

# Egypt 23/4 - 2/5 2010

## Trip report summary

This is a much shortened version of the trip report, with many photos, in Swedish that can be seen at <http://www.avifauna.se/avifauna/rapporter-arkiv/reserapporter/nordafrika-mellanostern/egypten/>

The 10 day trip was arranged by me and AviFauna in cooperation with a local tour operator. We were 15 Swedish and one Danish birder and travelled in a large coach. It followed the general plan of the group trips in April/May 2008 and April 2006 (see the trip reports at this website) and aimed at seeing the same species.

The end of April and early May is a very good time of year if you want to see both the specialties of Egypt as well as some the impressive migration. It is late enough in Spring for Sooty Falcon to have arrived and to give you a decent chance for Crab Plover, and though migration volume have dropped it is still rich in species, mainly raptors and passerines.

Our target species were the “standard” ones for southern and eastern Egypt (we did not visit the Sinai peninsula) and ranging from the easy ones like Black-shouldered Kite, Senegal Thick-knee and Sooty Gull to the scarce and difficult Goliath Heron and African Skimmer. We hoped that the Three-banded Plovers would be back at the recently discovered site near Aswan and that the police/military situation would not prevent us from reaching Shalatein and the islands of Lake Nasser.



Pink-backed Pelicans were seen quite easily on this visit at Abu Simbel.  
Photo Peter Berglin

## Species result - hits and misses

In general, things went according to plan and we found most of our target birds, including some surprises. A total of some 160 species were logged which is less than two years ago, when we had 175 species during the same route. The more common species showed but some of the more scarce took hard work; only two Painted Snipes at the fish ponds near Abu Hamad after a few hours search, only some single Senegal Thick-knees along the trip, only two records of Crested Tern and very few larks and wheatears. We were lucky to find Crab Plovers on a distant sand bank in the Qulaan archipelago, see & hear the Hume's Owl in Wadi Gemal and nail the Three-banded Plovers! Two great finds was an Upcher's Warbler just south of the Shams Alam Resort and a total of five Eleonora's Falcons migrating at Ain Sukhna.

Of species we did not find were some; Goliath Heron, Lesser Crested Tern, African Skimmer, Senegal Coucal and Egyptian Nightjar. We searched extensively for the heron in the mangroves at Wadi Lahmi with no result, we also checked Hamata several times. According to the dive camp manager Ross, they might have been scared off by the tourism developments going on in the area. The L C Tern didn't seem to have arrived yet, almost no terns at all at the Qulaan Islands! Strong wind prevented us from reaching further out on Lake Nasser, but we saw the skimmers from the village in 2008. Several coucal sites were visited but that damn bird is just shy and discreet! Hysterical police officers and roaming dogs destroyed our chances at the nightjars in Abu Simbel.



one of some 15 African Pied Wagtails at Abu Simbel.  
Photo Peter Berglin

## Arrangements and hassles

This trip was a part of the 2010 program of bird watching tours offered by the main Swedish operator, AviFauna. I planned and lead the trip and a Luxor-based tour operator had all our arrangements (hotels, buses, permissions, local assistance) on the ground. We used Austrian Air for convenient flights from Stockholm and Copenhagen.

A birding trip in Egypt still (you might think this belonged to the past) comes with plenty of things to take into account. So make your preparations carefully and make use of the expertise available. IT IS an amazing birding country and the good much outweigh the not-so-good, let me be clear with that ☺! But please consider; a paranoid security system with police and military demanding “permissions” and papers at many places, language difficulties in combination with birders often seen as tourists with strange and problematic wishes, and money trickeries. So just plan your trip and come prepared and you will have some excellent WP birding!

## Itinerary

- April 23** arrival at Cairo Airport in the afternoon. Two nights at a hotel near Giza.
- April 24** the fish ponds at Abu Hamad. The canal along the Sakkara road. Much time consuming traffic in Cairo.
- April 25** morning drive to Ain Sukhna (150km) and raptor show until 1pm. Afternoon drive to El Gouna (300km) and evening there. Hotel in Hurghada.
- April 26** morning drive to Shams Alam Resort (340km) south of Marsa Alam. Afternoon boat trip to the Qulaan Islands. Two nights at Shams Alam.
- April 27** Hamata, Wadi Lahmi, Shalatein, Wadi Gemal.
- April 28** morning around the hotel, then drive to Aswan (380km) with few stops. Evening in Aswan. Hotel in Aswan.
- April 29** 4am convoy to Abu Simbel (270km) and the rest of the day there. Two nights at Nefertari Hotel.
- April 30** the whole day in Abu Simbel including boat trip on Lake Nasser with island visits. Evening try for Egyptian Nightjar.
- May 1** 9am convoy to Aswan (270km), visit at the fish ponds south of the city. Short *felucca* sailing on the Nile. Night train towards Cairo.
- May 2** arrival Cairo at 8:30am, day room at a hotel. Lunch time transfer to the airport, afternoon/evening flight to Sweden.



