

Glamorgan Bird Club trip to Lesvos

27th May to 3rd June 2004



'The Team' - Molyvos

Seven [yes 7] Falcons species, two Eagle species, two Buzzard species and fourteen [yes 14] Warbler species whetted your appetite? ... then read on.

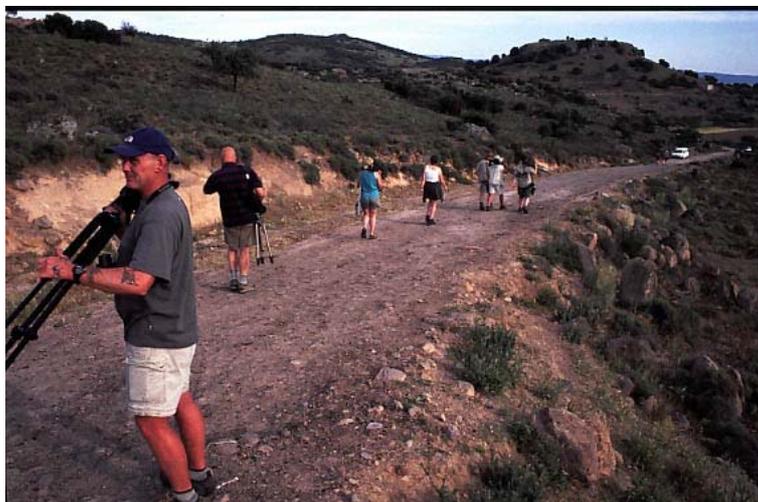
Courtesy of long-standing Club member Neil Donaghy and his Celtic Bird Tours firm, this was the first field trip of the GBC on foreign soil. We were a party of 11: Neil, Geri Thomas [who acted as leader, having led several of Neil's commercial trips to the island on previous occasions], Anne and myself, Alan Rosney, Gareth Jenkins, Gareth Roberts, Christian Jenkins, Clive Ellis, Trish Wood and Chris Bamford from Oxfordshire, who is a friend of Neil's from previous commercial trips of his, and joined to Club specially to come on the trip - welcome Chris.

A weary gang gathered at Gatwick at the unsociable hour of ~5:30 a.m. for the 6:45 departure for Mytilene. Within 5 hours and after an 'interesting' approach to the tiny airport which is next to the beach, we were already watching 4 **Cory's Shearwaters** and some very distant **Yelkouan Shearwaters** as we awaited Geri's arrival via Manchester [too complicated to explain]. Always a good challenge is what will be the first bird seen and in Europe it is remarkable how it is almost inevitably a **Barn Swallow** as it was for us. For some a **Black Redstart** showed on the airport buildings and **Crested Larks** strutted their stuff on the airport fringes. Many **Yellow-legged Gulls**, a possible distant **Audouin's** and **Common Swift** completed the 'tasters'. Minibus and car drivers duly registered we set off to Skala Kalloni and our hotel for the stay, the Kalloni II, **the** birding hotel on Lesvos, right next to the beach and overlooking the famous Kalloni pool, although this is now becoming rather overgrown. A cursory unpack and we were soon birding and a scan of Kalloni Pool revealed **Black-winged Stilts** with chicks, **Olivaceous Warbler** [a common bird in many habitats], a smart male **Black-headed Wagtail** and it's juv, **Swift**, **Swallow**, **House Martin** [nesting on the hotel] and **Common Buzzard** ... oh, and I forgot the **Spanish Sparrows** nesting next to our balcony! Not wishing to travel much more, a short stroll out to Kalloni West River produced **Hooded Crows**, **Crested Larks**, **Common Tern**, **Goldfinch**, **Jay** [of the race *atricaplli*, which has a solid black crown cap], 3 **Little Egret**, 3 **Kentish Plover** and 5 **Black Storks** flying over, one coming in to land. Heading back to the hotel the list increased with **House Sparrow**, **Cetti's Warbler**, **Corn Bunting**, a couple of **Nightingale**, **Common Whitethroat**, 2 **Bee-eaters**, **Collared Doves**, **Greenfinch** and **Chaffinch**, and a **Little Owl** flying past as we sat on the terrace doing the list for the day.

