

Trip report Egypt May 03-18 2003

By Joakim & Elisabeth Djerf, Sweden



Intro

We started collecting information for this trip as early as in July 2002. Soon we got in contact with Mindy Baha el Din (baha@internetegypt.com) - birding coordinator, birding tour organizer and birding guide etc in Egypt. We first asked her only for some general advice and birding information but ended up with having her organizing the whole trip!

This kind of “all-included-arrangement” was a new experience for us. We usually do the entire trip planning by ourselves.

We provided Mindy with a “target list” of wanted bird species and some other basic information. She then made three different itineraries for us to choose from. When we had made our decision, Mindy and the local travel agent Sally El Khayatt (sk@traveline-eg.com) at travel company TravelLine made a quote/estimate - which we later accepted.

All arrangements worked extremely well and we want to thank everybody involved in making our trip a successful one! We do recommend this convenient way of travelling/birdwatching in Egypt.

Participants to this family trip, combining serious birdwatching with holiday activities, were Joakim, Elisabeth, Adrian (6 years old) and Nova (1 year old) Djerf.

“Final deal” – Itinerary and other arrangements provided by TravelLine in cooperation with Mindy Baha el Din

- 03 May Arrival Cairo 01.15 AM meet assist and transfer to Oasis hotel accommodation based on half board.

- 04 May 04.45 AM pick up breakfast box from reception.
Full day Fayoum excluding lunch accompanied by our company rep.
overnight Oasis hotel half board.

- 05 May Full day Memphis, Sakkara, Pyramids and Sphinx - including lunch with an antiquity guide hotel Overnight Oasis hotel half board.

- 06 May 06.00 AM pick up for Gebel Asfar + lunch box afternoon visit to Egyptian museum + Khan el Khalili with antiquity guide Overnight Oasis hotel - half board.
- 07 May Morning drive to Wadi Hagul Suez birdwatching (lunch own arrangements) our rep. will guide you - drive to Ain Sukhna overnight Portrait Ain Sukhna half board.
- 08 May Morning bird hotel grounds and Ain Sukhna then drive to Hurghada accompanied by our rep. - arrive to Hurghada check in Magawish hotel half board – rep. will leave you will be looked after our reps resident in Hurghada.
- 09 May Full day Mahmyia including lunch – snorkelling. Overnight Magawish hotel half board.
- 10 May Day at leisure in hotel - Magawish hotel half board.
- 11 May Drive to Luxor accompanied by our rep from Hurghada arrive Movenpick Luxor - lunch in hotel birding Crocodile island where Movenpick hotel is situated - overnight Movenpick hotel half board
- 12 May Guided tour to Valley of Kings (2-3 tombs)/Queens (1 tomb), Temple of Hatshepsuit from outside only & Colossi of Memnon. Back to hotel afternoon visit to Karnak temple overnight Movenpick hotel half board.
- 13 May Drive Luxor/Aswan with our rep. from Luxor (would recommend a lunch box to be collected from Movenpick for the drive to Aswan). Late afternoon 4-5 hrs Felucca sail around First Cataract Islands. Overnight Basma hotel half board.
- 14 May Drive to Abu Simbel accompanied by our guide from Aswan. Mid afternoon visit Abu Simbel - Evening Sound & Light overnight Nefertari hotel half board.
- 15 May Morning half-day private boat ride on lake Nasser afternoon at hotel. Overnight at Nefertari hotel half board.
- 16 May Early check out - visit camel stations direct to airport to fly to Cairo, meet - assist at airport and transfer to Novotel hotel Half board.
- 17 May 04.05 AM transfer to airport to fly home.

(Some slight changes were made to the above during the trip.)

Day-by-day

May 3 Oasis Hotel, Cairo:

We arrived to Cairo late at night so we spent the whole first day in the hotel grounds. Sleeping, using the swimming pool, eating etc. Early morning we heard Oystercatcher-like calls from the rooftops in front of our hotel room - Senegal Thick-knees! At least three birds showed very well. We saw the Thick-knees and most of the species mentioned below every day during our stay at Oasis Hotel.

