

BirdWING Newsletter

Volume 1 Issue 3 Spring 2009

In this issue news from:

- *The Porto Lagos region*
- *Wetland Kerkini*
- *The Nestos region*
- *The Evros Delta*
- *Prespa Lakes*



Bird Watching In Northern Greece

The BirdWING Newsletter

...brings you regular news about birds and issues affecting them in Northern Greece. The newsletter is published in English and Greek and is distributed via email. We hope that Visitors' Centres will print copies to be given to visitors.

Give money for free!

During April, for **every** new subscriber to our newsletter **€2** will be donated to conservation projects in Greece.

Pass this on and help to raise money for free! Tell your friends to go to www.birdwing.eu and subscribe with the click of a button.

Alternatively email info@birdwing.eu. (Many thanks to GE and JPK for sponsoring this donation).



We already have nearly 200 supporters! The more members we have the stronger our voice so please forward this newsletter to any friends you think may be interested.



A focus on the Nestos region

On a cold February morning, with snow on the hilltops, we set off to explore the Nestos region, with our guide Hans Jerrentrup. Hans and his organization EPO have been central to the story that follows. We drove to the village of Agios Kosmas in the protected region. In partnership with EU LIFE, a vulture feeding station and observation hide have been created recently and, although not yet open to the public, we were fortunate to be allowed to take a look. Carcasses of dead animals, typically cows or pigs, are brought to the hilltop site on a regular basis. This has been taking place since last summer and, following a slow and wary start, a group of Griffon Vultures (*Gyps fulvus*) has begun to feed regularly at the site and to spend time in the area. We also had views of Golden Eagles (*Aquila chrysaetos*) from the hide. An Imperial (*Aquila heliaca*) and White-tailed Eagle (*Haliaeetus albicilla*) have also visited during the winter. Hans has been working closely with the local authorities to establish a centre in the village of Agios Kosmas and a building has been secured for this purpose.

(Continued page 5)

Bird news

The mild weather this winter saw unusually low numbers of wildfowl arriving at the Evros Delta and other Northern Greek wetlands this year. The annual arrival of Lesser White-fronted Geese (*Anser erythropus*) at the Evros simply didn't happen – they chose to stay at Kerkini instead!

Whether this will happen again or whether it was just because temporarily high water levels at Kerkini flooded lakeside fields and so offered more feeding opportunities than usual, we'll have to wait and see.

Fortunately there were some other highlights

of interest at Evros, including 1000 Whooper and Bewick's Swans (*Cygnus cygnus* and *columbianus*), 27 Spotted Eagles (*Aquila clanga*), two White-tailed (*Haliaeetus albicilla*) and one Imperial Eagle (*Aquila heliaca*). Six Black Storks (*Ciconia nigra*) and 113 Great White Egrets (*Ardea alba*) were also counted and there was a welcome sighting of a Little Bustard (*Tetrax tetrax*) in December.

At Lake Kerkini 2 Oriental Turtle Doves (*Streptopelia orientalis*) were also seen at the end of December, a rarity for Greece. A total of 142 Dalmatian (*Pelecanus crispus*) and a single White Pelican (*Pelecanus onocrotalus*) were on the lake in February, together with 1400 Flamingoes (*Phoenicopterus roseus*).



World Wetlands Day 2009 Porto Lagos

For the **World Wetlands Day**, this year as every year, the Lake Vistonida Information Centre organized environmental events for both primary and secondary school children in the region. The events were arranged in conjunction with the Centre for Environmental Education of Vistonida and the Super Prefecture of Drama, Kavala and Xanthi.



The events included a video, practical work with paper, thematic information in the centre and observation of birds in the lake. A diploma was awarded to participants. 100 students joined in the events.

Vasilis Terzis - fdnesism@otenet.gr



Editor's Comment

In this issue of the Birdwing newsletter, there's news from around the region, with information provided by the centres at Evros, Kerkini, Prespa, Porto Lagos and Nestos.

As you've read on page 1, there are now nearly 200 members of Birdwing. That's great in less than a year of existence but, if we want to have a voice that is really heard, we need to increase our membership.

How? Well, if every Birdwing member recruited just one new member then suddenly we've got double the voice. It's as easy as that.

