

BirdWING Newsletter

Volume 1 Issue 7 Summer 2010

In this issue news from:

- *Wetland Kerkini*
- *Prespa Lakes*
- *The Evros Delta*
- *The Amvrakikos Gulf*



The BirdWING Newsletter

...brings you regular news about birds and issues affecting them in Northern Greece. The newsletter is published in English and Greek and is distributed via email. Visitors' Centres print copies to be given to visitors.

Donations, donations!

In recent weeks Birdwing has received a number of generous donations from people in different parts of the world, via the **Donate** button of our website or through direct bank transfers. The donations amounted to over **500€**



Many thanks to Terry and Suzie Miles from Cape Town and Skiathos for their generous donation. Thanks too to Nikolaos Gallios from the Limnaio Hotel near Lake Kerkini and Heidi Bratz from Athens, David Watkins from England, Peter Goedhart from the Netherlands and PA from Scotland.

Tern raft success

Many of you will have heard of the success of the new Birdwing Tern raft – with at least 14 pairs of Common Terns (*Sterna hirundo*) breeding on it weeks after its installation at Mandraki.

Paid for by your donations and from money raised from sales of the Birdwing books, we're so pleased at this addition to the already wonderful Lake Kerkini.

Read more about the project on page 2.

Summer 2010

Special places in spring

For our new edition of the book 'Birdwatching in Northern Greece' we spent much of the spring visiting areas in the North-Western part of Greece to enable new sites to be included. We met many interesting people working to help birds in Greece. **See page 3 for map showing all the sites in the new edition.**

We had the pleasure of visiting the **Rodia Wetlands**, at the Amvrakikos Gulf, and meeting Minerva Kontopoulou and her husband Yiannis who voluntarily run the Rodia Wetland Centre there. **Read more about their work and fantastic centre on page 5.**

We met staff from the **Society for the Protection of Prespa (SPP)** and spent many excellent days exploring the amazing environment around the lakes, with high points such as finding and photographing breeding Barred Warblers. We also made new friends and found out many special things for inclusion in the next edition. **Read about a fortunate encounter on page 6!**

We visited the **Agras wetlands** where the Hellenic Ornithological Society have made an excellent job of making the environment accessible to all. Thanks to volunteer Fabio who showed us round.



Bird news round-up

A party of 3 Great Snipe (*Gallinago media*) was in the Slatina wet meadows area at Prespa at the end of April when a single one was at Porto Lagos along with a Broad-billed Sandpiper (*Limicola falcinellus*). A flock of 7 Terek Sandpipers (*Xenus cinerius*) spent time at Kalohori Lagoon south of Thessaloniki during May. Occasional sightings of Great Spotted Cuckoo (*Clamator glandarius*) were made at Kerkini during May where an unusual sighting of a pair of Bonelli's Eagles (*Hieraaetus fasciatus*) was reported at the same time.

A flock of 40 Cattle Egrets (*Bubulcus ibis*) was at Kalamas and a single one at Kerkini. It surely can't be long before a regular flock begins to follow the buffalo there. Groups of over 100 Collared Pratincoles (*Glareola pratincola*) were reported from several places, including the Evros Delta and Porto Lagos. A total of 22 Lesser Kestrels (*Falco naumanni*) was counted at the colony near Lake Ismarida as they prepared for the breeding season. Late April and early May is the prime time for the passage of marsh terns through the area with good numbers reported from several sites, most noticeably over 1000 on the Evros Delta on May 1st, mainly White-winged and Black Terns (*Chlidonias niger* and *leucopterus*).

Return migration is already underway at Evros – counts in July and early August revealed a fantastic **1468 Glossy Ibis** (*Plegadis falcinellus*), 735 White Pelicans (*Pelecanus onocrotalus*), 386 Black-tailed Godwits (*Limosa limosa*), and 47 Ruddy Shelduck (*Tadorna ferruginea*).



Evros Delta news

Evros Delta Management Body are still awaiting news of the Presidential decree and the national decision for hunting regulation. Birdwing has written to the Minister Tina Birbili and to others stressing the importance of ensuring that all Rasmar sites are given the highest level of protection.

The unprecedented spring flooding at Evros means that the main track around Paloukia lagoon is still impassable.



