



**GREECE: 9-DAY BIRDING ADVENTURE WITH
OPTIONAL EXTENSION TO LESVOS**

23 April - 1 MAY 2020



Rock Partridge (*Alectoris graeca*) is one of our targets on this trip.

Greece has one of the highest bird densities in Europe and offers wonderful cultural possibilities. On this 9-day trip we will start off in Athens, one of the cultural capitals of the world, where we will familiarize ourselves with the more common European birds as well as visit some of the best cultural spots in the city.

From here we make our way north to beautiful Lake Kerkini, which offers wonderful opportunities to view breeding **Dalmatian Pelican** and **Pygmy Cormorant**. The surrounding forest is home to six **Woodpecker** species, including **Syrian**, **Grey-headed**, and **Middle-Spotted**.

Our next stop is Mount Pangaion, where we will target alpine species that include **Rock Bunting**, **Alpine Chough**, and **Rock Partridge**.

We visit the Nestos Delta on our way to the Evros Delta. There, on the Turkish border, we will spend a few days. The vast Evros Delta offers a real opportunity to find a rarity or two, as well as **Mediterranean Gull**, **Eurasian Bittern**, and **Slender-billed Gull**. We also visit nearby Dadia Forest, which is the best location in Europe for raptors, with thirty-five out of the possible thirty-eight diurnal species in Europe possible!

We then drive back to Thessaloniki, where you can catch a flight back home or take a plane to bird the island of Lesvos.

Main Tour

Itinerary (9 days/8 nights)

Day 1. Cultural highlights and European birding introduction in Athens

After breakfast at your hotel you will be picked up and we will depart for a full-day tour to see the highlights of Athens, including the Acropolis with all of its famous monuments, the Ancient Agora, the Roman Agora, the Acropolis Museum, the Temple of Olympian Zeus, and possibly a visit to Marathon and the nearby wetland of Schinias, if time allows. From a birding point of view, we will familiarize ourselves with the common garden and city birds of Europe, which include **Common Kestrel**, **Common Blackbird**, **European Robin**, **Great Tit**, **Blue Tit**, **Eurasian Blackcap**, **Sardinian Warbler**, and **Little Owl**. We will enjoy lunch in the famous Plaka area, and dinner will be at one of the local tavernas, offering a great introduction to authentic Greek dishes.

Overnight: Acropolis Museum Boutique Hotel, Athens

Day 2. Athens birding and flight north to Thessaloniki

We will spend most of the morning at Mt. Immitos near Athens, looking for specials like **Rock Nuthatch**, **Rüppel's Warbler**, **Cretzschmar's Bunting**, **Barred Warbler**, **Black-eyed Wheatear**, and **Eastern Orphean Warbler**. After enjoying lunch in Athens we will make our way to Athens International Airport for our short domestic flight to Thessaloniki, from where we will be transferred to our guesthouse at Lake Kerkini. A special presentation about Lake Kerkini in the guesthouse will prove to be a great introduction to this place, before we will settle in and then enjoy the local speciality cuisine at a local restaurant.

Overnight: Guesthouse Limnaio, Kerkini

Day 3. Lake Kerkini and the Dalmatian Pelican

Lake Kerkini is simply magical. An early morning sitting by the shore, watching pelicans, egrets, and herons while being serenaded by **Common Nightingale** and **Golden Oriole** as the sun rises above snow-capped mountains reflected in a still lake is absolutely stunning. The lake and the surrounding area have a bird list of over 300 species, and we will spend a full day exploring the Lake Kerkini area. The main target species at the lake are **Dalmatian Pelican** and **Pygmy Cormorant**. The surrounding forest area holds a wonderful diversity of **Warblers**, including **Eastern Orphean, Sardinian, Subalpine, Olivaceous, and Eastern Bonelli's**, as well as **Common** and **Lesser Whitethroats**. **Common Nightingale** and **Common Cuckoo** are never too far away.

Overnight: Guesthouse Limnaio, Kerkini

Day 4. Lake Kerkini boat cruise and woodpeckers

After an early breakfast we will wrap up our lakeshore birding before departing for a morning boat cruise on Lake Kerkini, where we will witness an incredible number and diversity of waterbirds. We will visit the special raft where **Dalmatian Pelicans** breed, which allows for wonderful close-up views. Other waterbirds include **Great White Pelican, Pygmy Cormorant, Great Crested Grebe, Great Cormorant, and Eurasian Spoonbill**. After a picnic lunch we will spend the afternoon birding in the forests on the Bulgarian border, where we have the opportunity to see seven different **Woodpecker** species: **Great Spotted, Middle Spotted, Little Spotted, Grey-faced, European Green, Syrian, and Black**. Other interesting birds to be found here include **Rock Nuthatch, Sombre Tit, Eurasian Penduline Tit, and Short-toed Treecreeper**.

