

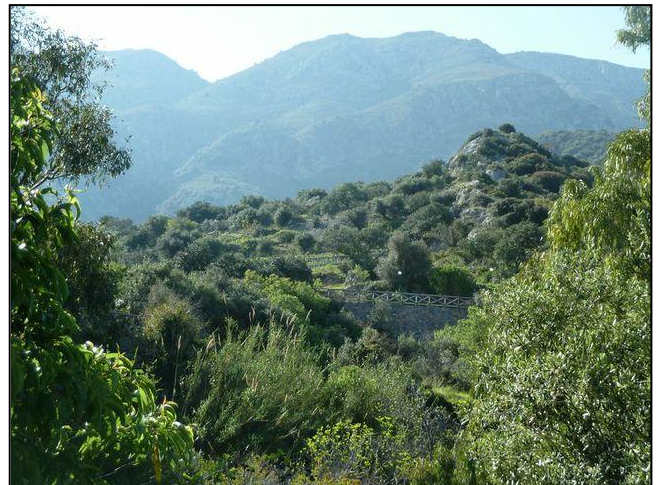


**Exploring the Birds and Backroads of Crete
April 5 – 15, 2014
With Elissa Landre**

Ancient ruins, gorgeous mountain gorges, and fantastic birding can all be found on this very special trip. Our favorite Greek guide has designed this tour just for us. Join us next spring!

With a temperate climate, Crete is more pristine than the mainland Greece and has a culture all its own. In addition to birding, we will explore several famous archeological sites, including Knossos and ancient Phaistos, the most important centers of Minoan civilization. Crete was once the center of the Minoan civilization (c. 2700–1420 BC), regarded as the earliest recorded civilization in Europe.

Crete's landscape is very special: defined by a high mountain range, deep valleys, fertile plateaus, and caves (including the mythological birthplace of the ancient Greek god, Zeus) Rivers cut deep, exceptionally beautiful gorges that create a rich presence of geological wealth and have been explored for their aromatic and medicinal plants since Minoan times. Populations of choughs, griffon vultures, and hawks find shelter at the steep cliffs.



A fantastic variety of birds also are found on Crete: not only its resident bird species, which are numerous and include rare and endangered birds, but also the migrants who stop over on Crete during their journeys to and from Africa and Europe. The isolation of Crete from mainland Europe, Asia, and Africa is reflected in the diversity of habitats, flora, and avifauna. The richness of the surroundings results in an impressive bird species list and many unexpected surprises. For example, recently spotted was a Blue-cheeked Bee-eater, usually only seen in northern Africa and the Middle East. Join us for this unusual and very special trip.



Travel with the Massachusetts Audubon Society
208 South Great Road, Lincoln, MA 01773
800-289-9504

DAY-TO-DAY ITINERARY

April 5 - Day 1: Arrival, Mailia Marsh, Palekastro village

Please plan to arrive at Heraklion international airport by mid-day. We will meet our local guide Alexander, biologist-guide Michalis, and driver at the airport, then transfer to our hotel which is located in an olive grove isolated on the beach. If time allows we will bird along the way at the Malia Marsh and the Seliniari Gorge. The marshes near **Malia** are home to an orchid found in only a few places on the island. This area of rough and cultivated fields has Stone Curlew, Hoopoe, Short-toed Lark, Wheatear, Whinchat, and Collared Pratincole in Spring. Walking along the shallow shore cliffs we might find Mediterranean and Cory's Shearwaters in the bay. The beach can be also good for waders and herons.

The primary business of the village of Palekastro is agriculture. Olives and grape vines are cultivated and a few fishermen remain. We will have our welcome dinner and Overnight here at the Marina Village Hotel (4 nights). www.marinavillage.gr

April 6 - Day 2: Kouremenos wetlands, coastal birding, Toplou Monastery

This morning, we will visit Hiona and Kouremenos wetlands on the coast nearby, where there is a good chance for Whimbrel, Grey Plover, Hoopoe, and the migrant Whinchat, as well as the locally common Crested Lark.