It had been necessary for channels to be carved to create routes for the flood waters to get to the sea more quickly and these are obviously not so easily replaced. The picture shows a missing section of the embankment.

Birdwing tern rafts

Members of staff of the Kerkini Management Body were involved in building, transporting and setting up the Birdwing tern raft. It was initially constructed in Kerkini village before being transported on a lorry to Mandraki, winched by a crane onto the water, covered in gravel etc. and floated to its final destination. Within weeks Common Terns (*Sterna hirundo*) had begun nesting.



Our thanks goes to all the staff involved and to Theodoros Naziridis for managing the project and for all those who donated money. We hope to make more of these rafts in the future.

This issue's quiz!

Can you identify Bird A or Bird B or both?
Email your entries to quiz@birdwing.eu

Bird A is an easy one for this issue, taken at the Evros Delta in June.



The answers to last issue's quiz can be found on page 7.

The photograph of **Bird B** was taken in May at Prespa Lakes, North-West Greece.



New Birdwing site guide!

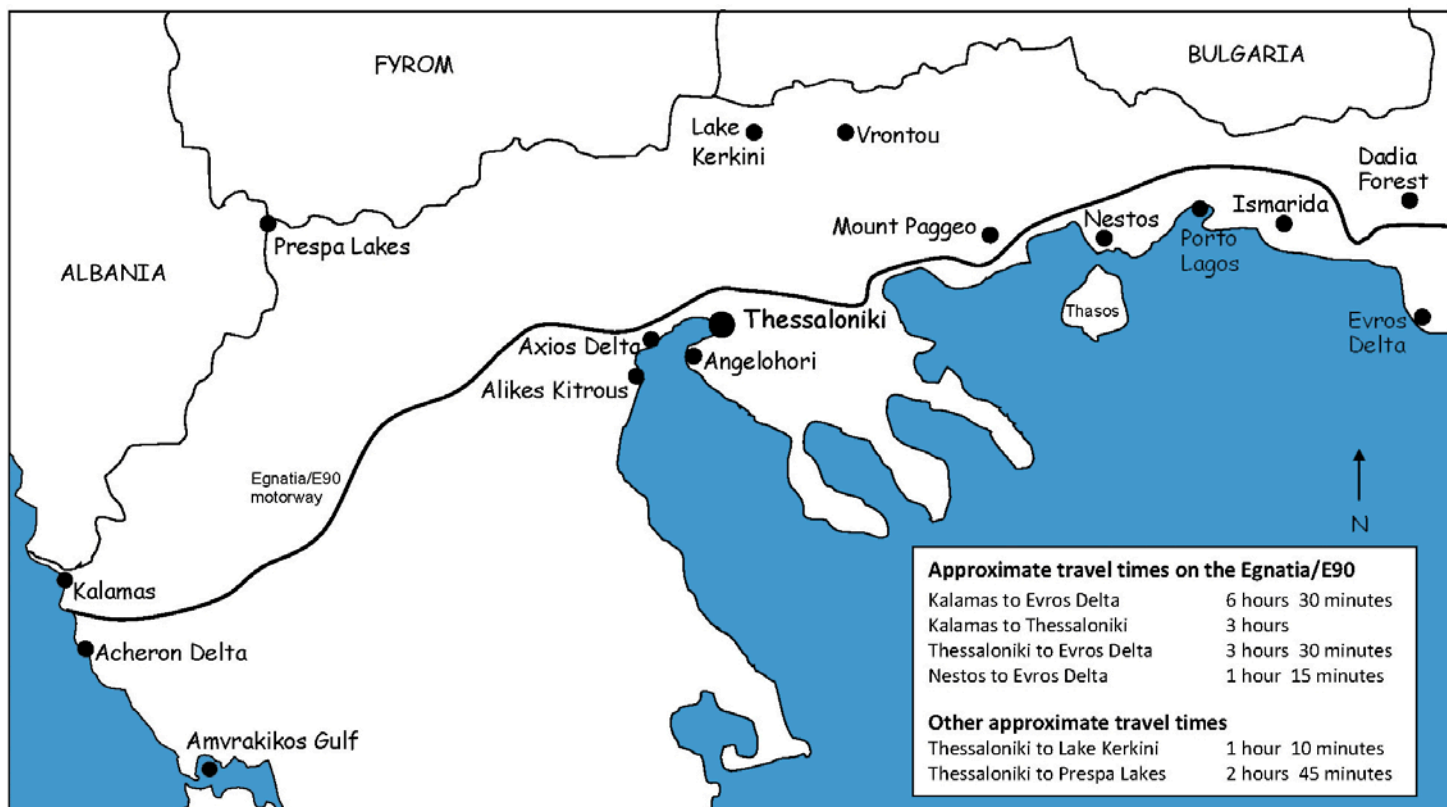
The new edition of 'Birdwatching in Northern Greece' will be published later in the autumn and covers a wider area of Northern Greece, including sites on the North-West coast and the Prespa Lakes. Our copies of the first edition are nearly sold out and so, unless you urgently need a copy before the autumn, you may like to wait until then to order 'Birdwatching in

