

Lesbos



Greece



2nd to 9th May, 2002



Thursday, 2 nd	Palios headland	15:30-19:30
Friday, 3 rd	East River, Kalloni	7:00-8:00
	Kallonia salt pans	8:00-13:00
	Achladeri Plain	14:00-16:00
	Achladeri to Skala Polichnitos	16:30-18:30
Saturday, 4 th	Kalloni Pool	6:30-9:00
	Upper East River	10:00-14:00
	Kalloni Small Pool / Potamia River valley	14:30-19:30
Sunday, 5 th	Devil's Bridge	6:30-8:30
	Agra area	9:00-11:00
	Tavari	11:30-13:00
	Skala Eresou	14:00-15:30
	Eressos to Kalloni	16:00-19:30
Monday, 6 th	Andissa / Sigri / Eressos junction	6:45-7:45
	Ipsilou monastery	8:00-11:30
	Faneromeni	12:00-15:30
	Ipsilou monastery	17:30-19:30
Tuesday, 7 th	Petra / Molivos area	6:15-11:30
	Molivos / Skala Sikaminias area	12:00-16:30
	Skalochori	17:30-18:30
Wednesday, 8 th	Kalloni pool & salt pans	6:00-12:30
	Napi valley	13:00-18:00
Sunday, 5 th	Achladeri Plain	6:30-7:30
	Dipi Larisos	8:00-10:00
	Haramida marsh	11:00-12:10

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Introduction

After 3 successive birding holidays on continents other than Europe, we decided a Mediterranean destination was well overdue. Lesbos was an excellent choice. We had covered many of the Med birds on offer before, but this island presents a mix of speciality breeders (such as Krüpers Nuthatch, Cinereous Bunting, and Western Rock Nuthatch), and superb migration potential, with the particular possibility of good numbers of fly through Red-footed Falcons. This combined with the ease of getting there (a few companies do package tours for a good price) proved an excellent combination.



The island is apparently the third largest in Greece, which gives plenty of scope for exploration. Even so, the majority of the hotels used are in the centre of the island, which means that even the most distant destinations are no more than just over an hour to reach. Almost all of the terrain is hilly, with few flat plains anywhere, and most of this, apart from the higher peaks and some of the more barren slopes to the west, is covered by either low scrub or trees. Woodland is by no means dense, or the trees high, which makes woodland birding somewhat easier than I have encountered elsewhere.

In addition to the accessibility of Lesbos by means of the package holidays, which has probably helped in the islands popularity over other islands of similar placing and potential (such as Samos to the South), is the advent of Richard Brookes' excellent guide to the birding sites on the island. He has spent over a decade visiting Lesbos, and the detail in the book reflects this, leaving it as a must have essential for the trip. The only word of warning I would have is that some of the distances he uses are a little optimistic, so don't always believe exact milages quoted. Alongside this guide, the other essential is a good map of the island, which can be bought beforehand, or seem to be generally available in most tat shops ("Road Editions" #212, 65 Ippokratous str. GR 106 70. Athens). I emphasise the word good - anything less than an Ordnance Survey quality map would lead to problems considering the size and placing of some of the tracks (not to mention the tiny streets in the towns).

For our base we chose Petra in the north of the island. The reason for this was purely down to cost, since Kosmar do a very reasonable range of appartments in this area - we paid £210 each for the week. The ideal base is Skala Kalloni , which is right on the birding doorstep (in fact, the Kalloni II hotel is situated directly opposite Kalloni Pool, which is one of the best small sites in the area, if not the whole of Lesbos!). Some of the companies that cover Skala Kallomi also fly out in April, whereas Kosmar have the first

week in May as the earliest date (currently), although with a one week trip, which we found more than ample to see most if not all of the specialities, this week is probably the best. Occasional wintering birds are still lingering, migration is still constant, and some of the breeding birds, such as Rufous Bush Robin, only appeared in this time.

There is often quite a difference in the weather at this time of year, judging by the experience of others who had been present the week before. The weather had been cool and unsettled, whereas we experienced almost constant full sunshine, which also meant that the amount of water in the pools and rivers depleted through the week. Yet despite sunblock being a requirement, mornings could be quite cold, and on the last morning, there were spots of rain - so rain gear may even be needed at times!

Car hire is an absolute essential, not only for reaching the birding sites (most are out of the way, and there was little evidence of a regular bus service), but also as a mobile hide. The latter benefit is not to be underestimated, since I have not noticed as big a difference between how close birds can be approached on foot and in car on trips before. Another tip is to pick the car up at the airport. The island is very easy to navigate on a first day including through Mytilini, the capital, which must be crossed from the airport, and we squeezed in many extra hours birding by doing this. The act of driving on Lesbos is an experience, since the quality of the roads varies tremendously. Many of the main roads are tarmacked, but even then you can bizarrely change from tarmac to dirt track at a seemingly indiscriminate part of the route. The Napi valley road has tarmac for most of its length, but incredibly the middle 3 kms or so are dirt track. We managed reasonably comfortably in a Renault Clio, but a 4x4 would have managed even better occasionally. On the other hand, some of the streets through even the more major villages have squeeze-tight alleys as the major thoroughfares, so small is often good!

SITES

Palios headland

Day 1



After landing at 2 o'clock, which was more or less on schedule, the switch to Mediterranean time and working meant that we had collected luggage, navigated customs, and collected the car by 3:30. Mytilini, the small capital of the island, was traversed without too much ado, and we travelled about 30kms North, turning off the main road on to the Palios headland, which is just to the East of Mandamados. The first km or so of this road was in quite good condition, and led us into a false sense of security, since it quickly deteriorated into the type of rough track, decorated with scattered potholes, that would be expected for this corner of the globe. Most of the surrounding habitat was low, rough scrub. What came as a surprise were the number of

small pools lining the edge of the track throughout. Most of these held very little if any birdlife, but there is every possibility that they will form a focus for drinking visits during the day. One larger pool, between Palios and the track leading off to Mandamados did support a couple of very wary Ruddy Shelduck, and approachable Wood Sandpipers. Although most of the track was bounded by low scrub, and occasional small copses, the end of the headland, past Palios, contained more low bushes, and thick intertwined scrub. There was a sign here for no photography, and in the light of the recent events with the plane spotters in Greece, we beat a hasty retreat. Nevertheless, this was a good spot for warblers, with a few singing, though elusive, Subalpine Warblers, and the first of what were to be many Orphean Warblers. We had expected to see one or two shrikes here, but to see all four, with the first (Lesser Grey) being the least common, was particularly satisfying. Only one Lesser Grey Shrike was seen, but was followed by single Red-backed, 2-3 Woodchat, and a pair of Masked Shrikes. The whole headland is very good for the basic Mediterranean birds, and was a good introduction to Lesbian birding.

We had entered the headland by taking a track to the South of Madamados (near Pedi), and continued our journey by following a right fork West of Palios, directly towards Madamados itself. This track was even rougher than the earlier one, but was bounded by quite a different habitat, with many orchards and the odd olive grove, interspersed with open areas (for grazing?), and seemed to have even more potential for birds. Singing Cetti's Warblers and Nightingales were along the course of the stream, which still retained a small amount of flowing water. Towards the end of the track, and near the main road, 3 Short-toed Eagles were seen hovering in the distance.

East Bank of East River

Day 2



After a good nights sleep, we overestimated the time of dawn (just after 6am), and got past Kalloni to the East River at 7am. The initial intention was to skirt straight down the river, and then aim for the salt pans. Yet it took an hour to do so, due to the excellent birding that can be had from the tracks along the banks. The eastern one was the best one to use at this time of day, keeping the strong sunlight behind us. The river still holds quite a lot of water, containing more as it winds towards the sea. There were plenty of warblers singing in the bushes, and it became clear that most of them were Olivaceous, which were particularly active. Some Reed Warblers were also here, and a single Sedge Warbler, with one pair of noisy Great Reed Warblers halfway down the track. Wood Sandpiper seemed to be the predominant wader by far, with plenty of groups of birds spread out along the riverbed. Together with the numerous Black-headed Buntings and Crested Larks, there was also the constant sound of singing Nightingales, with occasional birds popping out into the open briefly, with one hopping along the track itself. Most of the birds seemed to be concentrated on the banks of the river, as opposed to the orchards and farmland to the east, although not as much time was spent scanning this area due to the strong face-on sunlight. That area was to be covered later in the morning anyway.

