

BirdWING Newsletter

Issue 15 Summer 2013

In this issue news from:

- Axios/Aliakmon/Loudias
- Evros Delta
- Lake Kerkini
- Prespa Lakes
- Vistonidis/Ismarida/Nestos

www.birdwing.eu

Bird Watching In Northern Greece



Birdwing news

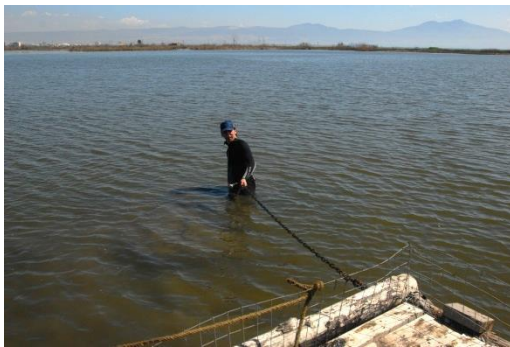
Spring is such a busy time in the bird-world and also too in Birdwing's world! So many new visitors wanting to come to Northern Greece, looking for help and information, new projects under discussion, doing some guiding with bird tours, meeting supporters and new contacts and dealing with new sections of our website. We're looking forward to the less frenetic summer months!



Spring raft repairs

Prior to the breeding season repairs were made to the Birdwing tern raft in the Gallikos estuary at the Axios – Loudias – Aliakmonas National Park.

Strong winds had caused some damage to the raft for Common Terns (*Sterna hirundo*) and it was successfully repaired in April.



Thanks to those at the region's National Park Management Body.

The raft at Mandraki, Lake Kerkini has been successfully used again this spring and plans are being discussed about enlarging it or building several more rafts.

Discussions have also taken place about a possible site for a new raft in the Porto Lagos area and we are hoping that permissions will be granted to allow one to be put in place ready for next spring. Read more about our plans for this and other projects in that region on pages 5 and 6.

Guiding with Greenwings

During May and June we have been raising money for Birdwing by guiding visitors from the UK with Greenwings Wildlife Holidays. The tours have been well received and Matt and Julian from Greenwings (www.greenwings.co) and many of their clients have generously donated to Birdwing.



During May, together with generous donations from our regular supporters, over 1000€ was given to Birdwing and a large number of the site guides were sold. We are now looking towards setting up a range of new projects for 2013/4/5.

Pelican Project

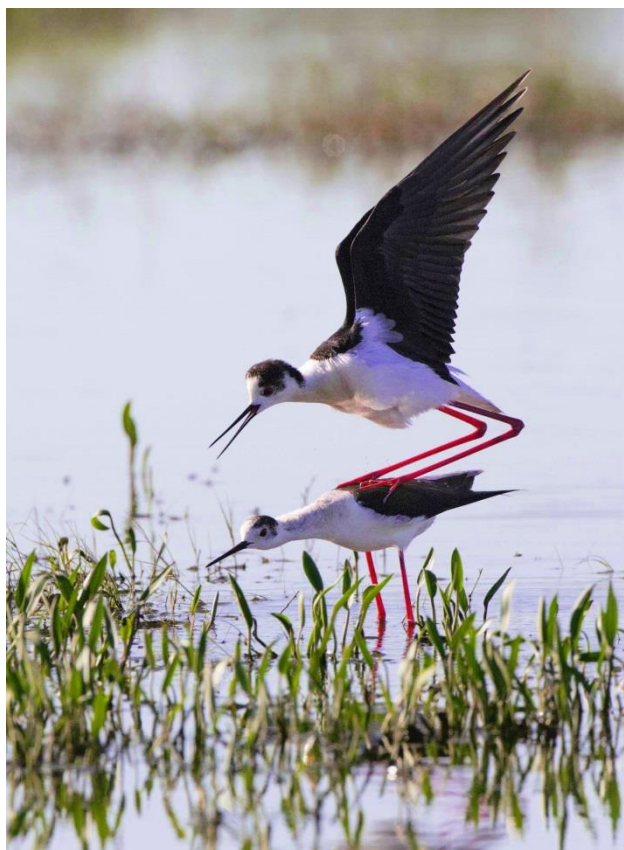


In our last newsletter details of the first phase of our Dalmatian Pelican Project at the Evros Delta were given. In January, due to some unforeseen adverse weather conditions, the area cleared of vegetation became flooded. As a result, it has been decided to arrange for a small raised platform to be put in place for next year. Read more details on page 5.

