

# BirdWING Newsletter

Volume 1 Issue 9 Spring 2011

## In this issue news from:

- *Axios-Aliakmon-Loudias*
- *The Evros Delta*
- *Prespa Lakes*
- *Lake Kerkini*



## 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.

## 1400€ raised in one month!

In mid-January we received copies of the second edition of our site guide, Birdwatching in Northern Greece. Since then sales have come in thick and fast, together with donations from some of our members following our last newsletter, resulting in over 1400€ being raised in just over one month! Many thanks to all of you for supporting Birdwing in this way. We hope that things will continue like this throughout 2011 and that we will be able to fund new projects that will directly affect birds and their habitats in Northern Greece.

Our thanks for generous donations go to KM from Melbourne, Australia, LVH and HVH from the Netherlands and LB who bought a large number of maths books we are selling to raise money for Birdwing! (See **page 10** for further details)

## Record numbers

In early February a European record was broken when nearly 2000 Ruddy Shelduck (*Tadorna ferruginea*) appeared at the Evros Delta!



**Read more about this and other sightings from the early part of 2011 on page 5.**

## Birdwing's future

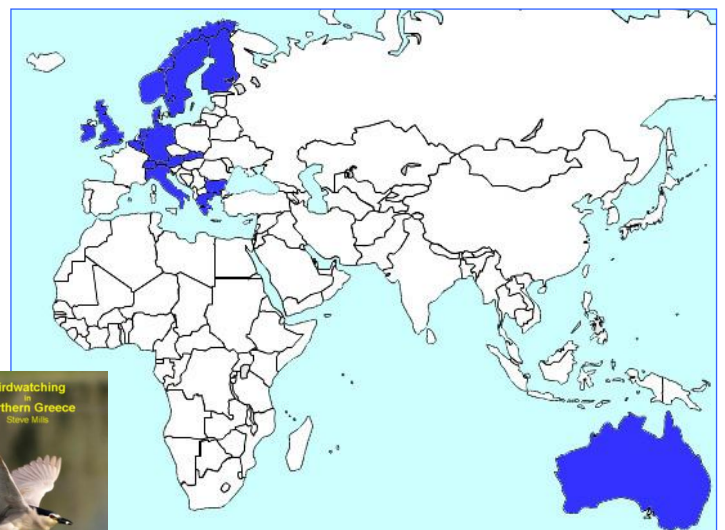
We received many responses from our members with your thoughts on how Birdwing should develop and grow in the future, following last issue's appeal.

**Find out more and read some of our supporters' comments on pages 3 and 4. Become a Birdwing partner – see page 9.**

## A national look at sales of the second edition so far

Sales of the book from different countries is as follows, so far:

UK: 33	Greece: 18	Netherlands: 10
Germany: 5	Belgium: 4	Switzerland: 4
Austria: 3	Finland: 3	Bulgaria: 2
Denmark: 1	Slovakia: 1	Ireland: 1
Australia: 1	Sweden: 1	Italy: 1
Norway: 1		
Spring 2011		



**Find out how to get your own copy on page 10.**

Birdwing News - 1

## Kerkini's news

Spring has arrived at the lake. The Dalmatian Pelicans, as every year, are already up on the platforms and have begun breeding.

In the last week of February two famous photographers from USA visited Kerkini as part of a workshop with other photographers from different countries. Arthur Morris and Robert O'Toole stayed for about a week and were really impressed by the environment of Kerkini but were more impressed by the friendly attitude of the Dalmatian Pelicans!



Steve Mills

The staff of the Management Authority of Lake Kerkini, with a small vehicle a little like a tank, and with the new equipment have made the first mapping of the area of the lake.



On 17/3/2011, the Management Authority of Lake Kerkini with the help and cooperation of primary schools in Lithotopos and Kerkini planted trees in the area near the bridge of Vironia continuing the effort in recent years for more greenery in the area.



