

BirdWING Newsletter

Volume 1 Issue 5 Winter 2009

In this issue news from:

- *The Nestos region*
- *The Axios-Loudias-Aliakmon area*
- *Wetland Kerkini*
- *Prespa Lakes*
- *The Evros Delta*



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.

Autumn Birdwing news

This autumn's events included **Birdwing** appearing on the ET3 channel in Greece, with airtime being given to the issue of illegal shooting of birds of prey, after the finding of a shot Osprey at the Evros Delta.

Read more about it on page 6.



This summer's British Birdwatching Fair went very well, with representations from Birdwing, the Kerkini Management Body and Prefecture of Serres. Many new contacts were made and it was great to put faces to the names of some of our Birdwing members.



We are very pleased to announce several donations from members to Birdwing, via our website www.birdwing.eu.

[Donate](#)

Many thanks to AM from Surrey and MVD from the Netherlands for their generous donations. In this economic climate when environmental budgets are being slashed it is great news that individuals are willing to donate hard-earned cash to help protect birds and their habitats.

We have also had a generous offer from Nikos Gallios from the Hotel Limneo in Hrisohorafa, Kerkini.- see www.limneokerkini.gr

Many thanks to all of you!

Winter 2009



Griffon Vulture released back to wild

The Hellenic Wildlife Hospital (EKPAZ) and EPO have successfully released a Griffon Vulture (*Gyps fulvus*), found last year with a broken leg, back into the wild. The release took place near the new vulture feeding station in the Nestos Mountains near Aghios Kosmas.



Read more about the release in the report by Eva Stets and Aris Christidis on page 3.



Kerkini pelican platforms grow!



Find out more about the extension work on page 4.

Birdwing News - 1



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 the early autumn. Working every day from August 14th until September 8th, the team ringed an incredible total of **7536** birds of 59 species!

Impressive though these stats are, the mean number of birds ringed per day of 301 is less than the mean of 352 from 2008, when the data was skewed somewhat by the exceptional total of 1650 birds ringed on a single day in August!

Numbers of several species were lower than in 2008, including Red-backed Shrike (*Lanius senator*), Sedge Warbler and Great Reed Warbler (*Acrocephalus schoenobaenus* and *arundinaceus*) whose numbers were well down. In comparison Savi's Warblers (*Locustella luscinioides*), Nightingales (*Luscinia megarhynchos*), Marsh Warblers (*Acrocephalus palustris*) and Redstarts (*Phoenicurus phoenicurus*) were much more numerous.

Highlights included:

- 1 Baillon's Crake (*Porzana pusilla*)
- 7 Little Bitterns (*Ixobrychus minutus*)
- 3 Levant Sparrowhawks (*Accipiter brevipes*)
- 2 Spur-winged Plovers (*Vanellus spinosus*)
- 37 Wrynecks (*Jynx torquilla*),
- 56 Thrush Nightingales (*Luscinia luscinia*)
- 684 Marsh, 746 Savi's and 7 River Warblers (*Acrocephalus palustris*, *Locustella luscinioides* and *fluviatilis*)
- 2 Masked and 3 Lesser Grey Shrikes (*Lanius nubicus* and *minor*)
- 1 Red-breasted Flycatcher (*Ficedula parva*)

Six birds were trapped that were already carrying rings - two Marsh Warblers (*Acrocephalus palustris*) previously ringed in Belgium, and four Reed Warblers (*Acrocephalus scirpaceus*), two from Serbia and two from Hungary.



Pictured here from left to right are volunteers: **Stavros Kalpakis, Maria Nidou, Dirk De Mesel and Eva Stets.**

If you would like to be involved in future ringing events at the Evros Delta, please contact Eleni Makrigianni at e.makrigianni@evros-delta.gr or us at info@birdwing.eu

Pictured below: Masked shrike (*Lanius nubicus*), Wryneck (*Jynx torquilla*), Levant Sparrowhawk (*Accipiter brevipes*), Hoopoe (*Upupa epops*), Baillon's Crake (*Porzana pusilla*) and Little Bittern (*Ixobrychus minutus*).

Photos by **Eva Stets.**



Griffon Vulture release

The release of a bird to its natural environment is always a very sensitive and touching moment.

