

Greece: Lesvos Spring Migration | April 20 - 27, 2024 | Trip Report | by James P. Smith

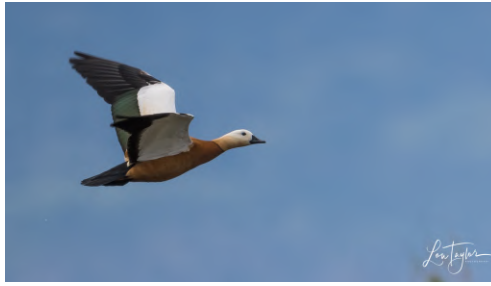


Compiled by Naturalist Journeys host guide James P. Smith with local guide Stylianos Zannetos. Our awesome guests were; Sophia, Julie, Marianne & Richard, David & Beth, Lou & Deb, and Leo & Joanne.



Sat. April 20 Mytilene | Skala Kalloni | Mikri Limni/Achlerderi Forest | Mesa Wetlands | Tsikinias River | Kalloni Salt Pans | Lotzaria Track

The Theofilos Paradise Hotel, deep in the heart of Mytilini's narrow cobbled streets, served as a great place for Naturalist Journeys to meet in preparation for our week on Lesvos. Overnight a cold front brought some rainfall and a big drop in temperature but as we left Mytilini, increasingly clears skies accompanied the journey all the way to the Kalloni Bay Hotel. The drive west passed through rolling hillsides filled with Turkish Pine, flowering broom bushes, and olive groves aplenty at the lower elevations. The light was wonderful as we skirted around the northern edge of Kalloni Bay overlooking the salt pans where hundreds of Greater Flamingos fed and rested, clearly visible from the road. We received a warm welcome at the Kalloni Bay Hotel and, with Niki on front



desk to assist, check-in was smooth and efficient. At 12:00 noon we reconvened in the lobby and headed out for lunch in the picturesque harbor side fishing village of Skala Kalloni. Lunch at Mezen was a delight and we enjoyed a range of traditional Greek dishes at this lovely family run restaurant right by the village square. The trip was off to a fabulous start!

From Mezen we headed east around Kalloni Bay climbing up through the Achlerderi Forest to Mikri Limni (meaning small lake). Stylianos had 'staked out' an active Krüper's Nuthatch nest several days prior and today was our lucky day. The nest was still active and we watched from a safe distance as the adults brought food items to the nestlings, leaving the nest with fairly large fecal sacks indicating the nestlings must have been in the advanced stages of development - our timing was good!

Mikri Limni was fairly high in the forest and at that elevation it was surprisingly cool so we decided to walk around to warm up finding several more forest species of interest including a pair Long-tailed Tits of the Turkish subspecies, evidently somewhat shorter tailed than the Central and Western European subspecies. Other birds in the forest were mostly heard -only, including lots of Common Chaffinches and Great Tits, and one or two Short-toed Treecreepers.

Pleased with the nuthatch success we headed down slope pausing to spend some time with a field full of Common Poppies before heading towards Kalloni Bay, the Mesa Wetlands and Kalamí Marsh. Greater Flamingos, Black Storks, Little Egrets and Black-winged Stilts were found right by the roadside before we moved on to the 'old bridge' overlooking Kalamí Marsh. Despite the cool windy conditions we did well to find Eurasian Coots and a very nice group of Garganey, a highly migratory duck species closely related to the teal family. Common day-to-day species featured here including Corn Bunting, Crested Lark and Western Yellow Wagtail, all of which would become familiar and seen on a daily basis during the tour. Far less expected was a Pygmy Cormorant picked out by Stylianos as it flew low over the marsh, actually passing right overhead giving great views. Pygmy Cormorant had not been found on any previous Naturalist Journeys tour to Lesvos – an excellent start. Almost as impressive was a close flyover Short-toed Snake-eagle as well as hundreds of Sand Martins, Barn and Red-rumped Swallows hawking low over the marshes. Dozens of Common Swifts could be seen feeding overhead and James spotted three Alpine Swifts relatively high above the Commons Swifts.



