

# Birds of North Greece

Holiday Report 2013



**Greenwings Wildlife Holidays**

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### Day 1: Monday 6<sup>th</sup> May

Our late afternoon flight meant an evening drive from the airport to our base next to Lake Kerkini. During our journey we heard Nightingales every 50 metres and had first sightings of Hoopoe, Common Buzzard, Common Kestrel and Bee-eater. The Nightingales awaited us at our hotel too and with windows open at night, their melodic song could be heard in all directions. Once settled in we all took a very leisurely stroll to a taverna in the village square and discussed plans for the week ahead over a traditional and delicious mezedes style meal. Bird watching didn't stop entirely for food and wine; Scops Owl was heard and White Storks were seen sitting on their telegraph pole top nests. All in all a good start to the holiday!

### Day 2: Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> May

After a good breakfast we drove to nearby Mandraki Harbour for our first proper view of Lake Kerkini. Steve and Hilary explained the lake's importance to many birds, including the Dalmatian Pelicans seen fishing further out on the lake. We also learnt about the pressures facing the drowned forest due to changes in water levels in recent years and the associated impact this has had on various breeding bird species. Our view of it was distant and it wasn't easy to appreciate the scale of it and the sheer richness of life it supports. Our boat trip planned for another day would bring us up close and personal though!



The air was thick with buzzing insects chased by House Martins and Swallows and in the phragmites we could hear a Great Reed Warbler. A Little Bittern gave tantalising views to most of the group, mostly from amongst the reeds, but some were lucky enough to see it out in the open. In adjacent trees Golden Orioles were heard and seen, these would become an almost constant and very welcome feature of our days out in the area. Other birds on show on and over the lake were

Squacco Herons, Night Herons, Purple Herons and Common and Whiskered Terns. We were told by Steve and Hilary that a pair of Golden Eagles nested in the mountain behind us, but we didn't get to see them on this occasion. Interestingly, their diet in the area is almost exclusively tortoises, which they carry to a significant height before dropping to break open the hard carapace.



Other wildlife highlights included a vivid green and blue Balkan Wall Lizard, a Dice Snake swimming amongst marginal vegetation, Beautiful Demoiselles (ssp. festiva) and several butterfly species – Red Admiral, Common Blue, Nettle Tree, Eastern Bath White, Small White, Clouded Yellow, European Swallowtail, Small Heath and Wall Brown.



Black headed Bunting

At a nearby quarry up in the surrounding hills where Eagle Owl can be seen, we had good views of Black-headed, Corn and Cirl Bunting. Despite a thorough scanning operation by the group we couldn't spot an Owl, but we did see some rather fascinating Rock Nuthatch nest structures, plus plenty of Crag Martins. There were good numbers of additional birds in the surrounding scrub habitat. These included Hoopoe and Woodchat Shrikes.

We also had Red-rumped Swallows overhead whilst enjoying our picnic lunch. In addition to the birds several Common Blue butterflies were seen, including mating pairs. We also saw our first Black-veined Whites, Southern White Admirals, Brimstone and the star of the show - a stunning and pristine Little Tiger Blue!



Mating Common Blues



Little Tiger Blue

After lunch we visited a couple more sites around the edge of the lake. These produced more interesting birds such as Lesser Grey Shrike, Cetti's Warbler, Kingfisher, Spoonbill, Wood Sandpiper, Little-ringed Plover, Turtle Dove, Golden Oriole, Pygmy Cormorant, Night Heron, Glossy Ibis and Squacco Heron. At one location, where Water Buffalo were grazing in an adjacent meadow (due to be part of dinner later in the form of spicy buffalo sausages!) a small number of Southern Festoon caterpillars were found on Aristolochia spp. and one or two adults were also seen flying. Nearby several Blue Chaser dragonflies were seen patrolling the ride and one kindly settled to pose for a few photos.



Lesser Grey Shrike

The area we ended the afternoon in was a known haunt of White-tailed Eagle. They didn't put in an appearance but the group were not disappointed as it had been a fantastic and wildlife rich first day. We all headed back to our hotel content and relaxed.



