

Trip Report - Northern Greece

6th - 16th May 2011

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Our constant reference on this trip was the new edition of "*Birdwatching in Northern Greece*", Steve Mill's invaluable site-guide. See www.birdwing.eu

Day 1: Friday 6th May 2011 - Dublin-Stansted-Thessaloniki-Kavala

Ryanair now flies to Thessaloniki from Stansted making it a convenient day trip from Dublin, arriving in Thessaloniki in the late afternoon. On previous trips we had travelled with Malev, Dublin-Budapest-Thessaloniki and Aer Lingus, Dublin-Athens. Malev this year is very expensive and going via Athens involves a lot of extra driving. We picked up the car in Thessaloniki Airport and had arrived in our Kavala hotel by 20.00. Reference from here on is mostly to birds we do not normally encounter in Ireland, total species listed at the end. On the drive we noticed **Greater Flamingos** on Lake Koronia, **Hoopoe** at the Hotel garden along with **Red-rumped Swallow** and the first of the ubiquitous **Nightingales** were singing.

Night in the Philoxenia Hotel, Kavala



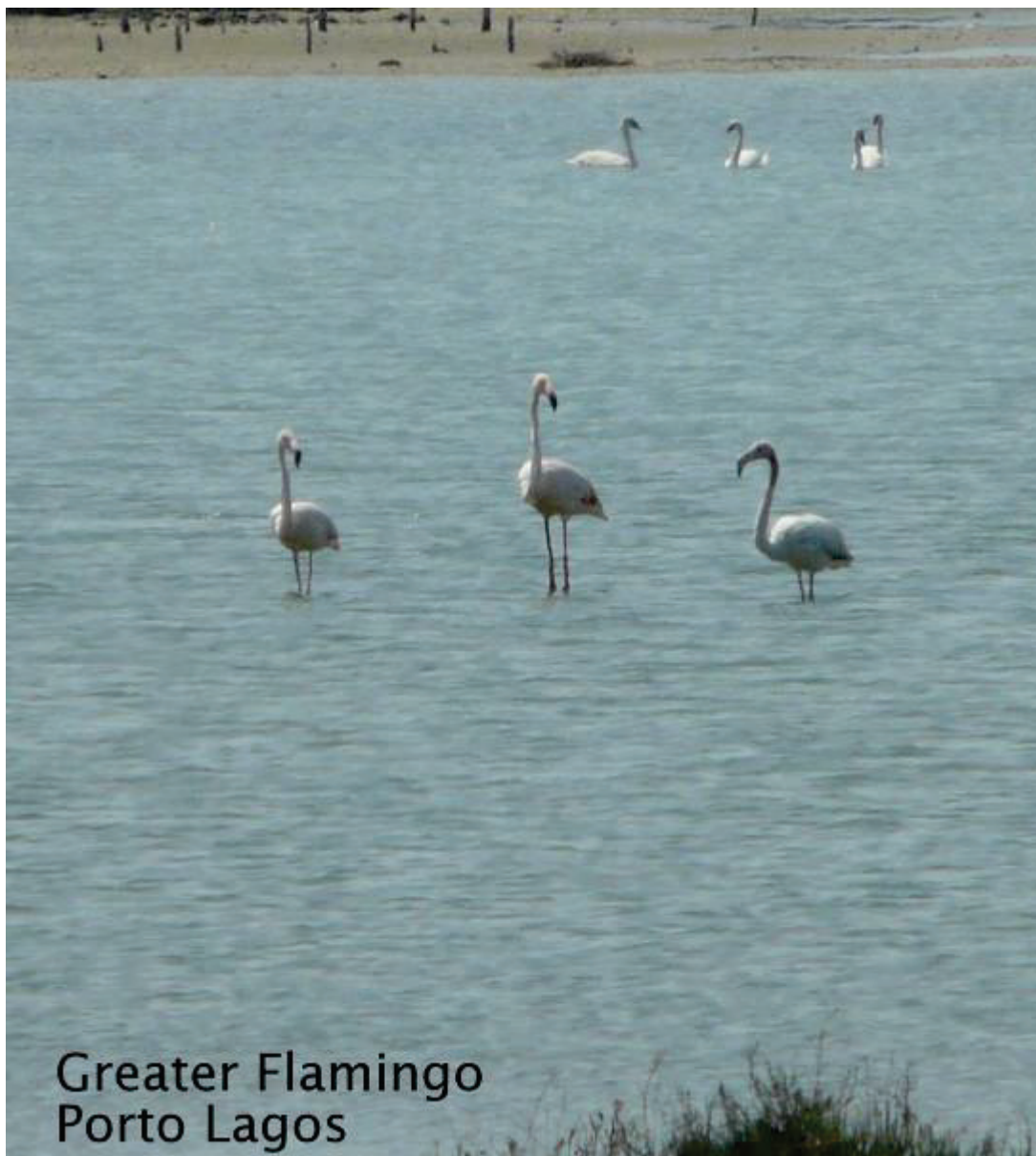
Red-rumped Swallow

Day 2: Saturday 7th May 2011 - Mount Paggeo

After breakfast the hotel garden added **Nightingale** and **Garden Warbler**. We set off on a day trip to Mount Paggeo, NW of Kavala.

A drive through mostly Beech woodland ascends gradually to the summit above the tree line. We hadn't much luck on the ascent through the forest but at one stop we had a pair of **Willow Tits** and we heard **Green Woodpecker**. Leaving the trees, as we drove higher on a rough road we saw our first **Black-eared Wheatears**, **Black Redstarts**, **Water Pipits** and a fine male **Rock Thrush**. The summit had nothing more than **Meadow Pipit** - no Alpine specialties. On the descent we encountered a small bunch of **Levant Sparrowhawks** crossing the high mountains, where we also saw an **Ortolan Bunting**. A **Woodlark**, **Crested Lark** and **Corn Bunting** were met with on the slope further down, as were singing **Eastern Olivaceous Warblers**.