Given the cooler than average conditions, the consensus among the group was to head back to the hotel to gather a few warmer layers for the rest of the day. After a short break we headed out towards the Tsiknias River mouth to be greeted immediately on arrival by an adult Little Gull! It flew straight up the river giving immaculate eye-level views as it flew past the tour vehicles. The river mouth itself provided nice studies of Little Ringed Plover, Common Sandpiper, Common Tern, and hundreds of Barn Swallows and Sand Martins, while a little further upriver a Purple Heron offered some nice flight views. From the Tsiknias River we moved towards the salt pans area where the brilliant afternoon light illuminated the Greater Flamingos in all their beauty and glory as well as close views of Black-winged Stilts, and a group of Western Yellow Wagtails sheltering from the blustery winds along one of the hedgerows.

The famous Lotzaria track was well and truly waterlogged after the overnight rain but it didn't deter Stylianos from pushing through the floodwater. He suddenly became very animated when he found a couple of Spur-winged Lapwings in the fields as well as several Gull-billed Terns and Pied Avocets, all very good birds for our first field day.

Arrival back at the hotel was around 7:15 pm, evidently a bit late as we ended up having 'lighter portions' for dinner with the three other birding groups staying at the same hotel consuming most of the buffet! An exhausting but rewarding day came to a close as we went through the day's checklist and observations, a post-dinner tradition that we'd repeat each evening.

**Sun. April 21 Kalloni Bay Hotel | Christou River Mouth | Filia |
 Metochi Lake | Skala Kalloni | Tsiknias River | Kalloni Salt Pans | Alykes
 Wetlands and Race Track | Lotzaria Track | Potomia Valley**

For those up early, the chilly pre-dawn air was full of bird sounds. Two Eurasian Scops-Owls called back and forth, and Common Nightingales could be heard singing from the hotel gardens while Greater Flamingos moved over the Kalloni Bay Hotel in the murky darkness probably commuting between the Christou River and the Kalloni Salt Pans. After a substantial buffet breakfast we departed west but first paused briefly at the Christou River. The scene was quite busy with Black-winged Stilts and several other species of shorebird including our first Little Stints, and a large flock of Wood Sandpipers that called excitedly as they rose up and departed north in migration perhaps heading toward the boreal forests of Scandinavia. Kentish Plovers, one of the more sought-



after species here, could be seen with scopes and a Western Marsh Harrier hunted over the marshes. Stylianos spotted a dark Peregrine moving low over the marshes, characteristically mercurial in its appearance, it moved off west at speed toward the Potomia Valley.

From the Christou River we drove the narrow winding roads passing scrub covered hillsides and rough pasture until we reached the hanging oak forests of Filia. Stylianos introduced us to his 'secret pond' where we had a host of interesting species including Eastern Subalpine Warblers and several singing Lesser Whitethroats. Northern Ravens and Common Buzzards, both resident breeders, played on the breezes but since the pond area was fairly quiet, we decided to take a little walk along a rugged farm track with hand-crafted drystone walls on either side. Deb did very well to find a Middle-spotted Woodpecker which appeared all too briefly before flying across the meadow to be followed moments later by our first Eurasian Hoopoe! This was also good spot for seeing Woodchat Shrikes and we had wonderful views of several russet-capped males. Julie spotted a brief male Cirl Bunting, and a singing Short-toed Treecreeper drew some attention before rain showers sent us scurrying back towards the vehicles. Flowering poppies, asters and daisies lined the roadsides. By the time we reached the vehicles the rain had stopped and soon afterwards we heard our first Eastern Bonelli's Warblers which admittedly gave us the runaround, some in the group had decent views while others had no luck at all.

From Filia we dropped down to the lowlands where increasing temperatures and warm sunshine developed encouraging small numbers of Black Storks to ride the warm air thermals. A late morning visit to Metochi Lake found a beautiful pair of Ruddy Shelducks that lifted off the lake and circled around calling. Unbeknown to us at the time they'd left a single chick behind on the water but thankfully came back to attend the chick as soon as we departed. Eurasian Reed Warblers could be heard singing from the reeds, and Stylianos spotted a roosting Black-crowned Night-Heron as well as a male Little Bittern, both within minutes of each other. Overhead, flocks of migrating European Bee-eaters passed over the lake and nearby fields, their beautiful liquid calls being audible over many parts of the island during the day.