Northern Greece – the second edition'.

The sites marked on the map below are all described in detail in the book.



A section including more limited information on additional sites is also included. These sites not shown on the map below.



Trip report

Here is an excerpt from a trip report from three of our members. The full report and bird list with excellent photographs can be read at www.birdwing.eu via the Downloads page.

25th April-9th May 2010
North-East Greece

Ian Kinley, Derek McAlone and Dave Thexton

This was our third trip to this part of Greece and the second in spring. It proved as enjoyable as we expected with highlights including Great Snipe and Olive Tree Warbler. However, as on previous visits, much of the enjoyment came from seeing lots of really good birds at close range to the almost constant accompaniment of singing Nightingales and Golden Orioles, all in glorious weather amid great scenery with friendly locals and an almost total absence of other birders.



Kapsalo, Dadia, Ian Kinley

One major change since our last trip in 2006 is the amount of good quality information now available on the birds of the area. This is due almost entirely to the efforts of Steve Mills and Hilary Koll, founders of Birdwing and authors of the indispensable *Birdwatching in Northern Greece*. The website www.birdwing.eu is a source of lots of useful information, including recent sightings and developments. *Birdwatching in Northern Greece* provides detailed information about birds and birdwatching in the region, with up-to-date maps and site info, and renders the outdated Gosney's *Finding Birds in Greece* redundant. The book can be ordered from the website; all money raised from sales goes to bird conservation in Greece, updates can be downloaded from the website and a revised edition is already underway. We're grateful to

Steve and Hilary for assistance with our Evros permits and also for additional information prior to our trip.

Despite Birdwing's attempts to raise the profile of birding in the area and the increased information now available, it remains little visited by birders – we met just *two groups* in the field in a fortnight which was in stark contrast to our spring venue last year, **Lesvos**. We were in no doubt which scenario we preferred. However, more visiting birders spending money in the area would clearly help to raise awareness of the importance of preserving habitats and wildlife.

We were two weeks earlier than on our previous spring trip in the hope of experiencing more obvious migration. Whilst this was foiled to some extent by the clear, settled weather, which was perfect for migrating birds but not for birders wanting to see them, and, apart from a single Red-throated Pipit and a handful of Whinchats, there was little in the way of passerine movement in evidence; nevertheless wader numbers were generally higher and the flocks of marsh terns were dominated by Whiskered and White-winged Black Terns and not by Black Terns as last time.

*Lesser Kestrels,
Kalamokastro,
Ian Kinley*



We were largely unaffected by the economic crisis and associated social unrest hitting Greece at the time of our visit, save for the high price of fuel, which rose from around 1.38 Euros a litre at the start to 1.50 or more by the end of our fortnight. There were no riots in the streets of Kerkini though the debate over a game of dominoes did get a bit heated at one point.

Number of bird species seen on trip: **193**

Ian Kinley

Go to www.birdwing.eu to read Ian Kinley's full report. Our thanks go to him and his group for their support. If you have spent time birdwatching in Northern Greece this spring or summer, please let us know what you saw.



Rodia Wetlands Centre

The Rodia Wetlands Centre is situated in the village of Strongili, at the Amvrakikos Gulf, not far from Preveza, in North-Western Greece.

The Rodia Wetlands are rich in biodiversity and are protected within the International Ramsar convention. The area is also a Natura-2000 site.