### Day 3: Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup> May

On our morning drive to the southern end of the lake we saw a beautiful Levant Sparrowhawk flying over. We were also treated to views of a Lesser Spotted Eagle and a Honey Buzzard performing its enchanting "butterfly" display flight. On to a Sand Martin Colony, where a hundred or so birds dazzled us with their busy, acrobatic flight, until they all took off as one - no doubt the result of a hunting raptor in the vicinity.

Also seen in the same area were Bee-eaters, Black-headed Yellow Wagtail, and Grey-headed Yellow Wagtail. Soon after, we stopped for a refreshing coffee at a lakeside café. As always the wildlife watching never truly stops and here we saw Short-toed Eagle and a White Pelican flock overhead. Closer to the ground were a few butterflies, including our first Small Copper of the trip. On the lake Great Crested Grebes were nest building and a Grey Heron posed statue-like on a rustic old boat.



A little later we drove up a track into the surrounding hills, where we stopped for lunch. We observed Eleanor's Falcon, Lesser Spotted Eagle and Common Buzzards overhead, plus a large White Pelican flock which circled over us a few times. The area was floristically interesting and held a good range of butterflies; Black-veined White, Scarce Swallowtail, Clouded Yellow, Common Blue, Green Hairstreak and a few others.



Probably our best experience of the day was the view looking down upon a Pelican and Cormorant feeding frenzy at the lake which made the water boil and foam. The Pelicans don't dive but rely on the Cormorants, following them as they stir up the fish and herd them into the shallows. A true wildlife spectacle!



Later we made a successful visit to a tower hide for Black Kites, where some were seen fairly high above the hillside. Also seen were Pygmy Cormorants and Hawfinch. Below the hide a brightly marked Cream Spot Tiger Moth was found. Further on, we stopped for Marsh Harrier, 9 Spoonbills, and 6 Little Egrets on a marshy strip. We had hoped for Great White Egrets, but none were seen on this particular visit.

#### **Day 4: Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> May**



On a farm track we were all enthralled by nesting Penduline Tits in riverside willows. We learned that the males build several nests (like Wrens) and the female chooses the best. Everyone had great views of the handsome male as he split his time between two nests. Watching this behaviour was one of the week's many highlights and showed the value in taking things at a gentle pace and taking time to enjoy and observe the birds, rather than rush to produce a tick list.

Later, a drive to one of the villages next to the lake for nesting White Storks proved more than worthwhile, adding Spanish Sparrows to our list. They were nesting within the lower construction of the Stork's nests. A quick visit to the Management Authority Visitor Centre and a

coffee turned up a beautiful Tree Sparrow on a garden fence. After spending lunch next to the lake, we headed off on the road to Bulgaria where we visited a Roller colony in a sandy cliff. Only 2 birds were seen but views were reasonable and we also found a pair of Kestrels nesting in a fairly narrow hole in the same cliff. The male was seen delivering a lizard to the female, which dragged it into the nest still wriggling! The area was pretty full of all sorts of other species, including, Golden Oriole, Nightingale, Olivaceous Warbler (with their scratchy cyclical song), Hoopoe, Red-backed Shrikes, and Crested Larks. We had some fantastic views of a pair of Golden Orioles, out in the open on a nearby bush. Bee-eaters posed similarly and allowed for leisurely observation of their colourful beauty through the scope.



White Stork on nest



Goldenring Dragonfly

A pile of rocks was investigated by Matt and as hoped Worm Snakes were found. These curious creatures live underground and feed on Ants, insects, spiders and worms. They strongly resemble a worm themselves, hence their name. They have tiny black eyes, making it difficult to tell the head from the tail! The ones we saw were mating and so after a short time we carefully covered them again and left them to get on with procreation!

Our last stop of the day was very close to the Bulgarian border, a woodland with very large Aspens by the river. Here we heard Grey-headed Woodpecker and Great Spotted Woodpecker calls, along with Short-toed Treecreeper and Olivaceous Warblers. Matt also pointed out a Roller that sat for a few moments at the top of one of the very tall Aspens. As the weather was a little cool a Goldenring dragonfly was happy to sit still and pose for us on a fairly low branch.

