



GREECE: LESVOS IN SPRING EXTENSION

04 – 08 MAY 2023

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*We could see the spectacular **Short-toed Snake Eagle** while in Lesvos, one of numerous birds of prey possible on the tour.*

For the last 40 years, birders across the world have flocked to Lesvos for the awesome birding that this small Mediterranean island has to offer. Lesvos (part of Greece) is separated from mainland Turkey by just eight miles (14 kilometers) of the Mytilini Strait. Its position, at the borders of two continents, results in the island having a great diversity of bird species, of both European and Asian origin, which simply takes off during the migration season (especially in the spring).

On this, the third-largest Greek island, extensive areas of very different habitats are found (such as olive groves, pine forest, garrigue, and maquis), while another very important aspect that lures the birds to the island is the number of wetlands that are found here. Lesvos has a surprisingly high bird list for a relatively small island of 344 species (following International Ornithological Congress (IOC) v11.1 taxonomy, as of May 2021), and as such this will prove an excellent short extension to our longer **Greece: Spring Birding Adventure** on the Greek mainland.

Spring on the island is an incredible experience as thousands of migrant birds pour into and over the island as they return from their sub-Saharan wintering grounds in Africa, some stopping to breed in Lesvos with other continuing further north. Multiple species from a wide range of bird families including many spectacular summer-plumaged warblers, flycatchers, wheatears, shorebirds (waders), crakes, terns, herons, egrets, birds of prey, pipits, wagtails, finches, and buntings move through the island and boost an already impressive resident population of bird species. Some of the top migrant highlights include **Eleonora's Falcon, Lesser Kestrel, Levant Sparrowhawk, Eurasian Scops Owl, Little Crake, Baillon's Crake, Little Bittern, White-winged Tern, Whiskered Tern, Masked Shrike, European Roller, European Bee-eater, Common Nightingale, Olive-tree Warbler, Rüppell's Warbler, River Warbler, Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin, Eastern Black-eared Wheatear, Isabelline Wheatear, Collared Flycatcher, Red-throated Pipit, Citrine Wagtail, Black-headed Bunting, Cinereous Bunting, and Cretzschmar's Bunting.**



European Bee-eater move through Lesvos in huge numbers in spring.

Being an island, Lesvos also has its own selection of interesting localized species and subspecies, including a couple of highly prized birds in **Krüper's Nuthatch** and **Western Rock Nuthatch**. Other interesting resident species include **Chukar Partridge**, **Greater Flamingo**, **Spur-winged Lapwing**, **Long-legged Buzzard**, **Middle Spotted Woodpecker**, **Short-toed Treecreeper**, **Long-tailed Tit**, **Sombre Tit**, and **Rock Sparrow**.



*The main resident bird target on Lesvos is **Krüper's Nuthatch** – a really beautiful representative of this large and widespread family (photo Eleni Galinou).*

You could also combine our two Greece tours with our **Bulgaria and Romania: Balkans in Spring** tour which offers a whole host of new species and experiences in two nearby beautiful countries bordering the Black Sea. This provides an ideal combination if you would like to extend your time in this beautiful and unique part of Europe, with some of the other great birds possible including **Eastern Imperial Eagle**, **Saker Falcon**, **Red-footed Falcon**, **Wallcreeper** (monotypic family), **Pied Wheatear**, and **Semicollared Flycatcher**.

Itinerary (5 days/4 nights)

Day 1. Arrival in Lesvos

We will be met at Lesvos airport and transferred to our nearby hotel in picturesque Skala Kalloni where we will base ourselves for the duration of this tour. Along the way we might get time to

look out at sea where we could see **Yelkouan Shearwater**, **Scopoli's Shearwater**, **Mediterranean Gull**, **Yellow-legged Gull**, **Great Cormorant**, and **European Shag**.

Once we have checked into our accommodation, we will get straight into exploring the local area and familiarizing ourselves with its avifauna, in particular, common species such as **Common Nightingale**, **Eastern Olivaceous Warbler**, **White Stork**, **European Bee-eater**, **Eurasian Hoopoe**, **Red-backed Shrike**, **Woodchat Shrike**, **Eurasian Golden Oriole**, **Whinchat**, and **Red-rumped Swallow**. These species, plus many more, move through Lesvos throughout the spring passage season and the number and make up of species can vary daily, making for a really exciting time for us. The Lower Tsiknias Valley, not too far from our accommodation, is a great migrant trap and we might find a range of waterbirds, including marsh terns (**Black Tern**, **White-winged Tern**, and **Whiskered Tern**), a range of shorebirds, herons, ibises, and crakes. The scrub here can also be full of warblers and **Spanish Sparrows** with the adjacent fields an excellent spot for shrikes, chats, and buntings.



