We wanted a reasonably priced holiday combined with some birding and relaxing in autumn sunshine.

Thanks to our friends from our village, Cliffe, Medway, Kent, Frank and Cathy Cackett who had been to the site before including this spring, we found what we were looking for. This is an ideal low budget holiday for a birder to take with non-birding family and friends.

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.

It has an easy going atmosphere, although a professional attitude towards security. One can wander freely watching wildlife and taking photographs.

We booked through Loveholidays.com and took a direct flight from Gatwick to Hurghada that took around five hours with easyJet. 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, the food good and varied and we enjoyed the evenings entertainment immensely. They had free WIFI.
The bungalows are just a five minute walk from Downtown and here there are many restaurants, bars, a cinema, aquarium and street entertainment.

The weather was hot and sunny each day with a maximum temperature of 30 degrees centigrade, on 17 Oct a nice cool breeze stayed with us until the conclusion of our vacation. The wind was N-NNW the whole time.

We birded just four areas on the resort and our sightings varied on each visit.

- **The Golf Course:** This has many areas of trees including tamarisk and acacia, sandy and rocky areas, patches of water and many flowering shrubs, all surrounding a manicured lawn.
- **The Fish Farm:** There are several pools, scrub, trees, reeds an area of mangroves and some scruffy unkempt areas that are ideal for birding.
- **Abydos Khor:** An estuary adjacent to Abydos Marina that is excellent on an incoming tide. There are mangrove and scrubby areas with some gardens. The marina is also worth a look around.
- **Movenpick Hotel** and other coastal gardens and shoreline.

The first and last are within easy walking distance of the hotel, the other two a short Tuk-tuk ride costing £2 each way for two people.

We made two trips outside the resort, both mainly for snorkelling to Coral Reefs in the Red Sea and then onto the Siyal Islands and Giftun Island, these islands are superb for birding and a magnet for migrant birds. The snorkelling on both days was an experience we will never forget. These trips can be booked from the hotel for around £30-£40 all day with lunch and drinks each person per day.
Systematic list of species

**Pintail.** A pair were ever present at the Fish Farm, and a single was near the Movenpick Hotel on 25 Oct.

**Garganey.** Seen throughout the trip, but no more than three birds daily. Also ever present at the Fish Farm.

**Cormorant.** Surprisingly scarce, with no more than two seen in one day. Abydos Khor a usual site for them.

**Night Heron.** Seen most days with some migrant flocks passing over the resort. Seventeen were on the Golf Course on 22 Oct.

**Striated Heron.** Common on the resort with around half a dozen observed daily. The Fish Farm being a prime site.
**Cattle Egret.** Up to ten recorded most days particularly on the Golf Course.

**Squacco Heron.** Up to five birds watched on every visit to the Fish Farm, smaller numbers elsewhere.

**Little Egret.** An uncommon bird, seen in ones and twos at the Fish Farm and Abydos Khor.

**Western Reef Heron.** The commonest egret on the resort, even residing in the hotel gardens. White and Intermediate colour morphs were present.

**Grey Heron.** A numerous species in the whole area.
**Purple Heron.** Seen on several days both adults and juveniles. The Fish Farm and Abydos Khor were prime sites for them.

**Osprey.** Up to six birds recorded each day, often fishing in the moat of the hotel gardens taking Arabian Angel Fish.

**Black Kite.** One watched from the tower on the Golf Course on 14 Oct.

**Pallid Harrier.** One adult male seen on the Golf Course on 20 Oct. Then two ringtails there on 23 Oct.

**Long-legged Buzzard.** Two from the Golf Course tower that were loosely in with Steppe Buzzards on 14 Oct.

**Steppe Buzzard.** Seen on several days with a maximum count of thirty on 14 Oct over the Golf Course.

**Honey Buzzard.** One spreading panic amongst the migrant birds on Giftun Island on 20 Oct.

**Sparrowhawk.** One large female on the Golf Course on 18 Oct.

**Levant Sparrowhawk.** A superb male graced Giftun Island with its presence on the 20 Oct, showing its apricot underparts, steel-blue upperparts, white underwing with black-tips. They have much narrower wing-tips then the above species.
**Kestrel.** Omnipresent throughout the holiday, with as many as 10 birds seen some days.

**Sooty Falcon.** Enjoyed on several days on the Golf Course and Gifun Island in a variety of plumages. One adult landed on the Golf Course tower handrail while we were sat there.

**Coot.** Three birds were resident on Coot Pond at the Fish Farm during our complete stay. A single was on the Golf Course on 25 Oct.

**Crane.** Twenty-six migrated low over Gifun Island bugling as they went over on 20 Oct.

**Black-winged Stilt.** A single male was present on Abydos Khor from 16-24 Oct.

**Collared Pratincole.** An adult was watched perched on the mast of a ship wrecked on a coral reef, c8 Kms east of El Gouna on Oct 19.

**Ringed Plover.** Ubiquitous and the commonest shorebird of the trip. Some day figures were in excess of 100 birds.

**Kentish Plover.** Numerous throughout our stay and seen in a variety of plumages. Abydos Khor is a prime site for this wader.

