

WP Euphoria in Egypt!



Lappet-faced Vulture. Photo: Klas Rådberg

Trip between 5-15 April 2006 conducted by:

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The birding hotspots of Egypt

Trip report 5-15th April 2006

Egypt has attracted more and more attention over the last years as a great destination for birdwatchers. A country suitable both for the more leisurely tourist/birdwatcher-kind of travelling and for the “WP-twitcher” who has lots of exclusive species to seek out.

During spring migration, a round trip in Egypt is an amazing experience. A big part of the mighty wave of birds that passes over famous Eilat can be seen along the Red Sea coast. Thousands of raptors and storks soars over the mountains, green areas are alive with passerines and flocks of herons, waders, gulls and terns are moving north along the coast.

I, Tomas Haraldsson, have been birding and living here for the last four winter seasons, usually October to April. I work as a freelance tour guide and also arrange birding trips through the Swedish tour company Nimbusresor. So in April 2006, I arranged a 10day-trip for a party of Swedish birders, Mikael Nelin, Klas Rådberg and Stefan Magnusson. With the aim of seeing as many of the Western Palearctic specialities as possible, and have some great birding along the way, I set up the itinerary as follows:

Day 1 – arrival at Cairo Airport. We headed straight down to the canal south of the city towards Sakkara. One night in Cairo.

Day 2 – early morning drive to the Abbassa area. Later we continued to Ain Sukhna and in the afternoon the last bit to Hurghada. One night in Hurghada.

Day 3 – the morning hours at the El Gouna golf course. During the day we drove (with some stops) down to Marsa Alam. Wadi Gemal and the hotel area. Two nights at Shams Alam Resort.

Day 4 – the whole day along the southern Red Sea coastline down to Bir Shalatein. Hamata and Wadi Lahami mangroves.

Day 5 – drive from Marsa Alam to Edfu with special permission and continue to Aswan. Afternoon visit to a site outside Aswan. One night in Aswan.

Day 6 – early morning drive with the convoy to Abu Simbel. The whole day on different sites there. One night in Abu Simbel.

Day 7 – morning in Abu Simbel, then with the 10 am-convoy back to Aswan and on to Luxor in the afternoon. Late afternoon visit to Crocodile Island. One night on Luxor.

Day 8 – the whole day around Luxor with bird sites and temple visits. Driving to Hurghada with the 6 pm-convoy. One night in Hurghada.

Day 9 – morning visit to Hurghada rubbish tip. Then the whole day with boat to a small island off Hurghada. At midnight bus transport to Cairo.

Day 10 – visits to Wadi Natrun and again to Abbassa. Afternoon in Cairo. One night in Cairo.

Day 11 – departure flight back to Sweden.

For hotels, transports, permissions, restaurants and so on, I arranged this in cooperation with the Swedish tour operator Nimbusresor and our agents here in Egypt. Please contact me for further information and more trips like this one.

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April 5th

After lots of correspondence via email and necessary preparations for the trip, I left El Gouna to meet the boys in Cairo. They were scheduled to land at 3 pm, so I had time for a visit to the famous raptor “café” in Ain Sukhna. Just where the mountains come all the way down to the sea, you have great views of the migrating raptors passing over the ridges. I only had about two hours here this day, but for a north European birder it’s just fantastic to sit here. Flocks of eagles with *Booted*, *Short-toed*, *Lesser Spotted* and *Steppe* seen together. Hundreds of *Steppe Buzzards* and some *Black Kites* and *Egyptian Vultures* and a single, huge *Griffon Vulture*.

Mikael, Klas and Stefan came smiling out from the arrival hall just before 3 pm. Welcome to Egypt! I had a taxi waiting for us and since the boys were almost overheated to get out in the field, we headed straight for the first target species. Just south of the city there is a canal along the road and here you might find both *Whitebreasted Kingfishers* and the elusive Senegal Coucal. The first one we found fairly easy, first a pair and then another pair further ahead! In this area we also got the first views of common species like *Fantailed Warbler*, *Graceful Warbler*, *Pied Kingfisher*, *Black Kite*, *Cattle Egret*, *Spur-winged Plover* and *Common Bulbul*.



White-breasted and Pied Kingfisher. Photos: Stefan Magnusson

We checked out a restaurant garden along the road to Sakkara and were really lucky to find a male *Semi-collared Flycatcher*, a rare passage migrant in Egypt. On the way back to the city we saw at least two *Black-shouldered Kites* and several *Senegal Thick-knees*, flying along the road. With the worst “birding needs” now satisfied, we went through the Cairo traffic to our hotel in Zamalek. A beautiful scene was played out as the sun set just behind the Giza pyramids, we are in Egypt now! The first meal of the trip was at Pizza Hut, just to be sure...



Semi-collared Flycatcher and Black-shouldered Kite. Photos: Stefan Magnusson

April 6th

Our day started as the *muezzin* called out from the minarets to the early morning prayer. Before dawn we were picked up by our taxi driver to go to Abbassa. This site is a 1.5 hour drive from central Cairo, so we planned to be there at 6 am. As we went through Bilbeis and on along the canal, the sun arose and we started seeing birds from the windows. Lots of *Cattle* and *Little Egrets*, *Pied Kingfishers*, some *Black-shouldered Kites* and at least 10 *White-breasted Kingfishers*. Nearing Abbassa, we saw heron colonies and fish ponds with lots of birds, and so we stopped at the first site and suddenly found ourselves surrounded by new bird encounters.

