

Honeyguide

WILDLIFE HOLIDAYS

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The Peloponnese
26 April – 3 May 2012

Holiday participants

Malcolm and Helen Crowder
Claire Hughes
Suzanne Hunter and Lesley Scott
Morag McGrath

David and Diana Melzack
David Nind and Shevaun Mendelsohn
Mike Poulton
Bridget Smith

Leaders

Robin and Rachel Hamilton
Chris Durdin

Host and local guide

Sue Davy

Our holiday was based at Elena's apartments in Livadi.

Daily diary by Chris Durdin, with additions by Robin, Rachel and Sue.

Wildlife lists compiled by Robin and Rachel.

Photos in this report were all taken during the holiday week, those edged blue by Diana & David Melzack, edged green by Morag McGrath and edged yellow by Mike Poulton. Others are by Helen & Malcolm Crowder, Rachel & Robin Hamilton and Chris Durdin.

Short videos filmed by Chris Durdin during the week are as follows:-

Red-rumped swallow – <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B3Uqqp3idM4>

Southern comma – <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aAcrKQYSaVQ&feature=relmfu>

Southern swallowtail – <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mp4-waLJZXE&feature=relmfu>

Cover photo: the flowery mountainside at Prastos, with Peloponnese cyclamen, four-spotted orchid and *Euphorbia rigida*.

Below: the group.



As with all Honeyguide holidays, part of the price of the holiday was put towards a conservation project, in this case for the Management Body of Mount Parnon and Moustos Wetland Ecological Park, to record biodiversity in the protected area. Honeyguide funded two cameras to be positioned in suitable places, e.g. animal runways, on which filming for mammals such as golden jackal and otter is triggered by motion detected by an infra-red sensor.

As at June 2012, the total for all conservation contributions through Honeyguide since 1991 was £80,839.

Daily Diary

Thursday 26 April – Athens, Corinth Canal and Livadi

Nearly four hours after leaving a very wet Gatwick, we arrived at a warm and dry Athens airport. Robin and Rachel had come out to stay with Sue on the Monday, and all three were there to meet and greet us. Honeyguide has picked up Europcar minibuses at airports on dozens of occasions and this was the least efficient, with no desk and the promised rep. nowhere to be found, but paperwork done we located the VW minibuses some 200 metres from the terminal. The tanks were only one-eighth full, so the next stop was the Shell petrol station down the road, next to Ikea. The convoy – Sue's Suzuki leading the two minibuses – then headed west along the motorway, sometimes immediately adjacent to the railway line, and an hour later we arrived at the Corinth Canal.

Our timing to reach this extraordinary feat of 19th century civil engineering couldn't have been better. Swan Hellenic's MS Minerva was just heading west through the canal and we watched it go under the road and footbridge. The view down isn't for those with a fear of heights, it has to be said. Several kestrels were flying around or on rocks jutting out from the man-made cliffs.

With much of the onward journey still ahead, half an hour was the time allotted here, but it was enough for a drink or ice cream from a nearby café. A little botanising on some rough ground revealed some nice ruderal plants, including crown daisies (here only the all-yellow version), weasel's snout, large Venus's looking-glass and the viper's bugloss *Echium angustifolium*.



Corinth Canal dwarfing the MS Minerva.

We headed south onto the Peloponnese peninsula – now effectively an island with the Corinth Canal cutting through the connection to the rest of Greece. We passed the remains of ancient Corinth, high on a hill, took in the scent of citrus groves and enjoyed Sue's one-way cut-through along back roads in Argos. Roadsides were increasingly colourful, with Judas trees in the hedges and dotting the hillsides and, farther south, white-flowered storax trees, banks of Mediterranean spurge, tantalising glimpses of a beautiful two-toned sage, plus a host of other flowers to be looked at more closely another day.

Two hours after leaving the Corinth Canal, we were taking a left turn into Livadi. Elena, with her son Stratos and daughter Maria, soon settled us into our apartments that were to be home for the week. There was just time to take in the sea view and the wafts of lemon and orange blossom before the short walk to Sophia's taverna, for a delicious traditional Greek meal.

Friday 27 April – Livadi and Upper Tyros

The morning was already hot and sunny by breakfast time, so we could enjoy our perfect Greek breakfast out of doors. Helen had seen a golden oriole and spotted flycatcher from the balcony. Even the late risers could enjoy waking to a dawn chorus of cirl bunting, blackbird and Sardinian warbler.

We started with a local walk for our first day, just strolling up the hill from our apartments. Natural history began in the car park when Diana and David M reported that their way to bed last night had been illuminated by glow-worms on the steps and David N brought us a cream-spot tiger moth, then Mike found a second by the steps at the back of the buildings. Two buzzards drifted past, one strikingly pale, and a small flock of red-rumped swallows. Then it was stop-start as 101 flowers were found and, mostly, named. A few highlights included the elegant knapweed *Crupina crupinastrum*, a delicate little white onion, *Allium subhirsutum*, the striking salsify *Tragopogon sinuatus*, stink aster, spiny golden star, a striking yellow umbellifer *Malabaila aurea*, the charming little pink hawksbeard, *Crepis rubra*, and many more. A very obliging Peloponnese wall lizard seemed happy to pose for photos, and Morag photographed a Greek rock lizard. It was a quiet morning for birds, though cirl buntings and Sardinian warblers kept us company all morning – and indeed for much of the week to come. Two more red-rumped swallows were enjoyed; they were chattering confidently on a wire and dropping down to a muddy puddle, and we soon found their nest attached to a roadside house.