Friday 28th May - warm and sunny

Off at 6:30 a.m. for a pre-breakfast session by the Kalloni lower East River. Out of the vehicles and for many an instant lifer in the form of a smart male **Black-headed Bunting** singing from a nearby bush. These were so common that we became rather blasé about them despite their amazing jet black heads and bright yellow bodies. Other highlights where 2 imm **Squacco Herons**, **Little Ringed Plover**, **Little** and **Common Terns**, 5 more **Bee-eaters** and then

another lifer for some, a **Rufus Bush Robin** nest building. A delightful bird this, about **Song Thrush** size with a long rounded rufous white tipped tail which it likes to show off.



Kalloni East River

Back to the hotel for an excellent buffet breakfast, and to collect our tasty picnic lunches prepared for us by the hotel staff, and then off for the first full days birding. A quick stop in Kalloni town to stock up with water and to say hello to the pair of nesting **White Storks** on an old chimney stack, and then a further quick stop at a small five-a-side football pitch surrounded by Eucalyptus and Conifers, when Geri's 'gen' had informed us of a roosting **Long-eared Owl**. Thanks to Christian's sharp eyes this was soon located in the crook of a conifer branch, allowing good 'scope views for all. We then headed off west to Kalloni Salt pans and the adjacent fields, known as the 'sheep fields'. Most obvious as we arrived were the large number of **Greater Flamingos** resplendent in their pink livery - 350 I later estimated. Also present on the lagoons were breeding **Avocet** and **Black-winged Stilt** and some frustratingly distant **marsh terns**, one of which was definitely ID'd as a **White-winged Black Tern** due to its clearly visible black underwing coverts. In the surrounding dry fields, highlights included the first of many **Red-rumped Swallows** of the trip, **Lesser Grey Shrike**, a skulky **Stone Curlew**, 2 **Short-toed Larks**, 2 fly-over **Ruddy Shelduck**, 3 **Great White Egrets** more **Black-headed Wagtails** and a few **Grey Heron**. Next stop was to look for the much sought after **Kruper's Nuthatch**, a diminutive Nuthatch with a black 'skull cap' and a rusty red 'breast plate', regarded by many to be **the** bird of Lesvos. There are a couple of well documented sites on the Island and we chose the one at the Achladeri picnic site, not far from the salt pans. On arrival hunger pangs called for lunch in the shade of the pine trees, so we tucked into our excellent packed lunches. Then began the search for the sometimes elusive and petite Kruper's. First bird of note was a **Spotted**

Flycatcher, and then a bird singing, using phraseology not unlike the repetitive Song Thrush, but with a voice akin to Nightingale - a male **Orphean Warbler**. This led us a merry dance until excellent views were had of the female, but the male eluded us. Next up a pair of cracking **Subalpine Warblers**, at times showing well in the prickly understory. Four **Woodchat Shrikes** were characteristically very obliging. After about an hour we were beginning to despair, especially after we met a chap from Yorkshire who had been there 4 hours without a sighting of the **Kruper's**! Then a shout from Alan Rosney - a **Kruper's** had alighted on a branch in the open right above his head. The second bird of the pair then arrived too, and afforded all, I think, excellent views before they flitted off up into the canopy. Making our way back to the vehicles **Long-legged Buzzard** was noted overhead sporting it's longish plain tail, and a singing male **Cirl Bunting** plus a female **Serin** also showed. Geri had by this time got back to the vehicles. Then suddenly I was alerted by a movement in the grass bordering a dry open track, and out popped a **Tawny Pipit**. I got Neil onto it straight away, but this was a lifer for Geri GERI! ... **Tawny Pipit**, over here! Fortunately he heard and was soon onto the bird - a good moment as Geri had seen all the other species we were to encounter, on previous trips - a just reward for leading our trip. It was now mid afternoon so a final foray at the upper East River in Kalloni was decided upon, heading there via the area known as 'Derbyshire', where 3 **Common Shelduck** and 4 more **Black Stork** on the ground, were noted as we passed by. Great excitement at upper East River was provided by a dark phase **Eleanora's Falcon** chasing a **Hobby** all over the sky - awesome! Also here, our first **Black-eared Wheatears** and also our first of many **Western Rock Nuthatches** were seen. For reasons which escape me, these became fondly know as 'Bob the Nuthatch' or 'Bobs' for short. The most likely solution would be Geri's propensity for bursting into song at the slightest provocation, using as a theme, any item in view at the time, be it living or dead, set to a well known tune. Hence Bob the Nuthatch was a singalong to the theme tune of the well known kiddies character, Bob the Builder. Anyway, back to reality - other new birds here were **Red-backed Shrike**, and a couple of lovely male **Cretzschmar's Buntings** [my spell checker definitely doesn't like that one!]. Spelt from memory tho' - not bad eh? Oh, and finally, the first of a good number of supposedly 'difficult' **Sombre Tits**.