Several singing *Clamorous Reed Warblers*, many *herons* and *waders* in the ponds and both *Whitebreasted* and *Pied Kingfishers* around us. Klas spotted a male *Streaked Weaver* in the reeds, our only view of this escaped species. We walked slowly along a ditch when suddenly a small wader sneaked away and hid behind a turf, a male *Painted Snipe*! Yes, one of the target species. Wader calls alerted us on both *Marsh Sandpiper* and *Spotted Redshank* flying over the ponds and a gang of *Senegal Thick-knees* roosted on a wall. Overhead also *Blue-cheeked Bee-eater* passing, and more colour was added by two *Kingfishers* and displaying *Garganeys*.



Senegal Thickknee, photo: Klas Rådberg and *Streaked Weaver*, photo: Stefan Magnusson

Another stop in the same area failed this time to produce Senegal Coucal, but luckily that gap was filled later in the trip. Here we saw another heron colony with *Night* and *Squacco* Herons together with *Cattle* and *Little Egrets*.

It was time to head on south and down to Ain Sukhna, so our driver left us outside Cairo where I had left the rental car yesterday. A neat 1.5 hour drive to the raptor watchpoint and at 11:30 we seated ourselves at the café and just enjoyed the show... A lots of “wow!” and “whoa, look there!” was heard as Swedish birders were confronted with the Egyptian raptor migration. We stayed for about two hours here and counted at least 700 raptors, mainly *Steppe Buzzards* but also *Steppe* and *Lesser Spotted Eagles*, 30 *Booted*, 18 *Shorttoed* and a *Spotted Eagle*, and some *Egyptian Vultures* and *White Storks*.



Steppe Eagle. Photo: Klas Rådberg, Steppe Eagle mobbed by Brown-necked Raven. Photo: Stefan Magnusson

With some great experiences and almost dazed by the spectacle, we turned our car south and followed the Red Sea. On some places we drove just by the shoreline and our first *Crested Terns* were seen just off shore. Otherwise the desert sceneries were fairly empty birdwise. By the rest house in Zaafarana we took some lunch and filled up the tank. At the parking we had another first encounter, this time two *House Crows*. We saw them also as we passed Ras Gharib later in the afternoon. Further south towards Hurghada we saw some *Spotted Sandgrouses* along the road, but mostly flying. Here I was lucky also to spot a huge “cloud” over the mountains, which in the scopes proved to be a massive flock of *White Storks*, some two thousand birds! A shame about the distance though.

Just before sunset we arrived to El Gouna and made a short visit to the lagoon here. Some *Ringed Plovers* and *Curlews* were seen, two *Reef Herons* (one dark and one light morph together) and some more *Crested Terns* and *White-eyed Gulls* on a raft just off shore. At the end of a great first day, we checked in at our hotel in Hurghada.

April 7th

This morning we started at the El Gouna golf course, a man-made but very exciting site in this small resort just north of Hurghada. During migration time the fairways and scrubs are filled with passerines seeking food and shelter. Among hundreds of *Tree Pipits* and *Yellow Wagtails* we found many *Tawny* and *Red-throated Pipits* and two *Richards Pipits*, rare wintering birds here. We had a *Quail* in the open ground just in front of us, many *Woodchat Shrikes* and *Hoopoes*. *Isabelline Wheatears* and *Shorttoed Larks* and a nice male *Ortolan Bunting* were also seen.

After a bakery visit for some breakfast we drove south. Passing Hurghada and Safaga, we stopped along the road from time to time to scan for migrants and the resident desert birds. An *Eastern Bonellis Warbler* was found in some scrubs with *Chiffchaffs* and after a while there were shouts and panic as a male *Pallid Harrier* passed our car! Just after this one another male passed, and we felt quite lucky. We had just started up again as a *Collared Pratincole* came flying over the desert, looking lost, and a large *Lanner* flew past. A *Hoopoe Lark* was also seen along the road before we came to Shams Alam Resort, south of Marsa Alam. It was time for lunch and some rest.



Pallid Harrier and Eastern Bonelli's warbler. Photos: Klas Rådberg

In the afternoon we worked through Wadi Gemal just south of our resort. A desert site with many scrubs which can be really good for migrants and local desert birds. This time though we found only a *Black-eared Wheatear*, some *Stone Curlews* and a few *Chiffchaffs* but not much more. We walked across the road and looked through the area closest to the sea. A *Masked Shrike* took off and after a while there were some doves calling for our attention, they proved indeed to be *African Collared Doves*! They were not so cooperative though, but we would see them more. Another mega-species in WP.



African Collared Dove. Photo: Stefan Magnusson

The last hour of the day we posted ourselves at the resort looking over the sea. A warm evening with lots of migrants in the gardens around us, so great views were given of *Woodchat Shrikes*, *Wrynecks*, *Nightingales*, *Bluethroats* and *pipits*. Two *Arctic Skuas* passed far out over the sea as well as some *Sooty Gulls* and flocks of *Lesser Black-backed Gulls*. At night we summed it all up with a good buffet dinner and wrote down the records of the day.

April 8th

A real birder takes his breakfast in the field, so of course we took our precious “food boxes” and had our croissants and eggs out by the resort garden. *Savi’s Warblers*, *Masked Shrike* and *Black-eared Wheatears* rested on their way north and two *Crag Martins* were also seen, fairly rare down here.

Today’s target was to see the Lappet-faced Vultures and what else there might be in Bir Shalatein, and working our way down there. We stopped first along the road and scanned over the Hamata mangroves, a bit south of the resort. Stefan spotted a large bird over the sea which turned out to be a *Brown Booby* to especially Klas’ great delight. The far distance of this bird was made up by our visit to Wadi Lahami to the south, where another *Brown Booby* passed just off shore, wow! In our short visit here we also had three *Greater Sandpipers*, some *Reef Herons* and a magnificent, probably third cy *Great Black-headed Gull* passing us really close.