Eurasian Hoopoe is one of several totally stunning birds that should be common on Lesvos.

The area around our accommodation could also yield **Eurasian Scops Owl**, **Western Barn Owl**, **Long-eared Owl**, and **River Warbler**. Once back at our hotel we will discuss the various birding areas on the island and the plan for the next three days when we will target the many highlight birds available by visiting the key sites and habitats for these birds.

The thrill of birding somewhere like Lesvos during the spring migration is that a wide range of species can occur anywhere at any time. While exploring the island over the next few days we will keep an eye open (and skywards) for numerous raptor species that can be possible here, such as **Long-legged Buzzard**, **Short-toed Snake Eagle**, **Western Marsh Harrier**, **Montagu's Harrier**, **Peregrine Falcon**, **Eleonora's Falcon**, **Red-footed Falcon**, **Lesser Kestrel**, and **Levant**

Sparrowhawk. The same is true for many other groups of birds and so we will be prepared to stop and look, as and when required, it is sure to be an enthralling few days birding.

Overnight: Malemi Organic Hotel, Skala Kalloni



*The tiny **Baillon's Crake** is one of a few gorgeous crake species possible on the tour.*

Day 2. Achladeri Pine Forest and Kalloni Gulf wetlands

Lesvos is one of *the* best areas in Europe for finding the localized **Krüper's Nuthatch**, and we have a wonderful chance to get close-up views of this highly sought-after species when we visit Achladeri Pine Forest. Other forest species that we might see here include **Middle Spotted Woodpecker**, **Short-toed Treecreeper** and the local form of **Long-tailed Tit**. Other breeding species here include **Masked Shrike**, **Woodlark**, and **Eastern Black-eared Wheatear**.

In the island's olive groves, such as those in the Achladeri area, we should get good sightings of **Olive-tree Warbler**, **Eastern Subalpine Warbler**, and **Middle Spotted Woodpecker** and as we move between Achladeri Pine Forest and Kalloni Gulf wetlands, our other main site for the day. We might call into a rocky outcrop area with the chance of both **Western Rock Nuthatch** and **Blue Rock Thrush**.

The Kalloni Gulf is surrounded by different types of coastal wetlands, including a large area of salt pans, making it an ideal place to search for migrating and breeding waterbirds but plenty of other birds can also be found here too. We will be able to see the elegant **Black-winged Stilt** nesting, plus **Little Bittern**, **Little Egret**, **Great (White) Egret**, **Squacco Heron**, **Grey Heron**, **Purple Heron**, **Black Stork**, and **Ruddy Shelduck** on their breeding grounds, together with an excellent variety of shorebirds (waders) such as **Collared Pratincole**, **Eurasian Stone-curlew**,

Little Stint, Curlew Sandpiper, Kentish Plover, and Little Ringed Plover. We may even find the stunning **Spur-winged Lapwing**.

Overnight: [Malemi Organic Hotel](#), Skala Kalloni



Ruddy Shelduck is a stunning species and one of the highlight birds of Lesvos.



Spur-winged Lapwing is one seriously attractive shorebird.

Day 3. Kalloni Gulf wetlands, the central island, and Mount Lepetimnos

We will start the day searching nearby wetlands for species such as those mentioned above plus others such as **Pied Avocet**, **Black-tailed Godwit**, **Wood Sandpiper**, **Marsh Sandpiper**, **Ruff**, **Common Tern**, **Little Tern**, **Black Tern**, **Whiskered Tern**, **White-winged Tern**, **Black-crowned Night Heron**, **Little Crake**, and **Spotted Crake** which are all possible. We should also see plenty of gorgeous **Greater Flamingos** here too, along with **Eurasian Spoonbill**, **Glossy Ibis**, **Common Shelduck**, and **Garganey**, a huge variety of species is possible.

It is also worth scanning the open areas here for **Pallid Harrier**, **Montagu's Harrier**, and **Red-footed Falcon**, arguably three of the best-looking raptors in Europe. We might also come across flocks of pipits and wagtails, these could include several subspecies of the **Western Yellow Wagtail** complex (including the stunning black-headed *feldegg* subspecies), **Citrine Wagtail** (a shockingly colorful bird at this time of year), **Red-throated Pipit**, and **Tawny Pipit**.



*Crakes can sometimes be confiding when on migration and we will hope for repeated views of the gorgeous **Spotted Crake**.*

From here we will make our way to the north of the island around Mount Lepetimnos, where we have the opportunity to again observe **Masked Shrike** along with lots of other really exciting species, such as **Black Stork**, **Woodchat Shrike**, **Sombre Tit**, **Western Rock Nuthatch**, **Rüppell's Warbler**, **Eastern Subalpine Warbler**, **Olive-tree Warbler**, **Eastern Bonelli's Warbler**, **Black-headed Bunting**, **European Pied Flycatcher**, **Collared Flycatcher**, **Middle Spotted Woodpecker**, **Little Owl**, and **Eurasian Scops Owl**.

