



Issue 19  
Spring 2015

## Birdwing App is launched!

Over this winter we've been busy designing and developing a new app for those interested in birds and birdwatching in Northern Greece. With features to attract young people and those with a new interest in birds, together with news on conservation projects, sightings and information on the best birdwatching sites of Northern Greece we're hoping that it will appeal to a wide range of our supporters.

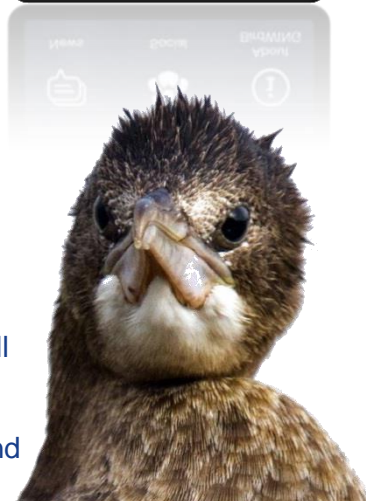
Designed mainly for smartphones, the free app can also be downloaded on Android tablets, iPads and Google devices!

Find out about the app and its features on page 4 and download it now!



## Bird identity challenge!

Test your bird identification skills in our Birdwing bird identity challenge. Some great prizes are up for grabs too! The entries with the most correct answers will win prizes, including a Birds of Greece Journal, 2015 photo calendars and Birdwing pens.



Try the challenge for yourself on page 6!

## Weather events cause destruction

The wet autumn and winter weather has recently caused structural damage to the embankments of Lake Kerkini. Work that has been going on for several years to restore the Strymonas River to its original course had only just been completed during the winter months. The water once again was entering the lake in the drowned forest rather than through the Glossy Ibis strip. However, in the first days of February the extreme water levels resulting from heavy rain and snow melt from Bulgaria caused the newly rebuilt banks to once again fail. The lake was also filled with much debris and water quality has been initially affected. Work on constructing new islands in the lake was also delayed with the wet winter weather conditions as the earth movers could not enter the lake safely to carry out the work.



Recent weather events hit other areas of Northern Greece too.

Extremely strong winds once again hit the Evros Delta, causing nesting materials put for the Dalmatian Pelicans on the platform to be blown into the water.





## Second Dalmatian pelican falls victim to illegal hunting in the Evros Delta

In early January, Achilleios, one of a group of Dalmatian pelicans fitted with transmitters as part of a telemetry project carried out by the Society for the Protection of Prespa (SPP), was found dead on an islet near the mouth of the Evros River. The last data obtained from his GPS / GSM transmitter caused concern as it showed he had come to a complete standstill. The SPP informed staff at the Evros Delta Management Body, who responded immediately. Wardens went by boat to his last location and found that, sadly, Achilleios had died. As his injuries aroused suspicion, Achilleios was taken to a veterinary surgeon in nearby Alexandroupolis. X-rays showed dozens of pieces of lead shot in his chest and left wing, an indication that he had been targeted by illegal hunters. Achilleios was fitted with his transmitter at Lesser Prespa Lake last summer and his movements had been monitored for several months. After visiting various wetlands in northern Greece, Achilleios had chosen the Evros Delta in which to overwinter, like many others of his kind.

The seriousness of the incident is compounded by the fact that at the same time last year another Dalmatian Pelican fitted with a transmitter was shot in the same area. On that occasion, the last data showed the pelican remaining in the yard of

a house in a village near the border in Turkey, however it was not possible to retrieve the transmitter. Although Turkish volunteer groups posted notices in the area and made several attempts to find this pelican, its body was never recovered.



Through its Dalmatian Pelican telemetry project the SPP has collected important data on the routes that these birds prefer to use, as well as the wetlands they use for nesting, feeding, rest during migration and for overwintering. The project has brought to light the enormous importance of the extended network of wetlands in northern Greece, as well as the human activities, such as illegal hunting, which remain a threat to the birds. Four other Dalmatian pelicans are currently being monitored using the same kind of transmitters, and anyone interested can track their movements in real time through the "Follow the Pelican" app on the SPP website: [www.spp.gr](http://www.spp.gr).