Birds:

Little Egret 10, Honey Buzzard 1, Kestrel 1, **Senegal Thick-knee 3**, Laughing Dove (common), Pallid Swift 2, Hoopoe 3, Swallow (singles), House Martin (singles), Little Green Bee-eater 1, European Bee-eater about 50 (in feeding parties flying by), Common Bulbul (common), Blackbird 4, Graceful Prinia (common), Hooded Crow (common), House Sparrow (common) and Goldfinch (heard).



Senegal Thick-knees, Oasis Hotel, Cairo May 3 2003 ©

May 4 El Fayoum/Fish farms near Sharshouk village/Lake Qarun area:

We left the hotel at 04:45 AM and were accompanied by the travel agency representative Mr Seif and our excellent driver for the whole stay Mr Ibrahim. After about 1 h of driving we also picked up a “local hunting guide”. The local guy was supposed to show us the two target species Senegal Coucal and Painted Snipe.

First stop was in an agricultural area to the south/south-east of Lake Qarun. Out of the car we immediately heard the “bubbling” call of Senegal Coucals. Maybe 4-5 birds calling from different directions. The birds were not easy to locate at first, but after some walking we managed to see two birds (probably a pair) at very close range (down to 3 m). They were not at all afraid of people, it seemed.

Then it was time for the very-much-sought-after-species the Painted Snipe. Being the first excursion for the trip we didn't really know how much birding experience, site knowledge etc. our guides had. We thought the local guide knew about the local species and how/where to look for them etc (he charged US\$50). Well, he managed all right with the Coucals but his knowledge about Painted Snipes (and most other birds) was not really satisfactory. He did know where he used to see the Painted Snipes in wintertime but when we checked this site it was almost dried out – no birds. We then talked to Mindy in telephone and she tried to explain to the local guide and us about the preferred habitat of this species and where/how we should look for it at this time of the year. We managed to see a lot of nice species this day but failed with the snipes.

The lesson we learnt this first day (and it goes for the whole trip with some excellent exceptions) was that you couldn't lean back in the backseat of the car and expect the guides to find the birds for you. You have to be active and settled. Tell the driver where and when to stop when driving in interesting birding areas. You need to do your homework about preferred habitat etc for the target species. Although the guides always succeeded in finding the way to the specific birding site, they sometimes didn't know very much about the birds. Fortunately Mindy had compiled a detailed "bird- and site information paper" for us. This information was vital and really saved us a few times during the trip.

Birds:

Senegal Coucal at least 4-5 calling + 1 pair, Great Bittern 1, Little Bittern 1, Cattle Egret (common), Squacco Heron (common), Little Egret (common), Grey Heron 10, Purple Heron 5, White Stork 1, Glossy Ibis 3, Marsh Harrier 1, **Black-shouldered Kite 3**, Honey Buzzard 1, Kestrel 1, Moorhen 1, Coot 1, Black-winged Stilt 10, **Senegal thick-knee 3**, Ringed Plover (plenty), Grey Plover 10, Spur-winged Plover (very common), Dunlin (few), Curlew Sandpiper (plenty), Temminck's Stint (heard), Little Stint (plenty), Wood Sandpiper (few), Red-necked Phalarope 3, Ruff (plenty), Black-headed Gull (few), Slender-billed Gull (very common), Little Tern (very common), White-winged Black Tern (plenty), Whiskered Tern (plenty, more than WwBT we think), Feral Pigeon (common), Laughing Dove (very common), Hoopoe 5, Pied Kingfisher (common), European Bee-eater, Blue-cheeked Bee-eater, Little Green Bee-eater, Roller 2, Crested Lark (common), Sand Martin (common), **Swallow (common – the red endemic subspecies)**, **Yellow Wagtail (common – the endemic subspecies)**, Common Bulbul (very common), Fan-tailed Cisticola (very common), Graceful Warbler (very common), Clamorous Reed Warbler 1 singing at Tunis, Great Grey Shrike 1 and House Sparrow (very common).

