

# **GREECE: BIRDS & HISTORY**

**A CIRCUMNAVIGATION OF THE PELOPONNESE**

**SEPTEMBER 1-10, 2010**

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## **ATHENS PRE-TRIP**

**AUGUST 30 – SEPTEMBER 2, 2010**

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TOUR REPORT  
GREECE: BIRDS & HISTORY CRUISE  
A Circumnavigation of the Peloponnese  
September 1–10, 2010

By Victor Emanuel

Our cruise around the Peloponnese immersed us in the culture, history, art, and philosophy of ancient Greece, and brought exposure to the scenic beauty and natural history of modern-day Greece. We visited the most famous ancient sites of Athens on our cruise pre-trip: Acropolis, Agora, and Marathon; and, of course, the most revered sites of the Peloponnesian Peninsula including Epidaurus—the largest and best-preserved Greek theater, Mycenae, Nestor’s Palace near Pylos, and, finally, Olympia and Delphi, both of which are incredible sites.

Especially memorable moments included reading part of Pericles’ funeral oration in the Agora, reading excerpts of several Greek plays in the theater in Epidaurus, and attending all of Paul Woodruff’s superb lectures.

As we toured the Acropolis, we imagined what it was like in Athens in the fifth century B.C. when every four years the procession of Athens took place; what the Agora was like when Socrates and Plato walked around it; and what the battle of Marathon had been like 2,500 years ago when an outnumbered Athenian army defeated the mighty Persian army in one of the most important battles of history.

Just as I had envisioned, this trip offered a fine combination of history, culture, and natural history. While touring the Agora, we saw Sardinian Warblers and a Collared Flycatcher during our walking tour; a Short-toed Eagle flew overhead as we stood at the battlefield of Marathon looking at the mound where the Athenian dead were buried; at Epidaurus we had great looks at Eurasian Jays at the ancient Asclepieion; and at Mycenae we saw Eurasian Hoopoe, Rock Nuthatch, Black-eared Wheatear, Blue Rock-Thrush, and a very cooperative Little Owl, the bird of Athena.

The Mediterranean is not known for its seabirds, but the sight of several hundred Levantine Shearwaters and numerous Cory’s Shearwaters flying close to the ship on the day we cruised from Epidaurus to Nafplion was remarkable.

The greatest birding highlight was cruising close by Egg Island, off the coast of Kythira, to view a colony of Eleonora’s Falcons. We had superb looks at over 20 of the rare falcons as they flew along the cliffs, perched on nest sites, and performed spectacular dives.

One of the most scenic places we visited was Kythira, the mythical birthplace of Aphrodite, the goddess of love and beauty. This unspoiled island is a back-in-time place with small, quaint villages and a gorgeous harbor.

Our trip ended with a morning at the sacred site of Delphi, home to the famous oracle and regarded by the Greeks as the navel of the world. At the Cascadian Spring we stumbled upon a couple of birds bathing that we had not previously seen, including Blackcaps and Icterine Warblers. In the late afternoon we passed through the Corinth Canal and then enjoyed an after-dinner stroll in the lovely port of Aegina.

## CRUISE ITINERARY

**September 1, 2010** – Participants on our **Greece: Birds & History** tour departed the U.S. today aboard international flights bound for Athens.

**September 2** – After completing their long overnight flights, people arrived in Athens throughout the morning and received transfer to our hotel, the Divani Acropolis, strategically located only a few blocks from the Acropolis itself. We gathered in the hotel's spacious lobby at noon today for a welcome and orientation session in which Victor and Barry introduced themselves, and trip participants made each others' acquaintance. Following lunch in the hotel restaurant, we departed for an afternoon trip to the National Archaeological Museum.

The National Archaeological Museum is one of the great museums of the world. Among its halls, rooms, and chambers exists one of the great collections of sculptures, artifacts, weapons, and other treasures from the ancient Greek world. We spent a couple of hours here as our superb local guide, Chryssa, led an interpretive walk past some of the museum's top attractions. We returned to Athens in the early evening and enjoyed a terrific meal at the Atticus, a lovely roof-top restaurant offering inspiring views of the Acropolis at night.

**September 3** – Today was the day we boarded our ship, but before getting ahead of ourselves, we had a whole morning ahead of us in which we would tour the extraordinary New Acropolis Museum. Only blocks from the hotel, we simply walked to the museum in a matter of minutes. Open to the public only since 2009, the museum is a beautiful and modern building that houses some of the greatest treasures and artifacts recovered from the Acropolis and surrounding area. Also it is not an accident that the museum's top floor offers commanding views of the Parthenon through its massive plate glass windows.

We spent several hours in the museum this morning, first touring the exhibits as a group, then disbanding on our own for some personal time to simply explore the facility and absorb the pieces from antiquity on our own.

We departed the museum around noon and made our way back to the hotel. After a short delay we boarded our bus and made the transit to the coastal community of Piraeus for lunch. Getting out of Athens proved very difficult as the traffic was terrible. Consequently, we did not arrive at the restaurant until about 2 p.m., which was later than planned. Regardless, we were all famished by the time we sat down. The good news is that our eating place, Zorba's, was all ready and waiting for us. The food was delicious, once again, and put us in the right frame of mind for an afternoon cruise.

After lunch we made the short transfer to the dock in Piraeus where our ship, the *M/S Galileo*, was tied up at the dock. The process of boarding, getting all the luggage to the rooms, and, participating in safety drills took over an hour. The ship's staff introduced itself and the captain made an amusing but informative introduction of himself.

*Galileo* departed the harbor after 4:00. Upon leaving the marina, we spent the remainder of the afternoon at sea simply cruising and relaxing as the ship crossed the Saronic Gulf en route to the coast of the Peloponnese. Watching from the viewing deck, we noted comparatively few birds to begin with, but several Yellow-legged Gulls and a number of flyby European Shags hinted at more birds to come.

In the late afternoon we gathered on the ship's back deck, where Victor, Paul, and Barry hosted an introduction in which we laid out the format of a birds and history-style trip. In particular, Paul provided a nice overview of the talks and activities he had in store for us.

*Galileo* arrived in the harbor at Epidavros in the early evening.

**September 4** – We awoke this morning in the beautiful protected harbor of Epidavros, a lightly settled but picturesque waterfront community that seems to capture the essence of a Greek fishing village. White-walled buildings, boats at anchor, and red tile roofed houses running up the hillside created a scene of tranquility. Epidavros is also a perfect gateway to the archaeological site of Epidaurus, located only 30 minutes away by bus.

Epidaurus was the center of healing in the Classical world and the place where people from all over Greece came with the hope of being cured of their ills. The Asclepieion, named for Asclepius, the most important healer god of antiquity, provided the sanctuary people sought. The fame and prosperity that grew over time at Epidaurus was a result of its increasing renown. Eventually, the area residents used their wealth to expand the size of the Asclepieion and undertake some important civic projects. Foremost among these was the construction of the extraordinary theater that dates from the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C. Today, the remains of the Asclepieion and the theater are the primary draw for visitors to this site.

Departing the ship at 7:30, we made good time to the archaeological site, arriving almost exactly when the entrance gate opened. This is what we wanted because it meant we were the first visitors of the morning, which allowed us to watch for birds and hear Paul and Chryssa's interpretation in near-complete privacy.

We began our morning with a tour of the perfectly symmetrical ancient theater. Besides offering interpretation, Paul included readings of excerpts from several well-known plays produced by such famous playwrights as Sophocles and Euripides. This was a most enjoyable exercise and one that allowed us to further appreciate the genius and creativity of the ancient Greeks. During one of the readings, a majestic Short-toed Eagle appeared in flight, high over the theater.

Next, we descended the theater and made our way over to the Asclepieion for a tour of the ruined site. Compared to the state of ruins at some other archaeological sites, very little of the original structures of the Asclepieion remain standing. Still, the layout of the original complex is very evident, and the entire place is littered with the remains of marble blocks and long collapsed pillars and columns.

Like many of Greece's archaeological sites, Epidaurus is surrounded by native vegetation and olive groves. The result is that these places are often very good for birding. This site is fairly large and occupied by a tree community of Aleppo Pines, oaks, and a variety of ornamental plantings. Making our way through the Asclepieion, we encountered a number of birds that excited many of us. We enjoyed wonderful views of Eurasian Jays on the ground by a dripping faucet, Spotted Flycatchers perching and zipping among the pines, and Sardinian Warblers issuing their harsh, chattering songs throughout the site. In all, it was a terrific morning of history, theater, and birding.

We departed Epidaurus at 11:00 and were back to the ship by 11:30. Since we weren't departing the dock until 12:45, we had opportunities to take in a swim along the waterfront or merely park ourselves at an outside café and enjoy a cold beverage.

By 1:00 we were back on board the ship and heading for Nafplion. Through the afternoon we were treated to sensational views of the Greek coastline. This is a rugged country and it seemed to us that the mountains that crisscross it often run right down to the sea. We saw very few of the open beaches that

most tourists enjoy, but rather gazed upon rocky shores and sheer cliffs. Small islets and rock outcrops occasionally appeared offshore of the mainland, and some of these held impressive concentrations of breeding seabirds. Toward the middle of the afternoon, we ran into hundreds of Levantine Shearwaters along with smaller numbers of Cory's Shearwaters sitting on the water and flying past the front of the boat. The viewing conditions were exceptional and anyone who wanted had no problem coming to the front of the ship and enjoying the show.

Paul delivered his first presentation late this afternoon.

An hour later we were coming into the scenic harbor of Nafplion. That night, after dinner, we were given free time to leave the ship and explore the charming town on our own.

**September 5** – A capital of ancient Greece, Nafplion is today a bustling and economically diverse city at the head of an enormous bay. It also serves as the most convenient jumping off point for many visitors who come to the ancient site of Mycenae.

We departed the ship at 7:15 this morning, which was a little earlier than the previous morning owing to the longer drive required to reach the archaeological site. Our route took us mostly due north from Nafplion, and our arrival at Mycenae coincided with the opening of the site at about 8:00. In similar fashion to the previous day, Paul and Chryssa led us through the ancient site, providing historical interpretation all the way through.

Mycenae is among the most renowned sites in all of Greece. The primary reason is that it is the place where King Agamemnon and the royal line of the Atreid dynasty are thought to have lived. For anyone interested in ancient Greece, especially those who have read *The Iliad*, the chance to see the site where Agamemnon lived and died and where the Trojan War began is very thrilling indeed. Adding to the mystique of the place is the fact that the German archaeologist Heinrich Schliemann, who oversaw excavations at Mycenae in the late 1800s, found what he thought was the death mask of Agamemnon among other incredible treasures.

Again, the birding was remarkably productive as well, as we saw a variety of interesting birds right at the entrance gate that included Eurasian Hoopoe, Little Owl, Blue Rock Thrush, and Rock Nuthatch among many others.

We departed Mycenae at 10:30 and returned to the ship. With our departure time set for 12:30, we were able to offer the group a variety of activities. Some used the time to see the town by day, where shopping and sightseeing were primary activities, while others of us went birding along the edge of Nafplion Bay at an area called Nea Kios.