Kalloni saltpans



After this steady start to the day, we came across the track opposite the ford on the East River, which snakes towards the saltpans. This track bisects a couple of km of open grazing land and crop fields, which was interesting enough in itself for a few stops. Initial birds were more Olivaceous Warblers and a single Cetti's Warbler, which came into the open quite regularly, with a single male Red-footed Falcon on telegraph wires close by. We were a little surprised by the paucity of harriers in what looked like appropriate habitat, but that might have been related to the time of year and luck. A group of 4 Black Storks together did fly in, and the first of our Little Owls was perched on telegraph wires. Towards the end of the track (near to the saltpans), was the first of the open small pools, and this was quite good for various races of Yellow Wagtail (*thunbergi* and *flava*). Bee-eaters seemed as if they were everywhere.



Past this pool, and over a cattle grid, there is a concrete headland where we left the car. The bridge can probably be crossed in the car if careful, but did not look too welcoming. We crossed the bridge on foot, through the rusty metal fence, and probably saw a lot more than could be seen using the car anyway. We spent the rest of the morning here, and overall it was well worth the time and effort put in. Numerous Crested & Short-toed Larks were around, with occasional raptors overhead - initially Short-toed Eagle and Marsh Harrier, with eventually female Montagu's Harrier low over the fields, and in the distance a Long-legged Buzzard was mobbed by Yellow-legged Gulls, which gradually flew closer before circling over and away. On the sand dunes was a small

plover that was attracting some interest from other birders, being variously diagnosed as Caspian Plover by the British birders, Lesser Sand Plover by the Scandinavians, and Kentish Plover by others. It was different, in that it had the overall jizz of a Kentish Plover, but lacks a white collar round the back of the neck (if anything, there was a slightly lighter brown band). The bill looked a little finer and longer than I remember from Lesser Sand Plovers, but this could not rule out the latter totally. The legs seemed dark, the breast band at the sides quite obvious, with the white on the forehead extending to the front of the eye, but not obviously behind. It also seemed to be sitting a nest, even though there was no sign of a male. While watching this for the first time, a Pratincole flew over and circled for around 5 minutes. It seemed to have the trademark dark trailing wing edge and underwing of Black-winged, but the views were not perfect enough to clinch this. We reached the eastern stream border of these sheep fields where there is a sand spit, which hosted 4 Grey Plover, a couple of Dunlin, and 2 Sandwich Terns among the Common Terns.

Walking back past where the plover was nesting, we cut across the sheep fields. This area also contained some boggy patches and occasional shallow pools, which were very good for Red-throated Pipits and various Yellow Wagtail subspecies, including the first Black-headed *feldegg*. On the pools were more Wood Sandpiper, a couple of Ruff, and a single Marsh Sandpiper.

Achladeri Plain

The main interest on the Plain, which is just north of Achladeri village, is the pine coniferous woodland, where some time was spent looking for one of the main target species - Krüper's Nuthatch. The appropriate site is found quite easily, not only by the obvious white disused buildings that can be seen from the road, but also the throng of birders cars (and minibuses if you are really unlucky with the timing!). The track through the pinewood leads directly from the parking spot, and within about 100m, the soft nasal calls of the Nuthatches can be heard reasonably frequently. They actually seem to have two calls, one which sounds similar to the North American White- & Red-breasted Nuthatches, and an alarm call resembling a very soft version of the European Nuthatch. They are also very mobile, but can eventually be picked out with good views (we saw at least 4 different birds). They are a delicate little Nuthatch, with the usual white breast and light grey back, but with additional rufous on the front of the breast as a band and on the forehead. Although not densely populated with varied species, and apart from Chaffinches, Greenfinches and Goldfinches, the woods are worth looking for others - we found singing Serin and Cretzchmar's Bunting, along with a pair of Woodchat Shrikes and single Masked Shrike.



Skala Polichnitos

After the treat of the Krüper's Nuthatches, we turned off shortly after Achladeri, and took the coastal track to the salt pans at Skala Polichnitos. The first couple of kms were back to the bumps, potholes and boulders to navigate round and through, but it is very pleasant, running alongside the coastline (the sea is only metres away). It passes through some excellent habitat, with open fields and olive groves, but does not turn up either a great variety or number of birds. We also passed one or two small pools which were quiet. The salt pans themselves were certainly worth the slow trip. They are a reasonable size, yet still smaller and more accessible than at Kalloni, with a rough track along the western border, which is eroded half way along. This meant walking, which was not a bad thing, leading to more birds being picked up, and along with the reasonably common Black-winged Stilts, Avocets, Ruff, and Common Terns, there were also smaller numbers of Little Stints and Curlew Sandpipers, and a single Collared Pratincole (just

sufficient distance for the main features when standing to be discerned). Although the red on the bill seemed to be fairly obvious, it wasn't until it flew a short distance that the rusty underwings could be seen (the white trailing edge to the wings was difficult).

Kalloni Pool

Day 3

The first view of the pool is of masses of birders out on their pre-breakfast sorties. There is very good reason for this, since this pool not only produces a good variety of birds, but is also right on the doorstep of some of the Skala Kalloni apartments - Kalloni II is directly opposite on the other side of a small road. The pool is adjacent to the beach on the western edge of Skala Kalloni, and the view from the main road is preferable in the early morning, due to the positioning of the sun. The pool consists of some open water in amongst beds of low reeds and grasses, which means that most of the birds are quite visible.



First views of the pool reveal most of the obvious species, such as Black-winged Stilt, Garganey, Glossy Ibis, and the superb White-winged Black Terns mixing with Whiskered Terns hawking over the water and vegetation. More patience leads to Little Bitterns, most of which seemed to be males, and more often than not in flight, although some can be seen in the open on occasion. More of a surprise was a European Bittern, which occasionally poked its head above the reeds in the corner adjacent to the Kalloni II hotel. Yet more patience found 2 female Little Crakes together in the same corner of the pool. These showed on and off over 20 minutes to half an hour, usually hugging the edges of the vegetation, but sometimes in the open. During the early morning stay, 2 Harriers flew over from the West, 1 Marsh and 1 Montagu's Harrier.

Upper East River



The area of interest for birds does not really cover the river. The track begins at some obvious grain silos near to the river itself, and then turns a sharp right. After about 400m, the track opened out on to the eastern side of the flat valley, which is generally fairly open, and the gentle slopes on the right hand side of the track are sparsely vegetated with scrub and bushes, with plenty of rocks interspersed. The small farm with the sheep and pig pens is fairly obvious, and we stopped just after this, at what is probably the most productive area. The well known Western Rock Nuthatch nest is about 100m after the farm, right next to

the road on a large rock. The nuthatches here were seen quite well away from the nest, but tended to be very flighty. A further two nests were found further up the track. The area where the track forks (about 50m up from the first nuthatch nest) is excellent, and we spent quite a lot of time here. The Rufous Bush Robin was first singing in a lone bush at the fork, but later favoured the bush at the first sharp right. Overall it was fairly pale, and tended to keep its tail straight while singing, only cocking later when it flew and landed elsewhere. The fork in the track also had extremely close Black-eared Wheatears (a pair) and Red-backed & Lesser Grey Shrikes. Further up the track, the landscape was more bushy, and this is quite good for the odd singing Cretzchmar's & Cirl Bunting. This Upper East River area is a very pleasant place to look for birds, particularly from the aspect of having seen only two other birders cars, and plenty of close, quality birds.

The plan following feta cheese sandwiches for lunch (well recommended) was to leave the Upper East River and visit Kalloni Small Pool. However, the Rufous Bush Robin returning again spurred us on to try for good photos of Western Rock Nuthatch at the second nest found. This pair of birds proved elusive, but parking the car and using it as a hide next to the first nest was particularly satisfying, with the birds returning regularly to the nest and the rocks around.

Kalloni Small Pool & Potamia River valley

After stopping off in Kalloni for another half a dozen bottles of water, we passed by Skala Kalloni again to find the track to the Kalloni Small Pool. This wasn't the easiest place to find, but we did get there eventually. It is a well vegetated pool, not too large, although the water itself did not hold a great deal apart from Moorhen and, in the water, Stripe-necked Terrapin. In one of the marginal trees, roosting and almost hidden, was an adult Night Heron. In the field opposite, a small group of Yellow Wagtails again included *thunbergi*, as well as *flava*. We circumnavigated the whole pool, which doesn't take too long, and then followed one of the tracks up the valley. There were birds here, but nothing of note.