May 5 Giza Pyramids & Sphinx, Memphis, Sakkara:

Full day looking at the famous antiquities. No special birds.



May 6 Gabel Asfar area (AM):

This site is situated to the NE of Cairo (about 1 h drive) on the way to Bilbeis. It's a very nice birding area. A big canal carrying Cairo sewage water up to the Bahr Bakar Drain emptying into Lake Manzalla. This was, according to Mindy, formerly one of the best birding sites in Egypt, but is now only a glimmer of its former self. Gabel Asfar is farmed with raw sewage and is rather smelly, dirty and dusty. Throughout the area are also orchards and fields worth checking for e.g. White-breasted Kingfisher and Senegal Coucal. Streaked Weaver and Avadavat can be found in the reed beds along the canal.

Birds:

Cattle Egret (extremely common), Little Egret (common), White Stork 10, Black Kite 30, Kestrel (common), Moorhen (common), **Senegal Thick-knee 3**, Spur-winged Plover (very common), Feral Pigeon (common), Laughing Dove (extremely common), **Senegal Coucal 2**, Hoopoe (very common), **White-breasted Kingfisher 15**, Pied Kingfisher (common), Blue-cheeked Bee-eater (few), Little Green Bee-eater (few), Crested Lark (common), Sand Martin (very common), Swallow, Common Bulbul, Blackbird, Fan-tailed Cisticola, Clamorous Reed Warbler 30, Hooded Crow, House Sparrow and **Streaked Weaver 2**.

May 6 Cairo – Egyptian museum, Khan el Khalili (PM):

More antiquities and some shopping.

Birds:

Pallid Swift 30, Black Kite (few) and Cattle Egret (everywhere).

May 7 “Cement factory” close to Ain Sukhna (AM)

Checked out from Oasis Hotel at 05:15 AM. Drove eastwards towards Ain Sukhna. Due to military activities (road blocking) we had to skip Wadi Hagul (site for desert birds e.g. larks, wheatears). Instead we went to a site called “Cement factory Farm”. Should be good for raptors early morning (roosting in the Casserinia trees before take off and thermal later in the day).

Birds:

White Stork 1, Steppe Eagle 3, Booted Eagle 5, Black Kite 30, March Harrier 2, Montagu’s Harrier 2, Long-legged Buzzard 2, Steppe Buzzard 100, Honey Buzzard 10, Levant Sparrowhawk 10, Kestrel (few) and Brown-necked Raven (few along the road).



Levant Sparrowhawk (2K) and an injured Steppe Buzzard, Cement factory, Ain Sukhna May 7 2003 ©

May 7 Suez (mid day)

We drove to Suez. Through tunnel to Asia and back again to Africa - cool! Then short birdwatching close to the Suez Canal. Not much birdwatching the rest of the day because of some tourist-stomach-problem...

Birds:

White Stork 700+1000 (soaring along the road), Squacco Heron 15, Little Egret 2, Western Reef Heron 2, Grey Plover 20 and House Crow 100 (more).

May 7 Ain Sukhna (PM)

Drove directly to Portrait Hotel at Ain Sukhna. One of us had to spend some hours in bed but wife and children could try the Red Sea and, later on, had a very nice dinner. From the hotel balcony we though managed to see a few nice species on the famous pier.

Birds:

Squacco Heron 1 and **Swift Tern 10**. We are almost sure we also saw a **Green-backed (Striated) Heron** sitting on the pier, but it was a certain distance and lousy health conditions.

May 8 Ain Sukhna – “Fowyz’s” (AM)

Got up at 06:00. Checked the Ain Sukhna pier again (and the sea) but saw no interesting birds at all. After breakfast we drove south for just a few minutes to the ramshackle cafeteria “Fowyz’s” on the coast road. This is a good place watching migrating raptors, storks etc.

