

Tour Report Lake Kerkini in Spring 16 – 20 May 2025

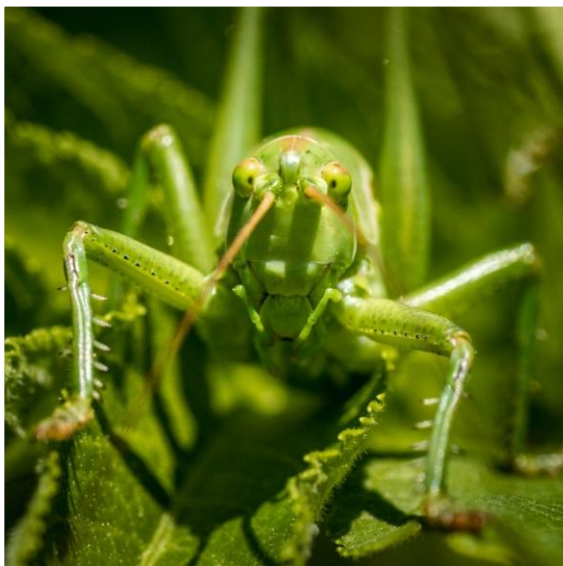
Dalmatian pelican



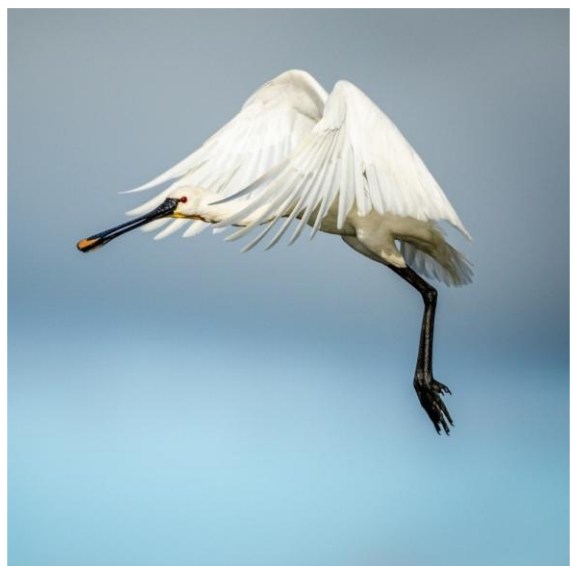
Coypu



Great green bush-cricket



Spoonbill



Compiled by Sean Weekly

Friday 16 May 2025

Day 1:

Rain, rodents and a warm welcome to Kerkini

This morning, I said goodbye to Group One, a mix of sleepy faces and heartfelt farewells, as I dropped them off at Thessaloniki Airport. Just a few moments later, I was standing by the arrivals hall greeting Group Two, who were all smiles and energy, eager to begin their own Kerkini adventure.

It was lovely to spot a few familiar faces from previous trips - always a pleasure reconnecting with returning guests and welcoming new ones into the fold.

We headed north toward the now-familiar charm of Kerkini village, our base for the next four nights. I gave the group a little heads-up on the forecast: rain, wind, and some unpredictable spells over the next 24 hours. Nothing we can't work around - but I let everyone know that we'd need to stay flexible with the itinerary and embrace whatever opportunities the weather gives us.

As we drove, I gave a bit of background about the incredible setting we'd soon be exploring. Although Lake Kerkini is technically a man-made reservoir, constructed back in 1932, it's become one of the richest wildlife havens in Europe. Strategically nestled along several major bird migration routes, Kerkini is a vital stopover for species heading toward the Aegean, the Black Sea, the Hungarian steppes, and beyond.

While there's wildlife to enjoy here year-round, spring really is something special. The lake is home to many species in spring, some including migratory favourites like osprey, glossy ibis, and white storks, with the lake filling fast with pelicans, egrets, and herons. Along the shore, the air buzzes with the calls of golden orioles, rollers, and bee-eaters and the skies often host surprises like Bonelli's eagle or the zippy European hobby.

After arriving and checking in, we regrouped downstairs for a welcome drink and some well-earned snacks, always a good way to ease into the rhythm of the trip. With a bit of time to relax, unpack, and shake off the travel day, we then met up again for our first photography outing of the tour.

We headed to the Triangle at Megalochori, a small overflow area connected to the lake, well known for its wetland richness and particularly for spotting coypu. On the way there, we saw our first glimpses of white storks gliding overhead, and even a common buzzard perched low in the grass, scanning for its evening snack.

