

PEREGRINE BIRD TOURS

BOCA tour to EGYPT

11th – 26th September 2009

TOUR REPORT

LEADER: Chris Doughty

Egypt has it all; good birding, ancient antiquities, plenty of sunshine and first rate accommodation. In short, it is a splendid destination. The tour had been specifically timed to coincide with the peak of the autumn migration, when literally thousands of Northern Palearctic birds were making their way through Egypt, to wintering grounds further to the south in Africa. We were not to be disappointed; as it often appeared to us that there were migrant birds literally in every bush! Around Lake Quarun, in the El Fayoum Oasis, highlights included Common Ringed Plover, Spotted and Common Redshanks, Marsh and Curlew Sandpipers and White-throated Kingfisher. In the deserts of Sinai highlights included Desert Lark, Yellow-vented Bulbul, Thrush Nightingale, Blackstart, White-crowned, Mourning, Desert and Isabelline Wheatears, Streaked Scrub-Warbler, Palestine Sunbird, Woodchat Shrike, Tristram's Starling, Sinai Rosefinch and Cretzschmar's Bunting. In areas around the Red Sea highlights included Western Reef-Heron, Black Stork, Levant Sparrowhawk, Sooty Falcon, Greater Sandplover, Common Snipe, Ruddy Turnstone, Heuglin's and White-eyed Gulls, Sandwich, Common, White-cheeked and Bridled Terns, European Nightjar, Common Kingfisher, Black-eared Wheatear, Common Whitethroat, House Crow and Striolated Bunting. In Upper Egypt we enjoyed birding close to the ancient monuments, where highlights included Great Egret, Eurasian Spoonbill, Egyptian Goose, Northern Shoveler, Ferruginous Pochard, Short-toed Eagle, Eurasian Sparrowhawk, Eurasian and Long-legged Buzzards, Red-footed Falcon, African Purple Swamphen, Senegal Thick-knee, Little Ringed Plover, Bluethroat, Clamorous Reed-Warbler, Olivaceous and Garden Warblers, Lesser Grey Shrike and two afro-tropical species, Namaqua Dove and African Pied Wagtail. It was not hard to pick out the mammal highlight of the tour, no, it was not the House Mouse or the Brown Rat, it was a splendid adult female Nubian Ibex, with a youngster. We were extremely fortunate to see this very uncommon species of mammal at all, but to see it so well, was indeed a very special moment of the tour.

We began our tour in Cairo, the most populous city in the world, with a daytime population of 22 million but only 18 million by night. From Cairo we drove southwest through the Western Desert to lake Quarun, in the El Fayoum Oasis. While driving through the sprawling suburbs of Cairo we found typical Egyptian birds, which included Cattle Egret, Eurasian Kestrel, Feral Pigeon, Laughing Dove, Rock Martin, Hooded Crow and House Sparrow.

From Cairo we drove to Lake Quarun in the El Fayoum Oasis where we enjoyed birding the afternoon and the morning of the following day. The birding was very good here and

we had a great time birding along the edge of the lake and amongst its many fish ponds. We saw Grey and Squacco Herons, Little Egret, Black-shouldered Kite, Common Moorhen, Black-winged Stilt, Spurwinged Lapwing, Common Ringed and Kentish Plovers, Black-tailed Godwit, Spotted and Common Redshanks, Marsh, Green, Wood, Common and Curlew Sandpipers, Little Stint, Dunlin, literally hundreds of Slender-billed Gulls, Little, Whiskered and White-winged Terns, Eurasian Collared-Dove, Pied Kingfisher, Little Green Bee-eater, stunning Eurasian Hoopoes, Crested Lark, Sand Martin, Barn Swallow, Yellow Wagtail, Whinchat, Spotted Flycatcher, Zitting Cisticola, Graceful Prinia, Sedge Warbler and Southern Grey Shrike.

We were also very pleased to find two splendid Little Bitterns who flew above the reedbed showing the pink in their wings very well before dropping into another section of the same reedbed. Another highlight here was a couple of White-throated Kingfishers who showed particularly well, as they sat on nearby telegraph wires, this is the only place in Africa, where this Asian species occurs. Just on dusk, an immature Black-crowned Night-heron flew over.

We then headed back into the busy streets of Cairo where we wandered around the great pyramids and the Great Sphinx, where we saw our first mammal of the tour; we had a very tame House Mouse at our feet. In the garden of our hotel in Cairo, we saw our first Common Bulbul of the tour.

Leaving Cairo behind we traveled east into the Eastern Desert, at one of the gorges along the route we drove very slowly, looking for birds as we did so. This proved very rewarding, as we enjoyed good looks at a few Desert Larks, a couple of stunning White-crowned Wheatears, a couple of equally stunning Mourning Wheatears, a very attractive adult male Desert Wheatear, in full breeding plumage and a few Brown-necked Ravens. On arrival at the town of Suez, at the southern end of the famous Suez Canal, we were greeted by dozens of House Crows. While having lunch on the top floor of the Red Sea Hotel, we could watch the ships passing through the Suez Canal. Following lunch we went birding at three different areas of mudflats on the outskirts of town. This also proved very rewarding; as we found large flocks of Grey Plovers, many of which were still in full breeding plumage, we also found a solitary Greater Sandplover, a few flocks of Eurasian Curlews, a couple of Ruddy Turnstones, still sporting their very attractive breeding plumage, we found a single Ruff and a few Caspian Gulls, a recent split from Yellow-legged Gull. We also saw a single Lesser Black-backed Gull, an adult Heuglin's Gull together with an immature; this bird is a recent split from Lesser Black-backed Gull. There were also large numbers of Gull-billed Terns, large numbers of Caspian Terns, a single Lesser-crested Tern, a couple of Sandwich Terns, a fairly large flock of Common Terns and a solitary White-cheeked Tern, in full breeding plumage. We had done very well indeed along the mudflats at Suez; we then drove to nearby Ain Sukhna, where we spent the night at a very comfortable hotel.

