Introduction

This was another trip that was focused as a family holiday and for the first time we stayed put in single location. We had previously tried to come to Luxor, only to have flights (and the whole trip cancelled at the last moment due to security concerns). My daughter had just finished University in Archaeology and Anthropology and was keen to go to such an iconic location. As we discovered, Egypt has made great strides to secure the main tourist areas and the people we met were friendly and welcoming. The low numbers of tourists meant that the hotel was very relaxed but there was a sense of desperation for some traders – but they didn’t cross the line into harassment.

We took the “insurance” of travelling with Egypt Air this time on scheduled services via Cairo – we assumed that at least this wouldn’t be cancelled – as it proved. The trip was booked via Expedia.

We spent the whole time at Jolie Ville resort. The hotel is set on its own private island in the Nile, 10 mins south of the main town. The island has been laid out with gardens around chalet accommodation and terraces overlooking the Nile. This gave ample opportunity for photography and relaxed birding.

The areas immediately along the Nile are green due to irrigation but moving outside this zone brought us straight into the edge of the desert. This was particularly the case on the west bank around the Valley of the Kings and associated sites.

Although we took a relaxed approach the site is a good one and the more adventurous could link it simply with a trip to Abu Simbel and/or the Red Sea coast.

The weather as dry and cloudless throughout, however the first week temperatures peaked at 40 ºC plus, meaning that the middle of the day was always relaxed and staying in the shade. Trips out were either early or late before the temperature became too high.
Site Comments

Crocodile Island – the home of Jolie Ville Resort. This private island is a secure and easy place to watch both around the gardens, the Nile itself and the market gardening beyond the manicured areas. It is renown as the place to find Nile Valley Sunbird and so it proved with daily views on the flowering trees. In addition, it is recognised for numerous herons and waders – key amongst these are the Senegal Thick-knee that share the lawns with Spur-winged Plovers.

Just south of the island is a smaller reed covered island, known locally as bird island – and it is easily reached by felucca ride from the hotel. This island seemed to be the resting place of a range of waders.

I was expecting (hoping) that the location and habitat would also be on a migration fly way, yet with a few exceptions there was little that could be said to be pure migration long the Nile. Low numbers of passerines were seen and probably a few were migrants. The European Bee-eater flock was all juveniles and seemed sedentary. The Isabelline Wheatear was a pass through, and the Yellow Wagtails seem to show a change of mix of subspecies. Along the Nile itself ducks and terns were seen heading south, and the large flock of Pelicans was a feature of the last evening.

In addition, the waterways were good for Odonata. A number of species were present in the grounds and the reed beds. Butterflies were scarce – probably in part due to the spraying of insecticide.

Most expected species were seen and in addition Indian Silverbill appears to have colonised in the recent past. I was surprised not to connect with three species – Clamorous Reed Warbler that I had assumed were resident, Greater Painted Snipe – always difficult and elusive but maybe they move off this area as they were definitely present earlier in the year – and the introduced Avadavat just not present.

West Bank sites

All the sites were in the desert edge and marked a departure of from the green swathe of the river valley itself. Apart from Rock Martins birds were few and generally silent. A couple of distant birds at the Valley of the Kings were likely to be Brown-necked Raven and Booted Eagle but they stayed on the ridge and disappeared.

At Hapshepsut temple, a couple of calling Trumpeter finches showed themselves.

Luxor temples

Luxor temple is in the centre of town and despite the trees present – nothing appeared to be showing except Laughing Doves and Bulbuls. The biggest surprise was a flushed Egyptian Nightjar.

At Karnak, Rock Martins were common around the Pylons and House Sparrows & Laughing Doves were present. Despite the wide extent of the grounds and standing water – nothing more was seen here.
Bird Species list

Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos platyrhynchos*) – only record was a flock of 6 on 23rd flying along the Nile.

Garganey (*Anas querquedula*) – a minimum of two males in a flock flying south along the Nile on 26th. It is probable that all the other birds in the flock of ten were the same species. Probably overlooked Crocodile Island, Luxor.

Eurasian Teal (*Anas crecca*) – most of the ducks heading south appeared to be teal although the flocks were infrequent and only peaked at 20 or so birds.

Little Grebe (*Tachybaptus ruficollis ruficollis*) – one was seen in the channel between Crocodile Island and the land.