Night in the Philoxenia Hotel



Day 3: Sunday 8th May 2011 - Kavala - Nestos Gorge - Porto Lagos and the Thracian Lagoons - Fanari

We drove to the Narrows of Nestos and parked at the beginning of the footpath along the river's east bank. There were lots of strollers taking the Sunday air along the narrow path cut from the cliff above the river and the views were very fine. A great profusion of spring flowers added to the enjoyment but birds again were scarce. We had **Crag Martin, White Wagtail** and **Little Ringed Plover**.

Returning towards the village we stopped by the railway line to view a small area of reeds and a pond. Here we had **Cetti's Warbler** and a **Little Bittern**.

We headed east, noting our first **White Storks**, and turned off the main road towards Porto Lagos and headed southeast towards Mandra. **European Bee-eaters** were very plentiful.

Avdira Marshes produced a single **Stone Curlew**, three **Ferruginous Ducks, Purple** and **Squacco Herons**, a pair of **Spur-winged Plover, Kentish Plover, Black-winged Stilts, Curlew Sandpipers, Little Stints, Spotted Redshanks** and our first **Yellow (Black-headed) Wagtails**.

We carried on towards Porto Lagos checking out the beach. Two **Caspian Terns** were roosting with **Black-headed Gulls** and **Sandwich, Common** and **Little Terns**. It was very windy on Lake Vistonida and we saw no marsh tern species. On the Dalani Lagoon saltmarsh we had a single **Black Stork** feeding. Turning towards Fanari we had **Marsh Harriers** quartering the grassy ground and a **European Roller** on the roadside wires.

Night in the Hotel Fanari



White-tailed Eagle - Lake Ismarida

Day 4: Monday 9th May 2011 - Porto Lagos-Lake Ismarida- Evros Delta (Loutros)

We headed back to Porto Lagos to check out Vistonida which was much less windy. We had **Peregrine Falcon, Whiskered Tern** and 6 **Black-necked Grebes** and flight views of **White Pelicans**.