Continuing south, we passed a checkpoint which required my passport number and some waiting. But stopping here was good, because just at the roadside were two *Desert Larks* and on the guards hut, a male *Rock Thrush*. We headed on with the great desert sceneries along the road, our eyes sweeping the plains for sandgrouses and Cream-coloured Cursors. The most memorable stop along this stretch was when a young *Lanner* was sitting just a few meters from our car, but unfortunately took off before we caught it on film.

At 10:30 am we reached this little end-of-the-world village called Bir Shalatein. We had hardly turned in on the main road before a monster of a bird appeared in the distance, the day’s first but not last *Lappet-faced Vulture*. There were camel carcasses with some *Egyptian Vultures* feeding on them, and more vultures circling high in the sky. A *Barbary Falcon* landed on its nest in one of the pylons and a *Hoopoe Lark* ran across the road. We just drove a little bit before we had to stop for a mixed flock of *Lappet-faced* and *Egyptian Vultures* circling over our heads!



Lappet-faced Vulture and Egyptian Vulture. Photos:Klas Rådberg

Down at the harbour we tried to get out to the shore but the local military were persistent but friendly and told us this was a security area. Some *plovers*, *Little Stints* and *Turnstones* were feeding in front of us, but scanning the sea was not possible. We decided to turn back and put our efforts in the mangrove areas. After filling up the car and taking a last look at the huge vultures we drove north. Stefan proved sharp-eyed and spotted a *Cream-coloured Cursor* along the road, good stuff. In Marsa Hemira we turned down to the beach and looked through

the little mangrove area here. A *Purple Heron* (be a little bigger please...), two *Whimbrels* and some waders including two *Greater Sandplovers* were at the mud flats.

The vulture experiences were obviously not over yet, as we spotted three *Lappet-faced Vultures* feeding on a carcass by a checkpoint further north. And at Berenice we were totally awed as a pair of these enormous birds were standing just some fifteen meters from our car!

At the checkpoint in the mountains the Rock Thrush was gone but just after it we had a flock of 16 *Crowned Sandgrouse* just by the road. Close views of these beautiful birds were given before they took off with their typical call. At Wadi Lahami we really worked hard for Mr. Goliath but he was nowhere to be found. A *Striated Heron*, a *Little Bittern* flying past and some waders and *Caspian Terns* was the result. The settings are nice though with white sandy beaches and coral reefs offshore, but the price on that lunch could have been better...



Crowned Sandgrouse. Photo: Klas Rådberg

Our last efforts for the big heron, and our last birding in the southern Red Sea, was at the Hamata mangroves. The low evening sun and the calm sea made a great atmosphere. Several *Reef Herons*, a *Spoonbill*, *Grey* and *Greater Sandplovers* were feeding on the mud flats and *Sooty Gulls* were offshore. An adult *Peregrine* flew by a bit surprisingly.



Greater Sandplover and Spoonbill. Photos: Stefan Magnusson



Dark and pale morph of Reef Heron. Photo: Stefan Magnusson

At night we decided to try to visit the police station to get a permit for the Marsa Alam – Edfu road for tomorrow. The officers sounded positive and it looked like we should be able to make the crossing to the Nile Valley. But a return tomorrow was necessary to meet with the general who decided on these things. We returned to the resort and had another nice buffet dinner and a good night's sleep.

April 9th

At dawn, Stefan made a good discovery of a *Scops Owl* sitting on a wall in the resort garden. After breakfast and checkout from the resort we then went to the police station in Marsa Alam. We had to wait for a while until the big general himself turned up and I could talk to him. It all went well and we were allowed to drive ourselves to Edfu, but we had to bring one of the officers going on leave with us. Fantastic, as far as I know, no foreigners have been driving this road for many years.

The road soon started to wind through the mountains, the scenery changing from wadis to desert plains. We found a *Steppe Eagle* sitting on a rock, perhaps waiting for the thermals to start. At a promising looking area with many scrubs and some acacias, we stopped and swept through it on foot. Some migrants like a female *Redstart* and a *Northern Wheatear* were hiding in the shade under a tree and photos of a female wheatear that was almost certainly a Pied Wheatear is right now being examined.

We reached the Nile Valley at Edfu about lunchtime and had a short birding break where the desert turned into the green and fertile river valley. *Nile Valley Sunbirds* were in the bushes just as we stepped out of the car and Klas flushed a *Mangrove Heron* from the ditch next to us. Singing *Fantailed Warblers* and lots of *Crested Larks* and some *Little Green Bee-eaters* were also here. In the little farmers town itself we had a break at a small café with our officer, mister Ashraf, for a cup of tea. A true cultural experience with us being the only Westerners among donkey carts, farmers in *galabeya* and wagons with sugar cane.



Nile Valley Sunbird (alias "ejaculata"). Photo: Stefan Magnusson

We turned south and headed for Aswan, Ashraf stayed in our car to get us through the checkpoints. The agricultural areas were a nice change of scenery from the deserts we had seen over the last days. The farmers seemed to live basically the same kind of life as they did during the Pharaohs! Some birds were seen along the road, some *Little Green Bee-eaters*, a few *Black-shouldered Kites* and a nice flock of 40 *Spoonbills* migrating north along the Nile.

