

## **Birdwatching around Kalkan, Anatolia, Turkey**

Between 2014 and 2016, we have been on family holidays to Kalkan, Anatolia, Turkey. We have stayed in apartments in this popular tourist town. In 2014, we visited in mid August for two weeks, and in 2015 and 2016 we were there for two weeks in mid July. Whilst this time of the year is unlikely to be the best for birdwatching (April/May will be best), you can still see quite a large number of sought after bird species. In the first year we hired a car in Kalkan for two days and during the other visits, we had a hire car for the whole period. Given that it costs £60 each way in Dalaman airport transit costs to Kalkan, a hire car soon becomes a reasonable proposition.

I have latterly used two books to help me, "Finding Birds in South West Turkey" by Dave Gosney and "Walking and Birdwatching in South West Turkey" by Paul Hope. I really only started using these books in 2016, up until then I did my own local exploration. Whilst both books were very useful, especially in helping to find directions to some good sites, most of the information relates to spring birdwatching when a number of the wetland sites in particular are less dry and more suitable for resident and passage birds.

Dave Gosney's book has a short section on birdwatching around Kalkan, I can now expand and update those details.

### **Sites**

#### **Kalkan**

In and around Kalkan, you can find a variety of good birds, just by walking from the centre of the town. Early morning is best and middle of the day can be pretty quiet birdwise. The maquis scrub areas around the town are good, particularly off the Elmali Road and the triangle of land between there and Kalkan itself. Prepare though for some steep uphill climbing to get there! I found that this area was good for passage birds in August, including both lesser grey shrike and olive tree warbler on one occasion each. The birdwatching guide books talk about seeing raptors overhead; in July and August, when raptors are breeding or moulting, they appear to be less obvious, however in 2016 I recorded one short-toed eagle soaring over the town with a white stork. I have yet to see Eleonora's falcon at Kalkan for example. The yellow-vented bulbul can be seen easily around the town, with the area behind the Yali supermarket, pretty good. For this species look for areas with palms. In all visits, I have seen Audouin's and yellow-legged gulls in Kalkan harbour and rock nuthatch and blue rock thrush on the crags above the public beach. Chukar, Ruppells warbler, eastern bonelli's warbler, Syrian woodpecker, sombre tit, woodchat and masked shrikes are also straightforward here, particularly in the aforementioned scrub and rocky area below the Elmali road. In 2016, we had Eastern olivaceous warbler nesting in our apartment garden, and more widely this species is common in the area around Kalkan.

#### **Islamlar**

Turn left off the Elmali Road in Kalkan above the by-pass to get to Islamlar and prepare for a steep climb up into the hills. Once you get beyond most of the villas, you enter pine forest after about 5 km. The pine forest holds Kruper's nuthatch. Listen for the distinctive calls. My first Krupers there were detected before sunrise on call! The crossroads area where the main road crosses a stream via a small concrete bridge with a dolmus bus shelter nearby is particularly good for Krupers. The

nuthatches become more difficult to see as the heat of the day gets up. Turtle doves are abundant and the woods seem alive with the purring calls of this species and the buzzing bees from the many beehives in the area. Raptors are few and far between, however in August, I have seen honey buzzard here (flushed off one the numerous bee hives!), and in July I have seen booted eagle. In August, I also recorded several spotted flycatchers in this area, presumably on passage. At the top of the Islamlar Road you join the Elmali Road; at this point in July I have seen chukar, serin, black-eared wheatear, Ruppell's warbler, lesser whitethroat, and Cretschmar's bunting.

### **Bezirgan**

The Elmali Road from Kalkan passes through a dispersed village called Bezirgan after about 10km. I have found this area to be good for a range of farmland birds. Follow one or other of two parallel tarmac roads through the village area, with one ending in a dirt track. The farmland area is good for crested lark, black headed bunting, cretschmar's bunting (common), cirl bunting, corn bunting, masked shrike, woodchat shrike and eastern olivaceous warbler. Check the stream side areas for nightingale. Chukar can be found in the hill edge areas. I have also seen a variety of raptors in this area including long-legged buzzard, buzzard, goshawk and sparrowhawk. In August, I found that some of the farmland birds had already left, for example crested lark and black headed bunting.

