# Birdwing Newsletter Special

We've decided to make this issue a nest box special! With such successful results from the Birdwing nest boxes around the country, we wanted to celebrate and highlight some of the details with you.

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**Issue 37 Autumn 2026**

## Birdwing nest box program

Our program began 12 years ago, in early 2015. Birdwing commissioned local carpenters in Thrace to make large nest boxes suitable for Kestrels and Rollers, initially. These boxes cost approximately 50 euros each and, with suitable wood preservative, can last more than 15 years.

Kestrels use large open boxes whereas Rollers prefer similar-sized closed boxes with a hole, as shown here.

Suitable locations were identified in different regions, including Porto Lagos, Lake Ismarida and the Rhodope Lagoons, the Evros Delta, Lake Kerkini and Lakes Koronia and Volvi and the Axios Delta. With the assistance and actions of the Management Bodies of these areas, boxes were erected on trees, buildings and, where permissions were granted by the local electricity company, on poles.

In areas with few trees, such as the Evros Delta and the area east of Porto Lagos, nest boxes were quickly found and adopted, and additional boxes have been erected over time.

The program was further expanded to include both larger Barn Owl boxes and smaller nest boxes for tits and flycatchers.

In 2026 our program was widened to include Thessaly, near to Trikala, where, with the help of a local carpenter and Eleni Makryianni, boxes for Rollers were made and put up.

# Some facts about our Kestrel boxes

- At the Evros Delta alone, over **150** Kestrel pairs have successfully nested in the past 12 years, and, with an average of 3 chicks per brood, we estimate **over 450** juveniles have fledged from our boxes.
- On many occasions Kestrel nests are observed with **4 or 5** chicks but Box **K13**, at Anthia, was observed with **7 juveniles** in June 2025!
- Most successful box for Kestrels at Evros:
  Box **K4** on the Eastern Pumping Station has been used successfully every year for **12 consecutive years**! We estimate almost **40** young have fledged from this one nest box!
- Three further boxes have been used successfully for **11 consecutive years** (**K5**, **K7** and **K8**).
- 2026 was the most successful year recorded at the Evros Delta, with **48 boxes** used by the target species. Added to this are an estimated **13 boxes** used in the area towards Xanthi.
- Most successful boxes in Porto Lagos region:
  The most successful two Kestrel boxes in the area east of Xanthi, around Porto Lagos and Ismarida, are **K5** between Glyfada and Ismarida; and **K3** near Mesi, the latter of which has been used by Kestrels every year but one since going up in 2016, with **5 juveniles** fledging in 2019. More recently, boxes placed on trees in West Wood, Porto Lagos, have also been successfully adopted, despite the dramatic thinning of the wood in recent years.

**Lesser Kestrels** (*Falco naumanni*) tend to prefer a different box design, slightly wider and with a hole. They also use holes in roofs leading to internal boxes. The species abounds in Thessaly and around Lake Karla, where a successful Life project some years ago resulted in many boxes being placed on trees, buildings and towers. In the villages around Lake Ismarida where a small population exists, boxes have been placed in many locations on buildings and water-towers.

# Some facts about our Roller boxes

- At the Evros Delta alone, over **120** Roller pairs have nested in Birdwing boxes in the past 12 years. With an estimated 3.5 chicks per brood (based on field studies in Italy) we estimate **over 420** juveniles have fledged there.
- Within **4 hours** of erecting Roller box **R29** (in May 2023) at the Evros Delta a pair of Rollers adopted it!
- Most successful box for Rollers at Evros:
  Box **R6,** located not far from Loutros Hill, has been used successfully every year for **10 consecutive years**! An estimate of **35** young are believed to have fledged from this one nest box!

- In addition, our observations show that these boxes have been used by **Little Owls** for breeding at least **13 times**! Broods of **3 juvenile** Little Owls were observed in 2025 in both **R14** and **R15**.
- In a battle over a box between Rollers and Little Owls, the Little Owls tend to win! They have the advantage of being resident and are usually able to defend a box on the arrival of Rollers in early May.

