We wanted a reasonably priced holiday, combined with some birding and relaxing in early spring sunshine.

Thanks to our friends from our village, Cliffe, Medway, Kent, Frank and Cathy Cackett who had been to the site before including last spring, we found what we were looking for. This is an ideal low budget holiday for a birder to take with non-birding family or friends. We visited the site in October 2016 (see our report from that trip on Cloudbirders). We were the only birders on site so all species were self-found.

El Gouna is a resort around 24 Kilometres, North of Hurghada on the Red Sea and is an oasis in a surrounding desert. It is South-west of Ras Muhammad on the main part of Egypt and not on the Sinai Peninsula. It looks ideally placed for migrant birds and one rarely needs to leave the resort to find them.

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It has an easy going atmosphere, although with a professional attitude towards security. One can wander freely watching wildlife and taking photographs. There is usually a refreshing cool breeze making birding more comfortable than in many other desert regions.

We booked through Thomas Cook and took a direct flight from Gatwick to Hurghada that took around five hours with Condor on-board a Boeing 757. Their meet and greet service was excellent getting us a quick visa and onto the hopper bus in next to no time. Our vacation was all inclusive and we stayed in the Panorama Bungalows just a few yards from the very birdy golf course. The staff were brilliant, many speaking good English. The food good and varied and we enjoyed the evening’s entertainment immensely. They also provided free WIFI.

The Panorama Bungalows resort is just a five minute walk from Downtown and here there are many restaurants, bars, a cinema, an aquarium and street entertainment, if one wants to vary the evenings.
The weather was hot and sunny each day with a maximum temperature of 30 degrees centigrade, a nice cool breeze stayed with us until the conclusion of our vacation. The wind was N-NNW for the duration of our visit.

We birded several areas on the resort and one or two elsewhere. Species seen varied on each visit.

1. **The Steigenberger Golf Course**: This has many areas of trees including palm, tamarisk and acacia, sandy and rocky areas, patches of water and many flowering shrubs, all surrounded by manicured watered lawns. A scorched patch that we nicknamed Aladdin’s Carpet was excellent on each visit too.

2. **The Fish Farm**: There are several pools, scrub, trees, reeds, an area of mangroves and some scruffy unkempt areas here that are ideal for birding.

3. **Abydos Khor**: An estuary adjacent to Abydos Marina that is better on an incoming tide. There are mangrove and scrubby areas with some gardens. The marina is also worth a look around.

4. **Movenpick Hotel**: and other coastal gardens and shoreline.

5. **Giftun Island**: Great for gulls, seabirds and migrant land birds, with a resident pod of Bottle-nosed Dolphin.

6. **Mira Water Treatment Plant**: Aquatic birds, sandgrouse, migrants.

7. **El Gouna Mosque Garden**: Migrant land birds.

8. **Ancient Sands Golf Course**: Coursers, Chats, Wheatears, Pipits, Larks and Shrikes.

Sites 1 and 4 are within easy walking distance of the hotel, whilst sites 3, 7 and 8 are a short Tok-tok ride away that costs around GB£2 each way for two people. The remaining places are outside the resort. Access to all of these can be arranged through Max at the Panorama Bungalows, just ask at the reception.

We made three trips outside the resort; two mainly for snorkelling to Coral Reefs in the Red Sea at the Siyal Islands and Giftun Island, these islands are superb for birding and a magnet for migrant birds. We also visited the Mira Water Treatment Plant en route to Hurghada.

A funny thing with this visit was that we often found the same species as in October 2016 in exactly the same place, right down to the same bush / tree, despite those species of plant being numerous and to us looking alike. One irritation was that copious amounts of staff were continually tidying up and weeding areas across the resort that otherwise would be perfect for migrant birds.

We developed our own names for areas on the Golf Course and the Fish Farm such as Magic and Shrike Corners, Aladdin’s Carpet, The Outer Basin, Bluethroat Row, Wryneck and Sibe Gardens which made the identification of areas between Lyn and me much clearer.

Two other frustrating things we found were the general bureaucracy and lack of access to other areas; we were simply refused, even money not tempting the guardians of just a few trees or a tiny rubbish dump and also the fact that no migrant birds were singing, only a few were giving contact calls and nothing reacted to playback calls / songs.

The snorkelling was also an experience never to be forgotten.

Private message me on twitter @OreillyReilly2 for details of where to find the MWT Plant and for access details.

Day trips can be arranged from El Gouna to all the Egyptian Tourist Attractions.