After a classic Greek lunch at Dionysios by the harbor we headed east towards the Tsiknias River where a stunning flock of European Bee-eaters was found resting and feeding in extremely blustery conditions, the wind blowing hard straight off the Gulf of Kalloni. Spending time with these incredibly beautiful birds was pure joy and the photographers in our party had a field day. From there we crossed the Tsiknias River to the Lotzaria track where we enjoyed a mixed flock of Western Yellow Wagtails including multiple different subspecies, as well as stunning views of a Spur-winged Lapwing, the second day in a row that this former island rarity put on a show!



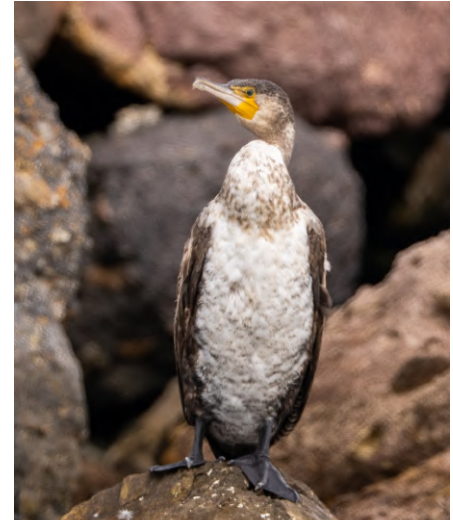
By late afternoon the forecasted high winds had really picked up from the southern quarter. We focused on the Alykes wetlands where the highlight was easily a flock of 27 Glossy Ibis close to the road plus a supporting cast of Ruff and Wood Sandpipers, and a bonus flock of six Curlew Sandpipers that circled around before moving off east. Stylianos spotted five or six Greater Short-toed Larks wonderfully camouflaged as they fed on the ground along the sandy racetrack, and James spotted a Sandwich Tern flying by as well as a first-year Mediterranean Gull which most of the group managed see despite the challenging conditions. A further brief stop discovered our first Northern Wheatear, and a first-year male Eastern Black-eared Wheatear.

We finished off the day by the mustard fields and olive groves of the magical Potomia Valley. A small reservoir in the valley hosted Little Grebe, Common Moorhen and Eurasian Coot, and there was a stunning male Western Marsh Harrier quartering the adjacent wheat fields, and a Harting's Vole bolted across the track never to be seen again! Back at the Kalloni Bay Hotel we finished the day with a much-improved dinner buffet, and wrapped up the day's observations with the evening checklist.

Mon. April 22 Kalloni Bay Hotel | Agra | Skala Eresou | Eresos to Sigri (Meladia Valley) | Sigri – Faneromeni

A beautiful day was just what we needed for our first drive out to the rugged volcanic terrain on the western side of the island. The boulder-scrree slopes of Agra provided the venue for our first stop and, since it was a remarkably windless morning, many species could be heard singing from the hillsides. The fluty songs of Golden Orioles resonated from the olive groves below, while upslope we heard and subsequently saw plenty of Eastern Black-eared Wheatears and a fair number of Cretzschmar's Buntings. Both Woodlark and Cinereous Bunting could be heard singing from this spot but alas, never came into view. Higher up the slopes, we found a brief Blue Rock Thrush, a Western Rock Nuthatch, and Leo's extra-ordinary eyes picked out a young Red Fox snoozing amid the boulders and fennel – wow!

We arrived at the picture-postcard coastal village of Skala Eresou in mid-morning to be greeted by two Laughing Doves perched on a wire in the parking lot. Laughing Dove is still a rare bird on Lesvos but well on its way to becoming fully established as a regular breeding bird. In fact, it was our very own Stylianos that found the first Laughing Dove nest for Lesvos and Greece back in September 2021. We walked the narrow cobbled streets down to the seafront where the visibility was excellent and watched many flocks Yelkouan Shearwaters passing over a flat calm, glassy Aegean Sea. Meanwhile, the owner of the local seafront taverna did his level best to



