

Dalmatian Pelicans of Lake Kerkini

Greece

January 31 – February 5, 2027

With John and Dixie and Jordan Hristov who is our local guide, expert photographer and ornithologist. He took all the photos in this brochure

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Limited to a group of six.

1 spot available as of May 15, 2026

I've long admired close-up and action images of the Dalmatian pelicans in Greece. While planning a Kenya tour for January of 2027, I looked into the best time to photograph these approachable birds in peak breeding plumage. Surprisingly, the ideal period is late January into February, with the first week of February being both a terrific time to photograph them and it also coincides with the end of our Kenya tour. So why not make a slight detour on the way back to the states and stop in Greece first?



Figure 1 Dalmatian pelicans in peak breeding plumage

We have decided to extend our tour to allow us four full days photographing the Dalmatian pelicans at Lake Kerkini in Greece. Dalmatian pelicans are the largest pelicans in the world with a wingspan up to 12 feet and incredibly approachable. They are used to people providing them with fish, so they readily approach you to easy photo range. Indeed, pelicans sometimes land on the boat you are in.

Since the pelicans fly low over the water of the lake right at you and land nearby with lots of splashing, they offer tremendous opportunities for flight photos. They also interact with each other frequently and that provides many more chances for outstanding images. Observing such large birds in peak breeding plumage offers exceptional photo opportunities, especially in the gorgeous light of dawn and evening.

Dalmatian pelicans inhabit lakes, rivers, and deltas across Europe, Russia, China, and India. Their name comes from Dalmatia in Croatia, not the spotted dog breed.

This is our first time photographing in Greece, but we have hired Dancho, a highly praised naturalist and local guide who took all the photos in this brochure.

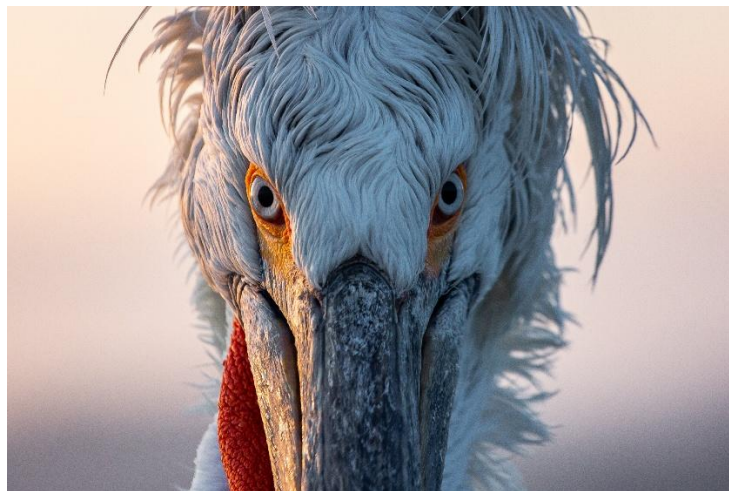


Figure 2 They come really close to you!

Brochure

Introduction

Embark on an unforgettable 6-day wildlife photography journey into the heart of Northern Greece, where pristine wetlands provide a dramatic stage for some of Europe's most elegant bird species.

Our adventure begins at Thessaloniki where we arrive. An hour and a half later, we will be at Lake Kerkini where we spend the next four days. The lake is one of Europe's premier bird photography destinations. Here amidst tranquil waters and misty sunrises, you'll come face to face with the magnificent Dalmatian Pelican—the world's largest pelican species. Renowned for their striking silver plumage, piercing eyes, and impressive wingspan, these charismatic giants offer extraordinary close-up photographic opportunities, particularly from small boats that allow eye-level perspectives in golden morning light. Lake Kerkini's rich wetlands also attract herons, cormorants, pygmy cormorants, and a variety of waterfowl, producing endless creative possibilities.

Eye-Level Perspectives



Figure 3 Black and white is another way to show them. Notice the low angle from the small boat.

One of the greatest advantages at Lake Kerkini is the ability to photograph pelicans from small boats that put you close to the water. This provides stunning eye-level angles, allowing you to capture reflections, water textures, and perfectly blurred backgrounds. The proximity of the birds makes it possible to fill the frame with detailed head portraits-

highlighting their pale silver plumage, piercing red eyes, and their beautifully textured orange-red pouch.

Golden Light & Atmospheric Conditions

Early mornings often bring soft mist rising from the lake's surface. Combined with warm sunrise light, this creates ethereal scenes—ideal for moody silhouettes, backlit wings, and glowing breath vapor on cold days. The diffused light also flatters the pelican's white feathers, preserving detail while maintaining a soft, painterly look.

