

## Winter Birding Tour at Lake Kerkini

11<sup>th</sup> February – 15<sup>th</sup> February 2018

Trip report written by tour guide, Simeon Gigov, [inquiries@neophron.com](mailto:inquiries@neophron.com)

In the beginning of 2018 Paul Sharp contacted us at Neophron Tours ([www.neophrontours.bg](http://www.neophrontours.bg)) to organize a birding trip to Lake Kerkini for his father and himself with the main target of seeing the wintering population of Lesser White-fronted Geese at the lake. It didn't take us long to sort out the details and organize the trip in the period 11-15 of February 2018.

**Day 1:** It was a travelling day only, as the RyanAir flight from Stansted arrived at 21:40. I had to start from Sofia in the early afternoon, take the keys from the hotel in Lithotopos (at the dam of the lake) and organize breakfast and lunch for the next day. The flight was on time and after an easy drive to the hotel we arrived just before midnight.

**Day 2:** Breakfast was at 6:30, as every day, which allowed us to take the maximum of the short winter days and we've been birding from dawn to dusk almost every day. We spent this whole morning along the eastern dyke of the lake. The water level was very low, creating excellent habitats for ducks, geese, swans and waders to feed and excellent conditions for birding too, although some flocks were quite far. We were driving slowly on the gravel path stopping at several spots to look for the geese and enjoy plenty of other birds, before we were approached by a National Park Authority's car and the NP's guards told us that the flock of 98 **Lesser White-fronted Geese** were not far from the road a little bit further. We drove slowly to the spot and parked the car behind a tree to avoid disturbance. The geese didn't seem to be bothered much from our presence and let us watch them for a long time. The flock was mixed with about 50 **Greater White-fronted Geese** and surprisingly 1 adult **Red-breasted Goose**. The morning produced more than 70 species of birds including some very distant **Bewick's Swans**, thousands of dabbling and diving ducks (**Gadwall, Wigeon, Mallard, Pintail, Shoveler, Teal and Common Pochard**), hundreds of **Greater Flamingos**, 2 wintering **Black Storks**, **Pygmy Cormorants**, hundreds of **Dalmatian Pelicans**, 2 **Glossy Ibises** (unusually wintering here), **Eurasian Spoonbills**, at least 9 **Greater Spotted Eagles** (including 1 *fulvescens* type), **Black-tailed Godwits**, 3 **Lesser Spotted** and 2 **Syrian Woodpeckers**, **Merlin**, 2 **Peregrine Falcons**, **Great Grey Shrike**, several flocks of **Long-tailed Tit**, multiple singing **Cetti's Warblers**, 2 **Black Redstarts**, **Grey Wagtail**, 3 **Meadow Pipits** and more than a dozen **Hawfinches**. Just before we left for lunch we spotted an adult **Pallas's Gull** in breeding plumage. This was probably the rarest bird that we saw on our trip, with very few observations from the area of Lake Kerkini. It is a huge gull, hard to mistake (especially in this plumage). This observation reminded us to pay a little bit more attention to the gulls and we soon spotted an adult **Caspian Gull** as well.

In the afternoon we explored the western side of the lake, trying to see better the **Dalmatian Pelicans** and also find some **Great White Pelicans**. We stopped at a place where fishermen feed them and we happened to see both species from a very close distance. Driving slowly on the road to Kerkini and stopping for birding at several spots we also saw 2 **Goldeneyes**, **Black-**

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**necked Grebes**, hundreds of **Greater Flamingos** and **Pygmy Cormorants**, 2 **Sombre Tits**, hundreds of **Water Pipits** and **White Wagtails**, 8 **Cirl Buntings**, etc.

Our next stop was at Mandraki on the northern side of Lake Kerkini. It is a good spot to observe the **Dalmatian Pelican colony**, which is already full of birds in mid-February, but we also found many other interesting birds like 41 wintering **Common Cranes**, 2 **Bewick's Swans** (much closer than those in the morning), 1 strange **hybrid Greater White-fronted x Red-breasted Goose**, **Black-winged Stilt**, 10 **Pied Avocets**, 6 **Curlews**, hundreds of **Lapwings**, tens of **Common Snipes**, **Spotted Redshanks**, **Common Redshanks**, also a **Merlin**, **Meadow Pipits**, etc.

We finished the day at an Eagle Owl breeding site. The first bird which this place produced was actually a **Grey-headed Woodpecker**. We had to wait until dusk before the **Eagle Owl** appeared on one of the rocks and it didn't stay long before it flew towards the nearby forest. It was a short, but a satisfying view, which send us happy back to the hotel.

