

# EGYPT – CAIRO, ABU SIMBEL AND THE RED SEA COAST, 23<sup>rd</sup> June – 1<sup>st</sup> July 2007

By [Richard Bonser](#)

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## **Introduction**

The purpose of the trip was to visit and re-visit sites on The Red Sea coast and The Nile Valley (including Abu Simbel) with the emphasis on targeting a few species that we had failed to see on previous visits to the country.

The trip was by and large successful. The Abu Simbel specialities Pink-backed Pelican, Yellow-billed Stork, African Skimmer and African Pied Wagtail were all easily observed along with Egyptian Nightjar and Sooty Falcon. A short visit to Abassa provided us with excellent views of Streaked Weaver and Senegal Coucal whilst Sooty Falcon, Lappet-faced Vulture, Crab Plover, Crested Tern, Bridled Tern, White-cheeked Tern and Sooty Gull were seen on The Red Sea. The only disappointment of the trip was the absence of Goliath Heron on the southern Red Sea.

## **Logistics and General information**

As it was little over a year (less than a year in CB's case) since we had visited Egypt, very little had changed. Have a look at my [2006 report](#) for more details though. We flew with Egypt Air from London Heathrow to Cairo and rented a car from Cairo airport through Hertz.

Organised convoys from Safaga to Luxor were scheduled daily at 7am and 6pm, with Luxor to Safaga convoys being at 8am, 2pm and 6pm. A convoy from Luxor to Aswan was certainly scheduled for 7am the morning we asked whilst we returned from Aswan (with Luxor being the convoy destination) at 2pm. Aswan to Abu Simbel convoys were leaving at 4am and 11.30am, returning from Abu Simbel at 10am.

In an attempt to cut down on mileage and bureaucracy, we tried to drive the road from Marsa Alam to Edfu on 25<sup>th</sup> June. Knowing that at least a couple of groups of birders had done this in 2006 we used the tactics that they had used but it was to no avail – the official line was the road was closed but it should be opening up again in the next month. Whether this is true, who knows... the various assortments of officials in Egypt have an uncanny knack of passing the blame, telling half truths and in some instances blatantly lying. It certainly wasn't as closed as we thought on 27<sup>th</sup> June when we ditched our Luxor convoy in Edfu and drove this road back to Marsa Alam with no problems.

As with the last trip, we'd all brought food supplies from the UK and nobody was ill. We did get a bit lax with our diet the last couple of days of the trip taking advantage of the quality food provided at [The Red Sea Diving Safari Ecolodge](#) at Wadi Lahami.

### **Daily Itinerary**

**23<sup>rd</sup> June** – afternoon flight London Heathrow to Cairo. Night in the car at Abassa.

**24<sup>th</sup> June** – early to mid morning birding at Abassa then drive, via Suez, to Hurghada. Birding at the Hotel Mugawish, Hurghada late afternoon/evening before driving to Wadi Lahami for the night.

**25<sup>th</sup> June** – birding at Wadi Lahami and Hamata Mangroves in the morning followed by a failed attempt at Marsa Alam to drive to Edfu. 6pm convoy from Safaga to Luxor, arriving Luxor 9.30pm.

**26<sup>th</sup> June** – privately arranged convoy Luxor to Aswan 1.30am – 4am, followed by a convoy from Aswan to Abu Simbel 4am – 7am. Birding at Abu Simbel, overnight at Ramses Hotel, Abu Simbel.

**27<sup>th</sup> June** – early morning birding, followed by 10am – 1pm convoy Abu Simbel to Aswan. 2.30pm convoy Aswan to Luxor, diverting at Edfu and arriving at Marsa Alam 5.30pm. Birding at Wadi Gimal before staying overnight at Wadi Lahami.

**28<sup>th</sup> June** – early morning birding Wadi Lahami, then a few hours birding at Shalatein/Marsa Hemira and evening visit to Hamata Mangroves. Overnight at Wadi Lahami.

**29<sup>th</sup> June** – early morning at Wadi Lahami followed by morning visit to Hamata Mangroves. Afternoon spent at Wadi Lahami with an evening visit to Hamata Mangroves. Overnight at Wadi Lahami.

**30<sup>th</sup> June** – early morning boat trip to Ras Bonas from Wadi Lahami. Drive north to Cairo during the day, birding en-route at Safaga Mangroves, Hurghada, Ain Sukhna and Suez. Overnight at The Novotel, Cairo Airport.

**1<sup>st</sup> July** – mid morning flight Cairo to London.

### **Websites and Acknowledgements**

Much of the information that we had was based on our previous trips to the country – my previous trip report can be found [here](#). Other trip reports can be found on the internet at sites such as [Surfbirds](#), [Travelling Birder](#), [Netfugl](#), [Birdtours](#) and [OSME](#). Particularly useful trip reports not mentioned in my previous report are those in 2006 by [Mark Lopez](#) and [Richard Klim](#).

A lot of the information was gleaned from email correspondence with people who had visited the country in the last 12 months. Particular thanks to Chris Bell, Martijn Bunskoek, Pierre-Andre Crochet, Graeme Joynt, Richard Klim and Mark Lopez who provided us with detailed information on certain species and sites.

## **SPECIES NOTES**

### **Goliath Heron**

We did not see this species despite checking the mangroves at Wadi Lahami, Hamata, Hemira and Safaga. A review of Egyptian Goliath Heron records up to March 2006 can be found [here](#) in the 'target birds seen' section. Historically, June does not seem to be the best time of year but the species did breed in 2006 at Wadi Lahami (the first confirmed breeding record in Egypt) and juveniles were still being seen there in July 2006. Prior to our visit, to our knowledge, the last reports of this species were 2 at Wadi Lahami and 1 at Hemira Mangroves in late March/early April 2007.