Birds:

White stork 1000+500+750+500, Black Stork 5, Egyptian Vulture 10, Osprey 1, Lesser Spotted Eagle 15, Greater Spotted Eagle 2, Steppe Eagle 30, Short-toed Eagle 2, Booted Eagle 40, Black Kite 150, March Harrier 3, Long-legged Buzzard 10, Steppe Buzzard 500, Honey Buzzard 100, Levant Sparrowhawk 15, Kestrel (few), European Bee-eater (few), White-crowned Black Wheatear 2 and Brown-necked Raven 5.

May 8 Hurghada (PM)

Almost non-stop driving from Ain Sukhna to Hurghada. We arrived to Magawish hotel at 04:45. Some birdwatching in the hotel grounds.

Birds:

Cormorant 1, Kestrel 2, Steppe Buzzard 1, Lesser Black-backed Gull (*fuscus*) 20, White-eyed Gull 25, Little Tern 30, Caspian Tern 5, European Bee-eater (few), Sand Martin, Swallow, Tree Pipit 10, Red-throated Pipit 1, Yellow Wagtail 6, Common Redstart 1, Whinchat 3, Woodchat Shrike 1 and Hooded Crow.



White-eyed Gulls, Magawish, Hurghada May 8 2003 ©

May 9 Mahmiya – Gifton Island, Hurghada

Early morning more birding in the hotel grounds.

Birds:

Night Heron 1, **Lanner Falcon 2**, Kestrel 4, Steppe Buzzard 5, Greenshank 1, White-eyed Gull 50, Little Tern 20, Caspian Tern 3, Sand Martin, House Martin, Swallow, Common Redstart 5, Northern Wheatear 1, Whinchat 3, Olivaceous Warbler 1, Garden Warbler 1, Blackcap 1, Lesser Whitethroat 20, Whitethroat 2 and Spotted Flycatcher 5.

Then it was time for a boat ride to Mahmiya, Gifton Island. Mahmiya is a “tourist snorkelling destination” with a paradise type beach with corals in the sea. We hoped to see some Red Sea birds (gulls, terns etc) on the boat ride and hopefully Sooty Falcon on the island.

We didn't see any terns at all except a single Caspian Tern. This was a small disappointment. But instead we had great views of our south-after target species Sooty Falcon and Brown Booby. Most of the Sooty Falcons were seen over the “Little Gifton Island” close to Mahmiya and two Brown Boobies flew by at very close range.

Birds:

Sea bird sp. 1 (probably a shearwater), **Brown Booby 2**, Black Stork 2 (southeast side of Abu Mingar Island, a small flat sandy island with a mangrove), Osprey 2, Steppe Buzzard 50, **Sooty Falcon 5+4+2**, Arctic Skua 1, Sooty Gull 5, White-eyed Gull (hundreds) and Caspian Tern 1 (the only tern!).



Brown Boobies, Mahmiya, Hurghada May 9 2003 ©

Later we had some afternoon/evening birding in hotel grounds.

Birds:

Sooty Falcon 1+4+1.

May 10 Magawish hotel, Hurghada

We spent the whole day in hotel area.

Birds:

Turtle Dove 1, Short-toed Lark 1, Tawny Pipit 4, Red-throated Pipit 2, Northern Wheatear 3, Whinchat 3, Steppe Buzzard 150, Levant Sparrowhawk/Sparrowhawk 1, Kestrel 3-4 pairs in the hotel grounds, **Sooty Falcon 2** (persistently hunting a passerine together over the Fantasy bar in the late afternoon!), Black-headed Gull 1, White-eyed Gull 100, Little Tern 15, Common Tern 1, Tern sp. 1 (probably a Lesser Crested Tern), Caspian Tern 5, Bee-eater (few), Lesser Whitethroat 5, Whitethroat 10, Subalpine Warbler 1, Olivaceous Warbler (common, calling from everywhere), Willow Warbler 1, Spotted Flycatcher 10 and Golden Oriole 1.