Red-rumped swallows' nest.

Scarce swallowtail was soon followed by southern swallowtail, lots of Glanville fritillaries and a dappled white. Further up the hill was the first of many Cleopatras, a clouded yellow, and David N spotted a southern white admiral, just over the road at the top, where we took a look at an old water-driven corn mill owned by the family at the Livadi apartments, made easier to access by some steps cut especially for us by Stratos. We found a slow-worm, and one or two hornets flew around in the dappled shade of enormous bay trees. We retraced our steps – it didn't take long despite pausing to watch a rose chafer – for an excellent lunch of omelette and salad at Sophia's taverna. Some had mountain tea to follow.

We took a short drive to Upper (Ano) Tyros, above where Sue lives. Again we struggled to get very far along a flower-rich Mediterranean hillside with magnificent views out over the Gulf of Argolikos. The trackside was colourful with white sage-leaved cistus and pink *Cistus creticus*, and spiny with thorny burnet and Greek spiny spurge. Other striking flowering shrubs included shrubby St John's-wort *Hypericum empetrifolium*, just coming into flower, the pale pink-flowered hairy dorycnium and a shrubby globularia *Globularia alypum*, endemic to the southern corner of Greece. Sue showed us an important local species, the the Parnon alkanet *Alkanna sfikasiana*, deep blue but with a surprising orange throat; this species is only found here, endemic to the hills of the Parnonas massif.



Botanising at Ano Tyros; and the Parnon alkanet *Alkanna sfikasiana*.

Our first orchid was small-flowered serapias, followed by four-spotted orchid – later to be seen in very large numbers. An Egyptian grasshopper landed on Lesley, mason bees were building their mud nest on a rock and green hairstreaks shone like emeralds in the bright sunshine. The area was fairly free of Bermuda buttercup, but on the one patch, on disturbed ground under a tree, there were also many spikes of branched broomrape *Orobanche ramosa*, which seemed to favour the invasive oxalis. Claire walked to the ruin on top of the hill and the pottering main group searched the rocky field-edge to discover a brilliant little patch of the Parnonas endemic cyclamen, *Cyclamen peloponnesiacum* ssp *vividum* and a few fine specimens of crown anemone *Anemone coronaria*. Claire had caught up with us again well before we concluded that it was time to return to the minibuses.

There was a stop in Tyros at the small supermarket for ice cream, among other things. Here Sue tried to find out what the herb is from which mountain tea is made. In answer to the question "What is it?" the answer was simply "Tea!" Later we found out this is brewed from a labiate, one of the species of *Sideritis* growing up in the mountains at around 1000m, higher than we were planning to venture. After resting and recuperating back at Livadi we returned to Tyros, firstly for the pharmacy that had been closed earlier and then to Akroyiali taverna, known especially for its seafood. Starters included octopus, with main courses either an assortment of locally caught fish or excellent classic moussaka.

Saturday 28 April – Prastos and Kastanitsa

Half a dozen Honeyguiders met Robin and Chris at 7.15 for a circuit down to the beach and round again. It was fairly quiet birdwise, with greenfinch, serin and Sardinian warbler among the local species, but our location on a migration route was underlined by two flocks of hirundines moving north, mostly house martins. Robin explained about the green pebbles, fragments of rock created by underwater volcanic activity, and we found tufts of seagrass on the small, stony beach. A big yellow horned poppy was flowering, as was an Indian bead tree – or Persian lilac: there were both ‘beads’ and lilac-coloured flowers. Breakfast was at 8 o’clock and we learnt that the excellent bread was cooked in a wood-fired oven, albeit some miles away, and brought to the shop in Tyros.

We managed a sharpish getaway soon after nine, to rendezvous with Sue by the crossroads in Tyros, today with her friend Wendy to assist with navigation and translation. It may have been frustrating to drive past so many flower-rich roadsides, especially after we’d turned inland and started to climb, but that was in a good cause: to give us more time above the de-populated village of Prastos, at some 800m, the last leg of the journey along tracks. Rachel and Chris started by introducing a flower apiece, and there were many to choose from: *Gagea graeca*, kermes oak, *Euphorbia rigida* and many more. A few metres farther and there were patches of four-spotted orchid, Peloponnese cyclamen, again the local endemic subspecies, perfoliate alexanders and the tiny bartsia *Parentucellia*. Most of the butterflies were again Glanville fritillaries, plus a small heath found by David N, and common blue. Suzanne pointed out what seemed like a three-toned ant, scurrying along: a photo and an ID check confirmed velvet ant *Mutilla europaea*. Wendy arrived after an energetic walk/scramble and reported golden eagle nearby. It didn’t show for us, but we had a good view of a sparrowhawk. White rock-roses, few-flowered orchid, *Ophrys mammosa*, prickly juniper, mallow-leaved bindweed, sun spurge..... just a few of the many and often colourful mix of species here, plus many that still needed a good search of the two-volume Flowers of Greece to confirm by species.



Bombus argillaceus on Jerusalem sage; Peloponnese cyclamen; *Euphorbia rigida* and rock roses.

As we returned to the minibuses, David M drew our attention to a large bumblebee – black with two broad yellow bands on the thorax – on Jerusalem sage (here the more compact and deeper yellow *Phlomis cretica* rather than the coastal *Phlomis fruticosa*); later research suggested this was *Bombus argillaceus*. We paused by some intense red peacock anemones *Anemone pavonina* before driving to Kastanitsa – a return along the road before a turn to go higher still. Here we had another taverna lunch, but with a difference, with two of the selection of dishes featuring the chestnuts after which the village is named, namely chickpeas with chestnuts and pork with chestnuts.

