

FYR Macedonia and Prespa, Greece



Nature and birds

May 6 – 15, 2017

Ella Maria and Leif Bisschop-Larsen, Denmark

Introduction

This report summarizes our 10-day-trip to Macedonia and the Greek Prespa lakes. We chose this area in Balkan after visiting the neighboring Southern Bulgaria two years ago, which was a pleasant experience, and inspired by Prof. Arne Strid who introduced us to the Greek flora many years ago on a study tour and recently recommended us to visit Prespa. In addition, we had great help from Jørgen Stubgaard who has been working with the national park of Prespa for many years and supplied us with valuable contacts in Prespa. Also, we had good advice from Michael Højgaard regarding where to stay in Macedonia.

Itinerary

Saturday May 6. We arrived in Skopje Airport at noon, and after getting the rented car we drove to Kavadarci and a little further south to Mokliste to Villa Bella Boutique Hotel for two nights. In the small river behind the hotel were Dipper and Grey Wagtail, and from the balcony we saw nesting Mistle Thrush and Spanish Sparrow. Golden Oriole and Nightingale were singing everywhere.

Sunday May 7. We drove south in the high land called Vitachevo (?). This is open grazed grassland more or less with bushes and wooded areas and mountains in the distance. Very few people live there. In this area we spotted Griffon - and Egyptian Vulture, Imperial - and Golden Eagle, Long-legged Buzzard, Little Kestrel



Griffon Vultures soaring over Vitachevo

and Hobby. Red-backed - and Woodchat Shrike were common as were Cirl -, Black-headed - and Corn Bunting. We heard Golden Oriole and Nightingale all the time.

In the afternoon we visited the ancient city of Stobi, impressive ruins from the Roman Empire. As could be expected this is habitat for Little Owl, Black-eared Wheatear and Hoopoe. We returned via Gradsko – Dolno Cicevo – Rosoman. This farmland was rich in buntings and Calandra Lark.

