

Egypt

Birds & History

Friday 26 November – Tuesday 07 December 2010

Leaders: Richard Coomber and local guides

2010 Cost: **£2,899** single room supplement **£290**



Our "Land of the Pharaohs" tour has been designed with just the right combination of bird watching and sightseeing. We will visit all the key habitats to find birds of the deserts, wetlands and marine and coastal environments. Given Egypt's strategic location, it is one of the best places to see a number of species found nowhere else in the Western Palearctic, such as Senegal Thick-knee, Nile Valley Sunbird, Senegal Coucal and Kittlitz's Sandplover. We will watch birds while exploring Egypt's world famous antiquities, which have inspired and awed man through the ages. The Ancient Egyptians were among the world's first natural historians and vividly documented the wildlife of their times on the walls of tombs and temples. No other country allows us the opportunity to bird watch in the past, as over 75 species of birds have been identified from the wall paintings and countless other artefacts. The life of Egypt will be well observed – from the modern skyscrapers of Cairo to the lowly mud-walled villages of the Nile. We will spend four nights on a Nile cruise, the ideal way to sightsee and bird watch Upper Egypt, as at this time of year the Nile will be teeming with wintering waterbirds and the weather should be superb. This will be Ornitholidays' eighth tour to Egypt.



Great Pyramid and Sphinx

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Days 1 & 2

We fly from London on a scheduled flight to Cairo. Upon arrival we transfer to our hotel in Giza near the pyramids, where we stay for two nights. Next morning we drive into town and visit a public garden where we see our first Nile Valley birds, such as Eurasian Hoopoe, Common Bulbul, Palm Dove, Yellow-billed Kite and Ring-necked Parakeet. We take a guided tour of the Egyptian Museum where we will see the fabulous treasures of Tutankhamun and the Geese of Medium, a masterpiece of ancient Egyptian bird art. We then drive south along the Nile Valley to Sakara, the cemetery of Memphis, located on the desert fringe, where we will see the Steppe Pyramid, considered the first successful attempt at pyramid building and known roosting site for Pharaoh's Eagle-Owl. We then visit the tombs of Sakara with their wonderful scenes of every day life and depictions of Egyptian wildlife.

Day 3

In the morning we visit the pyramids and Sphinx, one of the wonders of the ancient world. Here, we see the Solar Boat, a completely preserved mortuary boat, unearthed next to the Great Pyramid and restored to its former grandeur. Then we drive south through the Western Desert to Lake Qarun in the El Fayoum Oasis. This picturesque lake is home to Slender-billed Gull and the surrounding reed beds are one of the best sites to see Clamorous Reed Warbler and Little Bittern. Wintering waterbirds that frequent the lake include Great Black-headed Gull as a regular visitor and Marsh Sandpiper, Jack Snipe and Temminck's Stint are just some of the waders that can be found around the shores. In the surrounding farmlands we see characteristic agricultural species, such as Cattle Egret, Crested Lark, Spur-winged Plover and Graceful Warbler. If we are lucky, we might come across the elusive Painted Snipe. We return to Cairo and spend the night at our hotel.

Day 4

An early morning flight takes us to Abu Simbel on the shores of Lake Nasser, a huge reservoir formed after the construction of the Aswan High Dam. We spend the morning birding in the hotel gardens and the lakeshores, looking for African specialities, such as Egyptian Goose, Kittlitz's Plover and African Pied Wagtail. Interesting winter visitors can be found in the surrounding deserts such as Desert and Pied Wheatears. Given Abu Simbel's strategic location near the border with Sudan, it is one of the best sites to find a Western Palearctic rarity. After lunch at the hotel we will visit Abu Simbel Temple, built in honour of Ramses II and his beautiful wife, Nefertari. This magnificent construction is amazing, not only for the structure itself, but for the fact that the temple was taken apart block by block and moved to higher ground to save it from the rising waters resulting from the dam. Afterwards we return to the hotel for some optional birding until dusk. In the evening we will return to the temple to attend the Sound and

Light Show, a high tech extravaganza where we might catch a glimpse of an Egyptian Nightjar hawking insects in the lights.