Finally we reached Aswan at 3 pm and took some lunch after saying goodbye to mister Ashraf. We spent the last two hours of daylight at an amazingly rich area south of the city, bays and inlets of the Nile between the Old and the New dam. A hundred *White Storks*

roosting by a little marsh, hundreds of *Whiskered* and *White-winged Black Terns* flying around, some waders including 20 *Black-winged Stilts*, a male *Ferruginous Duck* and a pair of *Egyptian Geese* (twitchable!). Small parties of *herons* flew past as well as 200 *Glossy Ibises* and our first *Purple Swamphens* were at a distant shoreline. We found two different *Orphean Warblers* in the trees and also had awesome views of male *Nile Valley Sunbirds*.



Glossy Ibises. Photo: Klas Rådberg

After sunset we drove back to Aswan and to our hotel there. Totally hammered after a long day and 400 km in the car, and the lunch pizza still felt in the stomach, we rounded up the day at a café outside the hotel. Tomorrow it was off to the magical Abu Simbel, and we were really lucky to get a special permission, since private cars are usually not allowed in the convoy. Klas tried a sheesha, water pipe, to the amusement of the rest of us...

April 10th

Since the convoy was to leave Aswan already at 4:30 am, we went up before 4 am and took our dear breakfast boxes. The car was still where we parked it and so we headed for the convoy stop just south of the city centre. Just on time the convoy started on the 280 km/2.5 hour long journey and sped off through the Nubian Desert. Mikael proved to be an excellent convoy driver who had no problem keeping pace with the bus drivers. Otherwise the drive was uneventful, and we arrived full of birding energy at 7 am.

After a short scan over a dried out dam, we drove through the village to the large bay behind the airport. Lots of *Black Kites* roosting here, *Masked* and *Woodchat Shrikes* and both *Bee-eaters* and *Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters* flying over. We had great views over Lake Nasser from the hill and felt the excitement of being at the southern frontier of Western Palearctic! Two *White Pelicans* lay on the lake, pairs of *Egyptian Geese* and flocks of *Gull-billed Terns* passed. Suddenly an *African Pied Wagtail* came into my field of view, flying away from us and the others saw it very bad unfortunately.

We drove a short bit to see the pelicans better, and as we parked to get out, a flock of storks passed behind us. In the binoculars they actually looked like Yellow-billed Storks, so panic broke out as four men wanted to get out and get their scopes at the same time! We ran up to a little crest, got the storks in the scope.....*Yellow-billed Storks*!! Eleven of these beautiful birds landed by the shoreline, so we went back to see them better. Great photos were taken before they took off and landed on the other side of the bay.



Yellow-billed Storks. Photo: Klas Rådberg and Stefan Magnusson



Yellow-billed Storks. Photo: Klas Rådberg

We searched some other small bays and inlets around the village for the rest of the day. *Barbary Falcons* were seen several times, an *Egyptian Vulture*, more *Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters*

and many *Olivaceous Warblers*. We visited the great rock temple built by Ramesses II in the afternoon, almost alone there and an awesome experience.

In the evening we returned to the large bay and spend the last daylight there. A flock of *Greater Flamingoes* were seen, some *Little Terns* and more *shrikes* and *bee-eaters*. After dinner at the hotel it was time for another target species; Egyptian Nightjar.

They are of course tricky to find and never guaranteed. We took a little drive and checked the places where it's been seen before, under street lights and illuminated backyards. Again we found ourselves by the parking to the large bay-site and had a look around there. After a while we had a short glimpse of bird that seemed to land on a roof, looking nightjar-like! We managed to flush it from there, ehrrm..., and as it flew around and suddenly landed on the ground, we advanced on it and soon stood a few meters from an *Egyptian Nightjar*!! One of the whole trip's most memorable moments; the little nightjar with the huge eye in the torchlight. We rewarded ourselves with a whiskey in the hotel bar after this day...



Blue-cheeked Bee-eater. Photo: Stefan Magnusson

April 11th

I, personally, can never sleep that good when I'm down here. Often so many good bird sightings from the day still in my mind to digest, and eager and expectant to get out there again the next day. So in the morning we took our breakfast boxes and sat down by the pool as the African sun rose over Lake Nasser. Some migrants in the garden and extremely close views of *Turtle Doves*, a *Purple Heron* passed by and as did flocks of *Gull-billed* and *Whiskered Terns*. I went to the edge and looked down on the small rock in the water, and away flew two *African Pied Wagtails*! They landed further away, and after some running for the scope, we all saw them fairly good. Great!

As we packed our gear and were about to leave the hotel, 18 *White Pelicans* passed north over our heads and a female *Rock Thrush* was in the garden, as to say goodbye for this time. We drove to the large bay-site and put our efforts there until the convoy should leave at 9:30 am. It felt like this was the place where it could happen. And it did... We spread out and searched the scrubs, shoreline and scanned over the lake. A flock of *White Pelicans* roosted on the water, a male *Montagues Harrier* passed north and two *Barbary Falcons* were seen. Further into the bay we found a younger *Yellow-billed Stork* roosting with some *Little Egrets* and *Egyptian Geese*.

Some of the younger pelicans yesterday looked a bit strange, and of course we all had *Pink-backed Pelican* in mind since we were down here. But they were *White Pelicans* for sure. Now two pelicans caught our attention, swimming towards the other shoreline and eventually getting up on it. They were indeed smaller than some *White* ones close by, and were grey-pinkish coloured. We almost didn't dare say it, but they looked very much like our sought-after bird. Stefan arrived with his 20-60x scope, and now we could see better the size and colour and best of all, the black spot in front of the eye; they really are *Pink-backed Pelicans*!!