Great White Pelican (*Pelecanus onocrotalus*) – although a lone bird was seen in the Nile on the 22nd and 23rd Sept, it was on the evening of the 29th that a flock of over 150 birds formed their own “island” just south of Crocodile island. The birds had moved on by the following morning.

Grey Heron (*Ardea cinerea cinerea*) – seen daily around Crocodile Island, but not numerous.

Purple Heron (*Ardea purpurea purpurea*) – common on the reed-lined channel between Crocodile Island and the shore. Seen on all days with 3-5 birds present.

Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta garzetta*) - common and seen daily along the Nile.

Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis ibis*) - Common across all agricultural areas and seen daily in large numbers. Pre-roost flocks were also seen each night heading along the Nile.

Squacco Heron (*Ardeola ralloides*) – the commonest heron seen daily around Crocodile Island, probably over thirty birds present throughout.

**Striated Heron** (*Butorides striata atricapilla*) – the least common of the herons, but 1-3 seen daily around Crocodile Island.

**Black-crowned Night-Heron** (*Nycticorax nycticorax nycticorax*) - both adults and juveniles were present in roosting in the Nile side acacias and seen daily.

**Glossy Ibis** (*Plegadis falcinellus*) – seen most days in raggedy flocks heading along the Nile, but not on Crocodile Island itself.

**Black-shouldered Kite** (*Elanus caeruleus caeruleus*) - not uncommon over agricultural areas and seen regularly at Crocodile Island. Peak count on the island was three on 23rd.

**European Honey-buzzard** (*Pernis apivorus*) – a typical migrant around the Med, and after the first morning of the 21st, I thought it was going to be a typical bird here as well. However, after that first lifting off and heading south from the hotel gardens as soon as the warmth arriving, only one other was seen.

**Eurasian Marsh-Harrier** (*Circus aeruginosus aeruginosus*) - seen almost daily at Crocodile Island, always as singles. The majority were female/juv types.
Yellow-billed (Black) Kite (*Milvus aegyptius*) - only the African species, elevated by IOC to legitimacy, was seen. This is resident in the Nile valley, and I took care to check where possible if any migrant 'normal' Black Kites where here – without success. Frequent across Crocodile Island with a peak daily count of three.

African Swamphen (*Porphyrio madagascariensis*) – just one was seen early on 22nd Sept. This is a typical species of Crocodile Island and either they are not resident or they had decided to stay hidden in the reedbeds when I was around.

Eurasian Moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus chloropus*) - common around Crocodile Island and seen daily both on the edges of the reeds and on the floating vegetation on the Nile itself.

Senegal Thick-knee (*Burhinus senegalensis*) - two or more birds were present in the gardens on Crocodile Island throughout, although they could be elusive if disturbance pushed them into the surrounding area.

Black-winged Stilt (*Himantopus himantopus*) – a single bird seen at Crocodile Island on 24th.

Spur-winged Plover (*Vanellus spinosus*) – common on the hotel lawns around Crocodile Island and seen daily.

Common Sandpiper (*Actitis hypoleucos*) – assumed to be passage birds, 1-2 were seen most days on Crocodile Island.

Green Sandpiper (*Tringa ochropus*) – one was seen and heard on 21st on Crocodile Island.

Marsh Sandpiper (*Tringa stagnatilis*) – One was flushed and flew south along the Nile on the morning of 23rd.

Wood Sandpiper (*Tringa glareola*) – the commonest wader and easily seen along the edges of Crocodile Island. Seen daily with over ten seen each day.

Ruff (*Calidris pugnax*) – a scarce bird, but one seen on three occasions during our stay on Crocodile Island.

Little Stint (*Calidris minuta*) – a single was seen on bird island from the Felucca trip on 28th.

Common Snipe (*Gallinago gallinago gallinago*) - a single bird was seen in the channel between the island and the mainland on the first three days from 21st. Not seen thereafter.

Gull-billed Tern (*Gelochelidon nilotica nilotica*) - no more than three birds were often seen loafing off Crocodile Island and moving along the Nile. These were assumed not to be migrating.

Black Tern (*Chlidonias niger*) - the least common of the three marsh terns and first seen on the 24th. All birds were moving south and most in mixed flocks where Whiskered Terns dominated.

White-winged Tern (*Chlidonias leucopterus*) – although not as numerous as Whiskered Terns, this species was seen almost daily heading south along the Nile in loose flocks and often breaking off to hunt to the south in the small bays.
**Whiskered Tern** (*Chlidonias hybrida hybrid*) - the commonest of the marsh terns and seen daily in small flocks. It was noticeable that although assumed to be migrating, birds were seen to move northwards as well as southwards during the day. It was not clear how much of this is local movement rather than true migration. Often seen in mixed flocks with the previous two species.

