



Issue 20
Summer/Autumn 2015

www.birdwing.eu

Birdwing boxes breeding success!

As some of you will know, the new Birdwing nest-boxes put up in the Evros Delta for Rollers and Kestrels resulted in immediate success this spring! If you haven't seen our video, check it out [here](#)!



This is part of the longer-term project to put up nest-boxes in many areas in Northern Greece. Thanks to all those who have donated towards this project so far, including **Greenwings Wildlife Tours, Stephanie Coghlan and Alex and Josef Wirth.**

If you would like to contribute please go to:
www.birdwing.eu and click

[Donate](#)

Over 6000€ raised for Anti-poison dogs!



At the British Birdfair at the end of August we were able to present Roula Trigou from the Hellenic Ornithological Society (HOS) with a cheque for over 6000€ raised through the Birdwing Anti-poison Dogs campaign.

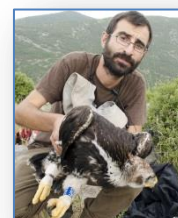
The appeal which ran through the spring was successful in raising money to allow the anti-poison dogs, Kuki and Kiko, to continue their valuable work protecting areas where Egyptian Vultures are breeding in Northern Greece.

If you are unfamiliar with the project and appeal and want to find out more, [click here](#).

For more information on the difficulties facing Egyptian Vultures in Greece see page 4.

Golden Eagles

In this issue we feature a report on the state of Golden Eagles in Northern Greece. See pages 7-9.



Birdfair friends

As always, in August, it is a delight to meet so many old friends and new contacts at the British Birdfair at Rutland Water.

Staff from the management bodies of the National Parks of Kerkini, Evros and Dadia, Koronia/Volvi were present, together with friends from other parts of Greece including Prespa and Samos. Others included hoteliers from the Kerkini region, guides and representatives from organisations including the HOS and Greenwings Wildlife Holidays.

There are unfortunately too many names to mention, but we feel privileged to know and to work with so many dedicated people who care about Greek birds and wildlife.

We also had many opportunities to encourage more people to visit Greece and see the wonders of its nature.

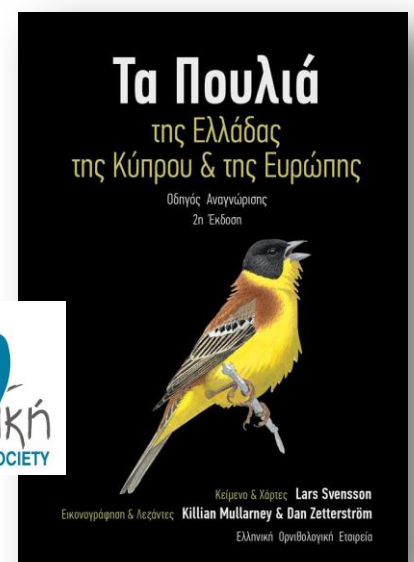


New book out now

The second edition of the Greek field guide, Τα Πουλιά της Ελλάδας, της Κύπρου και της Ευρώπης, (The Birds of Greece, Cyprus and Europe) is now available. It can be purchased from the Hellenic Ornithological Society's offices in Athens and Thessaloniki or can be ordered and posted to Greece and abroad. The cost for the book (which is in Greek) is 20€ + postage.

Finally, experienced and novice Greek-speaking birdwatchers will now have the necessary tool to develop the ability to recognize and observe species. This version describes all bird species found in Greece, Europe and Cyprus, as well as in neighboring areas of the Middle East and North Africa. The book has been illustrated and written by the most renowned experts on birds of Europe and has been adapted and edited by the HOS.

Please contact the HOS for more details at:
info@ornithologiki.gr



Tern raft news

Some disappointing news regarding our tern rafts this spring.... Unfortunate extreme weather conditions meant that the Porto Lagos tern raft pulled anchor just before the breeding season began and the water levels of the Salt Works lagoon meant that it could not be put back into position in time. We were really sad and disappointed that this happened but will be ensuring that heavier anchors are used in future and it will be repositioned in time for next year.

