

WESTERN TURKEY BIRDS AND HISTORY

APRIL 11-25, 2011



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Leaders: Brad Schram (Birds) and Umit Ozaydin (History)

This was VENT's seventh Birds & History tour in Western Turkey, but the first run in spring. Our tour was superbly co-led by Umit Ozaydin, as it had been the previous six tours, and his knowledgeable commentary on classical history and contemporary Turkish custom, economy, and politics added immeasurably to our experience. We occasionally tested his patience with bird discoveries at inconvenient moments, but his good nature and commitment to our breadth of experience never faltered.

Travelling Western Turkey in spring revealed the countryside in its brightest dress, delighting all with displays of wildflowers amongst ancient ruins, as well as fields of blooming peach trees near Selcuk. Our weather was best described as "unsettled," resulting in less than optimum birding conditions at a few key venues, but overall we were usually blessed with a break in the weather when most needed. A restaurant atop the mountain in Ulu Dag National Park opened just as we arrived during a heavy snow. The memory of cognac, chocolate, honeyed roast chestnuts, pistachios, and grilled Turkish sausages chased with tea, all done to an eclectic selection of musical favorites, proved an unforgettable experience. Although we did see some of Ulu Dag's specialties, the snow probably cost us a few species.

While conforming in many ways with previous trip lists, our spring tour showed an interesting contrast with fall tours in that the abundance of many species differed markedly. One expects most wintering water birds abundant in fall to be scarce or missing by mid-April—and this proved to be the case. Fall tour lists number Red-backed and Lesser Gray shrikes as abundant due to resident birds' numbers swelling with their fellows from northern and central Europe; we found all shrikes to be few and far between. Conversely, many raptors proved more abundant in spring—and migrant flocks of Spanish Sparrows in the thousands underlined seasonal differences compared with 2008's fall total of four individuals. Outstanding views of Little Crane, a Great Spotted Cuckoo pacing the bus below Hierapolis, and small flocks of Horned Larks in Ulu Dag's snow were all additions to this tour's cumulative trip list.

Western Turkey reminds one visually of California's Central Coast with its brush-covered slopes, coastal inlets, and orchards. Unlike California, however, Greek, Roman, Byzantine, and Ottoman ruins are dotted about the countryside. Birding amongst the marble columns of Miletus, Ephesus, Priene, Hierapolis, and more proved a unique experience. The striking Finsch's Wheatear, of restricted distribution, appears atop a fallen marble column dating to the 2nd century BCE at Hierapolis; an Ortolan Bunting sings amongst sarcophagi of the type given here to Marcus Aurelius. Sombre Tits appear in pines above while the group tracks down our first Blue Rock-Thrush at Hellenistic Priene. Overhead, a Short-toed Eagle carries a snake to a hidden nest in the palisade above. A pair of Spur-winged Lapwings occupy a small pond at Miletus containing a 2,000-year-old marble bas-relief celebrating Poseidon. Active Rock Nuthatches appear in virtually all the

ancient sites, the bird's personality coupled with its uniqueness making it a group favorite. Birding amongst Western Turkey's ancient ruins is, indeed, unique.

Samsun Dag National Park occupies a peninsula overlooking the blue Aegean, Greece's isle of Samos visible not far offshore. Arriving in early morning light, we seek Sylvia warblers inhabiting the scrub slope below. A stunning male Rueppell's Warbler—soon joined by others—is first to appear, granting all nice scope views. A Cirl Bunting sings atop a nearby pine. First Lesser, then Greater, whitethroats appear—the Lesser Whitethroat becoming the most regularly seen Sylvia warbler of the trip. In short order we are assaulted by the beauty of male Whinchat and Subalpine Warbler immediately down slope, glowing in the fine scope views. On departure for Greater Menderes Delta, with its Greater Flamingos and Slender-billed Gulls, a Eurasian Hoopoe jumps from a roadside ditch nearby. Beautiful Samsun Dag treated us generously.

Istanbul and the Bosphorus combine geography, history, culture and natural history in a combination perhaps unparalleled on the globe. Our visits to 6th century Aya Sofia, the Blue Mosque, and the ancient Roman underground cistern were unique life experiences. Palaces contain mythical sumptuary goods in abundance—but the Bosphorus rivals the jewels with its beauty. Our multiple crossings on bridges, ferries, and a special boat trip gave us close looks at hundreds of Yelkouan (formerly “Levantine”) Shearwaters, an Eastern Mediterranean specialty, as they moved to and from the Black Sea. Although spring raptor migration across the Bosphorus is reputed to be less spectacular than fall, a sampling on a vantage point near the Black Sea proved productive. Kettles of White Storks and Common Buzzards appeared overhead; single Eurasian Sparrowhawks dashed through. A “wave day” here must be one of the world's great migration spectacles!