From the pool, we went up the Potamia River Valley for the rest of the afternoon, and this turned out to be a little novel. The amount of time we spent in the valley did not reflect the small variety of species that we saw, particularly early on. The scenery here is wonderful, with the track surrounded on both sides by steep mountains with fairly high peaks. The amount of birds that we actually saw amongst the olive groves and oak woodland was quite low, although many of the common species were represented, such as Red-backed, Woodchat, & Masked Shrike, singing Nightingales, as well as the relatively numerous Subalpine Warbler. According to Brookes' guide, this track is supposed to end after a few kms, but it actually keeps on going until it meets the mountain village of Anemotia, which can presumably be crossed to get to Petra at the other side of the mountains. However, we decided to return by the same route, and within a few hundred metres of the village, saw Sparrowhawk and Peregrine. The best birding was when we were about half way back down, which was at around 6pm, and all of a sudden the raptors seemed to be more visible. Most prominent were Short-toed Eagles, with at least 5-6, with 2-3 Long-legged Buzzards, Steppe Buzzards, and an Eleonora's Falcon playing around on one of the high crags for some time.

Devil's Bridge

Day 4

First port of call was the small chapel about 1km to the west of Parakila (at Devil's Bridge). The main reason for this was that it was reputed to be the closest site to Kalloni for Cinereous Bunting. Early in the morning, it is a nice site to visit, with a short climb to the chapel, which is fairly open with very few trees around. It is situated in the corner of a not too steep ravine, bounded on one side by a small rock face, and on the other by slopes containing open grass topped by scree and boulders. No Cinereous Buntings were seen this morning, but birding was very good otherwise. At least 3 pairs of Cretzchmar's Bunting and a pair of Cirl Buntings were present, and on the slopes probably up to 3 different Black-eared Wheatears, 2 dark and 1 light throated. One of these had a group of 4 birders keenly trying to identify it as Finsch's. Initial views, where the bird was above us on a favoured rock perch, seemed to show black concolourous on the throat and wings, but prolonged watching found the white collar. The area was also good for Western Rock Nuthatch, with at least 2 pairs, possibly 3. One had a nest in the rock face above the corner of the road. Around the face, in small cracks in the rock, were plenty of small white feathers, and the bird seems to have collected these and shoved them in for some reason. It looked as if some were going to be put into the nest, but then it returned them to the rock face. Art deco à la Rock Nuthatch! Earlier, a Short-toed Eagle was hunting across the escarpment, and gave superb views in the early morning light.

Agra area

The road from Devil's Bridge to Agra became more barren and hilly, and we kept the windows open, listening for the song of Cinereous Bunting. All song heard was from

Cretzchmar's, and with a further 2 Western Rock Nuthatches at separate locations. The scenery approaching Agra is dramatic, especially looking across the valley at the village itself. We stopped on the other side of Agra, at a concrete building bounded by 2 cylindrical silos either side of the road, since this is another location where Cinereous Bunting had been reported. A good climb up the rocky hillside found yet more breeding Cretzchmar's, and Kestrel & Short-toed Eagle overhead. Although Cinereous Bunting was possibly singing further up the slopes, we couldn't locate it.



At 3km West of Agra, we arrived at a site reported for Rock Sparrows. This was found to be very productive for a lot besides aforementioned spuggies. The stop next to the corrugated roofed building that was just below the road produced a hunting male Montagu's Harrier within minutes in the valley below. Between the songs of Cretzchmar's Bunting was something a little different - not quite as nasal with a flutey end - a male Cinereous Bunting was found on the telegraph wires not far below. It was singing here for 5-10 minutes, then dropped further down, before returning again soon after, and proved to be quite approachable. During our time there, we also had superb hunting Short-toed Eagle (2) and Long-legged Buzzard. All 3 eventually found thermals together before disappearing over one of the ridges. Before leaving, a pair of Golden Orioles flew over the road into an isolated orchard.

Tavari & Skala Eresou



Lunchtime was spent to the South of Mesotopos, and just outside of Tavari. The road between the two has a track on the right supporting a small ford, which was host to a small stream at this time of year. However, it was enjoyable to have Cretzchmar's Bunting, Linnet, Red-backed Shrike, and Crested Lark either drinking or bathing while munching on feta cheese sandwich. An added bonus when we arrived was a singing Rufous Bush Robin. A little further on were two more fords, both dry. The second ford was reputed to be good for Little Owl, and the individual there as soon as we arrived would agree! Apart from that bird, a Kestrel being mobbed by 2 Hooded Crows was all

that was on offer. It is also a very barren location, with the constant tinkle of sheep bells in the rock-covered hills around. The rest of the track up to the cliffs was fairly uneventful, apart from the fact that we found both Red-backed & Lesser Grey Shrikes at the turn off to the cliff track, just as reported in Brookes' guide in 1998! The cliffs themselves again turned up the odd bird, with 2-3 Lesser Kestrels playing along some of the faces on the headland, and the rather bizarre sight of a Purple Heron perched on one of the faces to the right of where we were looking. During our time there, which was mid afternoon, and with only a light onshore wind, several groups of Cory's Shearwater passed from East to West, in flocks of between 10-30. The wind was so low that it was quite unusual to see them flapping most of the time.

After leaving the rocky and hilly terrain, we approached Eressos and its plain, which was much flatter. The Vergias river crosses under the road here, and all the upper part was fairly quiet. The last half km or so, before Skala Eresou was reached, was excellent. Just after joining the right hand bank where the road bridge crosses the river, were male Little Bittern, Squacco Heron, and Night Heron all in one spot, along with a lone Little Egret. The river bed in the main is rocky and fairly dry, leaving some stretches of standing water. We drove all the way up to the concrete ford, which is supposed to be quite good for wagtails, but it is likely that they are disturbed too frequently by local traffic at this time of the day. However, a few hundred metres short of this, on an exposed rocky area in the river bed, a single Yellow Wagtail was feeding with a male Citrine Wagtail. This is apparently a scarce passage migrant on the island, as well as being one of only two wagtails on this part of the river. It was a reasonably exciting find.

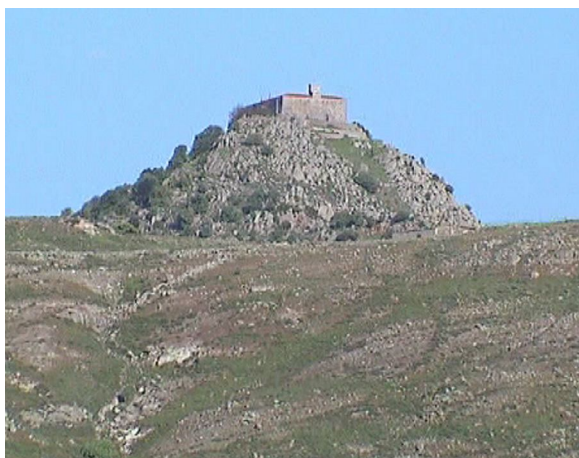
The last couple of hours of the day were spent on a couple of mopping up operations - namely Rock Sparrow, recheck the "Finsch's" Wheatear, and Scops Owl at Skala Kalloni. For the former, we went the 4½ km North of Eressos to what was supposedly a good site on steep cliff faces next to the road. Supposed was the word for it - there was no sight or sound here, although there was very close Cinereous Bunting, and Isabelline Wheatear on the slopes up from the roadside cliffs. As recompense, half way between Agra and Parakila, a quick stop to look at a passerine on the roadside revealed it to be a Rock Sparrow. Job #1 done! Back at Devil's Bridge, the very same wheatear as earlier was in the very same place (same rock, in fact!), and this was definitely Black-eared Wheatear. Just to check that there were no more hiding above the escarpment, we climbed to the top and found one other male - another Black-eared but with a much more buff crown. The likelihood is that the bird some were claiming as Finsch's was the former bird viewed at the wrong angle from below. Back at Skala Kalloni, we eventually found the school after skirting around the embers of bonfires in the middle of the road, and there were plenty of eucalyptus around the grounds, which is where the Scops Owl was reported to be roosting. We couldn't find the bird, but after 10 minutes or so chanced upon a pair of Middle Spotted Woodpeckers in an adjoining orchard. These had been apparently difficult to catch up with this year.

Ipsilou monastery

Day 5

After the ¾ hour drive from Petra to the Andissa / Sigrí / Eressos junction, we exited the car to look over the fairly barren terrain on a cool and calm morning. At least 4 displaying Isabelline Wheatears were evident straight away. They were very mobile and obvious, especially when in display flight. Also here were Red-backed & Woodchat Shrikes, numerous Spanish Sparrows from what was likely to be a colony in the poplars across the valley, and a couple of Ravens overhead.

