

Hurghada, Egypt

March 14th-21st 2017

Introduction

This report covers the bird sightings made during a week's family vacation in Hurghada with a non-birding wife and little time was spend birding. This report just to show, that it is still possible to see some interesting and nice birds in the Hurghada area. Most of the time was spend relaxing at the beach, at our hotel balcony or in the restaurant. The purpose of the trip was vacation first and secondly trying to see some of the special Egyptian birds without too much effort. We booked an all-inclusive vacation package and flew from Copenhagen to Hurghada staying at the Jasmin Palace Resort south of Hurghada. All birding was done from the resort premises except a short visit to the Hurghada Marina and a tourist trip to Luxor. The birding was focus on the early mornings from sunrise to breakfast (6-8am), when the lawns and gardens of the hotel hosted many resting birds. Direct migration was also seen in the mornings, but seemed to fate off around 9am, while raptors and shorebirds continued a little longer.

We had no safety issues during our vacation, we only meet nice people and never felt afraid or unsafe anywhere. We saw police and military in many places, especially at the checkpoints driving through the desert towards Luxor, but we were never stopped and never asked to show our passports etc.

Some birds were seen every day at the hotel and are not mentioned in the daily accounts, these birds were: Cattle Egret, Western Reef-Heron, Kestrel, Kentish Plover, Common Ringed Plover, Little Ringed Plover, Sooty Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Caspian Tern, Laughing Dove, Hooded Crow, Chiffchaff, Lesser Whitethroat, Yellow Wagtail, White Wagtail, House Sparrow and Spanish Sparrow.

March 15th – Jasmine Palace Resort

Purple Heron 1, Osprey 1, Black Kite 2, Common Crane 80, Greater Sand-Plover 2, Whimbrel 1, Common Greenshank 1, White-eyed Gull 5, Great Crested Tern 2, Pallid Swift 1, Lesser Kestrel 3, Bluethroat 6, Cretzschmar's Bunting 2.

The cranes were migrating north in one large flock, first noted by their calls. White-eyed Gulls and Great Crested Terns were seen around the hotel pier. The Greater Sand-Plovers (an adult red bird and a grayish winter bird) were seen with other plovers at low tide. The two Cretzschmar's Bunting, an adult male and a female were found on one of the hotel lawns in the early morning, nice birds seen at close hand.

March 16th – Jasmine Palace Resort

Brown Bobby 1 ad, Steppe Eagle 1, Black Kite 20, Steppe Buzzard 300, Greater Sand-Plover 3, Whimbrel 1, Spotted Redshank 1, Common Greenshank 1, White-eyed Gull 5, Armenian Gull 1, Lesser Black-backed Gull 150, Great Crested tern 2, Barn Swallow 4, Sedge Warbler 1, Bluethroat 3.

The Brown Bobby was seen flying north just off the hotel pier, a single bird was seen several times during the week, maybe the same bird which stayed in the area. The Sedge Warbler walked around on the lawn, hiding now and then in the bushes, a sighting very different from the sightings back in Denmark, where it often hides deep in the reeds. The raptors all migrated together high over the beach in the afternoon, I suspect that many more migrated that day, but flew too high to be seen.

A Red Fox was seen eating a hooded crow in the hotel garden in the early morning.

March 17th – Day trip to Luxor

Seen from Qena to Luxor (Driving along a parallel canal to the Nile, Karnak Temple, and Valley of the Kings) and back.

Purple Heron 3, Little Egret 20, Cattle Egret 400, Squacco Heron 5, Black-crowned Night-heron 4, Glossy Ibis 60, Black-shouldered Kite 15, Black Kite 20, Moorhen 3, Spur-winged Lapwing 4, Black-headed gull 50, Common Swift 50, Pallid swift 10, Hoopoe 8, Pied Kingfisher 20, Green Bee-eater 16, Kestrel 6, Brown-necked Raven 4, Rock Martin 10, Barn Swallow 200, Common Bulbul 10, Zitting Cisticola 1, White-Crowned Wheatear 2, White Wagtail 4

Seen from Safaga to Qena in the desert.

Black-eared Wheatear 1, Brown-necked Raven 6, Southern Gray Shrike 1, Spotted Sandgrouse 20, Crowned Sandgrouse 10.

The sandgrouses were seen in two mixed flocks, which flew off from the roadside as we passed in the minibus, it was good, although very brief views, but still possible to identify both species based on the forewings patterns. Also a good number of larks and wheatears sp. were seen, but not identified. In the early morning a relatively large fox/jackal with large pointed ears was seen looking down on the road from a hilltop in the desert.