Photos by Management Body of Kerkini

### April news on raptors

Two pairs of White-tailed Eagle are nesting around Lake Kerkini. Also one Golden Eagle is already sitting on its nest. Black Kites have already found their nests and they began breeding the day after their arrival. Lesser Spotted Eagles are arriving daily and over 140 Short-toeds have already passed through.



Steve Mills

The closed period for fishing, which is always difficult to enforce, began on April 1<sup>st</sup> and ends on May 20<sup>th</sup>.

Kostas Papadopoulos



## Birdwing – exciting new plans!

Following the positive and constructive feedback from you in response to our last newsletter we have met with a charity consultant and taken advice on moving towards registering Birdwing as a charity. The consultant assured us that Birdwing is in a strong position to proceed with this and, indeed, would benefit significantly from such a move given our income from donations and book sales.



As we move towards this we would like to restructure things with regard to our supporters, who come from a wide range of backgrounds and who have differing reasons for supporting Birdwing. Some supporters are largely interested in hearing of bird sightings in the region and in receiving information on where to see them. The consequential increase in eco-tourism in Northern Greece is something we are in favour of so we will continue to provide such assistance free of charge.

However, a large group of you have expressed your desire to support our efforts for conservation in Northern Greece and to know more of the wider issues affecting birds and their habitats here. We would like this group of people to become **Birdwing Partners**.



To show your support in this way and to become a Birdwing Partner many of you have said that you would be happy to give small annual donation of 10€.

Birdwing Partners would receive additional news on the work we are doing and would enable Birdwing to be run on a more solid financial footing. The names of the Birdwing Partners (unless anonymity is requested) will be published in our newsletters.

As soon as we have got the online section up and running we will contact you by email to let you know how to become a Birdwing Partner.

Spring 2011

## Some of your comments

*I believe that most of the newsletter subscribers will be more than willing to pay their "subscription" each year. I suggest you do this and I'm sure that everybody will respond positively. Keep up the good work!*

Lefteris Stavrakas

*Great newsletter as ever and yes, we will happily donate so you can be a bone fide charity.*

Suzie and Terry Miles (Cape Town)

*I am so impressed with the wonderful work you do! And Yes, I for one would be happy to make an annual donation to help Birdwing!*

Henrietta Molivadas

*I am sure all the people who receive your newsletter and who registered to get it would be willing to pay something for the protection of birds and habitats in Greece. Those great places, not too much destroyed yet, must be protected. And your action in Greece, informing and educating people is very important. But without money...we don't go far! So, 20 Euros as annual fee are not too much! But then we need a more official structure, like the UK charity you mention.*

Michel Gigon

*Thanks for your message - you deserve the support. Re the request in your latest newsletter concerning pledges to donate a regular amount - count me in.*

Karen Mather (Melbourne, Australia)

*I would be happy to make an annual donation to your work with Birdwing and support the proposal to form a charity provided you are confident that you will have sufficient income to make it worthwhile. I am sure that you are aware that this will enable you to claim the 20% tax through the Gift Aid scheme; also for people like me that pay higher rate tax there is the incentive of being able to claim back the personal tax. There is, of course, some additional administration for you!*

Tony Mercer

*A charity seems a good direction to go. I'd be more than happy to pay a subscription. Keep up the good work.*

David Tomlinson

## Your comments continued...

*Thank you again for [...] your newsletter. I think the work you are doing with Birdwing is superb, and I really applaud your efforts, keep it up!*

Phil Knott

*Yes - I think it would be a good idea for Birdwing to become a charity and I would be prepared to pay an annual subscription of at least 10 euros to support you. I look forward to hearing about what you decide to do, and hope you get plenty of encouragement from your current supporters.*

Chris Driver

*I think that becoming a registered charity would be an excellent idea and would be happy to pay an annual subscription of the amount that you suggest. Keep up the good work.*

David Parker

*Thank you for sending the Birdwing newsletter with its interesting articles and lovely photos. I would be happy to pay a subscription to help to promote the aims of Birdwing.*

Vaila Walker

*I would be willing to annually make a small donation. However, I would want to know what you would be spending the money on. I would prefer my donations to be spend on real nature stuff, like the tern rafts, or buying land to preserve it as a reserve (I think you mentioned that option).*

Jort Verhulst

## Charity set-up costs

Regarding Jort's comments above, we too are keen to ensure that money raised for Birdwing goes directly on projects for birds and their habitats. It is for this reason we **personally** will pay for the costs for setting up the charity, including consultant's fees etc. so that the money that is donated by you goes directly towards helping birds in Greece.