The important work carried out by the Evros Delta Management Body in order to protect and manage the area it is responsible for, has once more been underlined with this incident. Its prompt response has helped to highlight one of the serious problems associated with the protection of these birds. Dalmatian pelicans are a species of international concern for which Greece bears a great responsibility, as it hosts more than 25% of the world population. This unfortunate incident once again emphasises the need for co-operation in order to achieve the best possible conservation results, as well as a drastic reduction in threats to the species, as the effective protection and management of pelicans requires strong and dedicated collaboration.

Thanks to the SPP and the Evros Delta management body for supplying these details.





## Save Korinos wetland!

The SPA NATURA 2000 area (GR1220010) in Korinos Pieria, is under significant threat of development. The Ministry of Environment in Greece, despite the ongoing process by the European Commission, has approved the environmental assessment for a housing development plan for 6500 people inside the protected area!

This development will adversely and irreversibly affect the wetland, Delta Axiou – Loudia – Aliakmona – Alyki Kitrous as well as the neighbouring coastal sand dunes of the SAC (GR1250004), Alyki Kitrous – Evryteri Periochi.

At this moment NGOs including WWF Greece, HOS, Mesogios SOS, and the National Park management body have joined together to take the case to the council of State of Greece for an annulment of the decision.

Birdwing has added their support by donating to help challenge the decision in court.

If you can, please make your own a donation towards the funds for the court case. Donations with credit or debit cards can be made by [easypay.gr](http://easypay.gr). Email us at [korinos@birdwing.eu](mailto:korinos@birdwing.eu) and we'll send you details of how to pay.

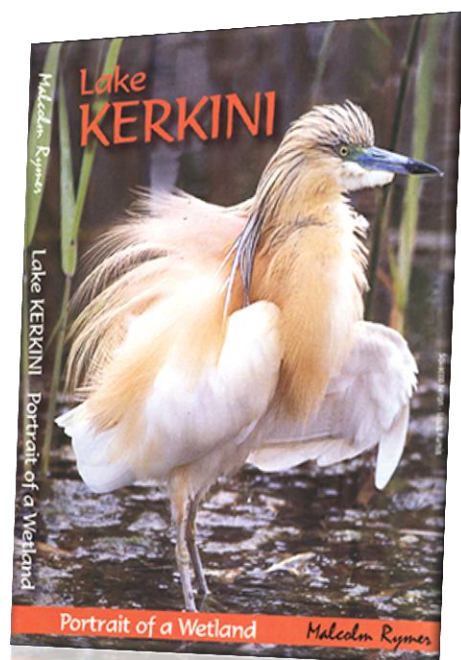
Follow more on this battle at [www.medsos.gr](http://www.medsos.gr) or [facebook.com/MedSOS](https://facebook.com/MedSOS). We will also keep you informed on any news on this issue.

## Lake Kerkini Wildlife film

Professional Wildlife filmmaker Malcolm Rymer has a new DVD for sale – showing in detail the wonders of Lake Kerkini!

He and his team visited the region many times over the last couple of years, collecting lots of footage and the film is now for sale! They can be purchased at [wildlifevideos.net](http://wildlifevideos.net) initially but will become available through the Birdwing website shortly. The film is an hour & three quarters and costs £19 plus £2 p&p.

Malcolm and his team became well-known in Chrissohorafa village as they were guests of Nikos Gallios at the Hotel Limneo on all their many visits. This is one of many wildlife films that Malcolm has produced over many years and we think this is one of his best!



We would like to thank Malcolm for his support of Birdwing and to wish him luck with all his future ventures. Buy your copy now!



## New Birdwing app

This app is for all people with an interest in birds and birdwatching in Greece.

The BirdWING app contains a quiz about Greek birds, photos and videos, information about the best sites including maps and related weather data. News from BirdWING and social media links allows the user to keep current with conservation projects and latest bird sightings.

### KEY FEATURES

**Quiz:** Available fully offline this flashcard style quiz is designed to aid users in improving their familiarity with the birds of Greece. Birds are described in English, Greek and using their scientific name. Test your knowledge of Greek birds and learn more about their diets, habitats, nesting habits and status in Greece. Select or choose to filter birds to focus on a specific set to learn more about them.

