The Fauna Of Lesvos Island

Lesvos is one of the richest and most important Greek islands as far as fauna is concerned. The island has a great biodiversity mainly because of its geographical location situated between two continents, Europe and Asia. Additionally, Lesvos has a great variety of ecosystems and in good condition, in which cultivations, wetlands, pine forests and deciduous forests are included.

The fauna of the island is very interesting. It is composed by European as well as Asian species because of the neighbouring with Asia Minor. Mammal species like the Persian Squirrel Sciurus anomalus, reptiles like the Coastal Viper Montivipera xanthina, and birds like the Kruper’s Nuthatch Sitta krueperi belong to the fauna of Asia Minor peninsula and their distribution in Greece is restricted only in Lesvos.

Thirteen species of terrestrial mammals have been recorded in Lesvos, 11 species of bats, 5 amphibians and 21 reptiles. The bird fauna of the island is very important, with some wetlands being very favorable for the birds, like the Kaloni and Geras Gulfs, as well as the Polichnitos salt pans. A total of 325 bird species have been recorded from the island.

The uncontrollable tourist development and industrialization during the last years, the new roads, the drainage of wetlands, the fires, the overgrazing of some places, and the illegal hunting are the major threats for the rich fauna of the island. The need for protection, from the authorities as well as from all of us is urgent, in order to secure the conservation of the natural heritage.

Amphibians and Reptiles of Lesvos

The herpetofauna of Lesvos is extremely rich. It is consisted of five amphibian species, two terrapins, two tortoises, six lizards and eleven snake species. There is one record of the Kotschy’s Gecko Cyrtopodion kotschyi from the island that is questionable, because it is based only on the presence of four eggs that were found in 1893 and were identified belonging to this species.

The geographical location of the island has as a result the presence of European as well as Asian reptile species. Lesvos, with some more Aegean islands are the westernmost distribution point of some species like the Snake-eyed Lizard Ophisops elegans, the Ringheaded Dwarf Snake Eirenis modestus and the Coastal Viper Montivipera xanthina, species of an Asian origin.

The two tortoise species that are found on Lesvos, the Mediterranean Spur-thighed Tortoise Testudo graeca and the Marginated Tortoise Testudo marginata are included in to the Annex ΙΙ of CITES Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species.

Four of the five amphibian and reptile species of the island are protected based on the Annex ΙΙ of Council Directive 92/43/EEC. These species are: the Mediterranean Spur-thighed Tortoise Testudo graeca, the European Toad Terrapin Emys orbicularis, the Balkan Terrapin Mauremys rivulata, and the Leopard Snake Elaphe situla.

Birds of Lesvos

Lesvos is a very interesting island for the ornithologists. The geographical position of the island makes it a very important stop-over station during the movements and migration of birds. Some rare bird species have been observed in the habitats of the island. In Lesvos a total of 325 bird species have been recorted.

The most important ecosystems for the birds in Lesvos are probably the wetlands. The most important of them are the two large gulfs of the island, the Kaloni and Geras Gulfs. The Kaloni and Polichnitos salt pans attract a large variety of birds as well as the river at Skala Eressos. Lesvos has many small springs and torrents that ensure the presence of surface water in the island during all year on the island.

Lesvos has three protected areas of the Natura 2000. Kaloni Gulf is one of them, there, 68 bird species of the Annex Ι of Council directive 79/409/ΕΕC are found.
The second area is Geras Gulf, Dipi marsh and mount Olympos, 4 species of the Annex Ι of Council Directive 79/409/ΕΕC are present there: the Purple Heron Ardea purpurea, the White Stork Ciconia ciconia, the Ruddy Shelduck Tadorna ferruginea and the Ruppell’s Warbler Sylvia rueppelli.

The third area is the western peninsula that includes the petrified forest of Lesvos in Sigri. Three species of the Annex Ι of Council Directive 79/409/ΕΕC are found at this area: the Ruppell’s Warbler Sylvia rueppelli, the Kruper’s Nuthatch Sitta krueperi, and the Cinereous Bunting Emberiza cineracea.
The mountains of the island are also very important for the bird fauna. In the mountains around Eressos the Cinereous

Bunting Emberiza cineracea is present.

Mammals of Lesvos

Lesvos has a great biodiversity of mammal species. For two of them Lesvos is the western’s edge of their distribution. These are the Persian Squirrel Sciurus anomalus and the Thomas’s White-toothed Shrew Crocidura lasia. For both of them Lesvos is the only place in Greece, and Europe where they can be found.

Six bat species that belong to the Annex ΙΙ of Council Directive 92/43/EEC are found on the island. These are: the Lesser Horseshoe Bat Rhinolophus hipposideros, the Greater Horseshoe Bat Rhinolophus ferrumequinum, the Blasius’ Horseshoe Bat Rhinolophus blasii, the Lesser Mouse-eared Bat Myotis blythii, the Greater Mouse-eared Bat Myotis myotis, and the Schreiber's Bat Miniopterus schreibersii.

Fauna Highlights of Lesvos

Kruper’s Nuthatch Sitta krueperi

This species is not found in any other place in Greece except Lesvos. It prefers the forests of the East Mediterranean pine Pinus brutia. During summer, the Kruper’s Nuthatch needs permanent surface water, because it doesn’t move in large distances for this reason. Generally permanent surface water is rare in Mediterranean habitats. The total population of the species in Lesvos is about 50-100 pairs. It feeds mainly on pine nuts. In the Red Data Book of threatened Vertebrates of Greece it is considered a rare species.

Cinereous Bunting Emberiza cineracea

In Greece the largest population of this species is found in western Lesvos. It is estimated that 100 - 250 pairs are found on the island. Some pairs are nesting on Chios and Skyros islands. The species is not well studied; in Lesvos it is nesting in dry and stony areas with garrigue vegetation. It feeds on insects and prefers Orthoptera (grasshoppers and crickets). The species is protected by the Greek and European legislation. According to the Red Data Book of threatened Vertebrates of Greece is a rare species.

Thomas’s White-toothed Shrew Crocidura lasia

The species is not found in any other place in Europe except Lesvos. It lives in areas with shrubs and bushes. There are no more data on its biology. It is a species that lives in Asia Minor and Lebanon. In the Red Data Book of threatened Vertebrates of Greece it is considered a rare species.

Persian Squirrel Sciurus anomalus

This species is not found in any other place in Europe except Lesvos, this island being the westernmost point of its distribution. It is found in coniferous and deciduous forests (oak and chestnut trees), olive groves, almond trees, etc. It is a social animal and lives in groups. It gives birth twice a year, during spring and autumn, from one to seven newborns each time. It doesn’t hibernate. It feeds mainly on olives, chestnuts, almonds, nuts and oak-apples but also on buds and leaves of certain plants. In the Red Data Book of threatened Vertebrates of Greece it is considered a vulnerable species. It is also protected by the Greek legislation.

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