*Steve and Hilary*

**We appreciate all comments and feedback from you and are sorry that we do not have room to include more of them here. Thank you to all of you who emailed us.**

## Last issue's quiz!

Bird A was a Turnstone (*Arenaria interpres*).



Bird B, was a Tree Pipit (*Anthus trivialis*) photographed at Porto Lagos.



Well done to

- Stefan Wegleitner
- Johannes Laber
- Chris Durdin
- Leo Tukker

See page 9 for this issue's quiz!

It should also be noted that concern was expressed by one or two supporters that registering in the UK would be less beneficial than registering and working from within Greece itself. Although we agree in part with these concerns we believe that the UK registration would result in a greater tax benefit for Birdwing, given the large proportion of UK supporters. We also would like to stress that we spend significant time building relationships with existing Greece organisations, such as the Hellenic Ornithological Society, and with the Management Bodies in the region. All our projects, as with the Kerkini tern raft, will take place in cooperation with such bodies. We see Birdwing as an organisation that brings a wider international audience to the issues surrounding Greek birds, but one that works alongside and together with existing groups.



## Winter bird news round-up

Snow fell in January as **Lake Kerkini** hosted 600 Flamingos (*Phoenicopiterus ruber*), 70 Spoonbills (*Platalea leucorodia*), 85 Bewick's Swans (*Cygnus columbianus*), 1500 White-fronted (*Anser albifrons*) and 15 Greylag Geese (*A. Anser*). Raptors included 9 Spotted (*Aquila clanga*) and 4 White-tailed Eagles (*Haliaeetus albicilla*), Peregrine (*Falco peregrinus*), Merlin (*F. columbarius*), Hen & Marsh Harriers (*Circus cyaneus* & *aeruginosus*). Ducks included 15 Smew (*Mergellus albellus*), 2 Scaup (*Aythya marila*), 2 Mergansers (*Mergus serrator*), 9 Goosanders (*M. merganser*) and singles of White-headed (*Oxyura leucocephala*) and Long-tailed Ducks (*Clangula hyemalis*). Eagle Owls (*Bubo bubo*) were calling on the 27th, when 4 Common Crane (*Grus grus*), 5 Black Stork (*Ciconia nigra*) and 5 Great Grey Shrike (*Lanius excubitor*) were around.

February highlights included 5 Griffon Vultures (*Gyps fulvus*) and a Saker (*Falco cherrug*). March saw the return of the early migrants, including 15 Black Kites (*Milvus milgrans*), which are already nesting. Other raptor sightings in March include a single Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*), 140 Short-toed Eagles (*Circaetus gallicus*), four Booteds (*Hieraaetus pennatus*), several Lesser Spotted (*Aquila pomarina*) and four White-tailed (*Haliaeetus albicilla*). Waders included 140 Little Ringed Plovers (*Charadrius dubius*), 80 Ruff (*Philomachus pugnax*) and 80 Black-tailed Godwits (*Limosa limosa*). Also on the lake are 45 White Pelicans (*Pelicanus onocrotalus*) and 75 Spoonbill (*Platalea leucorodia*).

**Porto Lagos** hosted 206 White-headed Duck (*Oxyura leucocephala*) on the 9<sup>th</sup> February.

January at the **Evros Delta** brought several thousand White-fronted Geese (*Anser albifrons*), with 25 Lessers (*A. erythropus*), 55 Red-breasteds (*Branta ruficollis*) and 2000 mixed swans. 99 Dalmatian Pelicans (*Pelicanus crispus*), 33 Spoonbills (*Platalea leucorodia*), and almost 4000 Flamingos (*Phoenicopiterus ruber*) added to the variety.