Birded out, we headed back to the hotel to freshen up and enjoy a tasty and plentiful evening buffet and a few Mythos beers. What a first day -we had seen everything we had set out to see, and had good views into the bargain - it can't get any better ... can it?

Sat 29th May - warm and sunny - again.

Pre-breakfast saw us at the Potamia Valley and it's small reservoir, just east of Kalloni. Star new bird here was a **Masked Shrike** sitting on telephone wires - another lifer for most of the group. Nearby **Red-backed** and **Woodchat Shrikes** kept the 'Masked' company. **Turtle Doves** were in profusion here

with at least 10 counted, and commoner species included **Great Tit**, a single **Lesser Whitethroat**, more 'Bobs', **Red-rumped Swallow**, **Corn Bunting**, **Black-headed Bunting** and **Nightingale**, which was seen in flight, showing off its rusty tail. In the air a **Peregrine** appeared, and a **White Stork** drifting lazily down the valley, and then most spectacularly, a pair of **Goshawk** displaying over a ridge.



Coffee Time

Later, replete with another hearty breakfast we head off for **Ruppell's Warbler** country. A stop-off en route at a view point 'bandstand' added 4 **Blue Rock Thrush**, another dark phase **Eleanora's Falcon**, 5 more 'Bobs', a **Jay** and 2 more fly over **Black Storks**. Also in the air was a buzzard sp. which after lengthy discussion was decided upon as a **Steppe Buzzard** [a plain tailed subspecies of our Common Buzzard].

On to the first roadside stop for Ruppell's - a lay-by near the town of Petra. No joy here but male **Cretzschmar's** and **Black-headed Buntings** and **Black-eared Wheatear** provided interest. Next stop was a small headland overlooking the lovely coastal town of Molyvos. As we set off along the track almost immediately Geri was on to a male **Ruppell's** which just as immediately decided to fly off, seen fleetingly by a couple of others but not well enough to see the critical features. Diligent searching and patience eventually rewarded the group with 2 male **Subalpine Warblers** and then finally, good views of a female **Ruppell's** at what was undoubtedly a nest site at the base of a small bush. We then split up and further diligent searching gave tantalising views of disappearing small black-headed warblers, but none which could be conclusively identified. Most had given up at this point and were back at the bus, and I was looking for Gareth R. and Chris B., when suddenly a small warbler alighted on top of a small tree not 20m from me - long enough through bins and then speedily erected 'scope to see the well

defined black head with thin white moustachial stripes and red eye rings to clinch a male **Ruppell's**. The others at the lay-by had seen the bird, but it was too distant to be satisfactory. Happily for the 'car group' and more especially for Neil, who gradually became more jittery as time went on and we dipped on Ruppell's at a couple of other sites, and he had 'only' seen a female, they later had very good views of a male in display flight. The view of Molyvos at this site was so picturesque that time was taken for a 'team' photo.



Birding

I should add at this point that the 'car group', comprising Neil, Chris B. Chris J. and Gareth J., perhaps through delusions of grandeur, had declared themselves the 'A', or rather 'alpha' team [to maintain the Greek theme]. We in the bus felt we needed no fancy name, our performance speaking for itself ☺.

