

Observations in Lesbos, Autumn 2004

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I stayed at Skala Polychnitou between 16th September and 15th October 2004. My principal objectives were firstly, on behalf of Friends of Green Lesbos (www.greenlesbos.com), advancing the issue of protecting the Natura 2000 site of the Gulf of Kalloni and secondly, continuing my study of diurnal movements of birds of prey through Lesbos. The results of this study are to be found in John Bowers, *Raptor Migration in Lesbos, Autumn 2004*, www.greenlesbos.com/downloads/migration2.pdf and are drawn on in the systematic list below. General bird-watching was fitted round these two objectives and my movements and observations were constrained by them. I visited the Gulf of Kalloni between the Kalloni Salt-pans and Nifida but not the northern side. The Polichnitos salt-pans were looked at on most days. Apart from that observations were made in the vicinity of Polychnitos and Vatera.

Abbreviations

MM	Moni Melanta
N	Nifida
KK	Marshes between Kelamis and Krioniri rivers ('Derbyshire' in the Brooks' book)
PIP	There are about 8 hills in Lesbos called Profitias Ilias (the Prophet Elijah). All have chapels on top and are prominent landmarks from villages. This is the one between Polychnitos and the Gulf of Kalloni
PIV	This hill of Profitias Ilias lies west of Vatera and north of Agios Fokas
SPK	Kalloni salt-pans
SPP	Polychnitos salt-pans
SB	Stavros beach and river east of Vatera
T	Traperia
V	Beach and river west of Vatera

A. Birds

- 1. Cormorant** Usually 1 or 2 at the top of the Gulf, off SPK or the Vouvaris estuary.
- 2. Shag** In contrast these were mainly to be found towards the mouth of the Gulf. Parties of up to 50 were to be found most days seen fishing off SPP or N.

- 3. Little egret** Very few. 6 at SPP on 27/9 and 10 at KK on 29/9 were the maxima.
- 4. Great white heron** This is a winter visitor. First at SPP on 21/9. Thereafter birds at various sites around the Gulf. Maximum 10 at KK on 12/10.
- 5. Grey heron** Birds present at all the wetland sites around the Gulf throughout the stay but in no great numbers. An influx (c. 30) at SPK on 19/9.
- 6. Black stork** No family party at SPP this year unlike the previous two years but family parties (of 4) at SPK and KK. 1 at Stavros beach on 26/9.
- 8. White stork** 1 at SPP throughout the period was presumably the famous non-migratory bird from the Polychnitos nest. It flew freely and showed no outward signs of injury.
- 9. Greater flamingo** At SPP c.100 (5 juveniles) at SPP until early October when, following flooding with spring tides, 70 of them moved to KI c.1000 (27 juveniles) at SPK.
- 10. Ruddy shelduck** 1 at SPP on 9/10. Otherwise c.40 at the back of SPK and 2/3 at KK throughout the stay.
- 11. Mallard** 1 pair at SPP on 17/9.
- 12. Hen harrier** 1 male at PIV on 24/9.
- 13. Marsh harrier** 35 in the autumnal migration at PIV. Otherwise singletons at SPP, SPK and V.
- 14. Sparrowhawk** 23 in the autumnal migration at PIV. Otherwise birds at various places in October.
- 15. Goshawk** 1 at SPP on 17/9.
- 16. Honey buzzard** 157 in the autumnal migration at PIV
- 17. Common buzzard** Widespread and common. c.6 pairs between Stavros beach and Agia Fokas.
- 18. Booted eagle** 19 in the autumnal migration at PIV
- 19. Short-toed eagle** Widespread until early October. Last seen at PIV on 25/9.
- 20. Osprey** 1 in the autumnal migration at PIV

21. Red-footed falcon 30 in the autumnal migration at PIV

22. Kestrel A few scattered pairs are resident.

23. Lesser kestrel 4 in the autumnal migration at PIV

24. Hobby 16 in the autumnal migration at PIV. Otherwise a pair at V (a usual breeding site until 28/9).

25. Eleanora's falcon 62 in the autumnal migration at PIV. Otherwise odd sightings at SPP, V, N and SB

26. Peregrine 1 in the autumnal migration at PIV. Birds seen hunting waders in the evening at both salt-pans. Pairs at V and SB were occasionally seen.

27. Chukar More often heard than seen around PIV and T

28. Water rail 2 at V on 14/10.

29. Moorhen

30. Oystercatcher 1 at SPK on 19/9. 2 on the beach at V in early October.

31. Stone curlew 2 at SPP until 27/9. A flock of c40 on plough at SPK on 27/9 had risen to c60 on 28/9.

32. Black-winged stilt 5 at SPP until 23/9 were the only records.

33. Avocet SPK only. 100+ on 18/9. c.30 on 29/9.

34. Ringed plover 2/3 at SPP on 18/9 had increased to 6 by 20/9 and to 10 by 1/10. By 8/10 there were only 2. There were a few birds at SPK in late September.

35. Little ringed plover Only at the two Salt-pans. Numbers highest in September with the maximum count 30 at SPP on 17/9.