Unfortunately, by the time we arrived at the Triangle, the rain had settled in, thick and steady. So we opted to stay put in the vehicles for a while, scanning from the windows. Even in the gloom, luck was on our side. Our first coypus were spotted moving cautiously along the opposite bank. Distant, yes, but a great start, and enough to lift everyone's mood with the gloomy weather.

And then the real treat: a female coypu with five tiny young, nestled on a platform of reeds out in the lake. They stayed still for a while, and the scene was surprisingly serene despite the rain. Later, a few juveniles ventured closer, even trotting out into the open, so we braved the weather and moved slowly down the bank to get closer to them, giving us a few wonderfully intimate photo opportunities, wet fur, twitchy whiskers, and all.



Just when we were about to pack it in and call it a day, we decided to take one last stop, hunting for tree frogs. Spoiler alert: I found nothing. The frogs clearly had other plans.

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But then, in true nature documentary twist fashion, our guide Babis casually points out a tiny green blob clinging to a stem nearby. And not just any green blob – a tree frog. A perfect opportunity for some macro photography. These guys really are *tiny*, thumbnail-sized amphibians.

Things escalated from there. A few more frogs made surprise appearances, clearly not wanting to be left out. As well as the frogs, we stumbled on some bonus macro stars: damselflies and spiders hiding in the reeds. Not a bad way to wrap up the day.



Before the light gave out, we made a short detour to Mandraki Port, a quiet spot at the northern edge of the lake. With just a bit of daylight left, we wandered the edges and quickly came across a little bittern, delicately stalking the shallows. We watched her hunting small fish, graceful and methodical. A beautiful way to wrap up our first afternoon.



Saturday 17 May 2025

Day 2:

“Squacco herons, white egrets, cormorants... and PELICANS”

Group Two rolled into their first morning on Lake Kerkini buzzing with energy, caffeine, and fully charged cameras. The weather forecast had promised sunny skies, but nature decided to be moody instead. Classic. We stepped out of the hotel, and boom, dramatic clouds, a chill breeze, and that stormy kind of lighting. A little atmospheric drama never scared us off, the birds didn't mind, so hey, why should we?

As we cruised across the lake, the Kerkini mountains loomed majestically in the background, wrapped in soft light as the sun started peaking through the clouds. Talk about a cinematic vibe. The shutters were snapping before we even hit our first stop.



We headed for the river mouth, hoping to catch some pelicans in action. Unfortunately, we didn't succeed in seeing pelicans, but cormorants stepped in to save the scene, posing like feathered statues in the trees. The reeds were bustling too, with birds flitting in and out like they had somewhere very important to be.



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We didn't hang around too long, because we had nesting colonies to explore. And that's when the show really started. Squacco herons, white egrets, cormorants, grey herons, and finally, a few great white pelicans lounging on driftwood like they owned the place. Birds everywhere meant that we had the opportunity to go click, click, click on our cameras.



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The highlight of the morning was a nesting pair of spoonbills. We floated silently, trying not to disturb them and managed to get some good shots when they looked at us. Like proud nest-owners who wanted to show off their latest real estate project, they made an excellent photographic subject.



Eventually, our stomachs won the battle, and we pulled over for a mid-morning break; coffee, tea, cake, and a view of yet more pelicans just hanging out in the marsh.