Anyway, back to birds again. After the Molyvos headland, onwards, after a couple of wrong turns, to Molyvos reservoir. It was up one of these wrong tracks that the car driver at the time, Gareth "McRae" Jenkins, managed to bottom the little Fiat Punto on a particularly nasty rock, whence it sounded more like something that should have been on a Welsh stage of the RAC rally, rather than pottering around the back roads and tracks of a Greek island! The reservoir? Nothing new here, and an area of scrub formerly good for Ruppell's had been burned. A dark phase **Long-legged Buzzard** provoked some discussion and interest, together with what by now were familiar birds - **Black-headed Bunting**, **Black-eared Wheatear**, **Red-rumped Swallow**, **Yellow-legged Gull** (an interesting collection of birds all named after the fashion 'colour - body part - bird', to which one could also add Red-backed Shrike, Black-headed Wagtail I wonder how many species in the world are named after the same fashion). I digress. Next stop was a minor road out of the small village of Lepetimos, since according to 'gen' yours truly had

obtained from the 'web, a birder on a previous trip had had a possible sighting of White-throated Robin - hey there's another one of those names! No luck on that score but a **Scop's Owl** called but was not seen - the only contact we had with the species despite several visits to 'guaranteed' sites.



Masked Shrike

And so, on to the delightful fishing village of Skala Sikimmia for a well earned rest and refreshing drink in the shade by the harbour. A potential site for Audouin's Gull this - more jitters from Neil - it was on his 'wanted' list. All of a sudden Chris J and I leapt up in unison - adult **Audouin's Gull** approaching. A lovely ad with its deep red bill drifted leisurely by at close range and Neil was all smiles. A **Shag** on the sea was also a new trip bird here. Time to return to base, the route taking us back via the Napi Valley. Halfway down here, just above the pig farm, we stopped and looked and listened. After a few minutes the strains of a somewhat Great Reed Warbler like song were heard and we were soon rewarded with good if brief views of the large chunky **Olive Tree Warbler**. **Masked** and **Red-backed Shrikes**, more '**Bobs**', another **Eleanora's** [getting blasé aren't we?], 2 male **Cirl Buntings** and a **Hoopoe** heard, rounded off the day nicely.

Sun 30th May

Car park before another pre-brekkie expedition. A **Starling** in flight could only be a **Rosy** [no Commons here], and indeed it was and an adult to boot, as it alighted in a tree above the bus. Unnoticed by us, poor Geri was already in the drivers seat waiting for us, and there was the bird, right over his head. Unfortunately it flew off before he got out! Fortunately we located more of these late [for Lesvos] passage migrants later in the day. And so to the early morning location - the so-called inland lake - a small tree- and reed-fringed lake 10 mins from Kalloni. Here 4 **Night Herons** and a pair of **Little Grebes**

with chicks were added to the growing list. **Great Reed** and **Cetti's Warblers** were seen well together, and a variety of other species now very familiar to us. A **Little Bittern** showed very briefly to some. In the air, both **Stork** species and a **Peregrine** flew over as did a hundred or so **Common Swift**. Suddenly a shout of "**Alpine Swift**" went up – try as I might I could not get onto this bird despite detailed descriptions of which cloud or patch of blue it was in. Never mind – at least it wasn't a lifer missed.