Spring photo gallery



A fantastic display of fishing pelicans and cormorants at Lake Kerkini (photo: Julian from Greenwings). Below mating Black-winged Stilts (Photo: Steve Mills)



Common tern (*Sterna hirundo*) (Photo: Alexander Wirth)



Dalmatian Pelicans near their nesting platform at Lake Kerkini. (Photo: Alexander Wirth)



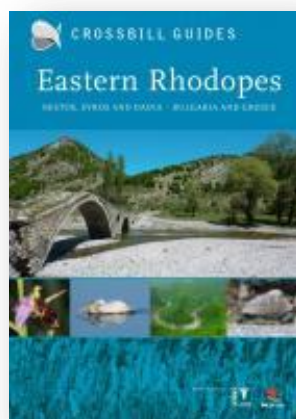
Stunning Glossy Ibis at Anthia Marshes. (Photo: Steve Mills)



Eastern Rhodopes Crossbill Guide

The new Crossbill Guide to the Eastern Rhodopes is now available.

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.

To buy, go to:

www.nhbs.com/eastern_rhodopes_tef_no_184622.html

Tragic illegal killing events this spring

Several terrible incidents occurred in Northern Greece this spring, involving illegal killing of wild animals and birds.

In one single incident, 5% of the breeding population of Egyptian Vultures (*Neophron percnopterus*) was lost in Greece. One of the birds killed, known as Lazarus, had survived a poisoning incident last year and had been satellite tagged. Read more at

www.lifeneophron.eu/en/news-view/150.html

Another incident occurred in March, near the mouth of the Nestos, where two Spotted Eagles and two Common Buzzards with a dead jackal were found poisoned.

Also in February a person was charged with shooting dead at least six Dalmatian Pelicans at a fishery near Porto Lagos.

The fight against poison and other illegal killing is not an easy one and certainly needs the joint efforts of all parties involved including livestock breeders, hunters, public authorities and so on. Unfortunately, this is not the case in the present period in Greece, where authorities together with society, seem to be indifferent towards the problem.

Please support the HOS's appeal on the following page and work towards fighting one of the worst scourges for wildlife conservation.

New Birdwing videos to promote the natural wonders of Northern Greece

Birdwing supporters, **Alexander and Josef Wirth**, have been filming and editing new videos to promote the natural wonders of Northern Greece. In response to an appeal in our last newsletter, to encourage more people to engage with the natural world, Alex and Josef from Germany, spent several weeks in Northern Greece recording footage and have since produced a number of excellent videos.

The first of these videos, promoting Lake Kerkini, will be viewable on our website and on YouTube shortly.



Check out our new YouTube channel at:
www.youtube.com/user/Birdwingeu

Summer 2013

Egyptian Vulture programme

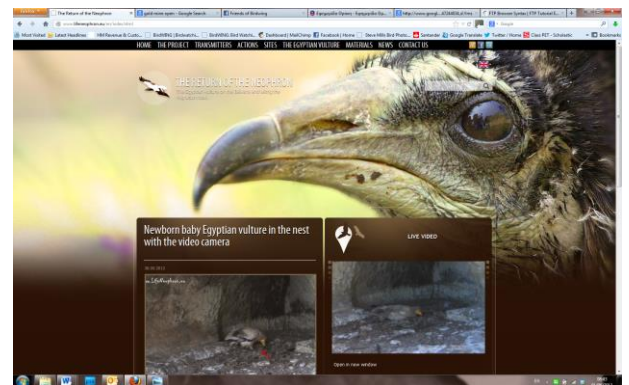
In our last newsletter we highlighted the excellent work of the new 'The Return of the Neophron' project, a cross-boundary mission with the goal of preventing the extinction of the Egyptian Vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*) in Bulgaria and Greece.

