

**GREECE & WESTERN TURKEY:  
FROM ATHENS TO ISTANBUL  
ABOARD THE *SEA CLOUD*  
JUNE 18-29, 2015**

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## GREECE & TURKEY: FROM ATHENS TO ISTANBUL

### ABOARD THE *SEA CLOUD*

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By Victor Emanuel

In 2005, for the first time in our company's history, VENT chartered the incomparable *Sea Cloud* for a Birds & History cruise from Athens to Istanbul. That trip proved so successful that I've longed to repeat it ever since. I never thought it would take ten years, but indeed it has, which is why I was so thrilled to offer this trip in 2015 after having waited so long.

Our tour group assembled in Athens on the evening of June 19 for a trip welcome and introduction. Dinner that night was at a rooftop restaurant that offered superb views of the Acropolis. The next morning, kicking off a full day in Athens, we started with a tour of the Acropolis and the Theater of Dionysus Eleutheris. As always, the Parthenon, that singular emblem of Athenian democracy, commanded the most attention. In the afternoon we visited the Acropolis Museum which houses thousands of works and artifacts from antiquity including originals and copies of the blocks and statuary that formed the friezes and pediments of the Parthenon. The next morning we visited the Agora, the public assembly place of ancient Athens. A highlight from our time there was a reading from Thucydides of a part of Pericles' Funeral Oration. Interestingly, the reading was delayed owing to the discovery of a Little Owl that had flown out of the nearby Temple of Hephaestus!

Paul Woodruff set the stage for the reading by discussing the Peloponnesian War and the events that led Pericles, the great Athenian general and statesman, to deliver his seminal speech, comparing it to Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. Various members of the group read parts of the oration. As we walked around the Agora, we thought of ancient luminaries such as Plato and Socrates who had walked those same paths more than 2,500 years ago. In the site museum we saw vials that had contained extracts of hemlock, the substance that was used to execute Socrates.

Having meandered among the columns and pediments of the archaeological sites, and having viewed the statues and other antiquities housed in the marvelous museum, we were better able to appreciate the creative power and genius of the ancient Greeks who irrefutably contributed so much to the development of Western civilization. After a fine lunch at a seaside restaurant in Piraeus, we embarked the *Sea Cloud* and commenced our voyage. A highlight from that first night at sea was our pass by Cape Sounio and witnessing the Temple of Poseidon illuminated against the night sky. As a side note, our trip would follow more or less the same route the Greeks followed when they crossed the Aegean to fight at Troy.

The next day was marked by a full day at sea. The morning began with a demonstration of the setting of the sails. Dr. Paul Woodruff then presided over a reading of Sophocles' *Philoctetes*. Various members of the group volunteered to read sections of this fascinating and little-known masterpiece. There, on the Lido Deck with the navy Aegean around us, we continued our

immersion in the history and culture of ancient Greece. In the afternoon, Paul presented a lecture on Homer in preparation for our visit to Chios the next day.

In preparation for this voyage, we selected Chios for our first destination as it is the reputed birthplace of Homer, not to mention that it is a beautiful island seldom visited by American tourists. We divided the group in half as we explored the central and southern parts of the island. For the morning session, one group visited Homer's Rock and the Nea Moni Monastery, the latter dating from the twelfth century A.D., while the other group toured part of the island looking for birds. The birding group was fortunate in obtaining good views of a number of Eleonora's Falcons that were cruising a ridgeline. This falcon is one of the rarest raptors in the world. It breeds in the late summer on steep-sided islands in the Mediterranean and winters in Madagascar. While watching these beautiful birds, one member of our group told us that it had been named Eleonora to honor Queen Eleonora, ruler of Sardinia, who issued a decree to protect the bird which later acquired her name. Over the course of the day, both groups also visited the charming villages of Pyrgi and Mesta. Outside of Mesta we saw the famous *mastichoria* (mastic) trees that extrude a sap which crystallizes and is then harvested for use in a variety of foods.

The next day we disembarked on Lesbos, home of the ancient poet Sappho, immortalized through her poems of love. Again we divided the group in half. One group toured the Castle of Mytilini and visited the new archaeological museum containing wonderful Roman floor mosaics. The other group, organized for the birders, visited the Kalloni Gulf where time amid a woodland of Aleppo Pine and nearby salt pans and wetlands yielded a wonderful array of birds including Common and Ruddy shelducks, Black Stork, Long-legged Buzzard, Common Nightingale, Krueper's Nuthatch, Crested Lark and, perhaps best of all, an over-summering flock of over 100 Greater Flamingos. In the afternoon we offered a return visit for part of the group to the Kalloni wetlands where we saw a White Stork at a nest site, Pied Avocets, and Slender-billed Gulls. The stork experience was especially memorable as the nest was located in the middle of a busy town. The rest of the group went to the lovely town of Agiassos, located on the lower slopes of Mt. Olympus and surrounded by beautiful forest. That evening we enjoyed a wonderful barbeque on the back of the *Sea Cloud* as we gazed back on Lesbos to the west and nearby Turkey to the east.

On the morning of June 25, we disembarked at Dikili, Turkey and visited Pergamon, an ancient site situated on the hills overlooking the region. This site reached its zenith in the Hellenistic and Roman periods. We visited the Greco-Roman theater, the Sanctuary of Trajan, and ended with a tour of the Sanctuary of Asclepius, an important center of healing in the ancient world. Our time at Pergamon produced a number of great birds including Syrian Woodpecker, Red-rumped Swallow, Black-eared and Northern wheatears, Western Rock Nuthatch, Woodchat Shrike, Cirl Bunting, and European Goldfinch.