After leaving the junction, there were at least another 3 Isabelline Wheatears on the way to Ipsilou monastery, where we parked at the base. Any birder contemplating driving up the track to the monastery needs certifying, because there are masses of migrants whichever side is climbed. We started on the right hand track, which skirts the eastern side of the hill, and it was still quite cold and windy at this time. The slopes here are rocky, with one or two small cliffs and scattered bushes, and was a haven for migrants - plenty of warblers (Blackcap, Whitethroat, Lesser Whitethroat), and the first Stonechats of the trip. On this side we saw at least 2 singing Cinereous Buntings and the first signs of Rock Sparrow. The latter were much closer to hand at the monastery itself,



where a pair were breeding in the walls next to the entrance. 2 separate Western Rock Nuthatches were here as well, along with the by now ubiquitous Cretzchmar's Bunting. As we neared the top of the hill, the presence of a military building and warning signs meant cameras away just in case (they reappeared when we reached the monastery buildings). While watching distance Rock Sparrow and Blue Rock Thrush (2 males of the latter) from the top, a Lanner flew past just over head height, then giving excellent views from above and below.

For the descent we chose a narrow and rough cobbled path bounded by a dry stone wall, which was on the southern (sunny) slope, with many scattered trees and bushes. This eventually met the newer looking track presumably designed for military use (it was roped off at the base). The bushes on this side were alive with migrants, particularly flycatchers (Spotted and Pied, with a single Red-breasted). 2 males and 1 female Golden Orioles flew over. This side of the hill was again good for Cinereous Bunting (2 males).

Faneromeni

After finding ourselves going the wrong way through Sigri, which is virtually one street anyway, we doubled back and found the small track to Faneromeni. This is one of the best cultivated patches on this part of the plain, showing as a postage stamp of green among much rougher and more desolate terrain from the Andissa road. For such a small area, there is quite a variation in habitat, and although the irrigated and cultivated plots are supposed to be the best for birds, we found more of interest elsewhere.

First stop was to have lunch by the beach, which also happens to be next to a marsh with quite dense reeds, and over here were 3 Purple Herons, with a group of 5 Glossy Ibises flying in, as well as one or two Little Bitterns back and forth. Doubling back to the small pool and wet mud next to the beach, Little Stint and Little Ringed Plover were joined for a short while by a Collared Pratincole, which was very approachable in the car. The small river, which presumably feeds the marsh, is crossed by two fords. The lower ford, which seems to be the less well known, and nearer the sea, was visited for breeding Penduline Tit, which had an obvious nest ~100m downstream. The bird visited every 10 minutes or so, and once in the nest, stayed inside for another about another 5 minutes. While watching here, a female Little Bittern was fishing for tadpoles directly in front of us, and a *feldegg* Yellow Wagtail was even closer. Back at the upper ford, which was better known and usually populated by a few birders cars, is an excellent site for Little Bittern. We saw at least 3, and these come right out into the open, presumably hunting amongst the swarms of thousands of tadpoles in the water.

Sigri to Eressos to Ipsilou monastery

The main Sigri / Eressos road was predictably no more than a rough dirt track. Very tortuous, not too potholed, but also not too many birds. Main interest was provided by a very close Little Owl half way along. As we approached the plains of Eressos, which is rather impressive from the slopes above, Long-legged Buzzard flew past, Steppe Buzzard further below, and the rather glorious surrounds of the Eressos rubbish tip found a Black Kite being harried by a Hooded Crow. Getting from this track through Eressos was testing - it merged into very narrow and tortuous back streets, but we eventually found the square and much needed ATM for cash.

The last couple of hours of the day were spent back at Ipsilou looking for migrants. The wind was still howling from the North, so we decided to ascend the left hand track which seemed the more sheltered. Near to the top of this track was where most of the birds were hiding and hawking. These were predominantly female Pied Flycatchers, with

the odd male, multitudes of Spotted Flycatchers, and various common warblers which included the first Wood Warblers of the trip. Overhead as we climbed the gradient was the Lanner for the second time in the day, flying quite high and away from the monastery. We spent some time looking over the open areas of broom in the sunlight, just below the entrance to the monastery, and it was noticeable that most of the flycatchers were here. As we descended the rough track once more, there were very few birds.

Petra / Molivos / Skala Sikaminias area Day 6

By this time, we had seen most if not all of the islands specialities, and plenty else besides, meaning that today was the day was for some local birding in the Petra area. Almost all of the morning was spent between Petra and Molivos, starting with a look from the lay-by's to search for Rüppell's Warbler. Early morning was a good time for this, because the sun was still below the hills, leaving the landward side of the road visible without the glare. It was quite cold at this time. We also found Rüppell's Warbler on the seaward side of the road, but the whole area seems to be good for them. The first few hours were then spent up a dirt track just beyond the first lay-by, and next to a rather grand looking house. This track only went for about ½km up a hill, but was very good for typical Mediterranean warblers (Rüppell's, Subalpine, Orphean, and Sardinian), as well as Cirl Bunting. Not only that, but when we located a Cirl Bunting nesting spot, we stood for some time and were rewarded with close Cirl Bunting and Subalpine Warbler. A little further up the road, we took another track with an old rusty gate across (which we found was still in use!). This track was a lot different from the first, having more open woodland on the slopes above, and when rounding the corner, farm and pasture land. Overall it was quiet, apart from on the low ridge at the end, where we not only established a new record for Western Rock Nuthatches on one small rock (4), but when we stood again for some time, one of the birds appeared on a rock only 5m or so in front of us.



The Molivos / Efthalou track was again was of those testing ones to find from Molivos, with no sign, but our second guess was correct. The first couple of kms hold the last of the sparse tourist area, and the track then climbs up to more interesting landscape. The first couple of gullies with trees were by and large quiet, but 5½ km out of Molivos, a sharp right hand bend with ample parking space on the corner was the base for wonderful views up to Mount Lepetimnos, with the closer wooded hills being framed by the highest point on the island behind. This was a good raptor watch point, and over the



space of an hour, we had 3 Long-legged Buzzards, 2 Peregrine, 2 Eleonora's Falcons, and 2 Steppe Buzzards. There were masses of hirundines in the air constantly, which included Alpine Swifts in the distance initially. One of the most impressive sights here was what seemed like masses of Bee-eaters at first hawking above us, visibly catching flying insects, then circling above the tops of the fells, before flying out in large groups towards Turkey in the distance. The rest of the coastal track towards Skala Sikaminias was fairly uneventful, but made traversing the bank holiday masses in the small seaside

village an event. There were the usual narrow streets, with cars coming from both directions, leaving total gridlock at one stage caused by no more than 10-12 cars. We eventually got through, and just after we had left the village and were climbing the steep hill, very close Long-legged Buzzards flew overhead. Stopping on the bend for a better look was mandatory!

Back on the main road towards Petra, and a couple more stops. The first was for singing Nightingales at the Lepetimnos junction, one of which sang in the open for a short time. While waiting for that, a Middle Spotted Woodpecker landed on the tree in front of the car - we saw it land, but not leave. This was also the site for our first and only Wren of the trip - not a common bird at this part of the island. A little further on, we stopped at the base of Mount Lepetimnos for some more good raptor watching - another 3 Long-legged Buzzards, 2 displaying Steppe Buzzards, and a pair of displaying Short-toed Eagles. The view from this side of the mountain in the afternoon, with the sun behind, is impressive, with low wooded slopes giving way to more craggy upper slopes. Most of the raptors were above the higher ridges, all of which can be seen on a stop on a tight bend between Molivos and Lepetimnos.

Olive Tree Warbler is always a difficult bird to pin down, not only due to range and scarcity, but also because of its secretive habits. We tried the reported site 3.6km to the east of Skalochori, where Richard Brookes had up to 7-8 singing males in 1998. The area was full of mixed woodland (mainly oak, interspersed with olives). We at first went through an unlocked iron gate, and then through a bare patch alongside, into the groves themselves. It was relatively quiet here, although we did disturb a Woodlark as we entered. No Olive Tree Warblers, but there were a few Subalpine Warblers, a Lesser Whitethroat, a couple of pairs of Cirl Buntings, both Red-backed & Masked Shrike, and Short-toed Eagle & Steppe Buzzard overhead.

Kalloni area

Day 7

The plan this morning was to go to Kalloni Pool first thing, which we did by 6 o'clock first light, scan around for any interesting arrivals, and get some information about other birds, such as Scops Owl, Olive Tree Warbler, and anything else of interest. As usually happens, things did not go exactly to plan, due to the good close birds that we chanced upon, and so we spent the whole of the morning in the Kalloni area, in particular in the salt pans vicinity. The weather had changed this morning, again starting cold, but the wind had switched around to the North-east, and was fairly strong, keeping temperatures down. We looked for any crakes that might be around in the corner of Kalloni pool - none today, but Water Rail legged it across the open mud. It was also noticeable that there were more Whiskered than White-winged Black Terns today, with 22 of the former, although 6 of the latter did fly in later.