Next stop will be the Vai beach palm tree forest and Itanos ruins. Itanos is an archaeological excavation where settlement dates back to prehistoric times. Most of the ruins visible today on site date back to the Hellenistic era, with several Byzantine foundations peering through the ground around the ruins of a Basilica. The archaeological site is found within walking distance from the beautiful beaches we call Erimoupoli. Here we will look for European Shag, nesting Cory's Shearwaters, Eleonora's Falcon, and Red-footed Falcon. We might also find Sardinian Warbler, Bee-eaters, and Audouin's Gull while we explore the area.

After lunch, we will visit the very lovely 15th century Toplou Monastery, one of the most significant monasteries in Crete, dedicated to Panagia (Virgin Mary) and St. John the Theologian. It was founded around the mid 15th century, plundered by the knights of Malta in 1530, and shattered in 1612 by a strong earthquake. Due to its strategic position, the senate of the Republic of Venice, then ruler of Crete, had it rebuilt. The monastery flourished until the surrender of eastern Crete to the Turks in 1646, after which it was abandoned for a long time. In 1704, it acquired special protection privileges from the Patriarch and was re-inhabited. After its monks were slaughtered by Turks in 1821 during the Greek Revolution of Independence, Toplou was again deserted until 1828. In 1866, during the massive Cretan revolt against the Turks, it was once again devastated. And later, during the German occupation of 1941-44, Toplou was providing shelter to resistance fighters and housed their wireless radio.

This heavily fortified structure is historically and architecturally interesting, but we will not forget to bird in the area looking for Common Buzzards, Kestrels, and the Cretan subspecies of the Great Tit. We will continue on to peaceful Sitia, and stroll in the harbor with Eleonora's Falcon, Little Egret, Audouin's Gull, and Kingfisher. After dinner we will listen for the Little Owl and the Barn Owl, as well as the Nightjar at Palekastro. Overnight Marina Village Hotel in the village of Palekastro, www.marinavillage.gr

April 7- Day 3: Kato Zakros, Gorge of the Dead, Xerokambou Gorge

This morning we will transfer to Kato Zakros on the coast, along a winding road and a lovely, mountainous landscape. **Zakros** is a site containing ruins from the Minoan civilization, believed to have been one of the four main administrative centers of the Minoans, and its protected harbor.

We will visit the ancient Palace of Zakro, originally built around 1900 BC, and bird in the nearby wetlands as well as the Faraggi Nekron (Gorge of the Dead). This gorge carries the mood of these ancient roots and the bonds of humans with nature. This well-visited gorge has a walking route that starts southeast from the village "Ano Zakros", crosses the gorge and ends next to the ancient palace. Throughout this morning we should find most of the heron species as well as the Peregrine Falcon, the locally common Blue Rock Thrush, Raven, and Cetti's Warbler, to name just a few.

On the way south to Xerokambos village, we will stop at the Xerokambou Gorge looking for the Golden and Bonelli's Eagle. We will continue to Alatsolimni (Salt Lake), with the occasional Greater Flamingo, Black-tailed Godwit, and Collared Pratincole on its shores.

A fitting end to such a full day will be watching the sunset at the interesting geological formation in front of the Kavali islets. These three small uninhabited Greek islets, close to the coast of Lasithi, are home to European Shag.

Overnight in the Marina Village Hotel in the village of Palekastro, www.marinavillage.gr

April 8 - Day 4: Travel Palekastro to Zaros and the Gorges of Cha and Lapathos

We will start early for a long day of travel which will take us to central Crete. On the way we will stop at the impressive Cha Gorge, the most dangerous gorge in Greece, which has a 700 foot high waterfall. The habitat here is good for the Red-billed Chough, Griffon Vulture, and Golden Eagle.

As we travel across the island we will pass Ierapetra, Europe's southernmost city, whose name means Sacred Stone. Shortly after we will drop by the Bramiana Reservoir looking for ducks, Garganey, and the Pallid Harrier. Along the edges we might find Woodchat Shrike, Stonechat, and common Hoopoe.