The following day while our suitcases were being loaded onto the bus at our hotel in Ain Sukhna we added European Bee-eaters, which were flying overhead, a solitary Isabelline Wheatear and a few Lesser Whitethroats. We then drove to the Ahmed Hamdi Tunnel which passes under the Suez Canal and comes out at the Sinai Peninsula, in Asia. A

quick stop at the Springs of Moses, produced a couple of new birds for the tour, which included Tawny Pipit and Red-backed Shrike. We had lunch at a small cafe at Ras Abu Rudeis. This was close to a small very scruffy looking roundabout which had a few sorry looking dead and dying trees in the middle. To our surprise, they held no less than three different species of shrikes! We found Red-backed, Woodchat and Masked Shrikes; this was a real treat for us all. We also enjoyed splendid looks at a very confiding Eurasian Reed-Warbler, with no water for miles around. We saw a very beautiful Eurasian Golden Oriole and best of all there was a Thrush Nightingale skulking in dense cover. In the afternoon we visited the palm-lined gardens of Wadi Feiran, a Bedouin settlement nestled in the pink granite mountains of southern Sinai. Here we found our two main target birds; Yellow-vented Bulbul and the very attractive Blackstart. Other new birds included a pair of obliging Greater Short-toed Larks and an immature Northern Wheatear. In the grounds of our hotel at St. Catherine's Monastery, we found a couple of Palestine Sunbirds.

We spent the first part of the following morning birding around the ancient monastery of Saint Catherine, in the shadow of Mount Sinai at 1,450 metres. The birding was very good here and we quickly found most of our target birds. We found a flock of Sinai Rosefinches in the carpark, but unfortunately, all the birds were females or immature males. Shortly after leaving the carpark we were able to watch a small group of Streaked Scrub-Warblers scuttling from bush to bush on the stony desert floor. The gardens of the monastery act as a migrant trap and here we found a couple of Common Chiffchaffs, a large flock of the endemic Tristram's Starlings and three first winter Cretzschmar's Buntings. We then enjoyed a guided tour around the monastery itself and were able to view many of the religious icons that are kept in the museum. Following lunch we drove down towards the tip of the Sinai Peninsula to overnight at Sharm El Sheikh. We had a quick stop at the local sewage farm where we enjoyed our first Western Reef-Heron, an immature bird molting into adult plumage; we saw a solitary Glossy Ibis and a single Common Snipe. There were also hundreds of White Storks pausing on their way south. We also enjoyed a large flock of migrating European Bee-Eaters.

We started off the following day by birding in the grounds of our hotel at Sharm El Sheikh; there had obviously been a large movement of *hirundineus* during the night and as well as the usual Barn Swallows and Sand Martins, we enjoyed watching several House Martins and a solitary Red-rumped Swallow. We then spent the rest of the morning birding in the Ras Mohammed National Park, at the southern tip of the Sinai Peninsula. In the mangroves here we found a few Striated Herons, this is the only place in the Western Palearctic where this species occurs and we also added another resident species here, when we had a quick look at a solitary Striolated Bunting. We also found our first Common Kingfishers here, which are winter visitors to Egypt. We also found that there had been a large fall of Northern Wheatears overnight and it seemed as though they were perched on every rock in the park! However, there had also been a fall of much rarer birds during the night and we were very pleased and excited to watch the following uncommon migrants from Europe. An adult male Pallid Harrier was a real treat, as was an immature Levant Sparrowhawk which flew close by us. We also saw a couple of Willow Warblers, which were flitting around just a few metres away from us.

Amongst the many Northern Wheatears we found a stunning adult male Black-eared Wheatear, which we all enjoyed a great deal. Later in the morning as we were driving along in our bus when Michael suddenly shouted nightjar, the bus emptied in a millisecond and we were able to watch a European Nightjar fly past us and land on the ground some metres away. We were able to walk towards the nightjar, where we enjoyed splendid scope views of this gem amongst birds. As we were returning to our hotel in Sharm El Sheikh for lunch we came to a screeching halt when we found an immature European Roller perched on the wire fence of a basketball court. A quick look at the Sharm El Sheikh sewage farm, produced several hundred White Storks and a new bird for the tour, a pair of immature Black Kites. Following lunch we drove to the port of Sharm El Sheikh, where we would take the ferry across the Red Sea to Hurghada and back to Africa. As we were lining up to embark on the ferry an adult White-eyed Gull flew overhead. As we were sailing out of the harbour an Osprey was perched on a light beacon on the cliffside.

Early morning birding in the gardens of our very comfortable hotel yielded various migrants drawn to this island of green, on the desert coast. There were large flocks of European Bee-eaters, Yellow Wagtails and Greater Short-toed Larks but the only new bird for the tour was a European Honey-buzzard which came in off the sea and flew over our heads. Much of the day was then taken up by a boat cruise where we visited a few offshore islands at the entrance to the Gulf of Suez. Amongst the many hundreds of White-eyed Gulls, Lesser-crested and White-cheeked Terns, we managed to pick out a solitary Black Stork, a solitary Western Marsh-Harrier, a solitary Greater-crested Tern and a couple of Bridled Terns. We stopped at one of the islands where some of the group enjoyed a little some snorkeling, some of us went for a walk on the island where we found many migrant birds sitting on fence posts and rocks. They were mainly Northern Wheatears, Spotted Flycatchers and Red-backed Shrikes, however, we also enjoyed watching a European Turtle-Dove, walking around just in front of us and we also saw a very nice looking immature Isabelline Shrike. It was proving to be a great day, however, the best was yet to come. As we were walking on the island we enjoyed our second sighting of the day, of the extremely range restricted Sooty Falcon, who was zooming around the island, attempting to catch one of the many migrant birds, who were resting up, on the island.

