

# PHOTOSPOT

## Egyptian Nightjar *Caprimulgus aegyptius aegyptius*

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The Egyptian Nightjar *Caprimulgus aegyptius* is a desert species that occurs mainly in open desert with some trees and bushes, often near water, where their cryptic appearance blends perfectly into their habitat making them difficult to see during the daytime, when they usually sleep under low bushes. They are nocturnal, flying at night to hunt moths and other flying insects. The subspecies of Egyptian Nightjar occurring in Arabia *Caprimulgus aegyptius aegyptius* is slightly darker and greyer with heavier vermiculations than the sandier and less strongly marked *C. a. saharae* from Africa (Cramp 1985).

The nominate subspecies is an uncommon bird in Arabia, with *The Birds of the Western Palearctic* (Cramp 1985) mentioning they winter in northeast Africa and migrate on a broad front across Arabia September–early November and March–mid May. Although this information is borne out by published data from countries of the Arabian peninsula there is no mention of summer or winter records. The *Birds of the Middle East* field guide (Porter *et al* 2010) makes no mention of summer records and only a comment saying birds winter in southern Arabia. The *Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Arabia* (Jennings 2010) mentions the Egyptian Nightjar is a scarce migrant and winter visitor but numbers are increasing, notably in the northern Arabian Gulf region, with birds present in summer since the beginning of the 21st century in areas where freshwater can be found. Over-summering has been noted in Kuwait and the Eastern province of Saudi Arabia with the possibility of this nightjar being overlooked as a breeding species being discussed by both Gregory (2005) and Meadows (2005).

The photographs shown with this Photospot (Plates 1–9) were all taken at Sabkhat Al Fasl, Jubail, in the Eastern province of Saudi Arabia in summer 2014. Birds have been recorded at this location May–mid September since 2007 at least. *C. a. aegyptius* occurs in northeastern Egypt and the Arabian peninsula, southern Levant, and Iraq, Iran to Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, eastern Kazakhstan, western Tadjikistan and extreme western Pakistan and it winters in the eastern Sahel, arriving on its breeding grounds early April–mid May and leaving in September. These arrival and departure dates are almost identical to the period birds have been seen at Sabkhat Al Fasl. There had been no confirmed breeding records of Egyptian Nightjar in the Arabian peninsula (Jennings 2010) but the 2014 records at Sabkhat Al Fasl where more than ten birds were seen together in July, August and September suggest breeding had occurred. As the birds are mainly silent and do not build nests but rather lay their eggs directly onto bare ground, proof of breeding is difficult to obtain. Breeding was proved in Bahrain in summer 2014 when a female with two chicks was found with the same bird having a second brood, or possibly a second nest present (Brendan Kavanagh pers comm).

Birds have also started wintering in very small numbers in eastern Arabia with regular records from the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Kuwait (Pedersen & Aspinall 2010, JB pers obs, King 2006, Al Sirhan 2014). It is clear that the status of the species has changed there in the 21st century, with the majority of birds no longer seen during the migration periods of early November and March–mid May. In eastern Saudi Arabia it was previously regarded as a vagrant (Bundy *et al* 1989) but is now known as a scarce passage migrant, summer and winter visitor, with July and August the best period for locating them. In Qatar most sightings are also now in July and August whereas



**Plate 1** (left). Egyptian Nightjar *Caprimulgus aegyptius aegyptius* 22 August 2014, Sabkhat Al Fasl, Jubail, Eastern province, Saudi Arabia. © Jem Babbington

**Plate 2** (right). Egyptian Nightjar *Caprimulgus aegyptius aegyptius* 29 August 2014, Sabkhat Al Fasl, Jubail, Eastern province, Saudi Arabia. © Jem Babbington



**Plate 3.** Egyptian Nightjar *Caprimulgus aegyptius aegyptius* 22 August 2014, Sabkhat Al Fasl, Jubail, Eastern province, Saudi Arabia. © Jem Babbington



**Plate 4.** Egyptian Nightjar *Caprimulgus aegyptius aegyptius* 22 August 2014, Sabkhat Al Fasl, Jubail, Eastern province, Saudi Arabia. © Jem Babbington



**Plate 5 (left).** Egyptian Nightjar *Caprimulgus aegyptius aegyptius* 18 July 2014, Sabkhat Al Fasl, Jubail, Eastern province, Saudi Arabia. © Jem Babbington



**Plate 6 (right).** Egyptian Nightjar *Caprimulgus aegyptius aegyptius* 29 August 2014, Sabkhat Al Fasl, Jubail, Eastern province, Saudi Arabia. © Jem Babbington





**Plate 7.** Egyptian Nightjar *Caprimulgus aegyptius aegyptius* 5 September 2014, Sabkhat Al Fasl, Jubail, Eastern province, Saudi Arabia. © Jem Babbington



**Plate 8.** Egyptian Nightjar *Caprimulgus aegyptius aegyptius* 18 July 2014, Sabkhat Al Fasl, Jubail, Eastern province, Saudi Arabia. © Jem Babbington

previously it was seen mostly mid April–late May and late August–mid November (Jamie Buchan pers comm). In Kuwait summer sightings are now regular but the best period for seeing the species is still the main migration period March–May (AbdulRahman Al Sirhan pers comm) and in Bahrain birds are seen throughout the year with most birds seen August–December (Brendan Kavanagh pers comm). In the United Arab Emirates the



**Plate 9.** Egyptian Nightjar *Caprimulgus aegyptius aegyptius* 4 July 2014, Sabkhat Al Fasl, Jubail, Eastern province, Saudi Arabia. © Jem Babbington

majority of records, as well as number of birds, occur December–February although there is also a peak in September with sightings for the country becoming increasingly common and summer records of up to 30 birds now occurring with breeding suspected in 2014 (Oscar Campbell pers comm).

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