### Day 5: Friday 10<sup>th</sup> May

Our first stop of the day was at the Black Kite tower hide next to the lake, where we had made a visit on a previous day. The weather was better on this occasion and so was the bird watching! We had fantastic close views of a Black Kite, which floated effortlessly past us at eye level, as it then made its way higher up the hillside, before landing on its nest (seen fairly clearly through scopes and bins). Booted Eagle was also seen and a Honey Buzzard performing the wing clapping display flight was seen by some of the group who weren't in the tower hide.





Black Kite

In order to get a different perspective we took a boat trip on the lake. From one of the villages our boatman steered us out onto the glassy lake and in the direction of the drowned forest. As we moved closer, we became almost one with the birds. White and Dalmatian Pelican affording good photo opportunities, along with Pygmy Cormorant, Squacco Heron, Night Heron, Grey Heron, Black

Tern, White-winged Black Tern, Common Tern, Tree Sparrow, and colonies of nesting Great and Pygmy Cormorant interspersed with nesting Spoonbills. It was an amazing experience to be amongst such high numbers of so many beautiful birds and to be treated to such privileged views of them going about their business. The sounds coming from them, particularly the nesting Cormorants,



were also mesmerizing and the whole group found it one of the biggest highlights of the week. We were also able to get within 400metres of the Dalmatian Pelican nest platforms, but no closer, as any disturbance can cause the Pelicans to panic, resulting in catastrophic egg loss.

After we got back on shore we went to see a large House Martin colony in Sidirokastro. Then, at the castle above the town, we saw a good few raptors including Long-legged Buzzard and Common Buzzard. Also seen were Blue Rock Thrush, Nightingale, Red-rumped Swallows and Firecrest. The butterflies were numerous too; notable species seen included Queen of Spain Fritillary and Krueper's

Small White. On the way back through town we stopped off at an ice cream shop, where, on a cliff face behind, we were fortunate to catch sight of a Rock Nuthatch and a nesting Common Kestrel devouring a lizard.

Our final stop by the eastern shores of Lake Kerkini along the Strimonas River track was made in the rather hopeful expectation of catching sight of something different. We were not disappointed with sights of Golden Eagle, Be-eater, Crested Lark, Pygmy Cormorant, Hoopoe and Cuckoo.



#### Day 6: Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> May



We headed east towards the city of Alexandroupoli and our destination of a village between Dadia Forest and Evros Delta, stopping at Porto Lagos on the way for a rest. At the Monastery there one or two caught sight of a Collared Pratincole fly over the walkway and all saw Mediterranean Gulls, easily identified, with the light shining through their all-white wings and from their calls. Beyond the monastery, Black-winged Stilts flew into a stretch of water in front of the Harrier strip and in the distance, 2 female Marsh Harriers were seen quartering. As we neared our village, we encountered lots of White Storks feeding in the roadside fields.

Upon arrival at our hotel, we heard Penduline Tits, calling Nightingales and what was later positively identified as a singing Thrush Nightingale or Sprosser in Suffolk parlance. In the evening some of us headed up to the radio mast site at Kapsalo with our Greek guide, Tasos, who works on the Greek-Bulgarian project which is trying to conserve the Egyptian Vulture. The cloud had gathered by the time we arrived and yet we still managed to see Black Vultures flying over and a lone Griffon Vulture flying and then settling in a tree. From the rocks we heard and then caught sight of a Peregrine calling, and in the distance, a Booted Eagle was seen.



#### Day 7: Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> May

After an early breakfast we left for the Dadia forest vulture feeding station to try and see the 3 Vulture species that the site is famous for. On arrival at the visitor centre, we all saw the Cirl Bunting singing from a wire. We made our way to the hide, where we were successful in our goal! We all took great pleasure in watching Egyptian, Black and Griffon Vulture together, feeding on livestock remains and occasionally flying off, or having a tete a tete with a Fox. Several of the group commented on how small the Fox looked in





comparison with the Vultures. Also seen or heard were Hawfinch, Turtle Dove, Hoopoe and Bee-eater. A number of Black Storks were seen in flight, Woodlark was singing and a Cuckoo was calling. Matt located a Black-eared Wheatear on a distant rocks and a Raven was somewhat dwarfed by the sheer size and bulk of the vultures.