At the Monastery Lake we had **Pygmy Cormorant**. On the beach again we had two **Slender-billed Gulls, Mediterranean Gulls, Black Tern**, and in the Tamarisk scrub, an **Eastern Bonelli's Warbler**, a **Willow Warbler** and a **Spotted Flycatcher**.

At the Salt Pans we had **Tawny Pipit, Greater Flamingos** and **Avocets**.

We checked out Mandra Marsh and Avdira Quarry adding commoner species to our list. We now turned our attention to Lake Ismerida and heading through Pagouria drove on the road on the western side of the lake.

A **Woodchat Shrike** was perched at the roadside as we came to the earth bank on the right hand to park and view.

Woodchat Shrike - Kerkini



The lake was teeming with marsh terns, **Black, White-winged** and **Whiskered**. A **Bittern** flew across the reeds. A perched raptor resolved itself into a **White-tailed Eagle**, with its mate then seen circling above. The nest, with two almost fledged eaglets was nearby. We carried on towards the sea, checking the fields for Calandra Lark, but with no luck on this occasion. Returning, we took the track on the eastern side. Here we had a male **Red-footed Falcon** on the wires.



Red-footed Falcon - Lake Ismarida

A group of **Glossy Ibis** flew towards the lake. We decided then to check out the area of the village of Kalamokastro for the **Lesser Kestrels** and were delighted to encounter a flock of about six circling around the mosque.



As the evening advanced we decided to head for Loutros, at the Evros delta, to get our hotel sorted.

Night in the Hotel Plotini, Loutros

Day 5: Tuesday 10th May 2011 - St. George's Hill, Loutros - Evros Delta

We started by checking out the track up to the summit of St George's Hill just behind our hotel.

A **Honey Buzzard** flew over and then a pair of **Ruddy Shelduck**. We picked up our permits to enter the Military Zone of the Delta at the Visitors' Centre beside the main road and drove to Feres to enter the Delta area. This was a long drive southwards parallel to the Turkish border through mostly agricultural land. I think an entrance at Monastiraki would be quicker to get to interesting landscape. We had a **Black Stork** feeding on the watermeadow to the left. After several miles we came to wetter land on our right where we added **Great White Egret, Little Gull, Gull-billed tern** and **Temminck's Stint**.

We crossed the wetland on a good track and heading North again for the Monastiraki exit we had four **Collared Pratincoles** in a ploughed field. We left the military zone and headed to the beach (Site 8 in the guidebook) seeing **Ruffs** and **Greenshank** in the flooded areas on either side of the track. A **Short-toed Eagle** passed overhead. A **Black-throated Diver** gave good views from the shore and a **Spoonbill** flew by.

Next we drove to Drana Lagoon as far as the road is permissible; all day it had been great bird-lively territory. We checked out Loutros hill again before dark. A mysterious little bird stood on the Holy Well cistern in the dusk. We eventually plumped for a first year **Black-eared Wheatear**, but not before considering some exciting possibilities!

Night in Hotel Plotini



Day 6: Wednesday 11th May 2011 - **Southern Evros Hills - Dadia**

From Loutros into the hills we passed the picnic site checking for anything interesting. We had our first **Nuthatch**. **Red-backed Shrike** was our next addition as the road ascended.

We arrived at a Police shooting range where target practicing noisily discouraged our birding. Higher up we had **Middle Spotted Woodpecker** in an area of mixed woodland and open space, with a **Golden Oriole** singing but eluding us.

We crossed over the hills and down to Dadia Visitor centre. There we discovered that the hostel, the restaurant and the shuttle bus to the feeding station were all out of action. Later we heard the opinion that local politics was involved. Brian walked up to the station, about an hour each way, and had **Black** and **Griffon Vultures**. **Booted** and **Short-toed Eagle** appeared around the Information Centre while I sat out eating strawberries and awaiting Brian's return.

On the Dadia – Likofi road four **Lesser-spotted Eagles** flew overhead.

We checked out the Thimaria Pools site on our way back to Loutros. It appeared too dry to hold very much this time.

