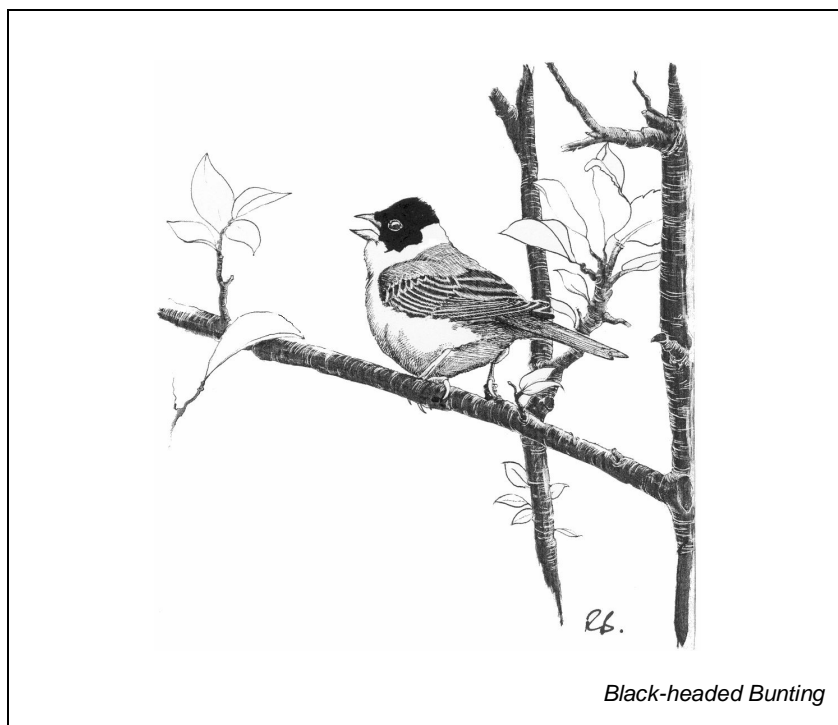


# NORTHERN GREECE

*a spring visit to one of our favourite destinations*



*Black-headed Bunting*

Our spring visits to Lake Kerkini have been amongst the most popular of our European trips. We always look forward to the abundant birdlife and beautiful scenery that this region has to offer.

The geographical position of this exciting country has resulted in a diverse mixture of influences, both cultural and ecological. Modern Greek culture is a result of an extraordinary diversity of influences. Romans, Venetians, Italians and, of course, the Byzantine empire have all left their mark. This diversity is mirrored by the rich birdlife which can be found in Greece, which comprises a mixture of species from Europe, the Mediterranean, North Africa and Asia.

Exciting Balkan species include Olive-tree Warbler, Black-headed Bunting, Rock Nuthatch, Dalmatian Pelican, Red-footed Falcon, Rock Partridge and Sombre Tit. Mediterranean species include Squacco Heron, Short-toed Eagle, Collared Pratincole and Slender-billed Gull. The eastern influence is shown by Eastern Olivaceous Warbler and Masked Shrike, while typical European birds like Hawfinch, Calandra Lark and Lesser Kestrel can also be found. The variety provided by the mountains includes Golden Eagle, Black Woodpecker and Rock Thrush.

A wide variety of habitats, including mountains, forests, maquis-covered hillsides, rocky gorges, lakes and salt pans are all within easy reach of our base, Lake Kerkini. Having just one centre will add to the relaxed feeling of this holiday; yet with such diversity on our doorstep we anticipate an impressive array of birds.

## ITINERARY

### LAKE KERKINI

Our base for the seven nights is the excellent Hotel Erodios, overlooking Lake Kerkini. The hotel is beautifully located, and pelicans, storks, herons and raptors are a regular sight from the restaurant area. A Golden Oriole provided an untimely distraction to breakfast on one occasion!

Scenically the most impressive wetland in Northern Greece, Lake Kerkini also holds more birds than any of the others. Surrounded by hills and mountains, the bird spectacle here is one of Greece's best kept secrets.