The birding was very good and we ended up recording a variety of gulls, terns, wading birds, shorebirds, and even a few landbirds. Among the highlights were Gray Heron, Eurasian Curlew, Little Ringed Plover, Lesser Black-backed Gull, and Crested Lark.

With everyone back aboard by 12:30 we departed Nafplion and spent the remainder of the afternoon at sea en route to Monemvassia. Once again, we were treated to some dynamic coastal scenery that included hidden bays, towering cliffs, lonely and isolated islands, and rugged coastline. At 4:30 Weecha Crawford delivered a very excellent presentation on the geology of Greece. This is a very geologically complex part of the world, and her lecture was extremely well done. Weecha was one of our trip participants and we are very grateful for her willingness to share her knowledge and years of teaching experience to further enhance our program.

We arrived in Monemvassia around 6:30 this evening, just in time to note a few Audouin's Gulls flying around the harbor before dark.

We docked in the small marina and were soon met by a bus that provided transportation for our group up to the small byzantine-era village that dominates the massive rock of Monemvassia. After a brief walking tour, many of us elected to stay in the village for dinner while many of the rest of us returned to the ship.

*Galileo* departed Monemvassia during the night and set a course for Kythira off the far southern tip of the Peloponnesian Peninsula.

**September 6** – Arriving on deck this morning, we found ourselves rounding the southern tip of Kythira with isolated Egg Island off the starboard side of the ship. We had heard that Eleonora's Falcons nest in the vicinity of Kythira and it appeared to us that Egg Island looked like a good place to search. So we detoured to Egg Island for a fast trip around the island before continuing to Kythira. Approaching from the north we were initially greeted by nothing. Despite the appearance of excellent habitat, we did not see a single bird. But as we came around the island's backside, we suddenly began seeing falcons. After finding nary a bird for the first few minutes of our pass, we suddenly were seeing multiple pairs of falcons sitting on the rocks, coursing over the ocean, and soaring high over the island!

Eleonora's Falcon is remarkable for its late-summer nesting habits, and we were privileged to have such fabulous views of this somewhat enigmatic bird of prey. Our captain deserved recognition for his willingness to take the boat by the island twice so that everyone had a chance to see this highly sought bird.

Kythira is a remote island, but by Greek island standards it is not as heavily inhabited or visited as many of the more familiar islands, such as Mikonos or Santorini. Perhaps that quality of being comparatively less crowded and developed added to the charm of the place, but we felt right at home in the scenic port where we were docked for the day.

Departing the ship by 9, we took a bus inland in an effort to find birds. It was a breezy and beautiful day to be outside, and we enjoyed nice views of Common Buzzards in several places, in addition to a single Honey Buzzard, a Short-toed Eagle, and a high-flying Booted Eagle. We returned to the ship around mid-day and were treated to a Greek-style Bar-B-Que complete with small glasses of Ouzo.

Following lunch, we made time for rest and relaxation. Some people simply took it easy in their rooms while others made a point of going swimming and enjoying the small beach on the waterfront.

We convened again at 3:30 for another of Paul's superb lectures. By 5:00 we were ready for our final activity of the day: a short bus trip to the quaint town of Chora, which is actually the island capital of Kythira. Our time here was mostly spent visiting the Venetian fortress that was built at the southern-most tip of the island in the 1500s. From the cliff top, the views of the port and the sea far below us were astounding, and removed any doubt as to why the Venetians might have selected this site for their fortress. On the return trip we had a chance to take our time strolling past an assortment of shops, some of which were visited by our group. By 7:00 our bus was ready to transfer us back to the ship.

**September 7** – *Galileo* departed Kythira during the night and began its trip up the west side of the Peloponnese, with tiny Pylos, on the southwest corner of the peninsula, our next destination. Pylos is a picture-perfect seaside town, and it is small wonder why the ancient Greeks, and anyone else who has ever been here, were so attracted to the place. The town sits on the backside of stately Navarino Bay and

is nestled between the waterfront and hills of limestone that rise abruptly to the rear. The bay, meanwhile, is undeniably one of Greece's most beautiful locations. It is formed as a result of an already protected circular scallop in the coastline further protected by Sphacteria Island extending down from the north.

We offered an early disembarkation this morning for the more avid birders among us who wanted to go birding at Dinari Lagoon. We departed the ship at 7:15 and made our way north along the coast until we turned off on a road that brought us parallel with the north end of Navarino Bay. Dinari Lagoon is a natural area that once existed as a periodically flooded delta wetland. Due to diversion of the natural waterflow for agricultural purposes, the wetland now relies on good water management to sustain what is left of the once-vast marshes that covered the area.

We found the birding good this morning but not spectacular. Among the highlights at the edge of marshland were Woodchat Shrike, Stonechat, Eurasian Reed-Warbler, and Crested Lark; while a Lesser Gray Shrike, Whinchat, and a Moustached Warbler were the top sightings near the mouth of the lagoon.

After birding, we continued to the town to the north for a visit to the museum that holds many artifacts recovered during excavations at Nestor's Palace. We spent about an hour at the museum before retracing our route to the actual archaeological site.

The remains of Nestor's Palace occupy a scenic hilltop setting north of Pylos. Though most of the palace is long gone, the foundation remains surprisingly intact and the entire site is covered by a large shed-like structure to prevent further damage from the elements. Fine views of the sea are had from the western side of the palace complex and extensive olive groves throughout the area lend a pastoral ambience to the setting.

We spent about an hour at the site viewing the foundation and what is left of the ancient buildings. Paul and Chryssa continued with their historical interpretation, including the story of the old Argonaut king himself, who, along with his sons Antilochus and Thrasymedes fought on the side of the Greeks during the Trojan War.

We returned to the ship for lunch, which was followed by some down time so that participants could do as they pleased. Some went shopping in town, and some went swimming. Toward mid-afternoon, Paul delivered another presentation.

After the lecture we offered a return trip to Dinari Lagoon that was very well attended. We went back to the area of marshland near the where we had seen the Woodchat Shrike in the morning as we figured the area undoubtedly held some other surprises. Sure enough, we enjoyed scope views of several shorebirds, including Common Redshank and Common Greenshank, as well as Western Marsh-Harrier, Gull-billed Tern, Little Egret, and Garganey. A nearby field hosted a huge flock of Eurasian Jackdaws and a separate flock of Western Yellow Wagtails.

We returned to the ship around 6:45, which offered just enough time to clean up and have a drink before dinner!

**September 8** – After cruising north through the night from Pylos, *Galileo* arrived in the port city of Katakolo in the gray of the pre-dawn. Today's destination was the famed site of Olympia, located about 45 minutes inland at the junction of two rivers. We scheduled our disembarkation for 7:15 this morning as we wanted to ensure we arrived at the site when it opened. Olympia is among the most heavily visited of Greece's famed archaeological sites, and a place where a strategy of early arrival can pay off handsomely. In this example our arrival meant we virtually had the place to ourselves for the first hour of the day.

The attraction of Olympia stems from the fact that it is revered as the birthplace of the Olympic Games. In the ancient Greek world, it was also the greatest panhellenic sanctuary for the worship of Zeus. The first recorded Olympics took place in 776 B.C., and were held uninterrupted for the next 1,000 years.

With so much to see in the Olympia area, we allotted almost an entire day for touring the ruins complex and seeing the marvelous archaeological museum before finishing with a visit to the museum of the History of the Olympic Games of Antiquity.

Our morning at Olympia was a nice one in which we saw the most important sites, including the Temples of Hera and Zeus and the famed stadium. Both museums were superb, and the interpretive information we received was exhaustive!

The birding at Olympia is unpredictable, but we did enjoy good views of Long-tailed Tits near the site entrance, followed later by fine views of a male Common Chaffinch.

To save time, *Galileo* had departed Katakolo while we were at Olympia and circled around the northwest end of the peninsula en route to the large port city of Patra, where it was waiting for us. After we finished at Olympia, we reboarded the bus and traveled overland to Patra where we were delivered to the ship in the late afternoon. We quickly re-embarked, departed the dock, and headed back out into the Gulf of Corinth.

The remainder of the daylight hours were spent in relative bliss as we cruised eastward on a gorgeous, sun-soaked afternoon. Watching for birds from the top deck, we finally spotted our first Mediterranean Gulls of the trip flying some distance from the ship. We also saw more Cory's Shearwaters, of which we had especially good views in the sparkling afternoon light.

We maintained an easterly course for the next five or so hours until we finally arrived at Itea on the north side of the Gulf of Corinth.

**September 9** – Today was our last day together, but one on which we had a lot to look forward to! Our tour of the Peloponnese and its revered archaeological sites culminated with a visit to the mountainside ruins of Delphi.

Unlike other archaeological sites in Greece, Delphi is built on the side of a mountain. First time visitors are awed as much for the stunning natural beauty that surrounds the ruins as for the ancient buildings themselves. Behind the site, the bare limestone cliffs of the Phaidriades thrust several thousand feet up, towering over the archaeological site and museum, while to the south runs a deep and fertile river valley.

In its prime, Delphi was renowned for its wealth and reputation, attributes which grew from the site's location as hosting the most important oracle in the classical world.

Departing the ship early, we were immediately surprised to find two well-marked White Wagtails foraging on the dock. We enjoyed excellent views of the birds before boarding the bus that would take us to the archaeological site. The ride to Delphi was a highly scenic one that saw us passing through vast olive plantations in the coastal lowlands before traveling up a mountain road that offered inspiring views of Itea and the distant sea.

We arrived at the archaeological site on time to be among the day's first visitors. We spent the next 4 hours touring the site and absorbing Paul and Chryssa's voluminous interpretation. Afterward, most of us

paid a visit to the museum, which houses a rather remarkable collection of artifacts, statuary, and carvings that have been recovered from the ancient site.

Some group members walked down the hill below the main part of the site to see the spring that provided the site its water.

We returned to the ship for lunch, and at that point *Galileo* departed the harbor in preparation for transiting the remainder of the Gulf. We cruised eastward through the afternoon hours, all the time watching the sea surface become steadily flatter. Today was a very warm one in the Gulf of Corinth and the heat waves made visibility in certain directions seem a bit distorted. There were very few birds around as well, as the shearwaters and gulls from the day before had essentially disappeared.

At 2:30 we tallied the birdlist for the last time and at 3:00 we took in Paul's last presentation.

At 4:00 we sat in on a disembarkation briefing and from that point until 5:00, participants were encouraged to settle their onboard accounts.

It was about that time that we finally reached the head of the gulf in anticipation of transiting the Canal of Corinth. The canal is a 4-mile cut through the Isthmus of Corinth, linking the Gulf of Corinth to the northwest corner of the Saronic Gulf. Built between 1881 and 1893, the canal represents one of the world's great engineering feats of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Because the canal transit is an orderly affair, we had to wait our turn as other ships that had arrived ahead of us were systematically allowed to enter the canal. After a 45-minute wait, it was finally our turn! As we entered, we were immediately gripped by its narrowness. Those of us familiar with the Panama Canal had probably expected a larger body of water, yet the sheer walls that rose around us in such close quarters added a sensation of traversing a narrow canyon.

Emerging into the Saronic Gulf, we found ourselves in a highly scenic bay ringed with undeveloped hills and peppered with small islets. By this time, the sun was dropping lower in the sky and the entire bay was illuminated wherever the long afternoon rays could still reach. It was a spectacular afternoon there in the Saronic Gulf, so much so in fact that it was literally difficult to go inside for dinner.

