



Crete 30 May to 12 June 2010

This non-birding holiday was based in Georgiopolis, approximately halfway between Chania and Rethymon on the north coast of Crete. This time all birding was done by bicycle, mostly in the early hours of the morning. As usual for Crete there were plenty of birds and other wildlife to be seen all over the place – though often hard to obtain good views or photographs.

This is the earliest time of year for my visits to Crete and there was a lot more birdsong than on previous trips – making many birds easier to locate. Georgiopolis proved to be an excellent base for someone without a car with abundant birding sites close to the village. Very relaxed atmosphere here without the traffic of many other resorts.

The lake at Georgiopolis was not as productive as Lake Aghia but regular visits still proved worthwhile. On the last day water levels suddenly rose by around half a metre. Lake Kournas also proved itself to be worth visiting despite the large numbers of tourists.

Olivaceous Warblers were absolutely everywhere – as common as Sardinian Warblers in some places. Turtle Doves too were very obvious with a good number of singing birds on the slopes behind the village. Highlights for me in a Cretan context were a Tawny Pipit at Georgiopolis and a Honey Buzzard over Mathes.

Another memorable experience was photographing two Squacco Herons at dawn whilst kneeling in the path of some ants with cramp in my leg and a cloud of mosquitos overhead – and not wanting to move in order to not scare the birds off. It was worth it!

Mathes, a few kilometres inland, provided some raptor interest and not having a telescope with me here almost definitely cost me some species. Argypoulis also looked to be a good raptor locality (stopped briefly there on an excursion).

Itinerary was as follows:

- 31st May: Georgiopolis Lake and area west of the town
- 1st June: Georgiopolis Lake and area east of the town
- 3rd June: Lake Kournas
- 4th June: Georgiopolis Lake and “cliffs” west of the town
- 6th June: Shores / dunes east of Georgiopolis (& non-birding trip to Lake Kournas)
- 7th June: Georgiopolis Lake and road to Mathes
- 8th June: Mathes (late afternoon trip)
- 9th June: Cycle ride Georgiopolis – Expoli – Selia – Likotinara
- 11th June: Lake Kournas (early morning), Mathes (afternoon)
- 12th June: Georgiopolis Lake and “cliffs” west of the town



Most of my birding was done within the area covered by this photograph of Georioupolis (taken from Mathes)



A view over part of Lake Georgioupolis



Dawn over the dunes east of Georgiopolis – a great habitat for a number of species but obviously threatened by development. Sea Holly in the foreground.



One of the highlights of the trip – watching two Squacco Herons fishing at dawn



Night Heron / natthevre at Lake Kournas – picture taken from a moving pedal boat.



Squacco Heron / topphegre at Lake Kournas



Serin / gulirisk were very common and singing everywhere in the coastal plain.



Male Sardinian Warbler / svarthodesanger – one of the commonest and widespread species on Crete and which don't often pose like this one did!



Honey Buzzard / vespevåk flying over Mathes



Typical view of Griffon Vulture / gåsegribb – right into the sun



Olivaceous Warbler / blekspottesanger were very common and widespread this time around



Black-eared Wheatear / middelhavssteinskvett



Many I have talked with fail to see Spanish Sparrow on Crete – here is proof that they are still around



Turtle Dove / turteldue were surprisingly numerous and widespread



Little Plover / dverglo – a species being squeezed out by development and a clear victim of tourism



This Little Plover chick hatched on a crowded beach – I'd be surprised if it got much bigger than it is pictured here



A couple of interesting combination photos. On the left Hobby / lerkefalk and Little Egret / silkehegre in the same tree, Lake Georgioupolis. On the right two Cretan specialities – an Eleonora's Falcon / leonara-falk and an Alpine Swift / alpe-seiler; the falcon was hunting insects not swifts.



Species List

Explanation of numbers

- * Less than 10
- ** 10s (10-99)
- *** 100s (100 -999)
- **** 1000s (1000+)

English / Norwegian name	Scientific name	Numbers	Comments
Little Grebe / Dvergdykker	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	**	Breeding birds at Lake Georgiupolis and Lake Kournas
Shag / Toppskarv	<i>Phalacrocorax aristotelis</i>	*	1-2 along the cliffs west of Georgiupolis
Little Bittern / Topphegre	<i>Ixobrychus minutus</i>	*	A single seen at Lake Georiupolis on 12 June
Black-crowned Night Heron / Natthege	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>	*	Singles seen onces at Lake Georgiupolis and a twice at Lake Kournas
Squacco Heron / Topphegre	<i>Ardeola ralloides</i>	*	2 at Georgiupolis and 1-2 at Lake Kournas
Little Egret / Silkehegre	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	*	Singles at Lake Georgiupolis, Lake Kournas and on the shore at Rethymon
Grey Heron / Gråhegre	<i>Ardea cinera</i>	*	1 at Lake Georgiupolis on a few dates
Honey Buzzard / Vespevåk	<i>Pernis apivorus</i>	*	A single over Mathes on 08 June
Griffon Vulture / Gåsegribb	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>	*	Several over Argypoulis, small numbers over Lake Kournas and at Mathes
Common Buzzard / Musvåk	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	**	Widespread and common
Common Kestrel / Tårnfalk	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	*	Common
Hobby / Lerkefalk	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>	*	A single at Lake Georgiupolis
Eleonora's Falcon / Leonorafalk	<i>Falco eleonora</i>	*	Singles seen at Mathes and near Lake Georgiupolis on 01 June
Common Moorehen / Sivhøne	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	**	Approx 20 present at Lake Georgiupolis, a few elsewhere
Common Coot / Sothøne	<i>Fulica atra</i>	***	Approx 30 at Lake Georgiupolis
Little Plover / Dverglo	<i>Charadrius dubious</i>	*	Several seen along the shores east of Georgiupolis. Breeding confirmed with newly hatched young seen.
Yellow-legged Gull / Gulbeingrāmåke	<i>Larus cachinnans</i>	**	10-20 daily on the shore and at the lakes
Common Tern / Makrellterne	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>	*	One fishing off the shore 01 June
Woodpigeon / Ringdue	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	*	Thinly distributed
Eurasian Collared Dove / Tyrkedue	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	***	Everywhere