### **Pink-backed Pelican**

Up to 6 birds were present on Lake Nasser 26<sup>th</sup> – 27<sup>th</sup> June, being best viewed from the point overlooking Airport Bay, Abu Simbel at N22.36684, E31.63865. We got closer views of the same birds when we managed to get a boat out onto the lake on the morning of 26<sup>th</sup> June where we viewed them from a small island (N22.37668, E31.65417).

### **Yellow-billed Stork**

A total of 11 birds were found in Airport Bay, Abu Simbel on 26<sup>th</sup> – 27<sup>th</sup> June – the birds favouring the spit and small islands on the far side of the bay when viewed from the point at N22.36684, E31.63865. Closer views were obtained on 26<sup>th</sup> when we managed to get a boat out onto the aforementioned spit.

### **Lappet-faced Vulture**

23 birds were counted at Shalatein on 28<sup>th</sup> June with the largest congregations being around a dead camel on the north side of the town. A lack of carcasses at the camel market itself meant that we didn't see any vultures on the ground here.

### **Sooty Falcon**

2 birds seen on the morning of 27<sup>th</sup> June at Airport Bay, Abu Simbel and an adult seen on consecutive evenings of 28<sup>th</sup> – 29<sup>th</sup> June at Hamata Mangroves. We tried for this species at a traditional site – Hotel Mugawish, Hurghada - on the evening of 24<sup>th</sup> June but were unsuccessful, possibly due to strong winds.

### **Crab Plover**

Up to 4 birds present at Hamata Mangroves. Although we visited these mangroves on a few occasions, we only saw this species twice – at relatively low tide and at the southern edge of the mangroves on both occasions.

### **Senegal Thick-knee**

Commonly seen in The Nile Valley. With no specific attempt to see this species, one was seen on a small canal at Abassa 24<sup>th</sup> June and 3 were seen in Airport Bay, Abu Simbel 26<sup>th</sup> June. We did not visit Crocodile Island, Luxor on this trip where this species can be found easily.

### **Kittlitz's Plover**

One was present on an island on Lake Nasser (N22.37668, E31.65417) near Airport Bay, Abu Simbel on 26<sup>th</sup> June – seen when we got a boat out onto Lake Nasser. We did not visit Wadi El Natrum on this trip where we found the species to be common in March 2006.

### **White-eyed Gull**

Common on the Red Sea coast - mainly Hurghada southwards and seemingly scarce in The Gulf of Suez - with largest numbers in Hurghada where hundreds were observed at the Hotel Mugawish on the evening of 24<sup>th</sup> June.

### **Sooty Gull**

Seen in good numbers on the southern Red Sea coast with all birds seen to the south of Marsa Alam at sites such as Hamata Mangroves and Wadi Lahami. There were never more than half a dozen or so at any one site and it was considerably scarcer than the previous species.

### **Crested Tern**

Seen in small numbers on the Red Sea from Hurghada northwards with the exception of 1 at Hemira Mangroves 28<sup>th</sup> June. 1 off Hotel Mugawish, Hurghada 24<sup>th</sup> June and, on 30<sup>th</sup> June, 3 just north of Hurghada by the Panorama Bungalows Resort and 6 just south of Ain Sukhna.

### **White-cheeked Tern**

A common bird and seen on a daily basis on the Red Sea coast with observations from Suez to Wadi Lahami. A peak of 400+ off Wadi Gimal on the evening of 27<sup>th</sup> June.

### **Bridled Tern**

Seen in good numbers (with a peak of about 40) on the southern Red Sea off Wadi Lahami and Hamata Mangroves, with a single bird seen off Wadi Gimal on 27<sup>th</sup> June. Although views were often distant, we did manage to see some birds well on a boat trip off Wadi Lahami on the morning of 30<sup>th</sup> June and a few birds fed close inshore off Hamata on the evening of 29<sup>th</sup> June.

### **African Skimmer**

To our surprise this species was easily located on Lake Nasser on 26<sup>th</sup> June where 3 birds were seen (at one point together) in Airport Bay, Abu Simbel. They were viewable from the point at N22.36684, E31.63865 – where they favoured the spit on the far side of the bay – and we gained exceptional views of one bird when we got a boat out to the spit where the birds were favouring.

### **Egyptian Nightjar**

At least three were seen extremely well under the floodlights at the Water Research Centre (N22.42246, E31.63016) in a small settlement to the north of Abu Simbel town from dusk on 26<sup>th</sup> June. Leaving Abu Simbel clock 3.9km from the junction of the Abu Simbel town and airport road and turn right onto an asphalt road at N22.40336,

E31.58330. Head along this road for a few km until you reach the first settlement where on your right are some obvious streetlights that surround the Water Research Centre.

### **Crowned Sandgrouse**

The road along the southern Red Sea seems to be a very reliable site for this species. We had a couple of chance encounters by the roadside – 1 just south of Marsa Alam 25<sup>th</sup> June and 6 just to the north of the checkpoint a few km south of Wadi Lahami 28<sup>th</sup> June. 7 also flew over the mangroves at Wadi Lahami on the morning of 28<sup>th</sup> June.

### **Spotted Sandgrouse**

A flock of 23 by the road 60km north of Hurghada at N27.69829, E33.49908 during the afternoon of 30<sup>th</sup> June.