As usual, we started the following day off with a walk around the grounds of our hotel, in Hurghada. Overnight there had been a large fall of Yellow Wagtails, Greater Short-toed Larks, Willow Warblers and Red-backed Shrikes. We did find one new species of bird for the tour, a solitary Common Whitethroat, who unfortunately, was very furtive and did not show particularly well at all. Following breakfast, we visited El Gouna Farm, which is also a great migrant trap. Amongst the dozens of migrants on show here, new birds included a stunning Rufous Bush-Robin who showed particularly well, we also glimpsed a Common Stonechat in this area. We then drove through the barren but dramatic Red Sea Coastal Range, where our vehicle came to a screeching halt as our local guide Abdullah, pointed out two very rarely seen Nubian Ibex, a mother with her youngster. We had super looks as they effortlessly climbed up a nearby shear cliff face. This was a real treat for us. We continued through the bleak Eastern Desert beyond the coastal

range, where we saw three very close Western Marsh-Harriers. On our arrival at Luxor, we drove to our hotel on Crocodile Island, an Island in the Nile River. In the late afternoon a walk around the island produced the following new birds; a beautiful Purple Heron, a female Eurasian Teal, a couple of Yellow-billed Kites, a pair of range restricted Senegal Thick-knees, a solitary Pallid Swift and the flowering trees in the garden were host to a pair of extremely range restricted Nile Valley Sunbirds.

The following day was spent sightseeing as we visited the very barren Valley of the Kings, visiting several tombs, before moving on to the impressive Temple of Queen Hapshepsut, the Colossi of Memnon, built in honour of Amunhotep, the builder of Luxor Temple, the Temple of Karnak and finally Luxor Temple. While at the Valley of the Kings there was a large movement of raptors on migration; the flock consisted mainly of Eurasian Buzzards, but in amongst them we managed to identify a couple of Long-legged Buzzards, a beautiful adult male Pallid Harrier and a magnificent European Honey-buzzard, which passed by just a few metres away from us. From the Valley of the Kings we could look across the Nile to Luxor on the West Bank and we began to appreciate why the Nile was Egypt and Egypt is the Nile; beyond the narrow strip of greenery, there is only the harshest desert.

We started the following day with a pre-breakfast birding walk around Crocodile Island, the island on which our hotel was situated, in the Nile River. It proved particularly rewarding; new birds for the tour included a migrating Eurasian Sparrowhawk, an African Purple Swamphen, a couple of Clamorous Reed-Warblers, a solitary Eastern Olivaceous Warbler and a superb adult male Red Avadavat, in full breeding plumage. We then continued our journey southwards, driving along the highway through the cultivated Nile Valley and on to Aswan. We broke the long drive with a quick stop at the Daraw Camel Market, where a small population of the Afro-tropical Namaqua Dove, had recently been discovered. We were very pleased to find two immature Namaqua Doves feeding on the ground in the camel market. In the afternoon we enjoyed a superb boat trip around the first cataract on the Nile River, at Aswan. We will long remember the trip for the huge numbers of Little Bitterns that we saw, almost 20. This was just one of eight species of herons we saw during the boat trip. We were also very pleased to find two new species of birds for the tour; we found a large flock of up to 60 Egyptian Geese, as well as a surprise find of a pair of Ferruginous Pochards, a very rare visitor this far south in Egypt.

The following morning we drove to the world famous Aswan High Dam. This amazing piece of engineering created the world's largest man made lake, 350 kilometres long. In a small picnic ground on top of the dam wall a superb, adult male Ruppell's Warbler suddenly popped into view, unfortunately, it was not particularly co-operative and it soon disappeared amongst a grove of trees. We then had a pleasant visit to the Philae Temple, a greeko-roman temple, on a small island in the Nile River. Moving on, we were obliged to join a convoy of buses which was escorted by policemen across the Western Desert and on to Abu Simbel. We made one quick toilet stop during the 300 kilometre drive, at a rather basic building which had a few cacti growing outside. We found three migrant birds sitting in the shade of an old bed; one was a Common Chiffchaff, another a Willow

Warbler and the third was an adult Bluethroat in breeding plumage. Unfortunately, it too was very skittish and we were herded back onto our bus by our machine-gun welding policeman, before we could have a good look at it. On our arrival at Abu Simbel we enjoyed a guided tour of the world famous temple, followed by a very enjoyable sound and light show.

We spent all of the next day birding along the shore of Lake Nasser, at Abu Simbel, home of the great temple of Rameses II and close to the border with Sudan. The heat was intense as we scoured the shoreline of Lake Nasser, where new birds included a solitary Great Egret, a small flock of Eurasian Spoonbills, a female Northern Shoveler, an adult Short-toed Eagle, an immature Red-footed Falcon, an immature Little Ringed Plover, a singing African Pied Wagtail, a solitary Garden Warbler and an immature Lesser Grey Shrike. Abu Simbel was a fitting climax to the tour; we saw more birds here than any other place in Egypt and none of us will be able to forget the magnificent temple, which was created by the generous of the ancients and then moved to higher ground by the marvel of modern engineering. Abu Simbel offered a good snapshot of the tour as a whole; a rich mosaic of great birds, combined together with enchanting antiquities.