The ship docked at the island of Aegina for the night, and, for a final act, we were permitted to leave the ship to stroll along the waterfront, look at the shops, or simply enjoy a cold drink.

**September 10** - *Galileo* departed Aegina around dawn this morning as it undertook the final 17-mile transit back to Piraeus. And so it was that as we came into dock, our circumnavigation of the Peloponnesian Peninsula had come full circle.

With the ship tied up, and the staff hard at work gathering all the baggage, it was finally time to say goodbye. After all the luggage was off the ship, we walked off *Galileo* for the last time, up the inclined walkway and onto a waiting bus that swept us all off to the airport and our departing flights home.

## **ATHENS PRE-TRIP ITINERARY**

**August 30, 2010** – Participants on the **Athens Pre-trip** to our **Greece: Birds & History** tour departed the U.S. today aboard international flights bound for Athens.

**August 31** – After a long overnight flight, people arrived in Athens throughout the morning and received transfer to our hotel, the Divani Acropolis, strategically located only a few blocks from the Acropolis. We gathered in the hotel’s spacious lobby at noon today for a welcome and orientation session in which Victor and Barry introduced themselves, and trip participants made each others’ acquaintance. Following lunch in the hotel restaurant, we departed Athens on our first group activity: a trip to Mount Parnitha on the north edge of Athens. At over 5,000 feet, Mount Parnitha is something of a high-country oasis offering cool respite from the warm lowlands.

Our trip was a productive one and allowed us to see a side of Greece that few tourists even consider. As most travelers who come to this country tend to visit the most famous sites (Acropolis, Delphi, Olympia, etc.) or most alluring sites (Greek Islands), a trip into the mountains presents an anomalous departure from the norm. Nevertheless, go to the mountains we did, and after a drive of about an hour, we arrived at the foot of Parnitha and encountered a limestone terrain blanketed in lime-green Aleppo pines. Ascending the highway, we continued all the way up to within a couple of miles of the summit. This is the zone of Grecian fir trees—thick, dark-green, and branching conifers that crown Parnitha’s highest reaches. Despite the fact that a devastating fire had scorched much of the mountain’s beloved fir forest in 2007, a surprisingly large number of trees survived the disaster. We visited a section of forest just above the burn belt and spent most of an hour seeking birds like Coal Tit and Firecrest that reside up here year-round.

Next, we turned around and made two prolonged stops in the open country that resulted from the burn. We enjoyed some excellent birding in this area, with birds like Eurasian Kestrel, Northern and Black-eared wheatears, Woodlark, Common Chaffinch, Eurasian Jay, and Spotted Flycatcher among the highlights.

We returned to Athens in the early evening and enjoyed a wonderful dinner at the Atticus restaurant, an authentically Greek establishment offering rooftop dining with marvelous views of the Parthenon by night.

**September 1** – For any visitor to Greece, particularly first-timers, a trip to the Acropolis is an essential first stop. The ancient marble temples that adorn the ancient limestone summit in the center of Athens represent the height of ancient Athenian democracy, mythology, wealth and architectural and artistic prowess. Constructed under the oversight of Pericles in the middle 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C., the temples are the ultimate expression of the Greek Classical period. While the iconic Parthenon is the chief attraction, the other temples (Athena Nike, Erechtheum, Propylae) round out what is widely considered among the most revered of the world’s ancient archaeological sites.

We departed the hotel after breakfast for a full morning tour of the Acropolis and nearby theater of Dionysus Eleutheris, which is considered the oldest theater in Greece. With Paul and Chryssa leading the way, we enjoyed a spectacular morning receiving historical interpretation as we worked our way from temple to temple before descending the Acropolis’s south face. Despite the obvious emphasis on the archaeological site, the birding was actually pretty good as well. Among the species we tallied this morning were Eurasian Kestrel, Alpine Swift, and Hooded Crow.

For lunch we went to the Plaka, situated on the northeast corner of the Acropolis, and enjoyed a spectacular prepared meal at a place called Scholarxeio. With so many wonderful food items to choose from, we had a great time feasting on a variety of authentic Greek dishes.

In the afternoon we boarded the bus and made the one-hour transit to Marathon. Situated on the coastal plain northeast of Athens, Marathon is one of history’s most important locations. It was here, in 490 B.C.,

when a badly outnumbered army of Athenians defeated an invading Persian force under the command of Darius the Great, thereby saving Athens from certain destruction. After the battle, the Greek soldiers who had been killed were buried together in a great, raised mound that still stands.

Our time in the Marathon region was divided between seeing the battlefield and birding along the coast. Our first birding area was the Olympic Rowing Club, a beautiful facility built for the 2004 Summer Olympic Games. Featuring several large water-filled impoundments lined by grasses and small bushes, this site is a surprisingly good birding area. Upon arrival we were met by a young man who is probably one of the top birders in Greece. Although we only had about an hour at the site, our time here produced sightings of some outstanding birds, including the rare Ferruginous Duck, Purple Heron, Little Ringed Plover, and a gorgeous “Black-headed” Western Yellow Wagtail. After departing the rowing center, we spent some time birding the so-called Marathon Marshes and surrounding pastures before returning to Athens. As our arrival in Athens was a little later than planned, we went straight to another Plaka-area restaurant, one with the name of Byzantino. Once again, we enjoyed a sumptuous feast.

**September 2** – While the buildings of the Acropolis may symbolize the height of Athenian democracy during the Classical period, it was the Agora where democratic values were developed, experimented with, and implemented. The Acropolis, undoubtedly resplendent with its marble columns and statuary, was the religious center for the ancient Greeks, but it was the Agora that formed the heart of the Athenian city-state. Serving as the political, judicial, and military center, the functionality of ancient Athens stemmed from events that transpired here.

The final half-day of the pre-trip entailed a walking tour of the renowned Agora and nearby museum. With Paul and Chryssa at the helm, we enjoyed a full morning of interpretation of the site’s history and architecture. The Temple of Hephaestus, with its columns and pediments, was undoubtedly the favorite sight for many, but it was the knowledge that this site hosted some of history’s most illustrious figures, including Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, that perhaps resonated most. Our reading of Pericles’ funeral oration, at the behest of Paul, was a significant enhancement to our program, and highlighted the value of traveling with a Classicist, as opposed to a more traditional historian.

Beyond its historical attractions, the Agora is also a bona-fide trap for migrating birds. The diversity of trees and other ornamental plantings here allows the Agora to function as a veritable oasis of green in a sprawling sun-drenched city of rock and concrete. A surprising number of birds may be found here during the spring and fall migratory periods, and as we worked our way through the site, the birding proved better than expected. A collection of exciting migrant species was found, and when matched with the resident species, rounded out an impressive list for the morning. Highlights included Spotted and Collared flycatchers, Common Redstart, Eurasian Magpie, Eurasian Blackbird, and Sardinian, Wood, and Willow warblers.

Following an interpreted walk through the museum, we returned to the Divani for lunch. Our arrival at the hotel marked the conclusion of the pre-trip.

## **BIRDS**

The taxonomic order and common and scientific names used in these birdlists are those given by

J. F. Clements, *Birds of the World: A Checklist*, 6<sup>th</sup> edition, 2007, with all updates through December 2009. The Clements system of taxonomy is applied to all VENT checklists and birdlists out the AOU area (North America).

### **Greece: Birds & History Cruise A Circumnavigation of the Peloponnese**

**Shearwaters (*Procellariidae*)** – The Mediterranean Sea is inhabited by two shearwater species: Cory's and Levantine shearwaters. Both species breed on islands throughout the region, and both are localized, but fairly common spring and summer residents around Greece. Cory's is the larger of the two species and is easily told by size; plumage; bill size, color, and shape; and flight style. Levantine Shearwater is a smaller bird whose range is mostly restricted to the eastern Mediterranean and Black seas. It is a small, fast flying, dark brown and white shearwater that often appears in large numbers around nesting colonies. Both species breed in the spring, although the nesting cycle of the Levantine Shearwater begins a couple of months earlier than that of Cory's. Cory's Shearwater disperses widely into the Atlantic Ocean in post-breeding dispersal, while Levantine Shearwater is largely resident with some local movement occurring. Excellent views of both species were enjoyed by all during afternoon cruises around the peninsula.

**Cory's Shearwater (*Calonectris diomedea*)** – Cory's Shearwaters were seen on five different days, with the majority of birds seen on September 4 and 8. The afternoon of the 4<sup>th</sup> found us at sea after a morning tour of Epidauros. Cruising south by southwest, we were en route to our next destination, Mycenae, when we began seeing both shearwater species around the boat. We noted between 20-30 Cory's among the much more numerous Levantines, with excellent views obtained of the critical differentiating field marks. The larger size, longer wings, slower flight style, and yellow bill were all seen well as a number of individuals passed close by the boat. More were seen the following afternoon on approach to Monemvassia, and then again the day after that while en route to Kythira. On the afternoon of the 8<sup>th</sup>, we noted several dozen more at very close range in the Gulf of Corinth while cruising east of Patra.

**Levantine Shearwater (*Puffinus yelkouan*)** – Levantine Shearwater is a regionally endemic bird whose occurrence is not always easy to predict. Obviously it is much easier to find around known breeding colonies, so the appearance of a couple of hundred birds on the afternoon of the 4<sup>th</sup> while en route to Mycenae was very gratifying. We enjoyed excellent looks at birds flying and perched on the sea surface for most of the afternoon as we made our way past an unseen breeding site. The critical field marks for this bird include a small size, dark brown and white plumage, and rapid flight style, all of which were seen with ease.

#### **Swans & Ducks (*Anatidae*)**

**Mute Swan (*Cygnus olor*)** – A lone individual at Dinari Lagoon on the afternoon of September 7 was the only one seen. Mute Swan is a bird native to Europe. In Greece, the nearest nesting area seems to be in the central part of the country, so the individual at Dinari probably represented either a wandering unmated adult or a dispersing immature bird. Unfortunately, the bird was not very close to us.

**Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*)** – As in the United States, Mallard is among the most widespread of European waterfowl. On the afternoon of September 7, we saw a distant flock of Mallards on the water and in flight over the far end of Dinari Lagoon. These birds were very far away from us, but the white bordered speculum and size were diagnostic of the species. Mallards breed in southern Greece, and almost certainly at this location.

**Green-winged Teal (*Anas crecca*)** – A couple of basic plumage males/females at Dinari Lagoon on the afternoon of September 7 represented early fall migrants from the north. Green-winged Teal breeds commonly from northern, central, and eastern Europe east across Asia and all the way into North America. For many years, ornithologists have expressed differing opinions on the taxonomic status of Green-winged Teal. Several subspecific populations are currently recognized, but some authorities feel the differences between European and North American birds warrant a so-called species split. While all populations fall under the “Green-winged Teal” umbrella, the European birds are often referred to as “Eurasian Teal” or “Common Teal.”

**Garganey (*Anas querquedula*)** – A small flock of basic plumaged birds was seen at Dinari Lagoon on the afternoon of September 7. Like the preceding species, these birds represented early migrants from the north. Unfortunately, they were seen at great distance, which thereby diminished the quality of the sighting. Through the telescope we were able to see the pale supercilium and dark eyeline that is distinctive in this species. Garganey breeds in central and northern Europe and winters in Africa.