**Gallery:** A photo gallery of birds are grouped into Migrating birds, Water birds, Passerines (Perching birds), Nocturnal birds, Songbirds and Birds of prey. The gallery section of the app also includes videos taken in locations in Greece.

**Locations:** Information is given on the top birdwatching sites in Northern Greece – Amvrakikos, Evros Delta, Dadia forest, Lake Kerkini, Prespa lakes, Thessaloniki, and Porto Lagos. This can be accessed via a map or the location name. A detailed description of each location provides information about the types of birds found there throughout the year.

The **News** section of the BirdWING app is the handiest way to keep up with current conservation projects, the latest bird sightings, bird habitat restoration work, and other efforts by BirdWING and its members. Supporters of BirdWING from around the world can now have this information at their fingertips.

Initially fifty-two birds are included in the app with plans in 2015 to increase this number.

The News, Social Media, Weather, and Video sections require an internet connection. The BirdWING app is best viewed on a smartphone and currently supports Greek and English.

To change language go to About BirdWing, click Choose language and select your language and press save,

Find the App on iTunes for Apple devices (iPhones, iPads etc.) from next week or on **Google Apps** now for Android devices searching for Birdwing.



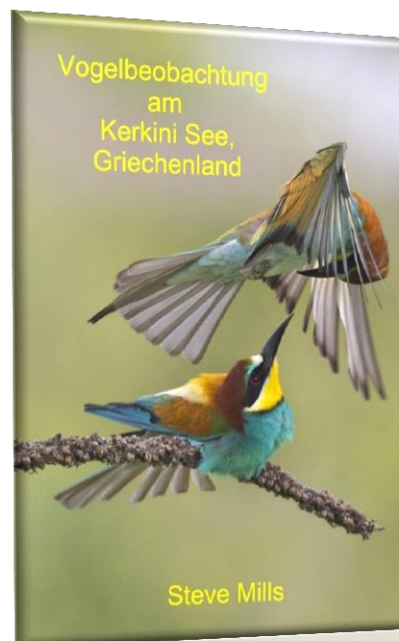
**Out now!**

## German site-guide for Lake Kerkini

**Vogelbeobachtung  
am Kerkini-See, Griechenland**

This new 2015 guide to Lake Kerkini in German has 48 colour pages with detailed maps, GPS data and information on sites around the lake and further afield. It is the most detailed and up-to-date guide available for the area. Steve Mills has been visiting these areas for over 20 years, at different times of year, and has a wealth of experience to draw upon.

Now available for **€12 + €2 Postage**.



If you know any German-speakers and think they might be interested in this book, please send them this link:

**[birdwing.eu/birdwing-books](http://birdwing.eu/birdwing-books)**

## Family fundraising!

The Wirth family from the Lower Saxony region of Germany decided to celebrate their birthdays this year in a different way! Rather than their friends buying presents, Josef, Heidi and their son Alex asked that donations be made to two of their favourite causes, one of which is Birdwing! With over 90 guests at their joint celebration a staggering €2850 was raised!



We would like to thank Greenwings for their donations and support for Birdwing. For each Greek trip they run, a proportion of their profits is donated to help birds in Greece.

## Winter Birds of Kerkini

In January a group of 9 Greenwings guests spent a week birding at Lake Kerkini and the surrounding areas. They had a very enjoyable time, seeing most of the key species for the time of year, especially the Dalmatian Pelicans.

Getting close to the enigmatic pelicans by boat and at the shore provided perfect photo opportunities or a chance to just sit and watch the birds.

The sheer numbers of birds seen in general resulted in some of the guests searching for collective nouns for the birds. Most apt of these was 'a harmony of Hawfinches'. The birds were seen nearly every day and always gave good views sitting out in the open, quite unlike Hawfinches in the UK.

We could not fail to be impressed by the sheer numbers of farmland birds. To see mixed flocks of Tree, House and Spanish Sparrows along with Corn Buntings, numbering many thousands and swirling around in the air then landing on the winter stubble was a vivid reminder of how good agricultural practices can have such a positive effect. Kerkini National Park is full of birds.

During the week we counted well over 70 Buzzards, watched thousands of Pochard, Teal, Wigeon and other winter ducks. Some of the other highlights included Goosander, Black-necked Grebe, Smew, Great Spotted Eagle, Pygmy Cormorant and Middle-spotted Woodpecker.