The excellent work being done continues with extensive monitoring, nest guarding and education awareness programmes.

A live video feed shows the nest of one of the breeding pairs being monitored as part of the project.

Keep up-to-date at

www.lifeneophron.eu/en/



Volunteers for nest guarding during the summer months in Bulgaria are also being sought. Go to:
www.lifeneophron.eu/en/news-view/164.html if you can help.



We look forward to bringing you more of these videos and would like to thank Josef and Alex for their continued commitment to Birdwing.

If you can help Birdwing in any way yourself, we would love to hear from you.



Email us at:
info@birdwing.eu

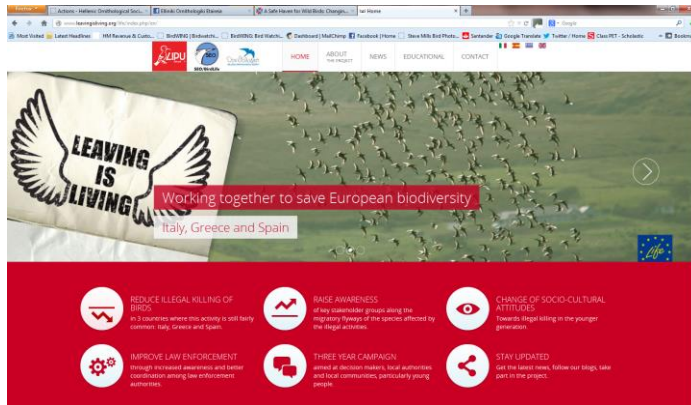
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Hellenic Ornithological Society appeal

The HOS, in conjunction with Birdlife organisations in Spain and Italy are running a campaign called:



A Safe Haven for Wild Birds: Changing attitudes towards illegal killing



The three-year campaign aims to eliminate illegal killing of wild birds during their spring migration journey through Spain, Greece and Italy. The appeal, which we hope will be widely supported, plans to involve exhibitions, educational materials, workshops and a documentary aimed at highlighting the illegal practices.

The specific objectives of the project are:

1. *Raise awareness of key stakeholder groups* (local communities, local authorities, hunters, local authorities and the wider public) along the migratory flyways of the species affected by the illegal activities, with regards to the effects of illegal killing of birds on local and European biodiversity;
2. *Change of socio-cultural attitudes towards illegal killing in the younger generation;*
3. *Improve law enforcement, through increased awareness and better coordination among law enforcement authorities;*

The campaign's website it found at:

www.leavingisliving.org/life/index.php/en/

Contributions can be made at:

www.indiegogo.com/projects/a-safe-haven-for-wild-birds-changing-attitudes-towards-illegal-killing

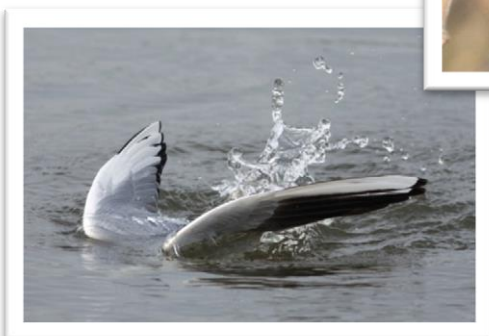
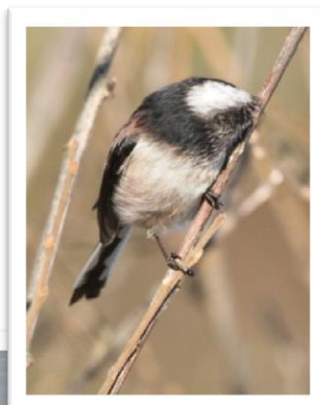
Please support this important appeal.