There were vegetation problems with our original raft at Lake Kerkini too this spring. We organised for the raft to be cleared of vegetation twice this spring but the roots of the plants are so firmly intertwined with the wooden structure that it has become impossible to remove it all completely without the wood breaking. It meant that there was



only space for a few pairs to breed on it this spring. Fortunately as a result of work to build new islands at Kerkini this year the terns used a new small island (which will have trees planted on it later in the year) so numbers this spring were not significantly affected.

However we are very pleased to announce that we have a completely new tern raft ready at Mandraki in time for next year's breeding! We will send photos when it is ready! Thanks to the Management Authority at Kerkini for this.



Kerkini site-guide in German

**Vogelbeobachtung
am Kerkini-See, Griechenland**

This new 2015 guide to Lake Kerkini in German has been selling well and we were even able to promote it on our visit to a Birdfair in Austria earlier in the spring.



The guide 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

Villa Belles



In Akritochori, near Lake Kerkini, is the impressive Villa Belles Hotel. Built in a magnificent location on the side of Belles Mountain overlooking the lake it constitutes an ideal destination for carefree, peaceful and relaxing vacation. Admire the natural beauty of the area while relaxing in the warm and hospitable atmosphere of the hotel. Rest in the comfortable and beautifully decorated rooms, taste homemade local delicacies in the snack-bar, enjoy your coffee and drink in the cafeteria-bar looking out upon the impressive view of the drowned forest.

Alex, who some of you may have met at the Birdfair recently, speaks good English and will ensure you have all you need for a wonderful trip.



website: www.villabelles.gr
email: info@villabelles.gr
telephone: +30 23230 71200

Poisoning in Meteora

An Egyptian vulture was found dead on the 16th of July in the area of Meteora, in Greece, and all evidence points towards poison as the most probable cause of death. The carcass was discovered in its nest when researchers from the Hellenic Ornithological Society (HOS) who are monitoring the population in the area accessed the nest after noticing the absence of the pair from its nesting site during the previous days. Although the second bird hasn't been found, researchers fear that it has followed the same fate as its mate, as it is unusual for this species to be absent from its territory for such a long period of time.

This event is the second case involving poisoned Egyptian vultures in the area of Meteora in only four years, and has hit one of the last three surviving pairs in the area. In just one incident, one third of the local breeding population has disappeared. It's a crying shame, especially when considering that just until after the turn of the century, this area could pride itself in having the highest concentration of breeding Egyptian vultures in Greece, and probably in all the Balkans.

While the whole world has its attention focused on Greece and its economic and political situation, many are unaware that, in the same country, a rare species is rapidly slipping into extinction. Egyptian vultures were a common sight in the Greek countryside not so many years ago, whereas now – according to the survey carried out this year - only 10 pairs survive. The main reason for this dramatic decline is the illegal but nevertheless widespread use of poison baits throughout Greek rural areas.

As the saying goes *"What the eye doesn't see, the heart doesn't grieve over"*. This is quite true with poison. Poison baits are usually placed by an anonymous hand in relatively remote places where nobody sees what the results are: if there is no body, there is no crime. It has been estimated that only 10% of poisoned wildlife is ever found. This means that the magnitude of the problem is always underestimated and thus can be put aside by authorities as a matter of minor importance. But is this true? Thanks to the work implemented by HOS and WWF in the framework of the LIFE+ Project "The Return of the Neophron", but also by other NGOs in other projects, much data and evidence has been collected in the past years to prove that poison baits and their impact on wildlife are



not such a trivial issue and cannot be ignored in the hope it will just "go away". The irrefutable fact is that this practice is illegal; it is a CRIME and should be regarded as so by society and authorities.

In only four years, Greece has lost 5 Egyptian vultures to poison baits. An emblematic species is disappearing right in front of our eyes so it is high time for both society and authorities to stop looking the other way and start acting. The Central Administration must pass down the order to relevant regional and local authorities such as Forestry Services and Municipalities, providing them with the resources needed to fight this scourge and enforce the law, implementing proper surveillance and monitoring, establishing action protocols and carrying out investigations and prosecutions among others. Society in its turn must also wake up and face its responsibilities; on many occasions the people in a village know who exactly the anonymous poisoner is, but perhaps out of fear or perhaps simply because nobody likes to be a snitch, the offender carries on with his illegal activity quite undisturbed.

