

Wildlife of Lycia

Autumn in Southwest Turkey

A Greentours Itinerary

Day 1

Arrive Antalya and to Elmalı

After arriving in Antalya we'll journey up into the mountains to a long wide valley famed throughout Turkey for its apple orchards. Up here it will already be cool at night, the apples (and nowadays many persimmons) already harvested. We'll settle into our comfortable hotel in Elmalı for a two night stay.

Day 2

Ak Dağı and Avlan Gölü

The highest mountain in the region, the imposing 3000m Ak Dağı has a road that will take us up to its serenely beautiful yaylas, summer pastures of bright green turf around small deep green lakes. The turf will still be green in the yaylas but the autumn will well and truly be governing the stoney slopes where we'll see many *Crocus cancellatus* and *Colchicum boissieri* will be in fine form. Red-fronted Serins, Finsch's Wheatears and Cretzschmarr's Buntings are amongst a birdlife redolent of areas further east. Alpine Accentors will still be in their winter flocks even at this season.

In the afternoon we'll explore beautiful Avlan, a lake the nestles in a montane basin at the foot of Çıgalkaya Milli Parkı which protects a large part of the Dokuzgöl Mountains. Avlan floods during the spring snow melt and spends the summer gradually drying up and typically by the end of October there's little water left. This concentrates the waterbirds and this season there can be large numbers of Black Storks, White Storks, Purple Herons, Great White Egrets, Night Herons and Spoonbills gathering round the 'ponds'. There's Ruddy Shelducks in numbers. Bearded Tits flock amongst the reeds and Penduline Tits, Moustached Warblers and migrant shrikes can be seen. Avlan is a very good place for raptors. Wintering Spotted Eagle, Hen Harrier and White-tailed Eagle are likely to have arrived already, and anything can be passing over.

Day 3

Cedar Forests and Kaş

Flocks of Calandra and Short-toed Larks erupt from stubble fields and amongst the orchards the wintering flocks of Yellowhammers and various finches might already have a Brambling or two.

The Cedar forest around the Karaova Beli, a pass at around 1500m, have plentiful Krüper's Nuthatches, Goldcrests and Serins. Goshawk and Green Woodpecker too. As we drop down the seaward side of the mountains we'll reach a fine oak grove where the *Quercus macrolepis* trees will be sporting their huge untidy acorn

cups. Middle Spotted Woodpeckers, both Eurasian and Krüper's Nuthatches, Firecrests and Short-toed Treecreepers are common. The verges nearby are ablaze with the golden goblets of *Sternbergia clusii*.

Heading further downhill we'll stop to enjoy roadside banks with fine displays of the bizarre foot-long *Biarum pyrami* before descending to Kaş where we'll stay for the rest of the tour. Kaş has a wonderful range of flora and fauna, superb landscapes, fine marine life, and with the comforts of a very fine hotel and a wide choice of great restaurants to enjoy. The town itself is a lovely place, the narrow shops lined with tempting little shops, cafes, bars and restaurants as the town rises up from its picturesque harbour. Past the amphitheatre a road takes us out to the flower-filled Peninsula, now the domain of beautiful villas and hotels, yet only forty years ago this entire coast didn't have a single tarmac road!

Day 4

Andriake & Kekova including boat trip and snorkelling options

Andriake's wetland though small has a huge list of birds and we'll see a range of waders, egrets and herons, ducks, and migrant passerines. Spoonbills and Great White Egrets lounge by the roadside and Spur-winged Plovers, Spotted Redshank, Ruff and Black-winged Stilts are much in evidence. Water Rails call from the reeds whilst dunes behind the shore offer shelter to passerine migrants that will likely include Isabelline Wheatears, Woodchat and Masked Shrikes.

From the harbour here we'll take a boat trip through the islands off Kekova marvelling at the underwater archaeology and the glorious scenery. We'll no doubt see a goodly number of Green Turtles and maybe a loggerhead or two. Audouin's Gulls are a regular sight and we'll see the uncommon Mediterranean race of Shag. We'll have a couple of chances to snorkel from the boat. The marine life is very good in this part of Turkey, indeed Kaş is the favoured destination for Istanbul's divers. Fish are abundant and include many colourful Wrasse as well as the elegant Cornetfish. If you are lucky you may catch a glimpse of a Yellow-spotted Mediterranean Moray Eel, or an Octopus, which are common in Kaş's waters. Squid often hover close to the boats' mooring ropes...

Day 5

Kaş's hinterland

Pockets of pink erupt from crevices in the pure white limestone of Kaş's peninsula. Sometimes just a few bright stars and sometimes twenty, all backed by glossy green leaves. These the lovely *Colchicum stevenii*. *Cyclamen hederifolium* also decorates these rock gardens alongside *Narcissis tazetta*.