We all know people who are interested in nature and the environment. Talk to them, email them, and introduce them to Birdwing. Pass on a copy of the newsletter or give them a link to our website at www.birdwing.eu

Tell them it's free and tell them how important it is that we, people who care about birds and nature in general, have a growing voice to raise against issues that are harming the things we cherish in Greece.

And what about if we each recruited two new members, or perhaps three.....

Steve Mills

Website highlights

1.



If you plan to visit Northern Greece this year and have bought the Birdwing book remember to visit the **Book Updates** page of www.birdwing.eu. Up-to-date news on sites and road changes will ensure that you go equipped with the best information.

2.



Check out the largest international wetland and waterbird conservation initiative ever to take place in the Eurasian-African region: Go to www.wingsoverwetlands.org



Great response to Birdwing's Questionnaire!

A big thank you to all who responded to the Birdwing Questionnaire.

The wide range of respondents included those who live and work in Northern Greece, including people from Management Bodies of the area, those who visit each year, have visited many or several times, and those who have visited once or who are planning to visit.

All regions of Northern Greece were of interest to the respondents, including the Evros Delta, Lake Kerkini, Dadia, Prespa, the Axios region, Porto Lagos, the Nestos region, Ismarida and other areas such as Mount Phalakri, Volvi, Koronia, Heimadatis, Zazari, Agra, and Pikrolimni lakes, Agios Mamas lagoon, Nea Fokaia marshes, forest and lakes regions near Kastoria/Florina.

All those who responded to the questionnaire felt that areas of Northern Greece could benefit from Birdwing's help.

The suggested ways Birdwing could most usefully help fell into three broad categories:

- Raising awareness of issues and providing information both for local people and the international birdwatching community
- Raising funds & working with local staff towards direct habitat improvement
- Lobbying

Responses as to how funds raised should be used included:

- Direct habitat improvement
- Buying land
- Education and public awareness

The responses as to the greatest threats to Greek birds included:

- Habitat damage and destruction, including the effects of agricultural methods/pollution/pesticides
- Indifference towards the environment, including political indifference
- Illegal use of poisoned baits and hunting
- Lack of education

We feel that the responses closely match the aims of Birdwing which are:

- *to be a group of interested people with a collective voice on conservation issues*
- *to provide a forum to raise awareness of things that can and should be done to help birds in Northern Greece*
- *to raise money for specific projects to immediately help some of the birds whose habitats are at risk*

See page 7 for more news of how Birdwing members can make a difference.

Congratulations – to all those who entered last issue's quiz...

Andreas Meissner
Chris Durdin
Colin and Sue Turvey
David Davidson
David Goulding
David Toms
Johannes Laber
John Barclay
Stavros Kalpakis
Yia Kak
Zoe Smith
Baptiste Doutau



Well done for correctly identifying the bird as a Honey buzzard (*Pernis apivorus*)

See page 6 for this issue's quiz!



Greek flora

By the middle of March the usual flora were decorating the landscape around Lake Kerkini, mostly in purple in the form of *Romulea bulbocodium*, *Lamium amplexicaule*, *Viola hirta* and *Anemone blanda*, but also some blue in the form of the *Squilla nivalis* and Grape Hyacinths (*Muscari* sp.), yellow from Lesser Celandines (*Ranunculus ficaria*), Buttercups (*Ranunculus* sp.) and *Hypecoum imberbe*, and a little white from *Ornithogalum montanum* and *Capsella bursa-pastoris*.



News from Wetland Kerkini

In February minor repairs were made to the wooden platforms and reeds were cut and left there and on the islands, so hopefully more pairs will breed this year. The staff intends to reconstruct the platforms this summer. On 7th March, the first Dalmation Pelicans (*Pelecanus crispus*) started to breed on one of the platforms.

On 8th March the first two Garganey (*Anas querquedula*) of the year were seen, reaching 80 only a week later. On 9th the first White Storks (*Ciconia ciconia*) arrived in Kerkini. Both of these species were later than last year. In contrast, the first Hoopoe (*Upupa epops*) and Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*) of the year arrived earlier than in most previous years (see table below).

This year saw a return to the **Spring Passerine Migration Survey** first done in 2005. Advertising proved successful and a nearly full squad of volunteers was soon signed up to work with Gordon Ramel. Ideally 4 volunteers work each week, so that by working in pairs they do 2 x 3 one-kilometre transects each morning.