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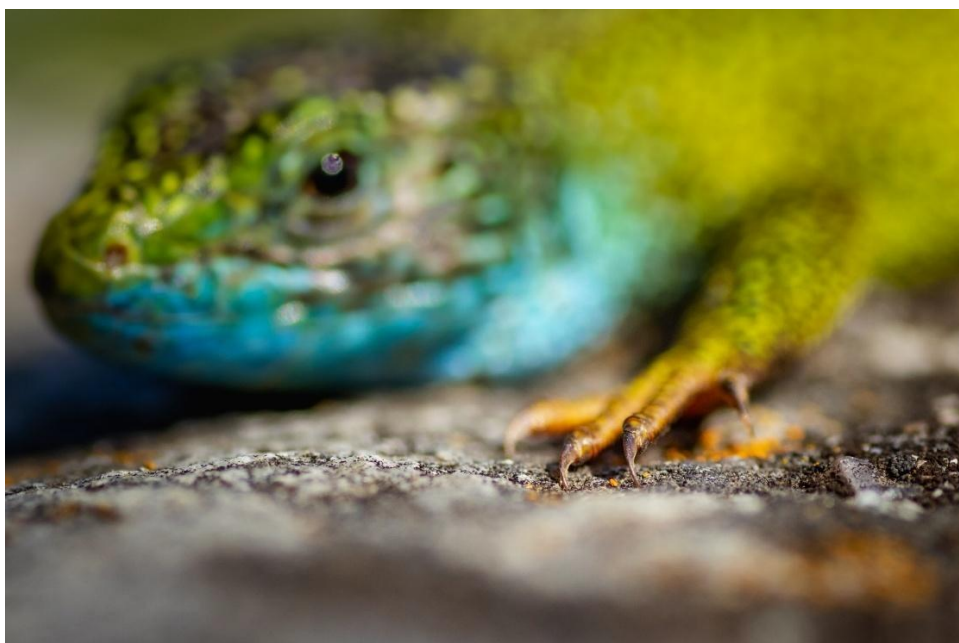
Fueled up and caffeinated, we set off again. Off in the distance, bird chaos. A bunch of cormorants and pelicans were having what can only be described as a buffet brawl. We had to check it out. A little fancy boat driving through shallow waters and a field of water lilies, and there right in front of you, a feeding frenzy. Splashing, diving, flapping, it was a photographer's paradise.



Not a bad way to kick off the Kerkini experience.

After a well-earned breakfast and a bit of downtime (a.k.a. backing up photos and enjoying looking at our roster of great photos), we regrouped and recharged. For lunch, a classic Greek salad that was extremely fresh and flavourful.

Bellies full, we wandered down to Kerkini Harbour for some lizard hunting. The European green lizards were out in force, with their neon green scales, they were hard to miss. They were basking, posing, and generally being super photogenic.





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But wait, there's more! While poking around the harbour, we stumbled across a few surprise guests, one of which was a (tiny, hairy, mildly judgmental) jumping spider.

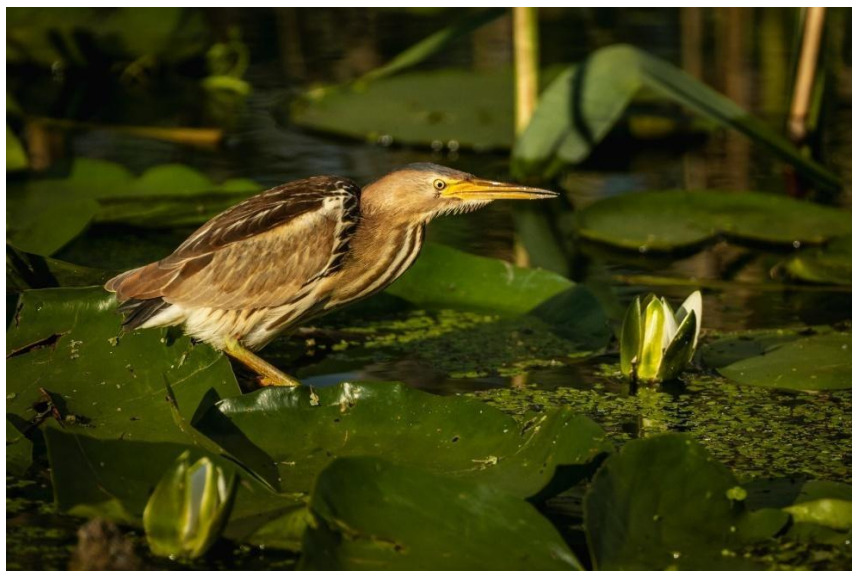


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We spent the afternoon looking at textures, patterns, and trying not to photobomb each other's shots.

Later on, we made our way (once again) to Mandraki Harbour for another round of "Where's That Bittern?" The sky was very moody, but our spirits were high. It didn't take long until we found her, perched at the base of the reed stems. The weather was grey and overcast; however, after some time and positivity, the weather changed in our favour and we saw some much-needed soft light hitting the bird perfectly against the greens of the reeds and the lilies. What an end to the day!





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Sunday 18 May 2025

Day 3:
Spoonbills!

We started the day with a peaceful early morning boat trip, gliding out onto the still waters. The light was near-perfect, gently backlighting the cormorants as they perched along the shoreline. It was one of those moments where everything felt calm and composed, and we focused on making the most of the conditions to capture some lovely silhouette imagery, simple, clean and atmospheric.