### **Route to Sutlegan**

Beyond Bezirgan follow the Elmali Road towards Sutlegan. Beyond Ikizca there is a pass through the mountains and then the road drops quickly towards Sutlegan. At the pass there is a pull in near a white house. From there a track leads into some juniper and cedar forest on the right hand side of the road. I found this woodland to be excellent for Krupers nuthatch, short toed treecreeper, green and Syrian woodpeckers, and long tailed tit (distinctive race). On the Bezirgan side of the pass there is a new dam and cutting being built. The woodland area here close to the road is also good for Kruper's nuthatch and other woodland species.

### **Sutlegan farmland and woodlands**

On the approach to Sutlegan there is a farmland area on the right hand side of the road. This area also has a good range of farmland birds, including Cretschmar's bunting. Long legged buzzards were also seen here. I have also been up the steep and winding Camlakoy Road from here passing through extensive areas of pine woodland. In this area, I saw Kruper's nuthatch and booted eagle amongst other species.

### **Gombe**

Further along the Elmali Road lies the town of Gombe. It takes just over an hour to get here from Kalkan early in the morning. This town lies below an impressive 9000 foot mountain, Yumru Dagi. Just before Gombe and beyond Sinekibeli you start entering into some old Juniper forest on rock scree on the right hand side of the road. I parked the car next to the main road and went into some of this forest up an obvious shepherd's track. I also tried the left hand side of the road here and encountered some fierce dogs! In this woodland I found green and Syrian woodpeckers, Kruper's nuthatch, nuthatch, mistle thrush, woodlark, common redstart, short-toed treecreeper, long tailed tit, sombre tit, rock bunting, and wren. Driving in the half flight en route to this site I saw several nightjars along the road. Close to Gombe, red backed shrike becomes the dominant shrike species

and I also noted magpie, Spanish sparrow and Syrian woodpecker there. The local dam was pretty birdless, apart from little-ringed plover, rock nuthatch and black-eared wheatear.

### **Gombe; Lcarsu and Selalesi**

From Gombe town centre follow the brown historical signs for Lcarsu and Selalesi and you go up a mountain track. This road is tarmac and then becomes a dirt track. In 2015, I went up this track, prior to knowledge of any better hill sites elsewhere (eg. Lake Girdev). I drive the hire car as far as I thought reasonable on the track and parked when it became rough. I then walked up the track to a small lake in spectacular and high mountain scenery. En route to the lake, I found that rock thrush, blue rock thrush and black redstart were very common (indeed, I now know that they are commoner here than the Lake Girdev area). Around the small lake on the scree slopes, I discovered breeding shore lark. There were also good numbers of rock sparrow, northern, Finsch's and isabelline wheatears, rock bunting, crag martin and alpine swift. Dipper was present on the stream. Rock nesting house martins were also of interest here.

### **Patara**

Dave Gosney's and Paul Hope's books provide details of access to this site. I have had mixed experiences in visiting this site on about 6-7 occasions. The site may have deteriorated in quality over time. Regular species that I have seen include little grebe, grey heron, little bittern, little egret, coot, moorhen, green sandpiper, little ringed plover, black-winged stilt, great reed warbler, reed warbler and cetti's warbler. I have also seen osprey, Eleonora's falcon, hobby, purple heron, greenshank, penduline tit and fan-tailed warbler.

Around the Roman ruins I have seen white stork, woodchat shrike, masked shrike, crested lark, rock nuthatch, eastern olivaceous and Ruppell's warblers, black-eared wheatear. Yellow vented bulbul is also now common in this area.

### **Saklikant**

A popular visitor attraction is the impressive Saklikant Gorge. I have been to this place now on two occasions with the family. I have seen both roller and bee-eater en route to this site on the Saklikant loop road which follows the river, as well as white stork and little-ringed plover. Grey wagtail, crag martin, rock nuthatch and rock sparrow are present at the gorge site and associated carpark area.

### **Seki and Gogu-Beli Pass**

Armed with the aforementioned birdwatching site guides, I went further afield in 2016 to Seki and Gogu-Beli Pass and also to TemelKoy at Girdev Lake. These sites are accessed from the main D350 Fethiye to Korkuteli Road. I left Kalkan at 4.15 am and was at the Gogu-Beli Pass for 5.30 and sunrise.