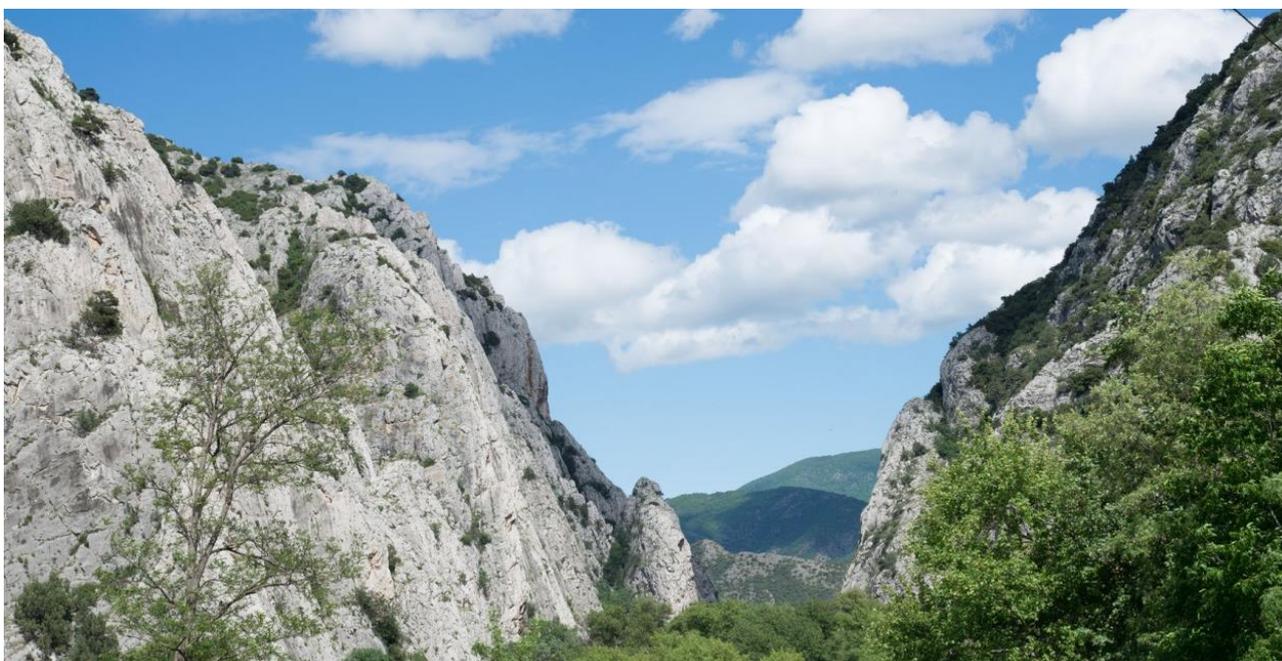


Stobi



Black-eared Wheatear

Monday May 8. Again, we drove through the beautiful Vitachevo area. We probably saw 10-15 Griffons and two Egyptian Vultures. Besides bird-watching we enjoyed the very rich flora, in one place near Barovo we found 5 species of orchids. From Barovo to Besvica the road was merely a dirt track, not recommended for tourist driving. The villages on this road seemed abandoned. After long time slow driving, we finally came to Demir Capija and further on through the “Iron Gate” along the river Vardar and the railway. This Gorge is quite impressive and typical bird species were Crag-Martin, House-Martin and Blue Rock-Thrush. Wall-creeper should be possible here but we didn’t see any.



The newly build highway cross the river just east of the gorge and the road to Klisura has therefore been moved. The beautiful landscape here is scarred by the enormous highway dam, but still there is a nice small valley to wander around in. One Griffon Vulture nest was spotted on the cliffs above.

We stayed at the Popova Kula Winery near Demir Capija, a quite luxurious but not expensive hotel surrounded by wine fields.

Tuesday May 9. It was raining all morning, so we started right away towards Prespa via Gradsko, Prilep and Bitola. South of Prilep we turned left by road 109. Here, we found intense grazed valleys and open mountain areas. There were many of the birds already seen, and in addition we saw Short-toed Lark, Crested Lark, and Rufous-tailed Rock-Thrush. Back on the A3-road we passed two Red-footed Falcons in a bush by the roadside.



Landscape at road 109

We passed the border to Greece at Niki without problems and took the road to Kato Klines and further on via Akritas on the mountain road to the Prespa area. The road from Akritas was actually sign-posted as closed but local people told us to continue anyway. The road was OK, but with lots of landslides and rock-pieces on the roadway.

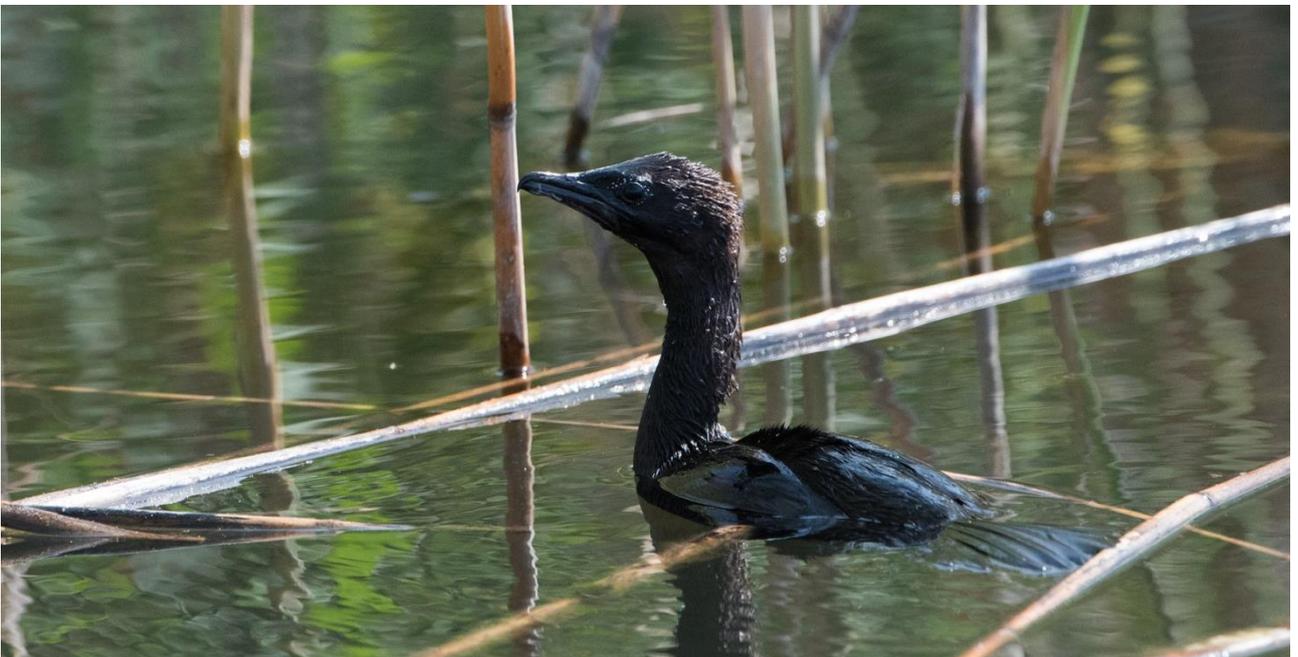
Late afternoon we arrived in Laimos to stay the next four nights at Hotel Milos, a former water-mill on the edge of the village. Here, we met with Chris Mounsey, Balkan Tracks, who helped us planning the Prespa visit. Chris was a great help for us during our stay in Prespa. Here, we also (accidentally) met some Danish friends from the Aage V. Jensen Charity Foundation whom we spent the evening with.