### **African Collared Dove**

Since our last visit there seemed to be alarmingly more *Collared Doves* present on the southern Red Sea coast. *Collared Doves* were common in the mangroves at Wadi Lahami and further sightings were made at Hamata Mangroves, Wadi Gimal and Safaga Mangroves. Observing several birds and noting their calls, we were not wholly convinced that we saw any African Collared Doves during our visit. Put another way none of the birds we saw would have stuck out as anything too different in a flock of Collared Doves in the UK.

### **Senegal Coucal**

A fairly localised resident in the Nile Delta but during a few hours birding at Abassa on 24<sup>th</sup> June we located at least 3 individuals in a small group of trees just before reaching the fishponds near Abassa village. To get to the small village of Abassa from the main Bilbeis to Ismailiya road, head across the canal on the road bridge and take the 1<sup>st</sup> left into the town itself on the dirt track. Follow this dusty track through the village until you reach some arable land. Just before we reached the fishponds, we parked by the bridge over the small canal and walked to an area of trees that are a couple of fields to the left of the road if you are coming from Abassa.

### **African Pied Wagtail**

3 at Airport Bay, Abu Simbel on the morning of 26<sup>th</sup> June. 2 birds on the shoreline around the point (N22.36684, E31.63865) and a further bird on a small island just offshore from here.

### **Streaked Weaver**

10 or so birds were seen in a reedy channel at Abassa on 24<sup>th</sup> June viewed from N30.54142, E31.71069. If coming from Cairo, you will reach the town of Bilbeis and then take the road to El Abassa that runs parallel with the canal – from this junction drive for 17.3km and you will then see a network of large fishponds on the left hand side of the road. Immediately after this, there is a track off the main road that allows access – it initially takes you into a small copse with a couple of houses (if you reach a pale green warehouse you've gone too far). Follow this track straight ahead, keeping the fishponds on your left and a canal on your right. Turn right over the 1<sup>st</sup> bridge you come to and then

left immediately after the bridge. After a couple of hundred metres, and just past a couple of small fishponds, park by a small building and walk along the reedy channel – this is where we saw the weavers. Other groups of birders have located this species a bit further east in the past, mainly in the reeds by the bridge to Abassa village over the main Ismailiya canal.

## DAILY DIARY

### 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2007

We caught a mid afternoon flight with Egypt Air from London Heathrow to Cairo. Due to a delayed take off we arrived later than we had hoped and thought it wasn't worthwhile forking out any cash to stay at the Novotel near Cairo Airport as we had originally planned. Instead we drove through the Cairo suburbs to Abassa where we spent a rather sticky few hours attempting to get some sleep in the car.

### 24<sup>th</sup> June 2007

#### Fishponds and dried up canal 17.5km east of Bilbeis on the road to Abassa

A couple of us rose in the half-light – a mixture of eagerness to get out birding and the fact that we couldn't sleep. We had turned off the main road onto a track by a blue house to search the trees here for Senegal Coucal – the site where some of us had seen this species in March 2006 and it had also been recorded a couple of weeks before our trip by a group of British birders. We were not in luck this time though.

We drove up this track for a few hundred metres, with the fishpond to our left and an irrigation canal to our right, and headed right over the first bridge (where some of us had seen Painted Snipe in 2006) over the canal. We then turned left and after a couple of hundred metres parked by a few small fishponds and walked along the reed fringed channel. **Clamorous Reed Warblers** were vocal, as were **Spur-winged Plovers**, and herons were everywhere – **Squaccos**, **Cattle Egrets**, **Little Egrets**, **Night Herons** and even the odd **Little Bittern** put in an appearance. Having struggled with the species last time, we were pretty stunned at how easily we found **Streaked Weaver** here – c.10 birds nesting in the reedy channel and viewed from N30.54142, E31.71069.

This area was alive with birds early morning. **Crested Larks**, **Fan-tailed Warblers**, **Graceful Prinias** and *savignii* **Swallows** were everywhere and **White-throated Kingfishers** and **Pied Kingfishers** were common. The odd **Blue-cheeked Bee-eater** cruised over whilst *pygmaea* **Yellow Wagtails**, **Hoopoes** and **Common Bulbuls** were seen on the ground. We then left this area and headed along the main road, passing a large colony of **Cattle Egrets** and a few **White Storks**, and turned right over the main canal towards Abassa town and then took the first left through this dusty settlement and into the area of arable land and fishponds.

#### Abassa fishponds

Just before we reached the fishponds, we parked by the bridge over the small canal and walked to an area of trees that are a couple of fields to the left of the road if you are

coming from Abassa town. A low **Honey Buzzard** was an early highlight of the trip whilst it didn't take us long to find **Senegal Coucal** here – at least 3 birds present in the small group of trees here. **Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters** were present, as were **White-throated Kingfishers**, **Squaccos** and a handful of **Hoopoes**, whilst an obliging **Black-shouldered Kite** perched in the open on a bare branch.

With the heat rising and the humidity making us all drip with sweat it was time to make the getaway and the 2 ½ hour drive to Suez via Ismailiya.

### Suez Bay

As we came through Suez town from the north, the bay is readily apparent on your left. We stopped at the same spot as last year at the extreme south end of the bay only a couple of km before we hit the main Cairo to Ain Sukhna road just east of the railway line. **House Crows** were everywhere whilst the bay itself was quite quiet with just a single **Caspian Tern**, c.15 **Slender-billed Gulls** and c.20 **Common Terns**. On this note we continued south and reached Hurghada by late afternoon.