**Day 3:** This day was dedicated to target birding, with a first stop at the Western Rock Nuthatch site. It didn't take long before we saw the bird, which was one of the few lifers for Paul. After prolonged and very satisfying views of the **Western Rock Nuthatch**, we decided to check the nearby river and we found a feeding **White-throated Dipper** (ssp. *cinclus*).

Our next destination was a riverine forest in the vicinity of the lake. The site is excellent for woodpeckers and we managed to see **Black, Grey-headed, Middle Spotted** and heard **Green and Great Spotted Woodpeckers**. Other interesting species of birds here were 2 **Wood Larks**, **Short-toed Treecreeper**, **Hawfinch** and 6 **Bullfinches**.

From there we went back to the northern part of Lake Kerkini to look in the reeds for the Moustached Warbler. In this cloudy cold day the chances for this small skulky bird weren't great, but we had to try. The birds at the lake were pretty much the same as yesterday, so we focused mostly on what was going on in the reeds. Unfortunately the birds were very quiet today and except a few calls from **Cetti's Warblers** and **Wrens** we didn't get anything else. Just before we left the site Paul spotted a small bird in the reeds, which he initially thought was a Chiffchaff, but soon he corrected himself on **Moustached Warbler**. Unfortunately he was the only one to connect with this bird, but he was also the only one that hadn't seen it before, so our mission was complete here as well.

Our last stop before lunch was the Eagle Owl site from yesterday, where we tried to find the bird in better light conditions. We failed to do that, but there was another good species of bird to be seen there - a small flock of **Rock Buntings** was feeding around.

As we arrived at our hotel for lunch we saw a flock of 7 **House Martins** flying above the restaurant. This is an amazing early observation of this species, but having in mind the mild winter this year it shouldn't be such a big surprise. A feeding flock of finches (**Chaffinch, Goldfinch, Greenfinch and Siskin**) attracted a **Sparrowhawk**, which tried its chances on them several times, but in vein.

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It was already raining when we finished our lunch, so we decided to birdwatch mostly from the car in the afternoon. We visited first the Chimarros Marsh to the south of the lake, where we saw small flocks of feeding ducks (**Mallards, Wigeons and Teals**) as well as plenty of songbirds, among which we found our only **European Serin** of the trip.

The last area for the day was the northwestern part of Lake Kerkini, where we saw huge flocks of feeding waders - mostly **Lapwings, Dunlins and Little Stints**, and also a **Little Ringed Plover** and 6 **Pied Avocets**. Other good birds here were **Goldeneyes, Black-necked Grebes, 3 Kingfishers, Grey Wagtail, Water Pipits**, etc.

**Day 4:** It was still raining this morning, but it didn't stop us to make a long walk along the reedbeds on the northern bank of the Strimon river. Some of the highlights here were 4 **Gadwalls, Green Sandpiper, 4 Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers, Crested Larks, Cetti's Warblers**, big flock of **Fieldfares**, our only **Mistle Thrush** of the trip, **Hawfinches**, etc.

As the weather improved we decided to explore again the eastern dyke of the lake and try to see again the Lesser White-fronted Geese. Unfortunately today the geese were much further away and impossible to identify from such distance, but we found some new species here that we'd missed the previous time: 2 **Great White Pelicans, Hen Harrier, Marsh Harrier**, hundreds (but very distant) **Golden Plovers**, and we saw again the **Pallas's Gull, Glossy Ibis, Spoonbills, Greater Spotted Eagles**, etc.

Today's spectacle, while we were having lunch, was an enormous flock of **Starlings** that we estimated to be 200,000 birds. It was a continuous line of Starlings migrating south that lasted about 10 minutes, with some smaller flocks trying to catch up in the next 15 min.

The afternoon was less exciting - we checked again the western and northern dykes of the lake in search of some new species for the trip, but without success. Then we decided to try again the Eagle Owl site. We went earlier this time and it was worth it, as we happened to see an adult **Golden Eagle** flying low above us, as well as hundreds of songbirds feeding in the area, including a **Brambling, Chaffinches, Hawfinches, Siskins, Greenfinch**, at least 20 **Rock Buntings**, a singing **Cirl Bunting**, etc. Such big congregation, of course, attracted a **Sparrowhawk**. At dusk once more the **Eagle Owl** flew above the quarry and disappeared in the forest. It was an excellent last evening at Lake Kerkini and we left back content to our base.