On the morning of 1 December 2009, we were fortunate to participate in such an event, releasing a vulture (*Gyps fulvus*), into the mountains near Aghios Kosmas, above Chrysoupoli, Kavala.

The young vulture was found in August 2008 near the river gorge and delivered by the biologist Hans Jerrentrup to Aris Christidis at the wildlife hospital. The bird was dehydrated and weak, with a severe fracture in his leg, which probably came from the usual conflicts with other vultures when fighting for food.

After first aid and care by the volunteers of **EKPAZ** in Kavala, the vulture was sent to facilities in Aegina, for a period of recovery.

Release day arrived and, organized by Hans Jerrentrup, everything was prepared to transfer the bird to the feeding station in the Nestos hills. After the transfer, the bird was tagged with two rings (metal and plastic) on the legs and an identification label on the wing, with the help of Mrs. Dora Skartsi from WWF Dadia.

Many other people were on hand to ensure everything went well - such a vulture has strong claws and a sharp beak! It is one of the largest birds of Europe, weighing approximately 6.5 - 8 kg and has a wingspan of 2.5m.

Finally, the vulture was given to Aris Christidis, for the last check ... and the moment we had been waiting for arrived. The bird had a few minutes to adjust itself and to stretch its wings ... then took one last look at us ... and left. He flew lightly away to freedom – back to where it belongs.

Many thanks to those present including:

Hans Jerrentrup, Aris Christidis, Dora Skartsi, Elzbieta Kret (WWF-Dadia), **Ingrid Francart, Stephan Beal** (volunteers from Dadia), **Eva Stets** (associate of EKPAZ), **Stefan Donth** (environmentalist), **Bernd Schuerenberg, Dieter Rothmund** and **Richard Schneider**.

The local authorities were also represented:

Mr Constantinos Ioannidis (Protection Company President Nestos Straits Development), **Mr Yiannis Tsakalidis** (Mayor) and **Mr Alekos Chorinos** (Secretary Expanded Prefecture of Drama - Kavala - Xanthi) together with some local residents.

The ringing and release was covered on the TV channel ET3 by journalist **Vaso Morali**.

It is worth noting that this vulture was the 14th liberated this year by the Hellenic Wildlife Hospital (EKPAZ). The other 13 were released in Crete. There are 4 or 5 more that will be ready for release in a few months. One will be released in Klisoura (Kastoria) and the rest will be taken to Crete.

We wish the birds luck in their journeys back to the wild.

Text and photos Eva Stets & Aris Christidis



EPO, the Society for Protection of Nature and Eco-development is run by Hans Jerrentrup in the Nestos area. Hans has tirelessly worked to improve the environment of the region. He has achieved a great deal there.

To support him and to find out how you can help contact him at epo@kav.forthnet.gr



EKPAZ, the Hellenic Wildlife Hospital, is run on a non-profit, voluntary basis and always needs vital funds to ensure that such creatures can be helped.

Why not adopt a bird or animal?

Check out their informative website at www.ekpazp.gr



Lake Kerkini's pelican platforms

In recent weeks two Dalmatian Pelican breeding platforms at Lake Kerkini have been rebuilt and extended. The Dalmatian Pelican (*Pelecanus crispus*) is a globally endangered species, with a world population in 2007 estimated at fewer than 14 000 birds. The first nesting raft was built at Kerkini in 2002 and was immediately accepted the following spring when seven pairs nested. This success has improved year-on-year and a second raft was built. In 2009 over 50 chicks fledged. The old wooden platforms however were in need of repair. By rebuilding and extending the size of both platforms it is hoped that breeding numbers will increase further.



The new wooden structures have been built at a time when the lake water levels are low and finishing touches, such as covering the top with reeds, will be completed in January.



At the same time, two new observation towers are being constructed for better monitoring of the pelicans (not for public use). One of these is opposite the breeding platforms and the second is at the mouth of the river.



