

Egypt

Nile River Cruise

19 – 26 Mar 07

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References:

1. Collins Guide to the *Birds of Britain & Europe with N. Africa & The Middle East*.
3. Trip Reports posted on the Web.

This report contains 6 pages and will conform to the following format:-

1. A brief introduction.
2. A table of common species seen along the Nile.
3. A day-by-day account of the sites visited with birding highlights.
4. A selective species trip list.
5. Summary.

Introduction

This was a family holiday selected by my wife, travelling with Voyages Jules Verne on one of the more “up-market” vessels (The SS MISR – King Farouq’s refurbished steamer), currently sailing on the Nile River.

Having previously travelled widely in the Middle East, there was only really one target bird; the Nile Valley Sunbird, with an outside chance of Kittlitz’s Plover.

The River cruise produced some good birds in a relaxed atmosphere, unlike the usual rushing around that I achieve whilst abroad.

Common Species

The following table contains a list of common species that can be easily seen in good numbers from Luxor, South to Aswan along the Nile River.

Scientific Name	Common Name
Phalacrocorax carbo	Great Cormorant
Ardeola ralloides	Squacco Heron
Bubulcus ibis	Cattle Egret
Egretta garzetta	Little Egret
Ardea cinerea	Grey Heron
Ardea purpurea	Purple Heron
Circus aeruginosus	Eurasian Marsh Harrier
Falco tinnunculus	Common Kestrel
Gallinula chloropus	Moorhen
Porphyrio porphyrio madagascariensis	Purple Gallinule
Fulica atra	Coot
Himantopus himantopus	Black-winged Stilt
Vanellus spinosus	Spur-winged Plover
Larus ridibundus	Black-headed Gull
Streptopelia senegalensis	Laughing Dove
Ceryle rudis	Pied Kingfisher
Upupa epops	Hoopoe
Hirundo rustica savignii	Egyptian Barn Swallow
Motacilla alba	White Wagtail
Corvus (carone) cornix	Hooded Crow
Passer domesticus	House Sparrow

Day by Day Itineraries with highlights

19 Mar 07

We flew from Gatwick at 0945, although this was delayed by an hour, which appears to be the normal state of affairs. The flight can hardly be recommended but achieved the desired aim after many queues for a number of reasons. We arrived on board our vessel the MS MISR at about 1930 local time (2 hours in front of UK time), settled in and enjoyed dinner on board.

Day 1 – 20 Mar 07

The boat had sailed from Luxor to Esna barrage overnight and in the morning light continued to Edfu. Two Garganeys, several Whiskered Terns and five Purple Gallinules were noted. Further down the Nile, the only Slender-billed Gulls, five Spoonbill and several Glossy Ibis made an appearance.

At Edfu – Temple of Horus, two Blue-cheeked Bee-eater and two Brown-necked Ravens were noted amongst the impressive buildings.

We re-boarded the boat after some hectic haggling (Life of Brian style), with some zealous vendors and journeyed to Kom Ombo. Whilst on route along the river the only Ruff of the trip, a Night Heron, another Spoonbill and several more Gallinule were noted. The only two Egyptian Geese were also noted on this leg of the journey.

Day 2 – 21 Mar 07

Today saw an early morning visit to Kom Ombo. From the boat a small long tailed bird was seen it was surely a Nile Valley Sunbird, although better views were required. We were not disappointed and the gardens under the Temple revealed two pairs of these superb little birds, the males in full breeding regalia. With migration well under way, several Lesser Whitethroats flitted about whilst the local Graceful Prinias and Common Bulbuls were in good voice. A familiar Reed Warbler like song from a bush was soon identified as an Eastern Olivaceous Warbler with its typical tail pumping action.

The boat then sailed from Kom Ombo to Aswan with the target bird safely secured on day two, which was a relief. The now familiar riverside birds continued to show and were complemented by several flocks of wildfowl, one of which contained three Ferruginous Ducks.

Day 3 – 22 Mar 07

We awoke in Aswan and set out to visit the Temple of Philae. A White-crowned Black Wheatear was seen by the jetty and a cracking male Masked Shrike also showed well. A Little Green Heron was seen on a rocky outcrop and several Gull-billed Terns circled the boat. On the Island, at least another four Nile Valley Sunbirds entertained us, an Osprey put in a brief appearance as did five Red-rumped Swallows and about sixty White Pelicans roosted on a nearby beach. We viewed a thermal full of Black Kites from the temple some of which were of the Yellow-billed sub-species.

Later in the afternoon we took a Felucca ride to Kitchener Island which produced another two male Nile Valley Sunbirds, a male Bluethroat (red spot), ten Ferruginous Duck and the usual common migrants.