**Day 5:** We decided to spend the last day around the Axios Delta National Park to the west of Thessaloniki. The area is just half an hour from the airport and provides excellent birding opportunities to keep you going all day. We started with the lagoons and the coastal area next to Kalohori. This is one of my favorite birding areas in Northern Greece, as birds are used to people and allow very close distance especially to cars. The day was cloudy, windy and even some rain started in the afternoon, so that was the best site to spend the day. The highlights here were **Red-breasted Mergansers**, hundreds of **Black-necked Grebes, Red-throated Diver, Pygmy Cormorants, 3 Little Egrets, 8 feeding Spoonbills**, tens of **Marsh Harriers, Pied Avocets, Oystercatchers, Grey Plovers, Greenshank**, among the thousands of **Black-headed Gulls** we found 1 **albino**, as well as 1 adult **Slender-billed Gull** and 1 adult **Mediterranean**

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**Gull, 5 Sandwich Terns** were flying offshore, **Syrian Woodpecker, Crested Larks, Stonechats, Water Pipits** and **Reed Buntings**.

In the afternoon we drove further along the coast towards the Gallikos estuary and the Axios delta. We couldn't reach the Axios River, as the road became too muddy and we didn't want to risk it. But we saw a few more good and new bird species for the trip like two male **Hen Harriers, Kentish Plover, Common Ringed Plover, Turnstone**, another adult **Slender-billed Gull** nicely resting on the shore, tens of **Common Gulls**, etc.

After another look at the lagoons of Kalohori it was time to leave for the airport. We had a nice dinner in a restaurant near the airport before I left our guests for their 20:00 o'clock flight to Stansted.

### Species List:

English Name	Latin Name	Location
1. Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	Lake Kerkini
2. Greater White-fronted Goose	<i>Anser albifrons</i>	Lake Kerkini
3. Lesser White-fronted Goose	<i>Anser erythropus</i>	Lake Kerkini
4. Red-breasted Goose	<i>Branta ruficollis</i>	Lake Kerkini
5. Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	Lake Kerkini, Axios Delta
6. Bewick's Swan	<i>Cygnus bewickii</i>	Lake Kerkini
7. Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	Lake Kerkini
8. Northern Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>	Lake Kerkini, Axios Delta
9. Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>	Lake Kerkini
10. Eurasian Wigeon	<i>Anas penelope</i>	Lake Kerkini, Axios Delta
11. Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	Lake Kerkini, Axios Delta
12. Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>	Lake Kerkini, Axios Delta
13. Green-winged Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	Lake Kerkini, Axios Delta
14. Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>	Lake Kerkini, Axios Delta
15. Common Goldeneye	<i>Bucephala clangula</i>	Lake Kerkini
16. Red-breasted Merganser	<i>Mergus serrator</i>	Axios Delta
17. Red-throated Diver	<i>Gavia stellata</i>	Axios Delta
18. Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	Axios Delta
19. Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	Lake Kerkini, Axios Delta
20. Black-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>	Lake Kerkini, Axios Delta
21. Greater Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus ruber</i>	Lake Kerkini, Axios Delta
22. Black Stork	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>	Lake Kerkini
23. Pygmy Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax pygmeus</i>	Lake Kerkini, Axios Delta
24. Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	Lake Kerkini, Axios Delta
25. Great White Pelican	<i>Pelecanus onocrotalus</i>	Lake Kerkini
26. Dalmatian Pelican	<i>Pelecanus crispus</i>	Lake Kerkini, Axios Delta
27. Gray Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	Lake Kerkini, Axios Delta

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28. Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>	Lake Kerkini, Axios Delta
29. Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	Axios Delta
30. Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>	Lake Kerkini
31. Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>	Lake Kerkini, Axios Delta
32. Greater Spotted Eagle	<i>Aquila clanga</i>	Lake Kerkini
33. Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>	Lake Kerkini
34. Eurasian Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	Lake Kerkini, Axios Delta
35. Hen Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>	Lake Kerkini, Axios Delta
36. Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	Lake Kerkini, Axios Delta
37. Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	Lake Kerkini, Axios Delta
38. Water Rail	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>	Lake Kerkini
39. Eurasian Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	Lake Kerkini, Axios Delta
40. Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	Lake Kerkini, Axios Delta
41. Common Crane	<i>Grus grus</i>	Lake Kerkini
42. Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	Lake Kerkini
43. Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avocetta</i>	Lake Kerkini, Axios Delta
44. Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	Axios Delta
45. Gray Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>	Axios Delta
46. European Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>	Lake Kerkini
47. Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	Lake Kerkini
48. Kentish Plover	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>	Axios Delta
49. Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	Axios Delta
50. Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>	Lake Kerkini
51. Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	Lake Kerkini, Axios Delta
52. Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>	Lake Kerkini
53. Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>	Axios Delta
54. Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>	Lake Kerkini, Axios Delta
55. Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>	Lake Kerkini, Axios Delta
56. Ruff	<i>Philomachus pugnax</i>	Lake Kerkini
57. Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	Lake Kerkini, Axios Delta
58. Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>	Lake Kerkini, Axios Delta
59. Spotted Redshank	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>	Lake Kerkini
60. Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	Lake Kerkini, Axios Delta
61. Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	Axios Delta
62. Slender-billed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus genei</i>	Axios Delta
63. Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	Lake Kerkini, Axios Delta
64. Mediterranean Gull	<i>Larus melanocephalus</i>	Axios Delta
65. Pallas's Gull	<i>Larus ichthyaetus</i>	Lake Kerkini
66. Common Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>	Axios Delta
67. Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>	Lake Kerkini, Axios Delta
68. Caspian Gull	<i>Larus cachinnans</i>	Lake Kerkini
69. Sandwich Tern	<i>Sterna sandvicensis</i>	Axios Delta
70. Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia v. domesticus</i>	Lake Kerkini, Axios Delta
71. Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	Lake Kerkini