Wednesday May 10. This day, we were accompanied by the very skilled guide Julian Hoffman for an introduction to the Prespa area in general and to the birds in particular. We enjoyed both the Great White Pelican and the Dalmatian Pelican, mostly in the air soaring over the lakes. From the hill Krina, we had a fine view of the breeding colony with pelicans, Night Heron, and Pygmy Cormorant. Commonly seen at the lake were Squacco Heron, Little Egret, Great Egret, and Grey Heron. Birds of prey were Marsh-Harrier, Common Buzzard, Kestrel, one Short-toed Eagle, and one Montagu's Harrier. The area is rich in smaller birds, we enjoyed watching/hearing Wood Lark, Crag-Martin, Red-rumped Swallow, Subalpine Warbler, Cetti's Warbler, Great Reed-Warbler, Red-backed Shrike, Lesser Grey Shrike, Wood-chat Shrike, Cirl Bunting, Black-headed Bunting, and Corn Bunting among others.

Thursday May 11. We visited some of the same places as we did the day before. We took a walk on the island Agios Achilleios with nice views of Lake Mikri Prespa. Here, we saw Sombre Tit, and by the floating bridge a Little Bittern. We took lunch-break at the view-point near Agios Georgios to watch the pelicans fly by and a Hobby catching dragonflies. In the afternoon we walked from Agios Georgios to Mt. Devas, absolutely the best botanic experience of our tour with lots of orchids and iris. Here, we also saw several fresh footprints of bear.



Great White Pelican



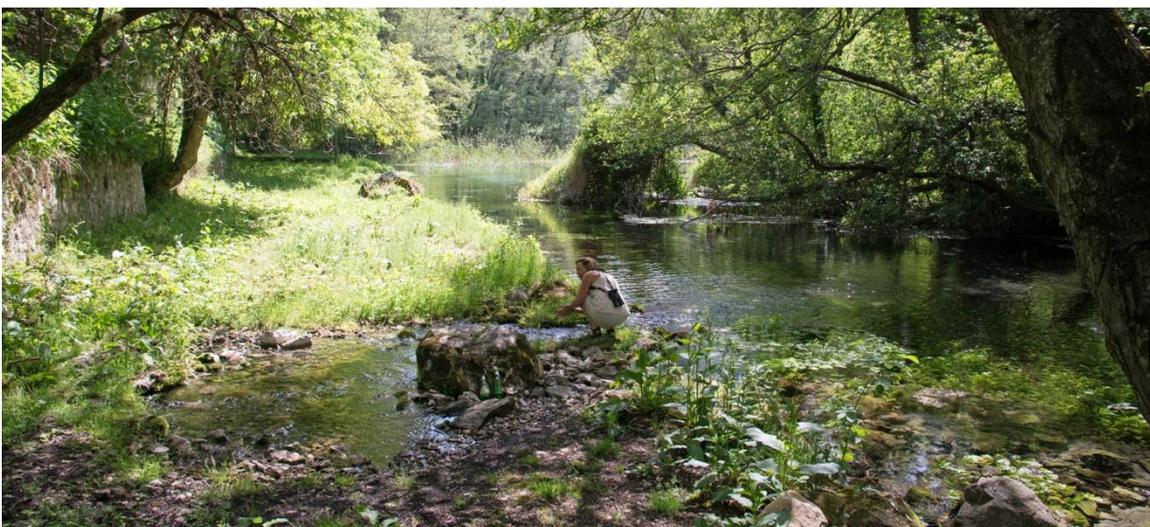
Pygmy Cormorant

Friday May 12. Together with Chris Mounsey we went on a boat ride from Psarades on Lake Megali Prespa. The hermitages on the cliffs west of Psarades were very interesting to visit, and in the boat we came close to Dalmatian Pelicans and Pygmy Cormorants. Back in the Limos area we had Barred Warbler, Tawny Pipit, Yellow Wagtail (feldegg), and 15-20 Bee-Eaters west of Platy.