The remarkable combination of classical Mediterranean history and sites, coupled with Turkey's rich history and culture, make a fascinating tour on their own; when done with a birder's interest, the tour becomes incredibly rich. Our 2011 Western Turkey: Birds & History tour confirmed the truth of this observation. Birding in ancient historic venues was wonderfully productive, fun, and endlessly fascinating!



ITINERARY

11 April: Depart USA.

12 April: Meet at Izmir airport. Afternoon birding Kuçuk Menderes delta, Gebe Kirse Lake. Overnight Selçuk.

13 April: Birding the Buyuk Menderes delta in the morning, then to Miletus. Lunch and visit to Didyma (Apollo's Temple) followed by birding at Lake Bafa. Overnight at Selçuk.

14 April: Zeytinlek Rd. outside Selcuk, Gebe Kirse Lake, Ephesus in the morning; then Mariam Ana in rain. Overnight Selçuk.

15 April: Birding in morning at National Park of Samsun Dag NP. Afternoon at Priene, then Camalti Salt Pans ("Izmir Bird Paradise"). Overnight Selçuk.

16 April: Drive to Dalyan, lunch at riverside restaurant. Birding/sightseeing at Dalyan (boat trip to Lake Koycegiz), Caunos cliff cemetery and hilltop Byzantine ruins of Caunos in afternoon. Overnight Dalyan.

17 April: Pre-breakfast birding in weedy field behind hotel; drive to Pammukale/ Hierapolis, stopping at Yayla Forest and town below for birding. Late afternoon birding at Hierapolis. Overnight Pammukale.

18 April: Drive to Bergama with birding en route at Lake Marmara. Following lunch, birding/exploring Pergamon's Acropolis and the Aesclepion. Overnight Bergama.

19 April: Drive from Bergama to Bursa, with birding at Lake Manyas, then at Lake Uluvat in the afternoon. Overnight Bursa.

20 April: Morning birding at Mt. Uludag above Bursa in rain, then snow. Lunch in small restaurant on Ulu Dag, then sightseeing in Bursa. Drive to Istanbul including two ferries. Overnight Istanbul.

21 April: Sightseeing in morning at Hippodrome, Blue Mosque, Basilica Cistern, Aya Sophia. Mid-afternoon visit to Çamlica hills and Bosphorus waterfront. Overnight Istanbul.

22 April: Morning birding in Belgrade Forest, then at "raptor hill" near the Black Sea on European side. Return to Istanbul & Topkapi Palace. Overnight Istanbul.

23 April: Stop at ancient Istanbul city walls, tour Süleymaniye Mosque, followed by visits to the Spice Bazaar and Grand Bazaar, ending with rooftop tea near Galata Tower. Overnight Istanbul.

24 April: Morning cruise and birding on the Bosphorus followed by a tour of Beylerbeyi Palace on the Asian shore. Lunch at one of Umit's favorite restaurants and a tour of Istanbul's Asian side. Overnight Istanbul.

25 April: Departures for most from Istanbul on homeward journeys.

BIRD LIST (Birds noted in **bold** are rare, of restricted range, or unusual for this tour)

