

26 April – 3 May 2012

# Peloponnese

Traditional, rural Greece

Three fingers of the Peloponnese, pointing south towards Crete, form the distinctive shape of Greece's southern tip. Already culturally and ecologically different from mainland Greece, this was reinforced when, in 1893, the Corinth Canal was cut through and the peninsula effectively became an island.

Bridges mean access is straightforward, but the separation is reflected in the wildlife community – such as Peloponnese cyclamen and two endemic lizards – and in everyday life. In today's increasingly urban Greece, here is an area where links to the land, small communities and a slow pace of life persist – Greece as it used to be. Donkeys used as working animals remain a common sight. The region has its own language, still spoken by older residents.

We're based in the Tyros-Livadi area on the coast of Arcadia, facing east into the Aegean Sea. Tyros is a small village with a long sea front and a fishing harbour. It is not on the main tourist trail; the majority of visitors are Greek. We stay in holiday apartments at nearby Livadi, a quiet coastal village with a friendly taverna for our evening meals.

With a coast running north-south, it's well placed for migrant birds. Some drop in to refuel on the brackish lake at Moustos and on the intertidal flats near Nafplio – the latter an unusual habitat in the scarcely tidal Mediterranean.

Breeding birds are a fairly typical southern European mix: short-toed eagle, woodchat shrike, Sardinian and subalpine warbler, for example. Rock nuthatches pop up in villages and historical sites.

Carob, citrus, fig and Judas trees emphasise the Mediterranean feel. Spring wild flowers are a rich, colourful mix including purple vipers bugloss, gladioli, orchids and much more – many still to be discovered and named.

Indeed uncovering more about the Peloponnese is why we're going: Honeyguide is following a Honeyguider. Sue Davy moved here in 2006 and has a passion for the area's wildlife and way of life. She'd like to share it with us – and glean information from the combined wildlife expertise of a Honeyguide group and leaders.

## Trees and shrubs

In Greece, Syrian juniper is confined to this area. Other conifers are Aleppo and black pines and Grecian fir. Both species of strawberry trees occur, sometimes growing side by side. Kermes oak, lentisc, Jerusalem sage and various cistuses are common shrubs. Hillsides have evergreen maples and wild olives; we expect to find almond leaved-pear and Valonia oak. Around villages chaste tree is common, as is the pretty but invasive lantana.



## Flowers

Spring flowers could include peacock and crown anemones, tulips *Tulipa orphanidea* and *Tulipa australis*, *Cyclamen peloponnesiacum*, Algerian iris, *Iris attica*, four-spotted and few-flowered orchids, grape hyacinth species, *Fritillaria graeca* and old friends like crown daisies and pitch trefoil.



Peloponnese cyclamen

## Reptiles and mammals

The area boasts two endemic lizards. Greek rock lizards – distinctively unstriped – and chunky Peloponnese wall lizards are found nowhere else. That's if the books are right: we wonder as nature guides show no wild boar here, but in chestnut forest we have found clear evidence from rootings, backed up by locals' reports. Golden jackal occurs but is tricky to see: mammals more likely to be seen include stone marten and eastern hedgehog. Other reptiles include geckos, Balkan green lizard and marginated tortoise.

## Birds

Those noted above plus egrets, including great white, slender-billed and Mediterranean gulls, buzzard, black-winged stilt, chukar, hoopoe, red-rumped swallow, blue rock thrush, black-eared wheatear, sombre tit, firecrest and girl bunting.

## Other wildlife

The area is under-recorded but spring butterflies could include Cleopatra, false Apollo, swallowtail, scarce swallowtail, eastern festoon, southern comma and southern white admiral. Praying mantis, violet carpenter bee and hummingbird hawkmoth are just a few of the supporting cast.

## Itinerary

Local walks and minibus trips, coastal and into the hills, all within the eastern part of the Peloponnese peninsula.

## Conservation project

A network of Natura 2000 sites – areas of European importance for wildlife – is overseen by the overstretched Hellenic Ornithological Society, which needs all the help it can get.

SUPPORTING



Price: £1,390 per person in twin room for a full week (Thursday to Thursday).

Single room supplement: £200

En suite facilities

Scheduled easyJet flight London Gatwick – Athens

Deposit: £200

Maximum number (two leaders): 12

Leaders: Chris Durdin, Robin and Rachel Hamilton



Hoopoe



Greek rock lizard (L) and Peloponnese wall lizard (R)



Corinth canal; Aegean coast; spring flowers.

More information visit  
[www.honeyguide.co.uk](http://www.honeyguide.co.uk)