Our last night of the tour was spent at a very fine hotel, close to the airport in Cairo. The following morning we managed to add one further bird to our tour list, thanks to Michael, who found an adult Common Redstart in breeding plumage, which we all managed to see very well indeed.

SYSTEMATIC LIST

ARDEIDAE

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea* Large numbers observed throughout the tour.

Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea* Small numbers present throughout the latter part of the tour.

Great Egret *Ardea alba* The only Great Egrets that occur in Egypt are migrants from Europe and they normally only occur along the Mediterranean coast of Egypt. Very small numbers do occasionally migrate across the Sahara to winter in tropical Africa. So we were fortunate to find a solitary bird along the shores of Lake Nasser, at Abu Simbel.

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta* Regularly encountered throughout the tour.

Western Reef-Heron *Egretta gularis* Small numbers present on the Red Sea coast.

Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides* Good numbers present in most wetland areas.

Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis* Commonly encountered along the Nile, but not elsewhere.

Striated Heron *Butorides striatus* A small party was observed well in the Ras Mohammed National Park, on the Sinai Peninsula and small numbers were also seen during the boat trip around the 1st cataract, on the Nile River, at Aswan. This is the only area in the Western Palearctic where this species occurs

Black-crowned Night-Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax* Seen well on a number of occasions.

Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus* A couple were seen well in reedbeds close to Lake Quarun, in the El Fayoum Oasis, followed by sightings of almost 20 birds during our boat trip on the Nile River, around the 1st cataract at Aswan.

CICONIIDAE

Black Stork *Ciconia nigra* A single migrant was observed well during our boat trip around the small islands at the entrance to the Gulf of Suez.

White Stork *Ciconia ciconia* We saw our first, a solitary bird, close to the small township of Nbaq, on the Sinai Peninsula. This sighting was followed by up to 2,000 birds at the Sharm El Sheikh Sewage Farm and we also enjoyed smaller numbers along the shore of Lake Nasser, at Abu Simbel.

THRESKIORNITHIDAE

Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus* We enjoyed a few good sightings throughout the tour.

Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia* A flock of six birds were seen well on the last full birding day of the tour, along the shore of Lake Nasser, at Abu Simbel.

ANATIDAE

Egyptian Goose *Alopochen aegyptiacus* Small numbers were seen on our boat trip around the 1st cataract on the Nile River, at Aswan, followed by sightings of large flocks at Lake Nasser, at Abu Simbel.

Eurasian Teal *Anas crecca* A single female was observed well in the scope, on Crocodile Island, in the Nile River, at Luxor.

Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata* A single female was observed well in the scope, on the shores of Lake Nasser, at Abu Simbel.

Ferruginous Pochard *Aythya nyroca* This species is a migrant from Europe and western Asia. Each year small numbers winter in the Sudan and Ethiopia, where numbers have been steadily decreasing in recent years. We saw two birds at very close quarters during our boat trip around the 1st cataract, on the Nile River, at

Aswan.

PANDIONIDAE

Osprey *Pandion haliaetus* Several good observations throughout the tour.

ACCIPITRIDAE

European Honey-buzzard *Pernis apivorus* This species is a winter migrant from Europe, the majority of birds migrate to Africa via the Straits of Gibraltar and winter mainly in western equatorial Africa. Only small numbers migrate through Egypt, on their way to their wintering grounds in East Africa. Therefore, we were very fortunate to enjoy two sightings of this attractive species of raptor. Julie and Chris saw one bird fly in off the sea and over their heads in the grounds of our hotel at Hurghada. We all enjoyed a second, very good sighting, of a solitary, adult bird, flying over the Valley of the Kings, at Luxor.

Black-shouldered Kite *Elanus caeruleus* Regular encounters throughout the tour.

Black Kite *Milvus migrans* This European migrant was observed at regular intervals throughout the tour and large numbers were loafing around the shores of Lake Nasser, at Abu Simbel.

Yellow-billed Kite *Milvus aegyptius* This resident, African endemic was seen well on Crocodile Island, in the Nile River, at Luxor.

Short-toed Eagle *Circaetus gallicus* An uncommon European migrant in Egypt, we saw one bird extremely well at Lake Nasser, at Abu Simbel. Most European birds prefer to migrate through western Europe, through the Straits of Gibraltar. Smaller numbers migrate along the eastern edge of the Mediterranean Sea and through Suez, which is what our bird had done.

Western Marsh-Harrier *Circus aeruginosus* We saw good numbers of migrating birds throughout our time in Egypt.

Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus* This species is an uncommon passage migrant through Egypt, from breeding grounds in western Asia. It winters mainly south of the Sahara. In recent years numbers have been greatly reduced which is probably due to destruction of breeding habitat in western Asia. We were very fortunate to enjoy three separate sightings of single birds during the tour. The first sighting was of an adult male sitting on the ground in Ras Mohammed National Park, at the southern tip of the Sinai Peninsula, the second sighting was also of an adult male amongst a large flock of migrating buzzards, over the Valley of the Kings, the third sighting was of a single immature, flying along the shores of Lake Nasser, at Abu Simbel.

Levant Sparrowhawk *Accipiter brevipes* Another uncommon migrant, we saw a single immature bird at the very tip of the Sinai Peninsula, in Ras Mohammed National Park.

Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus* A single, immature bird, was present amongst a flock of raptors, migrating southwards above Crocodile Island, in the Nile River, at Luxor.

Eurasian Buzzard *Buteo buteo* Small groups seen on migration flying over the Valley

of the Kings and Crocodile Island, at Luxor and over Lake Nasser, at Abu Simbel.