Outside the hide and a little way into the forest Rosemary found Violet Bird's Nest Orchids and a good-sized mature Hermann's Tortoise, which was still warming up in the morning sun.



Spur-winged Plover

We then moved south to explore parts of the massive Evros Delta, on the border with Turkey. En route and from the vehicle, Red-backed Shrike were very visible, with at least 12 being seen. Some of the most interesting birds of the day were the very handsome Spur-winged Plovers, seen in one of the shallow pools and on the track along the adjoining embankment. We took plenty of time to enjoy these birds and let everybody have good views. Several of the group managed to observe a mating pair. A further highlight was 3 White-tailed Eagles (2 adult and 1 immature) flanking us and then rising up on a thermal.

The Delta is famous for its sheer number of species, and it did not disappoint us. Marsh Harriers, Black Stork, White Stork, Black-headed Bunting, Corn Bunting, Nightingale, Bee-eater, a Glossy Ibis flock, Yellow Wagtail, Tawny Pipit,

Swallow, Spanish Sparrow, House Martin and Isabelline Wheatear (seen first by Peter and Tasos) were some of the birds observed. At a small lagoon, there were also good numbers of feeding Little Stint, Curlew Sandpiper, Kentish Plover, Ringed Plover, and a beautiful Grey Plover (in full breeding plumage on passage) which was first spotted by Malcolm. Great Egrets were first spotted by Kay. They were seen flying with Little Egret, which really helped demonstrate the size difference between these 2 species. We also had good views of a Skylark, Sand Martin, Shelduck, Oystercatcher and Black-headed Wagtail, amongst others.

#### Day 8: Monday 13<sup>th</sup> May



Bath White & Crab spider

After breakfast we had to say farewell to this fascinating far corner of Greece and make our way west again, to catch our afternoon flight to the UK. Along the way a scattering of Marsh Harriers, Storks and Buzzards were seen. At a rest stop Black-veined White butterflies were present and a seemingly obliging Eastern Bath White sat still on a flower, seen to have been grabbed by a Crab Spider when we approached it for a closer look! Also, the ever present Crested Larks made a final appearance.



## Species Lists

### Birds

	Common name	Scientific name
1	Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>
2	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>
3	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>
4	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>
5	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo sinensis</i>
6	Pygmy Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax pygmaeus</i>
7	Great White Pelican	<i>Pelecanus onocrotalus</i>
8	Dalmatian Pelican	<i>Pelecanus crispus</i>
9	Little Bittern	<i>Ixobrychus minutus</i>
10	Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>
11	Squacco Heron	<i>Ardeola ralloides</i>
12	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>
13	Great Egret	<i>Egretta alba</i>
14	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>
15	Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>
16	Black Stork	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>
17	White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>
18	Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>
19	Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>
20	European Honey Buzzard	<i>Pernis apivorus</i>
21	Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>
22	White-tailed Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>



23	Egyptian Vulture	<i>Noephron percnopterus</i>
24	Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>
25	Black Vulture	<i>Aegypius monachus</i>
26	Short-toed Eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>
27	Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>
28	Levant Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter brevipes</i>
29	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>
30	Long-legged Buzzard	<i>Buteo rufinus</i>
31	Lesser Spotted Eagle	<i>Aquila pomarina</i>
32	Booted Eagle	<i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i>
33	Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>
34	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>
35	Hobby	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>
36	Eleonora's Falcon	<i>Falco eleonora</i>
37	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>
38	Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>
39	Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>
40	Common Crane	<i>Grus grus</i>
41	Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>
42	Black winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>
43	Collared Pratincole	<i>Glareola pratincola</i>
44	Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>
45	Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>
46	Kentish Plover	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>
47	Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>
48	Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>
49	Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>
50	Curlew Sandpiper	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>
51	Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>
52	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>
53	Mediterranean Gull	<i>Larus melanocephalus</i>
54	Black-headed Gull	<i>Larus ridibundus</i>
55	Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus cachinnans</i>
56	Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>
57	Whiskered Tern	<i>Chlidonias hybridus</i>
58	Black Tern	<i>Chlidonias niger</i>
59	White-winged Tern	<i>Chlidonias leucopterus</i>
60	Woodpigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>
61	Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>
62	Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>
63	Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>
64	Scops Owl	<i>Otus scops</i>
65	Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>
66	Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>
67	Pallid Swift	<i>Apus pallidus</i>
68	Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>
69	European Bee-eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>
70	European Roller	<i>Coracias garrulus</i>
71	Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>
72	Grey-headed Woodpecker	<i>Picus canus</i>
73	Greater Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>