The first volunteers arrived on 15th March; Tsvetomira, Miroslava, and Daniel, third-year ecology students from nearby Sofia in Bulgaria.

Cold winds from the north during early March had dampened hopes of finding any migrants during the first week of surveying. Despite these doubts however, the start was good with first records of the year for Hoopoe (*Upupa epops*), Penduline Tit (*Remis pendulinus*) and Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*) on the first day out. Subsequent days produced the first Blackcaps (*Sylvia atricapilla*) and Wheatears (*Oenanthe oenanthe*) despite bitterly cold northerly winds on the Thursday and heavy snow on the Friday, which brought the survey work to a halt. The bird of the week was a Long-legged Buzzard (*Buteo rufinus*) showing excellently on the slopes above Vironia. Although these birds breed nearby, we seldom see them inside the National Park.

The first part of the following week, as the weather improved slightly, produced the first Black Kites (*Milvus migrans*) and Night Herons (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) of the year. There was evidence of considerable movement of Black Redstarts (*Phoenicurus ochruros*) as the two 1-km transects on the river north of the lake produced 49 of these on the 23rd.

Read more of the volunteers' experiences in the next issue of the Birdwing newsletter.

Other news

In mid-March, the Management Authority of Lake Kerkini bought 2800 plastic buoys. The aim is to give them to the fishermen to use on their nets in order to replace the various plastic bottles (water bottles, oil bottles etc) that they use now for their nets and which become discarded all around the lake. The buoys will be given to the fishermen at the beginning of April.

Gordon Ramel and Theodoros Naziridis

Wetland Kerkini: Some Early Spring First Sightings

Species	2004	2005	2007	2008	2009
<i>Anas querquedula</i>	No Record	March 18 th	pre-March 24 th	March 1 st	March 8 th
<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	March 11 th	March 17 th	March 7 th	March 5 th	March 9 th
<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	March 26 th	March 18 th	April 1 st	No Record	March 14 th
<i>Limosa limosa</i>	March 26 th	March 18 th	No Record	March 1 st	March 14 th
<i>Philomachus pugnax</i>	March 21 st	March 8 th	No Record	March 1 st	March 14 th
<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	No Record	April 3 rd	March 24 th	March 14 th	March 16 th
<i>Upupa epops</i>	March 21 st	April 1 st	March 24 th	March 27 th	March 16 th
<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	March 23 rd	March 20 th	March 30 th	March 11 th	March 16 th
<i>Delichon urbica</i>	March 21 st	March 8 th	March 30 th	March 26 th	March 19 th
<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>	March 26 th	April 3 rd	March 24 th	April 4 th	March 19 th
<i>Remis pendulinus</i>	No Record	April 6 th	April 5 th	March 29 th	March 16 th
<i>Milvus migrans</i>	March 21 st	April 1 st	March 24 th	March 29 th	March 24 th

(2006 records unavailable)

Many thanks to Megan Somers!



10-year old Megan Somers has been raising money for birds in Northern Greece.

She has raised over £25 for Birdwing by collecting loose change from her friends and family.

Megan, who cares greatly about environmental issues, said 'I'm going to carry on raising more money.' A pack of Birdwing stickers and a keyring have been sent to her. Thanks a lot Megan!

Donate

Any money raised for Birdwing can be paid using the Donate button at the website www.birdwing.eu

Butterfly focus

The butterfly for this issue is *Nymphalis polychloros*, the large tortoiseshell, a common species in much of Greece and one of the first signs of spring. Many of the first specimens seen in spring emerged late in the previous autumn and over-wintered as adults.



As spring turns to summer the remaining, sometimes ragged, individuals of the previous year are joined by freshly emerging adults. This species can therefore be seen for much of the year.

Focus on Nestos

(Continued from page 1)

In addition to the feeding station, observation hide and Visitor Centre, each a major achievement in itself, there have been other significant achievements in the Nestos region.

Since the beginning of the 20th century over three-quarters of all wetlands in Northern Greece have been lost. In 2001 an EU funded project was undertaken to restore and manage a series of ponds and lakes in the Nestos Delta near the town of Hrysopolis. With the involvement of local and regional agencies, 'buffer zones' were created around the lakes to stop the inflow of agricultural run-off, 50 000 water plants were planted and over 100 truckloads of rubbish and rubble were removed. Nature trails have since been created and huge numbers of schoolchildren have visited.