Raptors were everywhere, with between 7 and 10 White-tailed Eagles (*Haliaeetus albicilla*), 17 Spotted (*Aquila clanga*), 149 Marsh Harriers (*Circus aeruginosus*) and 219 Buzzards (*Buteo buteo*). Waders were well-represented, with nearly 6000 Dunlin (*Calidris alpina*), 1158 Avocet (*Recurvirostra avosetta*), 250 Little Stint (*Calidris minuta*) and 76 Whimbrel (*Numenius phaeopus*), with 56 Slender-billed Gulls (*Larus genei*).

February brought even greater riches with, on the 8th, an unprecedented total of 1980 Ruddy Shelduck (*Tadorna ferruginea*) (well counted, Didier!) which is undoubtedly a record for Greece and perhaps also for Europe! Their flights across the river to Turkey with loud trumpeting calls were a sight to behold. Didier's photo below captures the spectacle as they moved about the delta. A further top-class record by Belgian Birdwing supporter, Ronan Felix, was of 20 Little Bustard (*Tetrax tetrax*) and up to 5 Eastern Imperial Eagles (*Aquila heliaca*) on the 4th. White-fronted Geese (*Anser albifrons*) numbers peaked at 10 870 on the 18th.

March opened with a count of 54 Lesser White-fronts (*A. erythropus*) as they gathered before leaving northwards. These birds arrived at the Hortobágy National Park, Hungary, having been joined four more en-route, later in the month.

(Thanks to the Management Bodies of the National parks of Lake Kerkini and Evros Delta for the data)



Photo by Didier Vangeluwe

## Birdwatching in Northern Greece this spring?

Whether a regular visitor, a resident or a first-time holiday-maker we'd love to hear about your birdwatching highlights in Northern Greece. Do let us know. Send your news to [info@birdwing.eu](mailto:info@birdwing.eu)

Spring 2011

Keep looking at the Birdwing website at [www.birdwing.eu](http://www.birdwing.eu) for further news and sightings.



Birdwing News - 5

## Bulgarian links

We would like to highlight some of the work being done by Birdwing supporters in adjoining Bulgaria:

**Johan Bekhuis** is working in a Bulgarian-Dutch liaison project New Thracian Gold (NTG) in the Bulgarian Eastern Rhodopes (see [www.newthraciangold.eu](http://www.newthraciangold.eu)). The BSPB and WWF together with support from the project and RSPB have applied for a Life+ project related to Egyptian Vultures, also in conjunction with the Dadia-team from the Greek side. It is hoped that this project will be approved in September 2011.

A new tourist map of the Bulgarian part of the Eastern Rhodopes is now available from NTG (1:125.000 scale). Since the Greek-Bulgarian frontier opened recently at Zlatograd and Ivaylovgrad it might be interesting for tourists and birders to visit the Bulgarian side too. Find out more details at:



<http://newthraciangold.eu/cmsnews.php?nid=14&searchin=&search=&lng=en>

The NTG-staff are working on the production of a tourist booklet with info on culture and nature in the Bulgarian Eastern Rhodopes. This booklet will be a superb accompanying guide to the tourist map.

Birdwing supporters **Boris P. Nikolov** and **Iva P. Hristova-Nikolova** are involved in a project dealing with study of the biodiversity in the Chestnut forests of Belasitsa Mountain – which they think has the Greek name Oros Kerkinis, just on the Bulgarian-Greek border. Video clips are made by Iva are part of the project information campaign. Find out more and see their fantastic photos and videos of this area and others around the world see:

[http://www.fotobiota.com/aboutusUK.php#Video\\_Projects](http://www.fotobiota.com/aboutusUK.php#Video_Projects)



**Emil Enchev** runs wildlife photography tours and workshops in Bulgaria and Greece. See his site [www.cometobg.com](http://www.cometobg.com)



If you're involved in other projects or events you'd like us to mention in our next newsletter, let us know.