Days 5 to 8

In the early morning we drive north through the Western Desert to Aswan. There will be little in the way of bird life in this arid terrain, but we hope to find both Crowned and Spotted Sandgrouse at one of the camel feeding stations. Upon arrival in Aswan we will check onto the cruise ship where we stay for four nights. Later, we take a *felucca*, a traditional Egyptian sailboat, around the First Cataract Islands. Sailing on the Nile is a relaxing way to end the day, watching birds flying to roost while the sun sets. Early next morning we take a tour of the Granite Quarries where we will see the Unfinished Obelisk, followed by a brief visit to the massive Aswan High Dam. Then we will take a motorboat to the enchanting Temple of Philae, located on an island between the Old and New Dams. This Ptolemaic Temple is considered one of the most beautiful in Egypt. We return to the cruise boat for lunch, and begin our cruise down the Nile, watching birds from the comfort of the deck of the ship as we float past farmlands, islands, reed beds, towns and villages. We will see resident waterbirds such as Pied Kingfisher, Purple Swamphen and Senegal Thick-knee and winter visitors including grebes, ducks, gulls, terns, herons and waders. Barbary Falcon is an uncommon resident, while wintering raptors include Western Marsh-Harrier, Osprey, Long-legged Buzzard and Greater Spotted Eagle. In the afternoon we visit Kom Ombo Temple, the only temple dedicated to two Gods, Sobek, the Crocodile God and Horus, the Falcon God. The next morning we visit Edfu Temple, which is dedicated to Horus, the Falcon God – a favourite of birders! In the afternoon we continue to cruise down river, birding en route. There will be rafts of ducks on the open water and waders and herons along the shore, while terns such as Whiskered and White-winged Black will fly past. We scan the Nile for wintering specialities, such as Ferruginous Duck, White-tailed Plover and Glossy Ibis. In the mid-afternoon we reach the city of Essna, where we will join the queue to cross the lock. In the evening we will visit the Temple of Luxor, which is magical when lit at night. Little Owls hawk insects in the lights, while Barn Owls and bats can be seen flying overhead. Early next morning we visit the West Bank and see the beautifully painted tombs of the Valley of the Kings and Queens, as well as the impressive Temple of Queen Hapshepsut and the Colossi of Memnon. In the afternoon we return to the West

Bank and have a guided tour of Karnak Temple, a marvel of Ancient Egyptian engineering with its huge pillars and obelisks.

Day 9

We disembark from the ship and spend the day at Crocodile Island, one of Upper Egypt's great birding sites. A wide variety of birds can be found in the lush gardens, farmlands and reed beds around the island, including residents, such as Nile Valley Sunbird, Green Bee-eater and Egyptian Yellow Wagtail and winter visitors like Bluethroat, Red-throated Pipit and Sardinian Warbler. We will have a delicious lunch at the Crocodile Island Movenpick Hotel followed by further birding until we depart for the airport and our flight back to Cairo. Upon arrival we transfer to a hotel near the airport.

Day 10

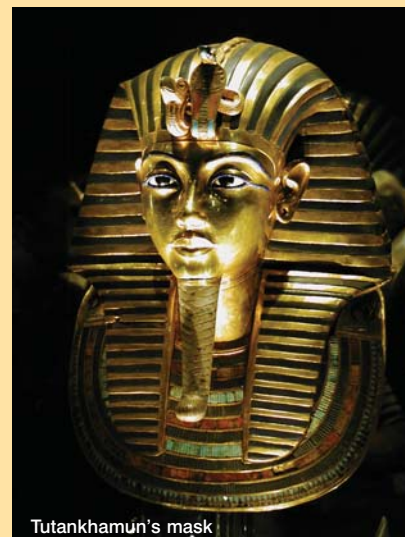
In the early morning we travel east through the Eastern Desert to the coast of the Gulf of Suez. We bird en route, looking for desert species, such as Hoopoe Lark, Bar-tailed Desert Lark, Mourning Wheatear, Brown-necked Raven, Scrub Warbler and wintering Spectacled Warbler. At Ain Sukhna we will have the opportunity to look for Red Sea birds, such as White-eyed Gull and Swift Tern. At midday we drive north to Suez, an industrial port at the head of the Gulf. Here there will be more gulls and another chance to see Red Sea birds, including Western Reef-Heron. We visit the Suez Canal, a modern engineering wonder, where we can watch Indian House Crows in the gardens and seabirds flying along the canal. In the late afternoon we return to our hotel in Cairo.

Day 11

We will visit Gabel Asfar in the Eastern Delta north of Cairo, in the early morning. This is one of the only locations in Africa where White-throated Kingfisher occurs and will be another opportunity to find Egyptian specialities, including Senegal Coucal. During the morning we visit the Citadel overlooking the City of the Dead and affording spectacular views of Cairo. This will be followed by lunch in the heart of the famous Khan El Khalili market where we will have the opportunity for some last minute shopping. We will return to our hotel for a farewell dinner.

Day 12

In the early morning we will transfer to the airport and depart from Egypt and we arrive into London at midday.



Tutankhamun's mask

Outline Itinerary

Day 1	Fly to Cairo and transfer to Giza
Day 2	Giza
Day 3	Cairo
Day 4	Abu Simbel
Days 5-8	Nile cruise Aswan – Luxor
Days 9-11	Cairo
Day 12	Depart Cairo

Party Size

Maximum of 14 clients.

Accommodation

Good quality accommodation in twin/double and single rooms, with private facilities.

Transport

By private coach and boat.

Includes

All flights, meals, accommodation, transport, entry fees, services of the leaders, airport taxes and tips.


Gratings

 Good

 120

 Hot


 Low

 Special

 Moderate

 Good

 Easy

 Scheduled



Crowned Sandgrouse



River Nile and Felucca