Night in Hotel Plotini



Day 7: Thursday 12th May 2011 - Evros - Philippi - Kerkini

Leaving for the long drive to Kerkini we first checked out the roads and pools between Alexandroupolis airport and the sea, adding Whinchat to our list.

We left the main road at Kavala heading NW for Drama and stopped at the archaeological site of Philippi, scene of the decisive battle Anthony & Octavian vs. Brutus & Cassius. Four **Hooded Crows** and a pair of **Black-eared Wheatears** obliged us, no Rock Nuthatch, not even a Sparrow!

We continued on to Drama and Serres turning SW for Thessaloniki and then after about 25km crossed the River Strymonas and turned right for Lake Kerkini. It's about 13km to the village of Lithotopos, where we checked into the Hotel Erodios which overlooks the lake and the dam. We had time to drive the 10km or so of the eastern embankment. We had **Dalmatian** and **White Pelicans**, **Great** and **Pygmy Cormorants** (the former in greatly reduced numbers compared with previous years), **Night Herons**, **Turtle Dove**, **Bee Eaters**, **Great Reed Warbler**, saw our first **Golden Oriole** and met a group of agreeable birders from the English midlands.

Night in Hotel Erodios

Day 8: Friday 13th May 2011 - A day spent checking the various Vironia tracks

A **Cirl Bunting** was seen at the hotel as we started out with a look at the "Eagle Owl" quarry, (which has been disturbed by removal of material for highway construction and seems no longer to have owls), where we had two **Short-toed Eagles**.

We headed for Vironia via the Kerkini picnic area where there was a **Green Woodpecker**. Tracks A, C, E, and F were visited. No woodpeckers encountered at A. C. had **Tawny Pipit**, **Griffon Vulture** and **Red-backed Shrike**. E. had **Golden Oriole**. F. gave us **Common Sandpiper** and **Kingfisher**.

Returning via Strymonas Marshes to the picnic area we added **Greylag Goose**, **Spoonbill**, **Hoopoe** and **Roller**.

Night in Hotel Erodios



Day 9: Saturday 14th May 2011 - Promachonas and the Woodpecker Wood - Vironia Trails - Kerkini Picnic site

In the morning we set off for the quarry just past the village of Promachonas. On previous occasions we had Bee-eaters, Rollers and Little owl here but no luck this year. We continued on to the Woodpecker Wood and spent some time on the path alongside the stream. We heard **Golden Orioles** and had a view of one. Starlings in the treetops are bad for the nervous birder's composure, especially for Irishmen who get few woodpeckers at home. Observing B&W woodpeckers returning to a particular tree we were sure we had a nest to observe at leisure but each sighting seemed to be difficult to square with the previous one!

Eventually, having noticed **Nuthatches** and **Great Tits** returning to the same tree, we abandoned the nest theory for a feeding site alternative and were happy to count **Great Spotted, Syrian** and **Middle Spotted** as seen.

On the Achladohori Road we had Western **Rock Nuthatch**, **Subalpine Warbler** and **Blue Rock Thrush**. We made our way back to Lithotopos via the Picnic Site on the lakeside.

Night in Hotel Erodio

Day 10: Sunday 15th May 2011 - Mandraki Harbour - Mt Belle - Kerkini

We heard from the English group at our Hotel that they had seen a Masked Shrike in woods on the west side of the lake and we decided to check it out. Despite a thorough search we had no luck with the Shrike but had a pair of **Hawfinches** on the track.

Next we went to Mandraki Harbour, lots of singing **Great Reed Warblers** were the best birds here. We went on to the reservoir on Mt. Belles slopes, a fiercely hot afternoon saw me sit in the air conditioned car while Brian rambled in the woods and had a possible **Olive-tree Warbler**. On Kerkini east track returning we had **Pochard** and **Shoveler**.

Night in Hotel Erodios

Day 11: Monday 16th May 2011 - Kerkini - Asprovalta - Lake Koronia

Leaving Kerkini on our last day we checked out the west lakeside wood again and had our **Masked Shrike** sitting in a hedgerow near where we had been directed. A **Lesser Spotted eagle** gave fine views soaring against the hillside. We decided to make for the coast cross country and headed for Asprovalta where we had **Pallid Swifts** on a previous visit. We got the swifts, from the main street flying against the hillside.