In the afternoon we cruised north toward the famous Dardenelles Strait. On the following morning, participant David Rowe gave a fascinating talk on the WWI battle of Gallipoli. In the afternoon we toured Troy, one of the most famous archaeological sites in the world. Here, we looked upon ruins over 4,000 years old, including those of "Homeric Troy," when the Greeks and Trojans waged epic warfare as chronicled in Homer's *Iliad*. We also saw the city gates from which Hector supposedly led the Trojans into battle against the Greeks. As we stood on the walkways of Troy looking toward the sea, we could imagine what it would have been like for the

Trojans to gaze upon the beached ships of the Greek army while masses of armed men came forth, and contemplate Hector saying goodbye to his wife, aware of his destiny.

Of course, our tour of Troy included close encounters with some wonderful birds including our best views of Eurasian Jay, a skulking Eastern Olivaceous Warbler that eventually showed well, and a memorable study of a gorgeous Masked Shrike.

The next morning we joined excursions either to the ancient Greek site of Assos or to the Gallipoli Peninsula to visit sites associated with the WWI battle. Both excursions were excellent. Those who went to Assos saw the Temple of Athena and other ruins and enjoyed a marvelous view of the Aegean with both Mt. Ida and Lesvos in view. Paul Woodruff talked about Aristotle, who lived at Assos for three years, teaching at the Academy of Assos. Those who went to Gallipoli visited a number of sites where the ANZAC forces landed in 1915 and attempted to establish beachheads. We also saw many gravestones. A tour group from Australia was visiting these sites, putting flowers on the graves of their ancestors. It was a moving experience to spend time where this famously bloody WWI battle took place.

In the afternoon we completed our transit of the Dardanelles. Fellow participant, Diane Katsiaficas, delivered a wonderful presentation on Byzantine culture. Afterward, Peter Zika gave a fascinating presentation on the flowers of the Mediterranean. Late in the day we entered the Sea of Marmara and enjoyed our last evening together aboard the *Sea Cloud*.

The next morning we disembarked in Istanbul, one of the great cities of the world. Most of the day was spent visiting the city's most iconic destinations: the Blue Mosque, Hippodrome of Constantinople, and Hagia Sophia.

Of 54 cruise participants, 34 stayed one extra day to participate on the Istanbul Extension. Our morning began with a trip to Topkapi Palace, built for the Ottoman sultans following the Turkish conquest of Constantinople. Departing the palace, we enjoyed a wonderful cruise on the Bosphorus followed by a superb lunch. In the afternoon many people chose to visit the Grand Bazaar. Our final dinner was in the oldest restaurant in Istanbul, located inside the Spice Bazaar. After dinner we went outside and walked right into a magnificent sunset spreading across the Golden Horn, the pink-stained sky filled with Yellow-legged Gulls and Alpine Swifts. For good measure, just as we began the walk back to the hotel, a muezzin called to prayer over a loud speaker from a minaret.

In the eleven days that followed our initial gathering in Athens, we had seen and learned so much about the history of this fascinating corner of the world. Along the way we saw some wonderful birds, attended thought-provoking presentations, and spent time with a great group of fellow travelers. This was VENT's fourth Aegean cruise, and one of the best.

## ITINERARY

**June 18, 2015** – Those who had not already left home for extra time in Greece prior to the start of the cruise departed the USA today for the overnight flight to Athens.

**June 19** – Participants of the VENT cruise, **Greece & Turkey: from Athens to Istanbul aboard the *Sea Cloud*** arrived in Athens throughout the day today. In the evening we gathered in the lobby of the Hotel Divani Acropolis and adjourned to a conference room for a trip welcome and orientation. The VENT staff introduced itself and we enjoyed a welcome cocktail and the opportunity to meet fellow travelers. Following the meeting we walked up Parthenonos Street to a restaurant offering fine rooftop dining and spectacular views of the Parthenon.

**June 20** – Although the prime interest of the trip for most was the opportunity to experience Greece and Western Turkey aboard the *Sea Cloud*, the program includes a day and a half in Athens prior to boarding the ship so as to incorporate the city's primary historic sites from antiquity: the Acropolis and the ancient Agora.

Our day began with a short bus ride to the base of the Acropolis, which we ascended as a group. We then broke into two smaller groups to avoid crowding; however, that proved somewhat fruitless given the appearance in short order of thousands of cruise ship passengers that soon overwhelmed the place. Despite the crowds, we toured of the famous hilltop site, visiting all of the important structures that date from the "Golden Age of Athens" including Athena Nike, the Propylae, Parthenon, and Erechtheum. Halfway through the morning we descended the south flank of the Acropolis and made our way to the Theater of Dionysus Eleutheris, the first theater of the ancient world. By the time we were finished, the heat of the day was upon us.

Following lunch at the hotel, we made the short walk to the Acropolis Museum, located a few blocks from the hotel. We spent the remainder of the afternoon touring this remarkable museum: a tour-de-force of extraordinary artifacts, structures, and statuary dating back thousands of years.

We returned to the hotel in time to refresh before gathering for dinner. As with the previous night, we walked toward the Acropolis and another restaurant where a lovely rooftop dinner awaited, complete with equally fine views of the Parthenon.

**June 21** – Today was marked by more touring followed by embarkation of the *Sea Cloud*.

On the heels of a final breakfast in Athens, we made the short ride over to the ancient Agora, the market place and civic center of ancient Athens. While the Acropolis is the best known of Greece's many historical sites, the ancient Agora should be on the to-do list of any first-time traveler to Athens. Whereas the Acropolis was paramount in its importance for religious purposes, the Agora was far more important to the administrative functionality of the Athenian city-state.