Pink-backed Pelicans and Egyptian Geese. Photos: Stefan Magnusson

Feeling extremely lucky with some really great WP birds over the last 24 hours, we slowly walked towards the car. What a place! The convoy left on time and after a 2.5-hour "desert race" with the buses, we arrived at Aswan by lunchtime. Here we had time for a quick pizza before the next convoy was due to leave for Luxor. This time it was only a few vehicles in the convoy, and I believe our driver Klas enjoyed the VIP treatment of convoy driving!

The Nile Valley had some *Black-shouldered Kites*, *Little Green Bee-eaters* and *shrikes* along the way, and at about 5 pm we were approaching Luxor. We decided to spend the last 1.5 hour of daylight at the well-known site Crocodile Island. Good to be here and the next day we would be here again during our whole day in the area. We wandered around at the fields and lagoons, spotting some of the exclusive species here. *Senegal Thick-knees* were seen close, *Clamorous Reed Warblers* singing, *Night Herons* over us, many *Nile Valley Sunbirds* in the trees and in the reeds some *Avadavats*, another escaped but twitchable species. *Hoopoes* and *Masked Shrikes* in the evening sun are impossible not to be amazed by.

After sunset we headed in to Luxor and checked in at our hotel. An evening walk to the beautifully illuminated Luxor temple is a must-do whilst in Luxor, birder or not! After being

awed by the columns and huge statues of Ramses the Great, we walked to a restaurant in the bazaar area and had a nice dinner.

April 12th

A little slow start (its nearing the end of the trip..) and after breakfast in the restaurant (!) we drove to Crocodile Island to meet up with a local bird guide named Abdo. We parked by the main road and walked towards the little village on the island. First, just by the road, we caught glimpse of a *Rufous Bush Chat*. At the wet fields by the village we had great views of *Purple Swamphens* and many *Squacco Herons*, and *Black-shouldered Kites* were overhead. Abdo took us to the other side of the island where, at the wet fields, it was supposed to be Painted Snipes. He waded out in the muddy water, and flushed a pair of *Painted Snipes*! We then had stunning views of the colourful female. Here also *Striated Heron* at close range, *Marsh Sandpiper* and the sounds of a *Little Bittern*.



Female and male Painted Snipe. Photos: Stefan Magnusson

There is a well-known site for Namaqua Dove outside Luxor at Abdo's farmland. So he took us there and we spent quite a while searching the dry fields and semi-desert areas. No little dove but well several *Rufous Bush Chats*, *Masked Shrikes* and other "locals". After this hot and dusty experience we took a lunch break before heading over to the West Bank and Valley of the Kings. The archaeological sites here also have some target species like Hooded and Mourning Wheatear, but these birds proved impossible to find this day. We scanned the rocky hillsides, crests and small gorges, but no wheatears anywhere. A very unafraid flock of *Trumpeter Finches* were at the royal tombs and the tombs themselves are of course the big attraction here, not the wheatears, birder or not...



Trumpeter Finch. Photo: Klas Rådberg

In the late afternoon we went back to Luxor and visited the Karnak Temple, refuelled the car, had a McDonalds-meal and at 6 pm, the convoy left for Hurghada. After about four hours we were back in Hurghada and checked in at the hotel. Now we also left the rental car that had served us well during this trip. Some 2500 km in seven days, and still not complaining! We separated for the night and had an Hungarian birder taking the boys out to a ringing site the next morning.

April 13th

After a morning at the Hurghada rubbish tip, we met in the town and went together down to the harbour. *White-eyed* and *Sooty Gulls* stood by the beach as we entered a small motor boat that would take us out to the islands. A bird trip to Egypt is not complete without a trip to the archipelago off Hurghada. Even though it would be a bit early for Sooty Falcons, it is still some great birding to be had out there.



White-eyed Gulls and Sooty Gull. Photos: Klas Rådberg and Stefan Magnusson

Under the burning sun we sped over the blue-turquoise coral reefs towards a small island called Abu Minghar. Closing in to the shore we saw many more gulls and *Little Terns* around the sand spit. We had to get off the boat and wade ashore, but in this water, no problem! We based ourselves close to the waters edge in order not to disturb the bird life on the island. The

bay on the eastern side held a good variety of waders including *Greater Sandpipers*, a *Collared Pratincole*, three *Oystercatchers* (!) and many *Grey Plovers*. A *Booted Eagle* headed out to sea and flocks of *Common Terns* passed north.

A younger tern caught our attention as it proved to be a *White-cheeked Tern*, but this would strangely enough be the only one we would see this day. A nice *Arctic Skua* passed us and when the boys were in for a swim my shout “*Great Black-headed Gull* on the sand spit!” had them splashing out of the water to see the young gull standing among *White-eyed* and *Sooty Gulls*.



White-cheeked Tern and Great Black-headed Gull. Photos: Stefan Magnusson

Then sun was beating down on us really hard, and so in the afternoon we were picked up and taken back to the harbour. We took our last meal together on the restaurant Felfela with a great view over the islands and the sea with yet more *White-eyed Gulls* and another *Arctic Skua* passing. Some good-tasting Egyptian food and the evening sun over the Red Sea was a fitting end for our great trip together. Now the boys would take the night bus to Cairo to pursue some missing species and I would be the nice boyfriend as my mother-in-law was coming to visit!