### **Gogu-Beli**

Red-fronted serin and serin were seen easily and at close range in the carpark area at the Gogu-Beli Pass summit. I also had red-fronted serin slightly lower down the hill on the Seki side. Also seen well at the pass area were long-legged buzzard, hoopoe, alpine swift, rock and blue rock thrushes, rock nuthatch, northern, black-eared and Finsch's wheatears, black redstart, eastern bonelli's warbler

and rock bunting. Lower down the slope towards Seki, I recorded woodlark, short-toed treecreeper, ortolan, circl bunting, black-headed bunting, sombre tit and red-backed shrike.

### **Seki**

A site is given in Dave Gosney's book for white-throated robin just outside Seki on the Temel Road. I tried this site on two occasions, once late in the day in hot weather and once first thing in the morning. I suspect this site might be easier for white-throated robin in May, as I saw only the tail end of one bird of this species during one of my visits despite extensive searching. I did though see long-legged buzzard, woodchat shrike, red-backed shrike, orphean warbler, Ruppell's warbler and circl bunting. A pallid swift flying over amongst Alpine swifts was also an odd species there. I also looked at the farmland around Seki, however temperatures were high and crops were being harvested. I did see Isabelline wheatear, red-backed shrike, skylark, crested lark, black headed bunting and Spanish and tree sparrows.

There is a large lake off the main road before Seki, and I saw; great crested grebe, cormorant, little egret, and green and common sandpipers, and little-ringed plover there.

### **Lake Girdev**

The Lake Girdev site is simply fantastic. I drove the whole way up to the Lake from Temilkoy on the dirt track in July 2016. I did not though locate the ski-centre that is mentioned in Dave Gosney's book. Paul Hope's book has the best directions to this site, and it is otherwise easy to miss the right road up the hill. I found the rough road beyond the Lake too tough for the hire car and abandoned the vehicle at that point. I did though have a walk on this track and surrounding area. I also walked around about half of the lake track. The fields around the lake were excellent for larks, pipits and wagtails.

During this visit I saw a huge list of bird species including;

En route to Lake; Kestrel, alpine swift, hoopoe, Syrian woodpecker, woodlark, tawny pipit, crag martin, rock thrush, eastern bonelli's warbler, sombre tit, red-backed and woodchat shrikes, black redstart, serin, red-fronted serin (at pass), circl, rock and black-headed buntings, ortolan and raven.

Lake; great-crested grebe, black-necked grebe (with young), little grebe, grey heron, night heron(3), white stork (large colony), black stork (3), ruddy shelduck, mallard, pintail, garganey, pochard, long-legged buzzard, kestrel, quail, coot, common crane(2), little ringed plover, turtle dove, little owl, hoopoe, skylark, crested lark, woodlark, calandra lark, short-toed lark, lesser short-toed lark, crag martin, house martin (colony on house before track at end of lake), tawny pipit (abundant), yellow wagtail (*feldegg*), northern wheatear, Isabelline wheatear, Finsch's wheatear, black-eared wheatear, blue rock thrush, rock thrush, mistle thrush, whitethroat, eastern bonelli's warbler, sombre tit, rock nuthatch, red-backed shrike, rock sparrow (c40), and corn bunting.

### **Dalaman Airport Pools**

On 20 July 2016, en route back to Scotland via Dalaman Airport, I visited the Dalaman Airport Pools. Given that there had just been a military coup, and the airport was on high security alert, and I had the family and luggage in the car, I did not feel comfortable hanging about here for long! However

saw squacco heron, little egret, black-winged stilt and yellow wagtail. Most of the ponds were dry and disturbance by fishermen on the beach was high. Lesser kestrels are regularly present at Dalaman airport, hunting insects under the arc lights near the front of the terminal!

### **Meis (Greece)**

From Kas you can take a day boat trip to the island of Meis, which belongs to Greece. I walked the steps and hill track behind Meis town and saw the following bird highlights; Eleonora's falcon, lesser kestrel, black-eared wheatear, Ruppell's warbler and masked shrike. There are yellow-legged gulls in the harbour area.

### **Mammals and other wildlife**

At Patara and Seki I have seen wild boar. On the Elmali road, in the early morning I have seen badger and golden jackal. At Islamlar and Bezirgan red squirrel is common. Around Kalkan, Kas and Meis you can go swimming with the numerous loggerhead turtles in July.

In October 2016, we are going to Kalkan for a week, and I intend visiting a number of these sites again, so will update this report then.

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