

Lesvos

6-13 May 1999

Participants:

Helen Daniels
Victor and Ruth Goulder
Carol and John Hewitt
Roger Howard
Roslyn Knight
David and Maureen Paling
John Pollard
Jack Randall



Spur-winged Lapwing

Leaders:

Dave Kjaer and
Peter Basterfield

Day 1: Leaving Gatwick on time at 13.40, we arrived at Mytilini at 19.30. Customs took a little time to process us but then, we were off by coach to our excellent family run hotel in Skala Kalloni. The drive allowed us to see some of the scenery although it was dark when we arrived at The Hotel Pasiphae. A meal had thoughtfully been laid on for us after booking in and a very tired party retired to bed well after 23.00, looking forward to the next days birding. Apart from the occasional House Sparrow at the airport the only birds of note seen during the day were some very distant shearwaters. These remained unidentified because of a very strong north-easterly wind, which was whipping up very large white horses. The wind was to dominate over the next two days and, as it was coming off the Turkish mountains, it was rather cold. In fact, it was almost woolly hat and gloves weather, not what you would expect in Lesvos in May, more like Portland in January!

Day 2: An early pre-breakfast walk to view Kalloni pools just outside the hotel was somewhat marred by the bitter wind but we were lucky enough to see the Spur-winged Plover on the last day of its brief stay, together with the first of what turned out to be daily Garganey. Common Nightingales were singing from the trees just outside our rooms and Crested Larks were everywhere. The first of the numerous Wood Sandpipers observed during our stay were seen well together with Little Stints, Black-winged Stilts

and White Storks. Other species which were then seen daily included Olivaceous Warblers, Spanish Sparrows and Black-headed and Corn Buntings. Following breakfast we took a trip along the front to see the Spanish Sparrow colony and visited a White Stork nest site before a leisurely drive/walk along the length of the East River. This produced our first Squacco Heron, Little Bitterns, Little Ringed Plovers, Red-throated Pipits and European Bee-eaters of the trip. Lunch was taken at the saltpans watching Greater Flamingos, Pied Avocets, Black-winged Stilts, numerous Little Stints, Ruff and our first Ruddy Shelducks, Western Marsh-harriers and Red-footed Falcons. Did I mention the Grey Herons, Cattle, Little and Great Egrets, Black and White Storks? Substantial packed lunches were provided every day and, after eating today's, we visited Achaladerdi to see the nesting sites of Middle-spotted Woodpecker and Kruper's Nuthatch, which also produced Lesser Grey Shrike and Cirl Bunting. On the way to the Napi valley, we also saw Chukar. Finally, a quick visit to the inland lake and Parakila gave us superb views of Red-rumped Swallows, Blue Rock Thrush and Cretzschmar's Bunting, which brought the first full day to a pleasant end.

Day 3: Every morning started with a pre-breakfast visit to Kalloni Pools to brush up on our waders and ducks and to look for new arrivals. Common Ringed, Kentish and Grey Plovers and Dunlin were all new with many Pied Avocet, Little Stint, Curlew Sandpiper and Ruff. After breakfast, another visit to East River on the way to the Napi valley where the first Black-eared Wheatears and Western Rock Nuthatches were overshadowed by superb views of Rufous Bush Robins singing. The highlight at lunch was a pair of Short-toed Snake-eagles displaying overhead with our first Sombre Tits calling in the bushes and more Black-eared Wheatears. The views from the top of the mountain were superb, allowing us to see the northern part of the island spread out below us. Arriving at Molivos, a roadside stop produced excellent views of both Rüppell's and Orphean Warblers. The day was completed with another visit to the saltpans where we were able to compare White-winged Black, Whiskered and Black Terns, all in spectacular breeding plumage, as well as see the first of regular Black-headed Wagtails and Greater Short-toed Larks.

Day 4: The sun broke through at last and our itinerary for today was similar to yesterday's, but leaving out Molivos. The saltpans produced Glossy Ibis, Purple Heron and Common, Little and Gull-billed Terns, plus good views of Zitting Cisticola (Fan-tailed Warbler). A repeat visit to the Napi Valley for the elusive Olive-tree Warblers was followed by a search for Cinereous Bunting, but for this we had to wait until tomorrow! We did however, manage to see three species of harriers today, Hen, Montagu's and Marsh.

Day 5: After the usual start at the pools and a visit to the saltpans before breakfast, we set off for Sigri via Agra. Good views of Rock Sparrow at Agra followed by excellent sightings of Lesser Kestrel were had in the Sigri region despite being "moved on" by the Greek army! Red-backed, Masked and Woodchat Shrikes were everywhere and at the

Andina crossroads were joined by six Isabelline Wheatears. At long last, a Cinereous Bunting posed just beside the vehicles, giving everyone good views. A drive back through 'Grand Canyon' found more Rock Sparrows but failed to find Eurasian Crag-martin. Two sightings of Long-legged Buzzard and a single Eleonora's Falcon rounded off the day nicely before a final visit to the saltpans where a vagrant Red-necked Phalarope, amongst the 100s of Little Stints and other waders, was an excellent find.

Days 6–7: The remaining days of our visit took on a routine of Kalloni Pools and the saltpans before breakfast. This was followed by a variety of repeat visits to the Napi Valley for Olive-tree Warbler, East River for Little Bitterns, Squacco and Purple Herons, Petre and Molivos for Rüppell's and Orphean Warblers, plus Alpine Swifts in quantity. A Bonelli's Eagle was a nice find. We finished both days with visits to the saltpans to look for new arrivals with the second day's visit producing excellent views of a juvenile Water Rail being fed by its parent, a new experience for the entire group. Other new birds included a single Great White Pelican in Kalloni Harbour on both days and a single European Roller in the Napi Valley and Eurasian Bittern on Kalloni Pool, both on the first day.

Day 8: A last day visit to the Inland Lake produced our only Black-crowned Night Heron of the trip which turned out to be a first-summer bird, a plumage unfamiliar to most. The Hotel Pasiphae looked after us extremely well during our stay with a good standard of accommodation and extremely friendly and helpful staff making sure that we enjoyed ourselves. 1999 was not a classic migration spring on Lesvos because of the unusual weather but nevertheless, in the final total of 126, all of the specialities were seen with one or two surprises as well.