We will head back to the coast and continue westwards with short stops off the road at the Lapathos Gorge – also known as the "Holy Apostles Gorge." Lapathos Gorge is the second longest inaccessible gorge of Crete, and is located in one of the most beautiful areas of Crete, Kato Symi. The canyon is generally dry except in winter when the snow at the Plateau of Lapathos melts. We will spend some time here looking for Black Vulture (the only possible place in Crete!), Griffon Vulture, Lammergeyer, and Golden Eagle.

In the afternoon, if time allows, we will stop at another Important Bird Area, the Iniou Dam, for a look at Purple Heron, Cormorant, and Yellow Wagtail.

We will then rest at Hotel Idi, tucked in a peaceful setting at the foot of Mount Ida's range, in the village of Zaros. <http://idi-hotel.gr/index.webman?section=hotel&lang=en>

April 9 - Day 5: Central Crete, Laloumas Reservoir, Phaistos, Kalamaki

We start our first day in Central Crete looking at Lake Faneromeni, a.k.a. Laloumas reservoir. This is an extremely important wetland, where rare birds and animals breed. We will look here for Booted Eagle, Ferruginous Duck, Little Crake, and numerous waders.

We then cross the main road, heading south to visit the ancient Phaistos archaeological site. This was a wealthy and powerful city in southern Crete, once one of the most important centers of Minoan civilization. It was inhabited from the Neolithic period until the foundation and development of the Minoan palaces in the 15th century BC. Although many inscriptions were found by the archaeologists, they are yet to be deciphered. Today, all we know about this site is based on the ancient writers and findings from Knossos.

According to mythology, Phaistos was the seat of king Radamanthis, brother of king Minos. It was also the city that gave birth to the great wise man and soothsayer Epimenidis, one of the seven wise men of the ancient world.

Our next stop is the beach area, a fantastic stretch of coast from Tymbaki to Kalamaki. Once Crete's biggest delta, this area is teeming with birds. There are enough birding opportunities here to fill the whole day. Here we will watch for Montagu's Harrier, Long-legged Buzzard, Great Reed Warbler, and the rather rare Red-throated Pipit, among others.

If time allows we will visit nearby Matala. The artificial caves in the cliff of the Matala bay were created in the Neolithic Age and the town was the port of Phaistos during the Minoan period. In the 1st and 2nd centuries the caves were used as tombs. Legend has it that one of these caves was frequented by the Roman general, Brutus. In the 1960s the caves were occupied by hippies and immortalized in Canadian folk singer, Joni Mitchell's 1971 song, *Carey*. For our purposes, these coastal caves are good spots to find Rueppel's Warbler and Bee-eaters!

Overnight at Hotel Idi, in the village of Zaros. <http://idi-hotel.gr/index.webman?section=hotel&lang=en>

April 10 - Day 6: Gortys, Mount Asterousia, Amba Gorge

After breakfast we will visit the nearby Gortys archaeological site. **Gortys**, with an unbroken history of 6,000 years and one of the most extensive archaeological sites in Greece, is the site of the first human habitation of Crete at the end of the Neolithic period (5th millennium BC). From the middle of the 1st millennium BC, Gortys replaced Phaistos as the chief power in the Mesara.

We then drive less than twenty miles east to go birding in the central and eastern Mount Asterousia. We will focus on the lovely villages of Charakas and Paranympoi, and end the day at Amba Gorge, which leads straight into the sea. Here we hope to find Griffon Vulture, complete with nests, Golden Eagle, Imperial Eagle, Bonelli's Eagle, Peregrine Falcon, Lanner Falcon, Chukar, Red-billed Chough, Rueppel's Warbler, and several migrants.

Overnight Hotel Idi, in the village of Zaros
<http://idi-hotel.gr/index.webman?section=hotel&lang=en>

April 11 - Day 7: Knossos, Gouves wetland, Lessithi Plateau, Mount Dikti

Early this morning we will travel north to Knossos, the gem of the Cretan civilization and maritime empire, considered Europe's oldest city, and an imposing archaeological site! Just outside of Irakleion, the Cretan capital, we will take two hours to fully explore and have a history tour. If time allows we will also stop in at the Natural History Museum of the University of Crete.

