

Lesvos Bird Trip Report, March 25-27th 2016

compiled by Spyros Skareas

www.greekbirding.blogspot.com



Scops Owls roosting at Papiana

Having been in Lesvos for birding twice the last 5 years, always beginning of May, I decided to spend a long weekend this year at the end of March. I was hoping to get some early migrants and possibly some rare vagrants. My targets were good views of Pallid and Montagu's Harrier, Long-eared Owl, Rueppell's Warbler, Cretzschmar's Bunting, any raptors and anything else that could arrive before April.



Short-toed Eagles over Eressos

There are some pros and cons in birdwatching in Lesvos early in spring. First, and most important, there are no other birders in the island! I could not believe driving alone in Kalloni Wetland, imaging all that May traffic, a very unusual sighting for greek birders. Prices are very cheap, approximately 30-40% down from May, in accommodation & car rental. Food is cheap at year long in Lesvos anyway. In terms of bird species, I enjoyed Long-legged Buzzards, Scops Owl (I got two in a frame), Ruddy Shelducks, Spur-winged Plovers, numerous Short-toed Eagles, and excellent views of Rueppell's Warber and Cretzschmar's Bunting. Especially about the last two species, which are targets for many birders, I found that one can actually get really close views early in spring. Birds are not as shy as when they raise young, so they are fearless and easy to approach.



Chukar at Sigri

On the contrary, when arriving as early as March, you definitely miss some later arrivals, such as Cinereous Bunting, Kruepper's Nuthatch (although resident, it's hard if its not during breeding months), Black-headed Bunting, most terns, herons and flycatchers. Also, you miss lots of info from other birders, and you end up searching alone... but this is fun too!



Spur-winged Plover at Vatera beach

Cost: 297 € total, for 3 full days (2 nights accommodation)

Flight from Athens: 120€, with aegeanair.com If you live in central/northern Europe, you can book a cheap flight to Athens with Easy Jet or Ryanair, for as low as 50 €, or with AegeanAir starting with 100 €.

Parking at Athens Airport: 15€

Car rental: 120 € for 3 full days, unlimited km, full insurance. Michalis Tsalis is very reliable and friendly. I booked a 4X4 Suzuki Jimny, ideal for any road in Greece. It literally (not metaphorically) goes everywhere!

Gasoline: 50 € for approx.. 400km covered during 3 days.

Accommodation: 60 € total (30 € per night) at [Diamanti Rooms](http://DiamantiRooms.com). Their website is very basic (needs renovation), so better see some pics at booking.com.

Since Pasiphae was closed, they forwarded me at this lovely, family owned "rooms-to-rent", just in front of the beach at Skalla Kallonis. Waking up and watching Black Heron on the beach was a super morning wakeup on Saturday. The rooms are basic, but very clean, the owners are very friendly, having birders as hosts since many years. Walking distance to local tavernas,

bakery and small shops at Skalla Kallonis. After driving all day, I do not want to take the car any more.

Food: 32 € total for 3 days. Recommended in Steve's book, **Dionysos taverna** at Skalla Kallonis is great, especially for sea food. I had boiled octopus with vinegar, fresh cod with skordalia (mashed potatoes with garlic), and boiled beets with olive oil, plus coke, for just 20€.

At Kalloni, try "To Steki" souvlaki, I had full gyros, with green lettuce salad and coke, for just 7,20€. Opposite is super market "Selachas" (closed on Sundays) from where I bought typical birders food for the first day in a rush (chocolate, chips, water, crackers) for 25€ and lasted 2 days.

Note that on Lesvos, VAT in services and goods is only 16% (and not 23% like in Greece's mainland)

Information from:

[A birdwatching guide to Lesvos](#), excellent bird guide book, by Steve Dudley.

[Lesvosbirding.com](#) as well as personal communication with Steve Dudley

[Lesvosbirdwatching.gr](#) as well as personal communication and guiding with

Eleni Gallinou, an avid local birder and experienced bird guide.

Personal info from local birder Petros Tsakmakis

Facebook group, such as "Facebook Birders" and "Lesvos Bird News"



Short-toed Lark at Kalloni Saltpans

Comments on locations from Steve Dudley's book ([A birdwatching guide to Lesvos](#)) and general suggestions.

Road conditions are better than 2 years ago. A new road is now available, from Antissa to Sigri, it takes 10 min from Ipsilou to Sigri fields.