We spent the entire morning at the Agora touring the remains of the temples and other structures that today only hint at Greece's glorious past. The Temple of Hephaestus is the dominant and most intact of the ancient edifices while the on-site museum offers a well organized sweep of thousands of years of history.

Departing the Agora, we boarded the bus for the forty minute trip to the port town of Piraeus, the ancient waterfront that serves as a maritime gateway to Athens. Lunch was enjoyed at a lovely

waterfront restaurant before we removed ourselves in preparation for the short transit to the *Sea Cloud*.

We arrived at the ship and completed the embarkation process following a somewhat disorganized sequence involving our luggage. Once aboard, the remainder of the day was spent settling into our cabins, taking in a welcome and orientation, and participating in mandatory safety drills.

Following our first dinner on board, we were called to the deck to witness the Temple of Poseidon grandly perched over the terminus of Cape Sounio, illuminated against the night sky.

**June 22** – Today was especially memorable as it represented our only full day at sea. When planning our *Sea Cloud* trips, we always prefer a first day at sea as it gives participants the opportunity to experience the ship in a relaxed manner, including her ambience, amenities, and history. It also allows for the VENT staff and ship staff alike to present a range of optional activities in which to participate.

At 9:00 a.m. the first activity was a demonstration of the setting of the sails. Always a highlight, no trip aboard *Sea Cloud* would be complete without the opportunity to watch her proud sails unleashed to billow in the wind. At 10:00 Dr. Paul Woodruff organized a reading and discussion of “*Philoctetes*”, one of Sophocles’ timeless plays. Later in the day, in preparation for the next day’s disembarkation at Chios, Paul led another discussion concerning “*Sappho’s Poems of Love*.”

Throughout the day, we enjoyed unlimited views of the Aegean Sea including a couple of islands. Birds were fairly few; however, we did spot our first Cory’s and Levantine shearwaters, many Yellow-legged Gulls, and even a Peregrine Falcon.

**June 23** – Today marked the first of consecutive days in which we explored one of Greece’s iconic Aegean islands. Chios was the first of the islands we’d visit, and was chosen for this itinerary for several reasons, not least of which it is the reputed birthplace of the great epic poet Homer.

In advance of a full day on the island, we split the group into two smaller groups, and organized each around a birding and sightseeing excursion and an excursion focused primarily on history and culture. Those with a preference for birding and sightseeing started with some birding in the hills of the southern part of the island before visiting the medieval towns of Mesta and Pyrgi. Meanwhile, the group with more of an interest in history and culture traveled to Homer’s Rock in Vrontados before moving inland for a morning tour of the twelfth century Nea Moni Monastery followed by a late morning trip to the Citrus Museum in Chios town.

Following lunch on board the ship, we offered two afternoon excursions, more or less flipping the activities from the morning. Those who had gone birding in the morning started the afternoon with a trip to Homer’s Rock before traveling inland to the aforementioned monastery. Meanwhile, the morning history and culture crew went south to Mesta and Pyrgi.

**June 24** – Early this morning we traveled the short distance from Chios to Lesvos, arriving early at the port of Mytilini.

As with Chios, the plan for the day included morning and afternoon excursions, including one trip designed especially with birders in mind, and another excursion for those with a greater interest in history and culture. For the birdwatchers, this outing would hold the best birding of the trip. The center of our focus was the huge Kalloni Gulf that is the dominant geographic feature on the south side of Lesvos. Around the gulf are several key habitats, the most important of which are in existence due to an industrial saltworks project. We traveled inland from Mytilini to the northeast corner of the gulf where an Aleppo Pine woodland bordered a lovely creek, all surrounded by rocky shrub-covered hills. The birding was quite good here and we ended up spending considerable time spotting a variety of species. From there we retraced our route back through an expansive salt pan ecosystem, stopping for another extended period, before rounding the top of the gulf and visiting the water-filled impoundment of the saltworks. The second group spent the morning in Mytilini visiting the remarkable fort or “Castle of Mytilini,” dating from the Byzantine and Venetian eras, and the archaeological museum featuring fantastic Roman floor mosaics.

In the afternoon, the primary activity was a trip to the village of Agiassos for touring, sightseeing, and shopping. For others, a return trip to the Kalloni Gulf area included an add-on trip to the town of Skalla Kalloni.

Back on board the ship in the late afternoon, we headed out to sea under beautiful conditions: the water was sparkling and fleets of shearwaters were sailing by for an hour or more.

**June 25** – This morning *Sea Cloud* made its first call in Turkey, at the port town of Dkili. The purpose of our stop here was to visit the ancient Greco-Roman site of Pergamon, and Dikili is the most logical access point.

While Greece is known for its menagerie of ruins and historical sites, it is a fact that Western Turkey is equally rich in that regard. Primarily this is because present day Western Turkey was a part of the ancient Greek world, a region known as Ionia. Pergamon’s heyday arrived after the decline of Athens and is most famous today for its Hellenistic and Roman ruins. We spent a full morning here and were not disappointed. Pergamon is a relatively well preserved site offering commanding views from a hilltop location. Among the highlights were visits to the Upper and Lower Acropoli, the Sanctuary of Trajan, and the remarkable Asclepion complete with tunnels and drainage system.