## Birdwing Representatives

Birdwing is planning to appoint volunteers who live in the different regions of Northern Greece to be Birdwing representatives. Their roles will be to pass on information about sightings and local issues. One of our members, Stephen Beal, who volunteered for WWF Greece a few years ago, is shortly to move to the Amvrakikos Gulf area and has volunteered to take on this role there.



If you are interested in volunteering to become a Birdwing representative please email us at:



[info@birdwing.eu](mailto:info@birdwing.eu)



In January and February we saw some of the most fantastic birdwatching sites in Greece but sadly we also witnessed some of the worst sights.

We visited the Evros Delta, Lake Kerkini, Porto Lagos and Prespa Lakes in an orgy of top-class birding. Evros provided something special with thousands of geese including Red-breasted, Lesser White-fronted and over 10 000 White-fronted. Spotted and White-tailed Eagles seemed to be everywhere and the sounds of nearly 2000 Ruddy Shelduck and the Whooper and Bewick's Swans were a musical delight.



Unfortunately as all these birds moved about the delta lines of hunters lay in wait and the sounds of gunfire were all too close. The fact that there are large parts of the Ramsar-protected Evros Delta where hunting is still allowed at certain times of the year is something that saddens me. I don't for a moment believe that these hunters have the skill (or perhaps desire) to distinguish a White-fronted from a 'protected' Lesser White-fronted Goose (of which there is a European population of fewer than 60) in a fast-moving mixed flock above them. I certainly struggle to do this!



Our experience at Porto Lagos was similarly mixed. Within minutes of finding a flock of over two hundred White-tailed Ducks we discovered that someone had been illegally shooting Dalmatian Pelicans, again another species that is endangered and fully protected. About 20 had been recently killed, together with other fish-eating birds like Great White Egret. The fact that the area serves as a fishery can be no coincidence and no excuse. To watch a beautiful Water Rail climbing over a dead pelican in the water will remain with me for some time.



It is such events that led us to set up Birdwing so that the voices of those who find these actions shocking and disturbing can be heard. Whilst we believe that long-term education is the way forward we also think that it is important for government decision-makers to look beyond short-term human interests and to do more towards fulfilling their responsibilities towards the environment for wildlife.

*Steve Mills*

### Appeal for help

**Have you specialist experience  
in reed management?**



The Hellenic Ornithological Society (HOS) is looking for experienced volunteers who could assist with some short-term reed management work at the Agras Wetlands in Northern Greece.

For more information write to  
Peri Kourakli at: [pkourakli@ornithologiki.gr](mailto:pkourakli@ornithologiki.gr)

## Shags recovering

Last year an extensive and prolonged algal bloom in the Northern Aegean Sea affected Mediterranean Shags breeding in the Northern Aegean, from Thracian Sea in the north to islands of Lemnos, Skyros and Northern Sporades in the south.

The algal bloom covered large marine areas for several months and caused a dramatic decrease of the breeding success of the Mediterranean Shag in the Northern Aegean Sea, one of the species strongholds in the Eastern Med. Some colonies, including the largest in Greece, experienced almost complete breeding failure. It is estimated that more than 50% of breeding pairs in Greece failed to breed last year.

Based on the latest information gathered through the LIFE Nature project *“Concrete Conservation Actions for the Mediterranean Shag and Audouin’s gull in Greece, including the inventory of relevant marine IBAs”*, carried out by the Hellenic Ornithological Society in 17 Special Protected Areas in Aegean and Ionian Sea, this year the Shag’s breeding performance is gradually recovering. Some are already looking after their chicks while the others are still courting and making nests.