As the sun rose and the light shifted, we made our way towards the nesting zones. There were plenty of squacco herons, skulking in and out of reeds. As ever, they tested our patience and timing, but with a bit of persistence (and some quiet teamwork), we managed to position ourselves for a few rewarding frames. Their subtle colouring and shy nature make them a tricky subject, but all the more satisfying when it works out.



A real highlight came shortly after when we came across a group of nesting spoonbills. Their return flights to the nest were graceful and rhythmic, and we were lucky to capture some elegant in-flight shots as they glided in with nesting material and the occasional catch.



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From there, we pushed on toward Mandraki, hoping for some feeding activity. We weren't disappointed. As we approached, we were met with the jaw-dropping sight of what must have been eight to nine thousand birds—cormorants and great white pelicans—all fishing in synchrony. It was nothing short of spectacular. Huge swirling flocks moved as one across the water, diving and surfacing in waves. A real feast for the cameras. Everyone had the chance to work on some action photography, capturing splashes, flight shots, and dramatic feeding behaviour.



After all the excitement, we headed back to the hotel for a very well-earned breakfast and maybe a second coffee or two.

Later in the morning, a few of us headed down to the local harbour for some macro and lizard photography. The sun had brought out plenty of activity: green lizards basking, jumping spiders on the hunt, and even a few grass snakes moving through the undergrowth. One guest nailed the timing and captured a snake just as its tongue flicked out, a cracking photo. The spiders, too, gave us a show, pouncing on flies and pausing long enough for some lovely close-ups.



On the walk back for lunch, we were treated to a brief but exhilarating moment as a golden eagle soared overhead. It didn't stay long, but just the sight of it drifting across the sky was enough to leave us all a little awestruck.

In the afternoon, we visited a small, lesser-known lake behind the Aklachori Monastery. Birdlife was relatively quiet there, but the insect world certainly wasn't. We turned our lenses to dragonflies, beetles, butterflies, and whatever else we could find tucked into the grasses and leaves. It was a nice change of pace, slow, observational, and detailed.

We rounded off the day back at the hotel for a relaxed dinner, cameras full and everyone in good spirits after another diverse and rewarding day in the field.

Monday 19 May 2025

Day 4:

Feeding frenzies and a splash of colour to finish

The morning began with a slower pace, but it was no less focused. Our goal for the early session was to catch another large feeding event, keeping fingers crossed for a repeat of the dramatic spectacle we'd witnessed yesterday. With a bit of quiet patience and some careful observation of the birds' movements, I worked on reading the behaviour of the flocks to get us in the right place at the right time.

Sure enough, after a bit of repositioning and watching the patterns unfold, the action kicked off. Cormorants and pelicans began to stir, building up into a full-blown feeding frenzy, a chaotic, swirling energy on the water's surface. The group quickly locked into the rhythm, capturing fast-paced shots of wings, splashes, and open beaks. It was a proper adrenaline moment, especially as the light stayed soft and flattering throughout.



Amidst the chaos, we found ourselves lucky enough to get some fantastic close-up views of pygmy cormorants – a rare treat. These small, often skittish birds offered just enough time for some satisfying portrait shots before vanishing into the reeds. And just when we thought the morning couldn't offer anything more, a night heron suddenly appeared, perched serenely on a patch of lily pads, perfectly framed. These birds had proven elusive all trip, so seeing one so calmly posed and in such a photogenic setting was a real gift.



After wrapping up the boat session, we returned to the hotel for a short rest. Around lunchtime, local guide Babis and I peeled off to set up the pop-up hides ahead of the much-anticipated afternoon bee-eater session. Due to the number of hides available, I was not going to be able to join in with the photo action. But I was going to watch from afar with binoculars. Meanwhile, a few of the group headed back out around Kerkini to continue their macro photography adventures and lizard-hunting, by now becoming quite the reptile spotters!

In the early afternoon, we set the long lenses aside and switched gears, trading soaring birds for the miniature marvels of the undergrowth. With macro setups prepped and eyes sharp, we set out on a two-hour insect hunt, combing the wilder corners of the land with quiet focus.