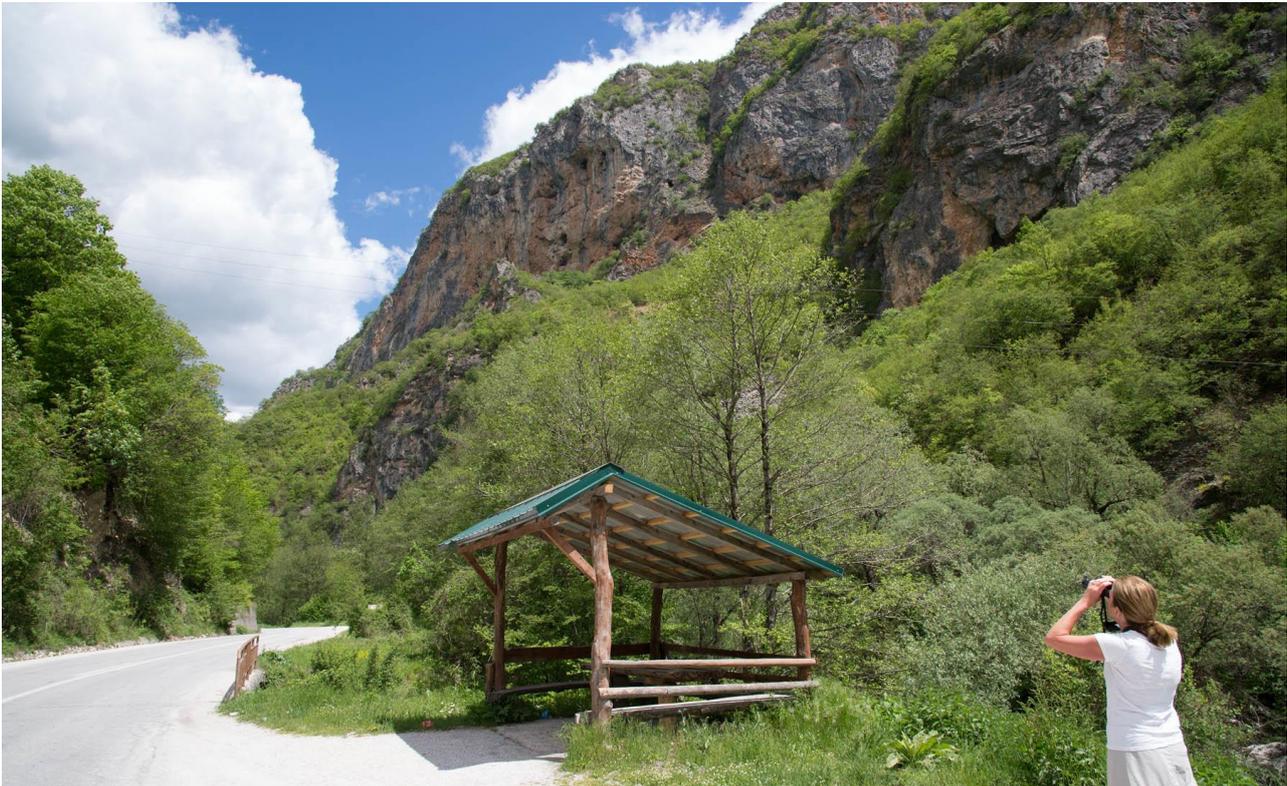


Dalmatian Pelican

Saturday May 13. We left Limos and headed for the Albanian border at Kristallopigi/Bilisht. From here, we went through the intensively cultivated valley to Zemblak, where we turned north on the mountain-road west of Lake Megali Prespa to the border to Macedonia at Gorice/Stenje. We didn't see many birds on this route, and especially the first part in Albania was quite disappointing with a lot of "development". North of Stenje we took the small scenic road over the high mountains of Galicica and reached Lake Ohrid. Here we visited Sv. Naum with a very big spring area. The water should come from the Prespa lakes underground. The spring was very interesting, but one should be aware that the place is a very crowded tourist hot-spot, take the quiet foot-path behind the lagoon to see the springs from land. At the end of the day, we found our way to Velestovo village above the city of Ohrid where we had a fancy apartment for the night. In the village we heard Scops Owl, the rest was ordinary species.