Last issue's quiz winners!

Bird A was a Long-tailed Tit (*Aegithalos caudatus*) and bird B was a Black-headed Gull (*Larus ridibundus*)

Congratulations to:

Rosen Kostadinov
John Barclay
Marco Crivellari
Katherine Kyparissou
Leo Tukker
Arno van Berge Henegouwen

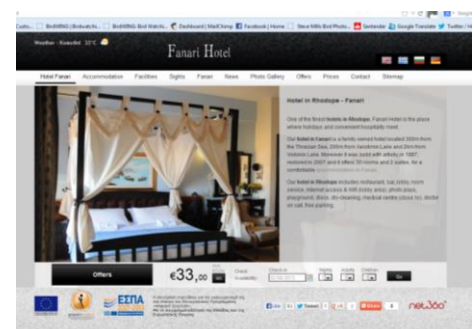


Fanari Hotel

Thanks to Athanasios Tsoukas, of the Fanari Hotel, for his offer of support for Birdwing. His hotel is just 2km from Lake Vistonidis and is 300m from the sea.

If you're planning a visit to the Porto Lagos or Ismarida area this is ideally located.

www.fanari-hotel.gr



This edition of the newsletter finds Birdwing involved in several initiatives, both new and ongoing.

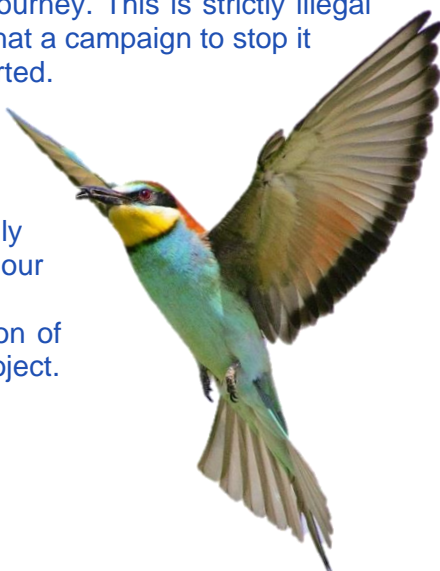


The project to encourage Dalmatian Pelicans to consider breeding again at the Evros Delta was hit by higher than usual water levels last winter which caused the chosen area, cleared of vegetation, to become flooded. There was therefore no opportunity for the birds to have a look at the area. During the autumn we are intending to place a wooden raft on part of the space which will hopefully prevent this washout from recurring.

Several projects have been discussed with the Management Body at Porto Lagos, including a raft for terns, a fence to prevent feral dogs and jackals from reaching an island where Greater Flamingos often show a willingness to attempt to breed and the provision of some nesting sites for a small population of Lesser Kestrels. All of these are on the table and await permission from the Management Body.

In addition, the Hellenic Ornithological Society have begun a campaign to put an end to illegal shooting of spring migrants as they pass through Greece (see page 4). Imagine it – you're a bird that has survived the journey to Africa last autumn and have begun the trip back to Europe. You avoid dying from exhaustion or predation as you travel thousands of miles, crossing the Sahara and then the Mediterranean, before making landfall in Greece, desperate to refuel. A safe haven? Protection afforded by EU law? Unfortunately not. Thousands of migrants are shot daily or poisoned on the last leg of their journey. This is strictly illegal and we believe that a campaign to stop it should be supported.

As a result Birdwing has supported this initiative financially and have shown our commitment by making a donation of **1000 €** to this project.



This spring we teamed up with Greenwings, a British tour group company with a strong interest in conservation and did some days guiding for them. This introduced new people to Birdwing and brought us new income from both the company itself and individual group members.

Finally, thanks to all those who have generously supported our efforts financially and practically in recent months, including Roger and Joy, Heidi, Greenwings, Terry and Susie, Malcolm and Pam, David Tomlinson from Gourmet Tours, Alex and Josef, Charles, Nikos and others who wished to remain anonymous.

