

# bird trip report

## Egypt 9-16 January 2009

by Tomas Axén Haraldsson

This was one of the handful of birds-and-culture trips arranged by me in co-operation with swedish tour operator Nimbusresor and local travel agency Palma Tours during the years 2003-2009. They were based on my extensive knowledge of travelling and birding in Egypt as well as leading tour groups.

### Itinerary

9 January - afternoon arrival in Cairo. Two nights in Cairo.

10 January - morning at Abbassa fish ponds, afternoon at the Giza monuments.

11 January - cultural visits at the Egyptian Museum and Khan el-Khalili. Overnight train to Aswan

12 January - full day birding around Aswan. Check-in to cruise ship, three nights on board.

13 January - full day birding from the cruise ship along the Nile.

14 January - morning arrival at Luxor, birding at Crocodile Island, temple visits.

15 January - morning birding outside Luxor, afternoon at the West bank monuments. Overnight train to Cairo.

16 January - homebound flight



*Chefren pyramid at Giza with both Bonellis Eagle and Kurdish Wheatear!*



*Glossy Ibis from the felucca in Aswan. Photo by Göran Sundholm*

The trip was focused on the rich winter wetlands both at Abbassa north of Cairo, around Aswan and the Upper Nile valley as well as around Luxor. Birdwatching from a cruise ship between Aswan and Luxor in mid-winter is spectacular: from a floating platform, elevated above the marshlands one have a perfect view.

We were lucky with the eagles at the rubbish dump area southeast of Aswan with both Imperial, Steppe and Greater Spotted Eagles and also had two records of Bonellis Eagle. Among the surprises must be mentioned a splendid Kurdish Wheatear at the Giza pyramids as well as a flock of 8 African Skimmers along the Nile.



*An adult Bonelli's Eagle just above our cruise ship near Kom Ombo. Photo by Göran Sundholm*



The group at the West Bank monuments.

### list of species

*117 species were recorded, reflecting both the birds-and-culture type of trip as well as the rather few species in mid-winter.*

*The area southeast of Aswan is referred to as "Aswan reservoir" or "Ash Shellal". The first being the body of water between the old and the new dam and the latter being the village and rubbish tip near the shore from where you view the water.*

*The ones in bold type are the more exclusive species and/or targeted on a birding trip to Egypt.*

**Nilgås / Egyptian Goose**

c. 50 at Aswan 12/1 and a low number along the Nile 13/1.

**Bläsand / Wigeon**

1000+ along the Nile during 13/1.

**Gräsand / Mallard**

c. 5 along the Nile during 13/1.

**Kricka / Teal**

250+ at Aswan and along the Nile 12-13/1. A smaller number also at Luxor sewage plant 15/1

**Snatterand / Gadwall**

2 just north of Edfu, the Nile 13/1

**Stjärtand / Pintail**

c. 15 at Aswan 12/1, c.50 along the Nile during 13/1 and c.5 at Luxor sewage plant 15/1

Skedand / Shoveler

1500+ along the Nile during 13/1 and c. 1500 at Luxor sewage plant 15/1

Årta / Garganey

At least 2 along the Nile during 13/1

Vigg / Tufted Duck

c. 75 at Aswan reservoir 12/1 and 200+ along the Nile during 13/1.

Brunand / Pochard

c. 5 at Luxor sewage plant 15/1.

**Vitögd dykand / Ferruginous Duck**

c. 25 at Aswan reservoir 12/1, c. 75 along the Nile during 13/1 and a pair at Luxor sewage plant 15/1.

Smådopping / Little Grebe

2 at Luxor sewage plant 15/1

Svarthalsad dopping / Black-necked Grebe

2 at Luxor sewage plant 15/1

Vit pelikan / White Pelican

1 adult along the Nile 13/1.

Dvärgrördrom / Little Bittern

a total of 14 seen during the trip, of which 5 were at Crocodile Island, Luxor 14/1.



*Little Bittern, the "Sakkara Canal", south of Cairo. Photo Sander Broström*

Silkeshäger / Little Egret

very common and especially numerous along the Nile

Kohäger / Cattle Egret

very common

Ägretthäger / Great White Egret

1 at Aswan reservoir 12/1

Rallhäger / Squacco Heron

common

**Striated Heron / Mangrovehäger**

2 adult at Aswan 12/1, 3 along the Nile during 13/1, 3 adult at Crocodile Island, Luxor 14/1.