Sunday May 14. From Ohrid we took the route to Debar and through Mavrovo National Park to Skopje. Mavrovo is impressive mountains with dramatic cliffs and woods. We only saw few birds, the only big birds were Buzzard and Raven. Near Mavrovo Lake we heard a likely Bonelli's Warbler. We had a hotel reservation in Canyon Matka, but this place turned out to be so crowded with one-day tourists that we gave up and continued to Skopje where we found a small boutique hotel for the last night.



Monday May 15. After dropping off the car at the airport we flew back to Cph. via Vienna. All went smooth without problems.

Practical informations

Air tickets were booked via Austrian Air: Copenhagen – Vienna – Skopje return. The car was rented at Auto Europe. All went as planned, the price was OK and the connection in Vienna smooth. Hotels were booked in advance, and the only problem was the inaccessible hotel in Canyon Matka.

When driving small roads you cannot always trust the signature of the printed map. Be careful when driving a small car. We had no accidents, but were in some cases not sure whether we could get through the road and whether it was the right road at all.

The handbooks used were: Evans T 2015: Macedonia, the Bradt Travel Guide. Svensson L 2012: Fugle I felten. Aulagnier S. et al. 2009: Mammals of Europe, North Africa and the Middle East. Arnold E. N. 2002: Reptiles and Amphibians of Europe.

Maps and guide: Map of Macedonia from Freytag and Berndt 1:200.000. Prespa Walking Guide 2009 from the Society for the Protection of Prespa. Google Map helped in other areas.

For photos we used Nikon D750 with 200-400 mm/f4 + 1.4 converter and Nikon D610 with 24-120 mm/f4.

For guiding in the Prespa area, Chris Mounsey and Julian Hoffman from Balkan Tracks were a great help. www.balkantracks.com. Myrsini Malakou of the Society for the Protection of Prespa helped us with the Prespa Walking Guide and more information, for which we are very grateful. www.spp.gr.

More photos from this tour can be seen here: www.natur-foto.dk, click "Rejser".



