

# Tour Report

## Greece – Pelicans of Lake Kerkini

17 -21 January 2022

Dalmatian pelican



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Compiled by Sean Weekly

Tour Leader: Sean Weekly

### **Day 1: Monday 17 January 2022**

It was an early start at Heathrow airport. I stayed locally near Terminal Five and arrived at the Terminal Two around 4:00am ready for an early flight at 6:30am. On arrival I met two guests in the queue whilst checking in. I had met one of them before at the WildFair event and had been in contact about this trip prior to today. The other guest I had met at another workshop before. It was good to be on hand and help them both with all the new travel restrictions and stresses in place at the airport. After a successful check in we enjoyed a nice coffee and a bacon roll! I then soon met one more guest just outside of the coffee shop, and she came to join us.

The plane was on time and boarding was smooth. Nice mild weather outside Heathrow which was good considering the recent cold spells. Our flight transferred to Frankfurt where I met our last guest before flying on to Thessaloniki. Everyone was in good spirits and really excited about the week ahead.

On arrival in Greece we were met by our local guides Gianis and Babis our English translator. There was nice sunny weather and blue skies outside in Thessaloniki with temperatures at 4°C. We then had an hour and a half drive to our hotel in Lake Kerkini.

Conditions are quite a bit colder in Kerkini due to its location in the mountain which gives the area its own mini climate. We all had our fingers crossed for some snow-capped mountain ranges. On entering Lake Kerkini itself we stopped off by the side of the lake for the group to see the gorgeous scenery and to wet the guest's appetite for the next few days. Overlooking the gorgeous mountains and wildlife of Lake Kerkini is certainly enough to tempt anyone to take some photos. It is simply breath-taking! We arrived safely at our hotel and had around an hour break before tucking into some traditional Greek food for dinner.

I then briefed the group on the timings and plan for the upcoming days before we retired to bed.

### **Day 2: Tuesday 18 January 2022**

*Weather: -3°C*

It was an early start for us as it was our first boat trip out on the lake. We left the hotel around 6:45am and drove the five minutes to the small port where we all boarded our traditional wooden Greek Boat. It was a cold one with temperatures at -3°C and a wind chill of -6°C so we certainly felt it stepping on to the boat.

Frustratingly we had some very strong winds around 29mph cutting through the valley and straight across the Lake which was not a great first start to the boat trip. However, we didn't have to wait too long before we saw our first Dalmatian pelicans which quickly flew in and landed all around the boat. The group were pleasantly surprised at how photogenic the birds were.

Annoyingly due to the very strong winds and choppy water conditions we couldn't head out far into the lake and had to hug the shoreline instead for everyone's safety. We made the decision due to the weather that it was best to cut the boat trip earlier than usual. So after a few hours on the water, we headed back to the hotel.

After a nice traditional hearty soup for our lunch, we headed out in the 4x4s to see the water buffalo situated in the meadows at the foothills of the Kerkini Mountains. We added this little excursion in due to the shorter boat trip and to break up the afternoon before our photography session a bit later on.

It was a nice little trip out and gave the group an insight into the local wildlife and environment around the lake itself. We even saw a Juvenile white-tailed sea eagle soaring fairly high around the mountains. Too far for photos but it was a good sighting nonetheless.

After the buffalo trip we returned back to the hotel to collect our camera gear and kit up for the afternoons session. We then headed out in the vehicles to the other side of the lake (around a 30-minute drive). We had some great sunny skies with a little bit of cloud which was nice, but annoyingly we still had the strong winds coming across the lake through the valley of the mountain ranges. We could not use the usual shore line feeding spot as the water was still too rough for the pelicans to settle. So, myself and our guides found a small inlet around the lake which had some calmer water. The session was fantastic, and the group had a great afternoon filling up their memory cards with plenty of pelican shots!

In the evening I gave a small impromptu workshop about exposure! So that the group had the knowledge for the next coming days. I taught the group about exposing for highlights and shadows so they would be better prepared if we had a nice sunrise in the morning.

### **Day 3: Wednesday 19 January 2022**

*Weather: -3°C with light winds*

Another early start again for our second boat trip of the trip. We left the hotel again at 6:45am and onto the boat for 7am.

The lake was a lot calmer than yesterday's venture, however we still had a gentle breeze which was still giving us some movement on the water. It didn't take long until the pelicans started to notice the boat and flew right alongside from different directions. It was still fairly dark at this point as sunrise was not until 7:30am. We had a full moon that was lighting up the pelicans and by cranking up the ISO it produced some nice and interesting images. This was a good opportunity for us to spend time during this blue hour to concentrate on portraits of the pelicans off the side of the boat.

Once the sun broke the horizon we then started up the boat and headed out deeper into the lake full throttle. The pelicans then followed the boat alongside. This was a fantastic chance for the group to get some really nice flight images with the gorgeous snow-capped Kerkin Mountains as a perfect backdrop!

After a great four hours out on the water it was time to head back to our hotel to warm up around the open log fire and to back up and download our cards. I also went through with the group anything that they were struggling with photographically so we could go through it now before we headed out to our afternoon shoreline feed.

A 3pm we headed back out again into the vehicles to the shore for our afternoon/evening session. I decided to ask our guides if we could stop off at a different location along the lake as I had found a really beautiful open and calm spot with the mountains towering in the distance. It really was an incredible spot however due to the openness of the location the birds would not come in close to settle down. We waited around 30 minutes here in case they came in but unfortunately they did not. So we headed back to the same spot as last night and within five minutes we had quite a few pelicans to photograph. We spent this session concentrating on portraits and close up shots of the birds. Exposing for harsh sunlight and learning how to use shadows and highlights to enhance an image. We then waited for the sun to drop behind the mountains which gave us some really awesome soft light for more portraits.

#### **Day 4: Thursday 20 January 2022**

*Weather: -2°C with slight breeze*

Today we were back out on the boat again for 7am for our last boat trip of the workshop. It was still pretty chilly out so lots of layers again. Luckily for our last session the wind from the last couple of days had completely dropped giving us some fantastic calm conditions out the water. We used this boat session again to get some more portraits and then some more flight images including head on and side shots in flight. Towards the end of the boat trip the breeze completely stopped giving us a perfect mirror reflection on the water. Exactly what we had been after the last few days. The group were very happy with the fresh new conditions and gave us all some lovely shots.

The afternoon session followed the same format as yesterday at the same location. We had some beautiful soft light which gave the group a great opportunity to get some lovely pastel colours of the pelicans with the mountains as a backdrop. Due to the nice soft light the group also had a play with getting some nice wide-angle images of the pelicans right on the shore. So close that some of the birds were very nearly touching the lenses!

#### **Day 5: Friday 21 January 2022**

*Weather: 0°C with slight breeze*

It was time to say wave off a fantastic group this morning. Due to the second group arriving today and lack of space in the vehicle (as the new group had a few extra people) I could not join the group to the airport to wave them off. I spent the morning and afternoon editing some images ready to brief the new group and show them some images of what to expect over the next few days!