Post-breakfast, the local **Scop's Owl** roost trees had no owl, even though it had been seen by others the day before. Onward then over the hills via the Dafia to Filia road. A cry of "Bop" caused a by now familiar sudden roadside stop, revealing a beautiful rufous tailed **Long-legged Buzzard**, and by the roadside **Cretzschmar's Bunting**, **Black-eared Wheatear** and a male **Blue Rock Thrush**. The 'Grand Canyon' was the next stop and this provided another very rufous **Long-legged Buzzard** drifting slowly over, shortly to be outshone by a magnificent **Short-toed Eagle**. After some searching, about 6 **Crag Martins** were located, flying in their characteristic acrobatic fashion along the sheer rock faces. The stunning scenery of this mini Grand Canyon was also graced by further '**Subalps**', **Cretzschmar's**, **Woodchat** and **Blue Rock Thrush**. Back in the vehicles and on the road again we soon emerged into a high barren area and the 'Isabelline triangle', a meeting of three roads above the town of Andissa, and as the name suggests we were soon watching the fluttering display flight of **Isabelline Wheatear**. Long, attenuated Wheatears these, sandy in colour, with a narrow black eye stripe, long black legs and a 'tall' upright stance. Another 'Isabelline' [Shrike] seen a few days previously was not in evidence. On again and we were soon at the highest point of the day [in terms of altitude, and probably also birding], at Ipsilou monastery, which sits on a conical hill in the north overlooking the Turkish coast (hence the adjacent military lookout – birding here is done on the far side of the monastery away from regimental eyes). Patient searching of the stony, scrubby terrain soon revealed the inevitable **Black-eared Wheatears** and '**Bobs**', and then a pair of **Chukar** with 10+ chicks, which proved very difficult to get people on to amongst the boulders and scant vegetation. Trying to get someone onto the right boulder on a hillside strewn with 100's is quite frustrating! ... and entertaining. Then finally in the shade of a small tree, a **Cinereous Bunting**, indeed 3 **Cinereous Buntings**, one a clear male with it's pale yellow unmarked head. Up by the monastery itself a particularly obliging **Masked Shrike** gave good photo and video opportunities, whilst a snake shooting out from underneath Anne's feet provided a modicum of excitement. This was a **Balkan Whip Snake** - quite large but not venomous. Onward from here to Sigri – another beautiful little fishing village – for a cup of Greek coffee – we were by this time realising that ND required a severe caffeine fix mid afternoon☺ . Whilst supping our drinks in the shade we were entertained by a number of **Kestrels**, at least one of which was a '**Lesser**'. Three distant **Ruddy Shelduck** were noted flying over. Final call of the day was to the lower Faneromeni ford, at a bamboo, tree, and shrub lined stream.

What a beautiful spot in the late afternoon and what an hours 'birdfest' we had here. Three **Little Bitterns** fed unconcernedly in the stream, catching the tiny baby **Spadefoot Toads** of which there were 100's. At least 10 **Spotted Flycatchers** performed from the bamboos and 3 **Bee-eaters** also took advantage of the protein in the form of baby toads. Five **Rosy Starlings** fluttered to & fro', a **Middle Spotted Woodpecker** made a brief appearance, as did a female **Golden Oriole**. Nearby an **Eleanora's Falcon** graced the sunset sky.



Baby Tortoise

Mon 31st May

To date the weather had been very pleasant in the mid to high 20's C. Today it was obviously going to get much hotter, as even during the pre-breakfast foray the temperature was noticeably increasing. Back to the salt pans for this, but on the other side in the hope of better views of marsh terns. Alas none were present, but **Common** and **Little Terns** fished the creeks, the latter being a delight at close quarters. Closer views were also had of the ungainly looking but stately **Greater Flamingos**, as they fed in unison. Two more **Black Storks** were also in view - we did rather well for this species. A couple of **Stone Curlew**, 5 **Kentish Plovers**, a further **Short-toed Lark** and a good selection of other 'water' species completed the scene. It is worth mentioning that apart from the few breeders, waders were mostly absent. An earlier visit is necessary to connect with the main wader passage, and indeed the main migration in general.

After yet another ample breakfast, we set off for Kalloni Upper East River - shallow valley, rocky terrain, scattered trees and shrubs. Nothing new here but a good selection of 'common' species. A singing **Rufous Bush Robin** had Alan and I guessing until we actually located the bird. Yet more 'Bobs' were seen, a female **Ruppell's Warbler** and a family group of **Subalpines**. It was now getting very hot so we decided to head for the shade and explore the

wooded hills around the inland town of Agiassos. On leaving the East River track a **Hoopoe** was finally seen.