English / Norwegian name	Scientific name	Numbers	Comments
Turtle Dove / Turteldue	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>	**	Widespread and singing away from the coast
Long-eared Owl / Hornugle	<i>Asio otus</i>	*	One over the "town" centre 07 June
Common Swift / Tårnseiler	<i>Apus aapus</i>	****	Thousands in Chania, hundreds elsewhere
Alpine Swift / Alpeseiler	<i>Apus melba</i>	**	Good numbers (tens) seen daily
Crested Lark / Topplerke	<i>Galerida cristata</i>	**	Small numbers on farmland, common in the dunes east of Georgiupolis
House Martin / Taksvale	<i>Delichon urbica</i>	**	Common
Barn Swallow / Låvesvale	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	***	Everywhere, one of the commonest birds
Red-rumped Swallow / Amursvale	<i>Hirundo daurica</i>	**	Thinly spread, largely away from the coast
Tawny Pipit / Markpiplerke	<i>Anthus campestris</i>	*	A single to the east of the village 01 June
White / Pied Wagtail / Linerle	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	*	Only one pair seen in the village
Stonechat / Svartstrupe	<i>Saxicola torquata</i>	**	Widespread
Black-eared Wheatear / Middelhavsteinskvet	<i>Oenanthe hispanica</i>	*	A few pairs along the cliffs west of the village
Blue Rock Thrush / Blåtrost	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>	*	Several seen away from the coast. Shy.
Common Blackbird / Svartrost	<i>Turdus merula</i>	**	Everywhere
Reed Warbler / Rørsanger	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>	*	A few holding territories in suitable habitat around Geogrgiupolis
Great Reed Warbler / Trostesanger	<i>Acrocephalus arundinaceus</i>	*	A single seen to the west of Georiupolis 31 May. Not seen again
Olivaceous Warbler / Blekspottesanger	<i>Hippolais pallida</i>	**	Common and widespread
Sardinian Warbler / Svarthodsanger	<i>Sylvia melnocephala</i>	**	Widespread
Blackcap / Munk	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	**	Widespread
Cetti's Warbler / Cettisanger	<i>Cettia cetti</i>	**	Widespread
Spotted Flycatcher / Gråfluesnapper	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>	*	Widespread
Blue Tit / Blåmeis	<i>Parus caeruleus</i>	*	A few down at the coast but more on higher ground
Great Tit / Kjøttmeis	<i>Parus major</i>	**	Common everywhere
Woodchat Shrike /	<i>Lanius senator</i>	*	A few seen in cultivated areas
Hooded crow / Kråke	<i>Corvus corone</i>	**	Common everywhere
Common Raven / Ravn	<i>Corvus corax</i>	**	Regular on higher ground
Italian Sparrow /	<i>Passer (domesticus) italiae</i>	***	Common everywhere



English / Norwegian name	Scientific name	Numbers	Comments
Spanish Sparrow / Middelhavsspurv	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>	*	Rather scarce but a few seen
Eurasian Tree Sparrow / Piffink	<i>Passer montanus</i>	*	A couple east of the village
Chaffinch / Bokfink	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	**	Widespread
European Serin / Gulirisk	<i>Serinus serinus</i>	**	Very common
European Greenfinch / Grønnfink	<i>Carduelis chloris</i>	**	Widespread
European Goldfinch / Stillits	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	***	One of the commonest species
Common Linnet / Tornirisk	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>	*	A few seen at Mathes and elsewhere on higher ground



This White Pelican lives at Georgioupolis, has a name, plays with children and is loved by many of the locals. However, it is free flying and can often be seen patrolling along the beach, often mobbed by Yellow-legged Gulls.



Other wildlife

As usual plenty of other wildlife seen including the following:

Loggerhead Turtle

Terrapin (Everywhere there was fresh water)

Balkan Green Lizard

Cretan Wall Lizard

Dice Snake (swimming at Lake Kournas)

Badger (as road kill near Mathes)

Hare

Bats (unknown species)

Land Crab – one of the surprises of the trip, seen near Lake Kournas



Land Crab – the first I have seen on Crete



Cretan Wall Lizard



Balkan Green Lizard



Swallowtail – loads of butterflies of many species were seen



Dragonflies of all colours were abundant

More about birding Crete here: <http://www.naturalbornbirder.com/travel/Crete.html>
More trip reports at <http://www.naturalbornbirder.com/travel/travel.php>
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