In the meantime, time is running out for our Egyptian vultures...

Roula Trigon (HOS)



Moved by this? How can you help?

- Follow and support the work of [WWF Greece](#), [HOS](#), and [Friends of Neophron](#) working to stamp out this type of crime
- Birdwing will continue to collect money for the anti-poison dogs in Greece so you can continue to make donations (see page 10)
- If in Greece, contact your local authority to express your concern over the problem of poisoned baits and related wildlife crimes.

Bird news roundup

Early June is usually a fairly quiet time as spring passage has finished and the nesting season is underway. Highlights at the Axios/Aliakmon area included 9 Purple Heron, 105 Little Egret, 38 Spoonbill, 55 Black-tailed Godwit, 157 Avocet, 9 Stone Curlew, 87 Collared Pratincole, 21 Kentish Plover, 225 Black-winged Stilt and 1244 Flamingo.



As June finishes and July begins, return passage gets underway. Areas of fresh water shrank as temperatures reached 40 degrees in mid-July. At the Evros Delta 545 Glossy Ibis and 330 White Pelicans were amongst the most noticeable indicators of autumn migration. Wader numbers built, with 712 Greenshank, 345 Marsh Sandpiper, 945 Spotted Redshank, 400 Black-tailed Godwit and 210 Black-winged Stilt. Other counts included 341 Spoonbill, 20 Purple Heron, 154 Little and 73 Great White Egrets, 167 Pygmy Cormorant. Finally, 5 Rollers were visible around the nest boxes.



Summer/Autumn 2015



Passage continued throughout August at Evros, with gatherings of 1160 Garganey, 616 Spoonbill, 245 Greenshank, 75 Black Stork, 751 Little Egret and 44 Spur-winged Plover.



Quick quiz

Email us if you know what this bird is at quiz@birdwing.eu



Congratulations to the two winners of the Bird Identification Quiz in our last newsletter: Ashley Saunders and Thomas Wurzinger.



Birdwing News - 5

Official endorsement

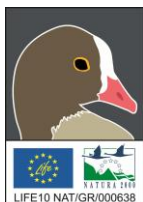
**Local Action Plans for
illegal killing in the Lesser
White-fronted Goose
project areas in Greece,
officially endorsed**



The Deputy Minister for the Environment has signed 3 Local Action Plans (LAP) against the illegal killing of birds, in the Lesser White fronted Goose hotspots in Greece. The Local Action Plans, which are have been drafted following relevant consultations with the local and national stakeholders have finally been endorsed by the Ministry of Reconstruction of Production, Environment and Energy (MRPEE). The LAPs foresee coordinated action to take place in the National Parks of Lake Kerkini, the National Park of Nestos Delta, Lake Ismarida and Lake Vistonida, and the National Park of Evros Delta in order to eliminate illegal killing of birds, an obsolete but unfortunately still existing practice.

Illegal killing has been identified internationally as one of the most significant threats to the Lesser White fronted Goose. In the wetlands of northern Greece, the critically endangered Fennoscandian population of the Lesser White fronted Goose, which counts a striking average number of 50-70 individuals, winters for a period of about 5 months. Although strictly protected by law, in December 2007 an adult Lesser White fronted Goose was found shot dead inside the Wildlife Refuge of the Lake Kerkini National Park.

The Ministry of Reconstruction of Production, Energy and Environment has produced the Local Action Plans against the illegal killing of birds, in the framework of the Campaign Against Illegal Killing in the wetlands of Northern Greece that is running as part of the LIFE + project "Safeguarding the Lesser White-fronted Goose Fennoscandian population in key wintering and staging sites within the European flyway". The implementation of the Local Action Plans is expected to significantly contribute to the abolition of incidents of illegal killing of birds in the respective National Parks, which will benefit not only the bird populations but the quality of the National Parks habitat as a whole.



www.wwf.fi/lwfg
www.piskulka.net
www.ornithologiki.gr

Koronia/Volvi nest-boxes!