We returned to the ship for lunch followed by an afternoon at sea, commencing the northward voyage to the Dardanelle Strait. Late in the afternoon, Cruise Director Tom Hook delivered a marvelous presentation on the history of the *Sea Cloud* entitled “*The Legendary Sea Cloud.*”

**June 26** – This morning we awoke to find ourselves at sea off the northwest Turkish coast. Our destination was the port at Kepez, still several hours distant. After three consecutive morning disembarkations, it was a welcome respite to have the first half of the day to relax aboard the ship. In preparation for an afternoon visit to Troy, Paul Woodruff hosted a talk “*Whose Side Was*

*Homer On?*” that explored the notion of Homer’s favored side in the epic war pitting the Trojans against the Greeks.

Around 11:00 a.m. *Sea Cloud* entered the Dardanelle Strait, bounded clearly on the north side by the Gallipoli Peninsula. Shortly after entry, fellow participant David Rowe, delivered an excellent presentation on the Battle of Gallipoli.

Following lunch we disembarked the ship for an afternoon tour of Troy, legendary home of King Priam and the Trojan civilization. Once again, breaking into two groups, we spent the afternoon touring the site, walking atop the ancient spans and ramparts that connected one part of the city to the next. Of course, Homeric Troy (Troy VII) of *Illiad* fame may have been of greatest interest. Our tour ended early enough to allow for some additional time for birding at the end.

We were back on board the ship by 5:30 or 6:00. That night *Sea Cloud* stayed dockside.

**June 27** – This morning we presented two very different excursion options. The first option involved a trip to the ancient site of Assos, about an hour south of Kepez, while the second option entailed a ferry ride across the Dardanelle Strait to the historic World War I battlefield of Gallipoli.

Assos was especially memorable for the wonderful views available of the Aegean Sea from the hilltop site, while those who went to Gallipoli had the distinction of visiting during the one-hundredth anniversary of that bloody campaign. Both groups were back on board for lunch.

The remainder of the day was spent cruising the length of the Dardanelles en route to Istanbul. This afternoon was especially pleasing, marked by calm waters, a refreshing downpour, and a smooth transit of one of the world’s most historic bodies of water. Fellow participant Diane Katsiaficas presented an illustrated lecture on “*An Introduction to Byzantium.*” Diane’s talk was followed in short order by a presentation from Peter Zika entitled “*Mediterranean Flowers: Parsely, Sage, Rosemary and Thyme.*”

**June 28** – The arrival of this morning marked the end of our journey at sea. After a night of cruising most of the length of the Sea of Marmara, we entered the Bosphorus Strait, and essentially cruised into another world. Certain cities of the world maintain an aura of individuality, of the exotic, or the beautiful. Istanbul is one of those cities. With its domes and minarets and ancient world juxtaposing with the modern, it is a city in flux, a city unlike any other.

Istanbul adorns the leading edge of the Bosphorus Strait, famously spanning corners of the European and Asian landmasses. On approach we were treated to the iconic sights of the Hagia Sophia, Blue Mosque, and Topkapi Palace among many other landmarks. All of these features populate a peninsula referred to mystically as the Golden Horn. The group disembarked *Sea Cloud* around 8:30 this morning. Following departure from the port area, we traveled to the historic part of the city for a morning-long tour of the Blue Mosque and Hippodrome of Constantinople. Following lunch at a nearby restaurant, we utilized the afternoon for a tour of the Hagia Sophia, Istanbul’s most famous landmark.

After checking in to the hotel, we traveled to an older section of the city for a final group dinner.

**June 29** – Those not taking the one-day Istanbul Extension departed Istanbul today. Those on the extension gathered in the lobby this morning in anticipation of a day of touring and sightseeing.

The morning began with a visit to Topkapi Palace, constructed as the seat of Ottoman power following the conquest of Constantinople early in the fourteenth century A.D, where we spent several hours. In the late morning we traveled to the waterfront on the Bosphorus for a leisurely sightseeing and birding cruise. Afterward, we enjoyed lunch in a beautiful waterfront restaurant.

After lunch, a number of us chose to take the afternoon off while others of us visited the Grand Bazaar.

In the early evening we gathered for the last time and walked into the historic part of the city for a short trip to the Spice Bazaar followed by dinner in the bazaar.

**June 30** – This morning we were escorted to the airport for departing flights home.

## BIRDS

The taxonomic order and common and scientific names used in this field list are those given by J. F. Clements, *Birds of the World: A Checklist*, 6<sup>th</sup> Edition, 2007, with all current updates.

### **Partridges & Quail (*Phasianidae*)**

**Chukar (*Alectoris chukar*)** – Chukar is a native bird throughout southern Greece including many of the islands. The problem, if you want to call it one, is that most of the birds that we see here probably derive from introduced or reintroduced stock given the bird's status as a popular game species. To underscore this point, DNA tests done on birds from Attica (southern mainland Greece) have revealed the presence of genes from birds of far southwestern Europe. Nevertheless, the birds are thriving in appropriate habitat, and the bird we saw on the rocky ridge near the Kalloni Gulf, Lesvos on the morning of June 24 was a nice find and should be considered a wild bird.

### **Ducks, Geese & Waterfowl (*Anatidae*)**

**Ruddy Shelduck (*Tadorna ferruginea*)** – Ruddy Shelduck is primarily an Asian species that enters Europe only very locally in the far eastern Aegean and southeastern Balkan Peninsula. So it was a treat to see four or five individuals in the salt pans that fringe the northeast corner of the Kalloni Gulf on the island of Lesvos on the morning of June 24.

