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Tour Report
Lake Kerkini in Spring
11 – 15 May 2026

Dalmatian pelican



Nettle weevil



Half-edged wall jumping spider



Cormorant



Compiled by Sean Weekly

Monday 11 May 2026

Day 1

I met the group early in the morning for our direct flight from Gatwick to Thessaloniki. Thankfully, everything ran smoothly, with the flight departing on time and arriving just after schedule. Excitement levels were high from the start, especially with the forecast looking very promising for the days ahead. With plenty of sunshine predicted, everyone was eager to get started and see what Kerkini had in store for us.

From Thessaloniki, we travelled north towards the beautiful village of Kerkini, our base for the next four nights.

Situated in northern Greece, less than two hours from Thessaloniki, Lake Kerkini offers some of the finest and most accessible birdwatching in Europe. Although it is actually an artificial reservoir, created in 1932, it has become an incredible haven for wildlife. Positioned along several major migratory routes between the Aegean, the Balkans, Hungary and the Black Sea, the lake attracts a remarkable variety of resident and migrant bird species throughout the year.

Spring is an especially exciting time here, with migrants arriving daily. Species such as osprey, white stork and glossy ibis begin appearing in good numbers, while the shoreline becomes alive with pelicans, herons, egrets, bee-eaters, rollers and golden orioles. Raptors are also a big feature of the area, with species including Bonelli's eagle, European hobby and northern goshawk all possible during our stay.

After checking into the hotel, we gathered downstairs in the courtyard for welcome drinks and nibbles, which were very well received after a long morning of travelling.

By the afternoon, the sun had started to break through the clouds, so it seemed the perfect opportunity to head out onto the lake for our first boat trip. We made our way straight towards the mouth of the Struma River, where huge numbers of nesting birds gather at this time of year.

We spent a fantastic first afternoon slowly exploring the area and photographing the incredible birdlife around us. Dalmatian pelicans, great white pelicans, spoonbills and cormorants were everywhere, alongside countless other species. For a short while, the light became absolutely beautiful, giving us some lovely high-contrast conditions for photography. We also enjoyed our first distant sighting of a black kite drifting over the wetlands.

More than anything, I wanted everyone to simply enjoy this first boat trip, settle into the rhythm of the tour and take in the sheer abundance of birdlife surrounding us. Lake Kerkini really is one of those places where everywhere you look there seems to be something happening.

As the afternoon went on, however, the weather suddenly changed. Strong winds began sweeping across the lake and conditions quickly became much rougher, so we decided it was time to head back to the harbour. The journey back was certainly a little bit choppier than the journey out, but still it wasn't that bad at all. An exciting end to our first afternoon on the lake!







Find out more about our Lake Kerkini in Spring trip or contact us

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Tuesday 12 May 2026

Day 2

The day began in the only sensible way possible, coffee at 6:30 am. There were definitely a few slightly sleepy faces appearing in the breakfast area, but thankfully the caffeine kicked in quickly and before long everyone was looking far more alive and ready for another day out on the lake.

Not long afterwards we piled into the vehicles for the short drive down to the harbour. The conditions that greeted us were absolutely gorgeous. The lake was beautifully calm, with barely a ripple on the surface, and the soft early morning light gave everything that lovely golden glow photographers dream about. It was one of those mornings where you just knew it was going to be a good session before we'd even stepped onto the boat.

We started by heading down the river to check on the nesting cormorants and see what else might be around. There were cormorants everywhere, perched, flying overhead, arguing with each other and generally behaving as cormorants do. Despite the activity, there wasn't too much else worth keeping us there for long, so after a short while we decided to move deeper into the main nesting colonies.
That decision turned out to be a good one.



Before long, we came across a lovely small group of great white pelicans and Dalmatian pelicans perched together on some driftwood. Better still, they were actually sitting where we wanted them to sit for once, rather than tucked away behind reeds or facing the wrong direction just to annoy photographers. The calm water and soft light made for some beautiful reflections, and everyone had the chance to enjoy some excellent photo opportunities.