Flight & Action Photography

Dalmatian pelicans are powerful yet graceful flyers. Take-offs and landings offer dramatic opportunities to capture wide wingspans, splashing water, and dynamic movement. Continuous feeding activity provides chances to photograph interactions between individuals—wing flapping, synchronized swimming, and occasional disputes that reveal expressive behavior.

Breeding Plumage and Character Portraits

During the time of the trip, the birds display their most photogenic breeding plumage. Their normally curly nape feathers become more pronounced, and their pouch turns vibrant orange-red, adding striking color contrast. Calm conditions allow for tight headshots with catchlights in the eyes and perfectly mirrored reflections beneath.



Figure 4 They will land on the boat with you.

Creative Possibilities

The uncluttered water background enables minimalist compositions, while reeds, distant mountains, and changing sky conditions offer environmental storytelling. Slow shutter techniques can emphasize motion in wing beats, while high shutter speeds freeze dramatic water droplets during take-off.

Lake Kerkini offers rare access, consistent subjects, and beautiful natural light—making it an extraordinary destination for capturing both the elegance and power of the Dalmatian pelican in a wide range of photographic styles.

Designed for passionate photographers, this tour combines expert local guidance, carefully planned shooting sessions, and optimal light conditions to maximize your portfolio opportunities. This immersive experience promises both technical inspiration and unforgettable wildlife moments at one of Greece’s most remarkable natural sanctuaries.

Itinerary

Day 1(January 31st)

You arrive by plane in Thessaloniki and transfer to Kerkini National Park (1.5 hours).

Our journey starts from the airport where the guide will meet everyone. After that we head to Kerkini National Park, where we spend the following four days photographing Dalmatian Pelicans.

We will spend the next five nights in a hotel at the lake.



Figure 5 What a beautiful pelican!!!!

Day 2-5, (February 1-4)

Dalmatian Pelican photography at Lake Kerkini.

We will spend these four days photographing Dalmatian Pelicans. Each day contains two sessions: one in the morning and one in the afternoon. For these four days, we will have 4 boat trips, 2 hours each and 4 sessions from the shore, if the activity of the pelicans and the water level at the lake allow it. If not, all sessions will be from a boat. Boats can take small groups, and we may split in two to allow more space.

The morning sessions start in the blue hour, and we will aim to be at the lake well positioned to make use of the stunning light conditions in the early morning hours. Before departing from the hotel, we will have a snack with coffee and light breakfast. After the photography session, we return to the hotel for a proper breakfast.

Mid-day is usually for downtime and review of our pictures. We can have a light lunch in a local taverna.

The afternoon session usually starts at 2:30-3 pm and continues into the blue hour depending on light conditions.

The pelicans are usually attracted with fish which keeps them close. There is plenty of time to experiment with a variety of photography techniques including close up portraits, minimalistic shots, high-key, low-key, back light, panning, reflections, and more. All depends on the creative vision of the photographer. The guide will be happy to share ideas upon request.

Boat sessions provide great opportunities for flight shots!!! Shore sessions are fantastic for low angle portraits or wide angle shots with pelican interaction.

Recommended equipment: any lens from a fish-eye, wide angle 16-35mm, mid telephoto 70-200mm to 500mm. Birds often come and land on our boats or will sit distantly on still water allowing a huge range of photo opportunities. A tripod is not necessary unless you want to take video from the shore.



Figure 6 Lots of flight photos await you!

Day 6 (February 5th)

Departure Transfer to Thessaloniki. Driving time is 1.5 hours, so if the flight is early, we may need to spend the last night close to the airport and do the transfer on the previous day.

Clothing Keep in mind temperatures can be cold in early February in Greece. Be sure to bring some clothes that are suitable for winter. Normally it isn't much below freezing as Lake Kerkini never freezes and that is why many birds winter on the lake, but cool and windy is quite possible. The average low temp in early February is 32 and the average high is 47 degrees.

Tour Price:

The cost of the tour is \$3300 (double occupancy.) The single supplement is \$150. Bring \$200 cash for tipping the boat drivers and our guide (Dancho). Give the money to Dixie and she will pay the tips in Euros. Please have euros to buy anything along the way in Greece.

What is included:

- All accommodations for 5 nights
- All meals for five days except lunch on the first day and dinner on the last day. John and Dixie will be paying for these two meals.
- All ground transport
- 4 days, 8 sessions with pelicans (boat trips or shore sessions)
- Soft drinks, tea, and coffee

What is not included:

- Airfare
- Alcohol
- Insurance
- Other items of a personal nature



Figure 7 Wide-angles lenses are useful!



Figure 8 Sunrise and sunset provide gorgeous opportunities.



Figure 9 We expect to photograph other species. Here is a flock of flamingos passing by.



Figure 10 Imagine this pelican swimming toward you in the calm morning water.