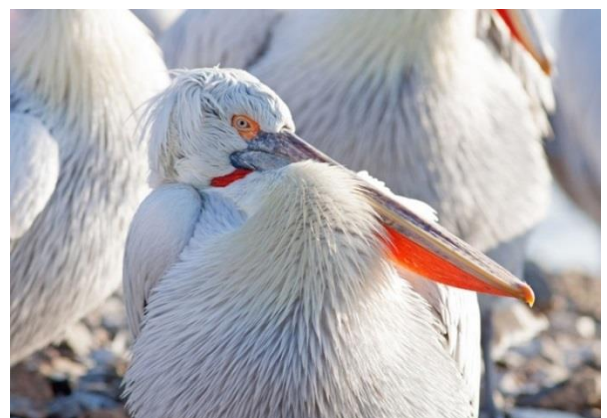


Photo: Julian Dowding



Their fundraising was for two projects: As one of their family comes from Bolivia, one project was supporting a Bolivian orphanage, to provide the children with warm food and warm clothes for the harsh winters (and they can be very harsh at an altitude of 5000m).

They also chose to support Birdwing, as they love wildlife and especially Greek nature.

Alex Wirth said *'We know that the impact of Birdwing can have long lasting joy for any nature lover and especially for the birds and surrounding wildlife. There are not many organisations in which you can become active as a supporter and even more importantly only a few which make changes clearly visible in short periods.'*