April 14th

After leaving Tomas and spending the night on a shaky bus between Hurghada and Cairo, we were picked up by the taxi driver Hamada to make another try at Abbassa for *Senegal Coucal* and *Kittlitz Plover*. All three of us were tired and after 2 hours of fruitless search we nearly gave up. Mikael then took a strategic look at a Danish trip report and saw that the Coucal had been seen at different spots in the Abbassa area. At our first stop we walked along a reed wall until Stefan finally screamed; “*Senegal Coucal*” (but in Swedish)! Mikael also saw the bird but as Klas was two meters ahead of the others he missed it since the bird very quickly vanished into the vegetation. After half an hour in purgatory for Klas, Stefan shouted again and the big skulky Coucal flew up and perched three meters in front of Klas. What an euphoria and relief for all three of us!

After scenes of joy in front of some surprised Egyptian farmers the taxi took us to Wadi El Natrun and without any difficulties we found six *Kittlitz Plovers* at the first stop. Very happy and tired we went back to the hotel and enjoyed some well-deserved beers and a dinner.

April 15th

The first ordinary hotel breakfast during the whole trip was eaten after eleven hours of baby like sleep. Before the plane safely took us back to Sweden, we went to a barbers’ shop to get

shaved in order to come home with a decent look. To summarize; the whole trip was a very pleasant experience with 170 species and a lot of fun!

The total records from the trip

Egyptian Goose	a pair at the Aswan site on 9 th , at least 20 at Abu Simbel on 10-11 th
Shoveler	50 at Abu Simbel on 10-11 th
Garganey	4 at Abbassa on 6 th
Ferruginous Duck	1 male at the Aswan site on 9 th
Brown Booby	1 off Hamata and 1 passing Wadi Lahami on 8 th
White Pelican	many sightings in Abu Simbel 10-11 th , totally at least 70 birds
Pink-backed Pelican	2 at Abu Simbel on 11 th
Great Cormorant	a few sightings of single birds
Little Bittern	heard at Abbassa on 6 th , 1 flying south at Wadi Lahami on 8 th and heard at Crocodile Island on 12 th
Night Heron	mixed colonies with other herons at Abbassa on 6 th , also about 15 at the Aswan site on 9 th and a few birds each at Abu Simbel 10-11 th and Crocodile Island 11-12 th
Striated heron	1 at Wadi Lahami on 8 th , 1 near Edfu on 9 th and 3 at Crocodile Island on 12 th
Cattle Egret	common to very common in most habitats except desert areas
Squacco Heron	common at Abbassa and in the Nile Valley
Little Egret	common at Abbassa and in the Nile Valley
Western Reef Heron	seen many times along the Red Sea 6-8 th , maximum 7 at Hamata on 8 th
Great White Egret	2 at the Aswan site on 9 th
Grey Heron	fairly common at Abbassa and in the Nile Valley, 1 at Hamata on 8 th
Purple Heron	singles along the Red Sea on 7-8 th , 5 migr. north at the Aswan site on 9 th and singles at Abu Simbel on 10-11 th
Yellow-billed Stork	11 adults at Abu Simbel on 10 th and 1 younger bird there at 11 th
White Stork	20 migr. north at Ain Sukhna on 6 th , about 2.000 migr. north at Ras Gharib on 6 th , about 100 at the Aswan site on 9 th and 25 at Abu Simbel on 10 th
Glossy Ibis	1 migr. north at Ain Sukhna on 6 th and about 200 migr. north at the Aswan site on 9 th
Spoonbill	1 at Hamata on 8 th and 40 migr. north along the Nile on 9 th
Greater Flamingo	about 15 at Abu Simbel on 10 th
Lappet-faced Vulture	at least 15 at Bir Shalatein on 8 th , 1 at Marsa Hemira, 3 about 50 km north of Shalatein and a pair at Berenice also on 8 th
Egyptian Vulture	14 migr. north at Ain Sukhna on 6 th , at least 10 at Bir Shalatein on 8 th , 1 migr. north about 80 km north of Shalatein on 8 th and 1 at Abu Simbel on 10 th
Black Kite	fairly common around Cairo and at Aswan and Abu Simbel. 24 migr. north at Ain Sukhna on 6 th

Black-shouldered Kite	2 south of Cairo on 5 th and 2-3 at Abbassa on 6 th . Fairly common in the Nile Valley on 9 th and 11-12 th
Osprey	fairly common along the Red Sea on 6-8 th
Lesser Spotted Eagle	at least 62 migr. north at Ain Sukhna on 6 th
Greater Spotted Eagle	1 migr. north at Ain Sukhna on 6 th
Steppe Eagle	at least 95 migr. north at Ain Sukhna on 6 th , 1 west of Marsa Alam on 9 th
Short-toed Eagle	18 migr. north at Ain Sukhna on 6 th
Booted Eagle	30 migr. north at Ain Sukhna on 6 th , 1 migr. north at Abu Minghar, Hurghada on 13 th
Marsh Harrier	singles seen a few times in the Nile Valley on 9-12 th
Hen Harrier	1 female migr. north at the Aswan site on 9 th
Pallid Harrier	2 males migr. north about 40 km north of Quesir on 7 th
Montagues Harrier	2 males and a probable female migr. north at Abu Simbel on 10-11 th
Steppe Buzzard	at least 420 migr. north at Ain Sukhna on 6 th
Sparrowhawk	3 migr. north at Ain Sukhna 6 th , a few singles seen elsewhere
Kestrel	common
Merlin	1 at Sakkara south of Cairo on 5 th
Peregrine	1 adult at Hamata on 8 th
Lanner	about 10 seen along the southern Red Sea on 7-8 th , notably 3 together at Shams Alam Resort on 7 th !
Barbary Falcon	1 at nest in Bir Shalatein on 8 th and at least 2 (several sightings) at Abu Simbel 10-11 th
Quail	2 at El Gouna golf course on 7 th
Moorhen	fairly common at Abbassa and in the Nile Valley
Coot	a few seen at the Aswan site on 9 th
Purple Swamphen	6-7 at the Aswan site on 9 th and about 5 at Crocodile Island on 12 th
Oystercatcher	3 on Abu Minghar Island on 13 th
Black-winged Stilt	4 at El Gouna on 7 th , 20 at the Aswan site on 9 th , 7 at Abu Simbel on 11 th
Stone Curlew	4-5 at Wadi Gemal on 7 th
Senegal Thick-knee	15 south of Cairo on 5 th , about 10 at Abbassa on 6 th and 5 at Crocodile Island on 12 th
Cream-coloured Cursor	1 just north of Bir Shalatein on 8 th
Collared Pratincole	1 migr. north 30 km north of Quesir on 7 th , 1 on Abu Minghar on 13 th
Ringed Plover	fairly common along the Red Sea on 6-8 th
Little Ringed Plover	a few singles seen
Kentish Plover	fairly common along the Red Sea on 6-8 th
Kittlitz Plover	6 at Wadi Natrun on 14 th
Greater Sandplover	about 15 seen in the mangrove areas in the southern Red Sea 7-8 th

