

Trip Report: Albania 28th March – 1st April 2024

Introduction

My wife bought me flight tickets as a Christmas present for our first visit to Albania, over the Easter Bank holiday weekend. Ostensibly, not a birding trip, I was still able to do a reasonable amount of birding, with a mixture of resident birds and early migrants.

Travel & Logistics

Being based in Luxembourg, we flew with Ryanair from Brussels Charleroi direct to Tirana, arriving at 12:50 hours on 28/03/2024.

We hired a car with MYCAR4YOU, located within a 10 minutes walk of the terminal. Tirana airport has many car hire providers; this firm was recommended to us by a friend who has used many of the local firms with mixed results. We found the company to be quite good and reasonably priced, providing a Nissan Micra, which ran without any problems. There is a petrol station located very close to the airport, near the main roundabout. Payment was in cash with a refundable card deposit.

Tirana has innumerable petrol stations so you can easily refuel as needed.

Cash

Cash is king in Albania – most places do not have credit card facilities. However, ATMs are everywhere so we had no problem withdrawing money.

Accommodation & Food

We booked using Booking.com, staying at the Hotel Zanzi in Durres for 1 night, followed by 3 nights at the excellent Green Park in Divjake. Both were very reasonably priced, clean and comfortable.

Green Park is a privately owned guest house in its own grounds with nice rooms, an excellent restaurant and comes thoroughly recommended. The owners were very hospitable, serving great food in their restaurant. The gardens are beautiful and it was very enjoyable having a beer or glass of wine in the evening. A word of warning – they can be quite busy with weddings, birthdays etc. so expect a bit of noise and music in the afternoons. By 6 pm things seemed to quieten down for the evening restaurant trade. Breakfasts were enormous, with a mixture of eggs, sausages, yoghurt, nuts, fruit, cheese, olives and local paratha-style bread!

During the night-time, the resident Scops Owl kept us awake! The surrounding farmland is decent for birding and it is possible to walk (20 mins) to the Karavasta Lagoon.

We ate in several restaurants and all were very good, serving rustic, fresh dishes of fish, meat or salad.

Birding Locations

Primarily we birded the wetland areas of Karavsta and Vlore. Karavsta is about 90 minutes drive from Tirana airport, with Vlore a good hour further down the coast. We took a small boat trip at Karavsta which proved to be a good birding option. The birding around Green Park was rewarding; I usually walked the dirt track along the drainage dyke through farmland to Karavsta

lagoon. It was then possible to walk along the raised bank skirting around the northeast side of the lagoon and onward to the 360 tower and visitor centre.

Birding

I self-birded throughout, content to simply see what I found. I used Ebird and BirdsEye to get a general idea of hotspots but Albania is relatively undiscovered as a birding destination so information is limited. Clearly, Dalmatian Pelican, Greater Flamingo and Pygmy Cormorant were targets with significant populations at both Karavsta and Vlore. Migration was obviously underway with new birds arriving each day. The biggest surprise was a first summer Great Spotted Cuckoo seen on two days near Green Park.

Head for the Visitor Centre at Karavasta; there is only one approach road from Divjake. There is an obvious car park on the left before the main woodland starts where it is possible to take a boat onto the lagoon for a small fee. This was quite enjoyable and gave us some nice birds. At the Visitor Centre there is a 360 tower offering canopy views of the surrounding woodland and area.