### Panorama Bungalows Resort, Hurghada

To the north of Hurghada town, the road skirts along the coast and it's worth looking out for congregations of gulls and terns. We managed to find a load of birds in a small bay adjacent to the Panorama Bungalows Resort, c.5km north of an Esso garage on the north side of town and a couple of km to the north of the sign 'Cairo 450km'. 24 **White-cheeked Terns** showed quite well, including several 1<sup>st</sup>-summers, as well as a **White-winged Black Tern**, 15 **Lesser Crested Terns**, 20 **Caspian Terns** and several **White-eyed Gulls**.

### Hotel Mugawish, Hurghada

This hotel is located on Hurghada's southern strip of hotels within a couple of km of the airport. Historically this has been a good spot to observe Sooty Falcons with evenings apparently best. So with anticipation we went into the hotel and sat in the aptly named 'Fantasy Bar' overlooking the sea and the adjacent shoreline. We waited and waited but there was no joy, with the strong wind perhaps having some influence on the negative result. Despite the lack of falcons we did see a few decent birds – a **Crested Tern** flew north and a few **White-cheeked Terns** and **Lesser Crested Terns** were present offshore whilst a **European Bee-eater** circled the palms. Pride of place though went to the huge numbers of **White-eyed Gulls** that drifted in from inland early evening affording exceptional views before continuing their journey north along the coast presumably to roost.

We left Hurghada shortly after 8pm and after a long drive south reached Wadi Lahami at about 12.30am. Initially it seemed as there was no life at [The Red Sea Diving Safari Ecolodge](#) but soon we managed to find a bloke to take us to some tented accommodation for the night, where we all got a good night's sleep.

**25<sup>th</sup> June 2007**

### **Wadi Lahami**

We awoke shortly after first light and walked a few hundred yards from our tented accommodation to the nearby mangrove area – certainly in the last 18 months, this has been the best site to find Goliath Heron in the Western Palearctic. On this occasion though there was no sign of this species. Plenty of other birds were present including 4 **Sooty Gulls**, 25+ **Greater Sand Plovers**, several **Western Reef Egrets**, 3 **Striated Herons**, a **Wood Sandpiper** and the only **Turtle Doves** of the trip. The *Collared Doves* in the mangroves perplexed us somewhat whilst a handful of **White-cheeked Terns** and c.20 **Bridled Terns** fished offshore.

### **Hamata Mangroves**

After a quick bit of breakfast we headed north a few kilometres to Hamata Mangroves. As we approached this site the only **Namaqua Dove** of the trip was seen by the road just south of the entrance track. We arrived at Hamata to find the tide was relatively low with 4 **Crab Plovers** found on the distant tide line. We waded out through the shallow water to get closer views, also seeing 5+ **Sooty Gulls**, c.15 **White-eyed Gulls** and lots of **Greater Sand Plovers** and **Kentish Plovers**. A **Striated Heron**, c.10 **Western Reef Egrets** and a few **Ospreys** were also seen here. Traditionally Hamata has been a good site to find Goliath Heron but we were again unsuccessful with a sole **Grey Heron** being the only large heron noted.

### **The Red Sea to Aswan**

With a plan to get to The Nile Valley by evening, we picked up our stuff from Wadi Lahami and headed off north to Marsa Alam. A confiding **Crowned Sandgrouse** was well appreciated as it sat in the middle of the two carriageways just south of Marsa Alam, as was an **Egyptian Vulture** between Hamata and Marsa Alam. In the last year or so, birding groups had been successful driving the road from Marsa Alam to Edfu and as this would save us a lot of time (i.e. by cutting out convoys from Safaga to Luxor and Luxor to Aswan). So we arrived at the checkpoint at Marsa Alam and, as predicted, we were asked to go to the police station to speak to ‘the chief’. The main man wasn’t present but a phone conversation with him bore bad news – he claimed that the road was closed, would be re-opening in a month, and under no circumstances would we be allowed to travel to Edfu. It was now 2.30pm and we were told that a convoy would leave Safaga to Luxor at 5pm so with time ticking we left rather frustrated.

We arrived at the convoy point at Safaga just before 5pm and were frustratingly told that the convoy would leave for Luxor at 6pm – so the rush up the coast wasn’t needed. Whilst here we also asked about travelling from Luxor to Aswan and the officials told us there shouldn’t be an issue with travelling without a convoy on this route. With this good news we had an uneventful convoy journey through the mountains and arrived at Luxor at 9.30pm. And here the fun started...

We headed south from Luxor but on the southern edge of the town we were stopped and told that tourists needed to travel in convoy to Aswan, the next one being 7am in the morning! Not exactly what the officials in Safaga had said to us. We stated our urgent



need to get to Aswan but were told to speak to another group of police in Luxor itself. You'll find that there's not just one police force in Egypt – there's the tourist police, the transport police, the lake police... the list goes on. Each segregated group seems to shift the buck to the others so what happens is rather ill-tempered, impatient people such as myself suffer extreme exasperation. Anyway, we finally found 'the big cheese' and he sorted out a special convoy for us – setting us back £25 each and leaving Luxor at 1.30am.

## 26<sup>th</sup> June 2007

To cut a long story short, after a journey at breakneck speed, we arrived in Aswan at 4am to find that we had achieved our objective – getting the convoy to Abu Simbel. The 300km of desert between Aswan and Abu Simbel was, in all fairness, pretty mundane and it was quite tricky to concentrate and stay awake on the little sleep we'd had.