### **Cormorants (*Phalacrocoracidae*)**

**Great Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*)** – A single bird around the largest body of water at Dinari Lagoon on the morning of September 7 was the only one seen. Great Cormorant is purely a wintering species in far southern Greece, and our bird was either a very early winter arrival or, possibly, an oversummering adult bird that did not breed.

**European Shag (*Phalacrocorax aristotelis*)** – The European Shag is something of a Great Cormorant look-alike, but closer inspection reveals the shag to be a smaller species with a smaller and thinner bill and a more rounded head. Most European birds breed in colonies along the outer Atlantic coast, from Scandinavia to North Africa; however, sizeable breeding colonies also exist in the northern Aegean Sea. We saw shags on September 3, 4, and 5, but the best sighting was of the large colony of birds visible on a small offshore islet on the very first afternoon while sailing from Piraeus to Epidaurus.

### **Hérons & Egrets (*Ardeidae*)**

**Gray Heron (*Ardea cinerea*)** – This, the European counterpart of our Great Blue Heron, is a fairly common and widespread bird that may turn up anywhere. We saw between 6-10 individuals along the edge of Nafplion Bay late in the morning on September 5 after touring Mycenae. One or two others were seen on September 7 at Dinari Lagoon.

**Great Egret (*Ardea alba*)** – A single bird at Dinari Lagoon on September 7 was unusual in that it seemed south of its mapped range (according to the field guide). However, the habitat appeared ideal for this species and the appearance of an early wandering individual at such a site as this is entirely plausible. This bird represented the European subspecies *alba*.

**Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*)** – This, the European counterpart of our Snowy Egret, is a common breeding resident of parts of central and southern Europe. The dozen or so individuals we saw between Nafplion Bay on September 5 and Dinari Lagoon on September 7 were clearly migrating birds bound for Africa.

### **Storks (*Ciconiidae*)**

[**White Stork** (*Ciconia ciconia*) – During the excitement surrounding the Eleonora's Falcon sightings off Kythira on the morning of September 6, Keith Parker saw a high flying flock of large long-legged white birds that were probably (but not certainly!) this species.]

### **Hawks & Eagles (*Accipitridae*)**

**European Honey-buzzard** (*Pernis apivorus*) – A single bird soaring with several Common Buzzards on Kythira on the morning of September 6 was the only one seen. Honey Buzzard is a localized breeder in southern Greece and a common migrant a little later in the fall. It is NOT a bird that is easily separated from the far more numerous Common Buzzard, and one must look at wing size, and tail and head shapes for positive identification.

**Short-toed Eagle** (*Circaetus gallicus*) – The Short-toed Eagle is one of the great birds of prey of southeastern Europe. It is separated from other European raptors by its brown-hooded appearance and the presence of beautiful barring and speckling that covers the chest and extends to the underwings. Powerful in stature, the bird soars on long and very broad wings. This species is a snake-eating specialist of dry and rocky country. We had tremendous views of a soaring bird over the ancient theater of Epidaurus on the morning of September 4.

**Booted Eagle** (*Hieraetus pennatus*) – A high and fast flying raptor seen on Kythira on the morning of September 6 was identified as a dark morph Booted Eagle. The uniformly brown plumage and overall size eliminated Common and Honey buzzards, while immature Bonelli's Eagle was discounted based on size and wing and tail shapes. Eurasian Marsh-Harrier was similarly eliminated based on that species' wing and tail structure. Unfortunately, this sighting was neither satisfying nor of a particularly high quality. Undoubtedly, some of us were frustrated at seeing such an alluring bird of prey so high and far away.

**Eurasian Marsh-Harrier** (*Circus aeruginosus*) – A female bird over Dinari Lagoon on the afternoon of September 7 was the only one seen. For those making the afternoon trip to this site, the reward was very good views of a flying bird over the marshes on the opposite side of the lagoon.

**Common Buzzard** (*Buteo buteo*) – This is Europe's most common bird of prey, and we saw it every day from September 5-9. Learning European raptors is not easy, given the diversity of birds of prey of that continent and the variability that prevails among many species. However, one of the first steps in gaining familiarity with that group of birds is learning to identify the Common Buzzard, inclusive of light and dark color morphs.

### **Falcons (*Falconidae*)**

**Eurasian Kestrel** (*Falco tinnunculus*) – Eurasian Kestrel is a fairly common resident bird around cities and archaeological sites throughout southern Greece. We saw kestrels on the 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> at Kythira, Dinari Lagoon, and Delphi respectively.

**Eleonora's Falcon** (*Falco eleonora*) – Our success in finding Eleonora's Falcon was possibly the trip's top birding highlight. We enjoyed marvelous views of 20 or more birds around Egg Rock offshore of Kythira on the morning of September 6. Eleonora's Falcon is very different than other European birds of prey in that it is a colonially nesting species whose world breeding range includes the islands of the Mediterranean Sea and far northwest Africa. This bird has evolved so that its nesting cycle coincides with the annual autumn bird migration. At the end of August and early September, a time when European landbirds are migrating south toward African wintering grounds and passing over the Mediterranean, the falcons fly over the surrounding sea and pick off migrating birds on the wing. Eleonora's Falcons

typically arrive at their breeding sites in May, favoring isolated islands or offshore rocks characterized by tall, sheer-sided cliffs. Nesting begins in August and young are out and being fed by early September. Eleonora's Falcons depart their breeding grounds in October and migrate to southern Africa for the winter.

Our encounter with this species was very memorable in that once we began seeing birds, on the lee side of Egg Rock, our captain graciously made two long slow passes, which enabled us to see and study light and dark morph birds as well as numerous flying and perched birds at length. Some individuals were seen coursing across the surface of the sea, while others were perched at nest sites.

### **Coots (*Rallidae*)**

**Eurasian Coot (*Fulica atra*)** – Very similar in appearance to our American Coot, the Eurasian Coot is a widespread resident bird across almost the whole of Europe. We saw about half a dozen individuals at Dinari Lagoon on September 7.

### **Plovers & Lapwings (*Charadriidae*)**

**Black-bellied Plover (*Pluvialis squatarola*)** – After visiting the archaeological site at Mycenae on the morning of September 5, a birding stop along Nafplion Bay produced a handful of migrating Black-bellied Plovers. Most of the birds were already in basic plumage, while some individuals did display some remaining blotchy black coloration against otherwise gray underparts.

**Little Ringed Plover (*Charadrius dubius*)** - After visiting the archaeological site at Mycenae on the morning of September 5, a birding stop along Nafplion Bay revealed about half a dozen Little Ringed Plovers in the salt marsh about 50 yards in back of the waterfront. Little Ringed is a breeding species during the summertime at this location, so it's not certain whether our birds were migrants from the north, or merely individuals that had not yet departed. Little Ringed Plover is told from Common Ringed Plover, another migrant species, by its yellow-pink legs, yellow orbital ring, and sharper dark bill.

**Snowy Plover (*Charadrius alexandrinus*)** - After visiting the archaeological site at Mycenae on the morning of September 5, a birding stop along Nafplion Bay produced one or two Snowy Plovers among the more numerous Little Ringed Plovers. Snowy Plover, also called Kentish Plover in Europe, is a widespread but localized breeding species on the continent. As southern Greece is not included in the bird's breeding range, the individuals we saw were clearly migrants from the north.

### **Stilts (*Recurvirostridae*)**

**Black-winged Stilt (*Himantopus himantopus*)** – On September 7, our group made two visits to Dinari Lagoon north of Pilos. A single female bird among the other shorebird species present was the only one seen.

### **Sandpipers & Allies (*Scolopacidae*)**

**Eurasian Curlew (*Neminius arquata*)** – Nafplion Bay on the east side of the Peloponnesian Peninsula offers an excellent combination of shoreline, mudflats, and saltmarsh that migrating birds find attractive. In a region nearly devoid of good shorebird habitat, this ecosystem, by default, offers some of the best opportunities in all of southern Greece to see a variety of waders, plovers, sandpipers, gulls, and terns. Late in the morning of September 5, after returning from a tour of the archaeological site of Mycenae, we stopped at Nafplion Bay to sample the collection of birds gathered along the bay's north side. Among the

interesting finds were a couple of handsome Eurasian Curlews along the shoreline. Large and brownish with a long and decurved bill, these birds cut a fine site as they waded nervously among the other birds. On a couple of occasions, we were treated to the sight of birds in flight, in which the white wedge that marks the bird's topside was clearly visible.

**Common Sandpiper (*Actitis hypoleucos*)** – We found a single Common Sandpiper at Dinari Lagoon north of Pilos on the morning of September 7. Common Sandpiper is essentially a European replacement of our Spotted Sandpiper. It is a common passage migrant throughout much of Europe and may be seen in a variety of freshwater habitats.

**Common Greenshank (*Tringa nebularia*)** – Several birds at Dinari Lagoon on the afternoon of September 7 were eventually seen well by all. Common Greenshank is one of the largest sandpiper species and certainly the largest member of the genus *Tringa*. It is differentiated from other shorebirds by its large size, long greenish legs (shanks), long and slightly upcurved bill, and a white wedge running from the tail to the center of the back.

**Common Redshank (*Tringa tetanus*)** – The Common Redshank is a common migrant bird in the southern and eastern portions of Europe. It is a lovely species whose combination of orange-red legs and striking black and white wings readily separate it from other shorebirds within the genus *Tringa*. We enjoyed pretty good scope views of 10 or so birds at Dinari Lagoon north of Pilos on the afternoon of September 7. For added measure, we had side-by-side comparisons with the former species.

### **Gulls & Terns (*Laridae*)**

**Black-headed Gull (*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*)** – Black-headed Gull is the most commonly occurring “non-Yellow-legged Gull” in Greece. It is very similar in appearance to the Bonaparte's Gull of North America, but is separated from that species by larger size and the dusting of dark gray on the underwings. Black-headed Gulls breed widely across Europe and are common wintertime residents in the Aegean and northern Mediterranean regions. Not to be fooled by the bird's name, post-breeding individuals lose the black plumage on their heads following the breeding cycle. We saw at least several individuals in every major port we visited.

**Mediterranean Gull (*Ichthyaetus melanocephalus*)** – This species is a localized and colonial nesting bird in parts of central and southern Europe. They migrate to the northern Mediterranean in winter where they may be fairly common around major ports. Early September marks the time when the first autumn/winter birds of the season begin to appear, but it wasn't until we reached the Gulf of Corinth on September 8 that we finally caught up with this bird. We saw about half a dozen individuals just offshore of Patra not long after *Galileo* departed the dock. This species bears something of a resemblance to the more numerous Black-headed Gulls, but the stouter size and uniformly grayish-white plumage allowed us to separate this bird from the previous species. While we had looks at a couple of fairly close fly-by individuals, most of the birds were simply not close enough for us to observe the important field marks.