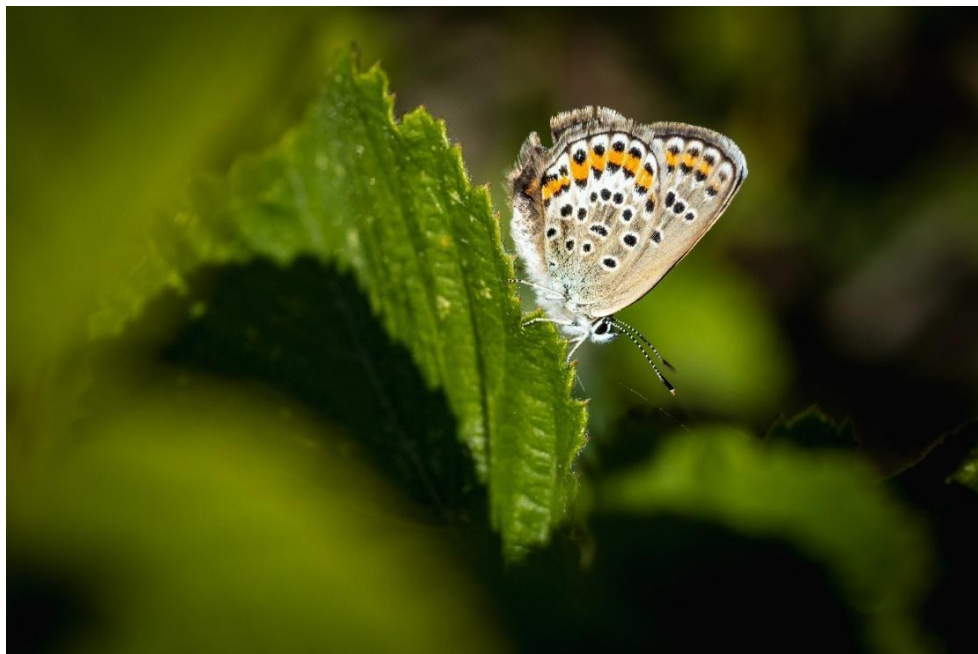
As we meandered through the grasses and along the edges of tangled hedges, it quickly became clear just how alive the place was. Every few steps revealed something new and fascinating, a vivid microcosm of predators, pollinators, and perfectly camouflaged creatures, each going about their day unnoticed.

We came across robber flies poised for ambush, their alien-like eyes glinting in the light. Bush crickets in brilliant shades of green clung to stems like tiny leaf spirits, while damselflies and dragonflies shimmered as they darted from perch to perch. Grasshoppers flicked out of the way with sudden, spring-loaded energy.

But the standout moment came when someone spotted a striking emerald green huntsman spider, its colouring almost impossibly vivid, crouched low among the leaves in perfect ambush posture. Cameras snapped furiously as we carefully adjusted our angles, trying to do justice to such an incredible find.