### Airport Bay, Abu Simbel

We arrived at Abu Simbel just after 7am and went straight to Airport Bay to make the most of the early morning. Airport Bay is the first large bay to the east of Abu Simbel town and is just east of the airport. As you head out of the town past a petrol station on your left you will go over a bridge over a small inlet. As you head up the hill take the second road on the right – recognisable by a massive 'gate-like' structure. Follow this road around for a couple of km, round a sharp left hand bend, and shortly after this turn right off the road and park on a flat sandy area opposite a building complex with lights around it. From here you can scan Airport Bay and walk to the point at N22.36684, E31.63865.

From where we parked, a quick scan of the lake revealed good numbers of **Egyptian Geese** and it did not take too long to find the first of the specialities – **Yellow-billed Stork**. We were looking directly into the sun and a distant pelican evaded specific identification but rather easier birds to see included a lone **White Stork**, c.250 **Greater Flamingos** and lots of **Whiskered Terns**. **Black Kites** (race *aegyptius*) cruised the lake shore whilst **Eastern Olivaceous Warblers**, **Graceful Prinias** and **Crested Lark** were vocal and common in the lakeside scrub.

We left the car and walked to the point at N22.36684, E31.63865 and immediately found a couple of **African Pied Wagtails** in the near bay. After watching these neat little birds for a bit we started scanning the spit on the far side of the bay where we could now see 9 **Yellow-billed Storks** as well as **Gull-billed Terns**, **Spur-winged Plovers** and the odd **Caspian Tern**. Whilst some of us were watching another **African Pied Wagtail** on a nearby island on Lake Nasser others were rather surprised to pick up an **African Skimmer** flying around the far point. With one of the team having failed to see this species here in 2006, it was fair to say that we were all rather elated. But things didn't stop there – we wanted some better views and, with everything going to plan, things continued in our favour when the first boat we flagged down agreed to take us over to the far point.

So we got on board the fishing boat and sped across the bay to where we'd observed the skimmer. The boatmen seemed fine although they were obviously keen to get us back as soon as possible before the lake police found out what was going on. And as we hopped off the **African Skimmer** was still present and showing extremely well, at times to within a few yards in flight, with even the central tail markings discernible. Happy with this, close views of **Yellow-billed Stork** and c.50 **Black-tailed Godwits** we got the boatmen to take us to a nearby island where we could get a view of the bay behind the spit. As we neared the island, we picked up a pelican again and it wasn't long before we were getting decent views of 3 **Pink-backed Pelicans**. As we stood on the island (N22.37668, E31.65417) **Little Terns** were obviously breeding here and as we scanned through the colony a quality **Kittlitz's Plover** was found. It was now mid morning and we'd seen all of what you'd term the 'Abu Simbel specialities', so with the boatmen getting keen to drop us off at the point where we started we headed back. A couple of **Senegal Thick-knees** showed well in the bay as we got off the boat.

It was now late morning and the combination of increased heat and lack of sleep made us retire to The Ramses Hotel in Abu Simbel town. After a few hours sleep we got up late afternoon and headed back to Airport Bay and to the point at N22.36684, W31.63865. In better evening light we found 3 **African Skimmers** flying around the spit on the far side of the bay before they came a fair bit closer. **Yellow-billed Storks** and a couple of **Pink-backed Pelicans** were still present whilst a couple of **Rufous-tailed Scrub Robins**, **White-crowned Black Wheatears** and **Rock Martins** were seen on the point.

### North of Abu Simbel

With dusk approaching we headed back to the car and drove a few kilometres to the north of the town with the intention of finding Egyptian Nightjar. Armed with information from people who had previously seen this species, we turned off the main Abu Simbel to Aswan road at N22.40336, E31.58330 (or 3.9km from the junction of the Abu Simbel town and airport road) and onto a smaller road that headed into the desert. Though we had a precise area by the lake shore that we had heard was good for this species, we were drawn to a small settlement nearby that was floodlit and surrounded by suitable habitat. We were not to be disappointed as within a couple of minutes of parking the car, an **Egyptian Nightjar** appeared and started hawking insects attracted to the lights at N22.42246, E31.63016. We entered the Water Research Centre compound and over the next hour or so were rewarded with astounding views of this species in the illuminated conditions. Extremely happy with things we headed back to Abu Simbel town to get a decent night's sleep.

**27<sup>th</sup> June 2007**

### Airport Bay, Abu Simbel

Like yesterday morning we headed to the point at N22.36684, E31.63865 that overlooks Lake Nasser. It was immediately apparent that there were more **Pink-backed Pelicans** compared to the previous day – 6 in total – and we increased our count of **Yellow-billed Storks** to 11. A real bonus was a couple of **Sooty Falcons** hawking over the lake shore and the adjacent islands, but unfortunately we were always looking into the light and the

birds were a bit distant. Lots of **Egyptian Geese** were again present, as were 3 **Senegal Thick-knees**, whilst **Greater Flamingos**, **Spur-winged Plovers**, **Squaccos**, **Cattle Egrets**, **Black Kites** (race *aegyptius*) and **Whiskered Terns** were all common. A couple of **Rufous-tailed Scrub Robins** chased each other in the scrub with **Crested Larks** and **Eastern Olivaceous Warblers** numerous in this area.

### North of Abu Simbel

With a little time before our mid morning convoy back to Aswan, we had a quick search of the area where we had seen Egyptian Nightjar the previous evening as we were all keen to see one on the deck roosting. Luck wasn't with us and the area seemed a lot vaster in the daylight though a couple of **Hoopoe Larks** seen here were our only ones of the trip.