We turned west, checking out Lake Koronia and arrived at Thessaloniki for our flight to Stansted.

SPECIES LIST

Abbreviations:			
ACH	Achladohori Road	LI	Lake Ismerida
AVQ	Avdira Quarry	LV	Lake Vistonida
AVW	Avdira Wetlands	MM	Mandra Marsh
D	Dadia Area	MT PG	Mount Paggeo
E	Evros Area	NG	Nestos Gorge
EM	Evros Military Area	PL	Porto Lagos
KA	Thessaloniki to Kavala	PLB	Porto Lagos Beach
KE	Kerkini East Track	PLS	Porto Lagos Saltworks
KW	Kerkini West Side	VT	Veronia Tracks
L	Loutros area	WW	Promachonas (Woodpecker Wood)
LH	Loutros Hill		

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Mute Swan (PLS) 2. Greylag Goose (KE) 3. Shelduck (LI) 4. Ruddy Shelduck (LH) 5. Mallard (KE) 6. Gadwall (KE) 7. Shoveler (AVW) 8. Wigeon (KE) 9. Pochard (KE) 10. Ferruginous Duck (AVW) 11. Tufted Duck (KE) 12. Black-throated Diver (L) 13. Black-necked Grebe (LV) 14. Little Grebe (KE) 15. Great Crested Grebe (KE) 16. White Pelican (LV, EM, KE) 17. Dalmatian Pelican (KE) 18. Great Cormorant (KE) 19. Pygmy Cormorant (PL, KE) 20. Great Bittern (LI) 21. Little Bittern (NG) 22. Night Heron (KE) 23. Squacco Heron (AVW, EM, KE) 24. Little Egret (AVW, KE) 25. Great Egret (EM) 26. Grey Heron (WSD) 27. Purple Heron (LI) 28. White Stork (WSD) 29. Black Stork (PL, EM, D) 30. Glossy Ibis (L) 31. Spoonbill (L, KE) 32. Greater Flamingo (KA, PL) 33. Griffon Vulture (D, VT) 34. Black Vulture (D) 35. White-tailed Eagle (LI) 36. Lesser Spotted Eagle (D, KW) 37. Short-toed Eagle (D, Eagle Owl Quarry, LI) 38. Booted Eagle (D) 39. Black Kite (D) 40. Marsh Harrier (AVW, L) 41. Common Buzzard (MT PG, EM, WW) 42. Honey Buzzard (EM, ACH) 43. Sparrowhawk (AVW) 44. Levant Sparrowhawk (MT PG) | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 45. Kestrel (MT PG, LI) 46. Lesser Kestrel (Kalamokastro) 47. Red-footed Falcon (LI, EM) 48. Peregrine (LV) 49. Moorhen (AVW, KE) 50. Coot (KE) 51. Oystercatcher (PLB) 52. Avocet (PLS) 53. Black-winged Stilt (AVW, PLS, EM) 54. Stone Curlew (AVW) 55. Collared Pratincole (EM, L) 56. Little Ringed Plover (NG) 57. Ringed Plover (EM) 58. Kentish Plover (AVW) 59. Grey Plover (PLB) 60. Golden Plover (PL) 61. Lapwing (AVW) 62. Spur-winged Lapwing (AVW, EM) 63. Sanderling (L) 64. Curlew Sandpiper (PL, EM, AVW) 65. Little Stint (AVW, EM, PL) 66. Temminck's Stint (EM) 67. Green Sandpiper (EM) 68. Common Sandpiper (VT) 69. Redshank (AVW, EM) 70. Spotted Redshank (AVW, EM) 71. Greenshank (EM) 72. Curlew (PLB) 73. Ruff (L) 74. Black-headed Gull (EM, KE) 75. Slender-billed Gull (PLB) 76. Common Gull (PLB) 77. Mediterranean Gull (PLB) 78. Yellow-legged Gull (EM) 79. Little Tern (PLB) 80. Gull-billed Tern (EM) 81. Caspian Tern (PLB) 82. Whiskered Tern (AVW, LI) 83. Black Tern (PLB, LI) 84. White-winged Tern (LI, EM) 85. Sandwich Tern (PLB) 86. Common Tern (PLB) 87. Collared Dove (KA) 88. Turtle Dove (AVW, KE) 89. Cuckoo (KE) |