Ruddy Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea* Not uncommon, seen in pairs in wet fields and marshes
Common (Green-winged) Teal *Anas crecca* a small flock still at Lake Manyas
Mallard *A. platyrhynchos* The commonest duck seen, most damp freshwater locations
Garganey *A. querquedula* Fine 'scope looks for all at Lake Manyas, 3 lingering birds
Common Pochard *Aythya farina* Lake Manyas only, in the 'scope, 6 birds still present
Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis* Fairly common on lakes
Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus* Not uncommon, stunning in the 'scope
Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus roseus* Large concentrations of this remarkable species in shallow saltwater lagoons at Greater Menderes Delta & Izmir Bird Paradise
Yelkouan (Levantine) Shearwater *Puffinus yelkouan* Commonly seen in flocks on Bosphorus
Great White Pelican *Pelecanus onocrotalus* Greater Menderes Delta & Lake Manyas
Dalmatian Pelican *P. crispus* A single sub-adult at Bafa Lake, 2 at Izmir BP, many at Lake Manyas—good looks for all at the world's rarest pelican!
Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* Very common on both fresh and salt water
European Shag *P. aristotelis* two birds seen at Black Sea edge were a bonus!
Pygmy Cormorant *P. pygmaeus* a limited range species, not uncommon on interior lakes
Gray Heron *Ardea cinerea* common in shallow salt water and interior lakes
Purple Heron *A. purpurea* A single bird nearby for excellent 'scope views, Lake Manyas
Great Egret *A. alba* fairly common at fresh water
Little Egret *Egretta garzetta* One of the commonest large birds of the trip: fields, lakes, shallow salt water edges.
Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides* although dubiously dubbed "a dirty bird" by one of the group in early confusion, all agreed that it's truly elegant--& not uncommon at lakes
Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax* 6 on a limb at Lake Koycegiz were uncommonly beautiful—one other fly-by later on tour.
Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus* formations in the air at both lakes Uluvat & Manyas
White Stork *Ciconia ciconia* A real crowd-pleaser! Commonly seen constructing nests in Selcuk, foraging in fields &, memorably, migrant flocks in rural countryside and overhead at raptor hill just south of the Black Sea, on the Bosphorus
Short-toed Eagle *Circaetus gallicus* eight birds seen near Selcuk, Menderes Delta, & Priene
Eurasian Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus* commonly seen over marshes, fields, near water
Montagu's Harrier *C. pygargus* two birds seen: Gr. Menderes Delta & outside Selcuk
Levant Sparrowhawk *Accipiter brevipes* one bird seen above Belgrade Forest
Eurasian Sparrowhawk *A. nisus* a couple seen at roadside & 6 at raptor hill by Black Sea
Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo* commonest raptor of the trip: seen over fields throughout—as well as 25-30 over raptor hill
Long-legged Buzzard *B. rufinus* uncommon over farmland between Izmir & Selcuk; 10 birds overall on the trip
Lesser Spotted Eagle *Aquila pomarina* single birds seen: one flying at roadside, another overhead at Caunos gave us a good look
Lesser Kestrel *Falco naumanni* single flying birds seen at: Izmir BP; Caunos; Hierapolis
Eurasian Kestrel *F. tinnunculus* Not uncommon, seen regularly in open country
Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus* Heard only, one uncooperative bird close at Belgrade Forest
Little Crane *Porzana parva* 'scope views! One each at Kayahayit and Uluvat Lakes—new to trip list

Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra* common at both shallow salt & fresh water venues
Spur-winged Lapwing *Vanellus spinosus* near/at Miletus & interior lakes—not rare



Kentish (Snowy) Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus* a few birds seen Gr. Menderes Delta, Izmir BP, Lake Koycegiz
Eurasian Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus* one at Gr. Menderes Delta, another at Izmir BP, seen once previously on this tour
Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus* only one (!), at Izmir BP
Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos* Singles at Izmir BP, & lakes Kayahayit & Manyas
Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus* one in a puddle near reeds at roadside, another distant at Lake Manyas
Spotted Redshank *T. erythropus* one elegant bird at Izmir BP—close ‘scope views for all!
Common Greenshank *T. nebularia* the only regularly seen migrant shorebird of the trip
Wood Sandpiper *T. glareola* a flock of twelve at Lake Manyas
Little Stint *Calidris minuta* only one seen—at edge of Lake Manyas
Black-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus* uncommon on lakes—abundant on Bosphorus
Slender-billed Gull *C. genei* 6 seen at Gr. Menderes Delta, at the Aegean Edge
Mediterranean Gull *Ichthyaetus melanocephalus* in migrant flocks at Menderes Delta, over farmland near Bafa Lake, and a few on Bosphorus among Black-headed Gulls.
Yellow-legged Gull *Larus michahellis* one of the commonest birds of the entire tour
Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica* one over salt marsh at Gr. Menderes Delta edge
Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybrida* a single bird flew by at close range, Izmir BP—elegant!
White-winged Tern *C. leucopterus* one cruising the shoreline nearby, lake Uluvat
Black Tern *C. niger* one only, amongst Common Tern flock--Bosphorus
Common Tern *Sterna hirundo* common working rips at Bosphorus edge
Sandwich Tern *Thalasseus sandvicensis* 1 only, working amongst yachts at Bosphorus edge
Rock Pigeon (I) *Columba livia* daily in all towns and cities
Common Wood Pigeon *C. palumbus* only a few seen—including the cold forest on Ulu Dag
Eurasian Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto* Daily, ubiquitous—except in Istanbul
Laughing Dove *S. senegalensis* seen around Istanbul only, where fairly common
Rose-ringed Parakeet (I) *Psittacula krameri* perched and flying around Istanbul historic sites
Common Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus* 2 seen, one perched briefly in Samsun Dag, a flyby at Yayla Forest, one previous record on this tour