It was quiet when we visited in February, but the reedbeds will soon be alive with warblers, martins and a range of herons. It's a triumph of local conservation and well worth a visit.

Beyond the lakes, towards the river mouth, 60 hectares of low-grade fields have been planted with trees to extend what remains of the previously enormous riparian forest. Four fragmented branches of the river are also being reconnected to create more freshwater habitat.

Once one of the largest riverine forests in Europe, covering some 30 000 acres, it was cut down in the 1950s to provide more agricultural land which, ironically, was abandoned as unproductive within 2 decades.

Despite its reduction in size, this forest remnant is still magnificent and was alive with the songs of Golden Oriole (*Oriolus oriolus*) and Nightingale (*Luscinia megarhynchos*) when we visited last spring. Keep an eye open for otters, wildcats, jackals and wild boar which all use the forest. A pair of White-tailed Eagle (*Haliaeetus albicilla*) nest, as do Honey Buzzard (*Pernis apivorus*) and Lesser-spotted Eagle (*Aquila pomarina*). At the river mouth itself, floating rafts have been installed and successfully used by hundreds of pairs of Common Terns (*Sterna hirundo*) and Little Terns (*Sterna albifrons*).

Given the doom and gloom that often surrounds conservation attempts in Greece it is great to be able to see such progress. Congratulations to Hans and EPO!

Find out more about the EPO's work via our links page at www.birdwing.eu

Click the *Living Lakes, Nestos* link.



For more details of where to go in the Nestos region see the Birdwing book 'Birdwatching in Northern Greece'. See page 6.

This issue's quiz!

We're doubling the fun this month by offering 2 mystery birds. Can you identify Bird A or Bird B or both?

Email your entries to quiz@birdwing.eu and we will publish the names of all those who are correct in the next issue.

Bird A



Bird B



Both birds were seen in Northern Greece in February.



Birdwatching in Northern Greece

You need this book.

This 100-page book contains up-to-date information on sites such as Lake Kerkini, Evros Delta, Porto Lagos, Dadia and the Evros Mountains. The entry for each site includes detailed directions, maps and reliable info on what you might see, when and where. There is a current status list for birds of the region, a checklist of birds of Greece and colour photos of the region's speciality species.

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



About us

In response to some of your questions and for the benefit of new members, here are 4 short facts about who we are and why we have been motivated to set up Birdwing.

1. We, Steve and Hilary, are full-time writers and consultants in the field of education, mainly writing maths books and software for children and teachers. Putting together Birdwing newsletters, creating and updating the website and all other Birdwing admin has to fit in around our work (so please forgive us if we don't always respond to your emails immediately).

2. For years we have been visiting Greece on holiday, usually involving birdwatching on the islands or mainland. A few years ago we began renovating an old derelict house in a mountain village in Thassos, where we now spend as much time as we can.

3. Steve writes a bird column for the 'Athens News' English-language newspaper to try to raise awareness of birds in Greece. If you would like to read any of his articles online, go to www.athensnews.gr and click Search. Type Steve Mills in the Author box and click All Issues for all his recent articles.

4. We want to provide you with the kind of information about birds in Greece that we always wanted and hope to be able to make a difference by raising money for habitat improvement.

Hilary Koll and Steve Mills

P.S. Thanks to Eva Stets for the photograph taken at the Evros Delta!

Special spring offer!



**Free keyring
with each
online book
order**



Bird artist

One of Birdwing's supporters, **Paschalis Dougalis**, is an internationally-known and award-winning wildlife and bird illustrator.

A Greek, he now lives in Munich, Germany, where he works as a freelance nature book illustrator. His pictures, such as this Imperial Eagle (*Aquila heliaca*), can be seen at:

www.dougalis-art.com



Paschalis says *'I'm missing my home [in Greece] more than can you imagine, but unfortunately there is no market for an Illustrator like me in Greece! I hope, at least that I'll be able to support my homeland as much as I can from abroad!'*

Contact him at: P-Dougalis@t-online.de



WWF report on the Evros Delta

A WWF briefing on the Evros Delta can be read at the following link.