At Agiassos, a lovely little town set in the hills amongst Chestnut forest, lunch was taken and we decided to do the circular walk recommended in Richard Brook's book. It was a very hot afternoon and the woods were not heavy with birds, but it was interesting to note the presence of common 'garden' species such as **Blackbird**, **Chaffinch**, **Greenfinch**, **Robin** and **Wren**, due to the higher and cooler climate than lower down. Several family groups were seen including a family of about 8 **Wrens** ferreting about on a mossy stone wall. Suddenly a harsh trill was heard, reminiscent of the end of a Wood Warbler song, without the starting 'sip, sip, sip' or clear 'pew, pew, pew,' notes. Neil was sure this was an **Eastern Bonelli's Warbler** and eventually frustratingly brief glimpses were had where the path crosses the stream for the return loop. Similarly frustrating glimpses were had of a **Middle Spotted Pecker**, much to the frustration of Christian who was 'after' this species! Further along the trail a family of **Nightingales** were extremely noisy, scolding us right above our heads until we moved on. Then, about $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way round the track, another **Bonelli's** trill, this time very close. Here finally after some patience, were 1, then 2 adults carrying food – surely a sign of breeding? Excellent views were obtained of these pale grey plain, 'open' faced phylloscs with pure white underparts and a hint of yellow fringing in the wings – a real coup. This was a delightful walk through habitat new to most of us – Chestnut forest. A couple of orchid species were seen, but most of these had gone over. The other wild flowers and butterflies provided many photo opportunities.



Picnic

Wending our weary way back along the coast road (the bus group), Clive suddenly called out "**Pratincole**" as we passed the salt pans. Considering this was a lifer for him, this was some feat. Geri obviously hadn't heard (probably mid way through a folk song about Fred the Flamingo ☺). "Geri, there's a

Prat back there GERI!" We then realised that as GFT executed a deft U turn, much to the annoyance of the following locals, the 'alpha' team were already at the roadside watching the bird. We quickly got back to the spot, unfortunately right beside a busy road, and were soon scoping a lovely **Collared Pratincole**, which even stretched it's wings and flew around a bit to show off the salient points of deep rusty brown underwing coverts and thin white trailing edge to the wings. As if this wasn't enough excitement we set off again only to find the 'alpha' team again stopped and waving us frantically in. A **Lanner Falcon** had just flown along a nearby ridge (but gone) – curses under breath from me as a lifer escapes – and there in a distant tree, a juv **Bonelli's Eagle** crashing around trying to find a firm perch and seemingly not knowing quite what to do with it's wings. The ad had been present but had disappeared along with the Lanner. The juv Bonelli's was constantly buzzed by sparrows as it ineptly tried to get a good purchase on a firm branch – a feat seemingly beyond its grasp – pun not intended – but during the course of which, as we watched incredulously through our scopes, it managed to grab a sparrow in it's beak. A meagre snack we thought. What an end to the day, and two of the famous Mr. Bonelli's birds seen into the bargain.

Not quite the end of the day though. It was the 'Greek evening' at the hotel. During dinner we were entertained by two couples in traditional Greek dress performing traditional dances, and then it was time for "everyone to have a go peeps innit?". The persuasive young dancers soon had most of us on the floor doing what amounted to a Greek version of the conga, although Neil was seen to disappear rather hurriedly to make a lengthy phone call on his mobile! This was followed by some assisted acrobatics involving a chair. Men from the audience were persuaded to stand with one foot on the seat of the dining chair and the other on the chair back. The idea was to cause the chair to rotate backwards and fall on its back with the occupant landing on the floor with a flourish. Gareth Jenks had a go, and also yours truly. I was advised afterwards that this was not a prerequisite for being **chairman** of the Club ☺ . Fortunately, or not depending upon your standpoint, none of this was recorded on film!

Tues 1st June – even hotter

I awoke with a nasty headache – this had nothing to do with the previous evenings events! – stiff neck from lugging around heavy optical equipment – honest guv! Anne and Chris B. decided to have a chill out by the pool. Thus a depleted crew set off early morning back to the Napi valley and were rewarded by much better and longer views of **Olive Tree Warbler**. There were two highlights apparently. One was a **Bonnelli's Eagle** sitting on a bush, being struck in the back of the head by an annoyed **Masked Shrike!** The other was what followed the discovery by Geri of a large snake crossing the road. In order for the others to get a look at it, he attempted to slow it down a bit by standing in front of it. It wasn't all that keen to slow down however and struck at Geris boot a couple of times at which point Geri gave up and let it