Overnight: Guesthouse Limnaio, Kerkini

Day 5. Alpine birding on Mount Pangaion and at Kavala

After breakfast we will depart for Mount Pangaion, where we will bird as we ascend, but the main focus will be on the higher slopes, looking for, among others, **Alpine Chough, Ortolan Bunting, Yellowhammer, Water Pipit, Rock Partridge, Rock Bunting, Coal Tit, and Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush**. From here we will depart for Kavala, amphitheatrically built on the slopes of Mt. Symvolos, one of the most picturesque cities in Greece with a very rich cultural heritage. After arriving by late afternoon we will wander on the cobbled streets, admire the medieval castle, and enjoy dinner in a fish taverna along the shore.

Overnight: Egnatia City Hotel & Spa, Kavala

Day 6. Nestos Delta to Evros Delta

After a relaxing breakfast we will start two days of birding in the brilliant delta habitats in northeastern Greece. First we will visit the Nestos Delta, where we will look for species like **Mediterranean and Slender-billed Gulls, European Shag, and Little Tern**. This area is also really good for shrikes, and we should see **Woodchat** and **Lesser Grey, and Red-backed Shrikes** without difficulty. After wrapping up the morning's birding and enjoying a picnic lunch we will make our way to the Evros Delta. The huge Evros Delta offers you the chance to see real rarities, due to its eastern location on the border with Turkey. We have organized a video presentation, a tour, and a boat trip on the delta for us, which will be a great introduction to the area.

Overnight: Hotel Isidora, Loutra Trianoupolis

Day 7. Evros Delta

Today we have a full day birding in the Evros Delta, exploring the mixture of birding habitats. Some of the species that we should encounter include **Spur-winged Lapwing, Eurasian Oystercatcher, Pied Avocet, Eurasian Stone-curlew, Grey Plover, Curlew Sandpiper, Marsh Sandpiper, Black-tailed Godwit**, and other species like **Eurasian Bittern, Purple Heron, Greater Flamingo, Long-legged Buzzard, European Roller, Little Tern, Sandwich Tern, Black Tern, White-winged Tern, Whiskered Tern**, and **Isabelline Wheatear**.

Overnight: Hotel Isidora, Loutra Trianoupolis

Day 8. Dadia Forest

We will leave early in the morning and drive to the nearby Dadia Forest, where we will spend a full day birding. This mountainous area is one of the best places in Europe for the observation of birds of prey. Thirty-five out of thirty-eight diurnal raptors have been recorded here, along with seven out of nine owl species. To find as many of them as possible will be our main focus. Some of the species we should see include raptors such as **Cinereous Vulture, Griffon Vulture, Egyptian Vulture, Golden Eagle, Booted Eagle**, and **European Honey Buzzard**, as well as **Black Stork** and passerines including **Long-tailed Tit, European Siskin**, and **Masked Shrike**. In the afternoon we will have a short drive back to our hotel.

Overnight: Hotel Isidora, Loutra Trianoupolis

Day 9. Drive to Thessaloniki and departure

Today will see our departure for Thessaloniki, with stops at wetlands along the way, as well as a picnic lunch. Then we will make our way straight to Thessaloniki Airport for your outbound flight.

5-day extension to Lesvos

Lesvos has been a famous birdwatching destination for the last two decades. Located at the borders of two continents, the island has a great diversity in bird species of both European and Asian origin, which simply takes off during the migrating season (especially in the spring). On the third-largest island of Greece extensive areas of very different habitats are found (olive groves, pine forest, garrigue, maquis), while another very important aspect to add to the island's avian richness is the fact that a great number of wetlands are found here. Some of the specials that we might see include **Krüper's Nuthatch, Short-toed Treecreeper, Cinereous Bunting, Cretzschmar's Bunting**, and **Isabelline Wheatear**.

Itinerary (5 days/4 nights)**Day 1 (Day 9). Departure to Lesvos**

Once we have arrived back in Thessaloniki and stopping for lunch we will make our way to the airport for our domestic flight to the island of Lesvos, where we will spend the next four nights. We will be met at Lesvos airport and transferred to our Hotel, where we will discuss the various birding habitats as well as the birding itinerary for the next three days.