The most conspicuous bird on the lake is Dalmatian Pelican and we can expect to see several hundred. The spectacle is enhanced by numerous White Pelicans, Little Egrets, Great Cormorants, Night Herons, Glossy Ibis, and Spoonbills, plus smaller numbers of Pygmy Cormorants, Purple Herons, Squacco Herons, Great White Egrets and Black Storks. Good

numbers of Whiskered Terns are joined by occasional White-winged Black Terns.

Ducks present include Ferruginous and Garganey, whilst of the raptors hunting the area the Lesser Spotted Eagle is the most evident. White Stork nests contain colonies of busy Spanish Sparrows. Little Bitterns and various crakes skulk in overgrown ditches whilst Kingfishers flash their brilliant colours. Damp areas attract Black-headed Wagtails and Cetti's Warblers, and in nearby woodland and farmland, Rollers, Golden Orioles, Nightingales, Hoopoes, Masked Shrikes and Lesser Grey Shrikes can be seen. We will look for three special warblers; Olive-tree, Eastern Olivaceous and Eastern Orphean. On an evening excursion we may see Little Owl, Scops Owl, Eagle Owl and European Nightjar.

### SIDIROKASTRO

Surrounded on three sides by rocky hills and a gorge, the town of Sidirokastro nestles unobtrusively into the Greek

countryside. Behind the town a road leads up through maquis-covered hills to a ruined Byzantine castle where Red-rumped Swallows are common and Sardinian Warblers chatter. On the rocky slopes Black-headed Buntings, Black-eared Wheatears and Rock Sparrows can be seen, and both Woodchat and Red-backed Shrikes are common. Nearby woodland holds Syrian Woodpecker and Hawfinch. Impressive rocky cliffs are attractive to Crag Martins and Alpine Swifts, and we also expect to find Subalpine Warbler, Rock Nuthatch and Blue Rock Thrush.

A road winds through a nearby valley through a rocky gorge and wooded hillsides, leading to a high plain where Golden Eagles and Long-legged Buzzards hunt. Juniper-clad slopes carpeted in wildflowers are home to Ortolan Buntings and Eastern Orphean Warblers. Calandra Larks sing over the plain, Rock Sparrows call from rocky outcrops and Eastern Bonelli's Warblers are busy establishing territories.

**KERKINI MOUNTAINS**

High mountains to the north and east dominate the landscape. We are fortunate in that good roads cut into them, allowing access to both mid- and high-elevation habitats.

Birds of prey will be uppermost in our minds. At lower levels Levant Sparrowhawks and Short-toed and Booted Eagles can be seen, giving way to Eurasian Sparrowhawks and Goshawks higher up. In the mid-elevation mixed woodland Sombre Tits are amongst the highlights. We also know of a beautiful Alder carr that is frequented by the rare Balkan form of White-backed Woodpecker.

In recent years, our drive to 5000 feet has provided some of the best and most unexpected sightings. An excellent road winds its way through old-growth pine forest to the rocky alpine zone. In the former we have seen Black Woodpecker, Crested Tit, Crossbill and Nutcracker. On reaching the bare scree slopes we can expect the localized Rock Partridge, Rock Thrush and Rock Bunting.

**KALOCHORI**

The diversity of birdlife around Lake Kerkini is outstanding for an inland site. Nevertheless, there are some species which can only be found on the coast, so our visit to Kalochori should be very productive.

We can expect large numbers of Mediterranean Gulls, plus smaller numbers of Slender-billed Gulls. Kentish Plover nest in large numbers, and there is normally a large non-breeding flock of Greater Flamingos. Passage waders use this site, including Black-tailed Godwit, Avocet, Ruff, Wood Sandpiper, Temminck's Stint, Spotted Redshank, Curlew Sandpiper and Little Stint. The site is excellent for rarities: one year we found

a summer-plumaged Red-necked Phalarope, another year it was two Broad-billed Sandpipers and for the last two years we have seen the rare Terek Sandpiper!