**European Turtle-Dove** (*Streptopelia turtur*) – possibly overlooked amongst the enormous numbers of Laughing Doves. Only one record of a single in the agricultural area at the north end of Crocodile Island on 22nd.

**Laughing Dove** (*Streptopelia senegalensis aegyptiaca*) - the commonest dove and seen in towns, villages and agricultural areas throughout daily.

**Common Cuckoo** (*Cuculus canorus*) – a single was at Crocodile Island on 21st.

**Little Owl** (*Athene noctua glaux*) - although probably resident around the new build area to the north of the island, only seen once on 23rd

**Egyptian Nightjar** (*Caprimulgus aegyptius aegyptius*) – one flushed up and called from the roof of the south end of Luxor temple on the evening of 25th. A strange location and the only night bird seen either here or at Karnak during the evening visits.

**Pallid Swift** (*Apus pallidus pallidus*) – although one of the first species seen at Crocodile island on the morning of 21st, it was not for another week that any others were seen. Certainly they were scare, with no more than 5 seen on any day.

**Pied Kingfisher** (*Ceryle rudis rudis*) – the only kingfisher present, and common along the Nile, both in the centre of town and in more natural habitat. Seen singly or in groups of up to six birds.

**Green Bee-eater** (*Merops orientalis cleopatra*) – common around Crocodile Island, generally in pairs or family parties. However, before sunset larger groups would form with up 20 birds. All were of the local Nile valley subspecies *cleopatra*.

**Blue-cheeked Bee-eater** (*Merops persicus persicus*) - a small flock of 6-10 birds were present throughout. They appeared to roost on the island but disperse along the Nile during the day.

**European Bee-eater** (*Merops apiaster*) – a flock of 5 or so birds were present on Crocodile Island and as with the previous species they roosted on the island but foraged further afield. It appeared that the flock was entirely formed on juvenile birds.

**Eurasian Kestrel** (*Falco tinnunculus*)- a family of three – four birds were around the hotel grounds at Crocodile Island and seen daily.

**Masked Shrike** (*Lanius nubicus*) – both adults and juveniles were present on the island and seen daily. Thy were particularly fond of the irrigation outlets that offered them a perch to hunt from.
Eurasian Golden Oriole (*Oriolus oriolus*) – present in low numbers and especially in the Nile side Acacias on Crocodile Island. Seen on most days but probably migrants passing through rather than the same birds.

**Hooded Crow** (*Corvus cornix pallescens*) – common in town and in all agricultural areas and seen daily.

**Crested Lark** (*Galerida cristata maculata*) – common around the agricultural areas on Crocodile Island and along the Nile. Seen daily in pairs and small parties.

**Bank Swallow** (*Riparia riparia shelleyi*) - only one seen joining the swallows along the Nile on the 25th at Crocodile Island, Luxor

**Rock Martin** (*Ptyonoprogne fuligula*) - a species that was familiar away from the Nile on the rocky slopes on the West Bank, but also around the Pylons at Karnak and the other temples.

**Barn Swallow** (*Hirundo rustica savignii*) – seen daily in good numbers along the Nile. Although most were typical savignii with the rich red underparts, a few of other races were seen on a daily basis, but much in the minority. It is uncertain which other races were present.

**Red-rumped Swallow** (*Cecropis daurica rufula*) – again surprisingly scarce after being one of the first birds being seen on 21st. Only ones and two seen on 3 dates. All around Crocodile Island, but perhaps overlooked elsewhere.

**Common Bulbul** (*Pycnonotus barbatus arsine*) - common in the gardens and parks especially around Crocodile Island and the other temple complexes/gardens in the city.

**Willow Warbler** (*Phylloscopus trochilus*) - a single was seen on the first morning and then after not seen until the 25th. Obviously a scarce migrant.

**Eastern Olivaceous Warbler** (*Iduna pallida pallida*) – seen almost daily but no more than three on any day. Fond of the Nile side acacias these appeared to be southbound migrants.