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| 90. | Little Owl (Kerkini Village) | 128. | Blackcap (VT) |
| 91. | Common Swift (KE) | 129. | Common Whitethroat (MM) |
| 92. | Pallid Swift (Asprovalta) | 130. | Subalpine Warbler (ACH) |
| 93. | Hoopoe(WSD) | 131. | Eastern Bonelli's Warbler (PLB) |
| 94. | Common Kingfisher (VT) | 132. | Chiffchaff (MT PG) |
| 95. | European Bee-eater (WSD) | 133. | Willow Warbler (MT PG,PLB) |
| 96. | Roller (KE,ACH) | 134. | Wren (MT PG) |
| 97. | Green Woodpecker (MT PG, KE) | 135. | Spotted Flycatcher (PLB) |
| 98. | Great Spotted Woodpecker (WW) | 136. | Long-tailed tit (MT PG) |
| 99. | Syrian Woodpecker (WW) | 137. | Blue Tit (WSD) |
| 100. | Middle Spotted Woodpecker (WW,D) | 138. | Great Tit (MT PG,WW) |
| 101. | Woodlark (MT PG) | 139. | Coal Tit (MT PG,D) |
| 102. | Crested Lark (AVW,L) | 140. | Willow Tit (MT PG) |
| 103. | Sand Martin (WSD) | 141. | Nuthatch (L,WW) |
| 104. | Crag Martin (NG) | 142. | Western Rock Nuthatch (ACH) |
| 105. | Barn Swallow (WSD) | 143. | Golden Oriole (WSD) |
| 106. | House Martin (WSD) | 144. | Red-backed Shrike (L,KE) |
| 107. | Red-rumped Swallow (WSD) | 145. | Woodchat Shrike (EM,KE, LI) |
| 108. | Tawny Pipit (MM,EM,KE) | 146. | Masked Shrike (KE) |
| 109. | Meadow Pipit (MT PG) | 147. | Jay (WSD) |
| 110. | Water Pipit (MT PG) | 148. | Magpie (WSD) |
| 111. | White Wagtail (NG) | 149. | Jackdaw (NG) |
| 112. | Yellow(Black-headed) Wagtail (WSD) | 150. | Rook (KA) |
| 113. | Grey Wagtail (ACH) | 151. | Hooded Crow (WSD) |
| 114. | Nightingale (WSD) | 152. | Raven (D) |
| 115. | Black Redstart (MT PG) | 153. | Starling (WSD) |
| 116. | Northern Wheatear (MT PG,L) | 154. | House Sparrow (WSD) |
| 117. | Black-eared Wheatear (WSD) | 155. | Spanish Sparrow (WSD) |
| 118. | Whinchat (MM,L) | 156. | Tree Sparrow (AVQ) |
| 119. | Robin (MT PG) | 157. | Chaffinch (WSD) |
| 120. | Song Thrush (MT PG) | 158. | Goldfinch (AVW) |
| 121. | Blackbird (WSD) | 159. | Greenfinch (ACH) |
| 122. | Rock Thrush (MT PG) | 160. | Bullfinch (MT PG) |
| 123. | Blue Rock Thrush (ACH) | 161. | Hawfinch (KW) |
| 124. | Cetti's Warbler (NG) | 162. | Ortolan Bunting (MT PG) |
| 125. | Great Reed Warbler (WSD) | 163. | Cirl Bunting (WSD) |
| 126. | Eastern Olivaceous Warbler (WSD) | 164. | Black-headed Bunting (WSD) |
| 127. | Garden Warbler (KA) | 165. | Corn Bunting (WSD) |



Lesser Spotted Eagle - Kerkini