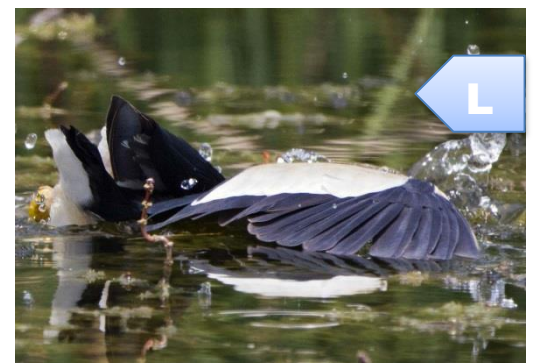
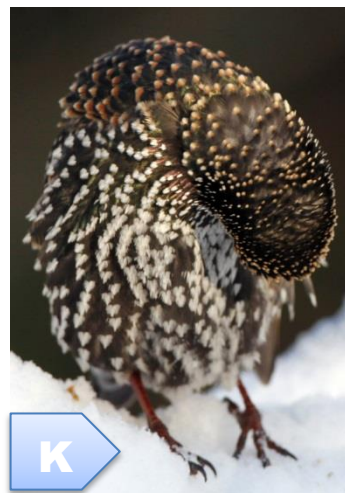
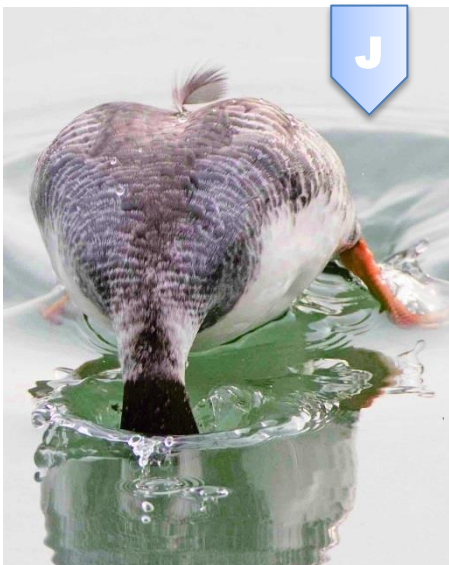
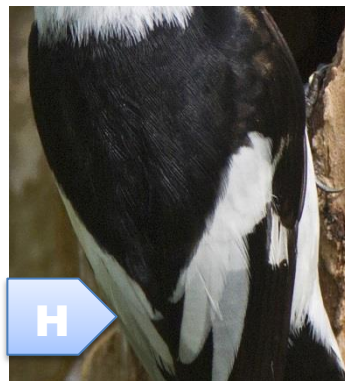
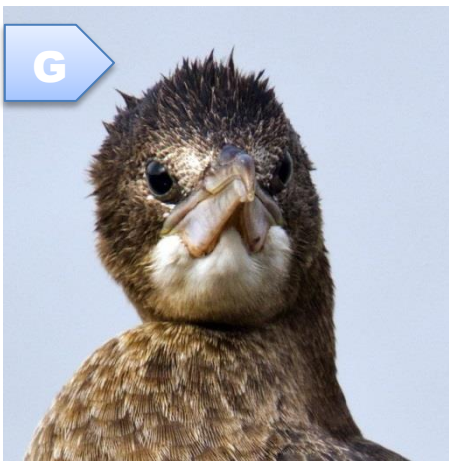
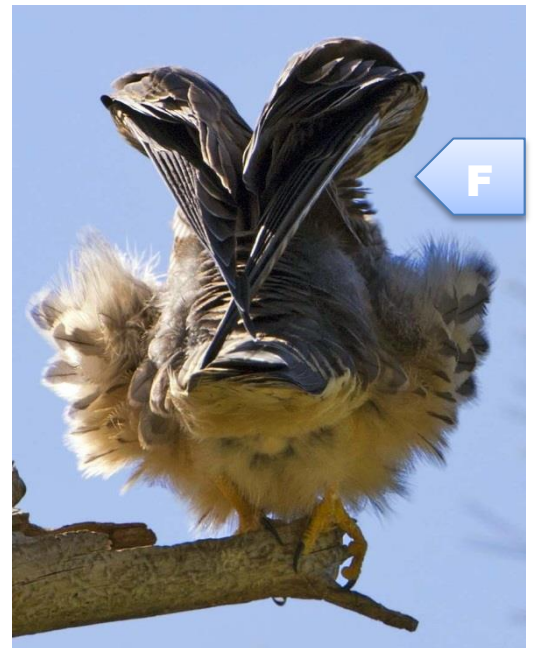
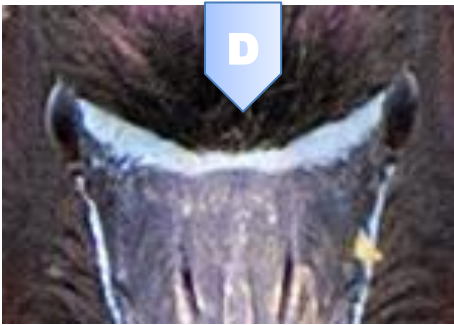
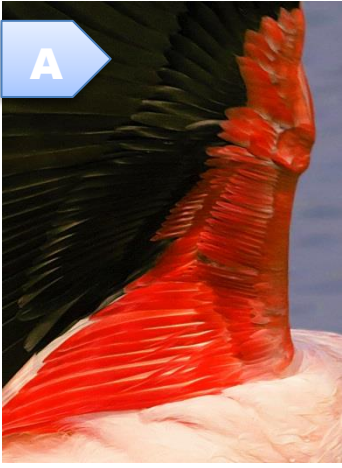
The family, who have been generous supporters of Birdwing for several years have produced many films for us showing the wonders of Greek nature. See our Youtube channel [here](#).

Alex has also translated the new German guide to Lake Kerkini, in which some of his photos are included (such as the one below), for which we are very grateful.

Thank you to the Wirth family for this wonderful idea and to all their friends for their generous donations!



## Bird Identity Challenge





## Bird identification quiz rules!

Please send a list of your answers from A to L to [birds@birdwing.eu](mailto:birds@birdwing.eu) The closing date for entries is: 28<sup>th</sup> February 2015. We will notify our members of the winner and runners up before the end of March.

## Prizes!

Thanks to photographer George Blonsky for donating two copies of his Birds of Greece journal. Copies of the journal can also be purchased for £23.39 at [blurb.co.uk/b/5685602-birds-of-greece-journal](http://blurb.co.uk/b/5685602-birds-of-greece-journal)

Read more of George's work including his photography workshops in Greece on page 8.

Thanks also to Matt Doogue for donating two of his limited macro photography calendars as seen on the BBC's Autumnwatch. Read more about Matt's passion for wildlife on page 10.

Thanks too to Malcolm Rymer for donating one of his new Lake Kerkin DVD's (see page 3).