**Moustached Warbler** (*Acrocephalus melanopogon*) - one was seen in the reeds around Crocodile Island on the 23rd.

**Eurasian Reed-Warbler** (*Acrocephalus scirpaceus scirpaceus*) - one was seen on the 23rd at Crocodile Island.

**Zitting Cisticola** (*Cisticola juncidis*) – only found in the edge of the agricultural fields/edge of reeds on Crocodile Island. First seen on 23rd and whenever in the right habitat thereafter.

**Graceful Prinia** (*Prinia gracilis gracilis*) – a familiar species in any park area and across the Crocodile Island. Seen daily.

**Lesser Whitethroat** (*Sylvia curruca*) - seen daily and common in the acacias along the Nile on Crocodile Island. The commonest warbler on most days.

**Isabelline Wheatear** (*Oenanthe isabellina*) - a single bird was found at the north end of the island on 22nd, an obvious migrant.
**Nile Valley Sunbird** (*Hedydipna metallica*) – common around the gardens on Crocodile Island and seen daily, although probably not more than ten birds present. Due to timing, all the males were in eclipse plumage.

**Western Yellow Wagtail** (*Motacilla flava pygmaea*) – birds were seen daily on Crocodile Island, particularly around the zoo, the playing fields and the grazing area. It was difficult to assign races to most although the local *pygmaea* – a white throated form that is otherwise similar to a small *thunbergi* appeared to be present. Also a few *feldegg* were seen, however most could not be assigned to subspecies.

**Indian Silverbill** (*Euodice malabarica*) – Although a relatively new coloniser from introduced birds, not totally surprising to find in the riverside vegetation. Only 4-6 birds present.

**Trumpeter Finch** (*Bucanetes githagineus githagineus*) – a pair were seen around the temple complex at Hapshepsut Temple, West Bank on the 24th were the only confirmed sightings.

**House Sparrow** (*Passer domesticus niloticus*) - common in all habited areas. They formed noisy roosting flocks at Jolie Ville every evening where over 100 birds congregated.

**Mammals**

The only mammals seen were bats and there appeared to be a minimum of two species present, but only one was identified. The other species was about the size of a Daubentons bat and was seen on the Nile side lawns at the Jolie Ville.

**Egyptian Fruit Bat** (*Rousettus aegyptiacus*) – found to be common in the Gardens of Winter Palace hotel, where a flowering tree drew animals in to feed. Also seen at the Jolie Ville on one evening.

**Reptiles**

Another group that I struggle with and in note to self must do better. Not particularly numerous except for the lizards at the hotel, which I am struggling to name.

**Mediterranean House Gecko** (*Hemidactylus turcicus*) – this appears to be the gecko seen in the temple ruins after dark, especially Luxor temple where we visited in the evening.

**Nubian Spitting Cobra** (*Naja nubiae*) – although seemingly unlikely, the snake seen in the hotel grounds on 24th had the double collar marks and otherwise plain body that suggest this was the species.
Butterflies

There were relatively few butterflies seen, and these were all in the garden area, but the spraying of insecticide obviously impacted the numbers seen. In reality low numbers were seen and all were in the gardens around Jolie Ville.

Plain Tiger (*Danaus chrysippus*) – This large and obvious species was a familiar sight around the hotel grounds.

Millet Skipper (*Pelopidas thrax*) – seen twice in the borders. Assumed to be this species and not the similar Mediterranean Skipper.

Desert Babel Blue (*Azanus ubaldus*) – not uncommon, but this tiny species could be elusive.

African Migrant (*Catopsilia florella*) – a small number assumed to be this species were seen regularly in the gardens.

Odonata

The area around Crocodile Island was good for dragonflies. Allegedly, Egypt has 51 recorded species and is regarded as poor in terms of diversity, no doubt due to the desert dominating much of the country. The area of Crocodile island seemed rich and any walk around the gardens and reeds brought a few sightings

Common Bluetail (*Ishnura senegalensis*) -

Violet Dropwing (*Trithemis annulate*) – present at the north of the island on the river wall and edge

Banded Groundling (*Brachythemis leucosticte*)- common along the Nile side walk with thirty or so present throughout.

Long Skimmer (*Orthetrum trinacria*) – one found in the reeds on the east side of the Island on 23rd.

Black Percher (*Diplacodes lefebrii*) - one found in the same area as the Long Skimmer on the morning of 23rd

Broad Scarlet (*Crocothemis erythraea*) – regularly seen in the reed beds along the Nile.

Red-veined Darter (*Sympetrum fonscolombii*) – common in the gardens throughout.

*Martin Pitt – November 2017.*