We'll head up into Kaş's Cedar Forests, a gorgeous place full of huge Cedars, gnarled old Oaks, and at this season red, bronze and yellow from the *Acer monspessulanum* and Smokebush. Krüper's Nuthatches are abundant and so too are woodpeckers – this is a great place for them with Syrian, Great Spotted, Middle Spotted, Lesser Spotted, Green and even White-backed all possible. Flocks of finches and buntings feed in rough fields between the forest. Dotting the forest

edge will be the rich yellow goblets of *Sternbergia clusiana*, the impressive flowers erupting leafless from the dry ground. Careful searching under the cedars will reveal another *Sternbergia* though it is much less attractive than *clusiana* and difficult to spot, this the unusual *Sternbergia colchiciflora*. Clumps of *Colchicum balansae* line the roadside, and altogether more attractive are the large stars of tessellated *Colchicum variegatum*. Crocus are of course everywhere too, mostly *cancellatus*, but depending on how the season is going we might see a lot of the paler form of *Crocus mathewi* here too.

Day 6

Patara

The coastal road westwards from Kaş takes us along a very unspoilt coast where thousand metre mountains plunge directly into the sea. We'll pass one of Turkey's most iconic beaches, Kaputaş, where an impossibly narrow and deep gorge reaches the sea via an improbably scenic beach. Rock Nuthatches and Blue Rock Thrushes will be seen. Ibex spend the night just above the road on these cliffs but usually move off soon after first light...

We'll visit nearby Patara, where the ruins of an ancient city will hold our attention for a while, especially so now that the reconstruction of the ancient Lycian Lighthouse has completed. Behind Turkey's longest beach is a vast area of duneland and marshy delta. This is a superb birdwatching area with many a rarity being found and from our perspective will give us a chance of seeing many migrants such as Shrikes, Bee-eaters, and an abundance of warblers. Great Spotted Cuckoos are found in the sparse woodlands and if there's water in the large shallow lagoons we can expect large flocks of herons, egrets and waders. The Esen Çayı Rivermouth is a good spot for Audouin's Gulls and if there's any wind offshore we've a chance of both Yelkouan and Scopoli's Shearwaters.

Impressive Baba Mountain rises to over 6,000 feet. Though not the highest mountain in the region it is particularly impressive as on its western side it drops almost vertically into the sea. It has a most marvellous flora too with abundant *Colchicum boissieri* and *Crocus pallasii*, and it is here that we can find the gorgeous purple-centred ivory goblets of rare *Crocus mathewi*.

Colourful cliffs beset with Lycian Rock Tombs dominate the pleasant little town of Dalyan nestled against a bend in the Dalyan (ancient Calbys) River. Dalyan could hardly have more diverse habitats. Within a few kilometres are reedbeds, lakes, beaches, limestone maquis, pine forests, globally important Liquidambar Forests, mountains and cliffs. Not surprising then that Dalyan is so rich in wildlife. For the last four days of the hotel we will be staying at the excellent Dalyan Resort by the river. Like most of Dalyan the hotel is single storey, a result of enlightened low-impact development regulations imposed almost two decades ago by the local authorities. The well-equipped rooms are very comfortable and are spread through the grounds. The restaurant produces great fare, and there's a good-sized swimming pool and even a hamam or Turkish bath and sauna. The centre of

Dalyan is a fifteen-minute stroll, and an excellent place for a bit of Turkish carpet shopping!

Day 7

Dalyan Beach and Kaunos Ruins

Another turtle, the impressive Loggerhead, sometimes basks in the reed-fringed lagoon that sits behind Dalyan's beach. They nest on the beach from spring to mid-summer and at this season the last of the hatchlings will be scurrying for the sea. The dunes are decorated with the beautiful scented Sea Daffodil and the purple blooms of the Sea Bindweed. Grass Snakes and Dice Snakes are common in the reedy and rushy margins of the lagoon. Kentish Plovers race about on the sand and there's usually a Spur-winged Plover or two at this season, and sometime large 'falls' of Yellow Wagtails of varying races. Pied Kingfishers hover over the lagoon, and we should keep an eye skywards for this is the best time for Eleonora's Falcons in the Dalyan with a good number of these sleek falcons in the area, feeding off migrant birds. In the centre of the marshes is a superb restaurant set amid marshy fields and beset with reed-lined channels. This is a great spot for dragonflies and damselflies and even at this season there's good diversity with Broad Scarlet, Epaulet Skimmer and Eastern Willow Spreadwing all on the wing. We'll have a lunch out here and be able to check the marshes from the tower hide where migrating White Storks might feature or perhaps Hobbies feasting off the many *Odonata* present. The abundance of Stripe-necked Terrapins is apparent wherever one is around this restaurant!