slither on it's way. At the time it was suspected to have been a Puff Adder, but we later learned from a couple of Dutch guys who were 'in' to reptiles, and who had captured a smaller version of the snake to keep in a bottle in their hotel bathroom overnight ... True! ... that it was an **Ottoman Viper** – one bite and you've got 20 mins 'til curtains!!! 'Nuf said. I had recovered enough by lunchtime by the pool to join the afternoon excursion to the Potamia Valley and reservoir again, where Rock Sparrow had been reported by the overflow. None there for us, but a wealth of butterflies provided interest. A stop off at Parakila Marsh, west of Skala Kalloni had us listening to what at first sounded like a Little Crake, but eventually turned out to be a plaintive **Coot**. **Great Reed** and **Olivaceous Warblers** sang well here. Just beyond Parakila is an area known as 'Devils Bridge', which comprises a rocky slope below a charming little chapel, and here we saw 3 **Sombre Tits**, a **Cirl Bunting** feeding young, **Cretzschmar's Bunting**, '**Bobs**' and a pair of displaying **Corn Buntings** and Geri glimpsed a **Cinereous**.

Weds 2nd June - the last whole day ☺

We set off for Agra, perched up in the hills. A roadside stop just above the town produced 2 stunning male **Red-footed Falcons** which must have just arrived, rather late for this species. A **Middle Spotted Woodpecker**, a pair of **Cirl Buntings**, 2 '**Bobs**, a **Black-eared Wheatear**, and numerous **Hooded Crows**, completed the scene at this stunning viewpoint. On to an impressive roadside crag just above the Eressos cement works – doesn't sound very salubrious I know, but the views were again stunning. A male **Rock Sparrow** finally gave good views to those who had missed the 'alpha' teams one earlier in the week, and another lifer for me. The alpha team's one earlier in the week ... yes, I had forgotten that. The bus team had missed the fact that the 'alpha' team had stopped, due to our being in front [and concentrating on the road!]. After realising that they were missing and waiting for some time we retraced our steps thinking that [a] they had got lost, [b] Gareth 'McCrae' Jenkins had overcooked it on a bend or [c] the exhaust had finally fallen off! We arrived back to where they had stopped only to get very inconclusive views, much to my chagrin. Anyway, back to 2nd June – we made our way via the 'Isabelline Triangle' – yet another **Long-legged Buzzard** here and of course the **Isabelline Wheatears** [we were getting more blasé now], and thence to Sigri for a coffee break. On the road above Sigri, a cry of "Falcon!", both teams pile out and there, a family group of 2 ad and 2 juv **Lanner Falcons** giving a spectacular flying display as the adults taught the youngsters to hunt. They even perched on rocks to allow more leisurely viewing. What a sight. Down by the harbour for a picnic, and an obliging male **Lesser Kestrel** gave good views of its grey wing panels and 'plain' face. The final foray of the trip was back to Faneromeni ford. This was quieter than the previous occasion, but **Nightingales** bathing in the stream were nice to see, plus **Bee-eater**, another '**Middle Spot**' and a couple of **Short-toed Eagles**, 1 ad and 1 juv. A **Little Owl**

sat in the open in a tree nearby, but we couldn't find the Rollers that had been seen the day before.

Thurs 3rd June

A day for packing and getting to Mytilene with about an hour to shop, and then joining the chaos at the tiny airport, whose departure lounge is not much bigger than the living room of 122 Westbourne Road! The chaos was exacerbated by the crash of the air traffic control computer in the UK resulting in some delays in flights coming out.

A great trip – the birds were not the only interest of course – I recall bright green lizards, myriads of fantastic butterflies that had us reaching for the field guide every step of the way, profusions of beautiful wild flowers, the list goes on. Geri's knowledge of the insectivora was invaluable. I know he is preparing a list of the non-ornithological wildlife highlights.

It has been said already but I'll say it again – this was a resounding success for the first GBC foreign trip. The group gelled well and everyone made a contribution. My thanks go to Neil for suggesting it and to him and Elena at the Greek end for making the arrangements; to Geri for leading and imparting his knowledge of the island and its wildlife, and knowing where to go for the birds and for driving the minibus all week, and to the two Jenkinses for driving the car; and finally to Yannis and the staff of Kalloni II for the excellent in house meals and the superb packed lunches and for making our stay a real pleasure, and of course the bottles of Ouzo! Here's to the next one!

Considering we did not go at what is considered the peak time, we thought we did rather well.

Trip total 127 species

My total 110 including 15 lifers.

John Wilson – July 2004

johndw@ntlworld.com