A little later we were treated to a fantastic squacco heron sighting amongst the lily pads. This species can often be surprisingly tricky to photograph well, usually preferring to vanish into cover the second you lift the camera, but this individual seemed fairly relaxed and allowed us to get remarkably close. It became one of those birds that keeps everyone happily occupied for far longer than originally planned.



As always, time on the lake seemed to disappear ridiculously quickly, and before we knew it, it was time for our mid-morning coffee and tea break. This came with homemade apple cake, which I'm fairly certain was appreciated even more than the birds by some members of the group. To be fair, it was absolutely delicious and disappeared at an alarming rate.

Eventually we began making our way slowly back towards the harbour, enjoying the peaceful conditions and constant bird activity all around us as we went.



Back at the hotel, we had breakfast before a bit of downtime to recharge our batteries, both camera and human. After lunch, we gathered together for one of my post-processing masterclasses where we discussed editing techniques and, more importantly, the importance of consistency in your editing style. I always think it's incredibly important for photographers to develop a look that makes their work instantly recognisable, rather than endlessly chasing trends or changing styles every five minutes depending on what Instagram is doing that week.

By mid-afternoon it was time to head back out again, this time on foot towards the harbour for the reptile part of the itinerary.

On the walk down, we stumbled across two coypus happily sitting beside the path, munching away on grass without a care in the world. They were completely unconcerned by our presence and turned into a very entertaining distraction for quite some time. There's something about photographing animals eating that seems to become strangely addictive once everyone starts.



Eventually we dragged ourselves away and continued towards the harbour in search of European green lizards. As is usually the case with reptiles, they initially decided not to cooperate in the slightest. Every time someone spotted one, it would vanish into cover approximately half a second later, normally just before everybody else managed to see it.

After a fair amount of searching, patience finally paid off. We found several individuals basking out in the warm afternoon light, and they eventually settled enough to allow some fantastic close-up photography. The dappled light filtering through the vegetation created some really lovely natural conditions and gave people the chance to experiment with different compositions and softer backgrounds.

After another busy and very enjoyable afternoon, we returned to the hotel for a quick shower and a chance to freshen up before dinner. Once again, the food was excellent, and the evening was spent doing what photography tour groups always do at the end of the day: comparing images, discussing sightings and pretending we definitely don't need another early morning coffee tomorrow.



Wednesday 13 May 2026

Day 3

This morning we made the sensible decision not to head out onto the lake by boat, as strong winds had arrived overnight and conditions were far too rough for a comfortable session. I don't think anybody was too disappointed though, as it meant a slightly more relaxed start to the day and, perhaps more importantly, breakfast before sunrise for a change.

After a leisurely breakfast at the hotel, we headed out for the morning session, making our way towards a well-known coypu hotspot near Megalochori, an area known locally as "the triangle", a small spillover wetland connected to Lake Kerkini.

Rather than taking the direct route, we decided on a small detour along the river. This turned out to be a very good decision as we passed a nesting colony of bee-eaters, with birds constantly flying overhead, calling noisily in the warm morning air. We weren't stopping properly for them until later in the day, but it certainly whetted everyone's appetite for the afternoon session.

The drive itself was beautiful, with some absolutely epic views of the surrounding Kerkini mountains rising dramatically above the wetlands. One thing about this part of Greece is that even travelling between locations can feel like part of the experience.

On arrival at the wetlands, we didn't immediately see any coypu, although there was certainly no shortage of distractions while we waited. Out on the water, a large group of great white pelicans and cormorants were actively fishing together. Although they were fairly distant, it was still an impressive sight watching the birds constantly diving, splashing and competing with one another.

While keeping one eye open for furry mammals, we turned our attention towards some of the smaller wildlife around us and enjoyed a bit of macro photography. Great green bush crickets posed surprisingly well, dragonflies zipped around the reeds, and several spiders became photographic models for the morning.