Natthäger / Night Heron

c. 50 at Abbassa fish ponds 10/1, small numbers in the Nile Valley from Aswan to Luxor.

Häger / Grey Heron

fairly common but in low numbers

Purpurhäger / Purple Heron

fairly common along the Nile from Aswan to Luxor 12-14/1, 40+ during 13/1.

Bronsibis / Glossy Ibis

c. 40 at Aswan reservoir 12/1, c. 10 at Aswan 12/1, 250+ along the Nile during 13/1 and some 400 in Luxor 14/1, seen flying north at sunset.

Skedstork / Spoonbill

a total of 125 along the Nile during 13/1.

Vit stork / White Stork

c. 50 at Aswan reservoir 12/1

Större flamingo / Greater Flamingo

1 flying south just north of Kom Ombo, the Nile 15/1

**Svartvingad glada / Black-shouldered Kite**

fairly common both around Abbassa fish ponds and in the Nile Valley.

Brun glada / Black Kite

common. Highest numbers SE of Aswan near the rubbish tip and the reservoir, about 75.

Smutsgam / Egyptian Vulture  
1 adult at Aswan reservoir 12/1.

Brun kärrhök / Marsh Harrier  
1 2cy male at Abbassa fish ponds 10/1. Fairly common around Aswan and along the Nile 12-13/1, 15+ seen during the cruise day 13/1.

Sparvhök / Sparrowhawk  
Three singles recorded during the trip.

Örnvråk / Long-legged Buzzard  
1, possibly 2, at Abbassa fish ponds 10/1, 2 along the Nile during 13/1 and 1 at Crocodile Island, Luxor 14/1.

Ormvråk / Common Buzzard  
1 at Crocodile Island, Luxor 14/1. Small, compact and dark buzzard, harassed by corvids.

**Kejsarörn / Eastern Imperial Eagle**  
2 at Aswan reservoir/Ash Shellal 12/1. One 2cy bird and one 4-5cy bird.

Stäppörn / Steppe Eagle  
at least 3 at Aswan reservoir/Ash Shellal 12/1. One adult and two 2-3 cy birds.

Större skrikörn / Greater Spotted Eagle  
at least 3 at Aswan reservoir/Ash Shellal 12/1. One adult and two 2-3 cy birds.

Dvärgörn / Booted Eagle  
1 pale morph along the Nile 13/1 and 1 dark morph at Luxor sewage plant 15/1.

**Hökörn / Bonelli´s Eagle**  
1 adult at Giza pyramids 10/1 and 1 adult just north of Kom Ombo, the Nile 13/1.

Fiskgjuse / Osprey  
2 at Aswan reservoir 12/1 and several along the Nile during 13/1.

Slagfalk / Lanner  
a pair at Valley of the Kings, Luxor 15/1.



*Lanner over the Valley of the Kings. Photo by Sander Broström*

**Berberfalk / Barbary Falcon**

1 just north of Aswan, the Nile 13/1. One unidentified large falcon in Aswan probably this species.

**Tornfalk / Kestrel**

common.

**Sothöna / Coot**

Common along the Nile, hundreds.

**Rörhöna / Moorhen**

Very common in the Nile valley, especially in the river itself. Gatherings of over a hundred seen.

**Purpurhöna / Purple Swamphen**

c. 10 at Aswan 12/1 and common along the Nile 13/1.

**Mindre sumphöna / Little Crake**

a male along the Nile during 13/1. Feeding in the open at the edge of the reeds, clear but distant view.

**Styltlöpare / Black-winged Stilt**

seen at all wetlands visited with high numbers along the Nile, hundreds.

**Senegaltjockfot / Senegal Thick-knee**

heard at Abbassa fish ponds 10/1, at least 1 at Aswan 12/1 and 5 along the Nile during 13/1. Surprisingly none at Crocodile Island, Luxor which is usually a safe spot.

Tofsvipa / Northern Lapwing  
c. 10 along the Nile during 13/1.

Sporrvipa / Spur-winged Plover  
very common

**Sumpvipa / White-tailed Plover**  
a total of at least 18 along the Nile during 13/1.

Större strandpipare / Ringed Plover  
c. 10 at Aswan and along the Nile 12-13/1.