**Common Shelduck (*Tadorna tadorna*)** – Approximately eight or ten individuals were seen in the same area as the above species. However, whereas the Ruddies were seen through the scope at moderate distance, we enjoyed close fly-over views of this handsome species. It was also special having the opportunity to compare the two species in close proximity to one another.

### **Flamingos (*Phoenicopteridae*)**

**Greater Flamingo (*Phoenicopterus roseus*)** – In the Old World, one normally associates flamingos with the sun-scorched salt lakes of the African Rift Valley. So it may come as a surprise to some to learn that Greater Flamingos breed across parts of southern Europe as well. The commercial salt harvesting operation at the north end of the Kalloni Gulf on the island of Lesbos happens to be one of the best areas in southeastern Europe to see the species. On June 24 our group made two visits to the salt pans, and both times we were rewarded with wonderful views of feeding and resting flamingos including birds in flight. Although flamingos rarely nest on Lesbos, evidently it is typical to encounter a sizeable over-summering flock, as we did. Seeing these beauties was one of the trip's avian highlights.

### **Shearwaters & Petrels (*Procellariidae*)**

**Cory's Shearwater (*Calonectris diomedea*)** – Bounded on three sides by land, the eastern Mediterranean Sea is not one of the world's meccas for seabirding. Warm water, a relatively high salinity level, and great distance from the open Atlantic Ocean and its associated currents and upwellings account for the lack of diversity among pelagic species; yet seabirds do occur here in the form of two species of shearwaters, one an endemic breeding subspecies and the other an endemic full species. To our delight, both species were fairly common to common throughout the trip. The first type of shearwater, Cory's Shearwater, is the larger of the two and is recognized by its gray-brown upperparts, more languid flight style, and paler bill. We saw Cory's at sea on most days from June 22-26. All birds were of the race *diomedea*, often referred to as "Scopoli's Shearwater."

**Levantine Shearwater (*Puffinus yelkouan*)** – The other shearwater of the region, Levantine Shearwater, is a small shearwater that breeds on rocky islands in the central and eastern Mediterranean. It is recognized by its small size, rapid flight style, and striking black-above-and-white-below plumage pattern. Hundreds of Levantines were seen at sea from June 22-26; however, we got to know the bird especially well during our transit of the Dardanelle Straits where lines of shearwaters were noted close to the ship coming and going from feeding grounds in the distant Black Sea. Those who participated on the one-day Istanbul Extension were treated to hundreds more flying in rapid fashion, low over the water, right past the city waterfront during our cruise of the Bosphorus Strait.

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

**Black Stork (*Ciconia nigra*)** – Black Storks typically are not found in far southeastern Europe in the summer, yet the bird is known from Lesbos in low numbers as an over-summering resident. Breeding actually has been suspected but never confirmed. We saw three or four individuals in the salt pans around the Kalloni Gulf, Lesbos, on June 24. A beautiful species to be sure.

**White Stork (*Ciconia ciconia*)** – This is the iconic rooftop nesting stork that we commonly associate with much of Europe. In Greece, White Stork occurs as a nesting species only in the north of the country and as a passage migrant in the spring and fall. Lesbos, however, is just far enough north that a few pair stay to breed. On the afternoon of June 24 we visited the village of Skalla Kalloni to view a nest with a chick, which was wonderful.

### **Cormorants & Shags (*Phalacrocoracidae*)**

**Great Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*)** – In the eastern Mediterranean, Great Cormorant occurs as a summer resident in low numbers with most individuals residing farther north at this time of year. One or two birds were noted at the salt pans around the Kalloni Gulf on June 24. As one travels north, however, the bird becomes more common. As evidence, we saw four or five individuals very well on the Istanbul Extension (Bosporus cruise) on June 29. Subspecies *sinensis*.

**European Shag (*Phalacrocorax aristotelis*)** – This is the common cormorant species of the eastern Mediterranean, even in the summertime. We enjoy excellent views of birds on Lesvos on June 24 and others in the Dardanelle and Bosporus straits.

### **Hérons, Egrets & Biterns (*Ardeidae*)**

**Gray Heron (*Ardea cinerea*)** – Several were seen well at the salt pans around the Kalloni Gulf on Lesvos on June 24. This is the Old World replacement for the Great Blue Heron, a bird familiar to most.

**Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*)** – Like the Black Stork, Little Egret is a generally uncommon species in southern Europe during the warmer months. However, the salt pans of Lesvos are such a draw to waterbirds that a few of these white beauties over-summer. We saw one or two birds at the Kalloni salt pans on June 24.

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

**Short-toed Eagle (*Circaetus gallicus*)** – This bird is not especially uncommon in the dry country of the eastern Mediterranean region. We saw one individual, a bird hunting along a ridgeline, on the island of Chios on the morning of June 23. The bird was distant, but those willing to give it a shot were able to see it fairly well through the spotting scope.

**Eurasian Sparrowhawk (*Accipter nisus*)** – An individual initially thought to be this species was seen soaring over a pine woodland along the northeast coast of the Kalloni Gulf, Lesvos on the morning of June 24. Photos and a snippet of video were obtained by participant Warren Reggleman, who later worked to confirm the bird's identity as Eurasian Sparrowhawk. This is a very uncommon bird on Lesvos during the summer.

**Common Buzzard (*Buteo buteo*)** – This species is widespread in Europe during the summer; we saw a couple of birds on Chios and Lesvos, with the best views obtained on Lesvos on the morning of June 24. Scope views were available for most of the group.