Work has begun in the Koronia/Volvi National Park to put up nest-boxes for Kestrels, Rollers and owls. As part of the Birdwing nest-box programme materials for the boxes have been bought and work to build them is underway, to have them ready for the breeding season next spring.



Greenwings' donations

We were delighted to receive several new donations to Birdwing from Greenwings Wildlife Holidays, as pictured here receiving a cheque from Julian Dowding.



The company runs several holidays to Northern Greece at different times of year and they kindly donate a proportion of their profits to conservation organisations, including us! In the Spring we were involved in guiding with them at Lake Kerkini. Find out more about their trips for 2016 [here](#).



The Golden Eagle in NE Greece: resisting extinction

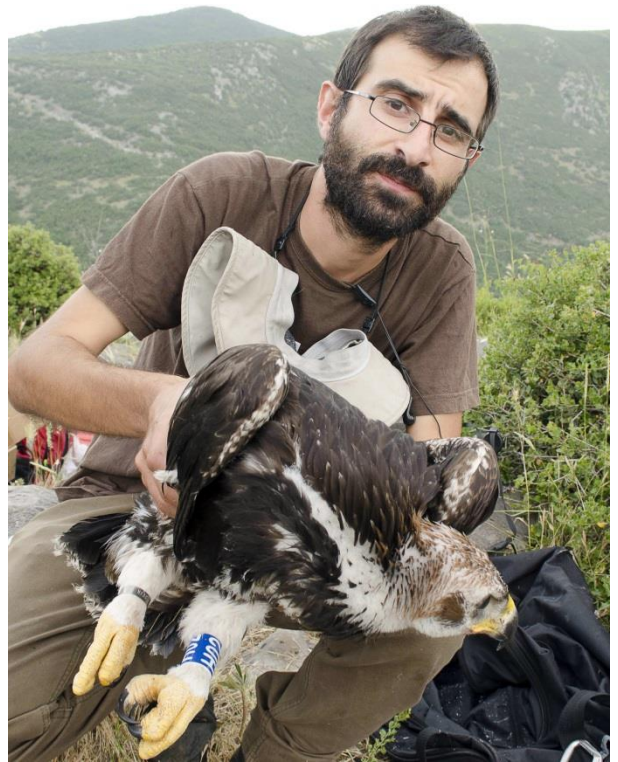
Lavrentis Sidiropoulos

Field Ornithologist, Hellenic Ornithological Society/
BirdLife Greece

It's a crisp and cold December afternoon, and I'm perched on a small rock overlooking a valley and a small peak, in the hills close to Xanthi. After close to four hours on the watch, I've not yet seen what I'm looking for. The sun sinks lower, and the evening prayers are rising from the loudspeakers of the mosque in the nearby village. As if on cue, an adult golden eagle shoots up from behind the ridge to the east and starts furiously sky-dancing in full splendor: the undulating flight, wings half closed on the sleek body as it ascends and descends almost rhythmically, its allula shooting out from bent wings. The display is mostly for territorial reasons - the eagle may be seeing a conspecific intruder that despite my scanning of the horizon, I cannot.

This bird belongs to one of the territories discovered between 2010 and 2012, in an exhaustive survey of eagle habitat, mostly hilly terrain between the valleys of Nestos and Evros, including the Lekanis Mts. The total count has yielded close to 35 territories that have been active at least once during this period when combined with data from WWF-Greece Evros project. Considering the fate of all other large raptors in the area in the past decades, this number comes as a pleasant surprise. Indeed, the golden eagle is the only large raptor that hasn't gone through a recent population crash in the country.

In the north-east, where there is a dearth of high mountains, it inhabits mostly small, hidden crags in valleys. Tree nesting is not common but it occurs (in pines, oaks, beech and other deciduous trees), with both types of nests recorded in at least two territories. Nests have been found from <100m altitude to slightly more than 1000m, in steep terrain with complex topography. Most of the population is spread over scrub maquis with openings and other diverse landscapes and the density of the pairs seems to be influenced by the latter. Nests tend to be well spaced apart, the exception being the Nestos gorge, where nest spacing opportunities are relatively confined due to the linear configuration of the cliffs along the river valley. Otherwise, Kompsatos valley with its high livestock numbers and the mosaic of open lands and pastoral woods, host the highest recorded density with some pairs nesting as close as 4 km.