Following an excellent lunch, we took a walk through the village to a fairly new Interpretation Centre for the Mount Parnon and Moustos Wetland Ecological Park, seeing grey wagtail, blackcap and green-veined white on the way. The Information Centre is in the old school, which is sad in that without a school, the village is declining. There were some nice photos, with text all in Greek but helpfully explained for us by an English-speaking guide. While we were inside it rained rather heavily, and the minibuses were moved to a closer meeting point while the group, led by Wendy, wound their way down through the village, past banks of the striking yellow and black *Vicia melanops*, electric blue *Anchusa hybrida*, and flamboyant two-tone wild pea *Pisum sativum*.

The rain had eased and we drove into the chestnut forest above the village. *Loranthus* – a close relative of mistletoe – was growing high on the chestnuts, and a little later Wendy picked up some old but real mistletoe underneath some black pines. (In Greece, mistletoe is usually found on conifers.) In this new habitat there was immediately a surprise: narrow-leaved helleborine under the trees. We



found *Iris unguicularis* (familiar to many as a winter-flowering garden flower) growing with a widow iris, and a beautiful large-flowered violet (identity unknown) in the woodland too, and we heard both coal tit and green woodpecker. It was a short walk to a picnic table in an area of open grassland, by which some orchids in bud were tentatively identified as toothed orchid *Orchis tridentata*, confirmed a little later by a nice clump out in flower in among the Greek fir *Abies cephalonica*. It rained again, then the sun came out and a double rainbow appeared. By then we were out of time, so we headed back, with a detour for some of the party via the Tyros shops.

Dinner was a delicious meal of fresh local fish, again at Sophia's taverna, a short walk from the apartments, with birthday cards and cake for Bridget and, belatedly, Chris.

Sunday 29 April – Paliohora

A later 8:30 breakfast for Sunday and a fairly local day gave us an hour before breakfast; we followed the sign that takes you the long way round to the beach, then back past Sophia's taverna. There were two spotted flycatchers on wires at the back of our apartments, and we enjoyed good views in bright sunshine of Sardinian warbler and curl bunting. There was one turtle dove on a wire, and like yesterday a movement of hirundines, mostly house martins. Back at base, those same spotted flycatchers could be seen from the breakfast table, settling and perhaps thinking about nesting on a rectangular outside light-fitting over the balcony of David and Diana's apartment.

We headed south past the ketchup factory and wound our way through the back streets of Leonidio before heading up to a rich, diverse plateau at some 800 metres. Gently undulating hills surrounded us, mainly dominated by cistus and arbutus scrub (both *Arbutus andrachne* and *A. unedo*) and Kermes oak, lit up frequently by the bright yellow of two or three broom species. We were then off-road, and followed a well-maintained and wide unmade road, re-graded for the first section in just the last week. At our first stop, Rachel found a good bird with our first woodchat shrike of the day: by the day's end we must have seen some 20. Botanists dived into the first of many rich fields here, as often, with masses of pink hawksbeard *Crepis rubra*, the strikingly angular-flowered grass, *Aegilops*, tassel hyacinth, wild marigold, stripy-flowered *Anchusella variegata* (another southern Greek endemic) and much more besides. A rock partridge called for much of the time we were at this spot and from a viewpoint on top of a corn-threshing circle we tried and failed to see it. Diana found a black-veined white and a curl bunting sang from a tall and conspicuously red-barked eastern strawberry tree. A raven flew overhead, while a pair of blue tits busily carried food to their nest in a derelict barn.

At the next stopping point, in a patch of neglected arable, surrounded by oak, arbutus and cistus scrub, we puzzled over two red poppies – common poppy and prickly poppy, there was blue woodruff *Asperula arvensis* and bright pink tussocks of *Saponaria calabrica* cowering among the rocks – and we found our first, albeit distant, short-toed eagle. A flowering and very un-bristly kermes oak was attracting hundreds of a brown chafer with six black spots. We caught and examined a faded southern festoon butterfly; most fritillaries, here as everywhere, were Glanville fritillaries. Small ascalaphids flew around, hawking for insect prey, but never settling to allow a positive identification. Lunch involved a short walk from a parking spot to the enclosure around an extraordinarily isolated chapel, perched high on the plateau, far from habitation, where there were stone picnic tables and benches in the shade. Sue had assembled a splendid picnic which we spread out on the tables, and we relaxed and enjoyed our surroundings. Two-tone fodder vetch was under our feet and there was a lot of the very beautiful eastern subspecies of Lusitanian milk-vetch *Astragalus lusitanicus* ssp *orientalis*. The grass was studded with the bright blue *Veronica glauca*, the small periwinkle *Vinca herbacea*, and the cornflower *Centaurea pichleri*, with pretty patches of coral pink *Lathyrus annuus*.

