



Things at home had become quite oppressive, so Bev went to "Going Places" along Broadstairs High Street and booked a holiday off of the window. As it turned out, it was a great move and we ended up in the village of Agios Gordios, on the south-west coast of Corfu (3<sup>rd</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup> September) less than three weeks later. I had never travelled so far east, and the limited information, that I was able to glean from the inter-net, didn't bode well for my prospects of birding. We were travelling on a very tight budget, so a hire car wasn't an option. My plan, as it was on our honeymoon, was for me to bird the mornings and then spend the rest of the day with Bev. I would only cover the area within walking distance of our apartment.

I had no idea how steep the hills were or testing the birding, within olive groves and vineyards, would prove. I enjoyed the challenge immensely and was happy to test my abilities within a habitat that simply doesn't exist within the county of Kent (or the UK for that matter!). My desire to produce a trip report, for the web site, meant that I carried my scope, camera and assorted paraphernalia required for capturing various creepy crawlies. Mistake number one was to take a cheap tri-pod and number two was to under-estimate the importance of carrying a bottle of water whilst birding in temperatures above 30 C!

We arrived at Corfu Airport, after an excellent flight from Gatwick, to be introduced to the Corfiot attitude for work. Very similar to myself, in many ways, there is no chance that hurry or stress is an option. Your baggage will get unloaded when the guys are ready – what are you going to do about it? I'll tell you what – you wait – simple!

#### Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> September - Day 1

The adventure begins. Apart from a few Little Egrets noted from the plane, as it landed at Corfu Airport, there was little birdlife to be seen as we were taxied to our apartment in the Sea Breeze complex. An adult Woodchat Shrike on the wires, by the carpark, as we unloaded our suitcases was a nice introduction to the potential of the immediate area. House Martins, Red-rumped & Barn Swallows were obvious in the skies over the village, whilst a quick walk around the immediate area resulted in several Sardinian, 2 Olivaceous, 1 male Subalpine and 1 Wood Warbler plus a few Blue Tits. House Sparrows proved to be very common and an after dark walk revealed the presence of Scop's Owl; at least 2 birds calling from the Olive groves beyond the village boundaries.

#### Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> September – Day 2

Bev was already planning to spend her first day “toasting” around the pool as I set off up the steep road that goes south from the village. Red-rumped Swallows were on the wires around the village and I saw a Common Buzzard perched high on a tall, straight, pine tree. A family of Serins were buzzing about over a small cleared area as I made my way steadily upward. A dark coloured raptor, perched high up on the hillside provided a stiff test of my id skills. I am glad it remained around the area, as my first pics were not particularly good. By following a coastal track/rough road, I was able to get quite close to the bird and obtain some excellent images of, what was, a dark phase Eleonora's Falcon. Much larger than I had imagined, the flight appeared quite laboured for a bird with such a reputation. I have a feeling that it had just arrived in the area and was tired. Two Kestrels mobbed it for a while, yet it took little notice and remained perched. Other birds noticed included 2 Golden Oriole, 3 Blue Rock Thrush and a singing Short-toed Treecreeper. Despite my obvious success, I did struggle to get to grips with the various warblers that allowed fleeting glimpses as they worked their way through the dense foliage of the Olive trees. I went back down to the apartment for something to eat and a much needed drink.



### **Eleonora's Falcon**

**This fantastic, dark phase, adult was found on my first morning. I didn't get any other opportunities to study the species in such detail. I was a very happy birder as I made my way back into the village to spend the afternoon with Bev and a beer!**

I couldn't sit by the pool all afternoon, so went back up into the hills for a second time. This time I had a litre of water with me! A moulting adult Common Buzzard called twice, as it circled high over the ridge. Working much harder in the Olive trees I managed to find 1 Willow, 1 Wood, several Olivaceous, 1 imm Subalpine, 1 Icterine and, most bizarrely, 3 Cetti's Warblers along with Spotted Flycatcher, Serin, Short-toed Treecreeper and mixed flocks of Blue & Great Tits.