The Centre was founded in 2002 and is housed in the old village school building. Run by volunteers Minerva and Yiannis, the centre runs environmental excursions for schools, organised groups and individual tourists. Such trips can involve birdwatching, visiting the Monastery of Panagia Rodia, archaeological sites, having a tour of a fish-farm or even a farm for water-buffalo, whatever is of interest to you.

The Centre also provides information about the rich biodiversity of the wetlands, through videos and displays.



There is also a fantastic gift and souvenir shop which has many unique items and helps to raise money for the continued promotion of the region.

More information can be found at the Centre's website at www.rodiawetlands.gr or contact them via email at rodia@otenet.gr



The new edition of 'Birdwatching in Northern Greece' will include a section on the Amvrakikos Gulf and will be published later this year.



Editor's Comment

I'm looking forward to meeting birdwatching enthusiasts at the British Birdwatching Fair next week. It's great meeting people who share a love for birds but also who share the vision that, unless we all get involved and take action, our world's natural riches will diminish rapidly.

It's easy to focus on the delights of birdwatching in Greece, the range of species, the ability to get close to birds, the country's warmth and hospitality but it is equally important to draw attention to the need for those of us who love birds and wildlife to get involved in making things better.

If you are a bird lover, but have never been to Greece, a birdwatching trip there could help

birds by bringing income to rural areas and encourage local communities to protect, rather than destroy, their valuable ecology. If you have enjoyed watching birds in Greece and aren't planning a trip then why not join us in writing letters to the decision-makers to ensure that environmental views are heard above those whose wishes might be detrimental to birds and their habitats. Email us for further details.

Alternatively support us at Birdwing by passing our details on to others to increase our membership or make a small donation to help us continue with on-the-ground projects.

If you love birds it shouldn't be a matter of 'whether' to help them, but 'how' to help them, otherwise our hobby could end up being like Dodo chasing.

We *can* make a difference and, more importantly, we *must* make a difference.

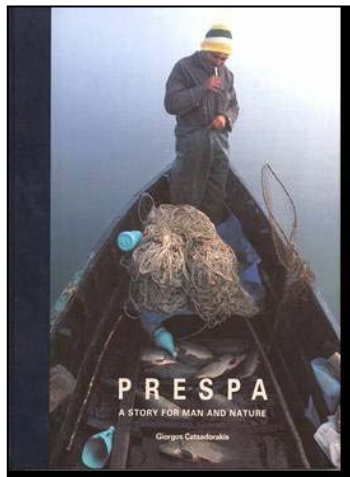
Steve Mills

Living in Prespa

When I mention that our garden bird list includes blue rock thrush, hoopoe and golden eagle, then you're going to be sure we don't live in London N19 anymore. The year 2000 was a watershed for us in more ways than one as we packed up and left England for the unknown in the form of the Prespa Lakes in Northern Greece. People often ask us how we came to be here and what made us choose Prespa. The answer basically boils down to having invited the unexpected into our lives with a flagrant disregard for the consequences!

We'd known for some time that we wanted to leave London in search of a more fulfilling way of life. We spent almost every weekend out of the city, walking, birdwatching and simply enjoying the countryside, whilst our weekdays were bursting at the seams with work, stress and the daily indignities of metropolitan life.

During the time when we were thinking about where to go we received our regular copy of the RSPB magazine. In the back was a review of the book 'Prespa – A Story for Man and Nature' by Giorgos Catsadorakis. We'd never heard of Prespa back then, but the review was excellent so we decided to take a chance on the book.



When it arrived we sat down to give it the once over with a glass of red wine in hand. Wiser heads may have mulled it over, researched in the library or on the internet, bought guidebooks and spoken to friends who had travelled in Greece. Wiser heads would have considered the rashness of moving to a country which one of us had never even been to before, and which spoke one of the more fiendishly difficult languages to be found in Europe. Wiser heads perhaps, but not ours; three hours and another bottle later, we had decided to move to Prespa.

