

# Egypt - Birds & History

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

2012

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## Outline itinerary

<b>Day 1</b>	Fly Cairo
<b>Day 2</b>	Cairo; the Pyramids and museum
<b>Day 3</b>	Abu Simbel
<b>Day 4/5</b>	Aswan
<b>Day 5/7</b>	Luxor; Valley of the Kings, Karnak etc
<b>Day 7/9</b>	Sharm El Sheikh
<b>Day 9/10</b>	St Catherine
<b>Day 10</b>	Cairo
<b>Day 11</b>	Fly London

## Dates

Sunday, 14th October – Monday 24th October 2012

## Cost

£3,395 (London/London)

## Single room supplement

£295

## Grading

A. Easy birdwatching walks (the optional Mount Sinai climb is more strenuous!)

## Focus

Birds and Egyptian history



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**NB. Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.**

## Introduction

Due to its strategic situation at the junction between Eurasia and Africa, Egypt has a rich and varied avifauna with over 470 different species recorded. This eleven-day tour which combines the best of birds and history has been timed to coincide with late autumn migration when resident species are augmented by large numbers of passage and winter visitors. October is a good time of year to see migrating birds of prey; some 27 species pass through Egypt, including Honey Buzzard, Imperial Eagle, Lesser Spotted Eagle, Levant Sparrowhawk, Egyptian Vulture and Pallid Harrier. We will visit a wide range of habitats (agriculture, wetlands, marine and coastal environments and deserts) each with its own unique birds. We will go in search of species found nowhere else in the Western Palearctic including Nile Valley Sunbird, African Pied Wagtail, Senegal Thick-knee, to name but a few. While hope to chance upon some migration spectacles, the highlight will undoubtedly be the antiquities from Egypt's glorious past, which are among the most spectacular monuments in the world! As in all Naturetrek tours, we will not pass up the opportunity to see other wildlife. There will be a chance to snorkel at Ras Mohammed National Park and experience the dazzling diversity of marine life at this acclaimed coral reef. We will also hike the high altitude mountains of South Sinai and experience the beauty and nature of this vast desert wilderness.

### Day 1

Sunday

#### Cairo

We depart from London on a scheduled service flight to Cairo, this sprawling metropolis on the banks of the Nile. Arriving late evening we then transfer to our hotel on an island in the midst of the city.

### Day 2

Monday

#### Cairo

Following an early breakfast we will drive to Dashour Lake, a scenic wetland on the edge of the Nile Valley. In the shadows of the Dashour Pyramids, we will have our first chance to see birds typical of Egyptian farmlands: Spur-winged Plover, Common Bulbul, Senegal Coucal, Fan-tailed Warbler and White-breasted Kingfisher. A diversity of migrants can be expected. Then we will drive north to our primary objectives, the Pyramids and Sphinx. There is almost a sense of disbelief to be viewing a scene that is at once so familiar, yet veiled in mystery and it is impossible not to marvel, like millions of visitors before us, at the ingenuity of the people involved in their construction. We will also see the Solar Boat, a Pharaonic funerary boat found buried next to the Great Pyramid of Khufu, and reconstructed and housed in a special museum. After lunch we will have a guided tour of the Egyptian Museum, which stores an impressive collection of artifacts from Egypt's glorious past, including the treasures of Tutankhamun. In the evening we will visit Khan El Khalili market in Islamic Cairo where we will have a chance to shop this bustling "souk". Nearby we will dine at Al Azhar Park while enjoying stunning views of the Citadel.

### Day 3

Tuesday

## Abu Simbel

Early morning we will catch a domestic flight to Abu Simbel, Egypt's most southerly settlement. Here we will bird-watch the shores of Lake Nasser, one of the world's largest man-made reservoirs and take a boat ride on this immense wetland with a hope to obtain closer views of waterbirds as we search the islands and khors. In addition to commoner migrants, there will be a chance for more unusual fare, such as Pink-backed Pelican, Kittlitz's Plover, African Pied Wagtail and other visitors from Africa; anything can turn up at this prime locality for African wanderers! If lucky, we might catch a glimpse of a Nile Crocodile or Monitor basking on the lake shores. Later in the afternoon we will visit the magnificent Temple of Abu Simbel built in honor of Ramses II and his beautiful wife, Nefertari. The temple was taken apart block by block and moved to higher ground to save it from flooding caused by the dam. After nightfall we will attend the *Son et Lumiere* at the Temple and might catch a glimpse of Egyptian Nightjar in the lights.