**Species List**

**Mallard**: 2 on our Nile River Trip in Cairo on April 2

**Pintail**: 2 at Mira Water Treatment Plant on March 30
**Shoveler**: 52 at Mira Water Treatment Plant on March 30

**Common Teal**: 9 at Mira Water Treatment Plant on March 30

**Garganey**: 1 duck at Mira Water Treatment Plant on March 30

**Common Quail**: Seen on several days with a maximum daily count of 2. 1 bird was photographed in Movenpick Hotel Garden on March 24.

**Brown Booby**: 1 adult near Giftun Island on April 1

**Great Cormorant**: Up to 5 recorded at Abydos Khor on any one day. Smaller numbers were seen elsewhere.

**Night Heron**: 2, an adult and an immature on our Nile River Trip in Cairo on April 2, followed by another adult on S Golf Course on April 4.

**Striated Heron**: Seen most days, up to 3 birds, with the Fish Farm being a prime site.

**Cattle Egret**: Numerous on the S Golf Course and abundant in Giza, with some very grubby individuals on April 2.
Squacco Heron: Numerous at the Fish Farm and abundant on our Nile River Trip in Cairo on April 2.

Little Egret: Common on our Nile River Trip in Cairo on April 2.

Western Reef Heron: Seen most days, but a pair displaying at Abydos Khor was a special treat on March 23.

Grey Heron: Numerous throughout our time in Egypt.

White Stork: Some immense flocks recorded of migrating birds. One such flock of around 10,000 individuals was at Mira Water Treatment Plant on March 30.

Glossy Ibis: A handful seen most days at El Gouna and on our Nile River Trip in Cairo on April 2.

Osprey: Recorded most days, with up to 5 on Giftun Island, seen nesting on reedy sun shades near Abydos Khor with 2 young in nest.
Booted Eagle: 1 juvenile was at Mira Water Treatment Plant on March 30.
Black Kite: One of the most numerous medium sized raptors of the trip, often with hundreds recorded at various sites.

Marsh Harrier: Fairly numerous with up to 10 birds recorded on any one day. They were seen at a variety of sites.

Pallid Harrier: Recorded most days, although no more than a couple of birds on each occasion. Male and ringtails in equal numbers. The S Golf Course was a prime site.

Steppe Buzzard: Also another numerous medium sized raptor that was often recorded in large numbers at various sites.

Eurasian Sparrowhawk: Up to 2 birds recorded most days of both sexes. The S Golf Course was a prime site.

Common Kestrel: Numerous throughout our time in Egypt.

Sooty Falcon: An adult late afternoon on S Golf Course March 28.

Moorhen: Numerous at Mira Water Treatment Plant on March 30 and on our Nile River Trip in Cairo on April 2.

Common Coot: Numerous at Mira Water Treatment Plant on March 30 and on our Nile River Trip in Cairo on April 2.
Cream-coloured Courser: 3 superb adults at Ancient Sands Golf Course on March 31.

Collared Pratincole: 9 birds were on Aladdin’s Carpet, S Golf Course 2-4 April.

Black-winged Pratincole: 1 adult on S Golf Course on March 27.

Little Ringed Plover: up to 2 birds present on S Golf Course March 23- April 4. 2 birds were at Mira Water Treatment Plant on March 30.

Ringed Plover: Numerous throughout the holiday, with up to 50 birds at Mira Water Treatment Plant on March 30.

Kentish Plover: 5 birds present on Abydos Khor throughout our time there.

Grey Plover: 6 birds present on Abydos Khor throughout our time there, all in non-breeding plumage.

Spur-winged Plover: Recorded in every habitat with water, up to 12 birds on S Golf Course daily.

Wood Sandpiper: 1 at Mira Water Treatment Plant on March 30.

Green Sandpiper: 1 also at Mira Water Treatment Plant on March 30.

Common Sandpiper: Up to 4 birds seen daily from March 26- April 4 at a variety of sites including the hotel garden.

Redshank: 4 birds present on Abydos Khor throughout our time there.
**Greenshank**: Never more than 2 birds per day usually at Abydos Khor, but also on the S Golf Course.

**Eurasian Curlew**: Commonly seen up to 12 birds during the fortnight often on S Golf Course and Abydos Khor.

**Eurasian Whimbrel**: 2 recorded at Abydos Khor and on the beach by the Movenpick Hotel throughout the trip.

**Ruff**: A maximum daily count of 3 birds on S Golf Course and the Fish Farm throughout the duration.

**Black-headed Gull**: 1 first winter at Hurghada Harbour on April 1

**Slender-billed Gull**: Up to 25 gulls recorded daily with a few roseate, pink-hued birds. Giftun Island was a prime site.

**Yellow-legged Gull**: A few bog standard adults on Giftun Island and at Mira Water Treatment Plant on March 30.

**Armenian Gull**: Fairly numerous and watched in all plumages especially on Giftun Island and at Mira Water Treatment Plant on March 30.