Day 4 – 23 Mar 07

A 0315 wake-up call and an early departure saw us heading for Abu Simbel. Our arrival was greeted with a White-crowned Wheatear, another Hoopoe was seen as was a Graceful Prinia but the only new bird was a very pale grey coloured Crested Lark.

After lunch, we set sail north for our return to Luxor. Between Aswan and Kom Ombo the only Senegal Thick Knees were noted, along with two more Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters and a White Pelican. Numerous Pied Kingfishers and the Egyptian sub-species of Barn Swallow continued to circle the vessel as we sat in the sun and enjoyed a beer or two.

From Kom Ombo to Edfu, a Clamorous Reed Warbler was heard and the only Ringed Plover of the trip was seen.

Day 5 – 24 Mar 07

The usual and common birds were seen on this leg of the journey between Esna and Luxor with no new birds for the trip being added.

Day 6 – 25 Mar 07

The group briefly stopped at the Colossi of Memnon but not before adding two Black-shouldered Kites on route. These striking birds appear to be present in small numbers around the cultivated fields of Luxor. At the statues three displaying Fan-tailed Warblers were seen, another Masked Shrike and two Stonechat.

The Temple of Hatshepsut was next and we added Trumpeter Finch and two Brown-necked Ravens here whilst Pale Crag Martins continued to be present at all Temple sites and several authentic Rock Doves were seen.

Later in the Valley of the Kings, at least fifteen Trumpeter Finches came to a bowl of water and some seed which allowed some close photos to be taken (by my wife) of this at times difficult bird to connect with. Whilst departing the site a Little Green Bee-eater perched on a rock.

An short afternoon walk by the Traveline moorings produced good views of a Clamorous Reed Warbler and another Night Heron.

Of interest during an evening visit to Luxor Temple was a noisy roost of Godfrey's Tomb Bat.



Trumpeter Finches at the Valley of the Kings

Day 7 – 26 Mar 07

On route to the Temple of Karnak another Black-shouldered Kite sat on telegraph wires and a Hoopoe fed along the roadside.

The journey to the airport produced several of the ubiquitous Pied Kingfishers, several Pallid Swifts overhead and one more Black-shouldered Kite, a species that appears to be quite common around the cultivated farmland of Luxor.

Selective Species List

Scientific Name	Common Name	Remarks
Tachybaptus ruficollis	Little Grebe	2 seen on the southerly journey between Esna and Edfu
Pelecanus onocrotalus	Great White Pelican	A flock of circa 60 seen roosting from Philae Temple and later migrating North with 1's along the river
Ixobrychus minutus	Little Bittern	1 along the river between Kom Ombo and Aswan
Nycticorax nycticorax	Black-crowned Night Heron	Singletons seen along the river but not numerous
Butorides striatus	Little Green Heron	3 birds seen 2 on the river between Kom Ombo and Aswan, 1 whilst approaching Philae Temple
Egretta alba	Great White Egret	Only 2 birds seen between Kom Ombo and Aswan on the 21st
Plegadis falcinellus	Glossy Ibis	1s & 2s along the river with a large flock of c60 between Kom Ombo and Aswan
Platalea leucorodia	Eurasian Spoonbill	5 birds seen on a river island between Esna and Edfu and 1 seen between Edfu and Kom Ombo
Alopochen aegyptiacus	Egyptian Goose	2 were seen on a river island between Edfu and Kom Ombo
Anas penelope	Eurasian Wigeon	Small groups seen along the river
Anas crecca	Eurasian Teal	8 birds seen in 2 groups
Anas acuta	Northern Pintail	2 drakes at Aswan with Northern Shoveller and 1 with the same species between Edfu and Kom Ombo
Anas querquedula	Garganey	3 birds seen, 2 drakes and 1 duck along the river with Northern Shoveller
Anas clypeata	Northern Shoveller	Large flocks seen all along the river
Aythya nyroca	Ferruginous Duck	3 between Esna and Edfu. 10 from Kitchener Island
Aythya fuligula	Tufted Duck	Small parties (mostly drakes) along the river between Edfu and Kom Ombo
Elanus caeruleus	Black-shouldered Kite	2 near the Colossi of Memnon, 1 over the fields near Luxor and 1 on the way to the airport on the final day
Milvus migrans	Black Kite	Numerous over Philae Temple with singletons seen elsewhere
Milvus migrans parasitus	African "Yellow-billed" Kite	Birds contained within the thermal at Philae were of this Ssp
Pandion haliaetus	Osprey	1 at Philae Temple
Burhinus senegalensis	Senegal Thick-knee	11 seen on the return journey between Aswan and Kom Ombo on a "beach"
Charadrius hiaticula	Ringed Plover	1 seen during the return journey up-river between Aswan and Kom Ombo
Philomachus pugnax	Ruff	A group of 8 were seen on an river island between Edfu and Kom Ombo
Gallinago gallinago	Common Snipe	1 at Edfu – flushed by a Marsh Harrier and one along the river between Aswan and Kom Ombo