74	Syrian Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos syriacus</i>
75	Greater Short -toed Lark	<i>Calandrella brachydactyla</i>
76	Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>
77	Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>
78	Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>
79	Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>
80	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>
81	Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Hirundo daurica</i>
82	House Martin	<i>Delichon urbica</i>
83	Tawny Pipit	<i>Anthus campestris</i>
84	Black-headed Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava feldegg</i>
85	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>
86	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>
87	Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>
88	Nightingale	<i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i>
89	Thrush Nightingale	<i>Luscinia luscinia</i>
90	Isabelline Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe isabellina</i>
91	Black-eared Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe hispanica</i>
92	Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>
93	Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>
94	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>
95	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>
96	Sedge Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>
97	Great Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus arundinaceus</i>
98	Olivaceous Warbler	<i>Hippolais pallida</i>
99	Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>
100	Common Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis</i>
101	Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapillus</i>
102	Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>
103	Blue Tit	<i>Parus caeruleus</i>
104	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>
105	Western Rock Nuthatch	<i>Sitta neumayer</i>
106	Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>
107	European Penduline Tit	<i>Remiz pendulinus</i>
108	Golden Oriole	<i>Oriolus oriolus</i>
109	Red-backed Shrike	<i>Lanius collurio</i>
110	Lesser Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius minor</i>
111	Woodchat Shrike	<i>Lanius senator</i>
112	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>
113	Common Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>
114	Hooded Crow	<i>Corvus cornix</i>
115	Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>
116	Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>
117	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>
118	Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>
119	Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>
120	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>
121	Greenfinch	<i>Carduelis chloris</i>
122	Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>
123	Linnet	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>
124	Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>



125	Cirl Bunting	<i>Emberiza cirlus</i>
126	Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>
127	Black-headed Bunting	<i>Emberiza melanocephala</i>
128	Corn Bunting	<i>Miliaria calandra</i>

## Butterflies

	Common Name	Scientific Name
1	Red Admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>
2	Common Blue	<i>Polyommatus icarus</i>
3	Eastern Bath White	<i>Pontia edusa</i>
4	Small White	<i>Pieris rapae</i>
5	Clouded Yellow	<i>Colias croceus</i>
6	European Swallowtail	<i>Papilio machaon</i>
7	Small Heath	<i>Coenonympha pamphilus</i>
8	Nettle Tree	<i>Libythea celtis</i>
9	Wall Brown	<i>Lasiommata megera</i>
10	Brimstone	<i>Gonepteryx rhamni</i>
11	Little Tiger Blue	<i>Tarucus balkanicus</i>
12	Black-veined White	<i>Aporia crataegi</i>
13	Southern White Admiral	<i>Limenitis reducta</i>
14	Painted Lady	<i>Vanessa cardui</i>
15	Spotted Fritillary	<i>Melitaea didyma</i>
16	Eastern Festoon	<i>Allancastris cerisyi</i>
17	Southern Festoon (larvae)	<i>Zerynthia polyxena</i>
18	Scarce Swallowtail	<i>Iphiclides podalirius</i>
19	Brown Argus	<i>Aricia agestis</i>
20	Queen of Spain Fritillary	<i>Issoria lathonia</i>
21	Knapweed Fritillary	<i>Melitaea phoebe</i>
22	Small Copper	<i>Lycaena phlaeas</i>
23	Green Hairstreak	<i>Callophrys rubi</i>
24	Meadow Brown	<i>Maniola jurtina</i>
25	Krueper's Small White	<i>Pieris mannii</i>
26	Eastern Dappled White	<i>Euchloe ausonia</i>
27	Large White	<i>Pieris brassicae</i>