March 18th – Jasmine Palace Resort

Steppe Eagle 2, Black Kite 50, Steppe Buzzard 50, Greater Sand-Plover 3, White-eyed Gull 10, Great Crested Tern 1, Barn Swallow 8, Red-rumped Swallow 16, House Martin 3, Eastern Olivaceous Warbler 1, Sedge Warbler 4, Bluethroat 3, Nile Valley Sunbird 1 male.

All the raptors were seen in one flock, which suddenly fell out of the sky heading for the desert, probably to rest during the sandstorm that suddenly appeared in the late afternoon. The sandstorm made the sky all light yellow-brown and the sun almost disappear. The

male Nile Valley Sunbird was a beautiful bird, watched for a long time at close range, showing of its shining breast in black and purple.

March 19th – Jasmine Palace Resort

Gray Heron 2, Spoonbill 6, Wood Sandpiper 6, Slender-billed Gull 2, White-eyed Gull 10, Great Crested Tern 1, Hoopoe 1, Wryneck 3, Barn Swallow 10, House Martin 8, Eastern Olivaceous Warbler 1, Reed Warbler 1, Bluethroat 3, Nile Valley Sunbird 1 male, Tree Pipit 8.

March 19th – Hurghada new Marina

Western Reef-Heron 3, Collared Pranticole 2, White-eyed Gull 10, Sooty Gull 20, Lesser whitethroat 1, Subalpine warbler 1 male, osprey 1

The male subalpine warbler was a nice surprise, flittering around a small bush with the whitethroat just outside the coffee bar, where we had our late morning coffee. The collared Pranticoles were migrating north overhead.

March 20th – Jasmine Palace Resort

Black Stork 2, Brown Bobby 1, Squacco Heron 1, Glossy Ibis 80, Marsh Harrier 1, Black Kite 400, Steppe Buzzard 50, Whimbrel 1, Marsh Sandpiper 2, Slender-billed Gull 8, White-eyed Gull 10, Whiskered Tern 22, Great Crested Tern 2, Blue-cheeked Bee-eater 5, Wryneck 1, Lesser Kestrel 3, Greater Short-toed Lark 50, Bank Swallow 5, Barn Swallow 20, Red-rumped Swallow 30, House Martin 5, Eastern Olivaceous Warbler 1, Bluethroat 3, Black-eared Wheatear 3, Tawny Pipit 3, Red-throated Pipit 1, Tree Pipit 20

The number of resting passerines and migrating passerines in the morning were impressive, also many wagtail, chiffchaffs etc. All the Black Kite came from the desert in the early morning, where they probably spend the night. This morning the adult Brown Bobby spend a few hours resting on a pole at the end of the hotel pier, allowing close views.

March 21th – Jasmine Palace Resort

Brown Bobby 1, Gray Heron 1, Osprey 1, Sparrowhawk 1, Black Kite 50, Steppe Buzzard 1, Whimbrel 1, Ruff 2, Little Stint 2, Cream-colored Courser 1, Slender-billed Gull 1, White-eyed Gull 5, Whiskered Tern 5, Great Crested Tern 2, Blue-cheeked Bee-eater 2, Lesser Kestrel 4, Greater Short-toed lark 600, Bank Swallow 2, Barn Swallow 10, Red-rumped Swallow 10, House Martin 5, Savi's Warbler 1, Bluethroat 1, Northern Wheatear 3, Isabelline Wheatear 1, Black-eared Wheatear 3, Tawny Pipit 2,

The morning migration was impressive, there were constantly Greater Short-toed Larks in the air, at one point a flock of 75 birds landed on the shore, rested a few minutes and flew off again. Also the Savi's Warbler was a nice find, hiding in a small bush on one of the hotel lawns, but the biggest surprise was the cream-colored courser, a nice adult bird migrating north around noon, just over our heads at the beach. A nice final addition to the birdlist of this vacation. In conclusion, we had a great and relaxing vacation, and the birding turned out to be a lot better and easier attainable than expected.

In total I found 89 species among them 9 lifers: Brown Bobby, Cream-Colored Courser, White-eyed Gull, Armenian Gull, Spotted Sandgrouse, Crowned Sandgrouse, Green Bee-eater, Brown-necked Raven, and Nile Valley Sunbird.

Stefan Stürup, Copenhagen, March 2017