**Audouin's Gull (*Ichthyaetus audouinii*)** – The Audouin's Gull is a specialty bird of the Mediterranean region whose occurrence on the Greek coast is not easy to predict. It nests colonially or singly throughout the eastern Mediterranean and southern Aegean seas, but typically is found only locally on isolated offshore rocks. This gull is a subtly handsome species identified by a white head, red bill, and olive-green legs. The only individuals we saw were a handful of immatures and adults in flight at the marina of Monemvassia late on the afternoon of September 5. Unfortunately, few of these birds were seen exceptionally well. After getting off the ship at the dock, and with the light fading, we transited up the narrow road that led to the Byzantine-era village above the marina. Those in the first vehicle were

fortunate to see an adult bird cruising over the sea not far below where the road terminated at the village gate. At one time, Audouin's Gull was considered among the world's rarest gull species, and though protection and propagation efforts have allowed the species to increase in numbers, it is still considered a threatened bird.

**Yellow-legged Gull (*Larus cachinnans*)** – Yellow-legged Gull is the most common and widespread gull in the Mediterranean region. It is a very large species that is closely related to our Herring Gull, and one that nests in a variety of natural and man-made environments. This bird was seen every day of the trip.

**Lesser Black-backed Gull (*Larus fuscus*)** – Lesser Black-backed Gulls nest in far northern and western Europe before moving to the Middle East and Africa in the autumn. We were somewhat surprised to record about half a dozen birds among various ports on September 5, 6, and 8. All of the birds we saw were adults, and although these individuals most likely represented early migrants, it is possible that some of them were over-summering individuals. The best views we enjoyed were of a pair along the bay at Nafplion on the 5<sup>th</sup>, although two birds in the scenic harbor at Kythira the next day were also seen well.

**Gull-billed Tern (*Sterna nilotica*)** – This species breeds locally in southeastern Europe in a variety of habitats, but winters in Africa. The lone individual we saw at Dinari Lagoon on the afternoon of September 7 was a migrant bird, in addition to being the only one seen. And yes, this is the same Gull-billed Tern that occurs in North America.

**Common Tern (*Sterna hirundo*)** – Common Tern is a common breeding species across much of Europe, but winters in western and southern Africa. The half dozen or so birds we saw along Nafplion Bay on the morning of September 5 represented migrating birds. Scope views revealed the birds to be post-breeding adults.

**Black Tern (*Chilodonia niger*)** – The Black Tern is another species found all over the world. Two birds over Dinari Lagoon on the morning of September 5 were clearly migrants headed for African wintering grounds.

### **Pigeons & Doves (*Columbidae*)**

**Rock Pigeon (*Columba livia*)** – Rock Pigeons, or “City Pigeons,” are absurdly common and tame in the Athens area and other urban parts of Greece. Seen every day of the trip.

**Eurasian Collared-Dove (*Streptopelia decaocto*)** – Also seen every day of the trip, collared-doves are ubiquitous all over southern Greece.

### **Owls (*Strigidae*)**

**Little Owl (*Athene noctua*)** – Little Owl is a common resident species across most of Europe, including all of mainland Greece. Unlike almost all of Europe's other owl species, this one is largely diurnal, which is wonderful for the observer, as the species is often detected in the middle of the day. Shy but not elusive, the Little Owl is often right at home in the vicinity of human habitation. A member of the genus *Athene*, Little Owl is closely related to our Burrowing Owl. We had superb views of a conspicuous pair at the archaeological site at Mycenae on the morning of September 5.

### **Swifts (*Apodidae*)**

**Alpine Swift (*Apus melba*)** – This is by far Europe’s largest swift species. It occurs in a variety of habitats and is often remarkably conspicuous around towns and archaeological sites. We only saw one bird during the cruise, a single bird high overhead with Common Swifts on Kythira on the morning of September 6.

**Common Swift (*Apus apus*)** – For a very common and widespread species, we saw remarkably few on this trip. A group of several birds beyond the harbor at Kythira on the morning of September 6 were basically the only ones seen. A couple of individuals were seen over Piraeus early in the morning of September 10 as *Galileo* was coming into the harbor.

**Pallid Swift (*Apus pallidus*)** – Pallid Swift is a close relative of Common Swift, and, in fact, is often very difficult to distinguish from that species. It is slightly browner in appearance than the straightforward black of Common Swift, while a paler throat and secondary feathers are the primary means for visual separation of the two species. Both species nest around the rim of the Mediterranean, but Pallid Swift is far more restricted in distribution and never seems far from water. We had one individual on this trip. A single bird flew by the back of the ship while it was at anchor in the harbor of Nafplion on the morning of September 5.

### **Kingfishers (*Alcedinidae*)**

**Common Kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*)** – A gem of a bird, we had scope views of a couple of active individuals at Dinari Lagoon on September 7.

### **Hoopoes (*Upupidae*)**

**Eurasian Hoopoe (*Upupa epops*)** – One of the most charismatic and distinctly marked birds of Europe and the Middle East, the Hoopoe is always high on everyone’s wish list. We had wonderful views of a bird foraging on the ground at the entrance to the archaeological site at Mycenae on the morning of September 5.

### **Shrikes (*Laniidae*)**

**Red-backed Shrike (*Lanius collurio*)** – Red-backed Shrike is a fairly common summer resident bird and common passage migrant in the autumn. We saw a couple of immature birds, and possibly an adult, at Dinari Lagoon north of Pilos on the morning of September 7. While adults present a striking site, the immature birds possess a subtle beauty that is easily overlooked by the casual observer. Closer inspection, however, reveals a delicately marked bird characterized by soft vermiculations on the breast and a mixture of rufous, black, and gray scalloping and barring on the backside.

**Lesser Gray Shrike (*Lanius minor*)** – Somewhat like our Loggerhead Shrike, the Lesser Gray is a largish shrike that displays the “classic” black and white appearance. Masked and with a long tail, this species is easily distinguished, even at long range. We had excellent views of a foraging bird at Dinari Lagoon on the morning of September 7.

**Woodchat Shrike (*Lanius senator*)** – Woodchat Shrike, like the Red-backed Shrike, is a smaller member of the widespread Old World shrikes. Adult birds are unmistakable, but immatures can present a difficult identification challenge if not seen well. Woodchat is separated from Red-backed Shrike by the browner and grayer tones to the back feathering (unlike the obviously rufous coloration to similar feathers on Red-backed Shrike) and by the comparatively pale coloration to the scapulars. We had a single immature bird in the scope at Dinari Lagoon on the morning of September 7.

## **Crows, Jays & Magpies (*Corvidae*)**

**Eurasian Jay (*Garrulus glandarius*)** – The classic “jay” of the Old World, we saw individuals on September 4, 7, and 9. Interestingly, our birds always seemed to be around archaeological sites, as demonstrated by the good views we had of many birds at Epidaurus on the 4<sup>th</sup>. Despite the fact that this is a common and widespread species, Eurasian Jay is a very lovely bird that is easy to admire. Field marks include a creamy-buff coloration, blue at the corner of the wing, a black mustache, white rump, and a large size. For people new to birding in Europe, seeing this bird is always an exciting and highly anticipated experience.

**Eurasian Magpie (*Pica pica*)** – Eurasian Magpie is nearly identical to our Black-billed Magpie, and was in fact considered conspecific with that species until about 7 years ago. We saw magpies easily every day of the trip except for the 6<sup>th</sup>.

**Eurasian Jackdaw (*Corvus monedula*)** – A compact and highly gregarious Eurasian *corvid*, Jackdaws are a common site across much of its European range. An enormous flock of about 300 birds near Dinari Lagoon on the afternoon of September 7 were the only ones seen.

**Hooded Crow (*Coris cornux*)** – An attractive and highly visible species, we encountered Hooded Crows every day of the trip.

**Common Raven (*Corvus corax*)** – Common Raven occurs across the entire northern hemisphere. We saw flying individuals very well at Kythira on the 6<sup>th</sup>, with other individuals at Delphi several days later.

## **Larks (*Alaudidae*)**

**Crested Lark (*Galerida cristata*)** – Crested Lark is the most common and widely distributed species in the lowlands of southeastern Europe. Adaptable to a diversity of habitats, it is as much at home in cut fields as it is along sun-baked salt pans. We had very good looks at a couple of birds along the edge of Nafplion Bay on September 5, while several others were seen well in the dry saltmarsh at Dinari Lagoon two days later.

## **Swallows (*Hirundinidae*)**

**Bank Swallow (*Riparia riparia*)** – Among the many Barn Swallows in the air over Olympia on September 8, were a couple of Bank Swallows. Our birds could have been either late departing summer residents or migrating birds from the north. This is the same Bank Swallow we have in North America, but an interesting footnote to our sighting is that the bird was formerly referred to as Sand Martin.

**Eurasian Crag-Martin (*Ptyonoprogne rupestris*)** – A southern European specialty species, Eurasian Crag-Martin is a rather inconspicuous yet surprisingly attractive bird. It is a fairly common resident at Delphi and can often be seen soaring over the archaeological site or against the high cliffs above. On the day of our visit, we noted several birds high against the cliff face around mid morning.

**Barn Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*)** – Barn Swallows were seen on three days, with the best views obtained at Olympia where the bird was common. Unlike the creamy orange bellied appearance of our North American birds, Eurasian birds are white below.

**Common House Martin (*Delichon urbicum*)** – One or two were seen among the ubiquitous Barn Swallows at Olympia on September 8. House Martins are generally widespread and common throughout much of Europe as breeding birds and as migrants, which explains my surprise that we didn't see more!

### **Chickadees & Tits (*Paridae*)**

**Sombre Tit (*Poecile lugubris*)** – The morning of September 4 was a “tit bonanza” at Epidaurus, with three species seen. Sombre Tit is more of a dry country inclined species than either Great or Blue tits and is typically much harder to find. The area around the archaeological site apparently provides proper habitat, however, seeing as how a single individual was seen well by several people.

**Great Tit (*Parus major*)** – Great Tit is a very successful and attractive little bird that is capable of turning up in almost any type of habitat. We enjoyed superb looks at Epidaurus, Olympia, and Delphi on September 3, 8, and 9. This species is larger than the other tits, and unlike those species, this one possesses a vertical black band that runs the length of the belly from the throat to the lower belly.

**Eurasian Blue Tit (*Cyanistes caeruleus*)** – This is a common little bird across much of Europe, and a species typically found in parks, yards, and gardens. A few were seen outside Epidaurus on the morning of the 4<sup>th</sup>, while others were seen at Olympia on the 8<sup>th</sup> and Delphi on the 9<sup>th</sup>. Without question, our highest quality sightings occurred at Delphi when we, as a group, observed a single, alert individual hopping in the branches of a small bare tree just inside the entrance gate.

### **Long-tailed Tits (*Aegithalidae*)**

**Long-tailed Tit (*Aegithalos caudatus*)** – We encountered a fairly confiding flock at the entrance area of Olympia on September 8. Improbably, we found these birds after disembarking the bus immediately upon our arrival at the archaeological site. Long-tailed Tit is a very attractive grayish white bird with a pink and black back. Its long tail readily distinguishes it from other members of the tit family.

### **Nuthatches (*Sittidae*)**

**Rock Nuthatch (*Sitta neumayer*)** – The shrill cries and ringing calls of the Rock Nuthatch are an unforgettable attribute of a number of Greece's archaeological sites. Equally at home among ancient temples and fortification walls as it is among boulders and rugged hillsides, this little bird packs a ton of charisma into a diminutive body. We enjoyed many wonderful views of this little bird at Mycenae on the morning of the 5<sup>th</sup>, and again at Delphi on the 9<sup>th</sup>.

