

Birding in Lesbos - Frances and Malcolm Stones

On 1st May, 2008, we arrived on the island of Lesbos at Mytilini Airport, collected our hire car and drove off to the hotel at Skala Kalloni, for the start of a two week holiday. We noticed immediately that conditions were different from an earlier visit, as water was cascading down previously dry river beds. Crested Larks were seen along the road and Barn Swallows, Red-rumped Swallows and House Martins were out in abundance. Tits and Finches were in full song, Hooded Crows occupied roadside posts and Whiskered Terns were feeding along the river. Close to the hotel a marsh area produced a late-departing Mute Swan and a basking Little Bittern lurked on the edge of a reed bed. Little Egrets were there in good numbers and a male Marsh Harrier took flight, whilst

from prominent perches came the song of Black-headed Buntings and Corn Buntings.

The next day we were up and about at sunrise and chanced on a Squacco Heron feeding on a river bed, and, in shallower water, Temmick's Stint, Little Stint and Little Ringed Plover were watched. Following breakfast we headed for an area of salt pans, passing Black Stork, Green Sandpiper and Wood Sandpiper at a river ford and numerous Bee-eaters hunting from roadside wires. At the



pans, Curlew Sandpipers were in full breeding plumage, there were more Stints and 150 Greater Flamingo, whilst White-winged Black Tern, Little Tern and Common Tern were there in number. Nearby, a Collared Pratincole popped up on a culvert and brought with it a Spur-winged Plover. From the hide we were blessed with a pair of Red-footed Falcons, Bee-eaters (opposite) and a White Stork - what a sight! In adjacent fields of short grass we saw Red-throated Pipit, Short-toed Lark, Yellow Wagtails and Whinchats. In fields where sheep grazed were Skylarks and Crested Larks; Olivaceous Warblers and Spanish Sparrows occupied the bushes, and on expanses of water, Shelduck, Ruddy Shelduck and Terns were feeding. On the return journey, at the estuary of the East River, we added, amongst others, Avocet, Grey Plover, Knot and Godwits, making 59 species for the day.

On 3rd May we noted Great White Heron before breakfast. We journeyed to the Devonshire area, noting Long-legged Buzzard, and then into woodland for breeding Krupers Nuthatch (below) and further up in the wood, Masked Shrike, Red-backed Shrike, Black-eared Wheatear and a singing Cirl Bunting. On the next day we spent time at the inland lake and watched Little Crake, Baillon's Crake and singing Great Reed Warbler, and adding Orphean Warbler at the nearby reservoir. At Devil's Bridge, prominent birds included a Woodchat Shrike, Cretzschmar's Bunting singing from a rock, and Cetti's Warbler singing from deep cover.

A return to the salt pans on the 5th proved worthwhile, for we had a wonderful first time view of a first ever Pallid Harrier and then moved on to the Nappi Valley, a hotspot for birders. We were not disappointed, as firstly Short-toed Eagle and then Eleanora's Falcon passed by and in the valley itself, Nightingale, Woodlark, Spotted Flycatcher, Lesser Grey Shrike and the elusive Olive Tree Warbler gave good views. Later a Subalpine Warbler was watched before we headed back, just as a Night Heron emerged from its daytime roost. The North Western area was our next destination, where, amongst the rocky outcrops, outstanding birds included Crag Martin, Blue Rock

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Thrush, Isabelline Wheatear, Golden Oriole, Sombre Tit, Rock Nuthatch, Roller and near Eressos, Rufous Bush Robin and Red-breasted Flycatcher. It was here, on a later visit, that we were pleased to locate a singing Cinereous Bunting and a Rock Sparrow. The following day, a trip to Molivas and the north coast produced a breeding Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, a passing Booted Eagle, a Ruppell's Warbler and, on our return to our hotel, a Ferruginous Duck. This was followed by more watching from the cliffs of the north west and sightings of Lesser Kestrel, Manx Shearwater and a Hobby. On the edge of the inland lake a Spotted Crake was feeding and a Barn Owl was seen returning to its nest site. In reed beds near Mytilini we noted a Marsh Warbler and at Parakila Marsh, Black Tern and Purple Heron were active.

Towards the end of the holiday we added Rose-coloured Starling and Hoopoe after further visits to previous locations, before returning home after a marvellous holiday on this magical island, where we logged 149 different species.