Great Spotted Cuckoo *Clamator glandarius* Another trip-list first. A well-seen flyby just below Hierapolis as we left in the morning.

Little Owl *Athene noctua* 2 seen: one at Izmir BP on channel-side boulders; another in ancient wall grotto at Pergamon. Another major crowd-pleaser!

Alpine Swift *Apus melba* 8 over Gebe Kirse Lake near Selcuk; scores overhead near Galata Tower in Istanbul.

Common Swift *Apus apus* Seen here and there—including over Istanbul.

Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis* A group favorite—near Bafa Lake, Kayahayit Lake, and a cooperative perched bird at streamside in Belgrade Forest

Eurasian Hoopoe *Upupa epops* Yet another group favorite. Singles at Samsun Dag & near Magnesia; two cooperative birds at Lake Manyas

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos minor* 1 bird, well (briefly) seen at Belgrade Forest

Middle Spotted Woodpecker *D. medius* Heard, then seen flying by a few at Asclepion

Great Spotted Woodpecker *D. major* 1 bird well-seen low on a trunk at Belgrade Forest

Syrian Woodpecker *D. syriacus* 2 in roadside trees south of Selcuk; three more in trees along dirt track in to Uluvat Lake

Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio* seen almost daily on fall trips—only one seen this spring trip—leader only. At roadside where unable to stop.

Masked Shrike *L. nubicus* only one—but very cooperative along sidewalk at Lake Manyas

Woodchat Shrike *L. senator* ‘scope views for all at Hierapolis of this attractive species



Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius* Virtually daily—commonly seen slipping through trees

Eurasian Magpie *Pica pica* Daily, multiples, in countryside. Very common.

Eurasian Jackdaw *Corvus monedula* Common in towns

Hooded Crow *C. cornix* common in towns and countryside

Common Raven *C. corax* 4 seen; 1 at Lake Koycegize, another at Hierapolis, 2 at Ulu Dag

Greater Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla* hanging high overhead for minutes, singing on territory, then plunging to earth for leisurely ‘scope views at Bafa Lake

Crested Lark *Galerida cristata* commonly seen among ruins and in open fields in countryside

Horned Lark *Eremophila alpestris* a dark-throated subspecies seen in the snow on Ulu Dag

Sand Martin (Bank Swallow) *Riparia riparia* a few at Gebe Kirse Lake near Selcuk

Eurasian Crag Martin *Ptyonoprogne rupestris* 1 only, seen closeby, leader only—Gebe Kirse

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica* commonly seen, virtually daily, including Istanbul

Red-rumped Swallow *Cecropis daurica* Gebe Kirse Lake, near Selcuk, at Izmir BP

Common House Martin *Delichon urbicum* commonly seen throughout—including Istanbul

Sombre Tit *Poecile lugubris* a few at Priene, Yayla Forest, and Ulu Dag

Marsh Tit *P. palustris* one only, leader only, Belgrade Forest

Great Tit *Parus major* Common wherever woods or groups of trees at roadside occur

Eurasian Blue Tit *Cyanistes caeruleus* a few only: along a farm road and at Belgrade Forest

Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti* Heard daily near Selcuk and points south—seen occasionally

Eurasian Penduline Tit *Remiz pendulinus* 1 seen nest-building near hotel at Dalyan—great 'scope looks—the only one seen

Eurasian Nuthatch *Sitta europaea* In cold, quiet Yayla Forest, and Belgrade Forest

Krueper's Nuthatch *S. krueperi* silhouettes overhead in snow on Ulu Dag—seen well by a few

Rock Nuthatch *S. neumayer* Commonly seen in ruins, loud and inquisitive—a group fave.

Short-toed Treecreeper *Certhia brachydactyla* Seen closely at Ulu Dag and Belgrade Forest



Eurasian Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes* perched right overhead at Belgrade Forest, singing.