We left Abu Simbel at 10am and after a rather dull drive through the endless desert arrived in Aswan at about 1pm. We stocked up on supplies and fuel and managed to find the Luxor convoy start point with relative ease. We had a little bit of time to chill out before this convoy set off at 2.30pm, quickly dissipating as soon as it left Aswan. We reached Edfu (between Aswan and Luxor) and made a quick decision to turn right to Marsa Alam as opposed to continuing in convoy to Luxor. The decision to regain our independence paid off, and after screeching through the checkpoint to the east of Edfu, we travelled without problems to Marsa Alam – despite being told 48 hours prior to this that this road was closed. At the checkpoint at Marsa Alam (where a couple of **Desert Larks** were present) the police were a bit surprised and after taking our passports for a couple of minutes wished us well before we headed off.

It was good to be back on the Red Sea and to the south of Marsa Alam we found a group of confiding gulls on the shore – half a dozen **Sooty Gulls**, 50 or so **White-eyed Gulls** as well as a **Lesser Crested Tern** – and noticed on the other side of the road that there was a small rubbish tip that presumably attracted the gulls to this area. After taking some photos of these birds we headed south and stopped immediately to the south of Shams Alam Resort at Wadi Gimal. Half a dozen *Collared Doves* were present in the palms here and a **Spotted Flycatcher** was seen in the scrub, whilst an impressive group of 400+ **White-cheeked Terns** fed offshore along with a solitary **Bridled Tern**. Considering you can see Gimal Island (a breeding site for Sooty Falcon) from here and the fact that at least one group of birders had seen Sooty Falcon in this area, we were a bit disappointed not to see this species before the light failed. Less than an hour later we were back at familiar surroundings - [The Red Sea Diving Safari Ecolodge](#) – where we were as it happens to end up spending the next 3 nights. The evening was pretty relaxed, albeit one of the team getting a shock as a few cockroaches appeared whilst they were having a shower.

### 28<sup>th</sup> June 2007

#### Wadi Lahami

It was good to wake up to the sound of terns, and once we headed out found a group of 40+ **White-cheeked Terns** feeding offshore. We reached the mangroves where an immature **Purple Heron** was found along with a couple of **Striated Herons** and

**Western Reef Egrets**, a **Green Sandpiper**, a **Pied Kingfisher** and 10 or so **Greater Sand Plovers**. A **Ferruginous Duck** flew purposefully south over the mangroves – the only duck we recorded on the trip – whilst a group of 7 **Crowned Sandgrouse** headed north early morning. A handful of **Sooty Gulls** lingered on the shoreline along with the commoner **White-eyed Gulls** whilst sightings of *Collared Doves* in the mangroves remained perplexing.

After breakfast we decided to head south from Wadi Lahami to Shalatein. 40km to the north of this town there is an area of mangroves at Hemira where Goliath Heron was recorded as recently as April 2007 and this was to be our first stop.

### **Hemira Mangroves**

As you drive south upon entering the small settlement at Hemira there is an obvious area of mangroves to your left. These can be easily accessed by turning left on the asphalt road towards the shore. There is a small, rocky promontory at the south end that allows you to view some of the seaward side of these mangroves whilst walking north covers the area more extensively. We found a couple of **Purple Herons** and **Striated Herons**, a handful of **Caspian Terns**, **Pied Kingfisher** and several **Eastern Olivaceous Warblers** in the mangroves whilst a **Crested Tern** passed close inshore. It is worth noting that, on a second visit later in the day, the soldiers in the nearby army base wondered what we were up to and in a friendly manner we were asked to go to their base and give them our passports, driving permit etc. So if this does happen to anyone in the future who tries to bird this area I wouldn't be too concerned.

### **Shalatein**

We had all visited the town of Shalatein, on the administrative border with Sudan, in 2006 and were keen to go back. Firstly we thought it was worthwhile birding the few green areas in the town in case there was a Black Bush Robin lurking – which there wasn't – and secondly watching **Lappet-faced Vultures** at close quarters for a 2<sup>nd</sup> time wasn't exactly a hardship. We counted 23 of these large vultures and after stalking one in an acacia and getting crippling views we managed to find a camel carcass where quite a number were present along with several **Egyptian Vultures**. **Brown-necked Ravens** were very common about the town, a couple of **White-crowned Black Wheatears** were seen and the odd **Sooty Gull** was present on the beach near the port area.

After stopping off at Hemira on the way back, once again without any sightings of Goliath Heron, just to the north of the checkpoint near Wadi Lahami a group of 6 **Crowned Sandgrouse** showed well by the roadside. After relaxing for an hour or so at the Ecolodge we headed back out and spent the evening at Hamata Mangroves.

### **Hamata Mangroves**

We entered the mangroves, as always, from the track at the southern end and it appeared that the tide was on its way in. A single **Crab Plover** was seen distantly along with the odd **Western Reef Egret**, a **Slender-billed Gull** and a **Purple Heron**. Then our attention was distracted by the presence of a stunning **Sooty Falcon** perched in a mangrove. By wading up to it excellent views were had and these views easily surpassed the distant

birds we'd seen earlier in the trip at Abu Simbel. Pretty chuffed we left Hamata at dusk and returned for our evening meal at Wadi Lahami.

**29<sup>th</sup> June 2007**

### **Wadi Lahami**

We once again wandered from our tents to the nearby mangroves and unsurprisingly no Goliath Herons this morning. In fact the area was pretty quiet and the tide was in though the **Purple Heron** did show well again as it perched at the top of a mangrove. Several **Eastern Olivaceous Warblers** were singing and the odd **Striated Heron** was seen but other than half a dozen or so of those contentious *Collared Doves* there was nothing of any real note before we headed for an extended breakfast.