Take a look at the website for Wetland Kerkini at www.kerkini.gr or check out recent bird sightings at our Kerkini page at www.birdwing.eu

Bird news round-up

The highlights of early autumn at Kerkini included 500 White Pelicans (*Pelecanus onocrotalus*), 200 Dalmatians (*Pelecanus crispus*), 4 Black Storks (*Ciconia nigra*), 300 Spoonbills (*Platalea leucorodia*) and over 200 Tree Pipits (*Anthus trivialis*). November brought 6-7 Spotted (*Aquila clanga*) and 2 Golden Eagles (*Aquila chrysaetos*), 2 Peregrines (*Falco peregrinus*), 2 Merlins (*Falco columbarius*) and an impressive 2000 Flamingoes (*Phoenicopterus ruber*). December saw duck numbers climb, with 15,000 Pochard (*Aythya farina*) and 74 Goldeneyes (*Bucephala clangula*). There were plenty of eagles too - 11 Spotted (*Aquila clanga*), 3 Golden (*Aquila chrysaetos*) and 4 White-tailed (*Haliaeetus albicilla*). Ten Black Storks (*Ciconia nigra*) and 5 Great Grey Shrikes (*Lanius excubitor*) completed the picture

At the Evros Delta wildfowl numbers began to build in November, with 161 Bewick's (*Cygnus columbianus*) and 83 Whooper swans (*Cygnus cygnus*) arriving, 200 Pintail (*Anas acuta*), 2090 Wigeon (*Anas penelope*) and 80 Ruddy Shelduck (*Tadorna ferruginea*). The first group of White-fronts (*Anser albifrons*) arrived on the 5th, sharing the lakes with 120 Flamingos (*Phoenicopterus ruber*), 47 Great White Egrets (*Ardea alba*) and 164 Dalmatian Pelicans (*Pelecanus crispus*). A few early Spotted



Eagles (*Aquila clanga*) joined a visiting Golden (*Aquila chrysaetos*), two Imperials (*Aquila heliaca*) and several White-tailed Eagles (*Haliaeetus albicilla*).



Editor's Comment

Have you ever wondered where your interest in birds came from? Was it a result of parental influence? Or did it just seem to arise naturally, as mine did? And what is it that you find interesting about birds? Is it the ability to tell a Treecreeper from a Short-toed Treecreeper at a hundred metres? (id tip – the latter tend to fall off more.)

Or is it perhaps the simple joy of connecting with something that is still wild in this cocooned, prepackaged, concrete world many of us live in? When you see a bird you're seeing a wild, creature out there, only a few meals away from starvation, fully engaged in the business of living.

It tends to be birds that allow us a glimpse into the real world out there. Strangely enough this was brought into focus for me not by a bird but by a weasel. As I was idly staring out of the window the other day I had a close encounter with a weasel. It clambered onto the window ledge and scurried along in that sinuous way they have before coming to a stop on the ledge. Something had caught its attention, probably a scent of something nearby. It sniffed, reared up on its hind legs and looked this way and that. I was less than a metre away. It gave itself a little wash, cleaning its whiskers with its front feet, and was off.

Thrilled though I was, this made me realise how few and far between close encounters with wild animals are. They tend to be secretive creatures of the night, reluctant to be seen.

No, it's birds that allow us that connection with the natural world. We see them in the garden, in the park, above the city, each one, at this time of year, concerned only with the maxim 'eat but don't get eaten'.

Wild connections, such as with a weasel, a hawk or the garden robin, can brighten up any day. But the episode with the weasel did make me think. As we surround ourselves with more and more gadgets and devices – ipods, mobiles, playstations, mp3 players etc. – will there be less opportunity for us and our children to connect with the natural world in the future? Will we become more insulated from it? And if so, will we care about what happens to it even less?

Steve Mills

Ideas for making wild connections...

Put up bird feeders, if you don't have them already. See page 6 for more info.

Get out and visit birdwatching sites or anywhere wild in your local area. Don't worry about identifying everything – just enjoy watching creatures and birds in the wild. If you're in Greece, check out www.birdwing.eu for information on the best sites.

Get children interested – why not pre-order a copy of our new Greek book 'Ο παιδικός οδηγός για τα πουλιά της Ελλάδας' - (A Children's Guide to the Birds of Greece). All proceeds go to help birds in Greece. See more on page 8!



Get volunteering! Reports in this issue of the newsletter involve people who have 'got their hands dirty' by volunteering to be part of a ringing team or helping injured birds. Nothing will get you closer to wild birds than this!

Congratulations – to the winners of last issue's quiz!

We certainly made it difficult for you in the last issue! Only **2 members** correctly identified both birds!

Bird A was a male Subalpine Warbler (*Sylvia cantillans*).



The difficult Bird to identify was this one...

The answer is:
Common Sandpiper (*Actitis hypoleucos*).