Also, the notorious dirt road from Sigri to Eressos, via Santorium and Tschlondas river (Meladia Valley) is drivable even with regular car, although some attention is needed in a few more rocky parts.



Great Spotted Cuckoo at Kalloni pumping station

Eressos beach is amazing, especially at sunset. As suggested in Steve's book, it's great to finish your day in the wild west with a drink in the village beside the beach. Another great beach (but having no bars or cafes) is Chrousos beach, with lots of Long-legged Buzzards and Short-toed Eagles in the surrounding fields. Vatera beach offered me one of this trip's highlight, the 2 Spur-winged Plovers, close to the river mouth. That's another area with lots of tavernas and sea side bars to relax after a birding day. For the 3rd time in Lesvos, Polychnitos Saltpans was a disaster. Very few birds, most of them needing a telescope to see, and not a great scenery either. I guess the places attracts more waders later in spring, but having visited the area in May too, I think I will try a different area next time.

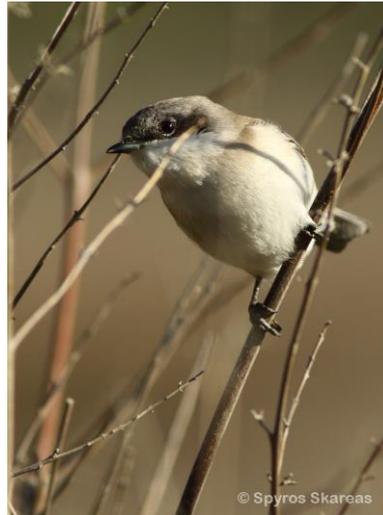


Cretzschmar's Bunting at Apothika

The north-east part of the island (from Mandamados to Mytilini) is nothing special, apart from the coastal road and the nice scenery. However, I got 4 Long-legged Buzzard soaring together close to Mandamados, and lost of Short-toed Eagles. Nice little ports throughout the road, ideal for an afternoon coffee or drink.

The south part of the island is also beautiful, but road conditions are bad in some areas. Road from Apothika to Makara offers very close views of Cretzschmar's Buntings, Black-eared Wheatears. There is a small river

mouth at Makara, where plovers and wagtails are also very close to the road and can be easily photographed. Now, the problem starts from Makara to Agra, named Kontisia valley. Advising people to get a 4X4 is one thing. But not a simple 4X4 like Fiat Panda. You will need a Suzuki Jimny or Daihatsu Terios, as well as good driving skills, especially for the first 6-7 kilometers. If you really want to visit Kontisia Valley, I suggest the road from Agra, keeping south for the first 7-8 km. This is the easiest part, with lots of tall trees and bushes that attract passerines.



Lesser Whitethroat at Sigri

Surprisingly, the water levels were awkward in various places. Kalloni wetlands are relatively dry in some area, while some pools are flooded. Faneromeni river mouth is dry, which was one of the best places for close up views of Squacco Heron, Little Bittern and possibly Citrine Wagtails. Metochi Lake was almost flooded, so there was no space for crakes, but maybe it was a little early too.



Little Owl at Mesotopos

The Scops Owls at Papiana park of Agia Triada (noted mini-soccer field in Steve's book) is excellent for Scops Owls. I saw 4 birds in total on 2 trees, only about 3 meters from the ground. You need time to find them and

when you do so, you wonder you could have missed them! This is the only place in Greece I could have such clear views and pics, even though I listen to them all year long even at my place. The first tree to look for them is the first eucalyptus next to the abandoned tavernas. It was the same 2 year ago. Then, on the eucalyptus next to the main road (please stay in the park and not on the road), try the trees in the middle.



Black Stork at Kalloni Salpans

Overall, [Steve's book](#) is great for any information a birder would need on the island. Do not expect to see every bird listed in each location. This is a matter of time, luck, skills and patience. Having good friends on the island, like bird guide Eleni Gallinou (<http://www.lesvosbirdwatching.gr/>) and amateur photographer Petros Tsakmakis, helped me enormously in finding the species I was looking for. Great Spotted Cuckoos were just beyond where I was looking for them every day, but it was only until Petros took me exactly to the spot. Same thing with the Bittern at Skalla Kalloni pool. I was looking for the Pallid Harrier for long, and it was only until Eleni showed me the place, when I finally found it. To make a point: Birding in Lesvos can be superb, but you need time and patience in each location. Help from other birders, exchanging info during the trip, and hiring a local guide even for one day (especially if you don't have many days to spend) can make a tremendous difference. Again, Steve's book is as essential as a pair of binoculars.