### **Creepers (*Certhiidae*)**

**Short-toed Tree-Creeper (*Certhia brachydactyla*)** – A single bird spotted by Keith Parker at Olympia on the morning of the 8<sup>th</sup> was the only one seen. Short-toed Tree-Creeper is told from Eurasian Tree-Creeper by voice and a couple of subtle field marks. It is the only creeper that occurs on the Peloponnesian Peninsula, which helps in identification. The tree-creepers are essentially Eurasian replacements of our Brown Creeper.

### **Wrens (*Troglodytidae*)**

**Winter Wren (*Troglodytes troglodytes*)** – A single, unobtrusive bird in the leaf-litter at the spring at Delphi on September 9 was seen by only a couple of people.

## **Leaf Warblers (*Phylloscopidae*)**

**Willow Warbler (*Phylloscopus trochilus*)** – A widespread breeding species of central and northern Europe, Willow Warbler is a very common and frequently encountered migrant on the southern edge of the continent in autumn. It is distinguished from other warblers by its dull greenish back, pale yellow throat, pale legs, and overall drab appearance. We saw several individuals at Epidaurus on September 4, and a couple others by the spring at Delphi on the 9<sup>th</sup>.

**Wood Warbler (*Phylloscopus sibilatrix*)** – The Wood Warbler is somewhat similar to the Willow Warbler, but a brighter green back and bright yellow throat contrasting with a white belly are usually good field marks for separating this species from Willow Warbler. We had good looks at a migrating bird in the pine forest at Epidaurus on the 4<sup>th</sup> and another at the spring at Delphi on the 9<sup>th</sup>.

**Reed-Warblers & Allies (*Acrocephalidae*)** - Warblers of the genus *Acrocephalus* are marsh-loving species whose preferred habitats are dense reeds and tall riverside grasses. They are powerful songsters, yet fairly inconspicuous from a visual perspective. In migration they are often difficult to identify, which is attributable to a lack of obvious field marks on most species in combination with ultra-furtive habits in nearly all species. Identifying these birds requires good views of subtle field marks.

**Icterine Warbler (*Hippolais icterina*)** – Icterine Warbler is a fairly common, but never abundant, autumn migrant in southern Europe. It is larger than either Willow or Wood warblers, and is told from those species by its evenly yellow appearance, plainer face and long bill with a pale lower mandible. One was seen by only a couple of us at Olympia on the morning of the 8<sup>th</sup>, while a couple more of us caught up with one at the spring at Delphi on the 9<sup>th</sup>.

**Moustached Warbler (*Acrocephalus melanopogon*)** – The discovery of a single bird at Dinari Lagoon on the morning of September 7 was remarkable mostly because we had a heck of a time properly identifying it. Victor initially found the bird in some low bushes that lined a canal by the main part of the lagoon, but after getting everyone else on the place where he first found it, the bird proved elusive and difficult to observe. Peering through low bushes, we were able to see the bird as it foraged and hid only inches off the ground. To be truthful, I initially thought the bird was an Aquatic Warbler, which would be exceedingly rare for this area, but it was our great fortune that Sam Naifeh had his camera with him and was able to obtain photographs that would later prove definitive. Back on board the ship, we studied images of the bird on Sam's computer and were able to easily discern the important field marks that determined the bird's identification. Foremost among these was the conspicuous pale supercilium (eyeline) and narrow black moustachial stripe that bordered the leading edge of the bird's cheek.

**Eurasian Reed-Warbler (*Acrocephalus scirpaceus*)** – We had distant, but high quality scope views of a pair of perched individuals at the end of a pasture at Dinari Lagoon on the morning of September 7. Eurasian Reed-Warbler is a common summer resident in Greece, and these birds likely represented a pair that had not yet migrated. The good views we had were probably attributable to the fact that the birds were sunning themselves on an exposed perch on what was a memorably warm morning.

## **Grassbirds & Allies (*Megaluridae*)**

**Zitting Cisticola (*Cisticola juncidis*)** – The only *cisticola* in Europe, Zitting's Cisticola is actually a common and widespread bird in marsh habitat across southern and western Europe. It is recognized by its tiny size, long tail, striped back and crown, and weak flight. We had numerous good views of perched and flying birds in the marshes at Dinari Lagoon on September 7.

## Old World Warblers (*Sylviidae*)

**Blackcap (*Sylvia atricapilla*)** – A pair of Blackcaps at the spring at Delphi on September 9 were the only ones seen. Blackcap is a handsome and easily identified warbler that reaches southern Greece as a passage migrant and wintering bird. It is a shame that only a few people got to see this one.

**Greater Whitethroat (*Sylvia communis*)** – Greater Whitethroat is one of the most common and widely distributed European Warblers. In migration it may be encountered almost anywhere. We had a single bird perched in the open in the same place as the Eurasian Reed-Warblers at Dinari Lagoon on the morning of September 7. Through the scope we could easily note the rusty feather edges on the bird's folded wing.

**Sardinian Warbler (*Sylvia melanocephala*)** – This is a very common permanent resident all over southern Greece. It occurs practically anywhere one finds vegetation, even in places where the plant community consists entirely of imported trees! A handsome bird, the male is dark gray on the back and breast with a white throat, extensively black cap, and bold red eyering. We had fine views of Sardinians almost every day of the trip, including at all major archaeological sites.

**Subalpine Warbler (*Sylvia conspicillata*)** – The Subalpine Warbler is among the loveliest of European warblers. Unfortunately, only one was seen by one or two people at Epidaurus on the morning of September 4.

## Old World Flycatchers (*Muscicapidae*)

**Spotted Flycatcher (*Muscicapa striata*)** – Spotted Flycatcher is one of the most common and widespread of European migrant birds. We enjoyed excellent views of many birds at Epidaurus on September 4, Mycenae on the 5<sup>th</sup>, Olympia on the 8<sup>th</sup>, and at Delphi on the 9<sup>th</sup>. It was a banner trip for this bird.

**European Pied Flycatcher (*Ficedula hypoleuca*)** – The only individual seen was a well-marked individual studied at length in the bushes at Epidaurus on the morning of the 4<sup>th</sup>. This species is not always easy to tell from the very similar Collared Flycatcher. Identification is based on the pattern and distribution of white in the wings and tail.

**Collared Flycatcher (*Ficedula albicollis*)** – A well-described individual at Delphi on September 9<sup>th</sup> was probably this species.

**European Robin (*Erithacus rubecula*)** – Those of us who walked down to the spring at Delphi on the morning of September 9 were treated to a lovely, orange-breasted European Robin perching quietly on the ground and fence in front of the spring. Robin is typically a common and frequently encountered bird throughout much of Europe, but this trip proved slim pickings for this species.

**Common Redstart (*Phoenicurus phoenicurus*)** – A single migrant female was noted in the vicinity of the spring at Delphi on September 9. Not seen by more than a few of us.

**Northern Wheatear (*Oenanthe oenanthe*)** – Occurring across the entire European continent, Northern Wheatear is a familiar bird wherever appropriate habitat is found. Wheatears are generally open country species with a predilection for large rocks and rugged hillsides, where they hunt for insects. Female and immature plumages of this species can be confused with the following species, but Northern Wheatear always shows at least a hint of white supercilium (eyebrow) in all plumages whereas Black-eared

Wheatear does not. We saw one adult female bird at Mycenae on the morning of September 5 and an immature at Delphi on the 9<sup>th</sup>.

**Black-eared Wheatear (*Oenanthe hispanica*)** – Black-eared Wheatear is one of Europe’s most striking birds. It is far less widespread than Northern Wheatear, being restricted to the southern tier of the continent. It occurs in variety of situations, but barren rocky hillsides, boulder-strewn grasslands, and even archaeological sites are typical habitats where the bird may be found. We had wonderful views of adult males, females, and immature at Mycenae and Delphi.

**Whinchat (*Saxicola rubetra*)** – Whinchats do not breed in far southern Greece, yet they are a commonly encountered autumn migrant. Unlike the similar Stonechat, Whinchats are boldly streaked on the back and crown and display a prominent white eyebrow. We had scope views of several birds at Dinari Lagoon on the morning of September 7.

**Stonechat (*Saxicola torquatus*)** – Stonechat is another widespread European bird that is only a summertime resident in the north of its range and a year-round resident in the southern part. It is separated from Whinchat in all plumages by a black head in male birds and a dusky headed appearance in females and immatures. We enjoyed terrific scope views of a couple of handsome individuals in the dry field at Dinari Lagoon on the morning September 7.

#### **Thrushes & Allies (*Turdidae*)**

**Blue Rock-Thrush (*Monticola solitarius*)** – This species breeds in a variety of habitats from sea level to middle elevations. It prefers dry and open country where rocky slopes, boulder-strewn ravines, and rock outcrops are found. Interestingly, many of Greece’s archaeological sites provide similar habitat, so it is not unusual to find these birds lurking around the ancient temples and fortification walls of some of the country’s best-known sites. We had very good views of this bird at Mycenae and the island of Kythira, but it was at Delphi where we had close encounters with several individuals.

**Eurasian Blackbird (*Turdus merula*)** – Although a common and widespread bird through much of Europe, we saw surprisingly few on this trip. Small numbers were seen between Epidaurus on September 4<sup>th</sup>, Mycenae on the 5<sup>th</sup>, and at Olympia on the 8<sup>th</sup>. Eurasian Blackbird is really not a blackbird at all, but rather a member of the thrush family that includes American Robin.

**Wagtails & Pipits (*Motacillidae*)** – The wagtails are a very widespread group of insect eating birds that may be found in a variety of open country habitats as well as cities and towns. As a group they are beautiful birds that tend to be colored either black and white or yellow and gray. They display nervous behavior with short bursts of flight and continual tail bobbing. Because the wagtails are highly migratory, they are capable of long flights.

**White Wagtail (*Motacilla alba*)** – We enjoyed close views of several striking males on the dock in the harbor at Itea on the morning of September 9. This was the subspecies *alba*.

**Western Yellow Wagtail (*Motacilla flava*)** – On the afternoon of September 9 we made a return visit to Dinari Lagoon north of Pilos. Just before the entrance to the preserve we stopped at a freshly cut alfalfa field where we located a continually shifting and nervous group of wagtails. We estimated the number to be over 100, but getting good views of individual birds was a challenge. Through use of the spotting scope, everyone was eventually able to gain satisfactory views. Most of the birds appeared to be immature, but it was difficult to say which birds were immature and which were faded adults. The subspecies *feldeggi*, or “Black-headed Wagtail” was detected, but in such a large flock it is likely that more than one subspecies was involved.

## **Buntings (*Emberizidae*)**

**Cirl Bunting (*Emberiza cirlus*)** – Those of us in the back of the group at Epidaurus on the morning of September 4 located several of this species amid the ruins of the ancient healing center known as the Asclepeion. At least one male bird was seen well, but at this late summer date, its snazzy summer plumage was clearly a bit faded. Still, the quality of our views was high enough that we all left satisfied.

