

# BirdWING Newsletter

Issue 14 Winter/Spring 2013

In this issue news from:

- Evros Delta
- Lake Kerkini
- Prespa Lakes
- Koronia/Volvi
- Axios/Aliakmon/Loudias

[www.birdwing.eu](http://www.birdwing.eu)

Bird Watching In Northern Greece



**Wishing you a happy and successful 2013...**

*..... a year in which we hope more and more people may become aware of the importance of the environment and birdlife in Greece*



## Dalmatian Pelican Project

At the time of year when Dalmatian Pelicans (*Pelicanus crispus*) begin to look their best and photographers flock to Greece to get fantastic shots of them with their red bills, we are pleased to announce that work has begun on the Dalmatian Pelican Project at the National Park of the Evros Delta.

Read more about this on page 2

## Birdwing Birdbrain competition winners

Since our last newsletter we have announced the winners of last issue's Birdwing Birdbrain Competition.

Congratulations to Tasos Bounas, Otto Samwald and Leo Tukker. In this issue we include a feature about the first-prize winner, Tasos Bounas from Ioannina, Greece. Tasos, who wins 5 nights at a luxury hotel at Lake Kerkini, is a young Greek wildlife photographer.



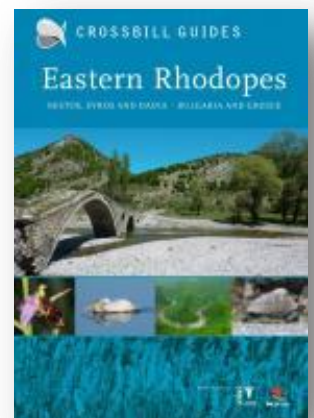
Read more about him and find out the answers to the competition on page 3.



## Eastern Rhodopes New Crossbill Guide

Birdwing are working with the publisher Crossbill Guides to assist them their book 'Eastern Rhodopes' due out this March.

The Crossbill Guides Foundation is a non-profit organisation dedicated to increasing public involvement with nature conservation.



With high quality nature travel guidebooks they aim to show just how beautiful European natural areas are. The Eastern Rhodopes guide includes information on plants, reptiles, animals, birds and the general ecology of the region, covering both the Greek and the Bulgarian sides of the Rhodope mountains.



## Dalmatian Pelican Project at the Evros Delta



The two-phase project, put forward by Birdwing, that was approved by the board of the National Park of the Evros Delta last year to encourage breeding of Dalmatian Pelicans (*Pelicanus crispus*) has begun.

In late November an area on the chosen island site in Drana lagoon was cleared of existing vegetation, nesting material was provided and several 'nests' were created to give the pelicans every idea of what we would like to happen next! The area is being monitored during this phase to see what level of interest is shown by the birds. Further nesting material will be provided in the event of strong winds in the area.



Keep up-to-date at [www.birdwing.eu](http://www.birdwing.eu) or at [www.evros-delta.gr](http://www.evros-delta.gr)



Birdwing relies upon your support for funding such projects and if you wish to make a donation towards this please go to [www.birdwing.eu](http://www.birdwing.eu) and click the Donate button.

**Donate**



## New observation towers at Lake Kerkini

Four new viewing platforms for public use have been completed at several locations around Lake Kerkini, together with shelters and display boards. Organised by the Management Body of the National Park and funded by the A.G. Leventis Foundation ([www.leventisfoundation.org](http://www.leventisfoundation.org)), it is hoped that the platforms encourage people to stop and appreciate the beauty of nature around the lake.

They have been named Kerkini, Sea Eagle, Black Kite and Lithotopos and are placed along the Lithotopos-Kerkini road (one near the dam at Lithotopos, one at the harbour of Kerkini and two in between.)





# Tasos Bounas

Tasos Bounas, the winner of the first prize in the Birdwing Birdbrain competition, is a young Greek biologist and wildlife photographer.



Tasos was born at Ioannina and is 25 years old. Since being a child he has always had an interest in nature (especially mountains) and birds (of course!), reptiles and amphibians. In the last 5 years he has been photographing and birdwatching. Tasos is involved in running a website called [www.wildmoments.gr](http://www.wildmoments.gr) with some of his birder-friends, Dimitris Vavylis and Babis Tsilianidis.

Some of Tasos' photos are shown below.