Long-legged Buzzard *Buteo rufinus* This species is a very scarce passage migrant in Egypt, from breeding grounds in central Europe and central Asia. Very small numbers winter annually in East Africa. We saw a couple of birds amongst a flock of migrating Eurasian Buzzards, flying over the Valley of the Kings, in Luxor and the following day, we saw a couple more in another migrating flock of Eurasian Buzzards.

FALCONIDAE

Eurasian Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* This is a resident species in Egypt and we saw it on every day of the tour.

Red-footed Falcon *Falco vespertinus* A lone immature bird, flew right by us, along the shore of Lake Nasser, at Abu Simbel. It was a beautifully marked bird.

Sooty Falcon *Falco concolor* This stunning species of falcon, was not surprisingly, voted 'Bird of the tour', by tour participants. Our first encounter with this species, was of a fast-moving bird seen during our boat trip around the islands at the entrance to the Gulf of Suez. Our second, much better sighting, took place on one of the islands, while some of the group were snorkeling close by. We enjoyed a third, somewhat distant sighting, while we were watching the two Nubian Ibex we saw in the Eastern Desert.



Sooty Falcon

RALLIDAE

African Purple Swamphen *Porphyrio madagascariensis* Seen well at Crocodile Island, in the Nile River, at Luxor and again later in the day, during our boat trip around the 1st cataract on the Nile River, at Aswan.

Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus* A common resident throughout the Nile Valley of Egypt, they had obviously had a good breeding season, as there were many young birds present amongst the adults.

RECURVIROSTRIDAE

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus* This well known species is a passage migrant in Egypt; we found a small flock at Lake Quarun, in the El Fayoum Oasis and a couple of birds on Crocodile Island, in the Nile River, at Luxor.

BURHINIDAE

Senegal Thick-knee *Burhinus senegalensis* This resident species was seen particularly well on a number of occasions.

CHARADRIIDAE

Spur-winged Lapwing *Vanellus spinosus* Good numbers present throughout the tour.

Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola* Large flocks made up mainly of birds in breeding plumage, were present on the mudflats at Suez.

Common Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula* Large numbers were present at Lake Quarun, in the El Fayoum Oasis and on the mudflats at Suez.

Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius* A solitary immature bird was observed along the shore of Lake Nasser, at Abu Simbel.

Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus* Present in most wetland areas we visited.

Greater Sandplover *Charadrius leschenaultii* A single bird was observed on the mudflats at Suez and a few birds were also present on the mudflats in the Ras Mohammed National Park, at the very tip of the Sinai Peninsula.

SCOLOPACIDAE

Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago* A single bird was observed at very close quarters, during our visit to the Sharm El Sheikh Sewage Farm.

Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa* We saw three birds together at Lake Quarun, in the El Fayoum Oasis, this sighting was followed by the observation of a single bird at the Sharm El Sheikh Sewage Farm.

Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata* Small numbers were present on the mudflats at Suez and on the mudflats in the Ras Mohammed National Park.

Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus* Small numbers of this attractive species were observed at Lake Quarun, in the El Fayoum Oasis.

Common Redshank *Tringa tetanus* Good numbers at Lake Quarun, in the El Fayoum Oasis and on the mudflats at Suez.

Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis* Small numbers encountered at Lake Quarun, in the El Fayoum Oasis and along the shore of Lake Nasser, at Abu Simbel.

Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia* Good numbers present throughout most wetland areas.

Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus* Singles at Lake Quarun, in the El Fayoum Oasis and at Lake Nasser, at Abu Simbel.

Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola* Small numbers present in a number of wetland areas.

Common Sandpiper *Actitis macularia* Ones and two here and there and then good

numbers observed during our boat trip around the 1st cataract, on the Nile River, at Aswan.

Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres* This attractive species is a passage migrant and winter visitor to Egypt. Small numbers of birds winter along the Gulf of Suez and the Red Sea Coast, from breeding grounds on the north coast of central Siberia. We were very fortunate to find a few birds, still showing lots of breeding plumage, along the mudflats at Suez.

Little Stint *Calidris minuta* Very numerous at Lake Quarun, in the El Fayoum Oasis, where it was the commonest wader and small numbers elsewhere.

Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea* This species is an uncommon passage migrant through Egypt to wintering grounds in sub-Saharan Africa. Therefore we were fortunate to find small numbers of migrants at Lake Quarun, at El Fayoum Oasis and on the mudflats at Suez, all were in non-breeding plumage.

Dunlin *Calidris alpina* Small numbers scattered throughout a number of wetlands we visited.

Ruff *Philomachus pugnax* Small numbers observed in a number of wetlands, before finding small flocks along the shore of Lake Nasser, at Abu Simbel.

LARIDAE

White-eyed Gull *Larus leucophthalmus* This Red Sea endemic proved to be very common anywhere around the Red Sea coast.

Caspian Gull *Larus cachinnans* Small numbers were present on the mudflats at Suez. This species has been split off from Yellow-legged Gull.

Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus* A couple were observed on the mudflats at Suez and a single bird was observed on one of the small islands at the entrance to the Gulf of Suez, during our boat trip from Hurghada.

Heuglin's Gull *Larus heuglini* An adult and an immature were observed flying together along the mudflats at Suez.

Slender-billed Gull *Larus genei* Literally hundreds were present at Lake Quarun, in the El Fayoum Oasis, with smaller numbers present on most of the mudflats we visited.

STERNIDAE

Gull-billed Tern *Sterna nilotica* This species is a winter visitor to Egypt and we saw it well on a number of occasions both along the coast and on inland lakes.

Caspian Tern *Sterna caspia* Good numbers present in all the coastal areas we visited.

Lesser Crested Tern *Sterna bengalensis* Small numbers present at the mudflats areas and huge numbers breeding on the small islands at the entrance to the Gulf of Suez, many were still feeding fully fledged young.