## **Siskins & Allies (*Fringillidae*)**

**Common Chaffinch (*Fringilla coelebs*)** – Chaffinch is among the most widespread of European birds and a species that may turn up anywhere from the coast to alpine plateaus. We saw birds around many of the archaeological sites we visited including Epidaurus, Olympia, and Delphi. The adult foraging on the ground at Olympia on the morning of the 8<sup>th</sup> provided our best views. This is a handsome bird that displays a powder-blue crown, orange-buff breast, white wing bars, and white outer tail feathers. They may be seen singly or in small flocks.

**European Goldfinch (*Carduelis carduelis*)** – A few around Olympia on the 8<sup>th</sup> were the only ones seen.

## **Old World Sparrows (*Passeridae*)**

**House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*)** – Common and widespread around cities, towns, and archaeological sites throughout the trip.

**TOTAL: 90**

## **Athens Pre-Trip**

## **Swans & Ducks (*Anatidae*)**

**Ferruginous Duck (*Aythya nyroca*)** – The Ferruginous Duck is a widely occurring, but locally distributed waterfowl species of southern Europe and western Asia. For years it has been a species of special concern among conservationists who have watched its numbers decline as a result of habitat loss and hunting pressure. Because the bird has attracted so much attention within the bird conservation community, its numbers seem to have stabilized and the species is actually doing well in certain locations. The discovery of a pair at the Olympic Rowing Club at Marathon on September 1 seemed a remarkable surprise. Our local guide let us know that the species has populated the area only within the last couple of years, which was interesting considering that our field guide shows the nearest breeding location in northwest Greece. Ferruginous Duck is a near uniformly brown scaup-like duck with a pale eye, leading some birders to refer to the bird as “Fudge Duck.” Finding this bird was one of the real trip highlights, not to mention entirely unexpected.

## **Grebes (*Podicipedidae*)**

**Little Grebe (*Tachybaptis ruficollis*)** – This is a common and widespread species throughout western and southern Europe. Several individuals were scoped on the open water at the Olympic Rowing Club on September 1.

## **Hérons & Egrets (*Ardeidae*)**

**Purple Heron (*Ardea purpurea*)** – A pair of migrating Purple Herons was seen in flight over the Olympic Rowing Club on the afternoon of September 1. This species is a regular late summer/autumn migrant throughout the region, but is not a bird that can be counted on or expected. Unfortunately, because the birds were seen in flight, I mistook the dark gray coloration of the birds' underwings for that of Gray Heron and initially misidentified them as that species. Since the birds ended up staying in the area, I was able to correct the identification upon obtaining a better view. This would not have been a big deal except for the fact that a number of the group members who had seen the birds had gone inside the visitor center and missed the birds after they had been properly identified. Apologies to all.

**Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*)** – Several individuals were seen through the spotting scope around the large pond at the Olympic Rowing Club on September 1.

### **Hawks & Eagles (*Accipitridae*)**

**Short-toed Eagle (*Circaetus gallicus*)** – We had spectacular views of a soaring bird directly over the ancient battlefield at Marathon on the afternoon of September 1. The circumstances were such that this bird appeared almost overhead at a time when Paul and Chryssa were offering interpretation of the monumental battle that occurred here in 490 B.C. Most of us had excellent views of the bird almost immediately, while others had to work a little harder to see it before it disappeared to the north. Short-toed Eagles are specialists of dry or sparsely vegetated habitats with lots of bare rock. They are a fairly common species throughout southeastern and western Europe as a breeding species, but migrate to Africa in the winter. The Short-toed Eagle is identified by its long and broad wings, richly speckled breast and underwings and a dark head. Their diets consist largely of snakes.

**Eurasian Marsh-Harrier (*Circus aeruginosus*)** – A single female or young bird was seen sporadically around the Olympic Rowing Club and nearby Marathon marshes throughout the afternoon on September 1. Female birds are recognized by their almost completely dark brown plumage.

### **Falcons (*Falconidae*)**

**Eurasian Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*)** – One or two birds were seen in flight from the vehicle on Mt. Parnitha on the afternoon of August 31; at least one more was seen flying around the Acropolis on the morning of September 1.

### **Coots (*Rallidae*)**

**Eurasian Coot (*Fulica atra*)** – We saw at least half a dozen birds at the Olympic Rowing Club on the afternoon of September 1. This species is nearly identical to our own American Coot.

### **Plovers & Lapwings (*Charadriidae*)**

**Little Ringed Plover (*Charadrius dubius*)** – Little Ringed Plover is a fairly common migrant in Greece wherever appropriate habitat is found. Interestingly, the Olympic Rowing Club does not really qualify as appropriate habitat, since the bird prefers salt pans and mudflats. We saw a single bird at the ORW on the afternoon of September 1. Little Ringed Plover is separated from the similar Common Ringed Plover (a bird we did not see) by its pink-yellow legs, yellow eyering, and sharp, dark bill.

### **Sandpipers & Allies (*Scolopacidae*)**

**Common Sandpiper (*Actitis hypoleucos*)** – A single bird seen through the spotting scope on a dock at the Olympic Rowing Club certainly represented a south-bound migrant. Common Sandpiper is closely related to our own Spotted Sandpiper. They breed across most of Europe and winter in Africa.

### **Gulls & Terns (*Laridae*)**

**Yellow-legged Gull (*Larus cachinnans*)** – Yellow-legged Gull is the common breeding gull of the Mediterranean region. The couple of birds we saw at the Olympic Rowing Club on September 1 were individuals that came in off the nearby sea to bathe in the Club's freshwater impoundments.

### **Pigeons & Doves (*Columbidae*)**

**Rock Pigeon (*Columba livia*)** – This was an extremely common bird in all urban habitats, with hundreds around the base of the Acropolis.

**Eurasian Collared-Dove (*Streptopelia decaocto*)** – We saw multiple dozens of collared doves all over Athens. Further, we even had a few up on Mt. Parnitha.

### **Parrots (*Psittacidae*)**

**Monk Parakeet (*Myiopsitta monachus*)** – Monk Parakeet is native to southern South America, but is a common cage bird in many places around the world. As with certain other *psittacids*, this one does very well when released from captivity, with wild free-flying populations thriving in many American cities. It is apparently established in Athens as well as we noted about half a dozen birds perched at close range in the Agora on September 2.

### **Swifts (*Apodidae*)**

**Alpine Swift (*Apus melba*)** – The graceful Alpine Swift is Europe's largest swift species. Boldly marked brown and white, they are distinguished from other swifts by a combination of size and field marks. In flight they may be recognized by their brown backs, white belly, and dark throat collar. Despite the use of the term "Alpine" in their common name, they readily nest at sea level, demonstrating an obvious preference for large buildings. The ancient temples of the Acropolis present excellent "habitat" for Alpine Swifts, as the many crevices, cracks, and overhangs found among the marble blocks and columns provide excellent roost sites. They are most easily found during the morning hours, when they cruise around the hilltop before dispersing over the city for the day to feed. We had good looks at a couple of flying birds off the northwest corner of the Acropolis on the morning of September 1.

**Pallid Swift (*Apus pallidus*)** – The Pallid Swift is a medium-to-large dark swift that is found mostly along cliffs and towns of the immediate coastline of the Mediterranean Sea. They are actually fairly common birds in appropriate locations during the summer months, but the problem of recognizing them lies in their very close resemblance to the much more widespread Common Swift. Pallid Swifts display a paler throat and inner primaries than on Common Swift. These features must be seen well to be of use, as the differences between the two birds are subtle. As always in these situations, experience with the two species is invaluable. We had several birds high over the Olympic Rowing Club on September 1 that were clearly this species. That the birds were moving rapidly meant that they were undoubtedly missed by some.

### **Kingfishers (*Alcedinidae*)**

**Common Kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*)** – A single bird was seen in the Marathon Marshes by a few members of our group on the afternoon of September 1. The problem with this sighting was that we were spread out over a distance of a couple of hundred yards making our way toward an irrigation canal when the lead participants caught a look at a flying bird as they approached the canal. The Common Kingfisher is an especially snazzy little bird featuring a jewel-like azure-colored back.

### **Woodpeckers & Allies (*Picidae*)**

**Eurasian Wryneck (*Jynx torquilla*)** – A single and highly elusive bird was discovered in the vicinity of the destroyed hotel on Mt. Parnitha on the afternoon of August 31. This bird was undoubtedly a southbound migrant, but its penchant for staying in heavy vegetation made it very difficult for any of us to see well. While some probably saw the bird reasonably well in flight, our recording of this species is truthfully little more than a footnote.

### **Shrikes (*Laniidae*)**

**Red-backed Shrike (*Lanius collurio*)** – An adult and an immature bird were spotted on the edge of the Marathon marshes late in the day of August 31. Red-backed Shrike is a lovely widespread bird in the summer months, and a common passage migrant in the fall.

**Lesser Gray Shrike (*Lanius minor*)** – An adult bird on a distant power line at the edge of the Marathon marshes on the afternoon of August 31 was seen by about three-fourths of the group. Despite the distance, we were able to see the bird well with the help of our spotting scopes.

### **Crows, Jays & Magpies (*Corvidae*)**

**Eurasian Jay (*Garrulus glandarius*)** – Eurasian Jays are large, striking birds, yet they can be surprisingly difficult to get a good look at. The two individuals seen from the bus on Mt. Parnitha on August 31 were going the other direction. Most of us did not see the bird well. That it was found at 5,000 feet on Mt. Parnitha is undoubtedly due to the fact that the devastating fire of a few years ago created acceptable habitat for the species.

**Eurasian Magpie (*Pica pica*)** – This is a very common and widespread bird throughout the Athens area. This may seem a surprise at first glance, but if one takes into account the northern latitude of Europe, and that most members of this family do well around human habitation, the surprise-effect quickly wears off. This bird is very closely related to our Black-billed Magpie, of which it was considered a subspecies until about five years ago.

**Hooded Crow (*Corvus cornix*)** – Hooded Crow is a very attractive member of the corvid family and occurs widely around the Athens area. We saw them everywhere we went.

### **Larks (*Alaudidae*)**

**Woodlark (*Lullula arborea*)** – The Woodlark is a lovely member of the lark family that occurs at a higher elevation in southern Greece than the lowland-loving Crested Lark. We saw a couple of birds on Mt. Parnitha on the afternoon of August 31. In full disclosure, the quality of our sighting of this species was very good (scope views!), unfortunately, I did not immediately recognize that the species in question was a Woodlark. Walking a section of the road that led through the burn area (2007), we spotted a lark perched on a boulder over the road. Someone exclaimed, “Crested Lark,” because the bird clearly seemed to display a crest. Everyone saw the bird well, but it wasn’t until after I had studied it well in the scope

that I realized I was wrong. The crest was not shaped properly for Crested Lark, and the bold face pattern was a good indicator of Woodlark. As I attempted to correct myself, the bird launched into the air and flew up the hillside a short distance to the ridgeline, where it became harder to see. In flight, the short tail, distinctive of Woodlark, was apparent. Alas, while everyone saw the bird well, it wasn't until after it had departed that I had the identification worked out. Apologies once again!

### **Swallows (*Hirundinidae*)**

**Bank Swallow (*Riparia riparia*)** – We noted several individuals in the Marathon marshes on the afternoon of September 1. This species was formerly known as “Sand Martin” in the Old World.