**Long-legged Buzzard (*Buteo rufinus*)** – Within Europe, this elegant raptor occurs primarily in the southeastern corner of the continent. In the Aegean Sea region, where it is reasonably widespread, it prefers open country in association with rocky hills and mountains. Our first encounter with Long-legged Buzzard occurred on Chios when we noted a soaring bird over the hills northeast of the town of Pyrgi. The best was yet to come, however, when we enjoyed amazing views of a perched and flying individual around the Kalloni salt pans on Lesvos on June 24.

### **Stilts & Avocets (*Recurvirostridae*)**

**Black-winged Stilt (*Himantopus himantopus*)** – Several were seen at close range in the Kalloni Wetlands, Lesvos on June 24.

**Pied Avocet (*Recurvirostra avosetta*)** – Numbers were seen among the flamingo flock at the Kalloni wetlands, Lesvos on the morning of June 24; however, scope views were

required as the birds were at moderate distance.

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

**Kentish Plover (*Charadrius alexandrinus*)** – Wonderful views of a pair close to the highway at the Kalloni wetlands on the morning of June 24. This species formerly was considered conspecific with Snowy Plover of North and South America; however, the species was split about two years ago. Kentish Plover occurs widely across Eurasia, with the widespread European birds of the race *alexandrinus*.

**Little Ringed Plover (*Charadrius dubius*)** – A single bird was seen well by most of us in a salt pan along the northeast coast of the Kalloni Gulf on the morning of June 24. Subspecies *curonicus*.

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

**Common Greenshank (*Tringa nebularia*)** – We found a single Common Greenshank amid the over-summering flock of Common Redshanks at the Kalloni wetlands, Lesvos on the morning of June 24. Greenshanks should be on their breeding grounds well to the north at this time of year, so the presence of a single bird undoubtedly represented a non-breeding individual.

**Common Redshank (*Tringa totanus*)** – The group of twenty-five or so Common Redshanks at the Kalloni wetlands, Lesvos on the morning of June 24 likely were non-breeding birds, although that statement couldn't be guaranteed. Still, nice scope views were easily available.

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

**Slender-billed Gull (*Chroicocephalus genei*)** – Slender-billed Gull occurs around the Mediterranean in low numbers, favoring salt pans and other arid expanses. The bird typically is found in low numbers and nowhere appears common (at least in the eastern Med.). We felt very fortunate to find a pair of adult birds associating with the next species late in the afternoon of June 24 on a salt pan on the edge of the Kalloni Gulf.

**Black-headed Gull (*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*)** – This bird is one of the more common gull species in the eastern Mediterranean, although much less so during the warmer months. We enjoyed scope views of a resting group of about 10 birds at the Kalloni wetlands, Lesvos on the afternoon of June 24. A few others in basic plumage were seen in the Dardanelle Straits on the morning of June 27.

**Mediterranean Gull (*Ichthyaetus melanocephalus*)** – Mediterranean Gull is a fairly common bird in the eastern Mediterranean outside of the breeding season. In the warmer months, most birds are farther north in Europe where they breed around marsh lakes and reservoirs. That said, non-breeding birds may be found in very low numbers during the warmer months. Our only encounters with Mediterranean Gulls this time occurred on the morning of June 27 in the Dardanelle Strait. A couple of distant individuals were seen off the dock some distance from the ship early in the morning. However, those traveling with Victor and Peter to the Gallipoli Peninsula saw the species very well from the passenger ferry. In fact, photos were obtained. Mediterranean Gull is best told by its nearly all-white wing and body plumage and stout bill.

**Audouin's Gull (*Ichthyaetus audouinii*)** – Audouin's Gull is sought-after specialty bird of the

Mediterranean Sea and nearby outer coasts of the Atlantic Ocean. In the breeding season, most Audouin's stay close to their breeding colonies and their appearance elsewhere is not guaranteed. On the afternoon of June 25 we departed Dikili along the Turkish coast when fellow passenger Karen Barker spotted a single bird trailing in the ship's wake. The only unfortunate quality to the moment was that we were at lunch, a time when very few of us had our binoculars at the ready!

**Yellow-legged Gull (*Larus michahellis*)** – Regardless of the time of year, this is the common gull species of the eastern Mediterranean. We saw this bird in large numbers every day of the trip. The widespread subspecies *michahelis*.

**Little Tern (*Sternula albifrons*)** – Several birds were seen well at the Kalloni wetlands on the morning of June 24. This bird is the sister species to the Least Tern of North America. Occurring widely in the Old World, we saw birds of the European race *albifrons*.

**Common Tern (*Sterna hirundo*)** – The handsome Common Tern is one of the world's most adaptable tern species, being found nearly around the world. We enjoyed superb views of birds fishing at close range at the Kalloni wetlands, Lesvos on the morning of June 24. These birds were of the race *hirundo*.

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

**Rock Pigeon (*Columba livia*)** – Common, especially around Athens and Istanbul.

**Common Wood-Pigeon (*Columbus palumbus*)** – Two birds were seen in flight over the pine forest during our first birding stop on the island of Lesvos on the morning of June 24. This site was located not far from the salt pans at the northeast corner of the gulf. This bird is very common in parts of Europe, but decidedly less so this far south. The widespread *palumbus* race.

**European Turtle-Dove (*Streptopelia turtur*)** – A single bird was seen by only a few of the birding group on Lesvos on the morning of June 24, in the same general area as the above species. We first located the bird by voice; however, these guys are ventriloquists, and the song we thought was emanating from the top of a tree was actually coming from a bird on fencepost at eye-level. By the time we figured this out only a couple people saw it before it flew.