36. Kentish plover At the salt-pans in small numbers. An influx at the beginning of October, with a maximum count of 40 at SPP on 1/10.

37. Turnstone 1 at SPP on 16-17/9.

38. Knot 1 at SPP on 20/9

39. Curlew sandpiper 3 at SPP and 1 at SPK on 18/9. 4 at SPP on 20/9 and 1 on 5/10.

40. **Dunlin** 2 at SPP and several at SPK on 18/9. 2/3 at SPP on 20/9
41. **Broad-billed sandpiper** 4 at SPK on 18-19/9.
42. **Little stint** Present at SPP throughout the period, though no more than 1 or 2 in October. Maximum c.40 on 20/9. 1 or 2 at SPK in September.
43. **Ruff** SPP only. 1 on 16/9 and 6 on 27/9.
44. **Curlew** Singles at SPP on 16/9 and SPK on 19/9.
45. **Redshank** Present at both salt-pans throughout. c.50 at SPP in mid-September had declined to c.20 by October. No counts at SPK.
46. **Spotted redshank** 1 at SPP on 20/9 and 1 at Agia Nikolaus on 3/10. .
47. **Greenshank** Present in small numbers at both salt-pans throughout the period. Maximum 10 at SPP 16-18/9.
48. **Wood sandpiper** 2 at SPP 16-23/9 and 1 on 8/10
49. **Common sandpiper** Odd birds at various places round the Gulf and at V and SB in September.
50. **Marsh sandpiper** 3 at SPK on 18/9 and 2 at SPP on 27/9.
51. **Red-necked phalarope** 1 at each salt-pan 18/9. The bird at SPK joined that at SPP on the evening of 19/9. They had gone by the following morning.
52. **Mediterranean gull** c.50 in the Harbour at Skala Polychnitou and SPP throughout the stay. None elsewhere except a few in Mytilini Harbour.
53. **Slender-billed gull** 1 immature at SPP on 5/10.
54. **Little gull** 2 juvs at SPK 18-19/9.
55. **Black-headed gull** Present in small numbers at both salt-pans.
56. **Yellow-legged gull**
57. **Sandwich tern** Up to 4 at SPP until 20/9.
58. **Common tern** 2 juvs at SPP on 16/9.
59. **Collared dove**

60. Little owl

61. Barn owl 1 in the car headlights between Polychnitos and Skala Polychnitou on 28/9.

62. Alpine swift Party of 23 south over PIV on 24/9 and 17 on 25/9.

63. Swift 1 south over PIV on 23/9 and 2 on 27/9

64. Kingfisher

65. Bee-eater 17 south from SB on 22/9. 5 south over PIV 25/9.

66. Hoopoe 1 above Nifida on 17/9. 1 at T on 28/9 and 1 at PIP on 9/10.

67. Middle-spotted woodpecker

68. Crested lark

69. Short-toed lark 2/3 on the beach at SPP and at SPK.

70. Crag martin 1 at SB on 4/10

71. Sand martin Small southerly movement at PIV on 23 and 26/9. Otherwise a few around the salt-pans in September.

72. Red-rumped swallow Odd birds in the hirundine movements of 23 and 27/9.

73. Swallow A heavy movement (2,000 per hour) at PIV on 23/9. None during the main raptor movement on 24/9. Light movement on 27/9 Otherwise surprisingly few.

74. House martin Small numbers in the hirundine movements of 23 and 27/9.

75. Tree pipit Odd birds around the Gulf in September.

76. Meadow pipit Half a dozen in the fields at SPP throughout the period.

77. Red-throated pipit 1 at SPK on 12/10 was the only record.

78. Tawny pipit Present in small numbers at all the main wetland sites around the Gulf throughout the period

79. White wagtail

80. Grey wagtail In October there were single birds in the harbours of Skala Polychnitou and Mytilini, and at Nifida and SB.

81. Yellow wagtail c.600 feeding on a field of cut fodder near Skamnicudi on 18-19/9 was an impressive site. Otherwise only small numbers on the Gulf wetlands and at V and SB. Odd birds flying south during the raptor watches at PIV.

82. Robin This is a winter visitor. First at T on 26/9. Several at MM on 1/10. thereafter becoming widespread.

83. Nightingale 1 at T on 23/9 was the only record.

84. Redstart At T, 1 or 2 usually but c.10 on 9/10. 1 at SPP on 6/10.

85. Whinchat Widespread around the Gulf and on the south coast. Odd birds still around at the end of the stay.

86. Stonechat This is a resident perhaps supplemented by winter visitors. Regular at SPP, V, SB, SPK PIP and Agios Nikolaus

87. Common wheatear. Small numbers around the Gulf and on the south coast throughout.

88. Isabelline wheatear KK only

89. Black-eared wheatear 1 or 2 around in the first week. None thereafter.

90. Blue rock thrush. Birds at SE, PIV, Agia Fokas and Polychnitos village.

91. Blackbird

92. Song thrush This is a winter visitor to Lesbos. Seen at Skala Polychnitou and PIP on the last day, 14/10.

93. Cetti's warbler

94. Reed warbler 1 at T on 26/9 was the only record.

95. Sedge warbler Only seen as casualties! 1 alive but exhausted on the doorstep of my house in Polychnitos on 6/10 and one killed by a car at V on 7/10.