Many thanks to you all.

Steve Mills

This issue's quiz!

Can you identify Bird A or Bird B or both? Both birds have been seen this spring in Northern Greece. Let us know your ideas.

Bird A



Bird B




Email your entries to quiz@birdwing.eu

Birdwing's plans in the Porto Lagos region


We have been making plans for future projects designed to help Lesser Kestrels, Flamingos and Common Terns in the Thrace region, together with members of staff from the Porto Lagos centre. Discussions have taken place and the necessary permissions are being sought. If approved, it is hoped that three projects might begin.

A Lesser Kestrel project in the Kalaokastro area is being developed, and a proposal has been written with a view to monitoring numbers and breeding locations and potentially providing nest-boxes.


Proposal to expand the breeding colony of Lesser Kestrels (*Falco naumanni*) near Kalamakastro, Thrace, Greece



Background:
The population of Lesser Kestrels throughout Europe has shown a general decline since the 1960s. This has been echoed throughout Greece where, between 2004 and 2009, the population size was estimated to be approximately 3152 with a large concentration in Thessaly with 2452 individuals (see appendix 3).
The combination of modern agricultural methods and the use of pesticides in the breeding areas have combined to reduce the availability of the main prey on which it depends. Other factors involved in the breeding areas include a reduction in the availability of nest sites as old buildings are either renovated or fall down. The Lesser Kestrel spends the winter in Africa where it faces further threats, including drought and poisoning as locust swarms, on which it feeds, are sprayed with pesticide.



Breeding:
Lesser Kestrels arrive in Greece in late March and early April. Males generally arrive first and immediately turn their attention to finding a suitable nesting site. The species forms loose colonies, frequently around human habitation, and nest in the walls or roofs of old buildings such as houses, stables and barns, as well as in tree holes and rocky outcrops. In Greece eggs are laid around the middle of April and the clutch size is usually between 3 and 5 eggs. The females undertake most of the incubation, which lasts around 28 days. The young birds leave the nest after a further 28 days.
The birds disperse from the breeding areas at the beginning of August but the migration from Greece to the wintering grounds in Africa begins in late August.



Food:
In Greece grasshoppers, crickets (Orthoptera) and beetles are the main prey. Small mammals and reptiles are also occasionally taken. It forages in steppe-like habitats, natural and managed grasslands, and non-intensive cultivation.

Current situation at Kalamakastro:
The only recent data is from 2008-2009 when the population was estimated to be around 15 pairs.

In other parts of Europe, Lesser Kestrels have successfully taken to breeding in wooden nest-boxes and this is our hope for the falling population near Lake Ismarida. Currently it is vital that Lesser Kestrel numbers are monitored in the area to provide base-line data.

A second proposal for a raft for Common Terns has been discussed and permissions sought for a potential site. Thirdly, it is hoped that measures can be taken to protect potential breeding grounds for Flamingos. In recent years it is believed that Flamingos have attempted to nest in one of the lagoons near Fanari. The construction of a fence along the edge of the lagoon could prevent feral dogs and jackals from reaching the nesting sites and could provide more protection for the area.

If you would like to hear more news of these developments and the implementation of these projects, you can read more at the Birdwing Partners' area of our website.

Mobile apps

In response to last issue's appeal we have been encouraged to receive help from a consultant who has offered to help us in our quest to produce mobile apps for visitors to Northern Greece.



We are very grateful to Charles Outhier for his support and we hope to be able to pursue this further to create mobile apps using DIY platforms for those with low budgets and limited technical expertise!

If you are able to help us with this or are interested in collaborating with us to produce visitor apps to your region, please let us know.



Natural Greece

A new ecotourism website - Natural Greece - has been set up to promote sustainable tourism. We, at Birdwing, hope to develop and strengthen the links we have with Natural Greece as they seek to make tourism a tool for conservation here in Greece.