Sandwich Tern *Sterna sandvicensis* An uncommon winter visitor to Egypt, where no more than a thousand birds winter. Therefore, we were fortunate to enjoy good scope views of two birds on the mudflats at Suez.

Greater Crested Tern *Sterna bergii* Approximately 400 pairs of Greater Crested Terns breed along the Red Sea Coast of the Sudan. It also occurs off the Egyptian coast in the Red Sea, mainly in the summer months between April and August. It may

possibly breed in small numbers here, but this has never been confirmed. Therefore, we were very fortunate to have a bird fly past the boat, during our cruise around the small islands at the entrance to the Gulf of Suez.

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo* The Common Tern breeds in Europe and Asia and the vast majority of the birds from Europe and western Asia winter principally along the coast of west and southern Africa. It is a fairly common passage migrant in Egypt. We enjoyed good sightings of birds on passage, along the mudflats at Suez and on and around the small islands to the entrance of the Gulf of Suez, during our boat cruise there.

Little Tern *Sterna albifrons* Large numbers present at Lake Quarun, in the El Fayoum Oasis and along the mudflats at Suez.

White-cheeked Tern *Sterna repressa* We found a single bird of this Red Sea endemic on the mudflats at Suez, which is further north than it normally occurs and then we saw literally hundreds on the boat trip around the small islands at the entrance to the Gulf of Suez

Bridled Tern *Sterna anaethetus* Very small numbers of Bridled Terns have been confirmed breeding on islands off the Egyptian coast in the northern Red Sea. Once the breeding season has finished they move down the east coast of Africa as far as Mozambique, where they mainly stay offshore. We were very fortunate to observe two individuals fly past our boat, during our boat cruise around the small islands at the entrance to the Gulf of Suez.

Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybridus* We found enormous numbers at Lake Quarun, in the El Fayoum Oasis and then smaller numbers scattered throughout most wetland areas.

White-winged Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus* The eastern European and western Asian populations of this species winter on inland waterways in sub-Saharan Africa. During the autumn migration there is a heavy passage along the Nile River from 16th August to the 18th October. We found large numbers at Lake Quarun, in the El Fayoum Oasis, around the 1st cataract and Philae Temple, both on the Nile River at Aswan and around Lake Nasser, at Abu Simbel.

COLUMBIDAE

Feral Pigeon *Columba livia* Large numbers around any form of human settlement, young pigeons are considered a delicacy in Egypt.

European Turtle-Dove *Streptopelia turtur* Small numbers observed throughout the tour and then flocks of birds observed on the shores of Lake Nasser, at Abu Simbel.

Eurasian Collared-Dove *Streptopelia decaocto* Small numbers scattered throughout the tour.

Laughing Dove *Streptopelia senegalensis* Very numerous, recorded on every day of the tour.

Namaqua Dove *Oena capensis* We were very fortunate to find a couple of immature birds at the Daraw Camel Market, at the very northern edge of their range.

CAPRIMULGIDAE

European Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus* An uncommon passage migrant in Egypt, we were very fortunate to enjoy good scope views in broad daylight, of an adult male, in Ras Mohammed National Park, at the southern tip of the Sinai Peninsula.

APODIDAE

Pallid Swift *Apus pallidus* A single bird observed flying over Crocodile Island, in the Nile River, at Luxor.

ALCEDINIDAE

Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis* Small numbers seen well around the mangroves in the Ras Mohammed National Park, at the southern tip of the Sinai Peninsula.

White-throated Kingfisher *Halcyon smyrnensis* We enjoyed a couple of sightings at Lake Quarun, in the El Fayoum Oasis, this is the only place where this Asian species occurs in Africa.

Pied Kingfisher *Ceryle rudis* Commonly encountered throughout all wetland areas we visited.

MEROPIDAE

Little Green Bee-eater *Merops orientalis* Small groups encountered throughout the tour.

European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster* We saw large migrating flocks, on almost a daily basis.

CORACIIDAE

European Roller *Coracias garrulus* The European Roller breeds in Europe and western Asia. All populations winter in sub-Saharan Africa, particularly in eastern Africa. The migration route differs markedly between spring and autumn. During the autumn migration, the vast majority of birds fly over the Mediterranean and the Sahara Desert in one, unbroken flight. This is the reason we only observed two individuals during our tour of Egypt. The first was an immature bird which we saw perched on the fence of a basketball court, in downtown Sharm El Sheikh, on the Sinai Peninsula and the second, also an immature bird, was observed in flight, along the shore of Lake Nasser, at Abu Simbel.

UPUPIDAE

Eurasian Hoopoe *Upupa epops* Commonly encountered throughout the tour.

ALAUDIDAE

Desert Lark *Ammomanes deserti* We found small flocks in the Eastern Desert and around St Catherine Monastery, in their favoured habitat of dry rocky desert.

Greater Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla* We found a few migrating flocks throughout the tour.

Crested Lark *Galerida cristata* Commonly encountered throughout the tour.

HIRUNDINIDAE

Sand Martin *Riparia riparia* Small migrating flocks encountered throughout the tour.

Rock Martin *Hirundo fuligula* A common resident which we saw well on numerous occasions.

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica* Migrating flocks were seen daily and we also plenty of the resident red-bellied *savignii* race.

Red-rumped Swallow *Hirundo daurica* A small scatter of sightings throughout the tour.

House Martin *Delichon urbica* A small flock was observed in the grounds of our hotel at Sharm El Sheikh, in the Sinai Peninsula and we saw a second, larger flock, along the shores of Lake Nasser, at Abu Simbel.