Very well done to the winners:

Yiannis Kakaletsis
and
Paschalis Dougalis

Thanks to everyone who entered.
See page 7 for this issue's quiz!

Do you live in Greece?

Gordon Ramel has some suggestions....

Bird feeders, and feeding the birds, are now both deeply embedded in the culture of England and other western countries. When I visited my Mum in the UK recently I brought two mesh bags of peanuts and 6 fatballs as a contribution to my Mother's bird cafe. Sadly in Greece this is not possible, buying refillable bird-feeders is practically impossible, never mind ready made supplies. But the winter is still cold here, colder than much of England in fact at times, food is still hard to find if you are a small bird. I'm sure Greek birds would really like to enjoy the same riches as their foreign cousins!

But there aren't any for sale, so we can't help?

Yes you can. No problem. Making your own feeder is simple - for half an hour's effort and about 2 Euros expense you can have about four. The one below was made from a commonly sold, soft, metal, mesh bought in the local hardware store, the bases of two 1.5 litre water bottles, a 15cm piece of stiffer wire and some string.

Alternatively use wood and mesh as shown below.

Use ordinary peanuts (not salted!) or use walnuts, a native alternative the birds already know and love. These are a bit more expensive but buy the broken pieces and the cost is not too bad.

Mix and match to suit your pocket!

(Note that because of the fungus aflatoxin it's best to use nuts that are safe for human consumption)



My feeders have been up on my 2nd floor balcony in Sidhirokastro since October and I often have as many as seven Great Tits at a time. Because I live in a town not a village, I don't get finches but at a feeder at the Centre for Ecotourism in Lithotopos (2005 and 2006) finches were regulars too. Even in the town I get Blue Tits, Sparrows and Jackdaws as well as the Great Tits - it's better than television!



And if you happen to work in a **Wetland Information Centre** having a regular crowd of visiting birds is a great attraction!

If you don't live in Greece..

Why not pop a birdfeeder or two in the post to someone you know? Or slip some into your suitcase next time you visit and give them to a friend? They won't weigh you down much but might encourage more people to get closer to and appreciate birds.

The birds will really appreciate it too!



Do you take a good photograph?

Why not enter our **Birdwing Wildbird Photo Competition?** and help birds in Greece at the same time! You could win a pair of **Bushnell 10x32 Powerview binoculars** (RRP £88.64).

See page 9!



This issue's quiz!

Can you identify Bird A or Bird B or both? They were taken in Greece in October. We hope that more of you will enter this issue's quiz than last time!

Email your entries to quiz@birdwing.eu

Bird A

Look left!



Bird B

Look right!

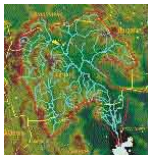


Osprey news

Most of you may have heard about our finding a dead Osprey that had been shot in a protected, no-hunting area of the Evros Delta. Following the incident, which was later confirmed by X-ray, we wrote to a number of organizations about the matter. Meetings were called, rewards for information offered by the Hunting Association and the TV channel ET3 ran a report on the matter several times.



Whilst the culprit is unlikely to be found, it is good to see the organizations taking the issue so seriously. We received replies from several of the organizations, including the Forestry Department of Alexandroupolis, The Hunting Association of Alexandroupolis, The Prefecture of Evros and the Hunting Federation of Macedonia and Thrace. Their responses (mostly in Greek) can be seen on the Downloads page of our website, www.birdwing.eu



News from Axios-Loudias-Aliakmon

Hunters continue to break the law

Despite being prohibited, sustained illegal hunting continues in the Kalochori Environmental Park. It seems that hunters continue to ignore legislation and hunt wherever they choose. Unfortunately the area is unguarded as the post of warden remains unfilled.

Recently children in the third grade of New Risio primary school, whilst on an environmental walk in the protected area, were upset to find many newly-shot birds. This is one of several instances of illegal hunting, one of which took place when a group of children were actually out in the Park. These children's environmental walk was accompanied by the sound of blasting rifles.