Water Pipit (*Anthus spinoletta*)



Grey Phalarope (*Phalaropus fulicarius*)

Tasos' future plans in the field of photography are to make photos of birds in their habitat with the use of wide angle lenses and also to take more behaviour shots.



Tasos will be visiting Lake Kerkini and staying at the Hotel Limneo ([www.limneokerkini.gr](http://www.limneokerkini.gr)), where many of the world's award-winning wildlife photographers stay when visiting the Lake, including Arthur Morris, Bence Mate, Steve Mills and Robert O'Toole.



1. What is the Latin name of the heron seen for the first time in Greece and in Europe this year?  
***Ardea ardesiaca* (Black Heron)**

2. What is the bird in this photo which was photographed at the Evros Delta in May?  
**Short-toed Eagle (*Circaetus gallicus*)**



3. Which bird bred for the first time at Lake Kerkini this year?  
**Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*)**

4. Which falcon, of which Greece holds the majority of the world population, delays breeding until August in order to feed its young on migrating songbirds?  
**Eleonora's Falcon (*Falco eleonore*)**

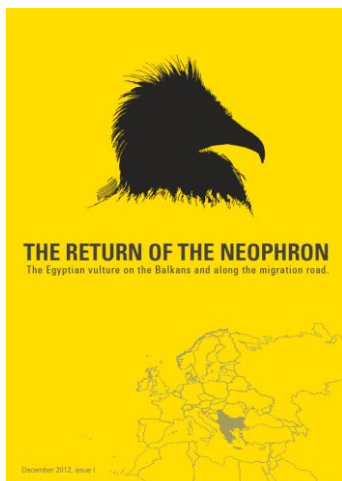
5. In which two wetland locations in Northern Greece has Birdwing financed tern rafts?  
**Lake Kerkini & the Axios Delta**

## The Return of the Neophron

Tasos Bounas (see previous page) is one of many Greeks involved in the Bulgarian/Greek project 'The Return of the Neophron', a cross-boundary mission with the goal of preventing the extinction of the Egyptian Vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*) in Bulgaria and Greece.

[www.lifeneophron.eu/en/about-the-project.html](http://www.lifeneophron.eu/en/about-the-project.html)

The Life+ project began just over a year ago with a large team including those from WWF Greece, HOS, BSPB and the RSPB. It has several types of actions, conservation, research and communication, more of which can be read about on their excellent website. The team's first newsletter has been produced outlining the project during 2012.



The English newsletter is available online and can be downloaded as a pdf from:

[www.lifeneophron.eu/en/newsletter.html](http://www.lifeneophron.eu/en/newsletter.html)

## '2013 – Open up to nature'

On our travels we meet many people who share our views about the importance of people opening themselves to nature and seeing it with joy and amazement. As an increasing number of people seem to be losing touch with the natural world around them we want to encourage more people to engage with it and to value it.



Stefan Boensch, a German-born wildlife artist based in Budapest, Hungary, shares these views. He is convinced that we 'all can open our hearts and feel the joy of being touched by the minute but ever-so-wonderful surprises of nature'. See more of his paintings at <http://stefanboensch.de/en/>

This is also a theme close to Birdwing member Julian Hoffman's heart. In his award-winning book *The Small Heart of Things: Being at Home in a Beckoning World*, due out in September 2013, he reminds us we are not strangers in the world if we remain open to awe. Read more at:

<http://julian-hoffman.com>

One way of experiencing nature if you are unable to visit a location is through sharing and viewing photos and videos. Why not spend a few moments looking at videos of Lake Kerkini or the Evros Delta on YouTube? Or share some of your own photos of birds and wildlife through social networking sites such as Facebook or Twitter?

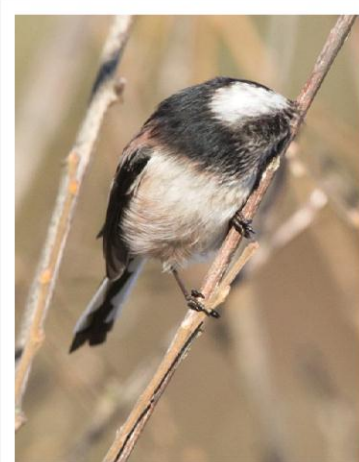


Let's try to encourage more people to appreciate the wonders of the natural world in Greece.