One remarkable aspect of tree nesting in the Pomak areas of Evros, are the few recorded tree nests on trees whose twigs were regularly pruned for goat winter fodder. This is a traditional practice that shapes the trees ideally for raptor nests when they grow old, as the repeated cutting gives them a "candelabrum" like form, and the central forks where the largest branches emerge can support the massive eyries. One Pomak shepherd has pointed to a nest in a Linden (*Tilia*) tree that has been regularly been pruned for tea, and testified that the local Golden Eagle used it (corroborated by the tortoise carapace in the nest crown).



The nest on a Linden tree, Evros, July 2012

Although immensely powerful and fully capable of bringing down a fox, our birds, as everywhere else in the Balkans, prefer the more accessible and easy to tackle tortoises during the breeding season. Tortoises come with a carapace though, and the eagles have solved this problem by dropping them on rocky surfaces, and as observed once in Evros, sometimes even on tarmac. They supplement their diet mostly with snakes, medium-sized mammals such as hares and martens, and the odd bird. Carrion is utilized year round, and is of high importance in winter. Approximately one in three pairs does not breed each year, and the rest raise one chick, with one in ten successful nests raising twins. In total, half the territorial pairs seem to be able to raise a chick every year.

Tortoise carapaces found on a roost, Lekanis Mts, July 2011



How many birds survive to reach sexual maturity (after the 5th year, although some birds do breed earlier if an opportunity presents itself through a gap in the breeding population when a paired for life bird dies) and establish their own territories is not known and cannot be readily answered without marking or tagging with satellite transmitters a number of chicks in the nest before fledging.

And it is not all rosy for these magnificent birds either. Intentional and unintentional disturbance, encroaching close to their eyries may lead to temporary or permanent nest abandonments (as happened when a new electricity network station was built close to a small gorge in Evros). Shooting, although thankfully rare these days can still have an impact on such small populations of long lived birds with low reproductive rates and deferred maturity. In Evros when the foreseen wind turbine - generated 960 MW are fully installed, they will inevitably have an impact on the population, both in terms of increased mortality risks due to collision, electrocutions (already recorded once) due to the extended grid network, and displacement that may render some territories in these almost fully occupied areas unviable. Range abandonment in the long term may also occur through close canopy scrub encroachment and forest expansion, due to land abandonment as the traditional extensive grazing livestock farming declines.



Immature bird on a territory held previously by adult birds, W Rhodopes, Aug 2015

But the foremost threat, that has claimed a confirmed record of 6 golden eagles in North Greece in the last three years alone (and probably more unreported), is the scourge of poison baits: four eagles in a the single infamous incident of Nestos gorge in early 2012 and two more in Askio Mt early this year from the same mortality factor that is responsible for the population collapse of vultures over most of mainland Greece. The loss of adult territorial birds is usually straightforward to detect if the territories are regularly monitored. The replacement is usually a younger bird (3-4 calendar years old) with some white patches visibly on the wings and tail. In 2013 alone, twenty two mortality events were inferred from recoveries of dead birds, interviews with shepherds and monitoring of the pairs' age composition, for a four year period.



Adult and immature Golden Eagles poisoned along with two griffons, Nestos Gorge, February 2012

HOS/BirdLife Greece, with the support of AEK Football Club, whose emblem is the Byzantine two-headed eagle reflecting the Constantinople (Istanbul) origins of the club founders, has installed a live 3G solar powered nest camera in NE



Greece that was actively transmitting through June and July 2015. A GPS – GSM transmitter was fitted to a chick from Evros in the previous year that for 10 months provided us with a first glimpse of the eaglet's dispersal behavior in the eastern Rhodopes. Another part of this project will soon see the reinstatement of a long redundant vulture feeding place in Pinovo Mt in Pella, Central Macedonia, that will support the resident eagle pair.