96. Garden warbler 1/2 at T 23/9 – 9/10.

97. Lesser whitethroat Small numbers seen at most sites throughout the stay.

98. Whitethroat Less widespread than Lesser whitethroat. Mainly at T, V and points around the Gulf in late September.

99. Blackcap T was the main site with usually up to a dozen coming to drink in the evening and over 100 in the orchards on 9/10. Birds were also plentiful at MM. Almost all the birds seen were males.

100. Sardinian warbler This seemed much commoner than in spring but the virtual absence of sub-alpine warblers made observation easier. It was common along the south coast extending inland as far as PIV. The commonest bird on the summit of PIP.

101 Subalpine warbler Seen only above Nifida on 17/9.

102. Orphean warbler Snatches of song heard from dense vegetation at SB and from PIP in late September.

103. Wood warbler Single birds at T on 24/9 and at MM on 1/10

104. Willow warbler present in small numbers at many sites until late September. 20 or so feeding in a field at V until the end of the period

105. Chiffchaff Winter visitor and passage migrant. common and widespread throughout the period.,

106. Pied flycatcher 1 female/imm. in olives on the peak of PIV on 7/10. 1 near Skamnioudi on 13/10.

107. Spotted flycatcher The most abundant migrant on the Island. Present in large numbers and more or less everywhere in September. Numbers declining thereafter but still some present at the end of the period.

108. Red-breasted flycatcher 1 at T on 22/9.

109. Sombre tit Not easy to see in autumn but present in at least some of the usual sites.

110. Blue tit

111. Great tit

112. Long-tailed tit

113. Krüper's nuthatch. Plentiful in usual haunts. None could be found in apparently suitable pine above SB. resetn

114. Rock nuthatch

115. Red-backed shrike Widespread and common throughout September and into October with some still present at the end of the period. 20 on stavros beach in the late afternoon of 4/10 would suggest movement.

116. Lesser grey shrike 1 regularly at SPP was last seen on 1/10. Otherwise singles at SPK and PIV.

117. Woodchat shrike 1 immature in olive groves at SPP until the end of September.

118. Golden oriole Heard in the evening at T on several occasions from 28/9 until the second week in October.

119. Jay

120. Jackdaw

121. Raven Usual pairs at Achladieri and PIV

122. Hooded crow

123. House sparrow

124. Spanish sparrow A party of c100 on SB on 8/10 were presumably on passage. The breeding population had gone by mid-September.

125. Chaffinch

126. Serin

127. Greenfinch

128. Goldfinch

129. Linnet

130. Corn bunting. Evening roosting flights are a feature of the autumn and can be observed at a number of places. 400+ passing over SPP in late September.

131. Cirl bunting

B. Dragonflies

Because of the dryness – there had been no rain for six months – there were few dragonflies on the Island. No Zygoptera were seen and only 8 species of Anisoptera, 2 of which were migrants. The site of the Island late autumn speciality, *Trithemis annulata*, was not visited.

Anax parthenope 1 above Nifida on 17/9

Aeshna affinis 1 at Mikri Limni in late September.

Hemianax ephippiger c.10 patrolling the beach at SB on 8-9/10 were presumably recent immigrants.

Orthetrum brunneum 1 male landed on the top of PIV 25/9.

Orthetrum caeruleum 1 very old male at Agia Nikolaus on 3/10.

Orthetrum ramburi 1 male on several occasions in the river bed at SB.

Sympetrum striolatum Widespread in small numbers

Sympetrum fonscolombii. Widespread in reasonable numbers. Large numbers on the beach at SB 8-10 October were presumably immigrants.

C. Lepidoptera

Late in a dry season there were few nectar sources to attract butterflies. The best concentrations were to be found on small patches of *Ditrichia viscosa* particularly at SB. On 8/10 12 species could be observed on a single plant:

Clouded yellow (including var. *Helice*)

Meadow brown

Grayling/Southern grayling

Wall brown

Great banded grayling (but rarely; it was mainly staying in the adjacent pine-woods)

Painted lady (large numbers and newly minted but none-the-less probably immigrants)

Lang's short-tailed blue (abundant)

Long-tailed blue (1 or 2)

Brown argus

Purple-shot copper

Small copper

Humming-bird hawk (widespread and abundant throughout the southern half of the Island)

Silver Y (in large numbers and probably new immigrants)

Other than this there wasn't much to be seen: a few **Swallowtails** (P1V seemed a popular location), **Mallow skippers** on some tracks and the odd **Red admiral**. There were **Large whites** in the villages and I saw several **Corvolvulus hawks** in Polychnitos.

D. Other taxa

Lesbos squirrels were everywhere and very easy to see. A few foxes were seen in the olive groves of the Gulf. There were 2 Common dolphins to be seen off SB. Glass lizards, Balkan green lizards, Agamas, Geckos and some small lacerta lizards were all recorded. Snakes were very few; 2 road-kills of unidentifiable vipers only.