A short-toed eagle dropped from the sky very close to us, and there were at least two animated subalpine warblers. Suzanne found a tiny scorpion and we all admired big patches of Peloponnese cyclamen. In the adjacent scrub, after lunch, Claire led us to a group of some 20 monkey orchids, beside which there were also a couple of small groups of man orchids and a few four-spotted orchids. In the arable beyond, red pheasant's-eye was abundant, *Adonis flammea* the species, as was ground-pine, a scarce arable plant in the UK, and we found a large clump of the very striking red-fruited dock, *Rumex tuberosus*. Robin found a collared flycatcher, but it stayed on the 'wrong' side of the trees and was difficult to see. A spotted flycatcher was more cooperative, and a female golden oriole flew swiftly by. Sue had alerted us to the possibility of fritillaries – the flower – and set off with most of the group along the track. A catch-up group with Lesley and others found their own and everyone gathered by a concentration of 20 or 30 *Fritillaria messanensis*, mainly fairly well tucked under the scrub and looking amazing in association with drifts of Peloponnese cyclamen.



Monkey orchid *Orchis simia*; *Fritillaria messanensis*; and *Leontice leontopetalum*.

We drove on across the plateau, by now more open and magically dotted with pear trees in full flower. Our final proper stop of the day was to investigate a swallow-hole, caused by a collapsing cave. There was the weirdest of plants in the arable, namely *Leontice leontopetalum* with inflated pods – a berberis, though you would never guess, and again there were astonishing quantities of *Adonis*. Those who descended to the slightly scary mouth of the swallow-hole threw a stone in and, after a ricochet or two, heard a distant, echoing plop as it hit a deep pool in the dark.

As we headed back, Sue mentioned the possibility of sombre tit and, very soon after, on cue, one was moving from small tree to small tree. That one went quickly from view, but a little farther on, another was much more cooperative. Encouraged by a recording, it sang to us from various treetops in an open, park-like landscape, posing picturesquely amongst the pear blossom and affording excellent views for everyone. Then it was time to descend, passing a migrant wheatear and a group of about a dozen ravens, and back to Livadi.



We had a real treat this evening: our evening meal was a barbecue of pork and chicken as guests of our host family, Panayiotis, Elena, Stratos and Maria. Wendy and her husband Nigel were there, plus three other ex-pats who've lived in the area for many years. Stratos, we learnt had, a few years ago, been the runner-up as best bouzouki player in his age group in Greece, and he entertained us with breathtaking skill and musicality (left).

Dad Panayiotis, after performing a couple of conjuring tricks, joined in the singing and dancing, and others did too.

Monday 30 April – the coast towards Nafplio and north to Mycenae

We woke to a bright morning with a curiously warm wind. There was a nightingale singing in the olive trees below us before breakfast and we found French lavender *Lavandula stoechas* and a large yellow retharrow (identification unconfirmed) on the scrubby hillside by the quiet coastal road.

Driving north, we stopped first at Moustos Lake to see what was about. No sooner had we arrived but a squacco heron was spotted. Very soon a little bittern flew along the reed edge, then again with a second bird, but they disappeared totally from view. The little egret was to be expected, and a peeping sound turned out to be a curlew on a wire. A short-toed eagle flew slowly over the hill, followed by a peregrine, and an immature marsh harrier quartered the rough ground beyond the lake. Reed warbler and wren sang continually nearby, but didn't show themselves. A crested lark flew across several times, carrying food, and a stonechat did so once. By the freshwater inflow, a common sandpiper paused by the tiny weir and bobbed among the stones, feeding.

We drove farther up the coast, then turned east towards Nafplio where the sandy shore is unusually wide for the Mediterranean. The first pull-off was birdless and we moved on without delay. The second, though, had a rich selection of waders, gulls and other wetland birds. A small pool, fringed with reeds and sea club rush, held two black-winged stilts, two wood sandpipers and three little stints. At the shallow sea edge there were four curlews and four herons, one of which on closer examination proved to be a purple heron. As well as the inevitable yellow-legged gulls there were about eight slender-billed gulls. Up to three little terns were fishing at sea, then some running dogs put up a flock of Sandwich terns. The stilts were surprisingly at ease with the dogs as they approached, and a little ringed plover seemed to ignore them completely. There were also Kentish plovers at the sea's edge and two grey plovers on a small sand bar.



Watching black-winged stilts, wood sandpipers and little stints in the small pool.

This was all taken in from the one spot, and we then walked along the back of the shore behind some small lagoons. Under the shade of the tamarisk and along the path an interesting and colourful plant community had developed on the sand, sea-shore species and arable weeds mixing in glorious profusion: white and yellow crown daisies, melilot *Melilotus indicus*, a very striking relative of the nightshades *Solanum elaeagnifolium*, a very pretty prostrate form of common mallow, tiny sea pursues, sea rocket, and much more besides. In the saltmarsh on the seaward side of the track, amongst the grasses and glasswort (both shrubby and annual), there were at least three yellow wagtails, including a superb black-headed wagtail. Robin picked up some coral-like lumps that were reef fragments formed by a honeycomb worm *Sabellaria alveolata*. Suzanne found another wood sandpiper. Finally, before time and the increasing heat pulled us back to the minibuses, we noticed that a rock-like lump in the shallow water was in fact a large dead loggerhead turtle.

An earlier group consensus had led to a change to the planned programme of visiting Nafplio in the afternoon, though we could all see the striking Palamidi fortress above the town. Instead, we drove some 20 minutes further north to the celebrated archaeological site of Mycenae. We discovered that it closes at 3 o'clock, to our surprise, and the only food was in a mobile outlet in the car park. But that was OK and most of us bought a filled roll and excellent fresh orange juice, still allowing a little over an hour to explore the site. It's worth noting that proof of age is needed for the concessionary rate and the loos are inside.