Lesser Grey Shrike

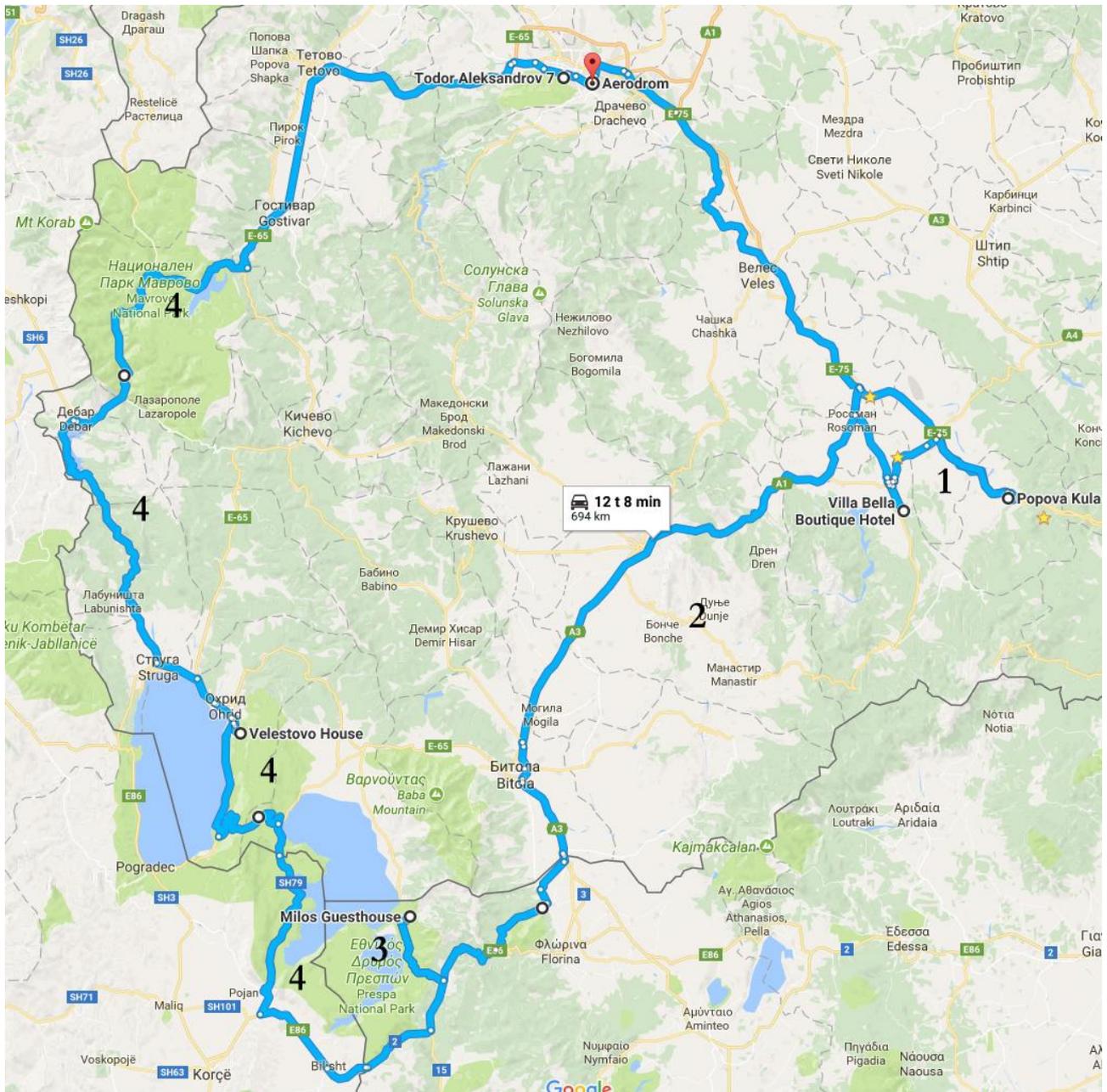


Iris germanica

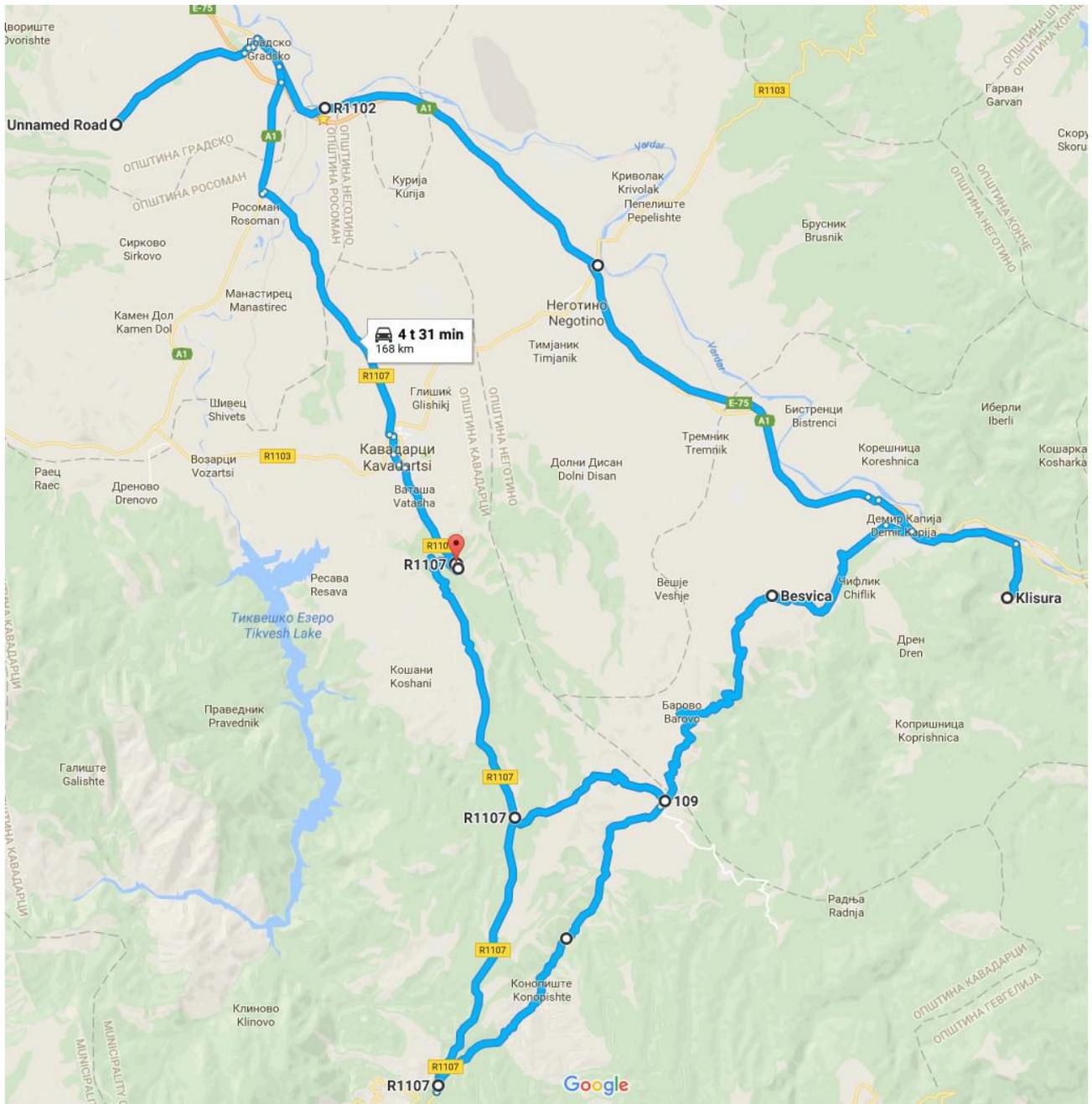


Bear track





Travel route with locations. 1: Kavadarci area (see below), 2: Road 109 SE of Prilep, 3: Prespa area, 4: Other places along the route. Google Map.



Kavadarci area, we also followed the road from Kavadarci to Negotina, a small road on the northern side of River Vardar, and a very small road from Dolno Cicevo to Rosoman. Google Map.

Birds observed in FYR Macedonia and Prespa, Greece 6 – 15 May 2017
Locations

Species	Scientific name	Danish name	1	2	3	4
Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	Grågås			x	
Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	Knopsvane			x	
Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	Gravand				x
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	Gråand	x		x	
Ferruginous Duck	<i>Aythya nyroca</i>	Hvidøjjet And			x	
Common Merganser	<i>Merqus merganser</i>	Stor Skallesluger			x	
Ring-necked Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	Fasan		x		
Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	Toppet Lappedykker			x	
Black-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>	Sorthalset Lappedykker			x	
White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	Hvid Stork	x	x	x	
Pygmy Cormorant	<i>Microcarbo pygmeus</i>	Dværgskarv			x	
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	Skarv			x	
Great White Pelican	<i>Pelecanus onocrotalus</i>	Hvid Pelikan			x	
Dalmatian Pelican	<i>Pelecanus crispus</i>	Krøltoppet Pelikan			x	
Little Bittern	<i>Ixobrychus minutus</i>	Dværghejre			x	
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	Fiskehejre	x	x	x	x
Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>	Sølvhejre			x	
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	Silkehejre			x	
Squacco Heron	<i>Ardeola ralloides</i>	Tophejre			x	