Also runners up will receive Birdwing pens.



## Anti-poison dogs

Birdwing have joined forces with the Hellenic Ornithological Society (HOS) to fund Greece's anti-poison dogs, Kouki and Kiko. The LIFE+ Project for the Egyptian Vulture includes dog patrols to target one of the main causes of death to Egyptian Vultures in Northern Greece, that of poisoning.



The dogs have been working now for 10 months with around 90 patrols being carried out. The handlers have covered more than 200 km with the dogs doing four times this distance on average. A total of 27 carcasses were found and identified as poisoned. The most common species found dead were dogs - either shepherd or hunting dogs - with a total of 23 fatalities, followed by foxes with 4 fatalities. In some cases, poison baits were also detected, in most cases these consisting of a piece of meat laced with poison. In Antichasia area, more than 10 kilograms of poison baits were collected. The main reasons to use the poison baits were wolf or fox extermination, control of stray dogs and personal conflicts among shepherds or hunters.

If you would like to donate towards this good cause, please go to

<http://fnd.us/c/7wpfa/sh/d4XhM9> or to our website at [www.birdwing.eu](http://www.birdwing.eu)



## Postage price increase

If you're looking to buy any of our Birdwing products, such as the site guide, the playing cards or the children's bird book we'd like to inform you that of February 28<sup>th</sup> 2015 our postage prices will be increasing to match the Royal Mail's price increases, which have doubled in some cases in the last two years. Get ordering now to make the most of the reduced prices!



## Photography workshops

In 2013, George S Blonsky, under his trading name of GEO Pictorial, set up a program of wildlife, bird and landscape photography workshops in Greece designed to share his passion and enthusiasm for the nature and wildlife of this amazing country.

The main idea of the workshops is to give people with an interest in wildlife and/or landscape photography an insight and experience into the workings of a professional photographer in the field. The joy of capturing a wonderful image of a truly wild animal or bird in the wild surpasses any feeling you might get when photographing a captive creature and the feeling of accomplishment is second to none.

George's courses, as well as covering all the technical photographic aspects of exposure, focussing, composition and post-production etc. you will learn about the process of photographing wildlife in the wild... whether it be by locating and setting up a hide or stalking through a mountain forest. You will also learn a few secrets to photographing for the fine-art, travel and stock photography markets to give your images an added edge.



Locations for George's courses include Lake Kerkini, Prespa Lakes, Evros Delta and the forest of Dadia, amongst others, where you will get the chance under George's tutelage to photograph both rare and common species.

George's experience runs to 20 years of providing images to some of the world's most prestigious publications, including National Geographic, GEO Magazine and Royal Geographic Magazine and for more details of George's work & photo odysseys please visit his site at [geopictorial.com](http://geopictorial.com) and click on the "Workshops" link or go direct to [photographyworkshops.eu](http://photographyworkshops.eu)

If you would like to book a course with George please quote **BIRDWING** in your booking and George will give 10% of your fee to support our Greek wildlife conservation causes.

Thanks very much to George for this generous offer to help birds in Greece and for his donation of journals for the quiz prizes!







## Birdnews roundup

The annual arrival of the whole of the European population of the Lesser White-fronted Goose to **Lake Kerkini** is always keenly anticipated. This year the main group arrived earlier than ever, with 44 flying in from the Hortobagy in Hungary on October 1<sup>st</sup>.

The first count by the **Evros Delta** Management Authority in December showed steadily building wildfowl numbers with some 33000 Teal, 22000 Mallard and 12000 Wigeon already present.



Swan numbers reached 2660, with 2100 Bewick's and 450 Whoopers. Avocets totalled 500 and Dunlin 2000 alongside 800 Flamingos. Geese had yet to arrive in any numbers, with just 24 Greater White-fronts and 81 Greylags. The Spotted Eagle roost held 22 birds.