### **Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> September – Day 3**

Up early again, I walked north this time and discovered an area of Olive Groves, Vineyards and Market Gardens in a depression in the hills, some 2.5 km away. There was some evidence of migration with several groups of Yellow Wagtails (race unknown) passing overhead. A wheatear raised my hopes, as it flicked across the path in front of me. Sadly, it was just a Northern Wheatear and was the first of 5 that I saw that morning. Another 2

Golden Oriole were noted amongst the more mundane species. I recorded my first Pied Flycatcher, Common Whitethroat, Nightingale, Blackbird and Stonechat as I walked around the area. Ominous rumbles of thunder were emanating from the north of the island and, despite the fact that I was still wandering around in glorious sunshine, leaden skies pre-warned of things to come. But every cloud has a silver lining and these particular storm clouds had a flock of 300+ Alpine Swifts fleeing, in a rather leisurely fashion, before them. I had stunning, prolonged views of these magnificent birds. Returning to "Sea Breeze" a displaying male Blue Rock Thrush parachuted across the rooftops



NORTHERN WHEATEAR

Monday 6<sup>th</sup> September – Day 4

Hoping that the spectacular overnight storms might have deposited a few migrants I headed back up into the hills to the south. Unused to the gradients, my legs were really starting to ache so I traded in my holiday flip-flops for my walking boots. A couple of Common Buzzards put on a good show but the only addition to my trip list was a Goldfinch that flew overhead. As we sat around the pool later in the day, a Grey Wagtail called as it flew south. Two distant falcons, seen high up over the ridge might have been Eleonora's, but as I only had my bins, I couldn't rule out Peregrine

Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> September – Day 5

Back up into the cultivated area to the north, my walk started with the sad discovery of a dead Hoopoe along the track from the apartment. It had probably collided with the overhead wires as it migrated in the dark. It proved to be my only encounter with this wonderful species. Bird wise, there wasn't a lot to be seen around the area, but I did see the fantastic Two-tailed Pasha butterfly. Yellow Wagtails continued to trickle south and Spotted Flycatcher numbers appeared to be up, so migrants were on the move. A juvenile Woodchat Shrike was discovered around a small farm, but steadfastly refused to co-operate with my attempts to get any pictures.

Happily the adult bird, that was resident around the apartment, was far more obliging. Sitting around the pool I was able to add Eleonora's Falcon and 3 Common Buzzards to the day list.



**Adult Woodchat**

**This individual remained in the vicinity of our apartment for the entire holiday. Being quite used to people it provided me with an excellent photo opportunity**

Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup> September – Day 6

My legs were aching so much I couldn't face the thought of another trudge up into the hills. Walking back yesterday, I had noticed a small, cultivated area to the north of the village, just inland of the beach. I set off along the boarded walkway that fringes the narrow strip of sand and eventually found a small track that allowed access into a group of small fields. What a discovery! The first bird I found was a juvenile Red-backed Shrike, quickly followed by a Wryneck. A large grey/green "*hippolais*" flew past me to be lost in a thick tangle of wild Olives and Brambles. I never relocated it, but feel fairly sure it was an Olive-tree Warbler. 4 Goldfinch, 3 Blue Rock Thrush, a juvenile Woodchat Shrike, 5 Whinchat and a Cetti's Warbler were all recorded in this tiny area of just a few hundred metres square. I knew that I would be a regular visitor for the rest of my stay.



**Red-backed Shrike**

**The first bird I found in the small, cultivated area just a few hundred metres along the beach from our apartment.**

Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> September – Day 7

A Greek Night in the Sea Breeze Taverna meant that I was a little jaded this morning. A quiet stroll along the beach was about all I could muster. The Wryneck, Red-backed Shrike and a Spotted Flycatcher showed well, but

Whinchat numbers had decreased to just 2 birds. Back at the pool I managed to scope 2 Peregrines, an adult and a juvenile, perched high up on the crag to the south. 3 long winged raptors flew south along the ridge, but remained un-id'd as I failed to get any views through my scope. I also got the only views of seabirds today. Despite having a balcony that overlooked the Ionian Sea, not one gull, tern or shearwater had been located. 4 gulls flew south and were probably Yellow-legged Gulls of the race "*cachinans*" or Caspian Gull.