Recently split from Winter Wren

Goldcrest *Regulus regulus* Lovely bird at eye-level very close in snow on Ulu Dag--magical

Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus* Commonly seen in mixed flocks of migrant warblers

Common Chiffchaff *P. collybita* 2 seen for sure—both tail-dipping—with Willows

Eurasian Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus* Seen at Kayahayit Lake, in a roadside puddle of reeds, and at Lake Manyas

Great Reed Warbler *A. arundinaceus* 2 seen in roadside reeds by a large puddle

Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla* commonly seen in mixed migrant flocks

Garden Warbler *S. borin* an apparent migrant seen in hotel garden at Bergama

Greater Whitethroat *S. communis* only a few: Samsun Dag & hotel at Bergama

Lesser Whitethroat *S. curruca* The commonest, if cryptic, *Sylvia* warbler seen

Rueppell's Warbler *S. reuppelli* A half dozen well-seen by all at Samsun Dag in low scrub

Subalpine Warbler *S. cantillans* 1 bird seen well in 'scope at Samsun Dag—wow, a stunner!

Semicollared Flycatcher *Ficedula semitorquata* A single male seen briefly at Priene

Collared Flycatcher *F. albicollis* multiples seen well by all, starting at the hotel in Bergama

European Robin *Erithacus rubecula* multiples seen well by all—lingering looks—at Belgrade Forest. Not seen elsewhere.

Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe* Only one, in orange grove below Yayla Forest

Finsch's Wheatear *O. finschii* at Pergamon & in ruins of Hierapolis—a crisply-marked bird!

Black-eared Wheatear *O. hispanica* The common wheatear of the ruins. All ancient sites.
 Isabelline Wheatear *O. isabellina* One only--Hierapolis
 Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra* beautiful, appreciated by all in many locations
 Stonechat *S. torquata* lovely male and female seen well in snow atop Ulu Dag
Blue Rock Thrush *Monticola solitarius* a special bird of the ancient ruins—seen with difficulty at Priene, but a male and female posed lingeringly for all at Pergamon
 Eurasian Blackbird *Turdus merula* Common in woods and near towns, singing beautifully
 Song Thrush *T. philemelos* at Miriam Ana & common in Belgrade Forest
 Mistle Thrush *T. viscivorus* common higher on Ulu Dag
 European Starling *Sternus vulgaris* uncommon around Istanbul, casual elsewhere
 Dunnock *Prunella modularis* a single bird on Ulu Dag was the only one seen
 White Wagtail *Motacilla alba* common at Bafa Lake—and a migrant flock along the dirt track to Uluvat Lake contained 45 birds! Active and interesting.
 Western Yellow Wagtail *M. flava (ssp. feldegg)* a few here and there including Greater Menderes Delta, Bafa Lake, and amongst the migrant flock of White Wagtails
 Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis* 1 at Samsun Dag, another on track to Uluvat Lake were only ones
 Water Pipit *A. spinoletta* 2 seen at roadside in the snow on Ulu Dag were the only ones
 Cirl Bunting *Emberiza cirlus* 1 at Gebe Kirse Lake, another in ‘scope for all at Samsun Dag
Ortolan Bunting *E. hortulana* 1 at Hierapolis, 1 at Pergamon, 2 on fence by the migrant wagtail flock near Uluvat Lake. Once on a previous tour. Yellow eyering diagnostic.
 Corn Bunting *E. calandra* flocks here and there in ag fields and fields near ruins
 Common Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs* Common in forests and city parks.
 European Greenfinch *Chloris chloris* Uncommon, but widespread in trees around ruins and in countryside.
 European Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis* Common, ubiquitous.
 Eurasian Linnet *Carduelis cannabina* 1 only—a male perched for ‘scope views at Hierapolis
 European Serin *Serinus serinus* 2 only—a male and female at roadside for ‘scope views in Yayla Forest
 Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes* Stunning views of birds feeding on the ground at Belgrade Forest.
 House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* In all towns and cities
 Spanish Sparrow *P. hispaniolensis* Only a few seen on fall tour—but thousands seen by us almost daily as they flew in big flocks & fed at roadside on their northward return from Africa to SE Europe—attractive little weaver finches.

MAMMALS:

Red Squirrel *Sciurus vulgaris*
 Common Bottlenose Dolphin *Tursiops truncatus*
 Harbor Porpoise *Phocoena phocoena*

REPTILES:

Agamid (sp.) Lizard
 Tortoise