Meanwhile, I spent a good amount of time searching for one of my personal favourites, the elusive European tree frog. Sadly, though, despite checking all the likely spots, none made an appearance. I suspect the conditions were simply too warm and dry today for them to be active. That's wildlife photography in a nutshell really: sometimes you spend ages looking for something tiny while standing next to a pelican the size of a small car.

Eventually we spotted our first coypu swimming along the opposite side of the embankment, casually feeding as it moved through the water. Although still fairly distant, it was a great start, and everyone enjoyed watching its behaviour. In total we saw two coypus during the session, with a couple of guests managing some particularly nice images despite the challenging distance.

As the morning continued, the encounters gradually improved, and at one stage we had a few lovely close views which resulted in some excellent photographic opportunities. The relaxed behaviour of the animals allowed people to experiment with compositions and slower, more thoughtful shooting rather than the usual panic of trying to focus on something disappearing into reeds.

Just as we were preparing to leave, the local herd of buffalo wandered past and into the wetlands to cool off. It created a fantastic scene, with the huge animals standing in the water against the dramatic backdrop of the Kerkini mountains towering behind them. One of those classic Kerkini moments where the landscape almost looks too perfect to be real.

We eventually returned to the hotel for lunch before gathering again for another of my editing and photography masterclasses, this time focusing on lighting and learning how to truly understand and use light creatively. We discussed how important light is in photography, not just photographing subjects, but photographing mood, atmosphere and shape. Hopefully everyone found it useful and came away with a few new ideas to try out during the remainder of the tour.

In the afternoon we headed back to the bee-eater area and set up the pop-up hides in preparation for the evening session. Unfortunately, just before we left the hotel, the heavens opened, and a fairly heavy downpour rolled through the area. It certainly wasn't ideal timing and slightly reduced our chances of getting strong bee-eater activity, but there was still enough optimism amongst the group to give it a try anyway.

Once everyone was tucked away inside the hides, we settled in for a couple of hours of waiting, hoping the birds might eventually cooperate. There were a few exciting close fly-bys which definitely kept everyone alert, but sadly the bee-eaters refused to perch where we wanted them to. As always, wildlife has an excellent sense of humour and rarely reads the itinerary.

Even so, sitting quietly out in the landscape listening to the calls overhead and watching the changing evening light was still a lovely experience and part of the enjoyment of these sessions.

After packing away the hides, we returned to the hotel for a late dinner before finally heading off to bed for some very well-earned rest ahead of another early start.

Thursday 14 May 2026

Day 4

Another early start this morning, beginning with the now very familiar routine of tea, coffee and slightly sleepy conversations before sunrise. By this stage of the tour, everyone had settled nicely into the rhythm of early mornings, cameras, wildlife and large amounts of caffeine.

Once suitably fuelled, we headed down to the harbour for our third and final boat trip of the tour. The conditions on the lake looked lovely once again, with calm water and soft morning light creating beautiful reflections across the wetlands. Today's main mission was very simple: find pelicans. Preferably cooperative ones.

As is often the case with wildlife photography, the birds clearly hadn't received the memo. We spent quite a while searching different parts of the lake, scanning distant groups of birds and slowly exploring the channels in the hope of finding some good photographic opportunities. Although the lake always feels alive with birdlife, pelicans can sometimes be surprisingly elusive when you actually want them close.

Eventually our patience paid off and we located a small group actively fishing. There weren't huge numbers, but after a fairly lengthy search nobody was complaining. The birds gave us some lovely opportunities for portraits as they drifted across the calm water, occasionally throwing enormous fish into the air or glaring suspiciously at us with their permanently unimpressed expressions.

The beautiful soft light really helped for photography, bringing out the detail in the feathers and the striking colours around the face and bill. Sometimes it's not about huge numbers of birds or chaotic action, but simply enjoying quieter moments and taking time to photograph behaviour and detail properly.