Driving the roads here we might locate **European Bee-eater**, **European Roller**, **Lesser Grey Shrike**, **Chukar Partridge**, **Red-rumped Swallow**, **Eurasian Crag Martin**, **Alpine Swift**, or **European Turtle Dove**, so it is always worth keeping our eyes peeled!

Mount Lepetimnos is another area that is usually particularly good for raptors and we will keep a look out for those as usual, maybe finding **Northern Goshawk**, **Peregrine Falcon**, **Short-toed Snake Eagle**, or **Eleonora's Falcon** while here.

Overnight: Malemi Organic Hotel, Skala Kalloni



*We will search for the beautiful **Masked Shrike** on Lesvos (photo Lavrentis Sidiropoulos))*

Day 4. Western Lesvos

Lesvos is one of the few islands where you can find **Cinereous Bunting**, and this species will be our main target for the day as we head out to the west of the island on what promises to be an exciting day. Today is often considered the most enjoyable day on Lesvos, due to the amazing scenery and birds possible.

While searching for **Cinereous Bunting** we will be able to see a variety of species occupying the extensive garrigue areas (garrigue is a low, soft-leaved scrubland ecoregion and plant community found in the Mediterranean) of the western island, with scattered and thin oak forest. We will also look for the gorgeous **Cretzschmar's Bunting**, **Cirl Bunting**, **Rock Sparrow**, **Isabelline Wheatear**, **Eastern Black-eared Wheatears**, **Northern Wheatear**, **Western Rock Nuthatch**, **Blue Rock Thrush**, **Eastern Orphean Warbler**, **Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin**, **Common Linnet**, **European Serin**, **European Goldfinch**, and **Little Owl**.

Other birds we will be looking for in this general area could include **Pallid Swift**, **Eleonora's Falcon**, **Chukar Partridge**, **Common Quail**, **Lesser Kestrel** and proper **Rock Doves**, not just the standard 'Feral Pigeons' that are so widespread around the world now, but their wild ancestors – the real deal! There are bound to be many other interesting birds found throughout the day too.

Overnight: Malemi Organic Hotel, Skala Kalloni



*We should find several gorgeous buntings on this tour, with **Cretzschmar's Bunting** being one of the best (photo G. Spiridakis).*

Day 5. Departure

We should have time for some early morning birding around our accommodation before we wrap up our activities and make our way to Lesvos Airport for the flight back home in the afternoon.

If you are not ready to head home yet, you could join us for our **Bulgaria and Romania: Balkans in Spring** tour, which offers an unforgettable experience in the Black Sea region of Europe, where yet more exciting birds await, such as **Wallcreeper, Eastern Imperial Eagle, Cinereous Vulture, Spotted Nutcracker, Grey-headed Woodpecker, Syrian Woodpecker, Black Woodpecker, Pied Wheatear, and Semicollared Flycatcher**, to name just a few.

Overnight: Not included

Please note that the itinerary 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. In addition, we sometimes must use a different international guide from the one advertised due to tour scheduling.

Duration:	5 days
Group Size:	4 - 8
Dates:	04 - 08 May 2023 04 - 08 May 2024
Start:	Mytilene International Airport, Mytilene, Lesvos
End:	Mytilene International Airport, Mytilene, Lesvos
Prices:	€1,895 per person sharing – based on 4 - 8 participants (2023) €2,085 per person sharing – based on 4 - 8 participants (2024)
Single Supplements:	€182 (2023) €199 (2024)

Price includes:

All accommodation (day 1 until day 4 as described above, or similar)
 Meals (from dinner on day 1 until breakfast on day 5)
 Drinking water – please bring a refillable water bottle
 Expert tour leader
 Local bird and wildlife guide fees
 Birdwatching site entrance fees and travel permits
 All ground transport and tolls/taxes while on tour, including airport pick-up and drop-off

Price excludes:

Flights to and from Mytilene International Airport, Mytilene, Lesvos
 Expenditures due to flight cancellations/delays or other causes beyond our control (force majeure)
 Visa fees if visa required
 Departure tax
 Items of a personal nature, e.g. gifts, laundry, internet access, phone calls etc.
 Any pre- or post-tour accommodation, meals, or birding/sightseeing excursions
 Soft/alcoholic drinks
 Personal travel insurance
 Gratuities (please see our [tipping guidelines blog](#))

Useful information:

During our tour, your guide will be driving you in a comfortable vehicle. The tour does not require a great deal of walking or steep hiking to see the bulk of the birds, however a basic level of fitness is required including the ability to walk on rough terrain at times.