May 11 Hurghada – Luxor (AM)

First a quick check in the hotel area. The birds were very much the same as yesterday e.g. the Golden Oriole was still there and so were the four Tawny Pipits.

The drive from Hurghada towards Luxor started at 08:00. We drove in a convoy. A short rest stop in a small place somewhere between Safaga and Qena yielded a Masked Shrike and three Booted Eagles. Several migrating raptors were seen during the drive. A lot of Steppe Buzzards, few Steppe Eagles and 5-6 Montagu's Harrier but most of the birds of prey had to be left unidentified. We also succeeded in identifying a few Desert Larks from the rather fast driving car.

When approaching the Nile valley, birds like Cattle Egret, European Bee-eater and Pied Kingfisher started to show in good numbers.

May 11 Crocodile Island, Luxor (PM)

The local bird guide Mr Abdou took us for a walk around the Crocodile Island. Abdou is very friendly man with good knowledge of the local species and, of course, the area on and around the Crocodile Island where he lives.

Hot like hell, well above 40°C at 16:30 when we started the walk. But very nice birding indeed! We were hoping very much for the Painted Snipe once again. Abdou told us that we had a very good chance of finding this species in Crocodile Island. He had seen the snipes just two days ago, he said. But no, we failed again.

Birds:

Little Bittern 1, Night Heron 5, Cattle Egret, Squacco Heron, Little Egret, Black Kite 2, Black-shouldered Kite 1, Honey Buzzard 1, Kestrel (few), Moorhen, **Purple Gallinule 1**, Senegal Thick-knee (heard), Spur-winged Plover (very common), Turtle Dove (few), Hoopoe 30, Pied Kingfisher 50, European Bee-eater 50, Little Green Bee-eater 10, Crested Lark 10, Yellow Wagtail (common), Common Bulbul (common), Fan-tailed Cisticola, Graceful Prinia, Clamorous Reed Warbler, Olivaceous Warbler (very common), Masked Shrike 1, **Nile Valley Sunbird 10** and **Avadavat 1**.



Male Nile Valley Sunbird and Pied Kingfishers, Crocodile Island, Luxor May 11 2003 ©

May 12 Luxor area (AM)

Met Abdou at “the best” Painted Snipe site at 05:55, but we had no luck this day neither.

Then it was time for antiquities again! Colossi of Memnon (Little Owl 4 on the statues!), Valley of Kings (Trumpeter Finch 2, African Rock Martin 5 and a probable sunbird sp. – see below), Temple of Hatshepsut and the Karnak temple. We also visited an alabaster shop and bought some souvenirs.

At the Valley of Kings, close to the caves, is a barrack (public convenience) with a water tap outside. The Trumpeter Finches were sitting on the ground drinking water pouring out from the tap. When watching the finches a different bird flew in. It landed on the water tap, drinking from it hanging upside down. It was about the same size as the finches, but with a very long and decurved bill. The colouration was dark grey above, paler below and the tail was dark - brownish or blackish. No striking patterns or other plumage details were noted by us (unfortunately). Someone then passed to close to the water tap and all the birds flew off and didn't return the short time we could wait.

We couldn't safely identify this bird. The general proportions matched a large sunbird. But a sunbird isn't the first species you think about in the hot and sandy desert habitat at the Valley of Kings.

We have considered the possibility of the bird being an aberrant one with a deformed bill, but don't think so. We still don't know for sure what it was. All suggestions and/or comments are welcome!

May 12 Crocodile Island, Luxor (PM)

After the antiquities tour it was very hot so we spent the midday poolside. In a desperate attempt trying to locate the Painted Snipe the male part of our family went out alone at 03:30.