<http://greenapple.gr/COP10Ramsar-EVROS.pdf>

Theodota Nantsou from WWF Greece recently told us that their organisation is reporting the situation to all responsible authorities and lobbying for adequate protection.

Following a recent letter that we wrote to our MEP, Richard Corbett, a formal Parliamentary Question was tabled on 17-3-09 to the European Commission regarding this matter. We will keep you informed of the response.



Representatives in the European Parliament

*Have you ever written to your MEP?
Do you know how to contact him or her?*

These important representatives are our voice in Brussels and can take action to tackle environmental issues in Northern Greece. Most of us realise that pressure needs to be put on the Greek government to ensure that wildlife habitats are not only protected, but are managed appropriately. Decisions in many of Greece's unique and valuable habitats are being made by those with vested interests, such as developers, fishermen, farmers and hunters. It is vital that the voice of the many who visit these areas with conservation and protection as their focus should also be heard.

We have been writing to our local MEP about Lake Koroneia, the Evros Delta and other areas under threat. Last year he tabled a parliamentary question to the Commission in response to our letter. Small actions, such as writing a letter or email, that we **all** can make DO result in change.

Will you make a commitment to write to your representative in Europe? If each of us wrote to one representative about Greek habitats think of the effect it could have.

Don't know how to make contact? Go to:

www.europarl.europa.eu/members.do

Change the page to the language of your choice at the top right hand side and click on your country of residence.

(Note that some countries, such as the UK, are regionally based and you can only write to your regional representatives.)

Perhaps you would like to but don't know what to write? Contact us at:

takeaction@birdwing.eu

We can email you sample letters to show what can be written...

**Please commit to this.
These are our representatives.
Let's use them!**



Prespa news summary

The quiet winter season is filled up mainly by observations of waterfowl in both lakes Megali Prespa and Mikri Prespa. The latter froze only partially and for a few days this year, allowing overwintering ducks to feed in its waters.

The Society for the Protection of Prespa (SPP) completed the annual Mid-Winter counts on the 17th of January. This action is coordinated by the Hellenic Ornithological Society contributing to the corresponding European scheme. The number of species was the same as last year, 23 different species were recorded, but the total number of birds recorded was almost half compared with 2008.

Among the bird species recorded were large flocks of Great Crested Grebes (*Podiceps cristatus*), Teals (*Anas crecca*), Shoveler (*Anas clypeata*), Tufted Duck (*Aythya fuligula*), Smew (*Mergellus albellus*), and the resident population of Goosander (*Mergus merganser*).

Since early February, Dalmatian Pelicans (*Pelecanus crispus*) have been arriving in what is the largest colony in the world, with over 1000 pairs in the last 5 years. Already most of the Dalmatian Pelican pairs have arrived to breed in the reedbeds of Lake Mikri Prespa and now the arrival of White Pelicans (*Pelecanus onocrotalus*) from their African wintering grounds is anticipated by the end of March.

Annita Logotheti – a.logotheti@spp.gr
Irene Koutseri – i.koutseri@spp.gr
The SPP website is at www.spp.gr

The Hoopoe is a funny bird

by Gordon Ramel

The Hoopoe is a funny bird
he only knows a single word
but he thinks it's very nice
so he always says it twice.



Local bird groups

Do you belong to a bird club, such as the RSPB, a local ornithological group or perhaps you meet with other birdwatchers?

We have printed leaflets about Birdwing for you to give to others. These glossy, colour leaflets can be passed on to your friends.



If you would like some leaflets posted to you free-of-charge, please send your postal address to info@birdwing.eu or complete a contact form with your details at www.birdwing.eu

And finally thanks ...

As always we would like to thank all those who helped us to produce this newsletter. Thanks to **Vasilis Terzis** from the Vistonidis Centre and to **Irene Koutseri** from Prespa for their contributions. We are also grateful to **Hans Jerrentrup** for the time he spent with us showing us the Nestos region and to **Theodoros Naziridis** and **Gordon Ramel** for news from Kerkini. Thanks also to **the staff** at the Evros Delta and to anyone else we have failed to mention.

... and
best wishes



And finally we wish **Eleni** and **Andreas** many best wishes for the birth of their third child in early June.