## This issue's quiz!

Can you identify these two birds taken by Steve Mills?

Bird A seems camera-shy and Bird B is making a splash!



Email your entries to us at [quiz@birdwing.eu](mailto:quiz@birdwing.eu) with your answers.

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## Spring 2013 wildlife tours – helping birds in Northern Greece



**Greenwings** wildlife and photo tours are offering trips to Greece this spring, focusing on birds and butterflies of the region in collaboration with Birdwing.

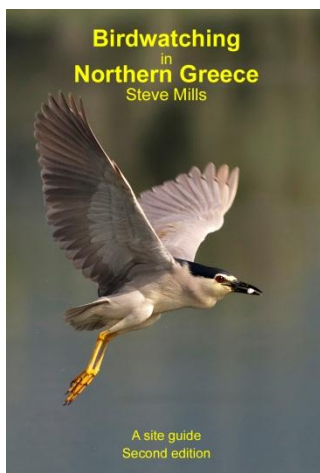
They will donate a proportion of the profits to Birdwing and to Butterfly Conservation. We, Steve and Hilary, hope to be involved with some guiding, and trips will visit some of the main sites, such as Kerkini, Evros, Prespa and Dadia.

For more information see:  
[www.greenwings.co](http://www.greenwings.co)  
or contact us at  
[info@birdwing.eu](mailto:info@birdwing.eu)  
with any questions.



## Birdwatching in Northern Greece site-guide.

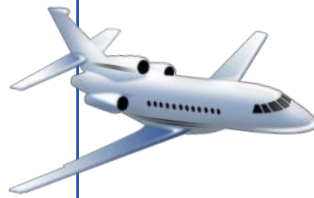
Don't forget, if you're travelling independently to Northern Greece, you need this book!



Go to  
[www.birdwing.eu/  
birdwing-books](http://www.birdwing.eu/birdwing-books)

and buy your copy there.

Remember, all monies raised go directly towards helping birds in Northern Greece. Quality information **and** you're helping the birds!



## Changes to 2013 UK flights to Thessaloniki SKG



Some changes have occurred this year in schedules to Thessaloniki with **British Airways** ceasing their winter scheduled flights. They will continue to fly direct from London Gatwick during the summer only.



**Easyjet** continue to fly from Gatwick to Thessaloniki several times a week all year round. They have also announced that they are intending to begin flights to Thessaloniki from **Manchester** this summer! This will be a welcome announcement to those in the north of the UK!



**Ryanair** has flights now, all year round, from London Stansted.



From May onwards charter companies, such as Thomson, fly direct to a range of Northern Greek destinations, including Thessaloniki, Preveza and Kavala.

**Gourmet Birds** tours, run by David Tomlinson, have been supporting Birdwing through their donations for many years. They are offering a range of tours around the world, including Lake Kerkini this spring. Find out more at [www.gourmetbirds.co.uk](http://www.gourmetbirds.co.uk)

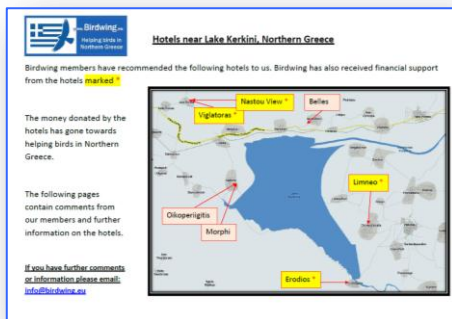


## Going to Lake Kerkini?

If you are travelling to Lake Kerkini independently and are looking for a hotel, we have a leaflet giving our supporters' feedback on local hotels and providing information about those hotels that have supported Birdwing.

Go to our Resources page on our new website and download the pdf leaflet. If you have further information on any hotels you have stayed at, either at Kerkini or elsewhere, please let us know so that we can keep the leaflet as updated as possible and create others.

[www.birdwing.eu/resources](http://www.birdwing.eu/resources)



## Donations to Birdwing

In recent weeks and months we have received generous donations to Birdwing from a number of our supporters – including Roy C., Edward C., Pierre V., Meriel W-W. and others who have asked to remain anonymous.

Some have donated using a debit or credit card, or using Paypal via the Donate button on our website and others have made a simple bank transfer, such as using BACS.