Black-crowned Night-Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>	Nathejre			x	
Egyptian Vulture	<i>Neophron percnopterus</i>	Ådselgrib	x			
Honey-buzzard	<i>Pernis apivorus</i>	Hvæpsevåge	x			
Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>	Gåsegrib	x			
Short-toed Eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>	Slangeørn	x	x	x	
Imperial Eagle	<i>Aquila heliaca</i>	Kejserørn	x			
Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>	Kongeørn	x			
Marsh-Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	Rørhøg			x	
Montagu's Harrier	<i>Circus pygargus</i>	Hedehøg			x	
Levant Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter brevipes</i>	Balkan-høg	x		x	
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	Musvåge			x	x
Long-legged Buzzard	<i>Buteo rufinus</i>	Ørnevåge	x			
Lesser Kestrel	<i>Falco naumanni</i>	Lille Tårnfalk	x	x		
Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	Tårnfalk	x		x	
Hobby	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>	Lærkefalk			x	
Red-footed Falcon	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	Aftenfalk		x		
Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	Rørhøne			x	
Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	Blishøne				x
Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	Vibe		x		
Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	Mudderklire	x			
Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	Hættemåge			x	
Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	Sølvmåge			x	
Rock Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	Klippedue	x	x	x	x
Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>	Huldue	x			
Wood-Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	Ringdue	x	x	x	x
Turtle-Dove	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>	Turteldue	x	x	x	x
Collared-Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	Tyrkerdue	x	x	x	x
Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>	Gøg	x		x	