We gained information about the exact trees for the Scops Owl missed earlier in the week, so we left for Kalloni school, where a group of birders were watching the bird. It was about 3-5m up one of the poplars (not eucalyptus) in the open, behind the playground of the school. The bird was very approachable, and occasionally mustered the effort to half open one of its eyes to check us out.

From there we were heading for the salt pans area via the East River ford, where, as we crossed, Great Reed Warbler was close and out in the open. This had followed an equally confiding Olivaceous Warbler on the other side of the river. There was not much of interest between here and the car parking area next to the sheep fields, so we crossed to walk in the latter. A recently arrived Rufous Bush Robin, now singing from a favoured perch next to an abandoned wheelchair, was checked out first. From here, we walked towards the salt pans, which had dried up considerably since our first visit. There were masses of Red-throated Pipits and Yellow Wagtails here, most of the latter being *flava*, and the odd *feldegg*. Back towards the car was a small concentration of Short-toed Larks. When we got to the car, we heard of reported Black-winged Pratincole in the fields opposite the south-western end of the salt pans. When we arrived, there were quite a few birders watching a group of 4 pratincoles, all variously claiming dark wings, dark backs, etc. Unfortunately, they were a little distant, and only flew sporadically. There was also the added difficulty of actually seeing diagnostic features, so we spent an hour or so

watching these, mainly on the ground, before they briefly flew past us, proving all to be Collared Pratincoles. Also in this area, on the telegraph wires directly in front of us, were initially 2 males and a female Red-footed Falcon (1 male departed) which periodically hunted the grass below for insects.

Napi Valley



Afternoon was supposed to be similar to the morning, spending a short time in Napi Valley looking for Olive Tree Warbler, and then moving on elsewhere. Again, due to the excellent birding, this went out of the window, and we spent until early evening there. Directions to the site were to drive 11.8kms north of the garage on the main coast road, and this would take us through Napi village itself and into the valley. These were spot on - leaving the car and heading into the sparsely wooded slopes quickly found up to 5 singing Olive Tree Warblers (3 seen, with open views of one, which briefly sang from the edge of a large tree). This site also proved excellent for other birds. At ground level, a couple of Middle Spotted Woodpeckers were chasing each other from tree to tree, and at one time squared each other up on one trunk. Hoopoes were also evident, as well as single Cuckoo and Golden Oriole. But the best of the birds were in the air in the form of raptors - at least 4-5 Short-toed Eagles, 3 Steppe Buzzards, 3 Long-legged Buzzards, and just as we arrived at least 6 Red-footed Falcons over the ridge to the West. Again in the valley, there were small numbers of close Sombre Tits in what seemed to be family groups.

Before heading further up the valley, we trekked back down towards Napi for a site with two large rocks, where Long-legged Buzzard could be seen perched, presumably nesting near here. At this same place, there was yet another Olive Tree Warbler singing in the open, with Woodchat Shrike nearby. We then headed back North, to the end of the valley, which ascends to a hairpin bend on the right. Scanning back, we saw what was probably the spectacle of the trip. Over the western ridges, Red-footed Falcons appeared, and numbered eventually around 60 birds circling in a tight group above the ridge. After watching these for 15-20 minutes, it seemed as if they were landing, so we took a track upwards, and after about ½km, crossed fields and walls to view a small and hidden part of the valley beneath. All the falcons had landed here, and seemed everywhere - on trees, stone walls, fences, and on the ground, with yet more hawking for insects. Particularly satisfying was that we found ourselves above the birds, giving an incredibly impressive view of them. A male Lesser Kestrel joined them for a short time. After 20 mins to half an hour of this, the whole group took off as one, and headed towards the ridge, forming another tight circling mass.

Before returning to Petra, we had a report of Lanner breeding on the cliffs just to the North of the village. We watched this area for about ¾ hour, and found only a pair of Peregrines perched at the end of one of the headlands. It seems unlikely that they would tolerate another pair of falcons nearby, and wondered if this was the pair that had been seen. One of the birds had a small fawn patch on the nape - presumably not enough to make it a Lanner? Whilst watching, a fox was in front of us, and stalked away along the headland under the watchful eye of a male Blue Rock Thrush. Out at sea, a school of 4

dolphins made their way slowly North, with a Yelkouan Shearwater in attendance. Over the calm sea, a group of a further 20 Yelkouans went both North and South (same birds?).

Achladeri plain

First stop on the last morning had to be back at the Krüper's site at Achladeri Plain. When we arrived, we pulled the car up around 100m from the car park, at what we thought was the nest site. As soon as we opened the windows, Nuthatches could be heard calling, but although we sat for about 20 minutes, none came close to where we were. However, we did see Short-toed Treecreepers, including an adult being shadowed by a juvenile, and surprisingly heard our first Wood pigeons of the trip. When we left the car, we found one of the Krüper's quickly, although it was characteristically mobile, favouring the higher branches. It took a little time, but we eventually collected good views and photographs. As we arrived back at the car, it was perched on what was probably the nest bearing tree, although it seemed as if the young had fledged.

Dipi Larisos

This is reputed to be the most extensive reedbed on the island, and although not large by Blacktoft or Leighton Moss standards, it certainly covers some expanse. For the birds themselves, the reeds are superb, since they still contain ample water, and this is demonstrated by the amount of song from warblers throughout. From the observing aspect, the views of the whole beds are restricted, and the seasonal pools are definitely very seasonal by this time. Walking the tracks, including the one through the centre of the reeds to the old building, did find the pools, but there was very little water visible, so negating the chance of crakes. However, walking around did find plenty of warblers, with Reed most common and vocal, followed by Olivaceous, flighty Cetti's, and the odd Sedge & Moustached Warbler. In the distance was what sounded like one or two Savi's Warblers singing, although the song did seem to be in very short bursts (possible confusion with Mole Cricket?). The reedbed abuts the sea with a narrow sandy margin which held only a single Common Sandpiper. The sea was uncannily calm. After we had covered the reedbeds, we took a drive along both banks of the river upstream from the road bridge. This is not a bad track by Lesbian standards, and although good views of the river, which was by and large either dry or stagnant, are very restricted. The whole track proved productive for both singing Nightingales (between 20-30, with individuals regularly being seen out in the open) and Olivaceous Warblers. Also here, another Middle Spotted Woodpecker, flushed from the middle of the track.

Haramida marsh

The remaining time on the island, passing the time before having to check in at the airport, was spent at Haramida marsh. This is only a 10 minute drive, and not a bad little spot. Singing Olivaceous & Cetti's Warblers were evident, with singles of White-winged Black Tern and Little Bittern over the reeds. A pair of Short-toed Eagles were over the ridge, and a few Alpine Swifts amongst the Common Swifts.

SPECIES SEEN

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

Only seen once, at Kalloni Small Pool (2), but also heard at Dipi Larisos

Cory's Shearwater *Calonectris diomedea*

Flocks of between 10 and 30 birds were passing Tavari to the West on 5th. These flocks were almost constant, and numbers eventually totalled probably over 200. The sea was calm, and little wind, which meant that they were almost constantly flapping with little shearing. A single bird was also seen from the airport before departure

Yelkouan Shearwater *Puffinis yelkouan*

The first group of birds seen were 3 together (East) past Molivos. Half an hour passed before another group of 8 passed in the same direction. On 8th, a single bird was shadowing a school of 4 dolphins (seen from the cliffs between Petra and Molivos). A short time later, 2 separate groups of ~20 birds were seen from the same location, one flying West, and the other East (they may have been the same birds seen twice)

Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*

The low number of 5 on the first afternoon (2nd) and one on the last from the airport may show the small amount of seawatching as much as low residency

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*

Small numbers seen on most days, with a peak of 6 on 3rd

Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*

Infrequent: 2 at Kalloni Pool (4th); 3 at Faneromeni; and a bizarre occurrence of one perched on one of the rock faces at Tavari

Great White Egret *Egretta alba*

The only birds seen were 2 on a pool to the South-east of the Kalloni / Mytilini / Achladeri junction (3rd). A single bird there on 9th may have been one of these

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*

Very common, and seen on most days, with the largest numbers at Kalloni Saltpans (~75)

Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides*

Seen regularly in small numbers: East River (1 on 3rd, 2 on 4th); Kalloni Pool (1 on 4th, 2 on 8th); Skala Eresou river bed (1); Fanerami (3); Sigri/Eressos track (5 at Meladia River crossing); Petra / Molivos area (1 on 7th); Kalloni Saltpans (1 on 8th); Dipi Larsos (1)

Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*

1 roosting in a tree around Kalloni Small Pool, 1 in the riverbed at Skala Eresou



Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus*

Although regularly seen, usually flying, at Kalloni Pool (at least 7), the best spectacle was at Faneromeni, where 3 were in the open river at the upper ford, and 2 at the lower ford. Additional birds were: Skala Eresou river bed (1); Faneromeni reedbed (1); Meladia River crossing on Sigri / Eressos road (1); Hamarida Marsh (1)

Bittern *Botaurus stellaris*

A single bird was poking its head above the reeds at Kalloni Pool (4th)

Black Stork *Ciconia nigra*

Rather surprisingly, this was more common than White Stork at the beginning of the week, although all birds seen were flying: Skala Kalloni (4,1,1 on 3rd; 1 on 4th and 1 on 8th); Upper East River (1); Devil's Bridge (1); Eressos (3); Ipsilou monastery (1)

White Stork*Ciconia ciconia*

1 in the fields next to the East river was the only individual seen, until three over the Molivos / Skala Sikaminias road, and 2 at Kalloni on 8th (1 on Kalloni river bed, 1 landing on Kalloni Pool)

Glossy Ibis*Plegadis falcinellus*

~100 birds flew up from the reeds on the pools to the east of Kalloni Saltpans and landed on open water (3rd); up to 20 on Kalloni Pool; 5 landed in a tree in Faneromeni Marsh

Greater Flamingo*Phoenicopterus ruber*

~100-200 birds at least were on Kalloni Saltpans, and 14 flew over Molivos (7th)

Mute Swan*Cygnus olor*

Sea off Kalloni Saltpans (6); pool South-east of Kalloni / Mytilini / Achladeri junction (10)

Ruddy Shelduck*Tadorna ferruginea*

An uncommonly seen bird and difficult to approach: Palios headland (2,1); Napi Valley (2 flying North early evening)

**Shelduck***Tadorna tadorna*

Skala Polichnitos saltpans (4)

Garganey*Anas querquedula*

Only ones seen were at least 10 on Kalloni Pool

Shoveler*Anas clypeata*

2 males at Kalloni pool (4th)

Black Kite*Milvus migrans*

1 being mobbed by a Hooded Crow at the rubbish dump on the West of Eressos

Short-toed Eagle*Circaetus gallicus*

One of the most regularly seen raptors, often in pairs, and occasionally displaying. Approximately totalling 25 by the end of the week, including a pair over the ridges from the airport on 9th

Marsh Harrier*Circus aeruginosus*

Another regularly seen raptor (~10), all seen being females

Montagu's Harrier*Circus pygargus*

Single females were seen at Kalloni Saltpans (3rd, 4th), and a male hunting the valley below the first major valley West of Agra

Sparrowhawk*Accipiter nisus*

1 from Anemotia

Steppe Buzzard*Buteo buteo*

Potamia Valley (3); Sigri (1); Molivos / Skala Sikaminias road (4); Skalochori (1); Napi Valley (4); Airport (1)

Long-legged buzzard*Buteo rufinus*


Kalloni Saltpans (1 on 3rd); Potamia Valley (3); valley West of Agra (1); Sigri (1); Molivos / Skala Sikaminias road (8); Napi Valley (6, including 2 separate perched birds)

Red-footed Falcon*Falco vespertinus*

Until the last day, the single male at Kalloni fields looked as if it represented the last of migration. On 8th, 2 males and a female were hunting from wires in the fields next to Kalloni Saltpans, with 1 male leaving. When we arrived at Napi Valley, about 6 were flying above one of the ridges to the West. These may have been part of the large group of 60 or so birds that were seen later in the afternoon circling over the ridge. They eventually landed in a small valley which we climbed above, to the spectacle of what seemed like falcons everywhere - record for one bush was 9 birds

**Lesser Kestrel***Falco naumanni*

Tavari cliffs (3); Faneromeni (2); Napi Valley (1)

Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>
1 West of Agra	
Eleonora's Falcon	<i>Falco eleonora</i>
All 3 birds seen were over ridges; Potamia Valley (1); Molivos / Skala Sikaminias road looking up towards Mount Lepetimnos (2 separate)	
Lanner	<i>Falco biarmicus</i>
What was probably the same bird was seen twice (a.m. and p.m.) from Ipsilou monastery	
Peregrine	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>
A pair together on one of the small headlands just north of Petra may have been the pair of Lanners reported by other birders. Elsewhere: Potamia Valley (2); Agra (1); Faneromeni (1); Molivos / Skala Sikiminas road (2)	
Chukar	<i>Alectoris chukar</i>
Close singles at Upper East River and Eresos / Kalloni road	
Water Rail	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>
Kalloni Pool (1 on 8 th)	
Little Crake	<i>Porzana parva</i>
2 separate females early morning at Kalloni Pool, and 1 in the same spot the same evening (4 th)	
Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>
Regularly seen on open fresh water	
Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>
Good numbers Kalloni Pool	
Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>
~15 noticed in channel at Kalloni Saltpans; 20+ on Skala Polichnitos saltpans; 1 at Faneromeni	
Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>
15+ on Skala Polichnitos saltpans	
Stone Curlew	<i>Burhinus oedicephalus</i>
Palios headland (pair); beach area of Kalloni sheep fields	
Collared Pratincole	<i>Glareola pratincola</i>
4 birds in Kalloni fields (8 th) had been reported as Black-winged. Distance and difficulty in picking out features in flight meant that it took over an hour to confirm them as Collared. A single bird flying over the Kalloni sheep fields (3 rd) was initially also identified as Black-winged, but there is some doubt over this. A bird at Faneromeni was extremely approachable in the car	
	
Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>
4 together on sand spit next to Kalloni sheep fields	
Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>
1 on sand spit next to Kalloni sheep fields (3 rd); 1 on pool in sheep fields	
Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>
Most birds were around Kalloni area (~10) and Skala Polichnitos saltpans (~10), with singles seen incidentally elsewhere	
Kentish Plover	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>
There was some dispute over a small plover nesting on the shore of the sheep fields. Some said Caspian, others Lesser Sand, and more Kentish. It looked typical Kentish apart from being a little darker than normal, and without the white collar (only a slightly lighter band). Almost definitely a Kentish. Elsewhere, there were 3 males on the sea channel to the West of Kalloni sheep fields, and 4 on the small pool outside of Skamnioudi	
Marsh Sandpiper	<i>Tringa stagnatilis</i>
1 bird with Wood Sandpipers on a pool in the Kalloni sheep fields (3 rd)	
Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>
Quite easily the most common wader, with birds seemingly on every river or pool. Numbers well over three figures for the week	

**Little Stint***Calidris minuta*Skala Polichnitos salt pans (~30); Tavari (2); Faneromeni (1); Kalloni salt pans (12 on 8th)**Common Sandpiper***Actitis hypoleucos*

Kalloni sheep fields (1); Skala Eresou (1); Dipi Larisos (1)

Curlew Sandpiper*Calidris ferruginea*

~10 on Skala Polichnitos salt pans

Dunlin*Calidris alpina*

~10 on Skala Polichnitos salt pans

Ruff*Philomachus pugnax*

Small numbers in isolated flocks on open water: Kalloni Pool (4); Skala Polichnitos salt pans (30); Tavari (2); Kalloni salt pans (10)

Yellow-legged Gull*Larus michahellis*

Extremely common in almost all locations

Sandwich Tern*Sterna sandvicensis*

2 on the sand spit at the South-eastern corner of Kalloni sheep fields

Common Tern*Sterna hirundo*

Common around Kalloni salt pans

Little Tern*Sterna albifrons*

Kalloni salt pans (8+); Skala Polichnitos salt pans (4)

Whiskered Tern*Chlidonias hybridus*Kalloni pool (1 on 3rd, 2 on 4th, 22 on 8th); Kalloni salt pans (3 on 4th, 10 on 8th)**White-winged Black Tern***Chlidonias leucopterus*Surely the most impressive of the terns, particularly in flocks, which was often the case here: Kalloni Pool (1 on 3rd, 20 on 4th; 4 on 8th); East River (20 on 3rd); Kalloni salt pans (50+ on 8th); Eressos (1); Faneromeni (4)**Turtle Dove***Streptopelia turtur*Numbers of single figures were seen on most days, with more heard, apart from at least 20 on the 2nd from various locations. None on 3rd**Collared Dove***Streptopelia decaocto*Perhaps a little more frequent than Turtle Dove, but again with numbers barely touching double figures each day. None on 3rd**Cuckoo***Cuculus canorus*