If you are interested in making a donation directly from a bank, please email us and we will send you all the necessary details. It's easy to do online or through a bank. If you are located in Greece donations can also be made to a Greek account, if you prefer.

Without your continued donations, however small, Birdwing can't undertake new projects to help the birds and their habitats in Northern Greece. Thanks for your support!



## Editor's comment

*Time and Technology is always marching on.*



When we set up Birdwing less than 5 years ago with a handful of email addresses and an idea for writing a site guide, we never expected the speed in which the online and social networking world would change. With a growing list of more than 800 supporters, trying to keep up with newsletters, Twitter feeds, website blogs, Facebook pages and groups and so on is quite a challenge, let alone producing electronic materials or developing apps.

If we want more people to engage with the natural world, ironically, for many people, we need to initiate this through the virtual world. Young people's interests grow from what they see in front of them so we need to spark their interest through images and news online.

Times have changed, and we are aware that we need to be exploiting the vast online opportunities as much as we can. As two self-employed people trying to do this in our free time, Hilary and I often feel opportunities are missed. It is to this end that we are asking for assistance. We are looking for volunteers. Can you help us?

Are you able to help us with:

- periodically posting news and/or photos of birds, wildlife and nature on Facebook or Twitter
- supporting us by letting us know of bird sightings you've seen in Greece
- helping us to develop simple apps for visitors to Northern Greece
- making videos of birds in Greece to post on our website.

Any other ideas of ways you can help? Let us know at [info@birdwing.eu](mailto:info@birdwing.eu)

Let's make 2013 a year to remember, when all of us play our part in encouraging more people to consider the wonders of the environment and to do what they can to protect and preserve it.

*Steve Mills*



## Winter bird news

A record of 4 Common Cranes (*Grus grus*) in December was unusual as far west as the **Axios** region. Other notable sightings there included an impressive 1697 Flamingos (*Phoenicopterus ruber*), 80 Dalmatian Pelicans (*Pelicanus crispus*), 30 Spoonbills (*Platalea leucorodia*) and 54 Great White Egrets (*Ardea alba*). Raptors included 4 Spotted Eagles (*Aquila clanga*), 39 Buzzards (*Buteo buteo*), 17 Marsh and 3 Hen Harriers (*Circus aeruginosus* and *C. cyaneus*).



Two unusual birds were at **Kerkini** in November - a Black-throated Diver (*Gavia arctica*) and, more particularly, a male Snow Bunting (*Plectrophenax nivalis*) which was the first record for the area and only the fifth for Greece.



Raptors in the area included five eagle species, with 16 Spotted (*Aquila clanga*), 2 Golden (*A. chrysaetos*), 2 Imperial (*A. heliaca*), 2 White-tailed (*Haliaeetus albicilla*) and a late-staying Lesser Spotted (*Aquila pomarina*). In addition to these raptors are Marsh and Hen Harriers (*Circus aeruginosus* and *C. cyaneus*), Sparrowhawk (*Accipiter nisus*), Goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis*), Peregrine (*Falco peregrinus*) and Merlin (*Falco columbarius*).

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The regular flock of Lesser White-fronted Geese (*Anser erythropus*) - virtually the whole of the European population - arrived at **Kerkini** on November 11th, this year totalling 56, and they stayed until December 21<sup>st</sup>, when they went missing for over two weeks.

Usually, on leaving Kerkini, they head south-east to the **Evros Delta**. This time there were no records of them until January 9<sup>th</sup> when 48 were seen at the Evros, rising to 61 the next day. It would be interesting to know whether they had been on the Evros unobserved or whether another stopover was involved. Let's hope for the future of this extremely vulnerable population that they manage to avoid the guns at Evros during their stay. For more information on the Lesser White-fronted Goose go to Facebook at:



[www.facebook.com/LesserWhitefrontedGoose](https://www.facebook.com/LesserWhitefrontedGoose)

or visit [www.piskulka.net](http://www.piskulka.net)

Other **Evros** records around the turn of the year include 26,000 Teal (*Anas crecca*), 18,000 Mallard (*A. platyrhynchos*) and 3500 Wigeon (*A. penelope*) on Drana and Paloukia, over 2100 Flamingos (*Phoenicopterus ruber*), around 1300 Whooper and Bewick's Swans (*Cygnus cygnus* and *C. columbianus*), 9 White-tailed (*Haliaeetus albicilla*) and 14 Spotted Eagles (*Aquila clanga*) and 50 Marsh Harriers (*Circus aeruginosus*).