## SPP brief news

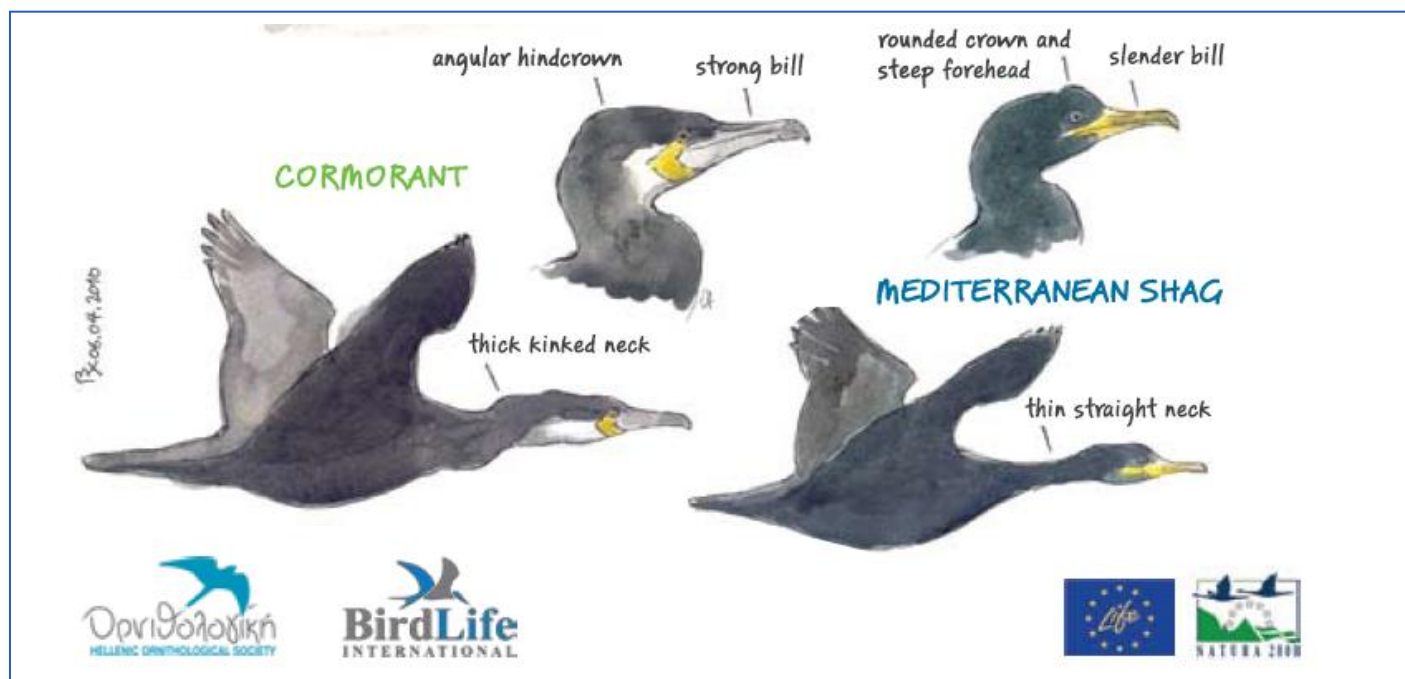
Two Spoonbills were spotted feeding at Prespa in mid March. Spoonbills have not bred in the area since 1992 and only rarely, the last few years, individuals have been observed during migration. Spoonbills, along with Glossy Ibises stopped breeding due to the shrinkage of wet meadows, which constituted the main feeding grounds for these species. Glossy Ibises started breeding again in 2005, following the management of water and littoral vegetation since 2002. A flock of more than 20 Glossy Ibis has been observed since late March.

Many ducks have been observed: Teal, Wigeon, Gadwall, Mallard, Pintail, Shoveler, Garganey, Pochard, along with the 2 Shelduck an irregular observation of spring migration. The presence of Ferruginous Ducks has been the highest of many years, reaching 20 individuals.

Dalmatian Pelicans have already arrived, while Great White Pelicans are also slowly finding their way towards their breeding grounds.