**Eurasian Collared-Dove (*Streptopelia decaocto*)** – Eurasian Collared-Dove is a common bird in the Athens area. Several were seen around the base of the Acropolis and in the ancient Agora on June 20-21.

**Laughing Dove (*Streptopelia senegalensis*)** – One of the last new birds of the trip, Laughing Doves were seen in park-like settings and public areas in Istanbul on June 28 and 29. Interestingly, Laughing Dove is a common bird in parts of the Middle East and throughout much of Africa, but is rather localized on the Turkish coast, which represents the extreme western end of its range. Our first sighting occurred in the Hippodrome of Constantinople on the morning of the 28<sup>th</sup>, while good views were also had the next morning on the grounds of Topkapi Palace. A highly attractive bird featuring vinaceous body plumage and wings infused with blue.

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

**Little Owl (*Athene noctua*)** – One of the trip's highlights was the discovery of a dandy Little Owl in the trees outside the Temple of Hephaestus in the ancient Agora on the morning of June 20. Others were seen well at the ruins of Pergamum, Turkey on June 25.

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

**Alpine Swift (*Apus melba*)** – No trip could have been more productive for this species than this one. Alpine Swifts were seen on several days, but were especially memorable in Athens and Istanbul at the beginning and at the end. On the morning of June 20 we watched a cloud of these birds swirling over the Acropolis, issuing their pitched screams, and streaming among the columns and of the Parthenon. In Istanbul we were treated to many close encounters with low-flying groups of birds. Especially memorable were the large evening congregations of birds we saw over the city. Huge with brown and white plumage, this bird is one of the world's largest swifts.

**Common Swift (*Apus apus*)** – Many individuals were seen in different locations throughout the trip including Athens, Chios, Lesbos, and Istanbul.

### **Bee-eaters (*Meropidae*)**

**European Bee-eater (*Merops apiaster*)** – This bird was essentially missed; however, participant Tom Taylor saw a fly-over individual at Troy on the afternoon of June 26.

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

**Eurasian Hoopoe (*Upupa epops*)** – During dinner in Athens on the night of June 21, the appearance of a pair of Hoopoes atop a nearby rooftop was a wonderful surprise. Another was seen at the base of the Acropolis that morning.

### **Woodpeckers (*Picidae*)**

**Syrian Woodpecker (*Dendrocopos syriacus*)** – One was seen briefly in the woods behind the Asclepion of Pergamon, Turkey on the morning of June 25. Unfortunately, not seen by all.

### **Falcons & Caracaras (*Falconidae*)**

**Eurasian Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*)** – Nice views of a pair of birds circling over the Acropolis on the morning of the 20<sup>th</sup>. A couple of others were seen elsewhere, including nice views of a kiting individual outside Mesta, Chios on the morning of the 23<sup>rd</sup>.

**Eleonora's Falcon (*Falco eleonora*)** – One of the premier birds of the eastern Mediterranean, we enjoyed good fortune with this bird this year. Unquestionably, one of the highlights of our time on Chios was the morning lift-off of Eleonora's Falcons over the island's rocky interior. The first sighting was of a couple of individuals over a distant ridgeline; however, birds began to appear around as the morning wore on. At one roadside pull-off we had birds in the air directly overhead. One or two others were seen at Pergamon on the morning of June 25. In the spring and summer months, Eleonora's Falcons are open country predators of dragonflies.

**Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*)** – An immature seen at sea on the morning of June 22 was the only one seen. Peregrines are resident in low numbers throughout the Greek islands.

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

**Masked Shrike (*Lanius nubicus*)** – This bird makes its way into Europe only in the far southeastern corner of the continent. We enjoyed our first views of this handsome species around the Kalloni Gulf, Lesbos on June 25; however, our best views were of a very close bird among the ruins at Troy on the afternoon of June 26.

**Woodchat Shrike (*Lanius senator*)** – Woodchat Shrike is a beautiful bird featuring a chestnut crown and black and white wings and body. We enjoyed excellent views of birds on several occasions, including on Lesvos on June 25 and at Assos on the 27<sup>th</sup>. Subspecies *senator*.

**Crow, Jays & Magpies (*Corvidae*)**

**Eurasian Jay (*Garrulus glandarius*)** – Despite its widespread range, Eurasian Jay is not at all a common bird in southern Greece. We saw one individual as a flyover on Lesvos nearby the Kalloni Gulf on the morning of June 24. Unequivocally, our best experiences with this bird were at Troy where multiple individuals were seen at very close range. A large and highly attractive species. The race *atricapillus*.

**Eurasian Magpie (*Pica pica*)** – Several were seen in Athens, particularly around the Acropolis on the grounds of the ancient Agora. The widespread *pica* subspecies.

**Eurasian Jackdaw (*Corvus monedula*)** – This is a very widespread bird, but only a few were seen well, especially near the harbor at Cannakale, Turkey. Race *soemmerringii*.

**Hooded Crow (*Corvus cornix*)** – An attractive and distinctly marked *corvid*, Hooded Crows were seen well in several locations, including the island of Lesvos and all along the Turkish coast to Istanbul. Race *sharpie*.

**Larks (*Alaudidae*)**

**Crested Lark (*Galerida cristata*)** – Exceptional views of this bird were had in the dry salt pans around the Kalloni Gulf, Lesvos on June 24. Race *caucasica*.

**Swallows (*Hirundinidae*)**

**Barn Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*)** – Common and seen almost every day throughout. These birds were of the widespread Eurasian subspecies *hirundo*.