There were also reports of 10-11 Little Bustard (*Tetrax tetrax*) on the delta and of Red-breasted Geese (*Branta ruficollis*) in Dimitriadis meadows feeding with the other geese.

In late December in the area of **Koronia Lake** there were over 1000 White-fronted Geese (*Anser albrifrons*) and a spectacular single flock of 7500 Shelduck (*Tadorna tadorna*)!!



Thanks to the Evros, Kerkini, Koronia and Axios Management Bodies for providing additional data. Photos: Steve Mills.

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# Operation Greylag at Prespa



The Greylag Geese (*Anser anser*) of Prespa are the only viable breeding population of the species in Greece, which makes them very important for the country. At an international level, these birds are at the southernmost range of the species in Europe and are also one of the few non-migratory Greylag Geese populations in the world.

A study of the species has recently been initiated by the Society for the Protection of Prespa (SPP) in collaboration with the Dutch Centre for Field Ornithology, the **SOVON** Institute, and with the support of the MAVA and Bodossaki Foundations. The aim of the project is to study the ecology of these geese in order to develop appropriate measures for their protection.

In addition, it is hoped that the project will provide answers to crucial questions, such as, what factors affect reproductive success, mortality rates and the survival of chicks? What is the correlation between reproductive success and the quality of the grass the geese feed on? Are the movements of the geese only local or do they leave Prespa, and when does this happen? What is the population trend and its distribution, and what are the seasonal patterns of activity? Are Prespa's geese a genetically isolated population?

To answer these questions the SPP and team of specialists from the Netherlands, needed to ring the birds and fit neckbands on them. They also fitted GPS transmitters to some to collect data on the distribution of the species within and outside the Prespa basin. One of the major difficulties encountered in the implementation of this project was how to "capture" the geese, and it was decided that the best way to achieve this was through the use of cannon-nets which can be fired very quickly and can cover a distance of 12 metres. Cannon-nets had never been tried in Greece before and the members of the team had mixed feelings about the technique, spending three anxious days testing their patience in attempts to catch the birds, until the operation was eventually completed successfully on October 11th 2012, when 57 greylag geese finally awaited them beneath the nets! Out of a total of 32 male birds which were caught, four were fitted with GPS transmitters with the codes H00, H01, H02 and H03. Since then, the team has been collecting the information conveyed from the birds and processing the data.

Follow them at: [www.spp.gr](http://www.spp.gr)



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## Living in Greece?

This is the time of year to put up nest-boxes on trees nearby or attached to your house.

What better way to engage in the natural world than inviting some birds to nest close to your home?



You could make your own very cheaply - Perhaps you have children and could involve them in this? See the simple instructions at:

[www.bto.org/nbw/make.htm](http://www.bto.org/nbw/make.htm)

Alternatively nest-boxes of many types can be purchased from global companies, such as Amazon, with European or world-wide delivery. You could even get up-close to the birds with an in-box camera, such as those at [www.ukwildlifecameras.co.uk](http://www.ukwildlifecameras.co.uk) who offer Worldwide delivery for under £5.

*Living elsewhere but with friends in Greece? - Why not send them a nest-box as a gift? The more breeding places for birds in gardens and parks in Greece the better!*

If you know a child who lives in Northern Greece, Birdwing will send a free nest-box to the first three children whose addresses are emailed to us at [nestbox@birdwing.eu](mailto:nestbox@birdwing.eu)



## And finally thanks ...

Thanks to **Lia Papadranga**, **Eva Katrana**, **Christos Panagiotidis** from Axios, **Angeliki Dimaki**, **Kostas Papadopoulos**, **Theodoros Naziridis** at Kerkini, the staff of the SPP from Prespa, **Eleni Makrigianni** and **Ioannidis Panagiotis** at the Evros Delta, and all the staff members at the Centres across Northern Greece who have provided us with information. Also a big thank you to those who have made donations to Birdwing in recent weeks – we really appreciate your generosity and support.

And, as always, thanks to anyone else we have failed to mention.

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