Småsnäppa / Little Stint  
2 at Abbassa fish ponds 10/1. Common along the Nile during 13/1 and at Crocodile Island, Luxor 14/1.

Mosnäppa / Temminck's Stint  
many small stints left unidentified, but at least 15 of this species at Crocodile Island, Luxor 14/1.

Brushane / Ruff  
c. 100 at Abbassa fish ponds 10/1. Common around Aswan and along the Nile 12-13/1 and at Crocodile Island 14/1, hundreds.

Enkelbeckasin / Common Snipe  
c. 25 seen at different sites, most along the Nile during 13/1.

Dvärgbeckasin / Jack Snipe  
1 along the Nile during 13/1. Feeding openly on a sandbank with other waders.

**Rallbeckasin / Painted Snipe**  
2 at Abbassa fish ponds 10/1. Short views of these skulking birds.

Rödspov / Black-tailed Godwit  
Low numbers around Aswan and along the Nile 12-13/1. A flock of 25 flying south at Aswan 12/1. No larger flocks seen.

Svartsnäppa / Spotted Redshank  
fairly common but in low numbers around Aswan and along the Nile 12-13/1.

Rödbena / Redshank  
3 at Aswan reservoir 12/1.

Gluttsnäppa / Greenshank  
Fairly common but in low numbers around Aswan and along the Nile 12-13/1.

Dammsnäppa / Marsh Sandpiper



3 at Aswan 12/1, c. 10 along the Nile during 13/1 and 1-2 at Luxor sewage plant 15/1.



*Marsh Sandpiper, seen from the felucca in Aswan. Photo by Göran Sundholm*

#### Grönbena / Wood Sandpiper

A few seen at most wetlands during the trip, no larger flocks seen.

#### Skogssnäppa / Green Sandpiper

2 each at Crocodile Island, Luxor 14/1 and Luxor sewage plant 15/1.

#### Drillsnäppa / Common Sandpiper

A few seen at most wetlands during the trip.

#### Skrattmås / Black-headed Gull

Common with high numbers (500+) passing Aswan 12/1 at sunset, presumably to night roost on Lake Nasser.

#### Sandtärna / Gull-billed Tern

Fairly common around Aswan and along the Nile 12-13/1. An impressive 500+ going for night roost, flying south at Aswan at sunset 12/1.

#### Vitvingad tärna / White-winged Black Tern

common at most wetlands, hundreds along the Nile during 13/1.

#### Skäggtärna / Whiskered Tern

Appearance like the previous species, but in smaller numbers. Many *Chlidonias* left unidentified. No Black Tern positively identified.

#### Afrikansk saxnäbb / African Skimmer

The surprise of the trip! 8 birds were seen roosting as well as flying at a sandbank in the Nile just south of Edfu on the afternoon of 13/1.



*A flock of African Skimmers on a sand bank in the Nile! Photo by Sander Broström*

**Turkduva / Collared Dove**

c. 5 at Abbassa fish ponds 10/1 and 7 at Luxor sewage plant 15/1.

**Turturduva / Turtle Dove**

2 at Crocodile Island, Luxor 14/1 and 3 at Luxor sewage plant 15/1.

**Palmduva / Laughing Dove**

VERY common.

**Långstjärtsduva / Namaqua Dove**

1 flying past the ship in Kom Ombo 13/1 and at least 2 male and 1 female at the farms near Luxor sewage plant 15/1.

**Minervauggla / Little Owl**

2 at the farms near Luxor sewage plant 15/1.

**Tornuggla / Barn Owl**

1 hunting House Sparrows and bats in central Luxor in the evening of 14/1.

**Blek tornseglare / Pallid Swift**

fairly common along the Nile and around Luxor 13-15/1.

**Smyrnakungsfiskare / White-breasted Kingfisher**

c. 10 along the road to and at Abbassa fish ponds 10/1 and several along the "Sakkara Canal", south Cairo 10 and 16/1.

Gråfiskare / Pied Kingfisher

Very common at most water bodies. Tens of birds at most visited wetlands, numerous along the Nile.

Kungsfiskare / Kingfisher

1-2 at Abbassa fish ponds 10/1, 1 at Aswan 12/1 and 1 along the Nile 13/1.