A gentle walk takes us through the ruins of the Carian Port at Kaunos where Rock Nuthatches shout from ancient arches and we are sure to see numerous Agama Lizards and even the odd Balkan Green Lizard sunning themselves on the old walls. Tall spires of Maritime Squill line the track and we'll photograph the tessellated stars of *Colchicum variegatum*. Black-eared Wheatear and Blue Rock Thrush enjoy these habitats and we're sure to see a Woodchat Shrike or two. Little Owls often perch on the beautifully situated amphitheatre. We'll watch Spur-thighed Tortoises munching their way through the rich herbage allowed to grow amongst the rocks of ancient temples, flushing up late season butterflies such as African Ringlet, Large Wall Brown and Eastern Rock Grayling.

Day 8

Lakes and Marshes – Köyceğiz Lake, Sulungur Lake and Hot Springs

White-throated Kingfishers can be seen from the river front of our hotel while Eurasian Kingfishers, improbably common in Dalyan, can be seen perching on the wires of the many little boats moored up along the river. We'll use one of these boats to explore the river system and Lake Köyceğiz, a wonderfully relaxing trip, and with plenty of birds; Purple Herons, Squacco Herons and Great Egrets, Whiskered Terns and White-winged Black Terns, Black-winged Stilts and Pygmy Cormorants. We'll see groups of Little Egrets and Glossy Ibis migrating through as well as a good scattering of Marsh Harriers. Lesser Emperor Dragonflies and Slender and Small Skimmers race by, or perch on the boat's rails. The loud yet somehow

somnolent croaking of Great Reed Warblers is sometimes joined by an orchestra of Marsh Frogs.

Short-toed Eagles drift overhead as we take another boat trip to see Euphrates River Turtles – over a metre long and with extraordinary leathery shells and tube noses – and you can see them just a couple of feet away! We'll stop at one of Dalyan's famous hot springs and mud baths. You can try the big mud baths or soaking in sulphurous hot pools, followed by ice creams under the shade of olive and pistachio trees, or you can look for migrant birds in the trees as Egyptian Vultures and Alpine Swifts fly overhead. Close by is a much smaller, quieter hot spring, just a pool at the edge of a field with cliffs behind. The trees are often loaded with migrant birds including Eastern Orphean Warblers, Blackcaps, Common Whitethroats and Olivaceous Warblers. Crakes are occasionally spotted by the pool. The beautiful Indigo Dropwing visits these pools too. Two-tailed Pashas zip past from time to time, these powerful butterflies fly very fast and have a habit of landing on the trunk around the far side of the tree so you don't notice they've stopped. We'll also see Olive Skipper, Pygmy Skipper and both Southern Rock Grayling and Freyer's Rock Grayling in this area.

Day 9

Liquidambar Forest

Dalyan, or more specifically the Lake Köyceğiz basin, is home to one of the rarest habitats in Turkey, indeed anywhere in the Mediterranean. Some 90% of the world's *Liquidambar orientalis* is found in just one small forest close by the lake's shores and almost all the rest is scattered along streams in the area. The forests are a delight, the leaves starting to attain their rich autumnal colours during our visit. Lianas, notably the Silk Vine and *Vitis sylvestris*, trail through the trees. Middle Spotted Woodpecker and Lesser Spotted Woodpecker are common and we'll hear plenty of Cetti's Warblers. Migrant warblers, especially Lesser Whitethroats, are common, as are redstarts and flycatchers. The lovely Small Red-eye damselfly favours well-vegetated pools within the woodland, in spring covered in Irises, but now with Lesser Emperor and Violet Dropwing perching atop the drying stems. Marshy pools and reedbeds next to the Liquidambar woods are home to Eastern Willow Spreadwing and the rare Turkish Red Damselfly *Ceragrion georgifreyi*, whilst birds of these productive fringes include Zitting Cisticola and the gorgeous Masked Shrike.

Day 10

Departure

As our return flight isn't until the evening we'll have a chance to catch up on whatever has eluded us this morning, or to concentrate on whatever has most interested us. Maybe a trip down to the beach to look again for turtles and migrant birds, or perhaps a boat trip up the river and into Lake Köyceğiz to look for White-tailed Eagle. Maybe it'll be the rare and lovely dragonflies of the Liquidambar woodlands that will draw us for a final visit, or perhaps we'd prefer to

just go and relax by the hot springs, before enjoying a final slap-up meal in one of the many very good restaurants in Dalyan.

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