We found Kittlitz Plovers at a likely breeding site on an island near Abu Simbel.  
Photo Peter Berglin

A collection of digiscoped video clips from the trip can be seen at my YouTube web <https://www.youtube.com/user/Tomas06560656> including the Upcher's Warbler south of Shams Alam, the Lappet-faced Vultures at Shalatein, the Three-banded Plover south of Aswan and the Rock Thrush at Ain Sukhna.

### Selected species list

This list only deals with the more interesting species seen during the trip. See other trip reports for a general idea of what to expect at this time of year. Migration is still very obvious with 17 species of raptors in five hours at Ain Sukhna, different waders and terns at El Gouna and the hotel garden at Shams Alam with its many warblers, chats, shrikes, Quail, pipits, Rock Thrush, nightingales, Wryneck and swallows.

Egyptian Goose <i>Alopochen aegyptiaca</i>	100+ Abu Simbel 29-30/4
Brown Booby <i>Sula leucogaster</i>	2 Qulaan Islands 26/4
White Pelican <i>Pelecanus onocrotalus</i>	1 Abu Simbel 29-30/4
Pink-backed Pelican <i>Pelecanus rufescens</i>	20 Abu Simbel 29-30/4
Little Bittern <i>Ixobrychus minutus</i>	3 Abu Hamad 24/4
Striated Heron <i>Butorides striata</i>	a total of some ten birds
Western Reef Heron <i>Egretta gularis</i>	common along the Red Sea
Yellow-billed Stork <i>Mycteria ibis</i>	16 Abu Simbel 29-30/4
Black-shouldered Kite <i>Elanus caeruleus</i>	a total of some ten birds
Short-toed Eagle <i>Circaetus gallicus</i>	39 migr. at Ain Sukhna 25/4
Lappet-faced Vulture <i>Torgos tracheliotus</i>	15 Shalatein 27/4
Greater Spotted Eagle <i>Aquila clanga</i>	1 migr. Ain Sukhna 25/4
Lesser Spotted Eagle <i>Aquila pomarina</i>	110 migr. Ain Sukhna 25/4
Steppe Eagle <i>Aquila nipalensis</i>	60 migr. Ain Sukhna 25/4
Eastern Imperial Eagle <i>Aquila heliaca</i>	4 migr. Ain Sukhna 25/4

Eleonora's Falcon *Falco eleonora*  
 Sooty Falcon *Falco concolor*  
 Shams Alam 28/4  
 Lanner *Falco biarmicus*  
 the south

5 migr. Ain Sukhna 25/4  
 5 Qulaan Islands 26/4 and 2

five records of single birds in

Purple Swamphen *Porphyrio porphyrio*  
 Aswan 28/4  
 Painted Snipe *Rostratula benghalensis*  
 Crab Plover *Dromas ardeola*  
 Senegal Thick-knee *Burhinus senegalensis*  
 Kittlitz Plover *Charadrius pecuarius*  
 Three-banded Plover *Charadrius tricollaris*  
 young, at the fish ponds south of Aswan 1/5  
 Greater Sand Plover *Charadrius leschenaultii*  
 Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinereus*

7-8 Abu Hamad 24/4 and 2

2 Abu Hamad 24/4  
 3 Qulaan Islands 26/4

five records

4 Abu Simbel 30/4  
 at least 4, including one

1 El Gouna 25/4

2 El Gouna 25/4



In this field-of-view: a family of Three-banded Plovers! In the WP! Can you find them?  
 Digi-pic by the author.