At Natural Greece they celebrate the ecological and cultural diversity of Greece and aim for travel with low environmental impact. Nature supports an almost unending abundance of variety and diversity. A visit to Greece with that same flair for diversity results in unique travel experiences that benefit communities, nature conservation and the environment.

www.natural-greece.gr/en/home

Evros Delta changes

In recent weeks there have been a number of changes to the permissions required when visiting the Evros Delta. For some time all foreign visitors to the Eastern military side of the Delta have required a permit and this continues to be the case, although the permit is now translated into English. In addition to this it seems that a second permit is needed if access to more sensitive sites is required, in particular areas close to the Evros River. This apparently applies to all visitors, Greek or foreign. Also access via Feres is now restricted. For more news on this, contact the visitor centre: info@evros-delta.gr

Other news is that demolition notices have been served on some illegal huts in the delta. Many were illegally built some years ago and are used by hunters and fishermen in the area but their use causes much disturbance to birds in the core protected area.



Have you been to Northern Greece this year?

If you are one of the many people who have been fortunate to enjoy the wonderful spring in Northern Greece for bird and nature watching, we would love to hear about it! The more information that we receive, about what you saw, your opinions of hotels, villages and restaurants, problems encountered together with any trip reports, and so on, the more we can help and pass on information to new visitors.

At Birdwing we strongly believe that eco-tourism is an important part of protecting valuable biodiversity and we aim to help and promote Northern Greece for being the wonderful wildlife destination it is.

We look forward to hearing from you. Please write to Hilary at: info@birdwing.eu

Many thanks,
Hilary



Wildlife websites to watch

Keep up-to-date with the efforts of other organisations working to promote and protect wildlife in Greece. Click on each logo to go to the website.

New Thracian Gold



EKPAZ:



Callisto



Arcturos



WWF Greece:



Birdwatching in Northern Greece site-guide

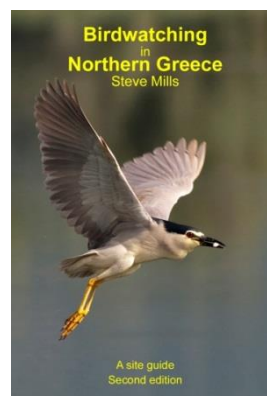
Don't forget, if you're travelling independently to Northern Greece, you need this book!

Go to:

www.birdwing.eu/birdwing-books

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!





Birdwing Partners' area

Finally, after some time in preparation, a new registered members' area on our website has been launched, called the Birdwing Partners' area. Here further information about our work is given to those who are our regular financial supporters. If you would like to gain access to this part of our site, we ask that you commit to making an annual donation to Birdwing.

The new area of the website is being developed and contains news of upcoming projects, blogs, issues and concerns for birds in Northern Greece, additional sensitive resources and downloads.

Sign In To Your BirdWING Account

Enter your details below to sign in to your account.

Email

Password

[Password Reminder](#)

We hope that those of our members who are committed to our work and who have a financial interest in how funds are used and who might wish to learn more about some of the underlying issues and problems for birds in Greece, will be able to use this private area to find out more.

If you wish to register for this area and we have not already contacted you, please email us and we will send you more details.

Some of our regular supporters donate 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.

Donate

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!



info@birdwing.eu

Congratulations!

The Director of the Society for the Protection of Prespa, Myrsini Malakou was recently awarded the 'Viron Antipas' award in Athens for her many years of successful efforts to lead the SPP in protecting the incredible biodiversity and culture of Prespa.



"..The best orchestra cannot deliver without proper conductor..."

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Other Prespa news



The Society for the Protection of Prespa will be beginning the second year of transboundary monitoring of the Goosander (Mergus merganser) population in the region. The SPP will be working with Galicica National Park Staff in FYROM to undertake a parallel count. Results from last year's data show that there are 18-24 breeding pairs, mostly on the Greek shore of Megali Prespa, the larger of the two lakes. This year monitoring will be taking place in Albania too together with the Albanian National Park as a training exercise, with a view to doing a full trilateral parallel count in the future.