### **Hamata Mangroves**

We spent a couple of hours late morning birding this area, again scouring the mangroves for that elusive heron. Though we had a predictable blank on the Goliath Heron front a couple of **Spoonbills**, lots of **Western Reef Egrets** and a couple of **Wood Sandpipers** were seen. This was the first time we'd driven to the extreme north of the mangroves and it is fair to say the area is quite large – at the northern end we found an exposed spit where 8 **Sooty Gulls** and 20+ **White-eyed Gulls** were sitting.

### **Wadi Lahami**

Returning to our accommodation for lunch, we decided to stick it out here for the afternoon as a couple of the group wanted to do a bit of snorkelling. The underwater scenery was rather impressive with a wide array of spectacularly coloured fish present on the reef just offshore from the Ecolodge. 37 **Bridled Terns** and c.50 **White-cheeked Terns** were fishing offshore as we chilled out late afternoon in the bar area.

### **Hamata Mangroves**

Late afternoon we just about mustered up the enthusiasm to head north to the Hamata area again. First of all we headed north of Hamata as we'd noticed small areas of mangroves by the road. Apart from a couple of **Green Sandpipers** and a 2<sup>nd</sup> calendar year 'large white-headed gull', probably a *heuglini*, there was little else of note. Back at Hamata the tide seemed to be in again and the mangroves were quiet except for what was presumably the same **Sooty Falcon** as last night present in the same mangrove area. A group of 8 **Bridled Terns** and a single **White-cheeked Tern** showed well in the evening light just offshore before we headed back to Wadi Lahami for another session of eating, drinking and relaxing.

**30<sup>th</sup> June 2007**

### **Wadi Lahami**

This morning we awoke relatively early and took a boat out from Wadi Lahami to a small mangrove area on the Ras Bonas peninsular named Kira 'el Hiriwai. Knowing that Goliath Heron had been recorded here a couple of years ago and with access from land difficult (as the entry road is by the military checkpoint to the south of Wadi Lahami) we

thought that it was worth a check considering the absence of this target species elsewhere.

As soon as we headed out a feeding group of c.70 **White-cheeked Terns** were seen offshore and we diverted to get quality views of these birds as they fished over the flat calm water. We headed a few km to the south and found another group of terns – mainly **White-cheeked Terns** – but after a bit of manoeuvring obtained excellent views of about a dozen **Bridled Terns** and a couple of **Lesser Crested Terns** on the reef edge. Several **White-eyed Gulls** were also present but when we reached Kira ‘el Hiriwai we were disappointed to find that the mangrove area was best described as ‘small’ and we were unable to get as close as we wanted due to the shallowness of the water. That said a *turtle sp.* swam close to the boat and **Western Reef Egret**, **Striated Heron** and a single **Spoonbill** were seen.

We got back to the Ecolodge at c.8.30am and after cleaning ourselves up and packing the car we said goodbye to the staff and commenced the long drive north in the direction of Cairo. Little was seen between Wadi Lahami and Hurghada, except for a rather bizarre looking guy in the petrol station at Marsa Alam, but on the north side of Hurghada we decided to look for some terns.

### **Panorama Bungalows Resort, Hurghada**

We re-visited Hurghada on the way back north and managed to find our way back to this site, where we had visited on 24<sup>th</sup> June. 3 **Crested Terns** were the highlight but were perched quite distant whilst about 10 **Lesser Crested Terns** and several **White-eyed Gulls** were seen in the sandy bay here.

### **60km north of Hurghada**

Driving north along the coast road from Hurghada we happened upon a group of sandgrouse by the roadside at N27.69829, E33.49908 – when we stopped and scoped them up we found 23 **Spotted Sandgrouse**. Apart from this the drive up as far as Ain Sukhna was uneventful.

### **Just south of Ain Sukhna**

As we headed towards Suez we noticed a group of terns by the roadside at N29.39417, E32.54997 (88km south of Suez, 37km north of Zafrana). Stopping here produced a total of 6 splendid **Crested Terns** along with 14 **Lesser Crested Terns**, 5 **Greater Sand Plovers** and our most northerly **White-eyed Gull** of the trip.

### **Suez Bay**

This unfortunately was going to be the last bit of birding that we would do. As the light started to go we scanned again visited this site in the hope that we may find the odd Little Tern and hence be in with a chance of Saunder’s Tern – this seems to be the place where people have recorded this species with the most frequency in the past. There were no Little Terns so that was that, although a couple of **White-cheeked Terns** were seen along with c.15 **Common Terns**, 5 **Lesser Crested Terns**, 4 **Whiskered Terns** and the only

**Sandwich Tern** of the trip. Along with lots of **House Crows** also present were a handful of **Black-winged Stilts**, several **Slender-billed Gulls** and a decent flock of **Redshank**.

We then headed off to Cairo – where we stayed at the Novotel at Cairo Airport – ready for our flight back to London the next morning.

### 1<sup>st</sup> July 2007

After a decent night's sleep we negotiated our way around Cairo airport and caught our mid morning Egypt Air flight back to London Heathrow.