Sooty Gull *Larus hemprichii*  
 Red Sea  
 White-cheeked Tern *Sterna repressa*  
 Crested Tern *Sterna bergii*  
 adult El Gouna 25/4  
 Crowned Sandgrouse *Pterocles coronatus*  
 Spotted Sandgrouse *Pterocles senegallus*  
 Namaqua Dove *Oena capensis*  
 Wadi Lahmi 27/4 and 2 Shalatein 27/4  
 Hume's Owl *Strix butleri*  
 White-breasted Kingfisher *Halcyon smyrnensis*  
 Little Green Bee-eater *Merops orientalis*  
 Aswan 28/4 and 1/5  
 Blue-cheeked Bee-eater *Merops persicus*  
 24/4 and a few other records of singles.  
 European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster*  
 for example at Abu Simbel 29/4 - 1/5

common along the southern

common at El Gouna 25/4  
 1 Ain Sukhna 25/4 and 3

2 Berenice 27/4  
 5 Berenice 27/4  
 1m Shams Alam 26-28/4, 4

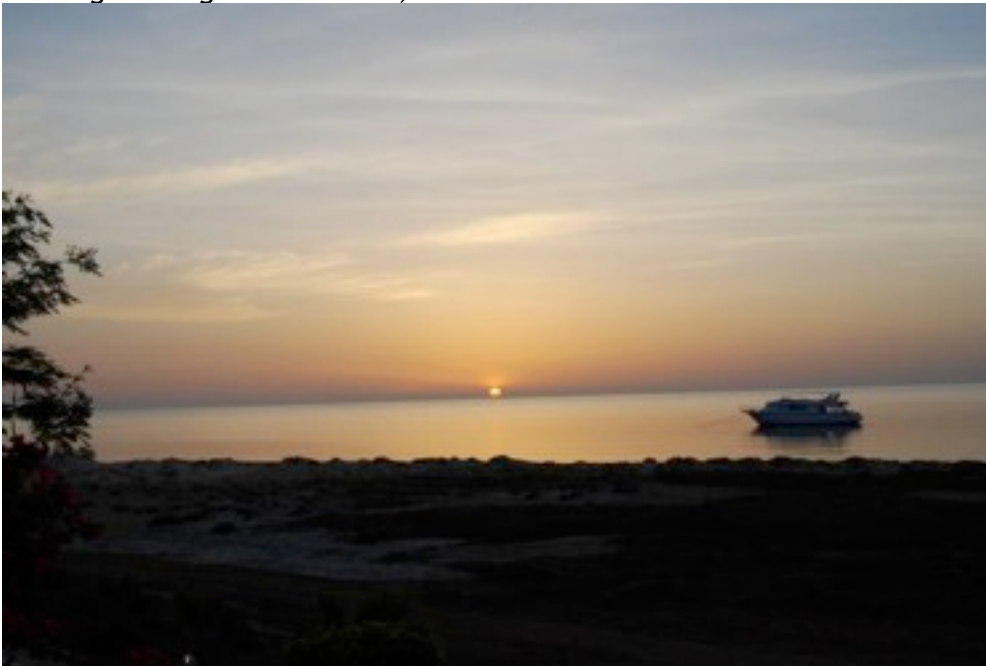
1 Wadi Gemal 27/4  
 common around Kairo 24/4  
 several records around

common around Abu Hamad

peak migration, hundreds

Hoopoe Lark *Alaemon alaudipes*  
roads 26-28/4  
African Rock Martin *Ptyonoprogne fuligula*  
and Abu Simbel  
African Pied Wagtail *Motacilla aguimp*  
Simbel 29-30/4  
Rufous Bush Chat *Cercotrichas galactotes*  
29-30/4  
Hooded Wheatear *Oenanthe monacha*  
Rock Thrush *Monticola saxatilis*  
Shams Alam 27-28/4  
Clamorous Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus stentoreus*  
and a few other records around Aswan  
Upcher's Warbler *Hippolais languida*  
Shams Alam 28/4.  
Bonelli's Warbler *Phylloscopus orientalis*  
Simbel 1/5  
Nile Valley Sunbird *Anthreptes metallicus*  
Aswan 28/4 and 1/5  
Masked Shrike *Lanius nubicus*  
Alam 26-27/4 and common around Abu Simbel 29-30/4  
House Crow *Corvus splendens*  
Hurghada, a few at each site, 25-26/4  
Streaked Weaver *Ploceus manyar*  
males gathering nest material, Abu Hamad 24/4

a total of 6 along the desert  
fairly common around Aswan  
fairly common (15+) at Abu  
common at Abu Simbel  
1m Ain Sukhna 25/4  
1f Ain Sukhna 25/4 and 2f  
common at Abu Hamad 24/4  
1 in tamarisk scrub south of  
1 in the hotel garden, Abu  
several records around  
1 each at Hamata and Shams  
Ain Sukhna, Ras Gharib and  
a small colony with four



sunrise at one of my favourite spots in Egypt - Shams Alam Resort on the southern Red Sea coast. Photo Tomas Haraldsson