MOTACILLIDAE

African Pied Wagtail *Motacilla aguimp* An adult bird was found singing along the shores of Lake Nasser, at Abu Simbel. This is the only place in the Western Palearctic where this widespread sub-Saharan species occurs.

Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava* We enjoyed watching many large migrating flocks throughout the whole of the tour, we observed at least three different races, which included *pygmaea*, *flava* and *felegg*.

Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris* The Tawny Pipit breeds throughout Europe, western and central Asia and northwest Africa. The main wintering grounds are the Sahel belt, just south of the Sahara in Africa, the Arabian Peninsula and India. Birds migrating through Egypt in autumn are thought to be birds from central Asia, of the race *griseus*. We saw a single bird at the Spring of Moses, on the Sinai Peninsula and two birds together, in farmland, on the edge of Lake Nasser, at Abu Simbel.

PYCNOPNOTIDAE

Common Bulbul *Pycnonotus barbatus* Commonly encountered throughout the tour.

Yellow-vented Bulbul *Pycnonotus xanthopygos* Small numbers of this range restricted species were present at the Wadi Feiran, in the Sinai Peninsula.

CISTICOLIDAE

Zitting Cisticola *Cisticola juncidis* This very small species of warbler was seen particularly well at Lake Quarun, in the El Fayoum Oasis and again at Crocodile Island, in the Nile River at Luxor.

Streaked Scrub-Warbler *Scotocerca inquieta* This resident species occurs in northwest Africa, the Sinai Peninsula, the Arabian Peninsula, Iran and Afghanistan. We saw a family party at very close quarters, close to St. Catherine's Monastery, on the Sinai Peninsula.

Graceful Prinia *Prinia gracilis* We enjoyed many good sightings of this confiding little bird.

SYLVIIDAE

Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus* Several migrants encountered throughout the tour.

Eurasian Reed-Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus* Small numbers encountered

throughout the tour, it seemed rather odd seeing them flitting around in the gardens of our hotels, many kilometres away from any reedbeds.

Clamorous Reed-Warbler *Acrocephalus stentoreus* Seen particularly well in reedbeds on Crocodile Island, in the Nile River, at Luxor and then we saw a couple more along the shores of Lake Nasser, at Abu Simbel.

Eastern Olivaceous Warbler *Hippolais pallida* A single bird was observed in the nursery on Crocodile Island, in the Nile River, at Luxor and we saw a few more at Lake Nasser, at Abu Simbel.

Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus* Large numbers encountered throughout the tour, they were literally pouring through Egypt, on their way to their wintering grounds in tropical Africa.

Common Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita* Small numbers observed amongst the many Willow Warblers.

Garden Warbler *Sylvia borin* A solitary bird was observed by some members of the group in the grounds of our hotel at Abu Simbel.

Common Whitethroat *Sylvia communis* A single bird was seen in the grounds of our hotel at Hurghada and a second bird was observed briefly along the shores of Lake Nasser, at Abu Simbel.

Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca* By far the commonest of all the passerine migrants, it was seen on almost a daily basis.

Ruppell's Warbler *Sylvia rueppelli* The total world population of Ruppell's Warblers breed in southern Greece, southern Turkey and the island of Crete. The entire population is migratory and winters in Chad and the Sudan. This means that the entire world population migrates through Egypt in order to get to its wintering grounds. However, research shows that small numbers occur in September in the Suez Canal region of Egypt, from here the vast majority of the population is thought to fly continuously to their winter grounds in Chad and the Sudan. However, we know that a superb adult male in full breeding plumage, was present at the Aswan High Dam, in Aswan on the 22nd September of this year.

MUSCICAPIDAE

Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata* We saw a great many of these migrant birds throughout the tour.

Thrush Nightingale *Luscinia luscinia* The Thrush Nightingale breeds in eastern Europe and western Asia, the entire population winters in eastern Africa from the Sudan to South Africa. The vast majority of birds enter Africa across the northern Red Sea, it is the second most common migrant on the Sudanese coast in August and September. Small numbers pass through eastern Egypt at this time of year. We were very fortunate to find one skulking in dense cover at Ras Abu Rudeis, on the Sinai Peninsula.

Bluethroat *Luscinia svecica* A very uncommon passage migrant through Egypt; we saw a single adult in breeding plumage, in the heart of the Western Desert, a little to the north of Abu Simbel.

Rufous Bush-Robin *Cercotrichas galactotes* This species breeds in southern Europe,

southwestern Asia, northwest Africa and parts of Egypt. We saw a solitary individual very well at El Gouna Farm, at Hurghada. It was not the resident breeding species of Egypt, but the migrant race *syriacus*, from the Balkans, Asia Minor, northern Syria and Lebanon, which winters in northeast Africa.

Common Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus* Another uncommon passage migrant through Egypt; thanks to Michael we were able to enjoy an adult bird in breeding plumage in the grounds of our hotel in Cairo, before driving to the airport, for our flight home to Australia.

Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra* A small number of these migrants were observed throughout the tour.

Common Stonechat *Saxicola rubicola* The Common Stonechat breeds throughout Britain, southern Europe and southwestern Asia. Birds breeding in the Ukraine, Crimea and western Caucasus, winter in small numbers in Egypt and Yemen. We saw an immature bird at the El Gouna Farm, at Hurghada.

White-crowned Wheatear *Oenanthe leucopyga* This very handsome, range restricted species, was seen very well in its favourite habitat of hot rocky deserts.

Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe* We encountered a few migrating flocks throughout the tour.

Mourning Wheatear *Oenanthe lugens* We saw a couple of these range restricted birds at a small gorge in the Eastern Desert.

Black-eared Wheatear *Oenanthe hispanica* We saw a single bird very well in the Ras Mohammed National Park, at the southern tip of the Sinai Peninsula and this was followed by another single bird which was present on one of the small islands, at the entrance to the Gulf of Suez.