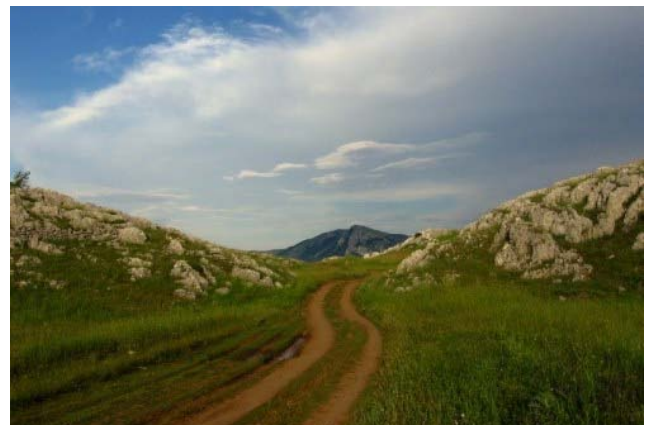
In the end it was something very simple. On every page and in every photograph of the book what was abundantly evident was the author's fierce love for Prespa and the birds and animals he encountered there. We simply thought that if a man who wrote as beautifully as Mr Catsadorakis, with such empathy and poetry, could love Prespa, then so could we.

So we came, and ten years later we're still here, lucky enough to live in one of the most ecologically and culturally rich places in Europe. With a garden bird list the envy of most of our friends! Prespa is home to Europe's largest Dalmatian pelican colony, while pygmy cormorants, white pelicans, great white egrets, purple herons, little bitterns and glossy ibis breed here.



There are glorious bee-eater colonies and remarkably easy opportunities to see bearded reedlings, black-headed buntings, hoopoes, penduline tits and all manner of warblers. Our mountain walks provide us with rock nuthatch, ortolan buntings, woodlarks and short-toed eagles. While there are many more birds I could mention Prespa is also home to over 1300 species of plants, an incredible diversity of butterflies and insects, and plenty of reptiles including tortoises and terrapins. Whilst out and about we've had plenty of daytime views of foxes, wild cat, boar and deer. There are numerous badger setts, otters leave fresh tracks by the lakes and water channels every day and we've even had the privilege of encountering both the European brown bear and, once, a wolf.

Throughout those ten years the unexpected has rewarded us time and again with new friends, new opportunities, new birds and astonishing coincidences. Most recently it came in the form of a car with a GB licence plate on the top of a mountain on the other side of the lakes. We had



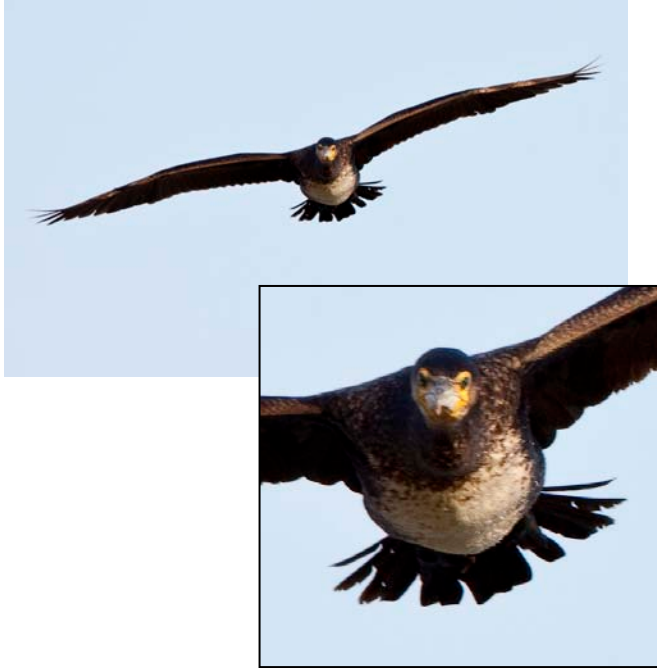
Last issue's quiz!

Bird A was a rather wet Whinchat (*Saxicola rubetra*).

Most entrants easily identified this one.



Bird B, however, proved to be more of a challenge. Very few entrants correctly identified Bird B as a (Great) Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*).



See page 3 for this issue's quiz!

Living in Prespa continued:

gone looking for the orchids that flower there every spring and parked in our usual meadow. Other cars are rarely seen up there, especially British ones, so we couldn't resist snooping in the windows. We'd just spotted the Birdwing sticker in the back when the owner came striding out of the surrounding forest prepared to fend off the potential car thieves. This time, as on many other occasions, that flagrant disregard for the consequences resulted in another unexpected pleasure - Steve Mills and Hilary Koll coming round for dinner that night and the beginning of a warm friendship, though from the look on Hilary's face as she approached her car that morning it could so easily have gone the other way!