Summer 2013

Bird news roundup

Migration was a little late this year for many species arriving in and travelling on through northern Greece. Once birds arrived, though, conditions, particularly for waders, herons and egrets, were excellent at many sites following the wet early spring.

Anthia marshes at the **Evros Delta** were particularly special with large numbers of waders, marsh terns and Glossy Ibis. Lanner and Eleonora's Falcons were also on the delta in May as was a Great Spotted Cuckoo.

The amount of spring rain was less welcome at **Kerkini** as the water level of the lake rose quickly to higher than normal levels to prevent flooding downstream. Amongst the losers were the Great Crested Grebes which, having tethered their nests to submerged vegetation, found themselves sitting on eggs which gradually disappeared beneath the surface. This is not a unique situation here and the majority of pairs will start the whole nesting process again. The high water level also removed much habitat for waders which were thin on the ground.

Away from the lake itself there was plenty of activity with Black Kites, Booted, Lesser Spotted, Golden and White-tailed Eagles in evidence. We were treated to displaying Honey Buzzards on several occasions.

Masked Shrikes seemed unusually plentiful and an immature Common Crane found the grazed ground along the river much to its liking.



Concerns over Gold Mines in Northern Greece

In addition to poisoning incidents there are serious concerns about permissions being granted for gold mines in several sensitive areas. One such plan is for a range of mountains just 8km from the fantastic Lake Kerkini. Other sites planned by Vancouver-based Eldorado Gold include Halkidiki and Alexandroupolis in Thrace.

Concerns for the environmental pollution that would be caused stem not only from the open-pit mining itself which would create a 4,500 acre hole in the land area together with underground mining, but more significant perhaps is the fact that 690,000 litres of water are required for every 1 kg of gold produced. Water is such a vital resource and this potentially could have a devastating effect on the region's rivers and wetlands.

The mayor of Alexandroupoli and an activist from the Halkidiki peninsula have travelled more than 7,500 kilometres to speak in Montreal, Ottawa, Toronto and Vancouver to raise public awareness in Canada about the impacts the mines would have on their forests, land and water, and the harm the company has already brought to their community and democratic process.

They spoke about the Skouries open-pit gold mine near the town of Ierissos. The community has serious concerns about the mine consuming and polluting the scarce amount of water they have for drinking and for agriculture.

Already hundreds of acres of forest have been flattened by bulldozers in preparation for the mine which is set to open in 2015. The mayor spoke about the Perama Hill gold mine near his town. He emphasized that the cyanide that would be used in this mine means death. He highlighted that 22 mayors in the region oppose the mine, and that whether it receives a permit or not, the people will not allow it to operate.

Read more at:
www.enet.gr/?i=news.el.article&id=355071

and at:
www.mnn.com/money/sustainable-business-practices/stories/greek-gold-mine-could-bring-economic-boom-or#



Other news

A wide range of events have been held at the Visitor Centres of the National Parks across the region to celebrate various environmental days.

One such event, a Celebration of Spring, took place at Nea Agathoupoli, near Thessaloniki and was widely attended.



At the Evros Delta Visitor Centre World Migratory Bird Day was celebrated with Primary School children from the area.



We hope that such successful events will encourage the next generation to engage with the natural world and with the birds and landscapes of Greek wetlands.

www.axiosdelta.gr
www.evros-delta.gr

Lake Kerkini in spring

During two recent holiday tours, whilst they were staying at the Hotel Limneo, Lake Kerkini, we teamed up with Greenwings and showed their guests the birds and wildlife of the area. The visitors enjoyed wonderful feeding frenzies of pelicans and cormorants, an excellent boat trip, watching Penduline Tits nest-building, acrobatic displays from Black Kites and Booted Eagles, a very obliging Rock Nuthatch and a magical displaying Honey Buzzard!

Thanks to everyone concerned and we hope to meet you all again.



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