Overnight: Malemi Organic Hotel, Skala Kalloni

Day 2 (Day 10). Achladeri Pine Forest and Kalloni Gulf wetlands

Lesvos is the only area in Europe where **Krüper's Nuthatch** can be found, and we have a wonderful chance to get close-up views. Other forest species that we might see are **Short-toed Treecreeper** and **Long-tailed Tit**. The Kalloni Gulf is surrounded by different types of coastal wetlands (salt and freshwater marshes, river mouths, lagoons, and two salt pans), making it an ideal place to search for migrating and breeding waterbirds. We will be able to see **Black-winged Stilt** nesting, **Little Egret**, **Great Egret**, **Squacco Heron**, **Purple Heron**, **Black Stork**, and **Ruddy Shelduck** at their breeding grounds, together with a variety of waders. At the Lisvori olive grove area we should get good sightings of **Masked Shrike**, **Olive-tree Warbler**, **Subalpine Warbler**, and **Middle Spotted Woodpecker**.

Overnight: Malemi Organic Hotel, Skala Kalloni

Day 3 (Day 11). Kalloni Gulf wetlands and the central island - Mount Lepetimos

We will start the day searching the wetlands for species such as **Pied Avocet**, **Common Tern**, **Little Tern**, **Black Tern**, **Whiskered Tern**, **White-winged Tern**, **Little Stint**, **Curlew Sandpiper**, **Kentish** and **Little Ringed Plovers**. **Black-crowned Night Heron** and **Little and Spotted Crakes** are also a possibility. From here we will make our way to the central island area, where we have the opportunity to observe **Masked** and **Woodchat Shrikes**, **Sombre Tit**, **Eastern Rock Nuthatch**, **Rüppell's**, **Subalpine**, and **Olive-tree Warblers**, **Black-headed Bunting**, **Middle Spotted Woodpecker**, **Little Owl**, and **Eurasian Scops Owl**.

Overnight: Malemi Organic Hotel, Skala Kalloni

Day 4 (Day 12). Western Lesvos

Lesvos is one of the few islands to find the **Cinereous Bunting**, and this species will be our main target for today. While searching for it we will be able to see a variety of species occupying the extensive garrigue areas of the western island with scattered and thin oak forest. We will also look for **Cretzschmar's Bunting**, **Isabelline** and **Black-eared Wheatears**, **Eastern Rock Nuthatch**, **Blue Rock Thrush**, **Eastern Orphean Warbler**, **Rufous Bush Robin**, and **Little Owl**. Throughout the three days birding on the island we will keep an eye open for raptor species like **Long-legged Buzzard**, **Short-toed Snake Eagle**, **Western Marsh Harrier**, **Peregrine Falcon**, **Eleonora's Falcon**, **Red-footed Falcon**, **Lesser Kestrel**, and **Montagu's Harrier**.

Overnight: Malemi Organic Hotel, Skala Kalloni

Day 5 (Day 13). Departure

After breakfast we will make our way to Lesvos Airport for the flight back home.

Please note that the itinerary above cannot be guaranteed as it is only a rough guide and can be changed (usually slightly) due to factors such as availability of accommodation, updated information on the state of accommodation, roads, or birding sites, the discretion of the guides and other factors.

Main tour:

Duration: 9 days
Limit: 6 – 8
Date: 23 April – 1 May 2020
Depart: Athens. Greece
End: Thessaloniki, Greece

Price: €4153 per person sharing, possible surcharges for smaller groups
Single supplement: €444

Price includes:

Meals
Accommodation
Park entrance fees
Boat rides on Lake Kerkini and Evros Delta
Museum entry fees for Athens cultural attractions
Domestic flight from Athens to Thessaloniki
Guiding fees
All transport in Greece from your hotel in Athens on day 1 until we get back to Thessaloniki on day 9

Price excludes:

International flights
Personal insurance
Drinks
Items of a personal nature, e.g. gifts
Gratuities

Extension:

Duration: 5 days
Limit: 6 – 8
Date: 1 – 5 May 2020
Depart: Lesvos Greece
End: Lesvos, Greece

Price: €2473 per person sharing, possible surcharges for smaller groups
Single supplement €246

Price includes:

Meals
Accommodation
Park entrance fees
Guiding fees
All transport while on Lesvos

Price excludes:

International flights

Domestic flight from Thessaloniki to Lesvos and back to Athens or Thessaloniki

Personal insurance

Drinks

Items of a personal nature, e.g. gifts

Gratuities