Grey Plover	some singles seen along the Red Sea 7-8 th and 25 on Abu Minghar on 13 th
Spur-winged Plover	common in most areas except the Red Sea coast
Turnstone	4-5 each at Bir Shalatein and Hamata on 8 th
Dunlin	a few birds seen
Temmincks Stint	10 at the Aswan site on 9 th
Little Stint	small numbers at Abbassa on 6 th and along the southern Red Sea on 8 th as well as about 50 at Abu Simbel on 10-11 th
Wood Sandpiper	a few seen
Green Sandpiper	a few seen
Common Sandpiper	fairly common along the Red Sea on 6-8 th
Redshank	low numbers seen along the Red Sea 6-8 th
Spotted Redshank	2-3 at Abbassa on 6 th , 1 at Hurghada dump 13 th
Greenshank	a few seen along the Red Sea on 6-8 th , at Abu Simbel 10-11 th and at Abu Minghar on 13 th
Marsh Sandpiper	1 at Abbassa on 6 th , 1 at Crocodile Island on 12 th , 1 at Abu Minghar on 13 th and 3 at Hurghada dump 13 th
Whimbrel	a few at Marsa Hemira and Hamata on 8 th and 4 on Abu Minghar on 13 th
Curlew	singles at the golf course and the lagoon in El Gouna on 6 th
Common Snipe	1 at the Aswan site on 9 th
Painted Snipe	1 male at Abbassa on 6 th and a pair at Crocodile Island on 12 th
Ruff	about 150 at Abbassa on 6 th and about 75 south of Ras Gharib on 6 th . Singles at El Gouna golf course on 7 th
Arctic Skua	2 migr. north at Shams Alam on 7 th and 2 (light morph) migr. north past Abu Minghar on 13 th
Black-headed Gull	fairly common in the Nile Valley with about 200 at the Aswan site on 9 th
Slender-billed Gull	a few at the lagoon in El Gouna on 7 th and 1 at the Aswan site on 9 th
Herring gull cachinnans/michahellis	a few seen along the Red Sea on 6-8 th
Lesser Black-backed Gull	some small migrating flocks along the Red Sea on 6-8 th
Great Black-headed Gull	1 probably 3cy passing north at Wadi Lahami on 8 th and 1 of the same age on Abu Minghar on 13 th
Sooty Gull	low numbers along the southern Red Sea on 7-8 th , about 15 at Hurghada/Abu Minghar on 13 th
White-eyed Gull	fairly common along the Red Sea 6-8 th and about 400 at Hurghada/Abu Minghar on 13 th
Little Tern	3 at Abu Simbel on 11 th and about 40 around Abu Minghar on 13 th
Common Tern	about 300 passing north at Abu Minghar on 13 th
White-cheeked Tern	1 subadult at Abu Minghar on 13 th
Caspian Tern	fairly common along the Red Sea, notably about 30 at Abu Minghar on 13 th
Crested Tern	singles along the Red Sea on 6-8 th and 1 off Hurghada on 13 th