Friday 10<sup>th</sup> September – Day 8

Planetthenet.org was celebrating its' first year and I was missing it! "Too bad" I thought as I trudged up into the cultivated area to the north. Serins proved to be very numerous with several large groups noted around the site. A small falcon was spotted gliding over a small wooded area. I identified it as a Hobby just in time to watch it land on a dead branch several hundred metres away. Attempts at digi-scoping were pointless, so I carefully stalked the bird and was able to get some nice images from the cover of a small Olive Grove.



**A sub-adult Hobby**

**Due to the conditions, a very pleasing image.**

**This proved to be the only Hobby I saw during my stay**

Pleased with my success, I continued on to the small farm where I encountered another large group of Serins feeding amidst the local House Sparrows. A flashing white rump alerted me to the presence of a wheatear, which, on raising my bins, proved to be a stunning adult Black-eared Wheatear of the race "*melanoleuca*". It led me a merry dance before finally becoming bored with the hide and seek game and allowing me to get some nice images. I also recorded my only White Wagtail of the holiday here.



My day wasn't over yet. Turning a corner in a mixed area of Olive and Fig trees, I found an adult and juvenile Golden Oriole perched in a small Oak.

The adult wasn't playing, but the juvenile allowed me to get some nice images as it basked in the dappled light. Blending superbly with the foliage. If they were celebrating back in Thanet, then I was having my share of the fun as I walked around today. A juvenile Red-backed Shrike, 1 Tree Pipit, 1 Blackcap and a good number of Stonechats kept my interest and filled in a few gaps in my trip list. Back down at the pool there was the spectacle of mass migration. In little more than 3 hours I recorded 10,000 Swallows, 500+ Red-rumped Swallows, 3 Marsh Harrier, 10 Common Buzzard, 11 Common Swift, 1 Grey Wagtail & 2 distant raptors with features suggesting Long-legged Buzzard. What a day, I only hope that Gadget and Co were enjoying themselves as much!



**Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> September – Day 9**

Just a quiet walk along the beach to the small, cultivated area. The Wryneck and both juvenile Shrikes were still present along with the normal bits I had become accustomed to seeing. A large, thrush sized, rufous bird flew across the small vineyard and alighted in the lower branches of a Fig tree. A check through the bins revealed it to be a Great Reed Warbler and a very nice addition to the trip list. 2 Grey Wagtails flew over heading south and by some careful use of a small bush; I managed to get some stunning images of the Wryneck sitting in a dead tree, calling frequently. There were 2 Whinchats flycatching from the overhead power cables. Back at the pool I only recorded a few Swallows and 6 Common Swifts moving south whilst 2 migrant Marsh Harriers were forced back north by the combined efforts of the 4 resident Common Buzzards. Behaviour that I had never seen before, although I do recall 2 Marsh Harriers shadowing an Osprey, at Grove Ferry earlier in the spring, thus ensuring that it left their territory.



### **Wryneck**

**After a number of near misses, I finally managed to get a series of images that do justice to the intricate plumage detail of this species. I was very relieved, having fluffed all my previous chances.**

### **Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> September – Day 10**

I awoke to realise that I had got a rather nasty ear infection that almost rendered me deaf. Birding takes on a whole new dimension when sound is removed from the equation. A walk north, up into the cultivated area, was very much a wasted effort and to cap it all, the cheap tri-pod gave up the ghost to the extent that any further digi-scoping would be impossible.

An immature Icterine Warbler was the highlight of the birding whilst a Southern White Admiral was a new species for me. The butterflies were very diverse, although not as numerous as I would have expected considering the location. Silver-washed Fritillary, Swallowtail, Wall Brown, Blue Argus, Small Copper, Speckled Wood and Lang's Short-tailed Blue were all seen regularly with several common species of White and Meadow Browns. The only other insect that could almost be guaranteed daily was Hummingbird Hawk-moth.



Monday 13<sup>th</sup> September – Day 11

Not much birding today, instead a bus trip (an experience in itself) into Corfu Town for a spot of retail therapy for Bev. Can you imagine how surprised I was when I came across a camera shop that sold tri-pods? "What a co-incidence!" 39 Euros later, a replacement had been purchased and a very happy Dylan traipsed around the various gift shops until it was time to endure another cramped journey back into Agios Gordios in a public cattle wagon!