Next stop is Gouves wetland along the island's northern coast, a must for birders, especially early April as the egrets, Wood Sandpipers, Black-winged Stilts, and herons abound. We will move inland and reach Mount Dikti, a grandiose landscape and mountain range. The dominant feature of Dikti is the Lasithi Plateau, the largest and arguably the most picturesque plateau in Crete. It is a place with a long history. According to some mythology, it hosts the cave where Zeus was born.

Today has an abundance of warblers and small birds, such as Corn Bunting, Cirl Bunting, Short-toed Lark, Tawny Pipit, and several birds of prey.

Overnight Hotel Idi, in the village of Zaros <http://idi-hotel.gr/index.webman?section=hotel&lang=en>

April 12 Day 8: Kamaraike Gorge, Amari valley, Kourtaliotiko Gorge

Today will be a full day of travelling as we drive to the western part of Crete, with several short birding stops along the way. Our first will be Kamaraike Gorge where we will try to find the Lanner Falcon, Alpine Chough, and Jay (*Garulus glandarius*). Continuing westwards, we will enter the beautiful Amari valley, and reach the scenic plateau of Gious Kambos, full of wild tulips including the endemic Red tulip (*Tulipa doerfleri*). It is also home to some special birds such as Blackcap, Orphean Warbler, Blue Tit, Wren (*Troglodytes troglodytes*), Turtle Dove, and Ortolan Bunting.

Afterwards, we reach the equally scenic Kourtaliotiko Gorge, looking again for the Lammergeyer, Golden Eagle, Bonelli's Eagle, and the vultures. If time allows we will enjoy a picnic lunch at the Preveli Convent, on a great location above the Mediterranean Sea.

Our next stop will be the Petres Gorge, which has water year-round and forms an important wetland of Crete, especially at its mouth near Episkopi. Our last stop is at Georgiopolis and Almiros delta on the western side of the town, and a small wood on the eastern end. Our hotel for the next few nights is in a quiet, less developed area, but within the Chania city limits, 2-3 km from the center/harbor. It is a good-size hotel, with a modern portion including a pool, and an old-style, renovated Venetian tower. Overnight in Oasis Guest House <http://www.oasis-guesthouse.com/index-en.htm>

April 13 - Day 9: Chania city tour, Aghia Lake, Souda's Bay

A cultural exploration of Chania will be this morning's activity, including the Venetian Harbor, ancient Aptera (Minoan Kydonia), and the old town Byzantine, Ottoman, and Venetian architectural and historical sites. We will stop at a more modern art gallery before lunch. We then head to Aghia Lake, a great wetland, barely 5 miles southwest of Chania, with the Marsh Harrier, Wood Sandpiper, Glossy Ibis, several herons, and many species of ducks. Also found here are Nightingale, Sedge Warbler, Cetti's Warbler, and Baillon's Crake (the surest place to see it on the island). If we are still not satisfied, we can have a peek at the small Souda Bay's wetland, right on the eastern edge of town, where the Moroni River flows into the sea. Overnight at Oasis Guest House <http://www.oasis-guesthouse.com/index-en.htm>

April 14 - Day 10: Samaria Gorge to Chania

Today we will drive up Samaria Gorge. This national park is famous for its flora, fauna, hiking, and natural beauty. The gorge became a national park in 1962, particularly as a refuge for the rare kri-kri (Cretan goat), which is largely restricted to the park and an island just off the shore of Agia Marina. There are several other endemic species in the gorge and surrounding area, as well as many other species of flowers and birds. It is a Biosphere Reserve and 16 km long, starting at an altitude of 1,250 m at the northern entrance, and ending at the shores of the Libyan Sea. We will not walk the length (it will probably still be closed as it generally opens after May 1), but the walk is very strenuous and can take all day. However, we will go up to the hamlet of Omalos, then on to Xyloskalo, on Mount Gigilo, where the path goes down into the gorge with good looks at the Choughs flying overhead. We will also look for Alpine Accentor, Wheatear, Blue Rock Thrush, Crag Martin, Short-toed Treecreeper, and Peregrine Falcon.