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As The New Year arrived so did some harsh weather. Accordingly the numbers of some species increased with, for example, Spotted Eagles reaching 36 on January 23<sup>rd</sup>. Swan numbers also increased, reaching a fantastic 10 000, with 3645 Bewick's and 1170 Whoopers. In January ducks were also present in large numbers, with over 39 000 Mallard, 30 000 Teal and 10 500 Wigeon. Over 800 Avocet were spread across the delta. Geese numbers, in the shape of Greater White-fronted, reached 1300. Regarding the Lesser White-fronteds, they were first noted at Evros on December 22<sup>nd</sup> and the winter maximum was 53 on the 8<sup>th</sup> January. Their departure, as the first stage of their spring migration, was extremely early this year, occurring overnight on the 19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> when they headed back to Kerkini.

And here they stayed until the sudden increase in water levels - see page 1 – left much of their feeding grounds underwater. As of February 2<sup>nd</sup> it seems that only one remained. Have they already set off north to Hortobagy in Hungary? Follow their progress at [www.piskulka.net](http://www.piskulka.net)



At the **National Park of Axios/Loudias/Aliaakmonas**, near Thessaloniki highlights of the midwinter count included 3000 Shelduck and a group of 20 Spotted Eagles. Thanks to the Management bodies of Evros, Kerkini and Axios for sending data.

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## Interview with Matt Doogue

Matt Doogue was a winner of the Greenwings' photography competition last year with the photo below and won a trip for two to Lake Kerkini. As an avid macro photographer his talents were recognised and he appeared on this year's Autumnwatch series. His '100 days of nature' challenge was followed by many admirers. The following is an interview with Matt:

### 1) When did your interest in wildlife and nature first begin?

I suppose my interest started when I was about 8 years old, with dinosaurs, I remember watching a show called 'Lost Worlds, Vanished Lives' by David Attenborough which was first aired in the late 80's and I was hooked. Every Sunday evening we would sit down and watch Nature shows. Fast forward to my mid-twenties I had almost every David Attenborough show on DVD, and I picked up my first DSLR camera to try and replicate the amazing photography I had viewed all my life.



### 2) How did you enjoy your first trip to Greece and what was most memorable about it?

The trip was amazing and very educational. I was surprised by the diverse range of wildlife found there. When you speak to people about Greece, most think of a beach holiday, as I did before this trip, Now I am aware that Greece is so much more than that! I have lots of great memories from this holiday, the people, the scenery, but most of all the wildlife, beautiful birds soaring high, stunning butterflies resting on delicate mountain meadow flowers, we even managed to see a European horn nosed viper!



### 3) What is the 100 days of nature challenge?

The #100daysofnature was started by a young conservationist, Lydia Johnson. The BBC Springwatch team shared it as a challenge to photograph one thing every day related to nature and I joined in. I decided that I would try and photograph 100 different species just in my back garden, to improve my own macro photography, and to show people exactly what can be found in your own garden. It was hard at times, especially as the seasons began to change and the insects began to disappear, but I did it, and it earned me a spot on the BBC's Autumnwatch show.

Continued on page 11...

## A rare streak of luck!

During June one of the guests on a Greenwings holiday in north Greece managed to see and photograph a Brown Hairstreak (*Thecla betulae*).

A nice sight at anytime and anywhere, but the significance of this sighting only became apparent later when, after checking with Greek butterfly expert Lazaros Pamperis. He was very happy to proclaim it the first ever record of the species in that particular area of Greece!

Well done Greenwings! (See more of their tours on page 5 of this newsletter)



This photo of a female Brown Hairstreak was not the one seen in Greece, but was taken by Matt Berry one of Greenwings' directors.



Continue from page 10...

#### 4) What 3 pieces of advice could offer to budding nature photographers?

If I could give any advice to aspiring nature photographers it would be this;

- Buy a cheap camera
- Learn it inside and out
- Stop comparing yourself to professional photographers
- Be inspired
- Dare to be different

But most of all **'Believe in yourself'** and you will go far.

*"The worst enemy to creativity is self-doubt"*



#### 5) Can you tell us about your appearance on Autumnwatch?

After completing the #100daysofnature challenge I was invited onto BBC Autumnwatch. I had a full behind the scenes pass for the day at RSPB Leighton Moss, it was a day I will never forget. I got to see exactly how much hard work goes into the shows. I met some special and inspiring people such as Chris Packham, Nick Baker and Lolo Williams and met the rest of the team including Michaela Strachan and Martin Hughes-Games. I was interviewed twice on live TV, I was very nervous but also loved every minute. One thing this experience did for me was cement my dream to a professional wildlife camera man working for the likes of the BBC Earth team.