EBird Links

<https://ebird.org/checklist/S166338519>

<https://ebird.org/checklist/S166366751>

<https://ebird.org/checklist/S166438204>

<https://ebird.org/checklist/S166587204>

<https://ebird.org/checklist/S166601930>

<https://ebird.org/checklist/S166762211>

<https://ebird.org/checklist/S166762370>

Summary Checklist

Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	10 birds seen at Spiaxho estuary, near Karavasta
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	Odd birds seen in flight near Karavasta
Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>	1 seen near Green Park on 01/04
Great Spotted Cuckoo	<i>Clamator glandarius</i>	1st summer type bird seen at Green Park 29 & 30/03
Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	Widespread
Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	Birds seen in dykes in farmland near Green Park
Greater Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i>	Many birds seen at Karavsta & Vlore
Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	6 birds seen at Spiaxho estuary, near Karavsta
Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	4 birds at Karavasta on 01/04
Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>	10 birds at Karavasta on 01/04
Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	2 birds seen at Spiaxho estuary, near Karavsta
Kentish Plover	<i>Anarhynchus alexandrinus</i>	Several birds seen at Spiaxho estuary, near Karavsta
Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	2 birds at Karavasta on 01/04
Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>	1 bird at Karavasta on 31/03
Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	Seen daily near Karavasta
Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>	1 bird seen at Spiaxho estuary, near Karavsta
Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>	Birds seen at Spiaxho estuary, near Karavsta
Caspian Tern	<i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>	3 birds seen at Spiaxho estuary, near Karavasta

Sandwich Tern	<i>Thalasseus sandvicensis</i>	
Slender-billed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus genei</i>	Seen at Vlore and Karavasta with a flock of 60 on 01/04
Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	Surprisingly uncommon. Odd birds seen at all locations.
Mediterranean Gull	<i>Ichthyaetus melanocephalus</i>	About 20+ birds seen at Vlore beach.
Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>	Widespread
Pygmy Cormorant	<i>Microcarbo pygmaeus</i>	Many birds at Karavasta & Vlore
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	A single flyby bird at Vlore beach
Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>	c. 10 birds at Karavasta on 31/03
Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>	A single adult bird seen on the boat trip at Karavasta on 29/03
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	Widespread in wetland and estuaries
Western Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	A few birds seen in fields with livestock.
Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>	Single birds seen at Karavasta
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	Uncommon with singles at Karavasta and Vlore
Dalmatian Pelican	<i>Pelecanus crispus</i>	About 40 birds seen, presumably nesting, on islands at Karavasta from the boat. Birds seen around Karavasta throughout.
Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	1 female from the 360 tower at Karavasta
Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	3-4 birds at Karavasta / Green Park
Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>	Singing bird at Green Park. Seen at several locations.
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	Several roadside sightings.
Red-footed Falcon	<i>Falco vespertinus</i>	3 birds seen hawking between Green Park & Karavasta
Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	A male seen at Karavasta from the boat.
Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	Very common.
Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	A flock of 15 birds near Narte Lagoon, Vlore
Hooded Crow	<i>Corvus cornix</i>	Widespread.
Eurasian Scops Owl	<i>Otus scops</i>	Heard nightly from 1830 hours in the garden at Green Park. Probably 2 birds.
Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>	Heard a few times near Green Park. One seen on roadside building near Divjake.
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	
Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>	Common in agricultural fields.
Calandra Lark	<i>Melanocorypha calandra</i>	2 singing birds from the raised bank on NE side of Karavasta
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	Widespread.
Western House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	A few birds seen.
Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Cecropis daurica</i>	Seen at several locations. Reasonably widespread.
Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>	Common along the dyke at Green Park.
Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	A single bird near Green Park.
Great Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus arundinaceus</i>	2 birds seen in reeds near Green Park.
Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>	Reasonably common near Green Park and in suitable habitat.
Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	Reasonably common and widespread.
Sardinian Warbler	<i>Curruca melanocephala</i>	Seen near Narte Lagoon
Common Whitethroat	<i>Curruca communis</i>	Single bird seen at Green Park
European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	Singles at Green Park & Vlore
Common Nightingale	<i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i>	Single bird singing in the garden at Green Park.
Common Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>	A male at Spiaxho.

Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>	2 males in fields at Green Park.
European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	A pair near Narte Lagoon, Vlore.
Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>	2 males in fields at Green Park.
Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>	A flock of 8 birds near Green Park
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	Common.
White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	A single bird at Spiaxho
Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	A few birds near Green Park
Eurasian Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	Widespread
European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>	Widespread
European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	Widespread
Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>	Widespread