I had to try out the new item, so I spent an hour along the beach, where the juvenile Woodchat allowed me to conduct a short field test.



**Juvenile Woodchat Shrike**

**Taken looking through some grapevines, the scapular patches show up really nicely in the late afternoon sunlight**

**Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> September – Day 12**

**A short session along the beach was fairly uneventful. The Blue Rock Thrushes enjoyed frustrating my attempts at anything other than distant record shots. A walk into the hills to the south later in the morning provided a couple of nice bonuses. There was a lone Alpine Swift over the ridge, as I made my way out of the village and I found a single Wood Warbler in the Olive Groves as I made my way to a rocky cliff in the hope of another chance at a Blue Rock Thrush image. I failed dismally with my first quest, but was rewarded with the sound of a “dueting” pair of Rock Nuthatch though, as hard as I tried, I failed to get a glimpse of either bird. On my way back to the pool I managed to get quite a nice series of images of Red-rumped Swallows perched on the wires just behind our apartment.**



**Red-rumped  
Swallow**

**Smashing little  
hirundines with a  
cheery call note  
and a very familiar  
sight around the  
village**

**Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> September – Day 13**

I went back up into the cultivated area to the north. I really would have been better off in bed! A Pied Flycatcher was a bright enough start, but it really was a struggle between the few birds that I found. 2 Tree Pipits flew over calling and I found 2 Olivaceous Warblers in a small vineyard, one of which was in sub-song. Odd Serin and Stonechat kept my list ticking over and a singing Golden Oriole was a surprise. I left the area early and headed back via the small area along the beach. 5 Whinchat, 1 Spotted Flycatcher, 1 Cetti's Warbler and the juvenile Woodchat sums up my efforts.

The only other occurrence of any note was that I saw my first live snake on the island. A very small Grass Snake slithered alongside the path before disappearing into a crevice.

**Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> September – Day 14**

Our last full day. I went back up into the rocky area with the sole intention of seeing the Rock Nuthatch. I did get a brief flight view of the pair, but that's about all. The Blue Rock Thrushes continued to frustrate my attempts of a good image but the time wasn't entirely wasted. I added 4 more species to the trip list. Common Redstart, Garden Warbler and Robin are hardly birds to inspire the imagination but the sight of a Long-legged Buzzard circling with 2 Common cousins allowed fantastic views and comparison of

structure and plumage detail. Other birds included 6 Alpine Swift, 1 Nightingale, 45+ Blackcap and a juvenile Kestrel.



Friday 17<sup>th</sup> September – Day 15

Home time and back to reality. The only birds, worthy of note, were a Northern Wheatear on the Corfu airport apron and 2 Little Egrets seen from the plane as we took off.

What an island and what great fun birding it. I had only scratched the surface of what is available to the visiting birder/naturalist. Any one with a reasonable budget, thus transport, should be able to cover the island fairly well in two weeks. The chance to discover my own birds in such magnificent surroundings really kept me going. The people are wonderfully friendly and the standard of local cuisine is first class. Despite our limited funds, Bev and I ate out most days and managed to sup a few "light ales" for around 50 Euros/day. I would like to thank the Sea Breeze family for their wonderful hospitality and the other guests at the complex for their company and friendship during our stay.

