unidentified white-fronts were present at the lake.



Scientific meeting 25th - 26th November

At the end of November the scientific meeting of the Lesser White-fronted Goose Life Project will take place in Kerkini. The Hellenic Ornithological Society (HOS) and the Management Authority of Lake Kerkini are organizing the meeting, involving participation from scientists from Finland, Norway, Estonia, Hungary and Greece.

On the days following this meeting, a seminar for birdwatchers from Greece, Bulgaria, Turkey and Romania will take place as outlined opposite.

Theodoros Naziridis



Balkan seminar 27th - 30th November

The HOS has participated in an international EU LIFE-Nature project since 2006, entitled "Conservation of the Lesser White-fronted Goose on European migration routes".

The European population of LWfG has no more than 20-30 breeding pairs and the species is in a critical state, with illegal hunting being considered the single most important threat to the population. One key action for the conservation of these birds is finding and protecting all the wintering and staging areas along their flyway. During the previous three years we have gained important information about the wintering of the species in Greece and we are now in position to state that possibly all the critically endangered Fennoscandian population winters in our region. The starting point for the organization of this seminar was the need to promote the monitoring of the LWfG in Romania, Bulgaria, Turkey and Greece after the end of the project and to promote the establishment of a monitoring network.

For more information about the Life project see www.wwf.fi/lwfg

Maria Panayiotopoulou

Although the conference is happening as this newsletter goes to the press a preliminary report indicates that it is being well attended by both people and geese! A flock of 150 grey geese has shown excellently on both the 26th and the 27th on the mudflats off Mandraki. This flock contains more than 40 LWfGs including a number of ringed birds and a brood of 3 juveniles. A full report will be available in the next issue.

Keep up-to-date with the LWfG project at:

www.wwf.fi/english/finland/lesser_white_fronted/

www.unep-aewa.org/news/news_elements/2008/lwfg_ssap.htm

www.piskulka.net/index.htm



Editor's Comment

In this issue of the Birdwing newsletter, there's news from around the region, with information provided by the Evros, Prespa, Kerkini, Dadia and Axios centres.

Staff from these centres continue to work hard on behalf of birds and the environment and need our support. Every day they face the consequences of environmental concerns being low down on the list of priorities of politicians.

Too often, even the 'protected' sites of Northern Greece face degradation as, it seems, the people with the power to make decisions lack the will to conserve and protect habitats.

Many important areas of Northern Greece face issues such as over-grazing, over-fishing, illegal dumping of rubbish, building development, a desire to extend hunting areas or an unwillingness to allow exhausted farmland to be re-flooded. It's easy to see how the people at the centres who have the environment at heart could become dispirited by the continual bombardment from such pressures. We must try to support them in their efforts.



By becoming a collective voice of support, 'Friends of the birds of Northern Greece' if you like, all of us at Birdwing can stand alongside the staff on the ground to offer support in any way we can.

Steve Mills

This issue's quiz!

What is this mystery bird, taken in northern Greece in September?

Email your entries to quiz@birdwing.eu and we will publish the names of all those who are correct in the next issue.



What's this bird seen flying over Thassos?

Greek butterfly



The butterfly in the photo is one that is commonly seen in Northern Greece in both autumn and spring. Even during winter you can see it on a sunny day as it passes the winter as an adult. It is common across Europe too and it has the scientific name of *Inachis io*. It has a common name in many countries but not in Greece.

We would like you, particularly you children, to write to us with your suggestion for a **Greek** name for this butterfly!

Send your suggestions to Gordon Ramel at info@birdwing.eu



Birdwing's Questionnaire

Please send us your responses via email to Qu@birdwing.eu

These can be written like this:

Q1- A,

Q2- B, C and D etc.

1. How much time have you spent or do you spend in Northern Greece?

A: Live there

B: Visit each year

C: Have visited several times

D: Have visited once

E: Other (please describe)

2. Which of the following Northern Greece sites have you visited (in relation to birds)? List all please.

A: Evros Delta

B: Lake Kerkini

C: Dadia Forest and Evros Mountains

D: Prespa

E: Axios-Loudias-Aliakmonas region

F: Porto Lagos/Nestos/Ismarida region

G: Other (please describe)

3. Which of the above sites do you have most interest in?

4. In relation to the site you chose in question 3, do you think it could benefit from Birdwing's help, through lobbying, direct habitat improvement or other approaches?

