

Unusual breeding site for Brown-necked Ravens *Corvus ruficollis*, Luxor, Egypt

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Over the years 1980–2012, I have visited Luxor, Egypt, seven times, each time recording Brown-necked Raven *Corvus ruficollis* west of the Nile in typical habitat along the Nile valley fringe or in mountains around the Valleys of the Kings. On my four most recent visits, I have recorded the species in Luxor city.

9–11 March 1985: two Brown-necked Ravens (BNRs) seemingly defending a territory in the garden of the Winter Palace hotel in the heart of the city. They were in conflict with a pair of Yellow-billed Kites *Milvus aegyptius* with a newly fledged juvenile.

25–28 January 1990: a BNR was by Luxor temple on 25 January. This is next to the garden of the Winter Palace hotel (which I did not visit).

18–22 March 1999: on 19 March a BNR pair was seen at Karnak temple (further north but also in the city, close to and east of the river) apparently defending a territory in direct combat with Hooded Crows *Corvus cornix*.

14–18 February 2012: I recorded BNRs on both my visits to Karnak temple, 14 and 17 February. On the second date, a pair was adding material to their nest on top of a column's capital. Hooded Crows around the temple were clearly 'not happy' with the presence of the BNRs. From this nest-site, the nearest mountainous desert is across the Nile c3–4 km away, while east of the Nile the nearest fringe to the desert is c7 km away. In Egypt, this seems to be the first record of a BNR nest site located away from the desert environment (Goodman & Meininger 1989, Sherif Baha el Din & Ahmed Riad pers comm). It is surprising that BNRs can settle in one of the most visited tourist places in Egypt.

The main breeding season in Egypt for BNR is February–mid May, with nestlings noted from early March (Goodman & Meininger 1989). This coincides with the high season for tourism where literally thousands of visitors enter the Karnak temple every day. Despite this human invasion, I believe that the temple area increasingly has become a relatively peaceful place. Access is now highly regulated and predictable. Few if any traditional local activities take place eg no



Plate 1. Location of Brown-necked Raven *Corvus ruficollis* nest on a column's capital at Medinet Habu temple, Luxor, Egypt. © Uffe Gjøøl Sørensen



Plate 2. Close-up of Brown-necked Raven *Corvus ruficollis* nest at Medinet Habu temple, Luxor, Egypt (see Plate 1), with head of brooding Brown-necked Raven just visible. © Uffe Gjøøl Sørensen

children are running around, no goat-herding. During daytime, the tourists all enter from a main entrance and the vast majority only visit the core area of the temple. After sunset, the light-and-sound shows are controlled and most of the temple is completely abandoned and quiet in the dark. The BNR nest site is located in a roped-off corner. At the same time, the location ensures two other qualities: the nest, up under the ceiling, is in permanent shade, hidden and shielded from the strong sunlight and the position on the top of a column ensures protection from mammalian predators. The latter is a real threat as I have recorded Red Fox *Vulpes vulpes* in both the two great temples in Luxor. The morning I located the BNRs' nest, a Red Fox was enjoying the heat from the rising sun on top of the Great Hypostyle hall in the centre of Karnak temple *ie* <100 m from the nest-site. At Luxor temple, in 1990, a Red Fox had its den halfway up the 25 m monumental entrance wall, and in 2012 a fox left the exact same den one early morning.

Later, again on 17 February 2012, I came across another example of a temple being a breeding place for BNRs. In the middle of the Medinet Habu temple, a pair had an exactly similar location of their nest on a capital to a column (Plates 1, 2). Brooding had started and it was fun to see the watchful BNR on the nest checking out the tourists passing right below. The much less visited and smaller Medinet Habu temple is located on the fringe of the desert west of the Nile river and much closer to normal BNR feeding habitat. BNRs adjusting to nesting in human-controlled landscapes away from the desert and in places with thousands of visitors seems a novel development.

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LITERATURE CITED

Goodman, SM & PL Meininger. 1989. *The Birds of Egypt*. Oxford University Press, UK.

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