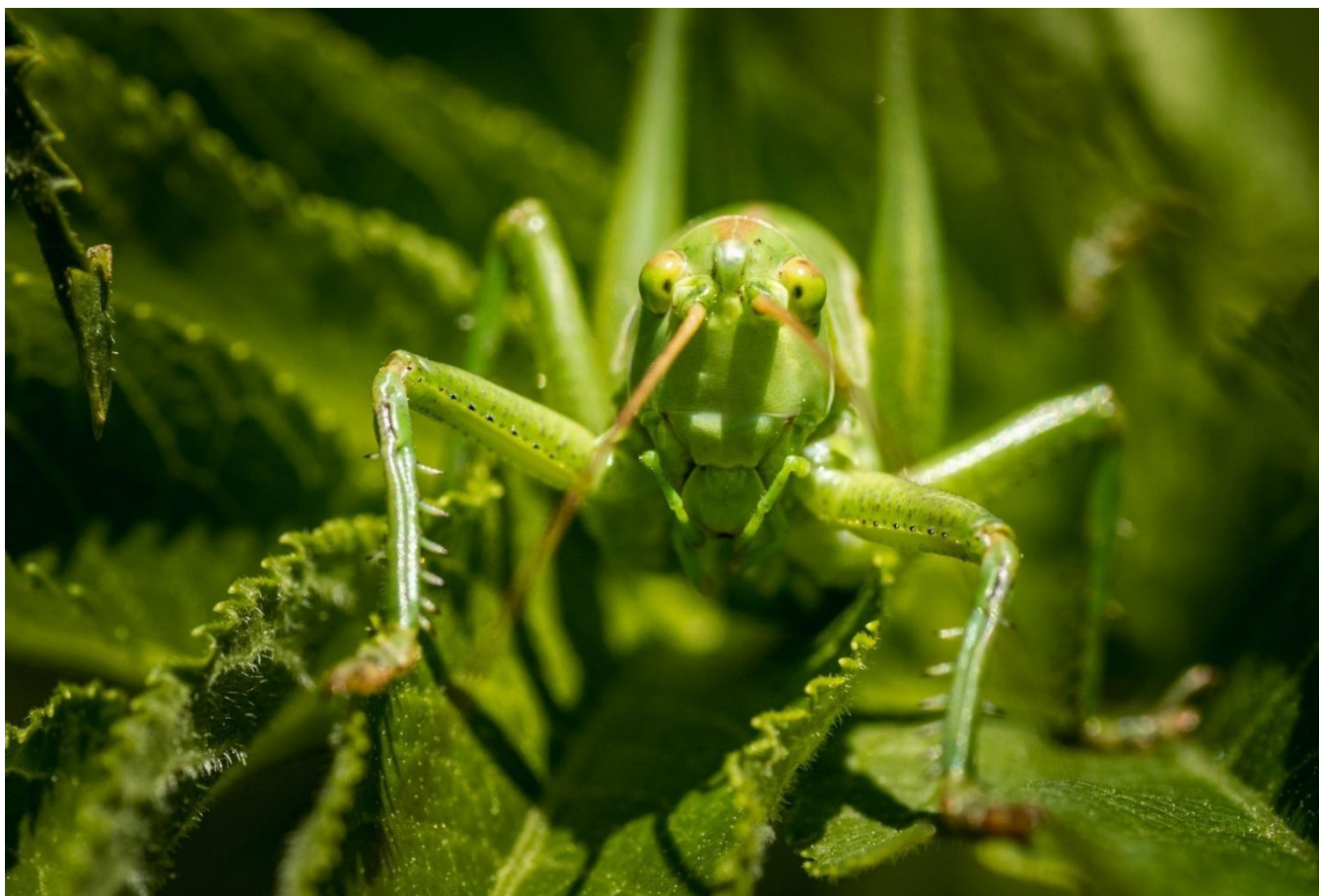


It was one of those rare, immersive sessions where time seemed to slip by without notice. Heads stayed low, knees were grass-stained, and every frame brought a new detail to admire. You don't always need big birds or dramatic landscapes to feel the thrill. Sometimes all it takes is a slow walk, a sharp eye, and the patience to look a little closer.



By the end, everyone had found something unique, something small, beautiful, and utterly their own. The creative buzz was apparent as we packed up and headed back, a little sun-warmed and full of stories from this tiny, wild world beneath our feet.

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The evening light brought us to our final destination of the day: the bee-eater hides. It was what everyone had been waiting for, and it definitely delivered. The air was alive with colour as these dazzling birds zipped about, showing off their hunting skills. We were treated to numerous perches, some with bee-eaters holding freshly caught insects, and a few instances of food-passing and brief courtship behaviour.

The session felt like the perfect note to end the day on: vibrant, energetic, and full of life. As the sun dipped lower and the colours grew even warmer, the shutters slowed, and a sense of calm settled in.

We returned to the hotel for dinner, tired but glowing after another wildlife-rich, colour-packed final day in Lake Kerkini.

Tuesday 20 May 2025

Day 5:

Goodbye Lake Kerkini

And just like that, the final day arrived. After one last breakfast together, it was time for farewells. Bags were loaded, memory cards were full, and there was that quiet, satisfied buzz that always comes at the end of a trip well spent.

As I dropped the group back at the airport, we exchanged goodbyes, warm handshakes, and promises to stay in touch, some already talking about where they'd go next. The group had gelled beautifully over the days, and it was a real pleasure to guide such a curious, creative and enthusiastic bunch through the wild corners of Kerkini.

From thousands-strong flocks of pelicans and cormorants feeding in synchrony, to the whisper-close encounters with coypu families and macro marvels like jumping spiders and glistening damselflies, the lake and its surroundings revealed its magic day after day.

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We had several highlights, bee-eaters flashing colour against the sky, golden eagles soaring above, night herons in soft morning light, and those unforgettable sunrise boat trips, gliding silently through still waters, surrounded by bird songs and mist. Each outing offered new moments, small and grand, that stitched themselves into memories.

As always, Lake Kerkini proved why it's such a special place and one of my favourite locations, that brings me back year after year. A hub of life, colour, and movement, framed by soft hills and rich wetland textures. It's a location that never repeats itself, and every visit offers something different!

Until next time, Kerkini...



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