Back to the snipe site I scanned the wet fields carefully. Suddenly I located a dark patch on the ground, which actually didn't look like a piece of mud. I went closer. Now the dark something was gone. Maybe it was a rat? I waited for a while and then I saw it again. This time I saw it was a dark bird crouching down and extremely slowly moving forward. More and more of the bird came in sight. Yes!! It was in deed a female Painted Snipe. And behind her a male soon appeared.

With a smile on my face I went back to the Hotel and told the good news to the rest of the family and also Abdou. He was a little disappointed because he wanted to find the snipes for us, he said. Anyway, all of us soon went back to the site and had splendid views of these amazing birds. Certainly one of the highlights of the trip!

Birds:

Except for the couple of **Painted Snipes** we saw about the same species as the day before.



Local bird guide Abdou at Painted Snipe site, Crocodile Island, Luxor May 12 2003 ©

May 13 Luxor – Aswan (AM)

We departed from Luxor at 06:20, driving in a convoy, arrived to the Basma hotel in Aswan at 10:30. Black-shouldered Kites were very common during the drive, we counted more than 20. Also plenty of European Bee-eaters, Pied Kingfishers, Cattle Egrets etc.

May 13 boat ride Aswan (PM)

According to our original itinerary we were supposed to have a 4-5 hrs Felucca sailing boat ride in Aswan. But when we met our new local bird guide, Mr Mohammed Arabi, he told us it wasn't enough wind for sailing. We should use a motorboat instead. Even if we firstly were slightly disappointed, this rearrangement showed out to be a very wise decision. Even in more windy conditions the motorised way of transportation is far more suitable for birdwatching purposes. You can go wherever you like, stop wherever you like, turn around and go back as you wish etc.

Arabi knew the area as his own pocket. He told us what we were supposed to see "behind the next corner" at a nearly 100% accuracy! The only trouble he had were when we located a female Tufted Duck – probably a species he didn't expect here at

this time of the year(?). He also knew most of the bird names in many languages, sometimes also in Swedish! His favourite was definitely the Senegal Thick-knee. He shouted out this species name with his own funny way of pronunciation (“Senegaaaaal Thiiiiick-kneeeeee”)!

The scenery was spectacular in the evening time; the back lit sand desert on the west side, the Aswan city on the east and the many islands in between with a lush growth of vegetation. Trees and bushes in full blossom, calls of the water birds etc. etc.

Birds:

Little Grebe 2, Little Bittern 20 (at least), Night Heron 10, **Green-backed Heron 10 (some with pullus)**, Cattle Egret (very common), Squacco Heron 10, Little Egret (very common – hundreds), Grey Heron 5, Purple Heron 2, Tufted Duck 1 female, Black Kite 1, Kestrel (few from Basma hotel balcony), Moorhen (very common – hundreds), Purple Gallinule 3 (2 adults + 1 pullus), Senegal Thick-knee 1, Gull-billed Tern 1, Turtle Dove 1, Hoopoe (few), Pied Kingfisher (very common – hundreds), European Bee-eater, Little Green Bee-eater (few), African Rock Martin 5 (from Basma hotel balcony), Yellow Wagtail (few), Common Bulbul, Clamorous Reed Warbler (very common), Nile Valley Sunbird 10 and House Sparrows.





Green-backed Heron, Little Bittern and Senegal Thick-knee, Aswan May 13 2003 ©

May 14 Aswan – Abu Simbel (AM)

We departed from Aswan at 10:30, driving in a convoy, arrived to the Nefertari hotel in Abu Simbel at about 02.00 PM. We didn't see many birds en route. Arabi (he was our bird guide for also the Abu Simbel area) noted two sandgrouses sp. flying up from the roadside, but we were driving too fast to safely identify them (most probably Spotted Sandgrouse though).

Having a short rest stop at a small cafeteria we were introduced to a crocodile baby. This "pet" belonged to cafeteria owners. They put this nasty little creature on our son's head and told us to take some pictures. We were warned though; even the small ones have very sharp teeth and are not very friendly animals...