2 heard, and 1 in flight in Napi Valley

Scops Owl*Otus scops*

1 was perched in poplars behind Skala Kalloni school. It favoured one particular tree (despite being disturbed regularly by the school kids through the day), and could be very approachable

**Little Owl***Athene noctua*Not seen as frequently as expected: Kalloni fields near East River (2 on 3rd); Tavari (1); Sigri / Eressos road (1)

Alpine Swift *Tachymarptis melba*

Tavari (3); Molivos / Skala Sikiminias road (20+); Haramida Marsh (10)

Swift *Apus apus*

Common - seen every day

Bee-eater *Merops apiaster*

Both a welcome and common sight and sound throughout the island. One of the best spectacles was on the Molivos / Skala Sikiminias road, where a group of 100+ were picked out initially over the ridges. They eventually came closer, hawking insects directly above us, before leaving the island in the same group, flying towards Turkey. The bird generally allowed reasonable approach, although not too close (even in the car), apart from a couple of birds perched next to East River. Others seen: Kalloni fields and East River (50+ on 3rd, 10 on 4th, 20+ on 8th); Upper East River (6); Devil's Bridge (25); Faneromeni (20)

**Hoopoe** *Upupa epops*More often heard (most days in small numbers) than seen: East River (1 on 4th); Ipsilou monastery (2); Napi Valley (2); Dipi Larisos (1)**Middle Spotted Woodpecker** *Dendrocopus medius*

Despite being a widespread breeding bird on the island, this had been apparently quite difficult to catch up with. We were lucky, in that we saw quite a few: a pair in the orchard next to Kalloni school (5th); 1 in the trees below Ipsilou monastery; 1 at Molivos (7th); 2 birds in the Napi Valley who may have been rival males - they seemed part of a Mexican standoff on opposite sides of a tree at one point; 1 bird on the final day at Dipi Larisos

Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla*

3 on the first afternoon at Palios headland were eventually quite approachable, and really weren't watched properly. Video on return questioned whether they might have been the unlikely Lesser Short-toed Larks, with a seemingly long primary projection and dark breast (heavy spotting?). Further birds subsequently scrutinised as Short-toed were: Kalloni sheep fields (20 on 3rd, 10 on 8th), Skala Polichnitos salt pans (2)

**Crested Lark** *Galerida cristata*

Extremely common throughout

Woodlark *Lullula arborea*

1 in flight 3kms East of Skalochori, and another heard at the Andissa/Sigri/Eressos junction

Sand Martin *Riparia riparia*Seen sporadically in small numbers: Skala Polichnitos salt pans (1); Kalloni salt pans (1 on 4th); Faneromeni (5)**Swallow** *Hirundo rustica*

Very common throughout

Red-rumped Swallow *Hirundo daurica*Seen in small numbers on every day, with all birds in at least pairs. Peak was 20 on 2nd and 7th**House Martin** *Delichon urbica*

Very common throughout

White Wagtail *Motacilla alba alba*

2 separate birds on the road between Kratigos and Haramida

Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola*

A splendid male was found in the riverbed at Skala Eresou

Yellow Wagtail*Motacilla flava*

Various subspecies were seen in different locations, with at least 3 varieties seen. The greatest concentration was in the Kalloni sheep fields, where at least 30 birds were present on 8th with Red-throated Pipits. The 3 subspecies identified were *beema*, *thunbergi*, and *feldegg*

**Tawny Pipit***Anthus campestris*

Kalloni sheep fields (1 on 3rd); Upper East River (1)

Tree Pipit*Anthus trivialis*

Kalloni sheep fields (singles on 3rd and 8th)

Meadow Pipit*Anthus pratensis*

1 in Kalloni sheep fields on 3rd

Red-throated Pipit*Anthus cervinus*

Apart from a single bird near Skala Polichnitos, the only place they were seen was in the Kalloni sheep fields, where numbers were particularly good on the 8th (50+), with a further 6 on the 3rd. Depth of colour varied dramatically with individual birds

**Wren***Troglodytes troglodytes*

Perhaps a little surprisingly for the north of the island (this is a bird normally localised to the South-east), we found a singing bird at the Lepetimnos village junction while waiting to photograph Nightingale

Blue Rock Thrush*Monticola solitarius*

Palios headland (2 males); Upper East River (male, female); Devil's Bridge (male, female); Ipsilou monastery (2 males); Petra / Molivos cliffs (male)

Blackbird*Turdus merula*

Common and seen every day, with up to 20 birds seen in any one day (mostly males)

Cetti's Warbler*Cettia cetti*

Predictably with this species, most of the birds were heard rather than seen, and they were quite common. Of those seen: Kalloni pool (1 on 3rd, probably same bird on 4th); Skala Polichnitos (1); Tavari (1); Dipi Larisos (1); Haramida marsh (1)

River Warbler*Locustella fluviatilis*

A single bird was heard singing early morning on the inland side of the Petra / Molivos road (7th). We failed to locate it, and it was not heard singing subsequently, which was no great surprise, since this was presumably a migrant

Moustached Warbler*Acrocephalus melanopogon*

1 bird seen briefly at Dipi Larisos

Sedge Warbler*Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*

East River (1 on 3rd); Skala Polichnitos salt pans (1); Kalloni (1 on 8th); Dipi Larisos (1)

Great Reed Warbler*Acrocephalus arundinaceus*

4 birds were seen, all on the East River (2 on 3rd, 1 on 4th, 1 on 8th)

**Reed Warbler***Acrocephalus scirpaceus*

Most of the birds seen and heard were at Dipi Larisos, where there were at least 15 birds

seen or heard. Others were: East River (5 on 3rd, 1 on 4th); Skala Eresou (1); Haramida marsh (1)

Olivaceous Warbler

Hippolais pallida

This was a prominent species, both in terms of numbers, where it was the most common reed / sedge dwelling warbler, and sight, since it was more likely to be seen singing in the open than relative species. Many of the birds seen displayed the characteristic "tail dipping". East River (2 on 3rd, 4 on 4th, 3 on 8th); Skala Polichnitos (2); Potamia Valley (2); Skala Eresou (4); Ipsilou monastery (3); Dipi Larsos (6); Haramida marsh (1). Many more were heard, but not looked for



Olive-tree Warbler

Hippolais olivetorum

Although this is characteristically a shy and usually difficult to see bird, the open orchards of the Napi Valley are a good place to see as well as hear them. At least 6 birds were on the west side of the valley, exactly 11.8 km north of the filling station turn off on the Kalloni coast road. Some of these birds were singing in the open on the outer (and upper) branches of large trees. A seventh bird was also singing openly on the east side of the valley, about 1-2 km South of the favoured site. We searched the previously known site, 3.6 km east of Skalochori, but there was no sign.

Wood Warbler

Phylloscopus sibilatrix

2 birds at Ipsilou monastery, and 2 on the Petra / Molivos road

Blackcap

Sylvia atricapilla

Ipsilou monastery (~20); Petra / Molivos road (1)

Whitethroat

Sylvia communis

Ipsilou monastery (4)

Lesser Whitethroat

Sylvia curruca

Ipsilou monastery (4); Skalochori (1); Dipi Larisos (1)

Orphean Warbler

Sylvia hortensis

The stronghold for this warbler seems to be on the North of the island, since all but one were seen there, with 8 on the first afternoon on the Palios headland, and 5 between Petra / Molivos on 7th. The exception was 1 between Sigri / Eressos

Rüppell's Warbler

Sylvia ruepellii

This warbler is particularly prevalent in the Petra / Molivos area. 3 males were on the inland side of the road just north of Petra, and a single male was on the seaward side. They occasionally show particularly well, singing from the top of open perches

Subalpine Warbler

Sylvia cantillans

All of the birds seen were males, with the exception of a single female in the Napi valley, and a female with a male in Potamia valley: Palios headland (3); Potamia valley (male and female); Ipsilou monastery (1); Petra / Molivos / Skala Sikiminas road (10); Napi Valley (male and female)



Sardinian Warbler

Sylvia melanocephala

Palios headland (female); Skala Palochnitos (male); Potamia valley (2 males); Petra / Molivos road (male and female); Napi Valley (female)

Spotted Flycatcher

Muscicapa striata

By far the most common and widespread flycatcher, seen on every day (apart from 8th), with the peak being on 6th, with most birds being at Ipsilou monastery