- Most successful box for Little Owls at Evros:
  On the road to Anthia, Box **R10**, after being used by Rollers for **4 years**, was taken by Little Owls and has been used by them for a further **4 years**.
- At Lake Kerkini, although a much smaller population of Rollers breed than at the Evros, boxes have still been successfully adopted. Little Owls, however, have an abundance of properties to nest in and boxes are fought over by them less frequently then in the Evros Delta or Ismarida regions.

- We have had several occasions where a Roller box has been taken by bees, occurring more commonly if the box is sited on a tree rather than a pole.
- In 2026 new Roller boxes have been placed in a rural region outside Trikala which we hope will be adopted soon.

# Some facts about our Barn Owl boxes

- We initially put up some boxes for Barn Owls at the Evros Delta after seeing one bird cowering in a – rather too small - Kestrel box!
- Barn Owl boxes are considerably larger than other boxes and it can take owls several years to choose to adopt a box. However, at the Evros Delta, one box has proved popular with local Barn Owls!
- Most successful box for Barn Owls at Evros:
  Box **B2,** located on a derelict building on the delta, was adopted by a pair five years ago. **Three juveniles** fledged in 2023, and we believe the box has been used for breeding in 2024, 2025 and 2026, with confirmed sightings of juveniles prior to fledging in the last two years.

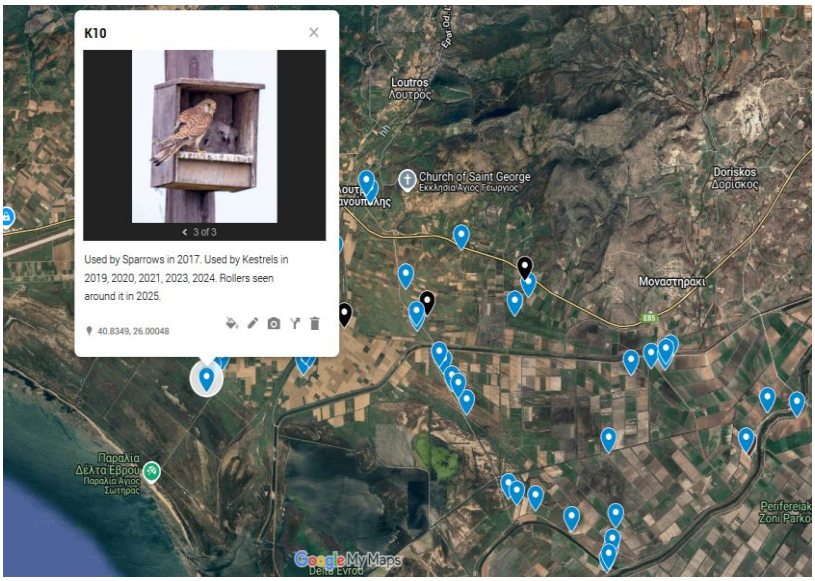
It should also be mentioned that, in Thessaly and across many parts of Greece, the non-profit organisation '**TYTO'** have a fantastic program for Barn Owls. (**www.tyto.org.gr**)

We are grateful to the Evros Delta National Park staff for their assistance in monitoring the boxes and providing data when we are unable to visit. See data chart on page 7.

## Interactive map

If you would like to explore the successes of individual boxes at the Evros Delta, please see our **interactive map** which has photos and data for each box. We plan to expand the maps to include boxes in other areas next year.

**https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/edit?mid=1CK76dDS-YxJJBqKyjyQu6MilUOpk5fk&usp=sharing**



## Nest box sponsorship

Over the years, when a box deteriorates, a tree falls or a pole is replaced, new boxes are continually required to replace the lost or damaged ones, so we are very grateful to individual donors who sponsor our nest box program, such as Meriel Wilmot-Wright, Stefan R and TP. Donations from organisations such as NABU (the tour group shown below) and Greenwings Wildlife Tours have also been used to expand our nest box program.

If you would be interested to sponsor a new nest box, let us know or donate here Donate or go to our website **www.birdwing.eu**

## NABU|naturgucker tour Northern Greece

Most people think of golden beaches, crystal clear water and mythology when thinking about Greece. But there are tourists, with a special interest in biodiversity, who think of natural beauties and species richness. They particularly come to Greece to visit its wildlife, seeking for alpine mountain peaks with endemic plant-species and shallow lagoons with passing waders.