After we have fully enjoyed this area, we will go either west to the stunning Aghia Eirini Gorge, or north to traverse the nice Meskla-Zourva road, full of woods, gorges, and birds. We will allow time for a stop at a Botanical Park halfway up the mountain, one of a few with plants from all over the world. We will end our full day with a farewell dinner in Chania.

Overnight at Oasis Guest House <http://www.oasis-guesthouse.com/index-en.htm>

April 15 - Day 11: Departure via Heraklion airport/seaport

Sadly, late this morning, we will say farewell to Crete, and transfer to Heraklion airport (85 miles away) to catch our afternoon/evening flights home.

About This Trip:

Fully escorted by Mass Audubon and local Greek guide, this tour is a mix of birding, history, and the relaxed and friendly Greek culture. Accommodations are in lovely, locally owned 2 and 3 star hotels, selected for their comfort and peaceful locations. Transportation on this tour will be in a comfortable, air-conditioned bus. Lunches will often be picnic lunches in the Crete countryside. As true of most birding trips, we will start early each day and travelers should be in good physical condition, able to walk on trails with ease.

About Your Mass Audubon Guide: **Elissa Landre**



Elissa Landre is the Director of Mass Audubon's Broadmoor Wildlife Sanctuary. She has led tours in Belize, Hawaii, Trinidad, and Tobago, Costa Rica, Hawaii, Ecuador, and Mexico. She has consulted on interpretation, guide training, and marketing for ecotourism at national parks in Bolivia and Poland, holds a master's degree in biology, runs a bird-banding station at Broadmoor, and is a past president of the Association of Field Ornithologists. On tours she likes to explore how protected conservation land is managed for birds and native plants

About Your Local Guides

Our local guides include our favorite Tour Manager, **Alexander Contos**, who has led all our previous Greek tours. He is always a traveler favorite.

We will also be joined by:

Michalis Dretakis, biologist and ornithologist at the University of Crete, and the Museum of Natural History. He is a member of the Greek Ornithological Society, the Greek Zoological Society, and the Archelon Committee for the Protection of the Sea Turtle. Currently writing the book *Birds of Crete*, and has been recommended by George Handrinos (author of *Birds of Greece*) as the expert ornithologist for Crete.

Bertrand Baijot, local ornithologist and guide since 1994, he is also an olive tree farmer and strong environmental activist in Sitia, Eastern Crete. Additionally, he is a licensed archeological guide at Knossos site.

PRICE : \$3775 - based on double occupancy, Single supplement is \$500

Price Includes:

- All accommodations
- All Breakfasts and Dinners
- All transportation within Crete
- Park and preserve entrance fees
- Services of naturalist guides and drivers
- All tips and gratuities

Does Not Include:

- Items of a personal nature such as beverages from the bar.
- Portage, laundry, phone calls, or gift items.
- International flights and Airport departure taxes

Travel Arrangements: You, the traveler, are responsible for booking and paying for your own international flights. Once you reserve your space, we will provide you with suggested flights and tell you which flights our leaders will be on. You may book flights directly with the airline, online, or with a travel agent. We will provide you with suggested flight schedule once we reach the minimum number of travelers. The tour will begin and end in Herakleion airport/seaport on the island of Crete.



TERMS & CONDITIONS

APPLICATIONS, RESERVATIONS, DEPOSITS: Early applications are strongly encouraged. Trip rosters usually must be finalized 4 months before departure! All applications must be accompanied by a completed reservation form and a \$500 deposit. Deposits can be by check or credit card (Visa or MasterCard). We reserve the right to decline your application. In the case of questionable health, we reserve the right to require a physician's certification to affirm you are capable of the activities. Final payment is due 90 days before the departure date. Final payment must be by check or money order.

RATES: All tour prices are based on double occupancy. If you would like us to find you a roommate, we will do our best, but cannot guarantee a share. If we cannot find a share, you will need to pay the single supplement. All forms and fares are accurate at the time of publication June 2013 but are subject to change at any time prior to departure. It is our policy to only pass on the actual amount of any increases in airfares or land costs such as those increases due to the devaluation of the dollar. Rarely, a price increase may be called for if the group falls below the minimum, as listed in the itinerary.