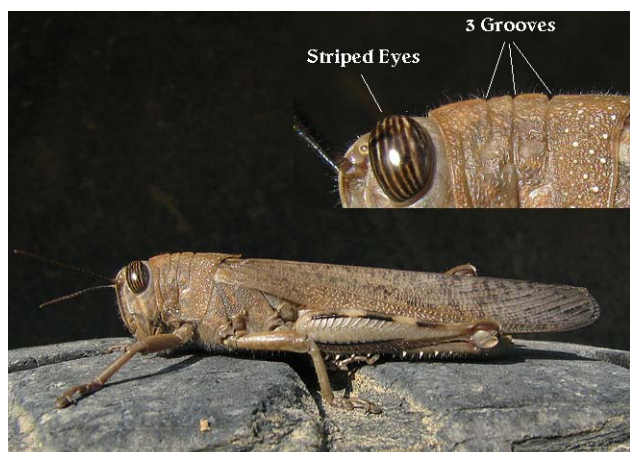
The Forestry Administration of Thessaloniki, the Hunting Federation of Macedonia and Thrace (KOMATH) and the Municipal Police were informed.

"We urge hunters to respect environmental legislation within the limits of the National Park, where hundreds of children are trained in environmental protection and should not feel the slightest fear of the presence of hunters," said Prof. Themistocles Kouimtzi, Chairman of the Axios-Loudias-Aliakmon Management Body.



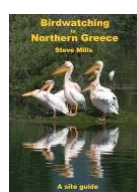
Focus on locusts!

One of the largest insects around in the Autumn in Northern Greece is the Egyptian Locust - *Anacridium aegyptium*.



Although it can be found all year round if you know what you are looking for, in October and November it seems to be all over the place. With the males 35mm long and the females up to 65mm long this is a handsome animal.

Superficially similar to the plague locust (*Locusta migratoria*) the Egyptian Locust is easily recognised by the 3 grooves across the top of its thorax and its striped eyes. It is not a pest of crops and is often found in habitats where the plant/small tree known as the Jerusalem thorn (*Paliurus spina-christi*) occurs. The specimen in the photo was found sitting on the tyre of a Jeep in the centre of Sidhirokastro in early November.



Birdwatching in Northern Greece new edition request

We are currently working on the second edition of the book *Birdwatching in Northern Greece*, as our copies of the first edition are rapidly declining in number!

If you have any feedback on the first edition of the book we would appreciate hearing from you. News of any interesting sightings would also be great!

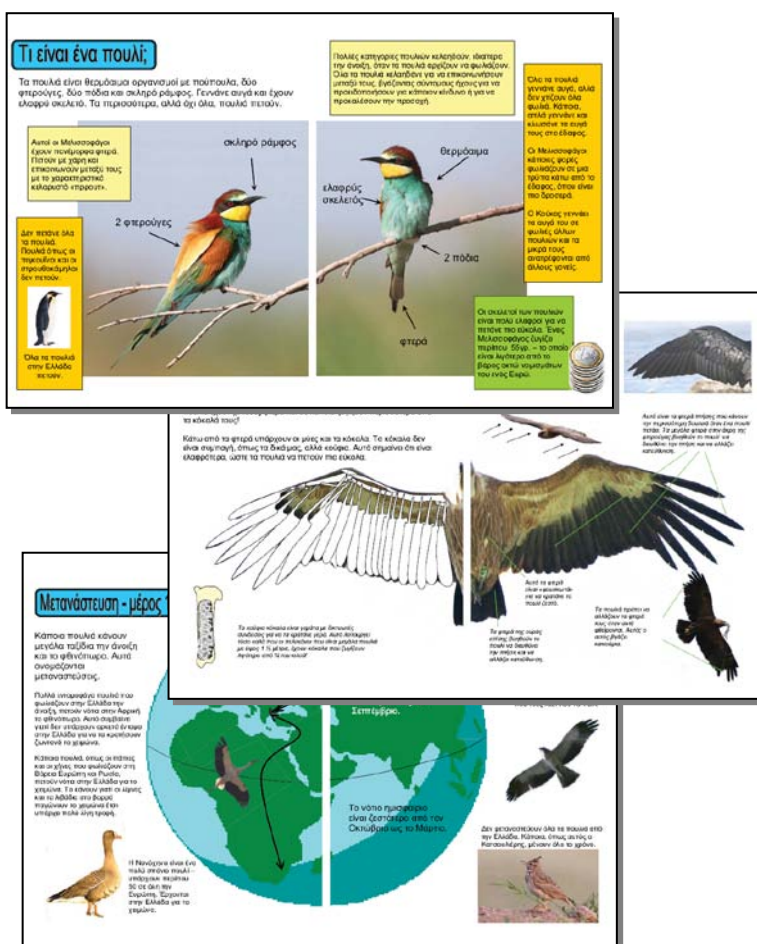
Please note that **all proceeds** from all editions of the book are given directly to bird conservation projects in Greece. Remaining copies of the book can be ordered online from www.birdwing.eu



New Birdwing book to raise funds for birds in Greece!