*SPP field team*

[www.spp.gr](http://www.spp.gr)



### Have you seen any Shags?

Help HOS in its quest to survey the Greek Mediterranean Shag population! Upload your observations to the project’s website:

[www.ornithologiki.gr/gr/seabirds](http://www.ornithologiki.gr/gr/seabirds)

### The Mediterranean Shag:

Length: 0.75 m      Wing span: 1 m  
Distribution: Islands and rocky coasts of the Mediterranean and the Black Sea  
Greek population: 1,000- 2,000 pairs

Although it looks a lot like its close relative, the Cormorant, it is smaller, with a slender head, neck and bill. Unlike the Cormorant, which prefers wetlands and ports, the Shag lives at sea.

*Roula Trigou*

Public Awareness Projects Coordinator  
Hellenic Ornithological Society  
[rtrigou@ornithologiki.gr](mailto:rtrigou@ornithologiki.gr)





## Evros Delta Spring ringing

The Management Body of the National Park and the Greek Bird Ringing Center are pleased to announce the ringing of passerines in the Evros Delta for spring migration, from April 28<sup>th</sup> to May 8<sup>th</sup> 2011.



This photo of Wryneck (*Jynx torquilla*) was taken by ringer **Eva Stets** during a previous ringing session at the Delta.

All are welcome to join this project and we will be glad to see new people participating.

There is the possibility of accommodation and transport to the station for anyone interested in coming from afar.

For more information contact Eleni Makrigianni by phone at the Information Centre on: +30 25510 61000

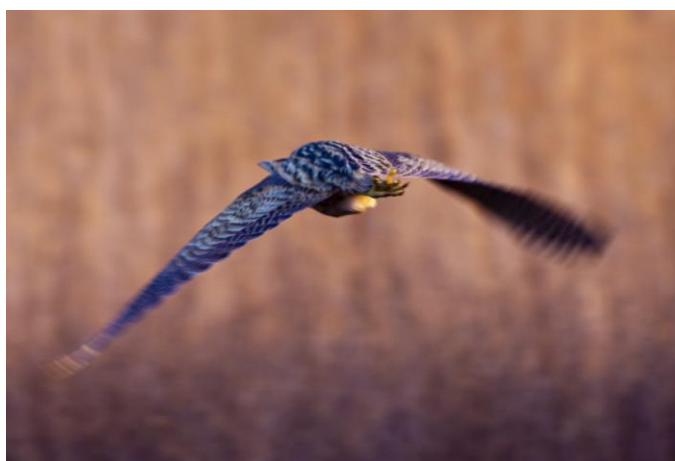
Eleni Makrigianni

[e.makrigianni@evros-delta.gr](mailto:e.makrigianni@evros-delta.gr)

---

## This issue's quiz!

Can you identify this bird?



Email your entries to [quiz@birdwing.eu](mailto:quiz@birdwing.eu)

Spring 2011

## Axios/Aliakmon/Loudias

This spring groups of volunteers have been helping to tidy areas of the region as part of the "One day on the Delta" campaign. Over a series of Sundays during March and April hundreds of volunteers, young and from Thessaloniki, Kalohori and the surrounding villages have been able within a few hours to change the face of the National Park.



The Cleanup Campaign is the initiative of the Management Body of Axios-Loudias-Aliakmon, with the support of the municipality of the delta. The rubbish and pollution from the surrounding region and the city of Thessaloniki is one of the main problems that degrades the National Park.

The Colorful Bikers, cyclists Thessaloniki, WWF, the UNESCO Youth Club of Thessaloniki, the Photography Centre of Thessaloniki, Aristotle University Photography Club all joined the campaign.

The voluntary cleaning events have taken place at Kalohori, the Gallikos River area, the coastal part of the Axios near Halastra, the Loudias estuary and the east riparian forest.