**Greater Sandplover.** Also numerous especially at Abydos Khor. The high tide count there on 14 Oct was twenty-eight.

**Grey Plover.** Up to sixteen birds were seen daily, mainly at Abydos Khor, where one or two of them were still in breeding “Silver Plover” plumage.
**Golden Plover.** One in partial breeding plumage on the Golf Course on 14 Oct.

**Spur-winged Plover.** Around twenty birds permanently on the resort, being very vociferous. They were always present on the Golf Course.

**Sanderling.** Ones and twos were around the shoreline and on Abydos Khor daily.

**Dunlin.** Not numerous with up to a dozen birds on Abydos Khor most days. Singles were recorded elsewhere.

**Little Stint.** Four of these diminutive peeps were on the Golf Course Oct 15-24 and often in the company of a Sanderling. Singles were watched elsewhere.

**Wood Sandpiper.** A flock of four were present on Abydos Khor on 13 Oct.

**Common Sandpiper.** Numerous with up to ten birds seen daily, often in multiple groups.

**Redshank.** A common wader on the resort, especially so at Abydos Khor where up to twenty birds were recorded most days.

**Greenshank.** Not as numerous as the previous species, but still recorded daily with around six on Abydos Khor most days.

**Bar-tailed Godwit.** One was scoped on the shoreline near The Movenpick Hotel on 26 Oct.

**Curlew.** Fairly common with around twelve birds observed daily. Some birds showed features of the eastern race, as they had extremely long-bills.

**Whimbrel.** Up to six birds sighted daily, sometimes calling to each as they flew by.

**Slender-billed Gull.** Up to twenty birds observed daily, with Abydos Khor being a prime site.

**Armenian Gull.** One adult on the Golf Course 24 Oct and two adults near the Movenpick Hotel on 26 Oct. A very distinctive gull.

**Sooty Gull.** Up to ten on Giftun Island 20 Oct with one and twos watched near the Movenpick Hotel on several occasions.
**White-eyed Gull.** Numerous around the resort, but extremely common on the Red Sea Islands, 500+ on the Siyal Islands 19 Oct.

**White-cheeked Tern.** Abundant on the Siyal Islands with thousands watched on 19 Oct in a variety of plumages.

**Caspian Tern.** Around twenty birds seen per day. Abydos Khor is a major site for them.
**Crested Tern.** At least a dozen of these shaggy-crested terns on the Siyal Islands on 19 Oct. Two or three usually around the shoreline near the Movenpick Hotel.

**Lesser Crested Tern.** More numerous than the above species and often in the same company. Up to fifty enjoyed on the Siyal Islands with lesser numbers on the shoreline near the Movenpick Hotel.

**Whiskered Tern.** A super tame adult was at the Fish Farm on 17 Oct. This bird was totally indifferent to humans.

![Crested Tern](image)

**Feral Pigeon.** Numerous in the region.

**Namaqua Dove.** A juvenile was on the Golf Course on 15 Oct, followed by an adult male and female there on 17 Oct.

**Collared Dove.** An adult was on the Golf Course from 22-26 Oct.

**Laughing Dove.** Formerly known as Palm Dove. Very numerous throughout the region and often the sound of the wilderness.

**Kingfisher.** Around half a dozen birds seen daily around the resort.

**Bee-eater.** Two chattering birds were hawking at the Fish Farm on 13 Oct.
**Short-toed Lark.** Observed on the Golf Course on a few occasions with around five birds watched. Also recorded on Giftun Island on 20 Oct.

**Sand Martin.** One or two birds seen most days, furiously feeding.

**Swallow.** The commonest hirundine, although not abundant and only around twenty observations daily.

**Tawny Pipit.** One or two most days, watched on the Golf Course and Giftun Island.

**Tree Pipit.** A single bird was at the Fish Farm from 21-25 Oct.

**Red-throated Pipit.** Seen everyday in large numbers with many still showing salmon-pink throats. A fall of around eighty birds were on the Golf Course on 16 Oct.

![Short-toed Lark](image)

**White Wagtail.** One of the commonest passerines on the resort. Often daily counts of 100+

**Yellow Wagtail.** Several adult males in with duller birds on the Golf Course *thunbergi* Grey-headed and *flavissima* Yellow Wagtails were observed. Up to fifteen birds daily, mainly on the Golf Course.

**Black-headed Wagtail.** One adult male of the *superciliaris* race, graced the Golf Course on 15 Oct.

**Grey Wagtail.** One was at the Fish Farm on 21 Oct.

**Bluethroat.** Up to ten birds seen daily on the resort from 16 Oct, with several adult male Red-spotted *svecica* race being amongst them.
**Redstart.** Around six birds recorded most days, with a high of eight on 26 Oct. All birds were of the European *phoenicurus* race.

**Northern Wheatear.** A common migrant passing through El Gouna and islands. A daily count of up to twenty birds was made.

**Isabelline Wheatear.** A single first winter bird was at Abydos Khor on 14 October.

**Desert Wheatear.** Around six birds were recorded daily including several adult cock birds in breeding plumage.
**Whinchat.** Two or three birds watched daily especially on the Golf Course.