## Photo Gallery



Red-backed Shrike



Spoonbill on nest



Cormorants on Lake Kerkini



Cormorants on Lake Kerkini

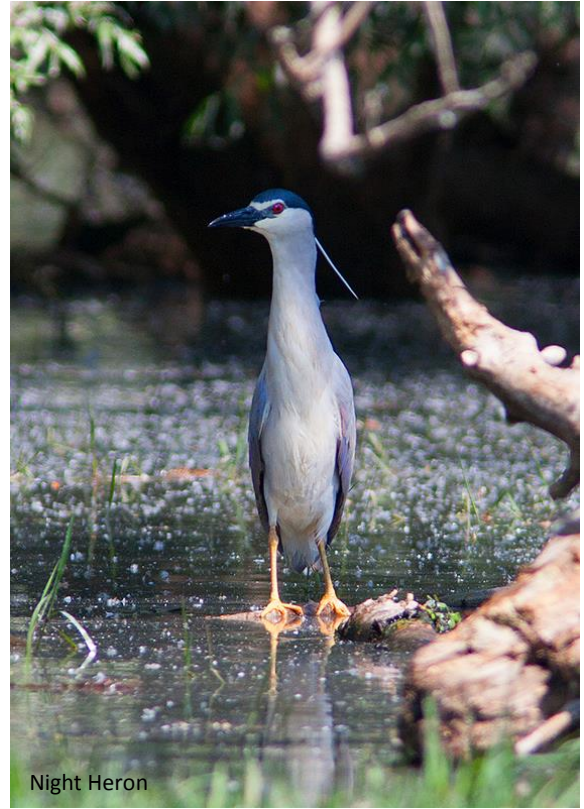


Squacco Heron

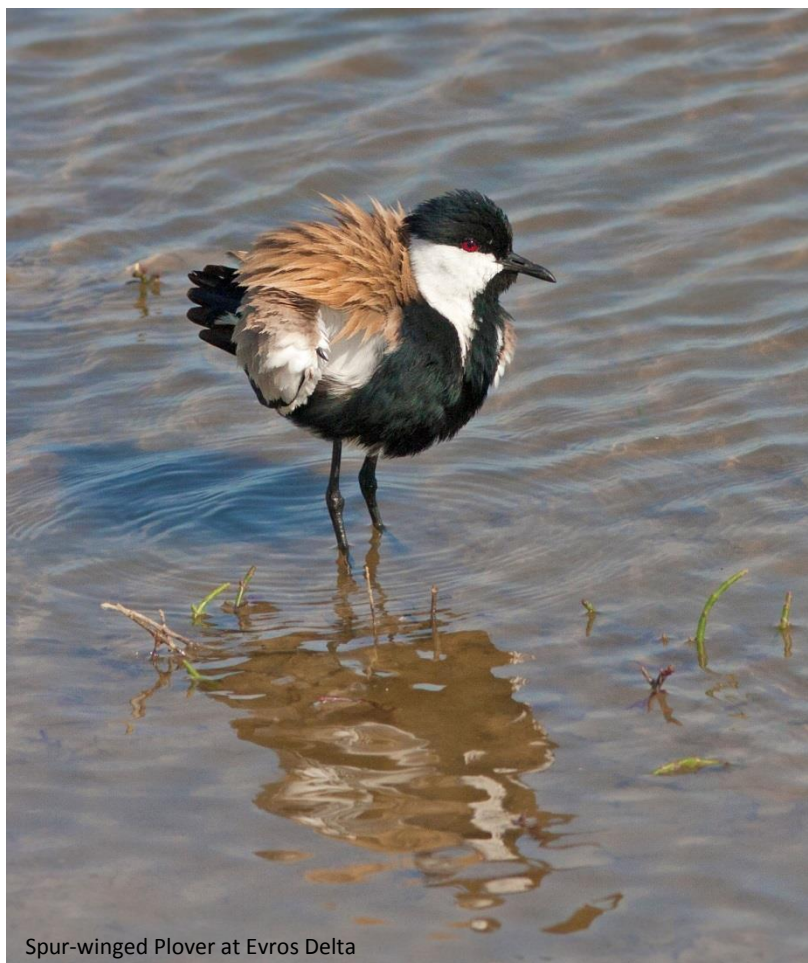




Spoonbill



Night Heron



Spur-winged Plover at Evros Delta





Black-veined White



Water Buffalo



Hermann's Tortoise



Wood Sandpiper



Pygmy Cormorant





Rock Nuthatch nests



White Stork