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## **Birdwatching trip to Lake Kerkini, Northern Greece (November, 2006)**

Lack of trip reports and vague rumours for the avian richness of Lake Kerkini, situated in Northern Greece very close to the Bulgarian border (some 20 km), and brought us to the shores of this lake on November 11<sup>th</sup>, 2006. We started our trip at 03.00 in the night from Sofia – 9 birders and a bus full of scopes, binoculars, cameras and loads of expectations. The timing was really perfect – we met the sun at the banks of the lake by the visitors centre in Mandraki village – one of the best observation points of Lake Kerkini. Due to low water level huge territories of the lake were dry, thus the waters started actually some several hundred meters away from us, but the distance was still good enough to complete our first impression about the lake – huge (covering an area of about 10 000 ha), shallow and full with birds (the species list of the lake and its adjacent territories exceeds 300 species!). The most interesting species we saw from this point were few Spotted Eagles, several hundreds of Flamingos, Spoonbills, lots of waders and ducks (for detailed species list see below). Afterwards we continued to the mouth of Struma River (Strimonas in Greek), which was easily accessible due to the lowered water levels of the lake and the river itself – huge willow forests, that are flooded during springtime, used to house more than a thousand nests of cormorants and herons – something, that should be checked again in spring. However a short walk among the thousands of trees provided us just with an idea about what is going on here from April till July. The dam of the lake was the next stop. We stopped several times as we were keen to count the whole lake. Hundreds and thousands of migrating Wood Pigeons, two Golden Eagles, more Flamingos, Crane, pelicans and other birds were spotted before reaching the village of Lithotopos. As it was getting late we started to search for a hotel where to stay overnight – unfortunately most of them were fully booked. Anyway the rates per room here were much higher (3-4 times) compared to the ones in the village of Melnik on the Bulgarian side of the border so we decided to get there for the night and come back again on the next day. We finished our trip around the lake and continued to the border and the village of Melnik where we stayed overnight. The village is very famous for its local brand of red wine so this little detour was welcomed by everyone in the group. The checklist for the day comprised 82 species!

On the next day we started again early in the morning, passed the border and along Lake Kerkini we continued to our next stop – Lake Doiran on the border between Greece and Macedonia. The difference between the two lakes was more than obvious – Lake Doiran was deep, with stable water levels throughout the year and appropriate mostly for fish-eating birds. Logically Dalmatian Pelicans and Cormorants were the highlights here. Then we proceeded southwards to Thessaloniki and the delta of Axios River. The latter was again very dry but vast areas, overgrown with halophytes were rather good sign for great variety of waders during spring, when everything is flooded here. Although we had some problems finding the place itself (as our map was obviously wrong and signs were missing at many places) we still had enough time during the afternoon to get an idea about this site. If you intend to go there alone be well prepared in advance as English-speaking people are totally missing. The return journey took about 6 hours from Thessaloniki to Sofia (border crossing included).

The weather during both days was excellent – sunny, a bit chilly in the mornings but very nice around noontime.



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For organizing one or two-day trips to Lake Kerkini or birding weekends to the lake and some other interesting sites at the Bulgarian side of the border, starting from Sofia, please contact us at:

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## LAKE KERKINI

(just an excerpt of the 82 species observed there within the first day)

1. Crested Grebe (*Podiceps cristatus*) – 200+
2. Dalmatian Pelican (*Pelecanus crispus*) – 500+
3. White Pelican (*Pelecanus onocrotalus*) – 3
4. Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*) – 1 000+
5. Pygmy Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax pygmeus*) – 20+
6. Great Egret (*Egretta alba*) – 20+
7. Night Heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) – 1
8. Black Stork (*Ciconia nigra*) – 1
9. Spoonbill (*Platalea leucorodia*) – 15+
10. Flamingo (*Phoenicopterus ruber*) – 3 000
11. Greylag (*Anser anser*) - 14
12. White-fronted Goose (*Anser albifrons*) – 10
13. Gadwall (*Anas strepera*) – 15+
14. Shoveler (*Anas clypeata*) – 80+
15. Pintail (*Anas acuta*) – 50+
16. Teal (*Anas crecca*) – 2 500+
17. Pochard (*Aythya ferina*) – 7 000+
18. Goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis*) – 4
19. Spotted Eagle (*Aquila clanga*) – 5
20. Golden Eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*) – 2
21. White-tailed Eagle (*Haliaeetus albicilla*) – 1
22. Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*) – 3-5
23. Crane (*Grus grus*) – 1
24. Water Rail (*Rallus aquaticus*) – 3
25. Avocet (*Recurvirostra avosetta*) – 1 000+
26. Lapwing (*Vanellus vanellus*) – 1 000+
27. Black-tailed Godwit (*Limosa limosa*) – 70+
28. Spotted Redshank (*Tringa erythropus*) – 5+
29. Greenshank (*Tringa nebularia*) – 4
30. Dunlin (*Calidris alpina*) – 500+
31. Snipe (*Gallinago gallinago*) – 30+
32. Curlew (*Numenius arquata*) - 1
33. Wood Pigeon (*Columba palumbus*) – 10 000
34. Turtle Dove (*Streptopelia turtur*) – 1
35. Cetti's Warbler (*Cettia cetti*) – 2
36. Blackcap (*Sylvia atricapilla*) – 1
37. Penduline Tit (*Remiz pendulinus*) – 2



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## LAKE DOIRAN

(highlights from the Greek part of the lake)

1. **Dalmatian Pelican (*Pelecanus crispus*)** – 100+
2. **Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*)** – 1200+
3. **Pygmy Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax pygmeus*)** – 1
4. **Great Egret (*Egretta alba*)** – 30+
5. **Ferruginous Duck (*Aythya nyroca*)** – 2
6. **Cetti's Warbler (*Cettia cettis*)** – 3
7. **Stock Dove (*Columba oenas*)** – 13
8. **Great Grey Shrike (*Lanius excubitor*)** – 1
9. **Gadwall (*Anas strepera*)** – 5+

## AXIOS RIVER

(few highlights from the Western part of the delta)

1. **Dalmatian Pelican (*Pelecanus crispus*)** – 4
2. **Pygmy Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax pygmeus*)** – 20+
3. **Spoonbill (*Platalea leucorodia*)** – 1
4. **Flamingo (*Phoenicopterus ruber*)** - 40
5. **Great Egret (*Egretta alba*)** – 5+
6. **Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*)** - 1
7. **Curlew (*Numenius arquata*)** – 25+
8. **Spotted Redshank (*Tringa erythropus*)** – 5+
9. **Greenshank (*Tringa nebularia*)** – 2
10. **Sandwich Tern (*Sterna sandvicensis*)** – 1
11. **Cetti's Warbler (*Cettia cetti*)** - 1