beckon us over to sample his wares, and he succeeded! It was actually the perfect time for a pit stop, coffee and sweet treats. Refreshed and ready for the next stage of our adventure, we drove up through the winding streets of Eresos until magnificent views opened up across rugged scree slopes and the barren, open terrain of the Meladia Valley. A stop at the highest point on the road found a pair of Isabelline Wheatears, our first of the trip, as well as good views of Tawny and Tree Pipits and a furtive flycatcher that turned out to be a female European Pied Flycatcher. Eastern Black-eared Wheatears were common here, and just a little down slope we founded a singing Cinereous Bunting, very much a key species for Lesvos as the island is thought to support some 250 pairs out of a total Greek population of just 300 pairs. Cinereous and Cretzchmar's Buntings are somewhat dependent on bush-cricket (*Tettigoniidae*), an abundant insect within the low-shrub (garrigue) habitat across the western part of the island.

After observing a family group of Western Rock Nuthatches 'playing' along a drystone wall, we dropped down into the main valley where Stylianos promptly spotted a Little Owl resting on the terracotta roof of a farm building. As we enjoyed views of the owl, a stunning male Red-backed Shrike appeared close to the road, and the 'jangling' song of Corn Buntings could be heard from every direction as several Alpine Swifts cruised overhead. Leo spotted a male Black-headed Bunting, and a Great Reed Warbler gave its gruff 'croaking' song from the thick vegetation. A very brief stop by the chapel saw a brief, unidentified flycatcher and a rather showy male Eastern Orphean Warbler singing. Somehow the morning had vaporized and seamlessly merged into early afternoon. As we drove over one last ridge and gazed across azure waters, the stunning coastal town of Sigri came into view just like a mirage. We descended straight into a delightful harbor side taverna for a late lunch, graciously and spontaneously assisted by Sophia, and voted one of the best meals of the trip!

After lunch we walked the farm tracks and olive groves of Faneromeni where European Bee-eaters in all their beauty and glory entertained the group for a while, the photographers in their element. The area was very good for shrikes as well with Woodchat and Red-backed on view as well a fine Lesser Gray Shrike, the rarest of the *Laniidae* family to be found on the trip. Calm conditions persisted throughout the day allowing us to see a number of songbirds 'teed-up' in trees and bushes including a couple of Greater Whitethroats, and Julie skillfully photographed a female Collared Flycatcher. An adult European Shag rested on rocks along the seafront before it was time to head out and take advantage of the newly constructed Sigri to Kalloni highway. Common Buzzard, Short-toed Snake Eagle, and even a tiny Eurasian Wren flew across the 'quick route' home before we arrived in good time for showers, supper and the evening bird list.



Tues. April 23 Kalloni Bay Hotel | Metochi Lake | Kalami Marsh | Mesa Wetlands | Achlerderi Coastal Track | Polichnitos salt pans | Achlerderi Forest (Megali Limni) | Agios Dimitris | Kalloni Salt pans

Complete cloud cover and a light southerly airflow started the day with a distinct rise in temperature and humidity. After breakfast our first stop was Metochi Lake where we had hopes of seeing a crane or two and it wasn't too long before Stylianos proclaimed "I have a crane"! A female Little Crane worked along the edge of the reeds, eventually giving pretty good views for all in the group. A much prized species, the Eurasian Hoopoe, landed in the middle of the dirt road and fed there for quite a while allowing Julie, Beth and Lou to get some great shots. At far end of the pool three shorebirds fed on a tiny mud bar, two were Green Sandpipers and the other a Marsh Sandpiper, and both species were new to the tour. All in all, an excellent start to the day.

Plans for a quick stop at the east side of the Kalloni Salt Pans were quickly aborted as every meter of parking space appeared to be occupied by birder's vehicles, no doubt chasing reports of a newly arrived Dalmatian Pelican! Instead we parked by the Mesa Wetlands and had our first Red-footed Falcons, far more satisfactory than battling with other birders for parking space and surely one most of the beautiful falcons to be found anywhere in Europe. The falcons hunted from wires and as we watched, Ruddy and Common Shelducks, White and Black Storks, and Western Yellow Wagtails all came into view while flocks of migrating European Bee-eaters gave their liquid, whistled calls passing overhead.