#### 6) If you could change one thing in life...?

If I could change one thing in life it would be the current state of our world's wildlife. Over the past 40 years we have destroyed 50% of Earth's wildlife and we have a responsibility to take care of it - more importantly, to treasure it, nurture it, let it blossom! We are all part of this world, from the little earth worm to the tallest giraffe, from the smallest delicate flower to the largest Amazonian tree! We all live here, and there is room for us all.

I have started an e-petition to try and get nature and conservation lessons put on the UK school curriculum. I believe through educating our children we will have a fighting chance but we need to **ACT NOW**. Get out with your children, educate them, teach them, show them! Let them immerse themselves in a natural world so beautiful they will never want it to change!

I have also started a new group called 'A planet fit for nature' - a team of photographers, naturalists, conservationists, bloggers and wildlife enthusiasts. We hope to spread the word about the natural world, but most importantly get children involved with nature. We've a competition soon where we hope to give a family everything they need to start a journey with Nature. Tesco has confirmed that they will be donating prizes.

**"Alone we can do so little, together we can do so much!"**

*Matt Doogue*

Matts Macro: [facebook.com/mattsmacro](https://www.facebook.com/mattsmacro)

Twitter : @MattDoogue

Epetition:

[epetitions.direct.gov.uk/petitions/70401](https://epetitions.direct.gov.uk/petitions/70401)

A planet fit for nature group:

[facebook.com/groups/708673092555779](https://www.facebook.com/groups/708673092555779)

Twitter : @Fitfornature

Win one of Matt's calendars by entering our quiz!

## Rare visit of a Snow Bunting

A rarity for Greece was recorded in early January at the National Park Axios - Loudias - Aliakmona by group of amateur birdwatchers. Spotted in the Gallikos – Axios area this sighting of a Snow Bunting created lots of interest and many birdwatchers arrived from other parts of Greece to see and photograph the bird.

The bird was unruffled by the experience, continuing to feed calmly while many birdwatchers viewed it.

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Photo: Yiannis Markianos

## New videos of Dadia Forest and the Evros Delta

Thanks to Alex and Josef Wirth Birdwing have two new videos on winter in Dadia and at the Evros Delta! Showing the incredible number of birds that winter in the two locations these videos aim to promote ecotourism in these regions and to encourage people to appreciate the wonders of Greek nature.

See these and more of our Birdwing videos on our Birdwing eu Youtube channel.

[youtube.com/user/Birdwingeu](https://youtube.com/user/Birdwingeu)



## Last issue's quiz!

Here are the answers to the mystery bird quiz from our last newsletter. Picture A is a Short-eared Owl and picture B is a Cuckoo.

Remember to have a go with this issue's Bird identification quiz and see if you can win a prize!



## Birdwing nest-box programme

In several of the National Parks of Northern Greece work has begun to get the Birdwing nest-boxes built and sited ready for the spring, to provide breeding opportunities for birds including Rollers, Kestrels and owls.



At the Evros Delta boxes have been sited in the Eastern and Western parts of the Delta, in Anthia marshes and around Loutros Hill. A range of tree and telegraph poles are to be used and two different designs of boxes are being constructed.

Watch our new video to find out more...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AOnkSk6wTDw>

## Donation thanks!

Many thanks to Greenwings, MG, RC, HB and to others who prefer to remain anonymous for their donations to Birdwing in recent weeks and to everyone else who has contributed to our efforts. Without all your help, many of the important projects we are undertaking would not be possible.

## Newsletter thanks!



Thanks to **Lia Papadranga** and **Stella Varelzidou** from Axios, **Angeliki Dimaki**, **Kostas Papadopoulos**, **Theodoros Naziridis** at Kerkini, **Eleni Makrigianni** and **Ioannidis Panagiotis** at the Evros Delta, **Julia Henderson** and others at the SPP, **George Spiridakis**, **Efstathia Sideri** from Pelican's eye, **Alexander** and **Josef Wirth and family**, **Nikos Gallios**, **Malcolm Rymer**, **George Blonsky**, **Matt Dougue**, **Matt Berry** from Greenwings 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.