<i>Limosa limosa</i>	Black-tailed Godwit	2 were seen feeding between Esna and Edfu
<i>Tringa totanus</i>	Common Redshank	1 seen between Aswan and Kom Ombo
<i>Tringa stagnatilis</i>	Marsh Sandpiper	1 seen between Aswan and Kom Ombo
<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	Common Sandpiper	Singletons seen throughout the trip along the river
<i>Larus genei</i>	Slender-billed Gull	A group of 5 seen between Esna and Edfu
<i>Gelochelidon nilotica</i>	Gull-billed Tern	Common around Philae Temple with 1s along the river
<i>Chlidonias hybridus</i>	Whiskered Tern	Good numbers seen all along the river
<i>Chlidonias leucopterus</i>	White-winged Black Tern	Small numbers mixed with the above and a group of 20 heading North between Esna and Edfu on the 20th
<i>Columba livia</i>	Rock Dove	Authentic birds seen at the Temple of Hatshepsut
<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>	Turtle Dove	1 bird seen at Philae Temple
<i>Apus apus</i>	Common Swift	Good numbers migrating in the second half of the week
<i>Apus pallidus</i>	Pallid Swift	Probably mixed with the previous species but 5 positively identified on the return to the airport
<i>Merops orientalis</i>	Little Green Bee-eater	1s & 2s seen at Kom Ombo, Abu Simbel and Valley of the Kings
<i>Merops persicus</i>	Blue-cheeked Bee-eater	A flock of 18 seen between Esna and Kom Ombo, with a pair at Edfu Temple and several around Luxor
<i>Galerida cristata</i>	Crested Lark	2 seen. 1 at Abu Simbel and 1 at the Colossi of Memnon
<i>Ptyonoprone fuligula</i>	Pale Rock Martin	Seen regularly in small numbers at all Temples
<i>Hirundo daurica</i>	Red-rumped Swallow	A group of 5 seen over Philae Temple
<i>Motacilla flava</i>	Yellow Wagtail	Singletons seen along the river
<i>Motacilla (flava) feldegg</i>	Black-headed wagtail	1 seen between Edfu and Kom Ombo
<i>Pycnonotus barbatus</i>	Common Bulbul	Fairly common - 1s & 2s seen in suitable habitat
<i>Luscinia svecica</i>	Bluethroat	1 male seen on Kitchener Island
<i>Saxicola torquata</i>	Stonechat	A male and female at the Colossi of Memnon
<i>Oenanthe leucopyga</i>	White-crowned Black Wheatear	2 at Philae Temple, 2 at Abu Simbel and one at the boat jetty to Philae Temple
<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>	Zitting Cisticola	Several seen in grasslands bordering the River
<i>Prinia gracilis</i>	Graceful Prinia	1s & 2s heard and seen in reeds along the river
<i>Acrocephalus stentoreus</i>	Clamorous Reed Warbler	Heard along the river and 1 seen in reeds near Luxor
<i>Hippolais pallida</i>	Olivaceous Warbler	Migrants seen and heard in suitable habitat
<i>Sylvia curruca</i>	Lesser Whitethroat	Good numbers seen at Philae Temple, Kom Ombo Temple and singletons seen throughout in suitable habitat
<i>Anthrepetes metallicus</i>	Nile Valley Sunbird	At least 8 seen in pairs, including stunning males in suitable habitat at Kom Ombo Temple, Kitchener Island and Philae Temple (nest seen)
<i>Lanius nubicus</i>	Masked Shrike	3 at Philae Temple and 1 at the Colossi of Memnon
<i>Corvus ruficollis</i>	Brown-necked Raven	2 at Edfu Temple of Horus and 2 at the Temple of Hatshepsut
<i>Bucanetes githagineus</i>	Trumpeter Finch	4 at the Temple of Hatshepsut and common in the Valley of the Kings (photographed coming to water)

Summary

The trip produced the target bird! A Cruise along the River Nile is an ideal relaxed way to bird watch, whilst keeping the family happy and enjoying the Egyptian historical sites. The excursion to Abu Simbel is a little tiring and a little over-priced, with not many birds on offer (unless you are lucky enough to encounter something like an African Skimmer on Lake Nasser, however, to go that far and not visit the site would be a shame.

I would recommend a cruise for the above reasons but if you are looking for a large list this is not the trip for you. Take care in selecting a vessel to travel on, as many look tired and not in particularly good order.