## Trip List

**Little Egret** *Egretta garzetta* – seen on the pools by the airport runway

**Marsh Harrier** *Circus aeruginosus* – 5 over 2 days were migrants

**Long-legged Buzzard** *Buteo rufinus* – 1 definite with another 2 possibles!

**Common Buzzard** *Buteo buteo* – seen regularly along the high ridge behind our apartment.

**Common Kestrel** *Falco tinnunculus* – seen on three occasions

**Hobby** *Falco subbuteo* – one bird in the cultivated area to the north

**Eleonora's Falcon** *Falco eleonora* – one photographed and it, or another, seen in flight high over the ridge

**Peregrine** *Falco peregrinus* – an adult and juvenile seen

**Caspian Gull** *Larus cachinans* – 4 birds, presumed to be of this species seen one day.

**Collared Dove** *Streptopelia decaocto* – very common around the villages

**Scop's Owl** *Otus scops* – heard easily on the two occasions I went to listen for them.

**Common Swift** *Apus apus* – a few migrants south on 10<sup>th</sup> & 11<sup>th</sup>

**Alpine Swift** *Apus melba* – a large movement on 5<sup>th</sup> and a few others noted on two other occasions

**Hoopoe** *Upupa epops* – a dead bird was my only record.

**Wryneck** *Jynx torquilla* – common in all habitats I visited, although never easy to see well.

**Barn Swallow** *Hirundo rustica* – very numerous with a massive movement on 10<sup>th</sup>

**Red-rumped Swallow** *Hirundo daurica* – very common around the village

**House Martin** *Delichon urbica* – very common around the village

**Tree Pipit** *Anthus trivialis* – migrants seen/heard on a couple of dates

**White Wagtail** *Motacilla alba alba* – one bird seen around the farm on 10<sup>th</sup>.

**Yellow Wagtail** *Motacilla flava* ? – migrants noted on several dates

**Grey Wagtail** *Motacilla cinerea* – small numbers noted on several dates.

**Robin** *Erithacus rubecula* – one seen on my last day

**Nightingale** *Luscinia megarhynchos* – singles recorded on three dates

**Redstart** *Phoenicurus phoenicurus* – single on my last day

**Northern Wheatear** *Oenanthe oenanthe* – 5 on the 10<sup>th</sup> and 1 on 17<sup>th</sup>.

**Black-eared Wheatear** *Oenanthe hispanica melanoleuca* – 1 on the 10<sup>th</sup>

**Whinchat** *Saxicola rubetra* – common migrant



**Stonechat** *Saxicola torquata* – common around the cultivated area to the north

**Blue Rock Thrush** *Monticola solitarius* – Common around the hills and village

**Blackbird** *Turdus merula* – encountered on several dates but never easy to see

**Garden Warbler** *Sylvia borin* – one on my last day

**Blackcap** *Sylvia atricapilla* – quite numerous around the Olive Groves

**Sardinian Warbler** *Sylvia melanocephala* – common everywhere

**Common Whitethroat** *Sylvia communis* – singles on several dates

**Subalpine Warbler** *Sylvia cantillans* – singles on 3<sup>rd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup>

**Cetti's Warbler** *Cettia cettia* – common all over the hillsides

**Great Reed Warbler** *Acrocephalus arundinaceus* – 1 in the small-cultivated area

**Icterine Warbler** *Hippolais icterina* – recorded on 2 dates

**Olivaceous Warbler** *Hippolais pallida* – quite widespread, though never easy to get good views of.

**Willow Warbler** *Phylloscopus trochilus* – a few seen during the holiday

**Wood Warbler** *Phylloscopus sibilatrix* – widespread and numerous

**Chiffchaff** *Phylloscopus collybita* – singles on a couple of dates

**Spotted Flycatcher** *Muscicapa striata* – very numerous around the Olive Groves

**Pied Flycatcher** *Ficedula hypoleuca* – only two records

**Great Tit** *Parus major* – common and widespread

**Blue Tit** *Parus caeruleus* – common and widespread

**Rock Nuthatch** *Sitta neumayer* – a pair on a limestone cliff south of the village

**Short-toed Treecreeper** *Certhia brachydactyla* – heard more frequently than seen, but quite widespread

**Red-backed Shrike** *Lanius collurio* – a couple of juveniles

**Woodchat Shrike** *Lanius senator* – quite common and widespread, seen daily.

**Jay** *Garrulus glandarius* – common and noisy

**Magpie** *Pica pica* – common around the cultivated area to the north

**Golden Oriole** *Oriolus oriolus* – generally seen in flight they were quite widespread amongst the Olive Groves

**House Sparrow** *Passer domesticus* – very common

**Goldfinch** *Carduelis carduelis* – seen/heard on a few occasions

**Greenfinch** *Carduelis chloris* – common around the cultivated areas

**Serin** *Serinus serinus* – seen regularly throughout the holiday



**Spotted Flycatcher**

**A very common species amongst the Olive Groves and market gardens to the north of the village. Always worthy of a second look.**