This spring, a group of eco-tourists explored the natural treasures of Northern Greece, under the experienced guidance of Alexander Wirth. Again, they travelled from the Dadia Forest, lake Ismarida and the Thracian lagoons, towards the Nestos delta, high up to the Paggeo mountain onto Lake Kerkini crossing several wonderful ecosystems and habitats and its inhabitants, including vultures, critically endangered species like the blue star or endemics such as Saxifraga sancta.

"*We come without a certain focus. Northern Greece hosts so many different habitats, so we just get an impression of what can be observed here. We screened habitats in total and tried to honour each of the occurring species ranging from tiny plants to big birds - biodiversity at its best. Observing over 500 species in just 10 days is a great privilege*." says tour leader Alexander Wirth. [Continued on next page]

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However, Wirth warns that these ecosystems are increasingly fragile: "*But these natural treasures are nowadays under pressure. The richness of the Greek wilderness is no longer a guarantee, as several factors now threaten its stability. Heavy grazing or invasive species (indigenous as well as neophytes) endanger ecosystems. Unnatural water level changes due to regulation threaten riparian forests, leading to empty nesting sites and other problems. On top, climate change is a threat, too. Late snow and frosting period put pressure on wildlife*."

To combat these threats, Wirth's mission goes beyond mere sightseeing. By promoting eco-tourism and providing financial support raised with his travels to local NGOs, he works to protect the very environment his groups come to admire - ensuring the wild beauty of Greece remains for future generations to explore.

We would like to thank Alex and NABU for their generous donations from the profits of this spring's trips to **Birdwing,** which have helped the Sundays with Nature project to go ahead (see below), organised and run by the **Society for the Protection of Biodiversity of Thrace**.

https://www.kavalapost.gr/energia-perivallon/351241/oikotoyrismos-ena-eidos-toyrismoy-poy-anthei-ta-teleytaia-chronia-se-paggaio-nesto-kai-thaso/

## Sundays with Nature

Following the success of last year's project "Sundays with Nature" run by the **Society for the Protection of Biodiversity of Thrace,** Birdwing was keen to support the continuation of this initiative, providing 3000 Euros funding for 2026. The project aims to highlight the natural regeneration of the fire-affected areas in the Evros prefecture and strengthen the human-nature relationship.

During spring the first three Sundays with Nature excursions took place.

1. The first event with the title 'Observing birds of prey' took place in Lira with 30 participants
2. 'Tracing life around the river' took place in Dadia with 35 participants
3. A further day with the same title took place in Dadia with 28 participants

Further events are planned for autumn, dates to be determined according to weather.

For more information and videos see: https://www.facebook.com/reel/2799707330382687

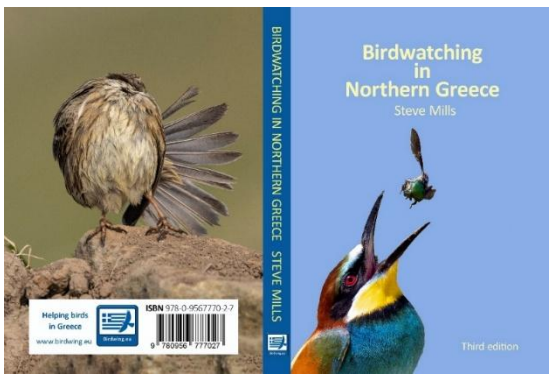
## Rare bird

A rare bird was spotted in Greece this autumn – seen previously fewer than 25 times in Greece! The bird was a White-tailed Lapwing, observed by Dimitris Kokkinidis at the Nea Adriani Lakes (see site 5 on page 197 of the site guide), The bird was present for several days in late September as shown in the photo below by Steve Mills). A White-tailed Lapwing was also observed at Aliki Kitrous in early June, reported by Darren Barratt (site 7 pages 98-99 of the guide).