FLIGHTS: You, the traveler, are responsible for booking and paying for your own international flights. Once you reserve your space, we will provide you with suggested flights and tell you which flights our leaders will take. You may book flights directly with the airline, online, or with a travel agent. Please be aware that most tickets are non-refundable, therefore you should not book your flight arrangements until you have checked with us to be sure the tour has the minimum number of participants for the trip to go. We ask that you provide us with your flight details so we can be sure to meet you at the airport upon your arrival.

PHOTOS: Mass Audubon reserves the right to make use of any photograph taken on the tour. We guarantee that no photos of a comprising nature will be used. If you have questions or concerns, please contact us.

TRIP INSURANCE: A brochure and application for optional trip cancellation, illness and baggage insurance will be sent to you upon registrations. We strongly recommend that you purchase trip cancellation insurance to protect yourself. Mass Audubon does provide Medical Evacuation Coverage as part of the tour price.

CANCELLATION Policy: If you need to change your booking, you must inform us immediately in writing. All cancellations must be done in writing and are effective upon receipt in the Massachusetts Audubon Travel Office. Cancellations received up to 121 days prior to departure will be refunded deposits less a \$300 per person fee. For cancellations between 120 and 90 days prior to departure, all deposits will not be refunded. There are no refunds for cancellations 90 days or less from departure. We strongly urge all travelers to purchase trip cancellation insurance. You will be sent information from the Massachusetts Audubon Society upon receipt of your deposit.

Your Responsibility: Although every precaution is taken to safeguard you and your belongings, group travel trips by their nature involve a certain amount of risk. Trip participants should understand that the domestic and international trips sponsored/operated by Massachusetts Audubon Society (Mass Audubon Tours) - hereafter collectively "M.A.S." - involve known and unknown risks. M.A.S. assumes no responsibility for injuries, death, financial losses or damage to clients' property caused by or occurring during participation in any of the travel trips sponsored/operated by M.A.S. Trip participants must assume responsibility for having sufficient skill and fitness to participate in the trips and activities offered or sponsored by M.A.S. Trip participants must also certify that they have no medical, mental or physical conditions which could interfere with their abilities to participate in the activities and/or trips they are participating in and they must assume and bear the cost of all risks that may be created, directly or indirectly, by any such condition. It is the responsibility of trip participants to have in place adequate insurance to cover any injury, damage or emergency transportation costs related to their travel and/or participation in trip activities and/or to bear the costs of such injury, damage or emergency transportation costs. Because of the risks associated with the travel trips sponsored by M.A.S. we urge all trip participants to supplement their own insurance with travel or vacation or emergency response types of insurance. M.A.S. requires that all trip participants acknowledge and assume these risks by reading and signing an M.A.S. Release and Waiver and Assumption of Risk contract prior to departure.

CONDITIONS OF TRAVEL: Travelers will be provided with an itinerary and trip preparation information. It is expected that travelers will read this information prior to trip departure. Travelers will be responsible for completing an application reservation form, including the personal information and a release of liability. Travelers will be expected to abide by the terms set for in the invoice. During the tour, travelers are asked to respect and follow the directions of their guide and leader.



Reservation Form:

Passenger 1 Name as shown on passport: _____

Nickname for Name tag: _____ **Date of Birth:** _____

Passenger 2 Name as shown on passport: _____

Nickname for Name tag: _____ **Date of Birth:** _____

Address: _____
City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____
Phone: Home: _____ Work: _____ Cell: _____
Email address: _____

Room Preferences:

- ____ I request single accommodations where available and will pay the single supplement.
- ____ I would like to be assigned a roommate. If one is not available, I will pay the single supplement.

Personal Information:

- ____ I/We are non-smokers. (If you are a smoker(s), please check here ____ and note that smoking is limited to outdoors in non-group spaces)
- ____ Is there anything Mass Audubon should know about your health that might impact your ability to participate comfortably on this trip? Please describe: _____

Deposit:

____ Please find my enclosed **check** deposit of \$500 per person: Checks should be made payable to “*Massachusetts Audubon Society*” OR ____ Please **charge** my credit card:

VISA MC Card # _____ Exp. _____

Signature