Pied Flycatcher

Ficedula hypoleuca

Apart from a single male at the Krüpers Nuthatch woodland in the Achladeri Plain, all birds seen were at Ipsilou monastery, the vast majority of which were females. Both Semi-collared & Collared had been claimed by other observers, but all birds seen were checked where possible, and none showed even marginal features of anything but Pied

Red-breasted Flycatcher

Ficedula parva

Single females were at Faneromeni and Ipsilou monastery

Nightingale*Luscinia megarhynchos*

This is a characteristic song throughout the island, and there are particular pockets where groups of birds have claimed adjoining territories. We found perhaps the greatest concentration to be on the banks of the river alongside Dipi Larisos, where at least 20 birds were singing. Nightingales were heard singing every day, and those which were actually seen were: East River (3 on 3rd, 1 on 4th, 1 on 8th); Petra / Molivos area (1); Dipi Larisos (3)

Rufous Bush Robin*Cercotrichas galactotes*

Apparently, these birds had only arrived at the start of this week. We saw 3 separate birds, which were all reasonably approachable (particularly if using the car as a hide). Interestingly, the birds did not cock their tails when singing, and the song is not particularly noticeable, so they could be overlooked if not careful. The singing bird at the Upper East River was very close (from the car) - the other birds were at the ford near Tavari, and a lone bush on the beach side of the sheep fields

**Whinchat***Saxicola rubetra*

Very common - seen on every day with numbers up to 20. However, this was perhaps the most wary of all the birds seen, even when approaching slowly in the car

Stonechat*Saxicola torquata*

Only one pair of birds seen, at the base of the northern slope of Ipsilou monastery

Northern Wheatear*Oenanthe oenanthe*

A mix of males and females (5) between the Andissa / Sigri / Eresson junction and Ipsilou monastery

Black-eared Wheatear*Oenanthe hispanica*

Seen on every day apart from 3rd, this is a very common bird, particularly when in the more rocky areas, of which there are many on Lesbos. The vast majority of the birds were males, and most of these were the black-throated form. These birds are generally very light above, with almost white cap, back, and breast. Because of this, there can be a temptation to confuse with Finsch's Wheatear when viewed from certain angles. Finsch's Wheatear occurs rarely on the island, but claims are regular, including a bird which was pointed out to us at Devil's Bridge. From the angle below its favoured perch above the road, the black often looked concolourous with the wings, but patience eventually revealed the white collar. Even so, we checked the ridge later for more birds, but only found one more male of the black-throated form, which also had a buff cap. These less common white-throated birds were the ones more likely to have the buff cap and throat. Peak number of birds was around 30 on the 6th, when we covered the West of the island

**Isabelline Wheatear***Oenanthe isabellina*

We had been pleased with the find of a single displaying bird around 4-5 km north of Eressos, thinking that this was a less regular find for the island. The next day, we came across the apparently well known site for this species at the Andissa / Sigri / Eresson junction, where at least 6 displaying males were constantly flying back and forth, as well as displaying

Great Tit*Parus major*

Very common - seen every day

Blue Tit*Parus caeruleus*

Very common - seen every day

Sombre Tit*Parus lugubris*

Upper East River (8); Agra area (8); Petra / Molivos area (1); Napi valley (10)


Krüper's Nuthatch
Sitta krueperi

This is arguably the most wanted breeding bird on the island, since it has a very restricted distribution in Lesbos, Turkey, and marginally in Georgia. It is also a bird of great character, almost constantly giving out its low nasal call, and is quite a delicate and nicely marked Nuthatch. The site we visited, in the Achladeri Plain, is the well known nesting place (apparently still the only one found on the island). There is a possibility that the young birds had fledged by the time we arrived, but the 4 birds we saw on 3rd, and single bird in a brief visit on 9th, were easily located by call. All were within 100-200 metres of the parking area, which is near a dilapidated white toilet block easily seen from the main road

Western Rock Nuthatch
Sitta neumayer

This is a much more robust bird than Krüper's Nuthatch, and prefers a very different habitat. It can be quite easily found in open rocky terrain, normally preferring rocks and rock faces, but not totally averse to frequenting trees if the need arises. Apart from the well known nest on the side of a rock, 100m or so up from a sheep pen on the Upper East River road, we saw 3 other nests, 2 further up the track, and one at Devil's Bridge. The latter birds had placed feathers in the small cracks in the rock around the nest, and spent some time rearranging them, and deciding whether or not to place them in the nest. Our record for one small rock (about 1 metre across), was 4 birds at once, along a track between Petra / Molivos. Upper East River (3 pairs); Potamia river valley (1); Devil's Bridge (1 pair); Agra to Eressos road (10); Western part of island on 6th (4); Petra / Molivos on 7th (5)


Short-toed Treecreeper
Certhia brachydactyla

Not seen until the final day, when we revisited the Krüper's Nuthatch wood at Achladeri Plain, when 3 were seen - one lone individual, and an adult being shadowed by a juvenile

Penduline Tit
Remiz pendulinus

A nesting bird was at the lower ford (Faneromeni)

Golden Oriole
Oriolus oriolus

Skala Polichnitos (1); Agra / Eressos (2); Ipsilou monastery (2,1); Napi Valley (1)

Red-backed Shrike
Lanius collurio

Certainly the most common shrike seen, and present on every day. As with a lot other species, males were by far the most common. Peak number was 25 on 6th


Lesser Grey Shrike
Lanius minor

Singles seen at Palios headland, Kalloni fields (3rd and 8th), Upper East River, and Tavari

Masked Shrike
Lanius nubicus

Palios headland (3); Achladeri Plain (1); Potamia River valley (1); Devil's Bridge (1); Ipsilou monastery (1); Skalochori (1); Napi Valley (1)

Woodchat Shrike
Lanius senator

As with Red-backed Shrike, seen on every day, and males far outnumbered the females, with a peak of 10 on the 6th

**Jay***Garrulus glandarius atricapillus*

The Middle-eastern subspecies (*atricapillus*) was the bird seen on the island, with a distinctive black cap, and was seen on every day but the last, with most on 7th (20)

Jackdaw*Corvus monedula*

Only seen on the first two days, with 20 on trip from the airport to Petra, and Kalloni area. The birds encountered (but not looked at in any detail), looked to be of the lighted naped subspecies

Raven*Corvus corax*

Andissa / Sigri / Eresson junction (2); Napi valley (1)

Starling*Sturnus vulgaris*

We wanted to keep this quiet, but this was the last species to be seen on the trip. A single spoiling bird was on the return trip from Haramida marsh to the airport

House Sparrow*Passer domesticus*

Abundant

Spanish Sparrow*Passer hispaniolensis*

When seen, present in numbers: Kalloni pool (maximum seen 30)

Rock Sparrow*Petronia petronia*

The first birds seen were briefly on the Agra to Parakila road, and looked to be breeding. However, it seemed the most obvious (and guaranteed) birds were at Ipsilou monastery. Some birds were seen on the North facing cliff faces, but the closest birds were a pair nesting in the walls next to the entrance of the monastery

**Chaffinch***Fringilla coelebs*

Common - seen every day

Greenfinch*Carduelis chloris*

Quite common - seen every day apart from 2nd in small numbers

Goldfinch*Carduelis carduelis*

Very common - seen in every day

Linnet*Carduelis cannabina*

Seen on 4th (2); 5th (8); 6th (2); 7th (4)

Serin*Serinus serinus*

Only bird seen was a singing male in the woods on Achladeri Plain

Cirl Bunting*Emberiza cirlus*

Potamia River valley (2 males); Upper East River (male); Devil's Bridge (2); Skala Eresou (2); Ipsilou monastery (6); Petra / Molivos (4); Molivos / Skiminiyas (4); Skalochori (2); 8th (10); 9th (3)



Cinereous Bunting

Emberiza cineracea

The West of the island is the stronghold for this speciality species. The nearest to Kalloni is reputed to be a singing male at the Devil's Bridge chapel, and, although this was not behaving as it should, a bird was seen on the ridge above the chapel. All of the 7 birds seen were singing males: West of Agra (2); Eressos / Kalloni road (1); Ipsilou monastery (4)

Cretzchmar's Bunting

Emberiza caesia

Seen on every day, sometimes in very good numbers, with most birds seen in the West of the island



Black-headed Bunting

Emberiza melanocephala

Common - the vast majority seen (bar 2) were males



Corn Bunting

Miliaria calandra

Very common

TOTAL SPECIES = 144