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72. Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	Lake Kerkini, Axios Delta
73. Eurasian Eagle Owl	<i>Bubo bubo</i>	Lake Kerkini
74. Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>	Lake Kerkini
75. Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>	Lake Kerkini
76. Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos minor</i>	Lake Kerkini
77. Middle Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos medius</i>	Lake Kerkini
78. Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	Lake Kerkini
79. Syrian Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos syriacus</i>	Lake Kerkini, Axios Delta
80. Black Woodpecker	<i>Dryocopos martius</i>	Lake Kerkini
81. Eurasian Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>	Lake Kerkini
82. Grey-headed Woodpecker	<i>Picus canus</i>	Lake Kerkini
83. Eurasian Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	Lake Kerkini, Axios Delta
84. Merlin	<i>Falco columbarius</i>	Lake Kerkini
85. Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	Lake Kerkini
86. Great Gray Shrike	<i>Lanius excubitor</i>	Lake Kerkini
87. Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	Lake Kerkini
88. Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	Lake Kerkini, Axios Delta
89. Eurasian Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>	Lake Kerkini, Axios Delta
90. Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	Axios Delta
91. Hooded Crow	<i>Corvus cornix</i>	Lake Kerkini, Axios Delta
92. Common Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	Lake Kerkini
93. Wood Lark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>	Lake Kerkini
94. Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	Lake Kerkini, Axios Delta
95. Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>	Lake Kerkini, Axios Delta
96. Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	Lake Kerkini
97. Sombre Tit	<i>Poecile lugubris</i>	Lake Kerkini
98. Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	Lake Kerkini, Axios Delta
99. Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	Lake Kerkini, Axios Delta
100. Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>	Lake Kerkini
101. Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>	Lake Kerkini
102. Western Rock Nuthatch	<i>Sitta neumayer</i>	Lake Kerkini
103. Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>	Lake Kerkini
104. Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	Lake Kerkini, Axios Delta
105. White-throated Dipper	<i>Cinclus cinclus</i>	Lake Kerkini
106. Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>	Lake Kerkini
107. Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>	Lake Kerkini
108. Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	Lake Kerkini
109. Moustached Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus melanopogon</i>	Lake Kerkini
110. European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	Lake Kerkini, Axios Delta
111. Black Redstart	<i>Phoecurus ochrurus</i>	Lake Kerkini, Axios Delta
112. European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	Axios Delta
113. Eurasian Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	Lake Kerkini
114. Fieldfare	<i>Turdus pilaris</i>	Lake Kerkini
115. Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	Lake Kerkini

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116. Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>	Lake Kerkini
117. European Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	Lake Kerkini, Axios Delta
118. Gray Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	Lake Kerkini
119. White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	Lake Kerkini, Axios Delta
120. Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	Lake Kerkini, Axios Delta
121. Water Pipit	<i>Anthus spinoletta</i>	Lake Kerkini, Axios Delta
122. Cirl Bunting	<i>Emberiza cirlus</i>	Lake Kerkini
123. Rock Bunting	<i>Emberiza cia</i>	Lake Kerkini
124. Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>	Lake Kerkini, Axios Delta
125. Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>	Lake Kerkini, Axios Delta
126. Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	Lake Kerkini, Axios Delta
127. Brambling	<i>Fringilla montifringilla</i>	Lake Kerkini
128. Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>	Lake Kerkini, Axios Delta
129. Eurasian Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>	Lake Kerkini
130. European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>	Lake Kerkini, Axios Delta
131. Eurasian Linnet	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>	Lake Kerkini, Axios Delta
132. European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	Lake Kerkini, Axios Delta
133. Eurasian Siskin	<i>Carduelis spinus</i>	Lake Kerkini
134. European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>	Lake Kerkini
135. House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	Lake Kerkini, Axios Delta
136. Eurasian Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>	Lake Kerkini, Axios Delta