**PACE**

Breakfast will be taken at about 7.30am most mornings. Basic fitness is all that is required. Day-long birdwatching excursions will be made with short/medium length walks on the flat. Visits to the mountains will involve very little uphill walking, done at a sensible pace.

**ACCOMMODATION AND FOOD**

Full-board accommodation is provided with seven nights in the wonderfully situated Hotel Erodios by Lake Kerkini. All rooms have en suite bathrooms. Packed lunches will be taken every day.

**PRICE INCLUDES .....**

All birdwatching excursions with expert leaders, full-board accommodation (starting with dinner on 28<sup>th</sup>, ending with lunch on 5<sup>th</sup>), soft drinks at meal times, local transport by mini-bus, return flights to Thessaloniki and airport taxes.

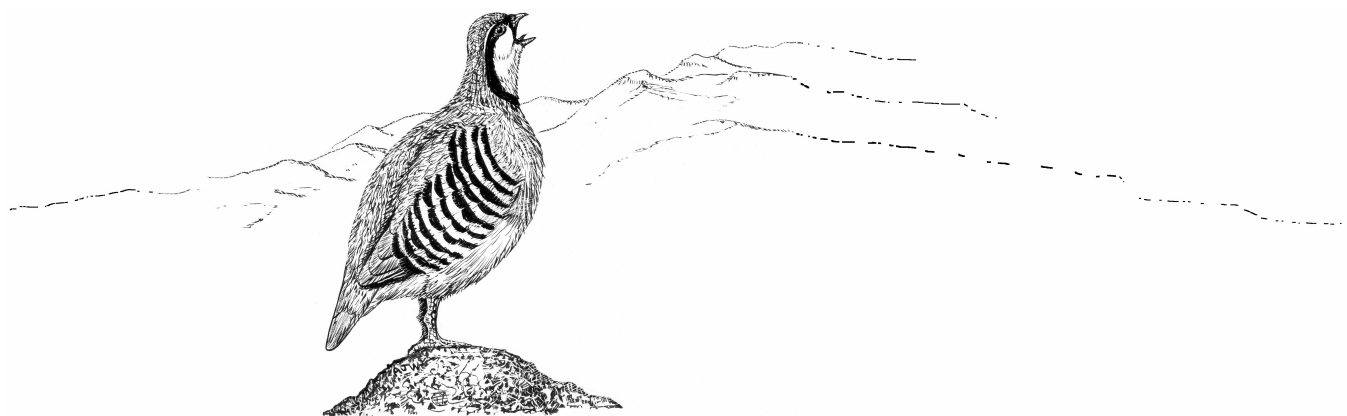
**WHAT IS NOT INCLUDED**

Travel insurance. Personal items, alcoholic drinks, laundry.

**INTERNATIONAL FLIGHTS**

Return flights from London Gatwick to Thessaloniki using the scheduled services of British Airways. Outbound flight departs early afternoon; return flight arrives back mid-evening. **Domestic flights from Manchester and other UK airports are available on this tour. See booking form for details. Due to the flight times it may be necessary to stay overnight at Gatwick. Please call for details.**

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>7 nights:</b>   | <b>28<sup>th</sup> April to 5<sup>th</sup> May 2012</b>         |
| <b>Principal leader:</b>   | <b>John McLoughlin</b>  |
| <b>Maximum group size:</b>   | <b>7 clients with one leader or 12 clients with two leaders</b> |
| <b>Cost with discount (if you book before 13<sup>th</sup> January 2012):</b> | <b>£1495 per person sharing</b>                                 |
| <b>Full Cost:</b>  | <b>£1595 per person sharing</b>                                 |
| <b>Single supplement:</b>  | <b>£170</b>   |
| <b>Deposit:</b>  | <b>£300</b>   |



*Rock Partridge*