**Barn Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*)** – Barn Swallows were common and widespread around Marathon and the Olympic Rowing Club on August 31.

**Red-rumped Swallow (*Cecropis daurica*)** – Red-rumped Swallows occur in southern Greece as both breeders and passage migrants. Even though we did much better with this bird on the main tour, we only had so-so views of a couple of birds in the Marathon marshes on August 31.

**Common House Martin (*Delichon urbicum*)** – The afternoon of August 31 was a good one for seeing swallows. Among the far more numerous Barn Swallows, some of us noted one or two House Martins flying overhead. This bird was certainly not seen by all.

### **Chickadees & Tits (*Paridae*)**

**Coal Tit (*Periparus ater*)** – The Coal Tit is a montane bird that seems to have an affinity for conifers. The closest place to see this species around Athens is in the fir forest atop Mt. Parnitha. It is a common species that can be seen with ease, generally, but for some reason, we really struggled to find this bird on our afternoon visit to the high country on August 31. After enough walking, we finally located a couple of birds that most of us were able to get on. Coal Tits are recognized by their silk black crown and throat, white nape patch, and white wing bars.

**Great Tit (*Parus major*)** – This attractive bird is the largest and most distinctively marked member of Europe's tit species. A black throat and vertical stripe against a lemon yellow breast and belly readily separate this species from other members of this family. Great Tit is common in every type of lowland habitat and we had no problem locating them around the Acropolis and the Agora in Athens.

### **Kinglets (*Regulidae*)**

**Firecrest (*Regulus ignicapilla*)** – The Firecrest is essentially an ecological replacement for the Golden-crowned Kinglet in the Old World. Tiny in size, but big in personality, these birds inhabit coniferous forests across much of Europe, with the southernmost population reaching Mt. Parnitha outside Athens. Although it took a while, we eventually had nice looks at several birds in the Grecian fir forest on Mt. Parnitha on the afternoon of August 31.

### **Old World Flycatchers (*Muscicapidae*)**

**Spotted Flycatcher (*Muscicapa striata*)** – This is one of the most common of all European birds. While drab and fairly nondescript in appearance, Spotted Flycatcher is identified, in part, by the fact that no other member of the genus *musciapa* shares the European range of this species. This bird is a very

common migrant in southeastern Europe, where a dozen or more can be seen in a day. We found it almost everywhere we went.

**Collared Flycatcher (*Ficedula albicollis*)** – We enjoyed good views of a perched individual at the Agora on the morning of September 2. This species is not always easily separated from the very similar European Pied-Flycatcher, but our bird was a male that still retained much of its black and white plumage, therefore allowing us to note the pattern of white on the wings and forehead.

**Black Redstart (*Phoenicurus ochruros*)** – A family of individuals hanging around the backside of the Temple of Hephaestus at the Agora on September 2 were seen by only a single observer. It was unfortunate that the rest of us didn't know about the sighting until it was too late, but based on the observer's description of what he saw, this is the only possibility.

**Common Redstart (*Phoenicurus phoenicurus*)** – We enjoyed terrific views of an adult female that appeared intermittently in the central part of the Agora on the morning of September 2. The female is a delicate buff-gray bird, while both sexes possess an orange-rufous tail with a dark central stripe.

**Northern Wheatear (*Oenanthe oenanthe*)** – The Northern Wheatear is a common bird in Europe wherever suitable habitat is found. In Greece, rocky mountains and hillsides provide excellent habitat for them, but they are also happy to frequent archaeological sites, where ancient temples and defense walls also provide ideal habitat. We had superb scope views of a couple of Northern Wheatears in the burned area on Mt. Parnitha on the afternoon of August 31. When separating female and immature birds from the following species, it is very important to note the presence of a white line over the eye.

**Black-eared Wheatear (*Oenanthe hispanica*)** – This is one of southeastern Europe's most beautiful birds. The males are readily separated from Northern Wheatear by the extensive black on the wings and throat, while a rich beige wash on the back and crown rounds out the diagnostic plumage. Female and immature birds present a more difficult identification challenge in contrast to male birds. A good clue is to look for a nondescript pale line over the eye that is not the true white of that found in Northern Wheatear.

**Whinchat (*Saxicola rubetra*)** – Whinchats are purely migrant birds in southern Greece. In all plumages they are told from the similar Stonechat by the broader and paler line over the eye and a more streaked back pattern. We had scope views of a couple birds in the weedy pasture at the edge of the Marathon marshes on the afternoon of August 31.

**Stonechat (*Saxicola torquatus*)** – Unlike the Whinchat, Stonechat is a common year-round resident in dry country habitat in southern Greece. Their numbers are augmented in the fall and winter with the arrival of migrants from the north. We had wonderful views of a sharp looking male in the same pasture as the Whinchat on the edge of the Marathon marshes on the afternoon of August 31.

### **Thrushes & Allies (*Turdidae*)**

**Eurasian Blackbird (*Turdus merula*)** – As a member of the genus *turdus*, the Eurasian Blackbird is really not a true blackbird at all, but a bird far more closely related to our American Robin. Still, save for a yellow bill and eyering, it is a black bird, and a species that is common all across western, central, and southern Europe. Perhaps because of the season we did not find the bird to be as conspicuous as I would have predicted; however, we did enjoy good looks at several birds in the Agora in Athens on the morning of September 2.

### **Wagtails & Pipits (*Motacillidae*)**

**Western Yellow Wagtail (*Motacilla flava*)** – We enjoyed scope views of a gleaming male bird at the Olympic Rowing Club on the afternoon of September 1. The black face and crown displayed by our bird identified it as belonging to the subspecies *feldeggi*.

### **Buntings (*Emberizidae*)**

**Cirl Bunting (*Emberiza cirlus*)** – A couple of immature birds on Mt. Parnitha on the afternoon of August 31 were so flighty, and seen so poorly as to barely be noted on this birdlist.

### **Siskins & Allies (*Fringillidae*)**

**Common Chaffinch (*Fringilla coelebs*)** – Chaffinches are common birds of rural areas and open country at all elevations. We had good looks at a restless group in the burned area on Mt. Parnitha on the afternoon of August 31. The male of the species is a subtly beautiful bird sporting a blue-gray crown and nape and a pinkish-apricot wash on the breast. It took patience, but everyone eventually saw a male bird well.

**European Greenfinch (*Chloris chloris*)** – A bright male spotted by Keith Parker in the weedy pasture at the edge of the Marathon marshes on the afternoon of September 1 was the only one seen.

**European Goldfinch (*Carduelis carduelis*)** – We repeatedly had great views of adult birds in the weedy pasture on the edge of the Marathon marshes on the afternoon of September 1. The birds' red and white face makes it an instantly recognizable species, while its black and yellow wings allow for identification even when it is only seen in flight.

### **Old World Sparrows (*Passeridae*)**

**House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*)** – House Sparrows are exceedingly abundant in the Athens area anywhere where there are people nearby.

**Eurasian Tree Sparrow (*Passer montanus*)** – A small flock of Tree Sparrows appeared on the power line at the edge of the Marathon marshes on the afternoon of September 1.

**TOTAL: 47**

**COMBINED TOTAL: 102**

## **MAMMALS**

**Red Fox (*Vulpes vulpes*)** – Many of us enjoyed superb looks at a red fox on a “wall” of the cut that is the Corinthian Canal on the afternoon of September 9. During our traverse of the canal, one of our participants yelled “fox,” and as those of us within earshot turned, we saw the animal in full view nervously watching us from a distance of about only 100 feet. In Europe, the Red Fox displays variation in appearance, according to geographic distribution. The animals of Greece appear almost yellowish, as opposed to the classic orange-red that most of us are more familiar with.

**Common Bottlenose Dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus*)** – The afternoon of September 5<sup>th</sup> was a leisurely one spent at sea cruising south from Nafplion toward Monemvassia. It was a beautiful sun-drenched day, and we were gathered on the ship's back deck listening to one of Paul's fine presentations when two dolphins rocketed out of the water directly behind the boat. Looking back, the animals surfaced only once before disappearing. Those who happened to be looking in the right direction at the right time were rewarded with a remarkable aerial display. Few dolphin species occur in the Mediterranean Sea, and this one is probably the most expected. It was identified by its uniformly slate-gray back and dorsal fin and silvery sides.

**Red Deer (*Cervus elaphus*)** – One of the largest deer in the world, the Red Deer is a massive animal that is closely related to the North American elk. Central and Western Europe form the core of the animal's range, while healthy outlying populations exist in Scandinavia, the U.K. Iberia, North Africa, Eastern Europe, and Turkey and the Caucasus. In Greece it is an uncommon and declining species. The 600 or so animals that reside on Mt. Parnitha north of Athens form what is considered the country's largest and most important population. The Red Data Book of Greek Vertebrates lists the animal as critically endangered in that country. The Parnitha population has been fairly stable, but long-term trends have revealed the animal to be in slow decline. The population was further stressed as a result of a disastrous forest fire that ravaged much of the conifer forest atop the mountain in the summer of 2007. Despite rumors of the animal's demise, they still persist in the mountain forests that crown the highest elevations as well as in the extensive burn area on the mountain's south face.

As part of the itinerary of our Athens Pre-trip, we visited Mt. Parnitha on the afternoon of August 31. Among the places we stopped to bird was a stretch of highway that led through the burn area. It was in this habitat where we encountered multiple Red Deer. As there was no place for them to hide (and not that they were particularly concerned with our presence anyway), we enjoyed tremendous views of several males, all of which seemed to brandish a full rack of antlers. Making the situation still more memorable was that a number of the deer could be heard bugling in the forests above us. The bugling marks the onset of the autumn rutting season, and the opportunity to hear these strange sounds was an unexpected bonus.

## BUTTERFLIES\*

\* Butterfly list provided after the trip, courtesy of Keith and Jackie Parker

Scarce Swallowtail (*Iphiclides podalirius*)  
Swallowtail (*Papilio machaon*)  
Plain Tiger (*Danaus chrysippus*)  
Clouded Yellow (*Colias crocea*)  
Large White (*Pieris brassicae*)  
Krueper's Small White (*Pieris krueperi*)  
Small White (Cabbage) (*Pieris rapae*)  
Eastern Bath White (*Pontia edusa*)  
Long-tailed Blue (*Lampides boeticus*)  
Lang's Short-Tailed Blue (*Leptotes pirithous*)  
Holly Blue (*Celastrina argiolus*)  
Common Blue (*Polyommatus icarus*)  
Geranium Bronze (*Cacyreus marshalli*)  
Small Copper (*Lycaena phlaeas*)  
Painted Lady (*Vanessa cardui*)

Red Admiral (*Vanessa atalanta*)  
Wall Brown (*Lasiommata megera*)  
Two-tailed Pasha (*Charaxes jasius*)  
Grecian Grayling (*Pseudochazara graeca*)  
Balkan Grayling (*Hipparchia senthes*)  
Tree Grayling (*Hipparchia statilinus*)  
Levantine Skipper (*Thymolicus hyrax*)  
Mallow Skipper (*Carcharodus alceae*)  
Mediterranean Skipper (*Gegenes nostradamus*)