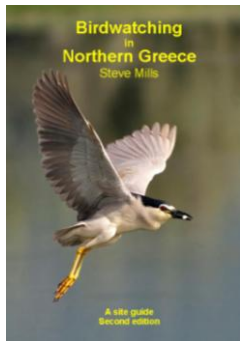
The events have been followed by entertainment including a show with jugglers and stilt walkers as part of the "Kids in Action" project.



Lia Papadranga

Info: +30 2310 794811, [www.axiosdelta.gr](http://www.axiosdelta.gr)

Birdwing News – 9



## Second edition of the site guide **Birdwatching in Northern Greece (2011)**

Planning a trip to any of the best  
birdwatching sites of Northern Greece?

**You need this book!**

The second edition has:

- 174 pages including 16 pages of colour photos
- revised, extended and updated sections on Lake Kerkini, Evros Delta, Porto Lagos, Nestos, Lake Ismarida and Dadia Forest
- new sites included for the first time such as the Amvrakikos Gulf, Kalamas Delta, Prespa Lakes and Mount Paggeo
- detailed maps and descriptions of the areas around Thessaloniki, including the Axios-Aliakmon-Loudias region, Alikes Kitrous, Nea Agathoupoli and Angelohori and the Epanomi lagoons
- 8 more sites in the Kerkini area and new sites in the Evros Hills
- more general information on lots of other sites, including Mount Olympus, Lake Karla, the Rodopi and Pindos Mountains
- more detailed maps and directions throughout
- GPS (Global Positioning System) data to be used by those with SAT NAVs or GPS equipment, such as those on mobile phones
- a current status list for birds of the region
- a checklist of birds of Greece, with those currently on the HOS List of Rare Birds in Greece indicated, and colour photos of the region's speciality species.

All money raised from sales go directly towards helping birds in Northern Greece.

The edition can be bought directly from our website [www.birdwing.eu](http://www.birdwing.eu) using all major credit cards or via a direct bank transfer into a Greek bank account. Please email us for bank details at [info@birdwing.eu](mailto:info@birdwing.eu)

We post books worldwide.

**Free car sticker with each  
new book order!!**



While stocks last – order your copy of Birdwatching in Northern Greece and receive a free car sticker!

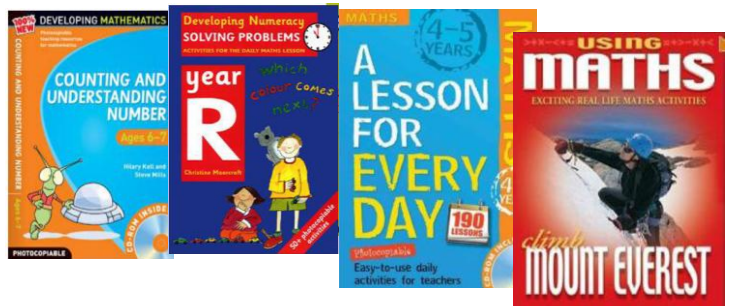


**Hurry and order while stocks last!**

## Help to raise money

Do you know any primary school teachers or secondary school maths teachers? Have you a child or grandchild aged between 5 and 14?

We, Steve and Hilary, write maths books for our main living and have a loft full of titles we have written over the years. We have decided to sell off these to raise money for Birdwing.



Email us at [info@birdwing.eu](mailto:info@birdwing.eu) for a list of books we have available and how to order. All the books are at discounted prices. Please tell anyone you think might be interested and help to raise money for birds in Northern Greece.

## And finally thanks ...

As always we would like to thank those who helped us to produce this newsletter. Thanks to **Roula Trigou** and **Peri Kourakli** at the HOS, **Eleni Makrigianni** and **Ioannidis Panagiotis** at the Evros Delta, **Julian** and **Julia** and **Irene Koutseri** in Prespa, **Lia Papadranga** from Axios, **Angeliki Dimaki**, **Kostas Papadopoulos** and **Theodoros Naziridis** at Kerkini, and all the staff members at the Information Centres across Northern Greece who have provided us with information. And, as always, thanks to anyone else we have failed to mention.

Spring 2011