We have written a new children's bird book and in collaboration with the Evros Delta Visitor Centre it has been translated and is being published in Greek.

Many visitor centres across the region expressed concern over a lack of suitable and interesting material for children to use to learn about birds and the environment and so we set about writing this book! The book is a guide to birds, their life-styles, features and habitats.



We hope to develop further supporting material in the coming months for schools and children to use when they visit the centres.

The book will be available from our website www.birdwing.eu shortly. We will send out an email to let you know when copies are available.



Birdwing Wildbird Photo Competition

We are pleased to announce the **Birdwing Wildbird Photo Competition** for our members! Have you taken a photograph of a bird in Greece that you think would stand a chance of winning?

The winning photo will be chosen by our judges on February 14th and will be displayed on our website and in our next newsletter. The winning photographer will receive a pair of **Bushnell 10x32 Powerview (Roof prism) binoculars** (RRP £88.64). These lightweight binoculars are perfect for slipping in your pocket when out with your camera or just on a walk!

Please read and comply with the rules below.



Rules:

1. The competition is only open to Birdwing Membership Subscribers (if we have sent you this newsletter to your email address then you are a member already!).
2. Only 1 photo entry per person. The photo must be of a bird taken in Greece. It must not be a captive, or injured bird. The entrant should be the sole author and copyright owner of the image.
3. To pay your entry fee (minimum of £5) go to www.birdwing.eu and click the Donate button. Please provide your name, address and email. Please note that all proceeds go towards helping birds in Greece so please be generous, if you can.
4. Once the entry fee has been paid, please email your photo (no greater than 6MB in size) to BWPC@birdwing.eu. Please give your name and say when and where in Greece the photo was taken. The closing date for entries is: **1st February 2010**.
5. We will notify our members of the winner and runners up before the end of February.
6. By entering, you agree to allow the photo to be displayed, with full credit, on our website and in our next newsletter.

Good luck!

Our thanks to RP for generously donating the prize.

Winter 2009



SPP news

The Society for the Protection of Prespa (SPP) has recently published the "Prespa Walking Guide", to help visitors explore and find their way in the beautiful and diverse National Park. Valuable information on the ecology, history, nature, architecture and human presence are revealed by the authors with simplicity and scientific accuracy, with the use of rich photographic material.

Depending on your style or mood you can choose one of the 14 trails and routes and discover the beauties of the area on your own.

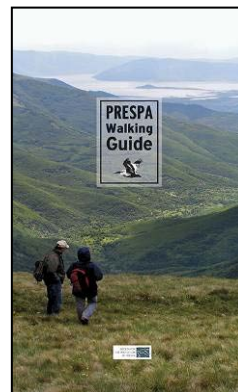


Photo - SPP ARCHIVE /M.GLETOS

The edition includes a guide and four detailed maps (1:25.000) and is available in Greek and English and costs € 20. Funds raised from the "Walking Guide" support the actions of the SPP. The SPP is an environmental organization located in the town of Agios Germanos, with the mission of protecting the natural and cultural heritage of Prespa.

Where to buy:

- Information Centre for the Transboundary Prespa Park in Agios Germanos, Prespa, Greece
- If overseas and willing to pay postage and bank transfer charges, then the guide can be also purchased via telephone (+30) 23850 51211, fax (+30) 23850 51343 or e-mail: spp@line.gr



And finally thanks ...

As always we would like to thank all those who helped us to produce this newsletter. Thanks to **Marianna Vlassi** and **Irene Koutseri** from Prespa, to **Gordon Ramel**, **Eva Stets**, **Aris Christidis**, **Dirk De Mesel**, **Theodoros Naziridis**, **Angeliki Dimaki** and all the staff members at the Kerkini, Evros and Axios-Loudias-Aliakmon Centres who have provided us with information. Thanks again to the people who have donated money and to anyone else we have failed to mention.

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