**Red-rumped Swallow (*Cecropia daurica*)** – This is an attractive swallow restricted in Europe to the southern tier of the continent. We saw Red-rumped on a couple of days, but especially memorable was the first individual, on Chios on the morning of June 23, and many others on the power lines outside the ruins of Pergamon on June 25. Subspecies *rufula*.

**Common House-Martin (*Delichon urbicum*)** – A very common bird seen on most days of the trip. House-Martins were especially common on Chios where we saw birds nesting in the central plaza of the village of Mesta, and plenty of others in Istanbul.

**Tits, Chickadees & Titmice (*Paridae*)**

**Great Tit (*Parus major*)** – Our best views of Great Tit occurred on the second morning of the tour when we saw several birds quite well on the grounds of the ancient Agora. Others were seen on Lesvos and at Pergamon.

**Eurasian Blue Tit (*Cyanistes caeruleus*)** – This bird is actually a fairly common species along our entire cruise route; however, and for whatever reason, we saw only a few. The best sighting was of a single bird coming into the water drip on the grounds of the ancient Agora on the second morning out. Race *calamensis*.

**Nuthatches (*Sittidae*)**

**Krueper's Nuthatch (*Sitta krueperi*)** – One of the premier birds of the region, Krueper's

Nuthatch is a bird primarily of the Aleppo Pine forests of Western and Central Turkey. In Europe, the bird is found only on the island of Lesbos. It was very gratifying to find a pair of this handsome little nuthatch at our first stop on Lesbos on the morning of June 24—a couple of birds foraging in the pines near the edge of the Kalloni Gulf.

**Rock Nuthatch (*Sitta neumayer*)** – The Rock Nuthatch is a delightful little songster fond of the rocky hills, rock piles, and ancient ruins of the Aegean Sea region. We saw nuthatches in a couple of places, but our best views were of many birds all over the ruins of Pergamon, including birds attending a nest. Subspecies *syriaca*, or “Western” Rock Nuthatch.

#### **Reed-Warblers & Allies (*Acrocephalidae*)**

**Eastern Olivaceous Warbler (*Iduna pallida*)** – A single skulky individual was eventually seen all amid the ruins of Troy on the afternoon of June 26.

#### **Sylviids (*Sylviidae*)**

**Sardinian Warbler (*Sylvia melanocephala*)** – This species is a very common and widespread bird around the Mediterranean; however, we didn’t exactly slay it on this trip. In fact, the only ones seen were some flighty individuals on the hillside below Pergamon on June 25, and a couple of immature birds in the ruins of Assos on the morning of June 27. Others were heard.

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

**Spotted Flycatcher (*Muscicapa striata*)** – A parent and immature bird were seen among the pines bordering the Kalloni Gulf on Lesbos on the morning of June 24. This species is a very common passage migrant throughout the region in the spring and fall, and a fairly common nesting bird in the warmer months.

**Common Nightingale (*Luscinia megarhynchos*)** – We were treated to the memorable sound of multiple singing birds along the watershed in the pine forest on the edge of the Kalloni Gulf on the morning of June 24; alas, only part of the group actually got their binoculars on a bird. A secretive species by nature, nightingales just aren’t given to exposed perches for more than brief periods of time.

**Northern Wheatear (*Oenanthe oenanthe*)** – We enjoyed marvelous views of a family group at the Asclepion of Pergamon on the morning of June 25.

**Black-eared Wheatear (*Oenanthe hispanica*)** – A stunner of a bird, we enjoyed many fabulous views among two different locations. Our first encounter with the species was of a male bird on a rocky hillside near the Kalloni Gulf, Lesbos, June 24. The next sightings occurred at Pergamon where we observed multiple birds at different places around the ruins complex.

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

**Eurasian Blackbird (*Turdus merula*)** – Normally a fairly common and obvious species, we only had glimpses of birds in flight in several locations; probably not seen well by anyone.

#### **Buntings & New World Sparrows (*Emberizidae*)**

**Cirl Bunting (*Emberiza cirlus*)** – Several individuals foraging together under the pines near the exit to the Asclepion were the only ones seen. That said, they were seen well and at length. A handsome member of the bunting family.

**Black-headed Bunting (*Emberiza melanocephala*)** – A gorgeous male bird was seen on a hillside above a *mastic* plantation on the island of Chios on the morning of June 23; a good thing too as it was the only one we saw. This bird is not especially uncommon in far southeastern Europe, yet its restricted range makes it one of the region's more sought-after birds.

**Finches, Euphonias & Allies (*Fringillidae*)**

**Common Chaffinch (*Fringilla coelebs*)** – Chaffinches were seen in the pine forest by the Kalloni Gulf on Lesbos on June 24; others were seen among the ruins of Pergamon on the next day.

**European Goldfinch (*Carduelis carduelis*)** – We enjoyed fine views of several lovely male birds at the Asclepion of Pergamon. Though common and widespread, we didn't exactly see lots of these this year.

**European Greenfinch (*Chloris chloris*)** – A handsome male bird was seen by a few people in the pines at the Asclepion of Pergamon on June 25.

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

**House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*)** – Widespread and common throughout.

**Spanish Sparrow (*Passer hispaniolensis*)** – Those that joined the afternoon birding excursion on the island of Lesbos on June 24 saw Spanish Sparrows nesting in the White Stork nest in Skalla Kalloni.

**Total: 72**

## MAMMALS

**Striped Dolphin (*Stenella coeruleoalba*)** – Dolphins thought to be this species were seen bow riding during our one day at Sea, June 22.