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Species	Scientific name	Danish name	1	2	3	4
Scops-Owl	<i>Otus scops</i>	Dværghornugle	x		x	
Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>	Kirkeugle	x			
Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>	Mursejler	x		x	
Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>	Hærfugl	x	x	x	x
Bee-eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>	Biæder	x	x	x	
Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	Stor Flagspætte	x	x	x	
Syrian Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos syriacus</i>	Syrisk Flagspætte	x		x	
Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>	Grønspætte	x		x	x
Red-backed Shrike	<i>Lanius collurio</i>	Rødrygget Tornskade	x	x	x	
Lesser Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius minor</i>	Rosenbrystet Tornskade			x	
Woodchat Shrike	<i>Lanius senator</i>	Rødhovedet Tornskade	x	x	x	x
Golden Oriole	<i>Oriolus oriolus</i>	Pirol	x	x	x	
Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	Skovskade	x		x	x
Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	Husskade	x	x	x	x
Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>	Allike	x		x	x
Hooded Crow	<i>Corvus cornix</i>	Gråkrage	x	x	x	x
Common Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	Ravn	x		x	x
Bearded Reedling	<i>Panurus biarmicus</i>	Skægmejse			x	
Greater Short-toed Lark	<i>Calandrella brachydactyla</i>	Korttået Lærke		x		
Calandra Lark	<i>Melanocorypha calandra</i>	Kalanderlærke	x	x		
Wood Lark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>	Hedelærke	x	x	x	
Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	Sanglærke	x			
Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>	Toplærke	x	x	x	
Bank Swallow	<i>Riparia riparia</i>	Digesvale	x		x	
Crag-Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>	Klippesvale	x	x	x	
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	Landsvale	x	x	x	x
Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Cecropis daurica</i>	Rødrygget Svale	x	x	x	x
House-Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	Bysvale	x	x	x	x
Sombre Tit	<i>Poecile luqubris</i>	Sørgemejse			x	
Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	Blåmejse	x	x	x	
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	Musvit	x	x	x	x
Penduline-Tit	<i>Remiz pendulinus</i>	Pungmejse			x	
Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>	Halemejse			x	
Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	Gærdesmutte	x		x	
White-throated Dipper	<i>Cinclus cinclus</i>	Vandstær	x			
Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>	Cettisanger			x	
Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	Gransanger	x		x	x
Eastern Bonelli's Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus orientalis</i>	Balkan-løvsanger				x
Eastern Olivaceous Warbler	<i>Iduna pallida</i>	Bleg Gulbug	x		x	
Reed-Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>	Rørsanger			x	
Great Reed-Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus arundinaceus</i>	Drosselrørsanger	x		x	
Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	Munk	x	x	x	x
Garden Warbler	<i>Sylvia borin</i>	Havesanger	x		x	
Barred Warbler	<i>Sylvia nisoria</i>	Høgesanger			x	
Lesser Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia curruca</i>	Gærdesanger			x	
Subalpine Warbler	<i>Sylvia cantillans</i>	Hvidskægget Sanger			x	
Sardinian Warbler	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>	Sorthovedet Sanger	x			
Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis</i>	Tornsanger	x	x	x	

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Locations

Species	Scientific name	Danish name	1	2	3	4
Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>	Grå Fluesnapper	x		x	
Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	Rødhals	x		x	
Common Nightingale	<i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i>	Sydlig Nattergal	x	x	x	
Rufous-tailed Rock-Thrush	<i>Monticola saxatilis</i>	Stendrossel		x		
Blue Rock-Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>	Blådrossel	x	x		
African Stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquatus</i>	Sortstrubet bynkefugl				x
Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>	Stenpikker	x			
Black-eared Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe hispanica</i>	Middelhavs-stenpikker	x		x	
Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	Solsort	x	x	x	x
Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	Sangdrossel	x		x	
Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>	Misteldrossel	x		x	
Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	Stær	x	x	x	x
Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	Jernspurv	x		x	
Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>	Gul Vipstjert			x	
Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	Bjergvipstjert	x			
White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	Hvid Vipstjert	x	x	x	x
Tawny Pipit	<i>Anthus campestris</i>	Markpiber			x	
Cirl Bunting	<i>Emberiza cirlus</i>	Gærdeværling	x	x	x	
Rock Bunting	<i>Emberiza cia</i>	Klippeværling			x	
Black-headed Bunting	<i>Emberiza melanocephala</i>	Hætteværling			x	
Ortolan Bunting	<i>Emberiza hortulana</i>	Hortulan			x	x
Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>	Bomlærke	x	x	x	
Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	Bogfinke	x	x	x	x
Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>	Dompap		x		
Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>	Grønirisk	x	x	x	x
Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	Stillits	x	x	x	x
Linnet	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>	Tornirisk	x	x	x	
Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>	Kernebider		x		
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	Gråspurv	x	x	x	x
Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>	Spansk Spurv	x	x		
Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>	Skovspurv	x	x	x	x