## Postage increases

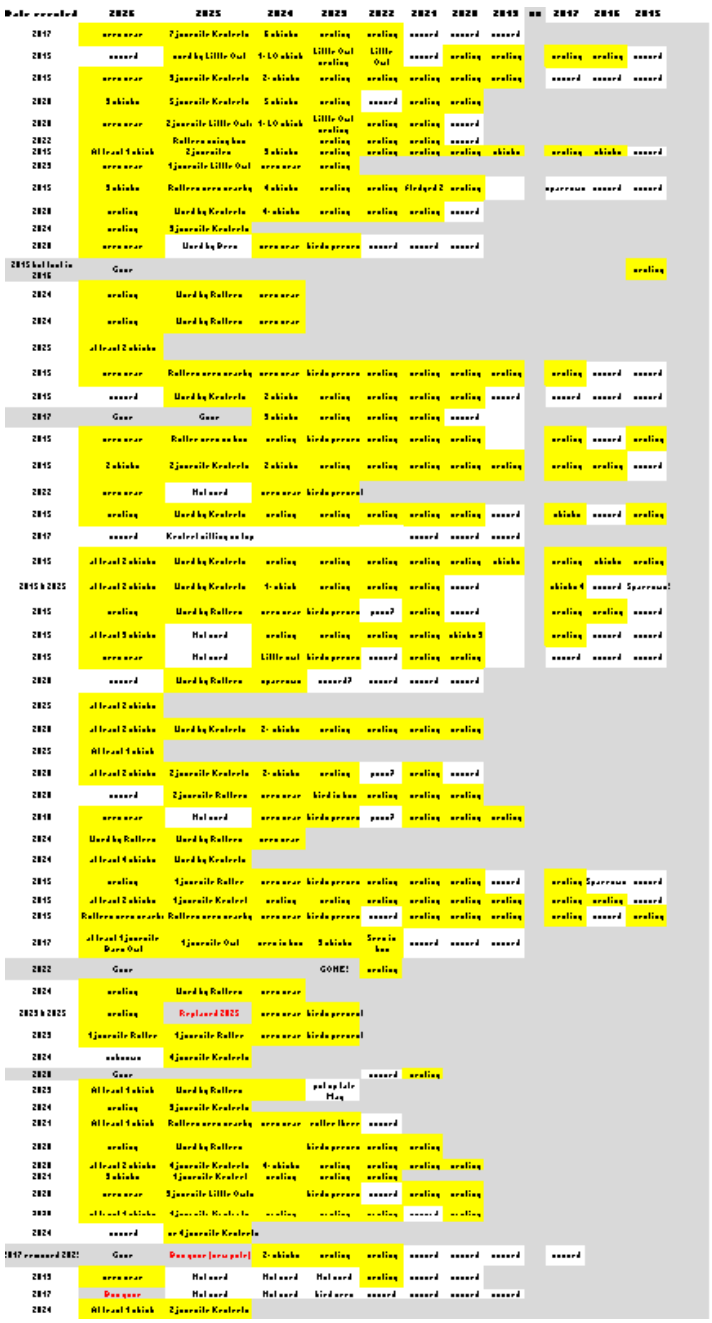
Due to changes in postal charges and printing costs, we have had to increase the cost of sending out copies of Birdwatching in Northern Greece this year. Birdwing.eu is still the cheapest website for purchasing, although it is available elsewhere.

**www.birdwing.eu/birdwing-books**.




## Evros Nestbox occupancy (yellow indicating use) 2026-2015

2026



## Lesser White-fronted Geese

This autumn's return of the endangered population of Lesser White-fronted Geese began at Kerkini on 25th September with 53 individuals. By early October the number was 76, lower than last years 96 at this stage, indicating a poor breeding year for the population. A Life project at the Evros Delta for the species is underway with land purchase, and habitat restoration and management, which is hoped will improve foraging grounds there for the population. We will bring you more news of this in our next newsletter.

# Gallery

Here are some images captured since our last newsletter, by Steve Mills, in a range of locations in Northern Greece including Lake Kerkini, Thassos and the Evros Delta.

Our thanks go to those of you who kindly donated to Birdwing and to those who contributed information to this newsletter, including the Evros Delta staff, the SPBT and to Alex Wirth and NABU.

If you would like to donate, please click here Donate or go to **birdwing.eu/howtodonate**

To contact us email **info@birdwing.eu** or go to **www.birdwing.eu.**