**Stonechat.** A single bird of western origin was at the Fish Farm 23-25 Oct.

**Lesser Whitethroat.** The commonest migrant bird at El Gouna, with around 100 birds seen daily and on occasions, the 16 Oct for example, double that amount.
**Sardinian Warbler.** Two adult males were found. One on the Golf Course Oct 17-18 and another at the Fish Farm on the Oct 25.

**Sedge Warbler.** Observed in ones and twos most days and often showing very well.

**Reed Warbler.** A single bird was in the Movenpick Hotel Garden from Oct 18-21.

**Willow Warbler.** Very common at the beginning of the trip, with around sixty birds being present daily. This whittled down to around half a dozen birds by the end of the vacation.

**Chiffchaff.** At the start of our time at El Gouna we saw up to six birds daily, but numbers increased to around thirty birds a day by the time that we left.

**Siberian Chiffchaff.** We picked up a bird in coastal gardens giving out a flat “eep” call and on further investigation we found a *tristis* Chiffchaff recognisable by its greyish upperparts, green tertials with a hint of a white wing-bar, white underparts without warmth, the supercilium was long with a hint of buff, but no yellow on it and it had glossy black legs. This bird may be the first sight record for Egypt. The bird was in a coastal garden close to the Movenpick Hotel on the 24 Oct.
**Spotted Flycatcher.** Up to three birds recorded daily at various sites including the Red Sea Islands.

![Spotted Flycatcher](image)

**Red-breasted Flycatcher.** A single bird was by the Golf Course Clubhouse on 14-15 Oct. Often picked up by its rattling call.

**Great Grey Shrike.** One very dark bird presumed *aucheri* race near the Golf Course Clubhouse on 14 Oct.

**Red-backed Shrike.** Single birds were seen most days at several sites, an adult female was on the vegetation-free Siyal Islands on 19 Oct.

**Masked Shrike.** The commonest shrike of the holiday with up to four birds recorded daily. The Golf Course was a prime location.

**Nile Valley Sunbird.** A very colourful male was feeding on the Golf Course close to the Club House on 24 Oct.
**Hooded Crow.** Abundant in the region and usually harassing any other bird larger than itself.

**House Crow.** They are a common bird in Hurghada, especially so near the harbour and often seen in close association with hoodies.

**Brown-necked Raven.** Several very tame birds on Giftun Island on 20 Oct. Singles were flying over the Golf Course on other dates.

**House Sparrow.** Extremely numerous throughout the region.

**Spanish Sparrow.** Not seen until the 23 Oct then hundreds recorded including 200+ on the Golf Course on 25 Oct.
Zebra Finch. One buff morph obviously an escape from captivity was found exhausted on the beach near the Movenpick Hotel on 14 Oct.
A Summary of Frank and Cathy’s visits.

Frank and Cathy had visited El Gouna on two recent occasions 17-23 March 2015 and 20 March-2 April 2016. Their observations show that this of year has many more migrant birds than October the month of our visit. During our trip we had many more North European migrants compared to their Southern and Eastern birds.

A selection of their sightings included in 2015.
Brown Booby, 2 Great Black-headed Gulls, 6 Black Stork, Spoonbill and 50+ Honey Buzzards and 2 Bimaculated Lark.

In 2016 records included.
56 Purple Herons, 70,000 White Stork, 9 Glossy Ibis, 1 Steppe Eagle, 1 Short-toed Eagle, 20 Red Kite, 500+ Black Kite, Marsh Harrier, Hen Harrier, Pallid Harrier, Long-legged and Steppe Buzzards, 3 Levant Sparrowhawk, Lesser Kestrel, 12 Sooty Falcon, Quail, Crane, Collared Pratincole, 6 Black-winged Pratincole, Little Ringed Plover, Curlew Sandpiper, 5 Temminck’s Stint. 200+ White-winged Black Tern, Whiskered Tern, Moussier’s Redstart, 20+ Isabelline Wheatear, Black-eared and Pied Wheatears, Blackcap, Ruppell’s Warbler, Spectacled and Subalpine Warblers,
100+ Short-toed Lark, Lesser Short-toed Lark, Red-rumped Swallow, House Martin, Tawny, Richard’s, Tree, Water, Red-throated and Meadow Pipits, Fan-tailed, Grasshopper, Bonelli’s and Olivaceous Warblers, Collared Flycatcher, Great and Blue Tits, Isabelline, Woodchat and Masked Shrikes, Nile Valley Sunbird, Turtle and Namaqua Doves, Barn Owl, Common and Alpine Swifts, Hoopoe, Pied Kingfisher, European and 100+ Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters, Wryneck and Goldfinch.

All in all, it is a pretty impressive list. Regular working of the area would produce many other species. I have seen a fairly recent photo of a Black Bush Robin at El Gouna for instance. A visit is worth it for the snorkelling alone. Frank’s unmistakable male Moussier’s Redstart and Lyn and my Siberian Chiffchaff were both potential first records for the country.