Afterwards we drove the shores of Kalloni Bay along miles of dirt roads passing through tiny picturesque bayside villages and making periodic stops for species such as Great Cormorant, Kentish, Little Ringed and Black-bellied Plovers, and Curlew Sandpiper. The meadows were full of flowering Common Poppies, and the calls of Great Tits, Eastern Olivaceous Warblers, European Greenfinches and European Goldfinches could be heard coming from acres and acres of beautifully maintained olive groves. Our final stop of the morning, the Polichnitos Salt Pans, was a new location for us which we birded from the roadside and enjoyed good scope views of Sandwich and Little Terns, as well as Little Stints and several Curlew Sandpipers in breeding plumage. European Stonechats teed-up on the thistles and we had really fine views of several Purple Herons in what was shaping up to be a great tour for the latter species.

We drove to higher elevations for lunch finding a nice secluded picnic site in the Achlerderi Forest neatly hidden amid the Turkish Pines. Woodland birds enlivened the lunch break with some exceptionally approachable



Common Chaffinches, as well as a few calling Short-toed Treecreepers, Great Tits and European Goldfinches. Yet more fortune came our way when we found another pair of Krüper's Nuthatch exploring a nest cavity in a Turkish Pine. While not particularly rare on the island, Krüper's Nuthatch is much sought after by visiting birders as the pine habitat of Lesvos is the only place in Europe where the species can be found.

After lunch we descended through the pines to the tiny settlement of Agios Dimitris for a coffee break and sweet treats and just happened to be serenaded by a Eurasian Scops-Owl uncharacteristically 'singing' above the taverna in the middle of the afternoon! The stream-side atmosphere was just lovely as we relaxed listening to singing Common Nightingales and the 'tinkling' calls of European Serins.

With a 100% cloud cover and relatively calm conditions, the light on the salt pans was guaranteed to be superb in late afternoon and we tried, once more, for the eastern berm of the Kalloni Salt Pans. All of the morning's birders had dispersed and we had the place to ourselves. Greater Flamingos were abundant and scattered throughout the pans and two large shorebirds resting on a berm proved to be Eurasian Stone-curlews, a species not seen on the previous year's tour and a scoop for Stylianos who admitted they were the best views of the species he'd ever had on Lesvos. The bizarre 'zit-zit-zit' song of Zitting Cisticola was a constant sound in the meadows behind us and we even had views of this tiny passerine bouncing and 'zitting' along in flight.

A little further south along the berm we had immaculate views of 10 recently arrived Whiskered Terns along with dozens of Common and Little Terns including several times when we had all three species in the scope together! The air was full of the 'cackling' sounds of Greater Flamingos and a flock of Northern Shovelers, including some fine males, circled several times looking agitated, perhaps getting ready for night migration.

A fine afternoon came to an abrupt end when one of the vehicles developed a mechanical issue and was clearly in urgent need of repair. The leaders quickly organized shuttle runs to the hotel, a mere 20 minutes away, and had the entire group back in time for dinner. Nor was the day completely over as Stylianos offered to take group members into Skala Kalloni to search for a Barn Owl he'd seen residing in the village square. Sophia, Julie, Beth and David all signed up after dinner and were eventually rewarded with views of a beautiful Barn Owl entering and leaving a chimney right in the village center neatly closing another remarkable day on Lesvos.



Wed. April 24 Kalloni Bay Hotel | Lardia Valley | Antissa | Ipsilou Monastery | Petrified Forest Museum | Sigri - Faneromeni

We set off in warm, blustery conditions with a strong southern wind blowing straight up from the Gulf of Kalloni. The hazy atmosphere may have been described as a little oppressive as this particular weather system brought a thin veil of Saharan dust deposited on many of the parked vehicles overnight.

The far west of the island was on the agenda for the second time during the tour, and this time we chose the more direct route although our final destination would be Sigri once again. A first stop at the Lardia Valley overlooked a steep-sided gorge with rocky outcrops and interesting geological features. A handful of interesting species called this habitat home and searching beyond the ever-present Eastern Black-eared Wheatears, we found a Blue Rock Thrush and several Eurasian Crag Martins, the latter checking out nest cavities. Eurasian Blackbirds and Eurasian Wrens were among the more vocal songsters, and Common Buzzards and Northern Ravens soared over the valley.