Black-headed Wagtail at Kalloni Saltpans

Feel free to ask me any more info, at s.skareas@gmail.com or at facebook groups, Lesvos Birders and Lesvos Bird News.

Species List

Scopoli's Shearwater	1 off shore Eressos beach
Cormorant	Widespread
Shag	2 off shore Eressos beach
Little Grebe	widespread
Great Crested Grebe	10+ off shore, at Kalloni Bay
Grey Heron	widespread
Great White Heron	widespread
Little Egret	widespread
Bittern	1 at Skalla Kallonis pools, across Kalloni Bay Hotel
Black Stork	1 at Kalloni Saltpans, 1 at Mesa
Flamingo	200+ at Kalloni Saltpans
Ruddy Shelduck	50+ at Kalloni Saltpans, several sightings across the island
Mallard	a few individuals at Kalloni area
Short-toed Eagle	common especially in the east/south part, Eressos, Makara, Chrousos, Agra, Mesotopos, Vatera
Common Buzzard	Widespread
Long-legged Buzzard	1 at Kalloni Saltpans, 1 Eressos, 3 at Mandamados
Sparrowhawk	1 at Parakoila
Marsh Harrier	Common around Kalloni area
Hen Harrier	1 female at Kalloni Saltpans
Pallid Harrier	1 adult male, at Kalloni Saltpans
Lesser Kestrel	4 at Sigri fields
Common Kestrel	Widespread
Chukar	5 at Sigri Sanatorium
Moorhen	Widespread
Coot	Widespread
Black-winged Stilt	Common at Kalloni Saltpans, but also smaller wetlands
Avocet	200+ Kalloni
Spur-winged Plover	2 at Vatera beach, west end
Little Ringed Plover	Common at Kalloni
Greenshank	5 at Skalla Kalloni pools
Wood Sandpiper	10+ Kalloni
Common Sandpiper	3 at Kalloni, 1 at Chrousos River
Little Stint	5 at kalloni
Yellow-legged Gull	widespread
Black-headed Gull	10+ Tsiknias river mouth
Sandwich Tern	3 at Tsiknias river mouth
Rock Dove	3 at Eressos beach, rocky west end of the beach
Collared Dove	widespread
Great Spotted Cuckoo	2 at kalloni pump station
Scops owl	4 at Kalloni, at Agia Triada Soccer Pitc, roosting on eucalyptus trees
Little owl	1 at Mesa

Common Swift	Widespread
Alpine Swift	10+ at Sigri Sanatorium
Hoopoe	Widespread
Short-toed Lark	10+ at Kalloni
Sand Martin	10+ Kalloni, 5+ Makara
Barn Swallow	Widespread
Red-rumped Swallow	Widespread
House Martin	widespread
Tawny Pipit	5+ at Kalloni
Tree Pipit	10+ at kalloni
White Wagtail	Widespread
Black-headed Wagtail	widespread
Blackbird	Widespread
Black Redstart	1 Kalloni beach, close to city of Mylilene
Whinchat	3 at Kalloni
Stonechat	Widespread
Northern Wheatear	Widespread
Black-eared Wheatear	Widespread
Zitting Cisticola	Kalloni, Polychnitos Saltpans
Cetti's Warbler	Widespread
Sedge Warbler	Widespread
Chiffchaff	1 at Sigri Santorium
Blackcap	1 at Meladia Valley
Lesser Whitethroat	3 at Meladia Valley
Subalpine Warbler	Widespread
Rueppell's Warbler	2 at Sigri Sanatorium
Sombre Tit	2 at Napi
Coal Tit	2 at Kalloni, Papiana
Blue Tit	Widespread
Great Tit	Widespread
Rock Nuthatch	Widespread
Woodchat Shrike	1 at Kalloni, 1 at Kontisia valley, 1 at Dafia
Jay	Widespread
Jackdaw	200+ at Sigri, 100+ at Eressos
Hooded Crow	Widespread
Raven	2 at Ipsilou Monastery
Common Starling	1 at Kalloni
House Sparrow	Widespread
Spanish Sparrow	5+ at Kalloni
Chaffinch	Widespread
Greenfinch	Widespread
Linnet	Widespread at the Sigri, Eressos area
Serin	widespread
Cirl Bunting	2 at Dafia
Cretzschmar's Bunting	Widespread. Best and close views at Apothika-Makara road, Sigri-Eressos road
Corn Bunting	widespread