Desert Wheatear *Oenanthe deserti* A single bird was seen well at a small gorge in the Eastern Desert and then we found small numbers scattered around the shores of Lake Nasser, at Abu Simbel.

Isabelline Wheatear *Oenanthe isabellina* The first one we found was in the grounds of our hotel at Ain Sukhna and later in the day we enjoyed much better sightings of a couple of birds at the Wadi Feiran, on the Sinai Peninsula.

Blackstart *Cercomela melanura* We enjoyed super close looks, on a particular hot day, of this very uncommon Red Sea endemic, during our visit to the Wadi Feiran, on the Sinai Peninsula.

NECTARINIIDAE

Nile Valley Sunbird *Hedydipna metallica* This range restricted endemic was fairly numerous in the flowering *Chorisia* trees in the grounds of our hotel on Crocodile Island, in the Nile River, at Luxor.

Palestine Sunbird *Cinnyris oseus* Another range restricted species of sunbird, this species is far less common than the Nile Valley Sunbird and we were very fortunate to see it well in the grounds of our hotel at St Catherine's Monastery, on the Sinai Peninsula.

ORIOLIDAE

Eurasian Golden Oriole *Oriolus oriolus* The Eurasian Golden Oriole breeds in Europe and western Asia; the European population winters in southern Africa and the Asian population winters in the Indian Peninsula. It is an uncommon passage

migrant in Egypt; we saw a couple of birds at Ras Abu Rudeis, in the Sinai Peninsula, followed by a second sighting of a couple of birds in the grounds of our hotel at Hurghada.

LANIIDAE

Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio* One of the most common migrants we encountered, on some days it seemed as though they were in every bush. Most of the birds we saw were immature birds, so they must have had a good breeding season.

Isabelline Shrike *Lanius isabellinus* This species breeds in the Steppes of central Asia and the whole population is migratory, wintering from northwest India and Afghanistan through the southern Middle East to sub-Saharan Africa, west to Nigeria and south to Kenya. There are very few records from Egypt, but perhaps it is overlooked amongst the many thousands of Red-backed Shrikes that migrate through each year. Some of the group saw a single bird on a small island at the entrance to the Gulf of Suez, while others of our group were snorkeling.

Southern Grey Shrike *Lanius meridionalis* A few birds observed well throughout the tour, this species is resident in Egypt..

Lesser Grey Shrike *Lanius minor* This species breeds in southeastern Europe and southwestern Asia. The entire breeding population is migratory and winters in Namibia and South Africa. Birds from Europe head southeast flying over Greece and the Aegean Sea, entering Africa on a narrow front principally through Egypt. We were fortunate to enjoy good looks at a solitary individual, on the shores of Lake Nasser, at Abu Simbel.

Masked Shrike *Lanius nubicus* Small numbers present throughout the whole tour.

Woodchat Shrike *Lanius senator* This species breeds in southern Europe and northwest Africa; the entire population is migratory and winters in the Sahel belt, a little to the south of the Sahara Desert, from the west coast to the Red Sea coast. During the autumn migration it is a scarce passage migrant through Egypt. Therefore, we were very fortunate to observe two birds together at Ras Abu Rudeis, on the Sinai Peninsula.

CORVIDAE

House Crow *Corvus splendens* We saw many around the township of Suez, this species is originally from India and jumped ship in the port in 1920 and has been slowly colonizing the area ever since.

Hooded Crow *Corvus cornix* Commonly encountered throughout the whole tour.

Brown-necked Raven *Corvus ruficollis* Commonly encountered throughout all the desert areas of Egypt.

STURNIDAE

Tristram's Starling *Onychognathus tristramii* We found a small flock of 15 or so of these Arabian specialities at St. Catherine's Monastery, in the Sinai Peninsula.

PASSERIDAE

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* Commonly encountered throughout the towns and villages.

ESTRILDIDAE

Red Avadavat *Amandava amandava* We found a single adult male of this introduced species, on Crocodile Island, in the Nile River, at Luxor.

FRINGILLIDAE

Sinai Rosefinch *Carpodacus synoicus* We were very pleased to find this Sinai endemic, in the carpark of St. Catherine's Monastery, in the Sinai Peninsula. Unfortunately, they were all females or immature males.

EMBERIZIDAE

Cretzschmar's Bunting *Emberiza caesia* This beautiful species of bunting has a very limited world range, breeding in only southern Greece, southern Turkey, Syria, Lebanon and Israel. The entire population is migratory and winters in the Sudan and Eritrea. It is an uncommon passage migrant through Egypt in both spring and autumn. We enjoyed good looks at a small flock of three immature birds in the gardens of St. Catherine's Monastery, in the Sinai Peninsula.

Striolated Bunting *Emberiza striolata* This species has a small world range, where it is sedentary. It occurs in the Sinai Peninsula the Arabian Peninsula, Iran, Pakistan and northwestern India. We saw a single bird on one occasion, in the Ras Mohammed National Park, on the Sinai Peninsula.

MAMMALS

Western House Mouse *Mus domesticus* A particularly tame individual was running around our feet during our visit to the Great Sphinx, at Giza.

Brown Rat *Rattus norvegicus* Chris saw one run across the track ahead of us on Crocodile Island, in the Nile River, at Luxor.

Nubian Ibex *Capra nubiana* We were incredibly fortunate that our local guide Abdullah spotted an adult female and an immature along the roadside in the Eastern Desert. This is a very endangered species and is under enormous pressure from hunters. We enjoyed great looks as they climbed effortlessly up a steep mountain slope, not more than 30 or so metres away from us.