It's easy to understand why the ancient Greeks chose this magnificent spot to build and settle so successfully, strategically perched high up overlooking the sea and surrounded as it is by spectacular views and richly fertile hillsides. We split up and walked through the Lions' Gate and either over or around the citadel at our own pace. Diana, David, Helen and Malcolm, who made it to the museum, said it was excellent. Wildlife-wise, it was much less tidied than we feared. Although the flowers on the open slopes were already nearly all in seed, any bank, wall or rock crevice that was at all shady



The massive portal of Lions' Gate at Mycenae; and a confiding rock nuthatch.

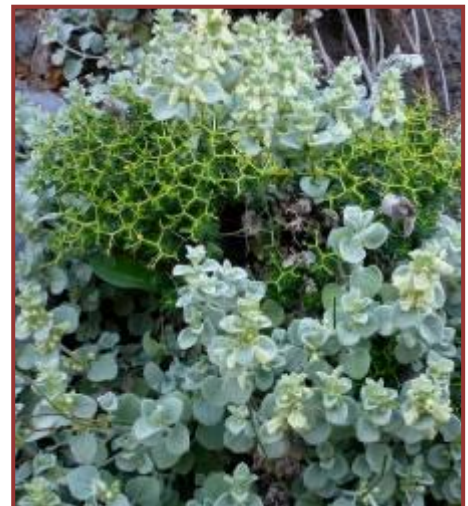
was full of interesting plants, many in flower: campanulas and clovers, poppies, mulleins and tiny ferns. Robin and Rachel found a green toad, singing its trilling song in a pool by the north gate. But the star, seen by many in the group, was rock nuthatch, calling away on ruins on the far side of the site and coming very close on a wire railing to Morag and Helen. And there were two tales of rescued hats: Malcolm's blown off and retrieved after a clamber, and Rachel's dropped near the ticket office, handed in to the shop and recognised and reclaimed by Shevaun.

Towards the end of the long drive back we paused again at Moustos Lake, where there was a distant ringtail harrier, perhaps a Montagu's, but nothing else new. Back at base, David N and Chris had a tour of Panayiotis's 'museum', a remarkable and eclectic collection of artefacts, local and from central Europe, spanning many centuries, which proved difficult to leave. Dinner was at Sophia's taverna again and this time she had prepared some traditional Greek baked dishes for us – though almost everyone elected to have moussaka, an excellent choice!

Tuesday 1 May – Tsitalia and Fokianos

We had a stunning view of a red-rumped swallow before breakfast, near the back of the apartments. Another spotted flycatcher was on the wires, and a distant golden oriole was heard. We climbed up the track behind the apartments and scrambled through some rather different habitat: rocky scree with tree heath – the autumn flowering *Erica manipuliflora*, very pretty bushy fumana *Fumana thymifolia* in good flower, the curious little shrubby *Phagnalon graecum*, banks of Mediterranean spurge and wild oregano. Returning for breakfast we found Panayiotis picking pelargoniums, marigolds and olive sprigs, which he made into a lovely garland to celebrate the first of May. He taught us to say '*kalo mena*', a Mayday greeting, which we heard off and on all day as there were many people out and about in the glorious weather we British might expect in Greece, but which Sue said was close to a heatwave for this time of year.

So it was good luck that most of the first stop of the morning was in shade – that of a roadside cliff, originally a cutting for the winding road, high up on the hill with lovely views across the valley and down to Leonidio. 'Sue's wall', as we nicknamed it, was especially a botanical stop, notable for, amongst other things, several Peloponnese endemics that Sue was able to show us. The first was the lovely lemon-yellow flowered labiate *Stachys chrysantha* (right, with Greek spiny spurge), soon followed by a beautiful campanula, the silvery blue *Campanula andrewsii* ssp *hirsutula* and also a perhaps rather esoteric delight, the grass *Melica rectiflora*. There were many other things to puzzle over but a common flower there was the familiar red valerian, about which Bridget explained a tip she'd learnt from Rachel before, that the flower has a small spur that holds the nectar and that feature separates the genus *Centranthus* from *Valeriana*.





Southern comma on valerian.

To emphasise the point, the valerians in the sun across the road were attracting nectar feeders, including a bee-fly, a bright southern comma, southern swallowtail, southern white admiral, black-veined white, large wall brown, green hairstreak, common blue and brimstone.

Eventually we tore ourselves away from this exciting place and drove on up the hill. We went through the village of Tsitalia and dropped down to the coast at the beautiful cove of Fokianos, where once Dodi and Diana were famously photographed by one of the paparazzi. The sun and Mayday had brought people out, including a local fisherman who was raffling a large fish he'd recently caught. Luckily, none of us won it. David N manfully took on the task of ordering drinks, including various re-orders when first choices were unavailable. We found shade for our picnic lunch under olive and carob trees, and afterwards some of the group took the short walk along the edge of a rather

dried-up and sadly birdless lagoon, part of the Moustos Lake and Mount Parnon protected area, to look over the pretty adjacent cove. There were small fish and seaweeds in rock pools, including a funnel-shaped seaweed that later research showed to be peacock's tail *Padina pavonica*.

A lovely walk on a track in the late afternoon on the return over the hill gave a chance to re-visit flowers we'd been seeing earlier in the week, such as *Gagea graeca* and sage-leaved cistus, but also led to some exciting discoveries. A spectacular horned *Ophrys*, with green sepals and curved green 'horns' caught everyone's eye and was much photographed. It didn't match any of the species recorded for the area in any of the books that we had, so on our return we referred the photographs to Christopher Grey-Wilson (author of *A Field Guide to the Bulbs of Greece*, which includes the orchids,) who confirmed it as *Ophrys leptomera*, a species which appears not previously to have been recorded from mainland Greece. Sue encouraged us to explore further up the track and Morag was first to find a tulip – happily not all had finished flowering – and here was the orangey *Tulipa orphanidea*. Malcolm was furthest up the hill and found the next tulips: four red *Tulipa goulimy*.