Of course, all serious wildlife photography sessions eventually lead to the most important event of the morning, another coffee break. This time it came accompanied by cake, which was met with universal approval and may well have boosted morale even more than the pelicans did.

There's something rather special about sitting on a boat in the middle of Lake Kerkini, surrounded by bird calls and mountains, drinking coffee and eating cake while cameras are scattered everywhere. It's a tough life, really.

After enjoying the peaceful morning on the lake, we eventually made our way back towards the harbour and returned to the hotel for breakfast.

Following breakfast, there was a short break to recharge batteries, back up memory cards and, in some

cases, attempt to narrow down the ever-growing number of pelican photos already accumulating on laptops and cameras.

After lunch we headed out for a macro photography session. Although Kerkini is famous for its birds, the smaller wildlife around the wetlands can be just as rewarding if you slow down and take the time to look properly. Dragonflies, spiders, beetles and various insects kept everyone busy for quite a while, with lots of opportunities to experiment creatively with depth of field, backgrounds and light.



Macro photography always seems to divide people into two groups: those who calmly enjoy the process and those lying face down in the grass questioning every life decision while trying to focus on something the size of a fingernail.

As the afternoon light improved, we returned once again to the bee-eater area for another attempt with the pop-up hides. Despite the birds being very active overhead, they unfortunately continued their ongoing campaign of refusing to perch where we wanted them to.

There were still plenty of exciting moments though, with regular fly-pasts giving everyone opportunities to practise flight photography and track the birds as they zipped overhead calling constantly. At times they came incredibly close, flashing through the frame in bursts of colour before vanishing off across the fields again.

Sadly though, not a single bird decided to land in front of the hides. Bee-eaters are wonderful birds, but they can also be absolute masters of testing photographers' patience.

Even so, the atmosphere of the evening session was fantastic. Sitting quietly in the warm fading light, listening to the constant calls overhead and watching the birds hunting insects across the landscape was still a lovely way to spend the afternoon.
Eventually, as the light faded and the activity slowed, we packed away the hides and returned to the hotel

for dinner and another relaxed evening together. By now the group had collected a huge variety of images and experiences from the tour, and conversations over dinner were full of favourite moments, near misses and the usual debate over who had taken far too many photos to edit once back home.

Friday 15 May 2026

Day 5

After four busy days of early starts, boat trips, hides, macro photography and a fairly impressive amount of coffee and cake, our final morning together in Kerkini had arrived.

For once there was no alarm before sunrise and no need to head out with cameras, so everyone could enjoy a much more relaxed breakfast at the hotel. It also gave us time to finish packing, check beneath the beds for any forgotten chargers and attempt to squeeze rather more equipment into our bags than we had arrived with.

Once everything was packed and loaded into the vehicles, we said goodbye to our hosts and began the journey south towards Thessaloniki Airport. The group would be catching their flight back to Gatwick, while I was travelling with them to meet my second group before returning to Kerkini for another tour.
The drive gave us one final opportunity to enjoy the beautiful scenery of northern Greece, with the mountains and wetlands slowly disappearing behind us. Conversation naturally turned to the highlights of the week: calm mornings on the lake, pelicans fishing around the boat, coypu beside the wetlands, colourful bee-eaters flashing overhead and, of course, the birds that stubbornly refused to land exactly where we wanted them to.

Although the wildlife did not always follow the itinerary, that is all part of the experience. The group came away with a fantastic variety of images, some brilliant encounters and plenty of stories from our time together at Lake Kerkini.

Before long we arrived at Thessaloniki Airport, where it was time to say our goodbyes. The group headed off to check in for their flight back to the UK, while I waited for my second group to arrive before making the journey north to Kerkini once again.

A huge thank you to the whole group for making the tour such an enjoyable one. There were plenty of laughs, some excellent photography and a really relaxed atmosphere throughout the week. I hope everyone arrived home safely with full memory cards and some very happy memories of Kerkini.

For me, there was just enough time for another airport coffee before welcoming group number two and preparing to do it all over again.





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