**Caspian Gull**: A single adult was at Mira Water Treatment Plant on March 30.

**Baltic Gull**: Fairly numerous on Giftun Island and at Mira Water Treatment Plant on March 30.
Sooty Gull: Also fairly numerous on Giftun Island and up to 5 birds at Mira Water Treatment Plant on March 30.
White-eyed Gull: The commonest gull of the region and seen at all coastal sites.
Caspian Tern: The most numerous tern, recorded with up to 12 birds daily. Abydos Khor being a prime site.

Crested Tern: Recorded at most coastal sites in fairly small numbers. 1 bird was at Abydos Khor for the duration of our visit.

Whiskered Tern: 26 at Mira Water Treatment Plant on March 30. A single bird was at Abydos Khor on April 1.

Crowned Sandgrouse: Around 50 came in to drink from the desert at around 08:15 at Mira Water Treatment Plant on March 30.

Rock Dove/Feral Pigeon: Abundant in all habitats.
Namaqua Dove: 2 males at Mira Water Treatment Plant on March 30.

Eurasian Collared Dove: up to 12 birds on the S Golf Course throughout the trip, always on Aladdin’s Carpet.

African Collared Dove: A single bird presumably in breeding plumage was on the S Golf Course on March 24 and not associating with the Eurasian species. It looked more slender, cleaner and shorter-tailed, with a roseate hue to its breast and head, which contrasted with its white under-parts and vent.
Turtle Dove: Up to 6 birds on S Golf Course March 31 – April 4, always on Aladdin’s Carpet.

Laughing/Palm Dove: Abundant in all habitats.

Short-eared Owl: A single bird flew past the balcony of the Panorama Bungalows on March 27. My first record from many trips to North Africa and the Middle East.

Common Swift: Just 2 seen from the balcony of the Panorama Bungalows on March 27, excepting a single seen by Lyn at the Fish Farm on April 3.
**Hoopoe:** Really good numbers seen throughout the holiday, it was not unusual to see up to 10 birds together. The S Golf Course was a prime site.

**Common Kingfisher:** Up to 5 birds recorded daily, wherever there was water. A variety of perches were used. Abydos Khor was a prime site.

**White-breasted Kingfisher:** A beautiful adult showed very well on our Nile River Trip in Cairo on April 2.

**Pied Kingfisher:** A couple of birds were recorded at El Gouna throughout our time there, especially at Abydos Khor were they would often perch on the streetlights. They were extremely common on our Nile River Trip in Cairo on April 2.

**European Bee-eater:** A flock of 6 were on the S Golf Course on April 4.
Blue-cheeked Bee-eater: Small flocks of less than 10 birds were watched throughout the trip, even from the balcony of the Panorama Bungalows. They would often land on the S Golf Course. A flock of 9 by the Pyramids at Giza on April 2 was a surprise.
**Wryneck:** Seen most days from day one, usually with up to three individuals. They were always in Wryneck Garden at the Fish Farm.

**Short-toed Lark:** An extremely common migrant with some flocks in excess of 100 birds. Their plumage was very variable. S Golf Course was a prime site.

**Sand Martin:** Numerous throughout the holiday.

**Barn Swallow:** Passing through in large numbers on the Red Sea with over 100 birds per day. The resident Egyptian Swallow of the Nile Valley were numerous on our day trip there on April 2. They are extremely dark with the under-parts and under-wing practically the same rusty colour as the throat.

**Red-rumped Swallow:** Very common throughout our entire stay, with over 100 birds some days. They were often prospecting buildings such as the Panorama Bungalows, presumably searching for nesting sites.

**House Martin:** Up to 10 birds recorded daily at a variety of sites.

**Tawny Pipit:** Also up to 10 birds seen daily, especially at both of the golf courses. Again they were very variable plumage wise.

**Tree Pipit:** Extremely numerous from March 27 and also tame, often wandering along the ground just a few metres from us at a variety of sites, especially in the hotel gardens.
**Red-throated Pipit:** Very common with many recorded every day. Some of the birds had super-red throats which were much brighter than most of the other individuals.

**White Wagtail:** One of the most numerous birds of the trip, hundreds recorded daily.
Yellow Wagtail: An absolute jewel of a species with 6 different races recorded; all were adult males. The beauty of this bird is that we know exactly where they are migrating to and therefore other birds also: Grey-headed (N Fenno-Scandia), Ashy-headed (Italy), Blue-headed (Central Europe), Black-headed (Balkans, Turkey, Caucasus), Superciliumed (South-east Russia) and Romanian (Eastern Europe).

Grey Wagtail: Usually a couple of birds present at the Fish Farm and often in Wryneck Garden where there is a split irrigator.