5. What do you see as the most useful way Birdwing could help? (please describe)

6. In what ways do you think birds could be directly helped using the money being raised by Birdwing? (please describe)

7. What do you think is the greatest threat to birds in Northern Greece?

Many thanks for taking part in this survey. It is very important that we hear your views to help us move forward and choose appropriate actions for the funds raised.

Feel free to write to us with any other comments or ideas.

Hilary Koll and Steve Mills

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Please help us by answering this questionnaire!

Websites of interest...

1. For more information about the Dadia's LIFE project, visit the website:



www.wwf.gr/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=87&Itemid=133

2. For German speakers, read about Dadia on Dr Andreas Meissner's site at

www.oekowerk.de/pages/dadia.pdf

3. An international free forum for anyone interested in wild birds:



www.birdforum.net

4. An interesting site, tracking the movements of Eleonora's Falcons from Mallorca.

www.seaturtle.org/tracking/index.shtml?keyword=falcon

5. The new Evros Delta website:



www.evros-delta.gr

6. One of our supporters, Spyros Skareas has two fascinating birdwatching websites at:



www.greekbirding.blogspot.com
www.greecebirdtours.gr

6. Another of our members, Panagiotis Oikonomou, has a stunning website at:



www.wildlifebirdphotography.gr



Birdwing on Facebook!

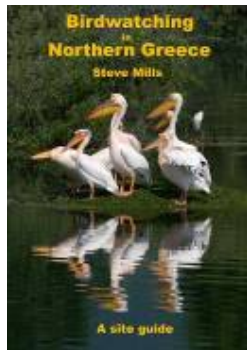
News for those of you who are technologically minded! Birdwing now has a page on 'Facebook'! If you are already on Facebook, please feel free to become a 'fan' of Birdwing and check the page for blogs and news as we develop this area over the next few weeks and months. Type 'Birdwing eu' into Facebook's search facility.

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Going to Northern Greece on a birdwatching holiday?

You need this book.

This 100-page book, published in 2008, contains up-to-date information on sites such as Lake Kerkini, Evros Delta, Porto Lagos, Dadia and the Evros Mountains. The entry for each site includes detailed, up-to-the-minute directions, maps and reliable info on what you might see, when and where. There is a current status list for birds of the region, a checklist of birds of Greece and colour photos of the region's speciality species.



Please note that **all proceeds** from the book are given directly to bird conservation projects in Greece. Books can be ordered online from www.birdwing.eu

Thanks for contributions and support...

We would like to thank all those who helped us to produce this newsletter. Thanks to **Irene Koutseri** from Prespa and to **Yannis Marinos** from WWF at Dadia for their contributions. We are also grateful to **Maria Panayiotopoulou** for information from the Axios-Loudias-Aliakmonas region and to **Theodoros Naziridis** and **Gordon Ramel** for news from Kerkini.

Thanks also to **Eleni Makrigianni** and **Andreas Athanasiadis** from the Evros Delta and to **Dirk de Mesel** for news on the ringing project.

There are too many names of those who have written us messages of support to include them all here, but we really appreciate them all. We also apologise if we have not been able to include any information that you have sent to us in this issue. We hope that we will be able to in the next issue.

New on www.birdwing.eu

Have you ever wished you had a list of the common Greek bird names with their English and Latin equivalents?

- A downloadable file of this information is now available free of charge! It can be found on the **Updates** page.
- Issues of the all the Birdwing newsletters (in Greek and English) are also available on this page for download.
- There is a new October 2008 update to the Birdwing book now available.
- See our **Links** page for other interesting websites about birds and conservation



What is BirdWING.eu?

We have set up BirdWING.eu with the aim of raising money and awareness for birds and their habitats in Northern Greece.

Our aims are:

- *to be a group of interested people, with a collective voice on conservation issues*
- *to provide a forum to raise awareness of things that can and should be done to help birds in Northern Greece*
- *to raise money for specific projects to immediately help some of the birds whose habitats are at risk*
- *to celebrate the environmental achievements of the management teams of the Ramsar sites*

Check out the website at www.birdwing.eu for more information.

Hilary Koll and Steve Mills