### Egypt June 2007 – Trip List

Pink-backed Pelican, <i>Pelecanus rufescens</i>
Little Bittern, <i>Ixobrychus m. minutus</i>
Black-crowned Night Heron, <i>Nycticorax n. nycticorax</i>
Striated Heron, <i>Butorides striatus</i>
Squacco Heron, <i>Ardeola ralloides</i>
Cattle Egret, <i>Bubulcus i. ibis</i>
Western Reef Heron, <i>Egretta gularis schistacea</i>
Little Egret, <i>Egretta g. garzetta</i>
Grey Heron, <i>Ardea c. cinerea</i>
Purple Heron, <i>Ardea p. purpurea</i>
White Stork, <i>Ciconia c. ciconia</i>
Yellow-billed Stork, <i>Mycteria ibis</i>
Eurasian Spoonbill, <i>Platalea l. leucorodia</i>
Egyptian Goose, <i>Alopochen aegyptiacus</i>
Ferruginous Duck, <i>Aythya nyroca</i>
Egyptian Vulture, <i>Neophron p. percnopterus</i>
Lappet-faced Vulture, <i>Torgos tracheliotus nubicus</i>
Honey Buzzard, <i>Pernis apivorus</i>
Black Kite, <i>Milvus migrans aegyptius</i>
Black-shouldered Kite, <i>Elanus c. caeruleus</i>
Osprey, <i>Pandion h. haliaetus</i>
Sooty Falcon, <i>Falco concolor</i>
Common Kestrel, <i>Falco tinnunculus rupicolaeformis</i>
Moorhen, <i>Gallinula c. chloropus</i>
Crab Plover, <i>Dromas ardeola</i>
Black-winged Stilt, <i>Himantopus h. himantopus</i>
Senegal Thick-knee, <i>Burhinus senegalensis</i>
Spur-winged Plover, <i>Vanellus spinosus</i>
Kittlitz's Plover, <i>Charadrius pecuarius</i>
Kentish Plover, <i>Charadrius a. alexandrinus</i>
Greater Sand Plover, <i>Charadrius leschenaultii columbinus</i>
Black-tailed Godwit, <i>Limosa limosa</i>
Whimbrel, <i>Numenius p. phaeopus</i>
Eurasian Curlew, <i>Numenius arquata orientalis</i>
Common Redshank, <i>Tringa t. totanus</i>

Greenshank, <i>Tringa n. nebularia</i>
Green Sandpiper, <i>Tringa ochropus</i>
Wood Sandpiper, <i>Tringa glareola</i>
Common Sandpiper, <i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>
Sooty Gull, <i>Larus hemprichii</i>
White-eyed Gull, <i>Larus leucophthalmus</i>
Slender-billed Gull, <i>Larus genei</i>
Lesser Black-backed/Heuglin's Gull, <i>Larus fuscus fuscus/ heuglini</i>
Gull-billed Tern, <i>Sterna n. nilotica</i>
Lesser Crested Tern, <i>Sterna b. bengalensis</i>
Crested Tern, <i>Sterna bergii velox</i>
Caspian Tern, <i>Sterna caspia</i>
Sandwich Tern, <i>Sterna s. sandvicensis</i>
Common Tern, <i>Sterna h. hirundo</i>
Bridled Tern, <i>Sterna anaethetus fuligula</i>
White-cheeked Tern, <i>Sterna repressa</i>
Little Tern, <i>Sterna a. albifrons</i>
White-winged Black Tern, <i>Chilidonias leucopterus</i>
Whiskered Tern, <i>Chilidonias hybridus</i>
African Skimmer, <i>Rynchops flavirostris</i>
Crowned Sandgrouse, <i>Pterocles c. coronatus</i>
Spotted Sandgrouse, <i>Pterocles senegallus</i>
Collared Dove sp., <i>Streptopelia</i> sp.
Turtle Dove, <i>Streptopelia turtur</i>
Laughing Dove, <i>Streptopelia senegalensis aegyptiaca</i>
Senegal Coucal, <i>Centropus senegalensis aegyptius</i>
Egyptian Nightjar, <i>Caprimulgus a. aegyptius</i>
White-throated Kingfisher, <i>Halcyon smyrnensis</i>
Pied Kingfisher, <i>Ceryle r. rudis</i>
Little Green Bee-eater, <i>Merops orientalis cleopatra</i>
Blue-cheeked Bee-eater, <i>Merops p. persicus</i>
European Bee-eater, <i>Merops apiaster</i>
Hoopoe, <i>Upupa e. epops</i>
Desert Lark, <i>Ammomanes d. deserti</i>
Hoopoe Lark, <i>Alaemon a. alaudipes</i>
Crested Lark, <i>Galerida cristata</i>
Sand Martin, <i>Riparia riparia</i>
African Rock Martin, <i>Hirundo o. obsoleta</i>
Barn Swallow, <i>Hirundo r. rustica &amp; H. r. savignii</i>
African Pied Wagtail, <i>Motacilla aguimp vidua</i>
Yellow Wagtail, <i>Motacilla flava pygmaea</i>
White Wagtail, <i>Motacilla a. alba</i>
Common Bulbul, <i>Pycnonotus barbatus arsinoe</i>
White-crowned Black Wheatear, <i>Oenanthe l. leucopyga</i>
Fan-tailed Warbler, <i>Cisticola j. juncidis</i>
Graceful Warbler, <i>Prinia g. gracilis</i>
Clamorous Reed Warbler, <i>Acrocephalus s. stentoreus</i>
Eastern Olivaceous Warbler, <i>Hippolais p. pallida</i>



Spotted Flycatcher, <i>Muscicapa s. striata</i>
House Crow, <i>Corvus s. splendens</i>
Hooded Crow, <i>Corvus cornix sardonius</i>
Brown-necked Raven, <i>Corvus ruficollis</i>
House Sparrow, <i>Passer domesticus niloticus</i>
Streaked Weaver, <i>Ploceus manyar</i>