We drove the winding roads across hillsides covered in Mediterranean garrigue to the beautiful village of Antissa where we promptly walked straight uphill and into the village square! Incredibly, a singing Laughing Dove was perched on wires right above the street, yet more evidence of the westward spread of Laughing Doves across the island. Several giant sycamores in the village square hosted a pair of Eurasian Scops-Owls and Stylianos knew exactly where to look but there was just one problem...the birds had moved. Much to the amusement of the elderly gents outside drinking coffee and smoking cigarettes, we began to search in earnest for the owls when they spontaneously began calling back n' forth across the village square. True to form, Stylianos soon spotted a scops-owl roosting fairly low down but neatly camouflaged by a cluster sycamore leaves. Surprisingly, the owl was a little 'jumpy' but ultimately settled in the open allowing for fantastic views and photo opportunities.



Around mid-morning we reached Ipsilou Monastery spectacularly set atop a volcanic peak at some 511 meters above sea-level with commanding views of the Turkish Coastline to the north. Founded in 800 AD, Ipsilou is one of the oldest monasteries on the island and as a group we spent time wandering the grounds and sampling the self-guided tours. A cooperative Blue Rock Thrush was spotted from the ramparts and the nesting Barn Swallows brought a charm of their own as they 'twittered' from wires in the courtyard. It was an absolute treat to find a pair of Rock Sparrows carrying nest material inside one of the buildings just before leaving and, amazingly, we heard and then saw a singing Cinereous Bunting close to the road and quite naturally pulled over for to have our best views of the species thus far!

As we pressed on westbound Sigri was something to behold, an incredibly pretty village with white buildings clad in terra-cotta tiled roofing set against an azure Aegean Sea. It was lunchtime (of course!) and again we enjoyed some fabulous Greek cuisine at Cavo Doro overlooking the harbor. Most ordered the lamb drizzled with mustard-lemon sauce, roast potatoes and Greek salad, and baklava for dessert.

After lunch, we headed straight over to the Petrified Forest Museum, a UNESCO heritage site and Global Geopark and enjoyed a fascinating lecture and guided tour of the museum. Stylianos chose to sit that one out having done the tour many times. The museum was situated quite high above the village and good for observing visual migration as we watched a migrant flock of four Gray and three Purple Herons fly north across the bay while several calling Western Yellow Wagtails and Tree Pipits could be heard passing overhead. Looking down into the streets below we had fabulous views of Red-rumped and Barn Swallows perched together while a feral cat played with one enormous European Glass Lizard! A male Eastern Orphean Warbler sang and showed well in the museum grounds for a short time though it moved on pretty quickly.

We dropped down to Fanerromeni where it was warm, calm and cloudy. Again, European Bee-eaters and their kaleidoscope of color stole the show as we watched them catch bees from wires, trees and cables, some of them coming down to drink and bathe in the Fanerromeni River. Julie was so taken with the spectacle she lingered and came back with some amazing pictures. From there we walked uphill overlooking olive groves, fields full of oak-scrub and abundant Giant Fennel. An Icterine Warbler sang from the olives though was quite difficult to see, and Leo spotted the first Sardinian Warbler of the trip in a spindly bush on the hillside above us. We played hide n' seek with a number of northbound migrants here; Common Redstart, Sedge Warbler and European Pied Flycatcher until the heat of the afternoon combined with dust sent us back down the hill and into Sigri for cold beverages and afternoon refreshment! Eurasian Kestrel, Common Buzzard and Short-toed Snake-



Eagle enlivened the drive back to Skala Kalloni and, courtesy of the newly paved 'fast' road, we arrived in plenty of time for showers, dinner and the traditional evening bird list.

Thurs. April 25 Kalloni Bay Hotel | Upper Napi Valley | Skala Sikamineas | Efthalou and Skala Sikamineas Coastline | Molivos Castle | Skala Kalloni | Lotzaria Track | Kalloni Salt Pans

We began the day in the Upper Napi Valley, north of Skala Kalloni, but had to skirt around Agias Paraskevi as there was a sign in the middle of the road simply stating "village closed"! The Upper Napi Valley site was farmland with rough pasture, drystone walls, scattered oaks and various stunted trees forming a fairly open, rocky landscape. Crested Larks, Common Chaffinches and Great Tits could all be heard along the track and it wasn't too long before we heard and then saw a family group of Sombre Tits, a resident chickadee look alike in the Near-east region and one of the key species for Lesvos. Eastern Black-eared Wheatears and Woodchat Shrikes brought a splash of color a little farther down the track where we found a second family of Sombre Tits and a fly-by Common Cuckoo.