Grön dvärgbätare / Little Green Bee-eater

Fairly common but in small numbers, often pairs, around Aswan and along the Nile 12-13/1. Several at Crocodile Island, Luxor 14/1.

Härfågel / Hoopoe

common.

[ Halsbandsparakit / Ring-necked Parakeet ]

3 flying over al-Azhar Mosque, old Cairo 11/1 and 2 at the "Sakkara Canal, south Cairo 16/1.

Tofslärka / Crested Lark

common.

Stenökenlärka / Desert Lark

2 at the parking lot, Valley of the Kings, Luxor 15/1.

Blek klippsvala / Rock Martin

seen at several areas around Aswan and Luxor 12-15/1, small numbers. Good views at the monuments like the Karnak Temple.

Ladusvala / Barn Swallow

common, mostly the local subspecies *saviigni*.

Backsvala / Sand Martin

2 along the Nile 13/1.

Rödstrupig piplärka / Red-throated Pipit

Fairly common but in small numbers at most visited areas. Some in summer plumage.

Sädesärla / White Wagtail

fairly common.

Gulärla / Yellow Wagtail

small numbers at fields and grasslands along the Nile. 75+ at Crocodile Island, Luxor 14/1.

Trädgårdsbulbul / Common Bulbul

fairly common in gardens and towns/villages during the trip.

**Blåhake / Bluethroat**

seen at most wetlands with reed beds during the trip, most areas had 1-3 birds. Some beautiful older males.

**Svarthakad buskskvätta / Stonechat**

only 2 females *rubicola* seen. 1 2cy male *maura* and 1 older male of unidentified subspecies were at Crocodile Island 14/1.

**Vitkronad stenskvätta / White-crowned Black Wheatear**

3-4 at Aswan reservoir/Ash Shellal 12/1.

**Munkstenskvätta / Hooded Wheatear**

1 female at very close range in Valley of the Kings, Luxor 15/1.

**Sorgstenskvätta / Mourning Wheatear**

2 at Valley of the Kings, Luxor 15/1.

**Isabellastenskvätta / Isabelline Wheatear**

2 at the farms near Luxor sewage plant 15/1.

**Ökenstenskvätta / Desert Wheatear**

1 male at the farms near Luxor sewage plant 15/1.

**Kurdstenskvätta / Kurdish Wheatear**

1 male at Giza pyramids 10/1.



*The male Kurdish Wheatear at Giza. Photo by Sander Broström*

**Blåtrast / Blue Rock Thrush**

1 at Karnak Temple, Luxor 14/1 and at least 1 at the parking lot, Valley of the Kings, Luxor 15/1.

Streckad prinia / Graceful Warbler  
common in suitable habitats.

Grässångare / Zitting Cisticola  
common in suitable habitats. Many on Crocodile Island, Luxor 14/1.

**Papyrussångare / Clamorous Reed Warbler**  
at least 2 at Abbassa fish ponds 10/1 and 2 at Aswan reservoir 12/1.

Sammethätta / Sardinian Warbler  
heard and some singles seen during the trip.

Ärtsångare / Lesser Whitethroat  
1 at Kom Ombo 13/1 and 1 at Crocodile Island, Luxor 14/1.

Gransångare / Chiffchaff  
common.

**Nilsolfågel / Nile Valley Sunbird**  
only a few seen, c.10, at different flowering trees around Crocodile Island, Luxor 14/1. 2 at the farms near Luxor sewage plant 15/1.

Ökenvarfågel / Southern Grey Shrike  
2 at the farms near Luxor sewage plant 15/1.

Kråka / Common Crow  
common.

Ökenkorp / Brown-necked Raven  
c. 5 at Karnak Temple, Luxor 14/1, a pair at Valley of the Kings, Luxor 15/1.

Stare / Starling  
a few small flocks seen around Cairo during 10 and 16/1.

[ Röd tigerfink / Red Avadavat ]  
c. 10 at Aswan reservoir 12/1 and c. 25 at Crocodile Island, Luxor 14/1.

Ökentrugetare / Trumpeter Finch  
c. 15 at the farms near Luxor sewage plant 15/1 and c. 40 at Valley of the Kings, Luxor 15/1.

Gråsparv / House Sparrow  
VERY common. Night roost along the cornice in Luxor with 1000+ birds.

Spansk sparv / Spanish Sparrow  
c. 25 at Abbassa fish ponds 10/1.