So, keep an eye out for the unexpected. It might arrive any time in any guise; the innocuous book you ordered, that flutter in a distant bush on a spring morning, a simple question from a stranger. While modern life is often said to be

Summer 2010

Websites of interest...

1. Read more about the beauty of Prespa at Julian Hoffman's blog 'Notes from Near and Far' at <http://julianhoffman.wordpress.com/>



2. Interested in Greek bird photography?

Then look out for photos by one of Birdwing's members **Manos Papadomanolakis!**

One of our favourite shots of his is this one of a buzzard!

More of his stunning shots can be found at his website



www.manospapadomanolakis.com

full of lurking dangers, it's been my experience that the more open we are to engaging with the chance encounter the more we are rewarded; with experiences we might never have otherwise had and with a brimming bird list as well.

By the way, that golden eagle as a garden bird does rather stretch the definition of garden bird to include the category '*Birds Seen Through The Scope Whilst Having A Cold Beer In The Garden After A Hard Day's Birding And Idly Deciding To Look At An Unfamiliar Lump On the Top Of The Mountain Behind Our House*', which, I'll concede, is a bit of a leap, but equally, rather unexpected.

Julia Henderson

To buy Giorgos Catsadorakis' book in either English or Greek go to the [e-shop](#) at the SPP website at www.spp.gr

Birdwing News - 7



20th - 22nd AUGUST

Venue: **Eggleton Nature Reserve, Rutland Water, Oakham, Rutland, England**

Representatives from Birdwing and Lake Kerkini will be there.

Make yourself known to them and give them your support!

www.birdfair.org.uk

Need a present for a Greek young person or child?

Ο παιδικός οδηγός για τα πουλιά της Ελλάδας (The Children's Guide to Birds of Greece) has been published and is selling well. The book, in Greek, is being used to help children understand more about birds and habitats. All funds go towards helping birds in Greece.

A perfect gift for a name-day or birthday and of interest to people of all ages – this book is packed with information about migration, beaks, feet, wings and feathers, habitats, food, birdsong and many other aspects of birds' lives. There is also a section containing fact-files about the most important and interesting Greek birds, including white storks, black vultures, flamingos, etc.



New to Birdwing? Who are we?

Birdwing was set up 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

Friends of Birdwing

facebook

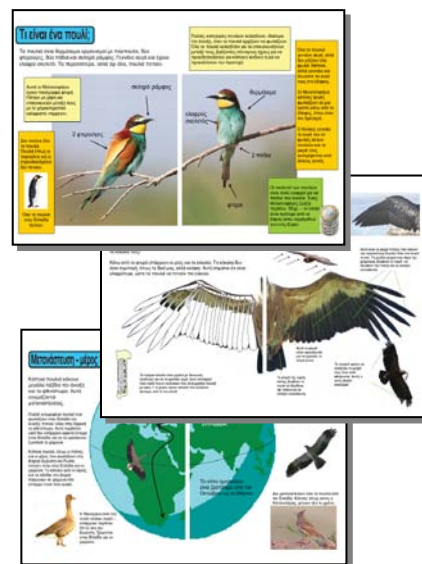
join our group +

If you are a facebook fan, join our group with regular photo quizzes and a chance to share pictures, videos and information and to talk about all things related to birds in Greece.

If you're not a lover of facebook, don't worry – we'll still be updating our website and sending our regular newsletters.



Go to www.birdwing.eu and order your copy now!



And finally thanks ...

As always we would like to thank all those who helped us to produce this newsletter. Thanks to **Julia Henderson** and **Julian Hoffman** from Prespa, staff at the Evros Delta, **Minerva Kontopoulou** and **Yiannis** from the Rodia Wetland Centre, **Ian Kinley** for his trip report, **Gordon Ramel**, **Theodoros Naziridis**, **Angeliki Dimaki** and all the staff members at the Information Centres across Northern Greece who have provided us with information. Thanks again to the people who have donated money and those who give us lots of support in what we are trying to do and to anyone else we have failed to mention.

We'd also like to wish farewell and good luck to **Gordon Ramel** who has taken up a teaching job in Thailand. His enthusiasm and efforts for the Greek environment will be greatly missed.