We continued north along narrow roads and spectacular scenery before dropping down to the incredibly picturesque coastal town of Skala Sikaminias on the north coast. And, we made the most of the visit enjoying a delightful taverna stop overlooking the harbor replete with turquoise waters, blue-and-white fishing boats and terra-cotta tiled buildings - Lesvos at its very best.

Stylianos chatted with the locals and found out that the normally 'sketchy' northern coastal road to Efthalou had been graded recently and our safe passage assured. The birding itself was a little quiet though we did notice several European Shags and a couple of sizeable flocks of Yellow-legged Gulls. Birds and wildlife aside, we had to pause for a moment when a wrecked ship, a life jacket still clinging to the hull, came into view along a particularly rocky stretch of coast, a sobering sight indeed since many Syrian refugees drowned while trying to make the crossing from Turkey in 2015/16.

After a fine picnic lunch on the beach Efthalou we continued along the coast for a short visit to the spectacular medieval site of Molivos Castle perched high above the Aegean and the town of Molivos itself. Alpine and Common Swifts cruised overhead as well as a soaring Peregrine and a fly by Lesser Kestrel. A brief stop by Kavaki Bay found a small group of Bottle-nosed Dolphins, our first dolphins of the trip, and from there we headed back to Kalloni Bay for a short break before going back out for rest of the afternoon. Stylianos had one more trick up



his sleeve and pulled out a family of Long-eared Owls almost in the center of town! Despite the noise, hustle n' bustle of town, two fledglings and an adult roosted quite peacefully in the olive trees along the street – quite amazing! The drive across the fields to the Lotzaria track found a fine male Red-backed Shrike, a brief group of six Collared Pratincoles, a pair of Spur-winged Lapwings, and our first Hen Harrier of the tour. The Alykes wetlands produced two close Glossy Ibis and several Black Storks, and the first Black-tailed Godwit of the trip, and four sand-colored Tawny Pipits graced the nearby racetrack blending in beautifully with their surroundings.

The eastern berm of the Kalloni salt pans was the final stop of the day where, in fairly blustery conditions, Stylianos announced he'd found a Dalmatian Pelican! And there it was, a truly magnificent beast resting on a small mud bar completely dwarfing the Great Cormorants and Pied Avocets it was resting with. And, if that wasn't enough, a second Dalmatian Pelican flew into to join it! Stylianos speculated the pelicans had spent the day following fishing boats out in Kalloni Bay and only returned to the salt pans to roost in the evening. These gargantuan birds, actually the largest species of pelican in the world, provided a thrilling and fitting end to yet another excellent day on Lesbos.

Fri. April 26 Kalloni Bay Hotel | Alykes Wetlands | Charamida | Skala Kalloni | Potomia Valley | Filia | Tsiknias River | Lotzaria Track | Kalloni Salt Pans

After a brief pause by the Alykes wetlands to watch feeding White and Black Storks, displaying Spur-winged Lapwings and a hunting Common Buzzard, we headed east to the beautiful pine-scrub hillsides of Charamida. This unique habitat was alive with the scratchy songs of scrub-dwelling *Curruca* warblers and after only a few minutes Stylianos located a fine male Rüppell's Warbler singing and even collecting nest material! Rüppell's is the only member of the genus breeding on the island that sports a complete black throat and a vivid white malar stripe while the closely related Sardinian Warbler has a dark head and completely white throat and was present and singing in the same habitat too. Cretzchmar's and Cirl Buntings were present here while northbound migrants passing overhead included Tree and Tawny Pipits, and several flocks of European Bee-eaters. Charamida Marsh nearby was worthy of a brief stop producing yet another Purple Heron as well as several Gray Herons and Little Egrets.