Photographing Valonia oak on the way to Fokianos; *Tulipa goulimy*; and *Ophrys leptomera*.

Sue had planned one more stop for us on the way down to the much needed fuel stop in Leonidio. We all piled out of the minibuses to see a very pretty endemic meadow-rue, with beautiful white flowers, lighting up a damp and shady corner by the road; this was *Thalictrum orientale*, quite unlike any meadow-rue we had ever seen before.

It was an evening of gifts. Stratos called us over as we were about to leave for supper, to present us with plastic bottles of home-grown olives to take back to our own homes. We were also offered freshly picked and deliciously crispy cos lettuce leaves. We drove to rendezvous with Sue in Tyros, from where she led us to the Taverna Konatsi in the village of Sapounakaiika, with a beautiful view over the bay. Wendy was there to meet us and to help act as interpreter and organiser for a magnificent meal, which included the biggest and most varied plates of mixed salad imaginable, and she handed out freshly-collected bundles of oregano – *Oreganum onites* – from her garden for us to take home to dry.

Wednesday 2 May – Lake Moustos

The morning was warm and sunny, and before breakfast there were wonderful views again of the local red-rumped swallows on a low wire, as we walked up the road we'd taken on the first morning. The turtle dove showed again, but there was little else of note. After breakfast and a group photo, Elena gave us bottles of their local olive oil and demonstrated how to treat the olives given to us yesterday – best done after a month or two. She poured away the brine, cut open the plastic bottle and put the olives in a jar with tablespoons of salt, vinegar and olive oil. After a vigorous shake, the jar was topped up with water. We took notes so that we could do it for ourselves after we got home.

At Moustos Lake, Katerina from the Mount Parnon and Lake Moustos Ecological Park was there to greet us, along with biologist Giorgos and two forest rangers. We had a potted history of this important site and its challenges: it is designated under the Natura 2000 Network; it covers 366 hectares of which the lagoon itself is just under half; about half of the marsh was lost under Bavarian rule, a loss that it is impractical to reverse; there is fairly secure funding from the EU for three years. Environmental education is being developed, with some 1,000 children visiting over the last year. The main interest for birds is as a migration stopover, including for the squacco heron which was there as we arrived. The conventional wisdom is that this is also true for little bittern, but we wondered if in fact they might stay to nest – there were at least three, often on the move while we were there. We handed over a second remote camera – we had given the first to Sue when we were on the Extremadura holiday – to help record mammals such as golden jackal.



Handing over the camera to Katerina, left, and Giorgos, far right;
and Lake Moustos from the lunchtime stop.

We walked past the viewing platforms and down the track along the south side. Cetti's and reed warblers sang from the reeds, a distant hoopoe called and a fan-tailed warbler 'zitted' out of sight behind the tamarisk. We had an unsuccessful search for terrapins on a patch of water with tangled trunks of tamarisk, but Helen found one on the return walk, which everyone saw well through the 'scope, and the neck spots confirmed it as European pond terrapin. There were no birds from the hide but we had close views of two male black-tailed skimmers, and the rangers showed us photos of a nose-horned viper *Vipera ammodytes* that they came across on the track. (Sue told us that Giorgos has been bitten by one and says that they only inject poison on 4 out of 10 occasions: I think we'd all agree that the risk isn't worth taking!)

Our picnic was at the ruin of a small tower-house built during the Turkish occupation and surrounded by the remains of fortifications. The small church in the grounds dates from 1611. It was very close by and afforded lovely views over the lake to the sea. There was a welcome standpipe for washing hands and even more welcome shade under the pine trees, and cool stone seats. There was some good improvisation for drinking vessels, including bug boxes! A little pottering after lunch yielded our first 'ordinary' swallowtail, bean trefoil with its smelly leaves, lots of vetches and woolly clover amongst the hare's tail and another Peloponnese endemic, the pretty pink *Petrorhagia glumacea*. An enormous ant that showed an interest in our lunch was identified as *Crematogaster lateralis*. Up in the ceiling of the old stone building a movement caught Claire's eye, and we had excellent views of a Turkish gecko.

It was seriously hot as we drove back along the track by the lake, past the hide and down to the beach. Most of the group relaxed in the sunshine, dabbling feet in the water or paddling not far from where a little ringed plover scuttled along, feeding. Suzanne spotted an eel among the small fish by the mouth of the stream. A few people set off along the beach, exploring in the heat. David M and Diana found several spikes of bug orchid, and we found yellow-wort, sea medick and other shoreline plants. The prettiest of these, right by the track, was the two-tone sea lavender *Limonium sinuatum*.

We took a different track away from Moustos, past an ancient bridge of unknown origin, picturesquely abandoned in the middle of a dry riverbed. A few botanists wandered off to look for wild oleander, dry riverbeds in the Peloponnese being the plant's native habitat; they had to be content with chaste tree *Vitex agnus-castus*. Dropping Sue in Tyros, there was time to do a little shopping and still return to Livadi in good time. Our final meal was at our home taverna with Sophia, a chance to share holiday highlights and to check we were all prepared and gathered for the following day's travelling.