Eagle chick and Adult on eyrie from remote 3G nest camera, Jun 2015. © HOS

The Golden Eagle is our last large raptor species whose population and distribution in Northern Greece is still largely intact. We hope that these magnificent and legendary birds continue to grace our skies, and their habitats are maintained in good condition as they resist the fate of all other large raptors. Given the ecological similarities (life histories, diet and habitat preferences), if there is a significant reduction in poison bait use, these places may be there for the much diminished vulture populations to recover.

Fieldwork for the Northeastern Greece Golden Eagle study has been funded by WWF-Greece, the VCF/FZS Balkan Vulture Action Plan, a Natural Research Ltd Mike Madders memorial grant, the AG Leventis Scholarships Foundation and AEK FC.

New Birdwing Grants

We are planning to begin offering small grants to individuals or groups to take actions for the benefit of birds in Greece.



Birdwing has three very clear aims:

1) Raising awareness

- to bring more eco-tourists to the important bird areas of Greece so that they become more valued and therefore protected
- to provide education for children and local people about birds

2) Raising money

- for direct habitat improvement to help birds

3) Speaking out

- to publicise issues impacting on birds in Greece
- to build a large membership base for a collective voice on conservation issues

If *you* have an idea for a project or action in Greece that would directly help birds or provide education about birds that requires funding and meets our aims we would be interested in hearing from you.

A more formal application process will be developed to accept proposals, but we are keen to receive initial suggestions or ideas at this stage. So please contact us if you have an idea!

We look forward to hearing from you!
info@birdwing.eu

Hotel Limneo, Lake Kerkini

...Feels like home from home!

Rated 5 stars on [tripadvisor](https://www.tripadvisor.com)

www.limneokerkini.gr/en/

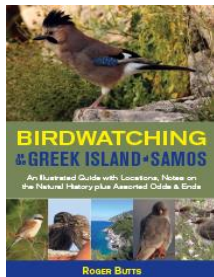


Other Birdwing news

We are very grateful to all of you who donated towards the anti-poison dog appeal and also to many of you who have made donations towards Birdwing during the past few months. Thanks to Linda Paisley for her monthly contributions and to Roger Butts and Joy Crawford for donating a proportion of the sales of Roger's excellent book *'Birdwatching on the Greek Island of Samos'*

(available in English at:
www.samosbirding.com

and soon to be available in Greek).



In addition to the donations to the appeal, we have received

generous gifts from P. Farrell, S. & T. Miles, Meriel Wilmot-Wright, Stephanie Cogan, Andy Broadhurst, 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.

Dadia Forest Inn

Some of you who are on social media may have already heard from us that the former 'eco-lodge' at Dadia has finally reopened. Now called the 'Forest Inn', the beautifully refurbished hotel has all the facilities you could wish for, including wifi. Its website is www.forestinn.eu. The accommodation also has a facebook page at www.facebook.com/DadiaForestInn with reviews and up-to-date news. Our supporters can receive a generous discount if you mention 'Birdwing'.



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How you can support Birdwing

To donate to Birdwing via the Donate button on our website, just follow this link www.birdwing.eu and click the Donate button on the left. You can pay by credit, debit cards or Paypal. If you do not wish to register with Paypal it is possible to donate without this, by clicking on the word 'Continue' at the bottom left of the first screen.

Alternatively make a bank transfer using the following details:

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Account number: 43604036

Sort Code 09 06 66

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IBAN: GB98 ABBY 0906 6643 6040 36

We can't do this without you!

Birdwing playing cards

After selling out of **1000** packs of the Birdwing playing cards this spring we're pleased to announce that more have now been printed and are available again through our [website](http://www.birdwing.eu) and some of the National Park visitor centres.



For a short time only we are offering some packs **for free** to school children. If you are a teacher or work with children on environmental activities, please contact us for more details at info@birdwing.eu



Newsletter thanks!



Thanks to everyone who has helped us with this newsletter and to all the staff members at the Centres across Northern Greece who have provided us with information. Particular thanks for this issue, go to **Lavrentis Sidiropoulos** and **Roula Trigou** (HOS) for their articles and news.

Summer/Autumn 2015