Gull-billed Tern	many at Abu Simbel on 10-11 th with at least 150 migr. north and about 50 roosting.
White-winged Black Tern	about 50 at the Aswan site on 9 th
Whiskered Tern	1+7 in El Gouna on 7 th , about 200 at the Aswan site on 9 th and about 50 at Abu Simbel on 10-11 th
Spotted Sandgrouse	three smaller flocks, totally about 20 birds, between Ras Gharib and El Gouna on 6 th
Crowned Sandgrouse	16 at the checkpoint south of Wadi Lahami on 8 th
African Collared Dove	4-5 at Shams Alam/Wadi Gemal on 7 th -8 th
Turtle Dove	1 at Bir Shalatein on 8 th and common at Abu Simbel on 10-11 th
Laughing Dove	very common
Senegal Coucal	1 at Abbassa on 14 th
Scops Owl	1 at Shams Alam on 9 th
Egyptian Nightjar	1 at Abu Simbel in the evening on 10 th
Pallid Swift	fairly common around Cairo and in the Nile Valley
Hoopoe	fairly common
Kingfisher	2 at Abbassa on 6 th , 1 at Hamata on 8 th and 1 at Abu Simbel on 10 th
White-breasted Kingfisher	4 south of Cairo on 5 th , at least 10 Cairo-Abbassa on 6 th and 4-5 at Abbassa on 6 th
Pied Kingfisher	common around Cairo and Abbassa on 5-6 th and in the Nile Valley on 9-12 th
European Bee-eater	a few smaller flocks seen and heard on migration, notably at Abu Simbel on 10-11 th
Blue-checked Bee-eater	about 10 at Abbassa on 6 th , totally at least 45 at Abu Simbel on 10-11 th and some singles noted elsewhere
Little Green Bee-eater	fairly common in the Nile Valley, f.ex. at Crocodile Island
Wryneck	at least 5 at El Gouna golf course on 7 th , 3 at Shams Alam on 7 th and 2 at Abu Simbel on 10 th
Crested Lark	common around Cairo and in the Nile Valley
Short-toed Lark	about 50 at El Gouna golf course on 7 th and some smaller flocks along the road elsewhere
Desert Lark	2 at the checkpoint south of Wadi Lahami on 8 th
Hoopoe Lark	1 south of Quesir on 7 th , 1 at Bir Shalatein on 8 th and another along the road on 8 th
House Martin	fairly common
Sand Martin	fairly common in the migrating flocks of swallows and martins
Crag Martin	2 at Shams Alam on 8 th , the only ones positively identified
African Rock Martin	fairly common at several sites in the Nile Valley, especially at the West Bank in Luxor on 12 th
Barn Swallow	common, both <i>rustica</i> and <i>savignii</i>
Red-rumped Swallow	fairly common, often seen with the other swallows in mixed flocks
Tawny Pipit	seen at the green areas and resorts along the Red Sea on 6-8 th , notably about 25 at El Gouna golf course on 7 th
Richards Pipit	2 at El Gouna golf course on 7 th
Water Pipit	1-2 at Abbassa on 6 th

Tree Pipit	common with many migrating north and feeding at lawns and gardens, notably about 200 at El Gouna golf course on 7 th
Red-throated Pipit	fairly common but in low numbers, same areas as previous species
White Wagtail	common
Yellow Wagtail	common with many in gardens and on El Gouna golf course, mostly <i>flava</i> and <i>feldegg</i>
African Pied Wagtail	1 at Abu Simbel on 10 th and 2 there at 11 th
Common Bulbul	seen in gardens and such areas around Cairo and in the Nile Valley, seemed fairly common
Nightingale	at least 2 at Shams Alam on 7-8 th
Rufous Bush Chat	1 at Crocodile Island and 3-4 at the desert site SE of Luxor on 12 th
Bluethroat	several sightings at Abbassa, El Gouna golf course, Shams Alam and at Abu Simbel
Redstart	a few singles seen
Northern Wheatear	about 20 at El Gouna golf course, many singles elsewhere
Isabelline Wheatear	4-5 at El Gouna golf course, a few singles elsewhere
Black-eared Wheatear	3-4 at Shams Alam on 7-8 th , elsewhere some singles along the road
Mourning Wheatear	1 along the road SE of Cairo on 6 th
White-crowned Black Wheatear	about 5 between Marsa Alam and Edfu on 9 th , elsewhere only a few singles along the road but several at Abu Simbel on 10-11 th
Whinchat	a few seen
Rock Thrush	1 male at the checkpoint south of Wadi Lahami on 8 th , 1 male and 1 female at Abu Simbel on 11 th
Savi's Warbler	2-3 at Shams Alam on 7-8 th
Sedge Warbler	1 at Shams Alam on 8 th and also seen at Crocodile Island on 12 th
Reed Warbler	a few at Shams Alam on 7-8 th and at Hurghada rubbish tip on 13 th
Clamorous Reed Warbler	6-7 singing at Abbassa on 6 th and several singing at Crocodile Island on 12 th
Olivaceous Warbler	very common at Abu Simbel on 10-11 th
Orphean Warbler	2 at the Aswan site on 9 th
Lesser Whitethroat	fairly common
Whitethroat	1 at Shams Alam on 7-8 th
Graceful Warbler	common around Cairo and in the Nile Valley down to Abu Simbel
Fan-tailed Warbler	common around Cairo and in the Nile Valley
Eastern Bonellis Warbler	1 south of Safaga on 7 th and 1 at Hurghada dump 13 th
Willow Warbler	some singles seen
Chiffchaff	common
Semi-collared Flycatcher	1 male in a restaurant garden near Sakkara, south of Cairo on 5 th
Woodchat Shrike	fairly common along the road, seen in almost every green area along the Red Sea, notably 5-6 at El Gouna golf course. About 10 at Abu Simbel on 10-11 th
Masked Shrike	not as often seen as previous species, but several at Shams Alam on 7-8 th and quite common in the Nile Valley, 5-6 at Abu Simbel on 10-11 th
Nile Valley Sunbird	seemed fairly common in the Nile Valley, especially at Crocodile Island on 11-12 th

Common Crow	common
House Crow	2 at Zaafarana on 6 th and about 20 at Ras Gharib on 6 th
Brown-necked Raven	common in desert areas, about 50 at the rubbish tip in Abu Simbel on 10-11 th
House Sparrow	common
Spanish Sparrow	fairly common
Trumpeter Finch	1 male at the Aswan site on 9 th and about 40 at the Valley of the Kings in Luxor on 12 th
Ortolan Bunting	1 male at El Gouna golf course on 7 th



Four happy Swedish birders! Photo: unknown Egyptian gard in Abu Simbel