Thursday 3 May – Athens and home

It was breakfast at 8 o'clock and by 9:15 we were away, with grateful farewells to the family and especially to Sue, who had come down to see us off. Two hours on, after wriggling through Argos, we had a drink and loo break at a service station by the main road opposite ancient Corinth. Three tollbooths and much motorway later, we were at the airport.

GROUP HIGHLIGHTS

Bridget	The wonderful environment and lovely flowers but in particular the different types of trees, especially pear trees in blossom, chestnuts, arbutus and kermes oak, the trees almost telling us what we would find beneath them.
Claire	Such a nice group of people. The botanical highlight was 'my' orchid – the horned orchid – I looked in the book and thought "I hope I see that".
Morag	Like Bridget, to be in an environment like this, but especially the tulips and the little bittern flying so close this morning.
Chris	As a tour operator, the trip going all right! Birds: sombre tit; I've not seen one for a long time; the wonderful views of the red-rumped swallow, and the butterflies on the valerian opposite 'Sue's wall'. And here at Livadi, the PYO lemons and the music.
Malcolm	The rainbow, red-rumped swallows; butterfly corner, and a great group to be with.
David N	The venue, the warmth extended to us by the family and the musical evening. Blue alkanet, <i>Stachys chrysantha</i> , sombre tit and today the crested lark singing from a tree.
Robin	The family's hospitality and generosity, the rock nuthatch at Mycenae and <i>Cyclamen peloponnesiacum</i> .
Shevaun	The smell of the orange blossom; the wonderful food; the red-rumped swallows on the wire in the early mornings; Panayiotis's 'museum'; the butterflies at Sue's wall.
Mike	The generosity of Elena's family, especially Stratos's bouzouki playing; the food at the tavernas; wonderful wildlife – the afternoon when I saw two lifers in an hour: subalpine warbler and sombre tit; Sue's wall and the butterflies.
Helen	Photographing the rock nuthatch at Mycenae; lunch at the taverna in Kastanitsa; being in flowery meadows and not knowing what you're going to find next.
Diana	Glow-worms; the little bittern today; the butterflies; the whole Mycenae experience.
David M	The wonderful butterflies; the exceptionally good views of a little bittern; the flowers – until today I'd have said the cyclamen grove, but the bug orchid I found was great. The overall highlight was Mycenae: fantastic views, the marvellous rock nuthatch and the fresh orange juice.
Suzanne	Seeing stilts and purple herons at the beach; the dinner with the family.
Lesley	So many wonderful things – the main highlight is this beautiful place; the welcome and the smell of orange blossom; so many special flowers.
Rachel	The very special Peloponnese cyclamen; the horned orchid; and the track where we found it; the rock nuthatch was pretty stunning, and the toad as well; the red-rumped swallows and their nest. This was a fabulous venue for a holiday, to be made so welcome in a family – and Stratos's bouzouki-playing.
Sue	The biggest thing for me is seeing you enjoying it, and realising that it's somewhere really special.

WILDLIFE LISTS

BIRDS

Little bittern	<i>Ixobrychus minutus</i>	A pair seen twice at Moustos lake
Squacco heron	<i>Ardeola ralloides</i>	1 at Moustos lake
Little egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	Several at Moustos lake
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	3 at Nea Kios and 1 or 2 at Moustos lake
Purple heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>	1 at Nea Kios
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	1 or 2 at Moustos lake
Short-toed eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>	1 near Paliohora and 1 near Moustos
Marsh harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	1 at Moustos lake
Montagu's harrier	<i>Circus pygargus</i>	A 'ringtail', probably Montagu's, at Moustos lake
Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	1 near Paliohora
Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	A few seen every day
Golden eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>	1 near Paliohora
Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	Seen every day
Hobby	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>	1 near Livadi
Peregrine	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	1 seen twice at Moustos lake
Rock partridge	<i>Alectoris graeca</i>	Heard near Paliohora
Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	Several at Moustos lake
Black-winged stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	Several at Nea Kios
Little ringed plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>	A few at Nea Kios
Ringed plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	1 at Nea Kios
Kentish plover	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>	Several at Nea Kios
Grey plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>	2 at Nea Kios
Little stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>	3 at Nea Kios
Wood sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>	3 at Nea Kios
Common sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	1 at Moustos lake
Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	4 at Nea Kios
Slender-billed gull	<i>Chroicocephalus genei</i>	A few at Nea Kios
Yellow-legged gull	<i>Larus cachinnans</i>	Ubiquitous along the coast
Little tern	<i>Sterna albifrons</i>	3 at Nea Kios
Sandwich tern	<i>Sterna sandvicensis</i>	A small flock at Nea Kios
Rock dove/Feral pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	Common near villages
Collared dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	Small numbers seen every day
Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>	1 or 2 seen or heard on most days
Green woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>	1 heard near Kastanitsa
Crested lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>	A pair carrying food at Moustos lake
Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	Common and widespread
Red-rumped swallow	<i>Hirundo daurica</i>	Common around Livadi, including a nesting pair
House martin	<i>Delichon urbica</i>	Several migrating flocks
Yellow wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>	Several at Nea Kios, including a male of the black-headed form
Grey wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	1 at Kastanitsa
Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	Seen or heard on most days
Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	Heard regularly at Livadi
Nightingale	<i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i>	Heard once at Livadi
Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>	A few migrating birds near Paliohora
Stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquata</i>	2 at Moustos lake
Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>	1 near Paliohora
Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	Very common and widespread
Cetti's warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>	1 singing at Moustos lake
Fan-tailed warbler	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>	1 calling at Moustos lake
Reed warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>	1 or 2 heard at Moustos lake
Subalpine warbler	<i>Sylvia cantillans</i>	Several seen or heard near Paliohora
Sardinian warbler	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>	Common and widespread
Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	1 at Kastanitsa
Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	Heard on most days

Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapilla</i>	Heard near Kastanitsa
Spotted flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>	A few migrating birds in Livadi and near Paliohora
Collared flycatcher	<i>Ficedula albicollis</i>	A migrating bird near Paliohora
Long-tailed tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>	A small group near Paliohora
Sombre tit	<i>Poecile lugubris</i>	1 or perhaps 2 pairs holding territory near Paliohora
Coal tit	<i>Pariparus ater</i>	A singing male near Kastanitsa
Blue tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	Common and widespread in suitable habitats
Great tit	<i>Parus major</i>	Common and widespread in suitable habitats
Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>	Heard near Kastanitsa
Rock nuthatch	<i>Sitta neumayer</i>	Superb views of 2 singing birds at Mycenae
Golden oriole	<i>Oriolus oriolus</i>	Migrating individuals at Livadi and near Paliohora
Woodchat shrike	<i>Lanius senator</i>	Several near Paliohora and 1 at Moustos lake
Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	Common and widespread in suitable habitats
Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>	Several at the Corinth Canal
Hooded crow	<i>Corvus corone cornix</i>	Common and widespread
Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	Seen on most days in hilly areas
House sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	Frequently seen in villages
Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	Common and widespread
Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>	Seen every day around Livadi and other villages
Greenfinch	<i>Carduelis chloris</i>	Seen and heard every day at Livadi
Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	Common around Livadi and other villages
Linnet	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>	A small flock at Mycenae
Girl bunting	<i>Emberiza cirrus</i>	Common and widespread

79 species

MAMMALS, AMPHIBIANS AND REPTILES

Eastern hedgehog	<i>Erinaceus concolor</i>	Occasional road casualties
Beech marten	<i>Martes foina</i>	Occasional road casualties
Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>	One by the coast road near Livadi, and a long-dead individual near Paliohora
Green toad	<i>Bufo viridis</i>	One singing at Mycenae
European pond terrapin	<i>Emys orbicularis</i>	A few at Moustos lake
Loggerhead turtle	<i>Caretta caretta</i>	One dead on the beach at Nea Kios
Turkish gecko	<i>Hemidactylus turcicus</i>	On buildings at Livadi and near Moustos
Balkan green lizard	<i>Lacerta trilineata</i>	One near Paliohora
Greek rock lizard	<i>Lacerta graeca</i>	Several on walls and rocks
Peloponnese wall lizard	<i>Podarcis peloponnesiacus</i>	Seen on most days on walls and rocks
Slow-worm	<i>Anguis fragilis</i>	A few seen around Livadi



Greek rock lizard



Peloponnese wall lizard

BUTTERFLIES

Swallowtail *Papilio machaon*
 Southern swallowtail *Papilio alexanor*
 Scarce swallowtail *Iphiclides podalirius* (top right)
 Southern festoon *Zerynthia polyxena*
 Large white *Pieris brassicae*
 Green-veined white *Artogeia napi*
 Black-veined white *Aporia crataegi*
 Dappled white *Euchloë ausonia* (middle right)
 Orange tip *Anthocharis cardamines*
 Clouded yellow *Colias crocea*
 Cleopatra *Gonepteryx cleopatra*
 Brimstone *Gonepteryx rhamni*
 Green hairstreak *Callophrys rubi*
 Small copper *Lycaena phlaeas*
 Holly blue *Celastrina argiolus*
 Small blue *Cupido minimus*
 Brown argus *Aricia agestis*
 Common blue *Polyommatus icarus*
 Southern white admiral *Aglais urticae*
 Painted lady *Cynthia cardui*
 Southern comma *Polygonia egea*
 Glanville fritillary *Melitaea cinxia*
 Spotted fritillary *Melitaea didyma*
 Jerusalem fritillary *Melitaea ornata* (= *Melitaea telona*)
 on a knapweed endemic to Greece, *Centaurea raphanina*.
 (bottom right)
 Small heath *Coenonympha pamphilus*
 Large wall brown *Lasiommata maera*
 Wall brown *Lasiommata megera*
 Meadow brown *Maniola jurtina*
 Mallow skipper *Carcharodus alceae*



OTHER INSECTS AND NOTABLE INVERTEBRATES

Flower chafer *Oxythyrea funesta*
 Violet carpenter-bee *Xylocopa violacea*
 Bumble bee *Bombus argillaceus*
 Egyptian locust *Anacridium aegyptiacum*
 Shield bug (Millwall bug) *Graphosoma italicum*
 An ascalaphid
 12-spot ladybird *Vibidia duodecimguttata*
 Bee-fly *Bombylius* sp.
 Velvet ant *Mutilla europaea*
 Ant *Crematogaster lateralis*
 Hornet *Vespa crabro*
 Paper wasp *Polistes gallicus*
 Cream-spot tiger moth *Arctia villica* (top right)
 Hebe tiger moth *Arctia festiva* (bottom right)
 Common forester *Adscita statice*
 A scorpion ? *Buthus occitanicus*
 Reef fragments formed by a honeycomb worm
Sabellaria alveolata
 Glow-worm ? *Lampyrus noctiluca*

