

Tour Report

Greece – Pelicans of Lake Kerkini

9 – 13 January 2023

Dalmatian pelican



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Compiled by Sean Weekly

Day 1: Monday 9 January 2023

I was already at Thessaloniki airport, as I had just dropped off the previous group and met one of the new group, whom I have known for many years as he has been to a few workshops with me. After a short wait, the rest of the group arrived. I already knew all except one and everyone was looking forward to the trip ahead. We gathered all the luggage and made our way to the hotel at Lake Kerkini, where we enjoyed a lovely traditional dinner before I gave a presentation with images so the group knew what to expect.

Day 2: Tuesday 10 January 2023

Weather: Heavy rain, 5° C

Sadly the weather wasn't ideal for our first outing, with thick clouds and heavy rain. After 20 minutes we saw our first three pelicans, however waited a short while for the conditions to improve. As the sun started to rise, the light improved, and soon lots more pelicans came in. Despite our very wet bottoms, it was a good morning session, and even with the rain there were a lot of pelicans around the boat - 40-50 at a rough count. The group tried slow shutter panning in-flight photos – a risky move for their first session, but the conditions were perfect for it!

In the afternoon, the rain had produced some lovely low cloud and even covered the mountain peaks with some really nice snow! It was great to finally see some snow back on the Kerkini mountains. We had a really beautiful session at the shoreline feed, however due to the rain, the sand and the edge of the lake was very damp and wet, so it was a little uncomfortable even when lying on the yoga mats. This session gave us some of the best conditions and the bluest light I have seen in Kerkini – it was great for wide-angle shots and clean portraits of the more mature male pelicans in the nice blue light of late afternoon.

Day 3: Wednesday 11 January 2023

Weather: Morning Cloudy 3° C. Afternoon Sunny intervals 11° C

We had another early start with a short drive to the harbour to start our morning boat trip. It didn't take long before the pelicans arrived around the boat, and we spent quite some time trying to photograph the birds in flight with the gorgeous snow-capped Orvolus Mountains as a backdrop. It was quite a challenge as lots of birds were flying and landing, and it was hard to isolate just one bird. However eventually it paid off and everyone got some nice shots. We then moved on to lots of panning shots, where a short break in the clouds gave us nice light for a short time that was ideal for a portrait shots.

Unfortunately today's shoreline feed wasn't very successful due to the previous day's rain oxygenating the water – which caused more fish to come to the surface – so the pelicans weren't interested in our fish. In the end I decided that as the birds were not coming to the shore to feed, we should back out on the lake with the boat. By the time we got back to the harbour and onto the boat there was only around 1.5 hours of daylight left, but we had the best conditions I've seen in a while. The scenery was amazing with purple-blue mountains that were perfect for some nice in-flight shots and portraits with the mountains behind in the distance.

Day 4: Thursday 12 January 2023

Weather: Clear 3° C

We had another early morning start for our boat trip. It didn't take long before lots of pelicans came flying straight in towards the boat, with some 50 birds all around us! It was still quite dark so we were waiting for sunrise which looked as if it was going to be very good. Sadly, however, it didn't really materialise into anything incredible, but the group still got some beautiful shots.

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By mid-morning lots of pelicans had started to land on the boat's roof which was fantastic for wide-angle photos. This gave us completely new opportunities for a different perspective and thus different images of the pelicans.

Sadly we had another unsuccessful shoreline feed, so I decided on another boat trip to capture the evening light. There were some gorgeous blue tones on the water for low level portraits, and the mountains were cast in a lovely, deep, rich purple-pink colour. These conditions were some of the best that I've encountered in Kerkini, and gave the group some mind-blowing images.

Day 5: Friday 13 January 2023

Weather: Clear 2° C

Today was the last boat trip for this group, and boy did it deliver: we had near perfect conditions! The lake was extremely calm and we had some really nice soft light for portraits with the Kerkini Mountains behind - a fantastic way to finish our last day. Everyone had such an incredible time and we laughed so much - it's always sad to see another group leave.

We headed back to the hotel for a late breakfast, before everyone headed to their rooms to pack their bags. It was then time to leave to the airport. I travelled with them to say my final goodbye and to meet my third and final group of this year.

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