Common Nightingale: 1 bird was at the S Golf Course March 31 - April 4 and another at Wryneck Garden at the Fish Farm on 2 April.

Thrush Nightingale: A 1st winter was hiding among garbage at the Fish Farm on 25 March.
Rufous Bush Chat/Robin: A displaying bird of the Eastern race was on S Golf Course April 2-4
**Bluethroat:** Recorded daily with up to 5 birds present, all birds were of the Red-spotted race. The Fish Farm was a prime site.
**Common Redstart**: Up to 3 birds recorded daily with the Fish Farm being a prime site. Some beautiful cock birds were seen.

**Northern Wheatear**: Abundant with more than 50 birds present daily. Recorded at most sites, they were the most numerous wheatear of the trip.
Isabelline Wheatear: Commonly seen with up to 25 birds watched daily. It is a robust wheatear with a thick bill and legs that often allows close approach. The S Golf Course was a prime site.
**Black-eared Wheatear:** Seen every day with up to 10 birds recorded on each occasion. Five different plumages studied. The S Golf Course was again a prime site.

**Pied Wheatear:** A 1st winter male moulting into breeding plumage was present on the S Golf Course March 28-29.

**Desert Wheatear:** A female was present on S Golf Course on March 22.

**Whinchat:** No more than 2 birds daily, with some lovely male birds in full breeding plumage. March 27 – April 4.

**Common Stonechat:** Single birds were seen daily in a variety of plumages from March 29-April 4.

**Siberian Stonechat:** A 1st winter bird was at the Fish Farm on March 28. An adult male Caspian Stonechat with a tail reminiscent of a whinchat was at S Golf Course March 27, it would continually flick its tail showing its striking pattern.

**Lesser Whitethroat:** Omnipresent as in our previous autumn visit, one of the commonest El Gouna birds seen.

**Blackcap:** A single redcap on S Golf Course on March 22 was the only record.

**Sedge Warbler:** Singles seen daily, especially at Wryneck Garden, Fish Farm.

**Reed Warbler:** A single bird was at S Golf Course on March 25
Savi’s Warbler: Our first record was in the Panorama Hotel Gardens on March 27. We then had 3 birds together at the Fish Farm on March 28, a unique sighting for me.

Willow Warbler: First seen on 23 March with numbers building up over a few days, culminating with up to 30 birds on S Golf Course on 27 March.

Eastern Bonelli’s Warbler: First seen was a pair at the El Gouna Mosque Garden on March 23. Up to 10 birds recorded daily from then on.

Chiffchaff: Abundant throughout out time in Egypt, but never in song.

Semi-collared Flycatcher: A total of 4 birds seen throughout our time. The first on S Golf Course on 21 March was still present on 4 April although minus its tail. 2 were watched together at the Fish Farm on 22 March.

Collared Flycatcher: Some splendid birds seen daily after the first at Panorama Bungalows Hotel Gardens on 30 March, at a variety of sites including The Ancient Sands Resort Garden on March 31. It was also seen with the fore-mentioned species on April 4.
**Turkestan Shrike:** An adult male was on S Golf Course on 21 March. This was a stunning bird with a bright Rufous tail.

**Daurian Shrike:** A female was also on S Golf Course on March 25-28. This bird was photographed.
Woodchat Shrike: A handful was recorded most days, following the first on March 25. They were seen at a variety of sites.
**Masked Shrike:** Recorded every day with a maximum of 3 per day also at a variety of sites.

**Common Bulbul:** Numerous in the Nile Valley and watched at several of the tourist attractions around Cairo.

**Nile Valley Sunbird:** A flock of around 9 birds would roam the S Golf Course that included a pristine male and several sub-adults, which were recorded throughout the holiday.

**Hooded Crow:** Abundant in all habitats. But with the spread of House Crow there must be competition. The race *pallescens* are more pallid and noticeably smaller than European birds.

**House Crow:** In 2016 we did not see this species outside Hurghada, however today this invasive corvid has spread to El Gouna itself and was extremely numerous around the hotel grounds.

**Brown-necked Raven:** One of the ornithological spectacles of the trip. On Gifun Island we witnessed a bird swoop on an adult White-eyed Gull and tear it to pieces despite its gallant fight back. Hooded Crows waited at the side-lines for the raven to finish eating before moving in. They were also numerous on the journey to Cairo.

**House Sparrow:** Extremely common throughout the trip.

**Spanish Sparrow:** Recorded throughout our stay, with some large flocks of up to 100 birds on the S Golf Course. Odd birds would often be seen with House Sparrows or Short-toed Larks. Pollen covered female types are a pitfall for the unwary birder, who at first sight could mistake it for another species.

Big thank you to Grant Heath for helping Lyn and I compile this report.