Crocodile and son Adrian, between Aswan – Abu Simbel May 14 2003 ©

May 14 Abu Simbel (PM)

We decided to drive to the famous "Airport site" a little later in the afternoon. Before this we spent some time in the Nefertari hotel grounds.

Birds:

Egyptian Vulture 1, **African Pied Wagtail 1 (flew in from the small islet just outside the hotel)**, Black Kite 20, Turtle Dove 5, White-crowned Black Wheatear 2, House Sparrow, Olivaceous Warbler and Graceful Prinia.



White-crowned Black Wheatear, Abu Simbel May 14 2003 ©

We started the evening tour at the inlet right across from the hotel.

Birds:

African Pied Wagtail 1 (seen only by Arabi), Spur-winged Plover (few), European Bee-eater, Crested Lark (common), Black Kite 50 (probably more) and **Egyptian Goose 1**.

Then we were supposed to go to the Airport site. Only problem was that our guide and driver didn't know where this site was located. At this moment Mindy's "bird- and site information" paper was invaluable. Following the instructions in the paper we soon reached the site. It was quite a great distance to the birds from where we parked the car. We walked a bit from here and placed ourselves behind some kind of sheep stable situated on a small hill. From here we had very good views of the area.

Birds:

Night Heron 2, Cattle Egret, Squacco Heron, Little Egret, Grey Heron, **Yellow-billed Stork 30**, **Egyptian Goose 10**, Black Kite, Black-winged Stilt 5, **Kittlitz's Plover 3 (at least)**, Spur-winged Plover (very common), Curlew Sandpiper, Little Stint, Greenshank, Gull-billed Tern 5, Turtle Dove, Laughing Dove, Hoopoe, European Bee-eater, Little Green Bee-eater, Crested Lark, African Rock Martin, Yellow Wagtail and White-crowned Black Wheatear.



Egyptian Goose, Abu Simbel May 14 2003 ©

Unfortunately we soon had to leave this very nice site and rush to the Abu Simbel Temple and the "Sound and Light Show". We were hoping to see Egyptian Nightjars coming out to feed in the lights during the show. We watched the show, given in Spanish this evening, all the time looking for nightjar movements – but no luck this time. A completely nightjar-free performance!

Later this evening we received some really bad news from Arabi (at least we thought so at the moment). The eagerly awaited boat ride on the lake Nasser, which was scheduled for tomorrow morning, had to be postponed to the afternoon due to some

strange “engine problems” with the local fishermen’s boat. Our thinking was that going out in the very hot afternoon instead of the (always-best-time-for-birding) morning must reduce our chances enormously to see the mouth-watering species we hoped for. Hmm, engine-problems... Relating to earlier experiences these kinds of “problems” usually means something else. The local fishermen must have been able to borrow another boat or acquire another engine if the problems were real. Especially when quite a lot of money was involved (it was extremely few tourists in Abu Simbel at the moment and we were certainly the only birdwatchers). We asked Arabi for the real reason, if the fishermen wanted more money or something, but he insisted in that the given reason was the real problem. Well, we had to reschedule and go to the “Camel station” the next morning instead of the last day as in the original itinerary.

May 15 Camel station, Abu Simbel (AM)

Only a short drive to the Camel station, we arrived at 07:45 and stayed until about 09:00.

Birds:

Spotted Sandgrouse 10 (including two adults with three pullus!), Crowned Sandgrouse 20 and White-crowned Black Wheatear 4.



Spotted Sandgrouse and Crowned Sandgrouse, Camel Station, Abu Simbel May 15 2003 ©

After this successful sandgrouse trip we searched Abu Simbel city for African Collared Dove but failed. This species is very unpredictable in Abu Simbel area, according to Mindy. Far from all birding visitors succeeds in finding it.

We spent midday poolside. We saw a really big heron sp. with long legs and heavy bill standing on a sand bank on the other side of Lake Nasser. Thinking of Goliath Heron, but it was too far away to make a safe identification.