After another great lunch at 'Mezen' in Skala Kalloni town square we headed back to the hotel for a short break before heading to the Potomia Valley. It was a little quiet during the hotter hours of the afternoon, perhaps to be expected, but we did hear and see an Eastern Orphean Warbler as well as Eurasian Blue and Great Tits, and a



Persian Squirrel found a home in the centuries-old olive trees. A final coffee stop at the Bijou cafe in Skala Kalloni was neatly accompanied by a resounding chorus of Levant Water Frogs emanating from the drainage across the street.

We found some relief from the heat by heading into the hills and the lovely farm tracks of Filia. The drive was worth the views overlooking Kalloni Bay and the impressive network of salt pans giving an almost a birds-eye view from on high. It was easy to see why northbound migrants passing over the Gulf of Kalloni would drop in and rest at the salt pans, wetlands and other habitats surrounding Skala Kalloni. Common Buzzards and Northern Ravens played on the breeze as they had done on our first visit, while Eastern Subalpine Warblers and Eastern Bonelli's Warblers sang from the oaks and scrub and we could only marvel at the concentration of Stripe-necked Terrapins in the 'secret pond'. Stylianos and the folks in his vehicle had nice views of Masked Shrike and, just as we paused for scenic photos, another enormous flock of European Bee-eaters passed north, calling excitedly as they went by. It had been an exceptional tour for that species and we'd managed to find them on every single day of the trip.

The final hour of the tour passed by the beautiful Tsiknias River watching Purple Herons, Wood Sandpipers, Common Greenshank, Western Yellow Wagtails and Eurasian Reed Warblers, highlighted by a stunning male Black-headed Bunting that seemed determined to show off by singing right next to the track. A female Montague's Harrier, our first of the trip, was found resting in a wet meadow just before it took off to give wonderful flight views and quartered the fields in 'classic' harrier fashion. Even down to the last few hours we continued to add new birds to the trip.

The last supper at the hotel was a wee bit emotional as we said our goodbyes with the knowledge that our departures from Mytilini would be staggered the next day. A wonderful tour with a wonderful group of folks was coming to a close and the grand Aegean adventure almost over.

Sat. April 27 Kalloni Bay Hotel | Skala Kalloni | Departures

Julie, Leo and Joanne caught the early flight leaving the hotel with Stylianos at 6am. Deb and Lou, and Beth and David were on the mid-morning flight and left the hotel at 07:45 am with James while Sophia, Marianne and Richard enjoyed a day at leisure and left the Kalloni Bay Hotel with James in mid-afternoon for an early evening flight from Mytilini. It had been a wonderful trip, full of majestic and memorable landscapes, and many exciting days of bird migration. Lesvos had indeed proved to be 'the jewel of the Aegean'.

Black Stork (Lou Taylor - LT), Eurasian Scops-Owl (LT), Group Photo (James P. Smith), Greater Flamingos (Beth Potter), Black-winged Stilt (LT), Hoopoe (BP), Eurasian Bee-eater (Julie Morgan - JM), Wood Sandpiper (LT), Greater Flamingo (LT), Ruddy Shelduck (LT), Group Birding (BP), Western Yellow Wagtail (LT), Spur-winged Lapwing (BP), Lamb (BP), Woodchat Shrike (LT), Lamb (BP), Scenic (BP), Western Marsh Harrier (BP), Little Grebe (LT), Red Fox (LT), Cretzschmar's Bunting (LT), European Bee-eater (LT), Red-footed Falcon (LT), Common Shelduck (LT), Great Cormorant (BP), Purple Heron (BP), Kuper's Nuthatch (LT), Greater Flamingo (BP), Eurasian Blackbird (BP), Street Scenic (JM), Barn Swallow (LT), Blue Rock Thrush (BP), Eurasian Blue Tit (LT), European Bee-eaters (LT), Eurasian Scops Owl (JM), Little Owl (LT), Common Chaffinch (BP), Western Rock Nuthatch (LT), Lemon Tree (JM), Yellow-legged Gull (LT), Long-eared Owl (LT), Montagu's Harrier (LT), Black Stork (LT), Donkey (LT), Horses (BP), Scenic (JM), Ruppell's Warbler (LT), White Stork (BP), Western Yellow Wagtail (LT), Black-winged Stilt (LT)