Birds:

Osprey 2, Whiskered Tern 75 (going north) and Spotted Flycatcher 2.

May 15 Lake Nasser, Abu Simbel (PM)

We met the local fishermen (having a boat with a working engine) at 03:00. We sailed northwards for about three hours carefully scanning all the small islands, islets and sand banks we passed.

This boat trip was the most memorable event during the whole trip. Fantastic scenery! And so many interesting bird species. We also caught a glimpse of a Nile Crocodile but only brief.



Abu Simbel temple, view from Lake Nasser, Abu Simbel May 15 2003 ©

When we approached one of the last small islands before we had to turn back, we discovered a single bird with a very obvious red bill sitting on the sandy beach. We shook our heads and looked again. It can't be true...must be dreaming... Just a few hundred meters from us sits an African Skimmer. Turning the engine off we slowly glides closer. Trying to get some photos of the bird, by digital camera through the telescope. Hands are shaking; the boat is gliding too fast. Oh no, the bird takes off. But not flying away, instead flying closer to our boat. Circling around the boat! Another skimmer shows up and soon yet another one. Now three African Skimmers are circling around the boat. We are now using the normal camera. The fishermen are laughing. The skimmers are all over the place!!

After this euphoric experience we turned back. Watching the Egyptian sunset and passing the illuminated Abu Simbel Temple just a few minutes before this evenings Sound and Lightshow. Any Egyptian Nightjars feeding today? We'll never know.

Birds:

Pink-backed Pelican 7, Night Heron, Squacco Heron, Cattle Egret, Little Egret, Grey Heron, **Yellow-billed Stork 50**, **Egyptian Goose 30 (always pairs, and one pair with two pullus)**, Black Kite (few), Black-winged Stilt 20, Senegal Thick-knee 7, Spur-winged Plover (everywhere), calidris sp. (few, probably Little Stint), Lesser Black-backed Gull 4, Little Tern 75, Gull-billed Tern 50, Whiskered Tern 200 (probably much more), White-winged Black Tern 10, **African Skimmer 3**, Turtle Dove, Laughing Dove, Hoopoe, European Bee-eater, Crested Lark, Swallow, House Martin, African Rock Martin, **African Pied Wagtail 10**, White-crowned Black Wheatear 20, Olivaceous Warbler, Clamorous Reed Warbler and House Sparrow.



Yellow-billed Stork and Pink-backed Pelicans, Lake Nasser, Abu Simbel May 15 2003 ©



African Skimmers, Lake Nasser, Abu Simbel May 15 2003 ©

When we came back to the hotel, our guide Arabi had to say goodbye and immediately head back to Aswan. This might have been the real reason for the

postponing of the boat ride. He couldn't show us the Camel Station the last day as originally planned because he had something going on in Aswan. The only chance for him to show us the sandgrouse site morning time was the day before. This is pure speculation, but it makes sense, doesn't it? When later discussing the matter with Mindy, she told us that it really doesn't matter what time of the day you go boat riding/birdwatching on the lake Nasser.

Anyhow we saw all the species we had hoped for plus a very heavy "bonus species" – the African Skimmer!

May 16 Abu Simbel - Aswan – Cairo

We left the Nefertari hotel at 11:30 AM. It was incredibly hot, above 45°C. Went to the airport, took off, intermediate landing in Aswan (hot, but only about 42°C) and finally landed in a "chilly" Cairo (only 34°C). Assist and transfer to Novhotel, only three minutes drive from the airport.

May 17 Novhotel, Cairo

This was an undesired extra day in Egypt because the KLM had cancelled our original flight home. The KLM Company didn't even pay us back the money we had to pay for the extra hotel night... Compare this with the British Airways; they once compensated us 2 x £75 for "suffering from a malfunctioning TV-set" on a flight home in the middle of the night some years ago!

May 18 Cairo – Amsterdam – Stockholm – home.

After saying goodbye to the Travelline representative Mr Seif, we had a trouble free journey home.