## Day 4

**Wednesday**

### Aswan

Early morning we will birdwatch the hotel gardens and other habitats around Abu Simbel. Namaqa Dove, Cyprus Pied Wheatear and Pink-headed Dove are some of the rarities we might encounter. Then we will drive north through the hyper-arid Western Desert to Aswan. Upon our arrival we will take a motorboat to the enchanting Temple of Philae which is situated on an island between the Old and New Dams. This temple, considered one of the most beautiful in Egypt, is also a good site for birding. Nile Valley Sunbird frequents the acacia trees and flocks of Ferruginous Ducks float offshore. Mid afternoon we will take a felucca, a traditional Egyptian sailboat on the Nile and tour the First Cataract Islands. Aswan is the heron capital of Egypt with over seven different species recorded, including Striated, Squacco, Purple and Night Heron whilst Yellow-billed Kite and Long-legged Buzzard might be seen circling overhead. As the sun sets we will watch White-winged Black, Whiskered and Gull-billed Terns migrating along the river.

## Day 5

**Thursday**

### Luxor

Today we travel north along the Nile Valley by road to Luxor stopping in route to visit Kom Ombo, dedicated to the Crocodile God, Sobek and Edfu Temple, dedicated to the Falcon God, Horus. We will see birds as we travel along the river and the surrounding farmlands. Upon arrival in Luxor we will have a guided tour of the Temple of Karnak, with its impressive hall of colossal stone pillars, one of the highlights of any tour to Egypt!

## Day 6

**Friday**

Today we explore the West Bank sites of Colossi of Memnon, Temple of Queen Hatshepsut and the beautifully painted tombs of the Valleys of the Kings and Queens. In the desert fringe we can see Trumpeter Finch, White-crowned Black Wheatear, Desert Lark, Blue Rock Thrush and Pallid Swift. In the cultivation Black-shouldered Kite, Little Green Bee-eater, Fan-tailed Warbler, Crested Lark and migrants such as Spanish Sparrow are usually found. We will take a boat across the river for lunch. In the afternoon we will bird different habitats around Luxor in search of residents, such as Clamorous Reed Warbler, Senegal Thick-knee, Avadavat., Purple Swamphen and

Lesser Pied Kingfisher and migrants like Bluethroats, Red-throated Pipits, Sardinian Warblers and White-tailed Lapwing. Kettles of birds of prey might be spotted migrating in the skies above the Valley.

## Day 7

Saturday

### Sharm El Sheik

We will have some more time to birdwatch Luxor in the morning. We will go to a spot where flocks of Spotted Sandgrouse come to drink at the Nile. A short flight will take us to the popular resort of Sharm El Sheikh in South Sinai. After lunch at our hotel, we will go birdwatching at Nabaq Protected Area along the Gulf of Aqaba coast, which protects the most northernmost mangroves in the Red Sea. The sand and gravel plains here are home to Bar-tailed Desert Lark and Red Sea birds, such as Western Reef Heron, White-eyed Gull, Sooty Gull, Caspian Tern and Osprey frequent the mangroves. Greater Sand Plover and other migrant waders can be found feeding along the tidal flats, while flocks of migrating Garganey can be observed offshore. We will return to bird the hotel gardens which can be teeming with exhausted migrants.

## Day 8

Sunday

### Ras Mohammed National Park

In the morning we will visit Ras Mohammed National Park. Although primarily a marine park, its boundaries encompass a considerable diversity of desert habitats. This headland at the southern most tip of the Sinai acts as a bottleneck for migratory birds. Large numbers White Storks pass through here in August, but at this time of year we should be affording some stunning views of birds of prey which congregate here. We will visit the mangroves and coastal habitats. Although it's the end of the breeding season, there is a chance for a Sooty Falcon along the cliffs. We will also have the opportunity to snorkel at Shark's Bay where there is a sheer wall of coral descending 36 meters into the bottomless depths. We will return to Sharm and birdwatch the environs of the city visiting sewage treatment plants and plantations, which attract migrants. Anything can turn up at this time of year! There will be an optional trip at dusk in search of the elusive Lichtenstein's Sandgrouse.

## Day 9

Monday

### St Catherine

In the morning we will make a final attempt to see sandgrouse as well as migrants at Sharm. After breakfast we will begin our journey to St Catherine high in the mountains. During our drive along the Gulf of Suez we might find migrating birds of prey and desert birds such as Hoopoe Lark and Morning Wheatear. St Catherine National Park occupies much of the central part of the South Sinai. A relatively high precipitation gives rise to a rich diversity of plant and animal life. It is a mountainous region that includes Egypt's highest peaks, intersected by a complex network of deeply cut wadis. We will stop and have lunch at the nunnery at Wadi Feiran. In the gardens we can see Sinai specialties: Yellow-vented Bulbul, Palestine Sunbird and Blackstart. We will continue our drive to the remote settlement of St Catherine in the heart of the mountains. Mid afternoon we will take a leisurely hike up Wadi Arabian guided by a local Bedouin. As we walk amidst the pink granite peaks and ancient olive orchards, we hope to encounter birds and other wildlife.

## Day 10

**Tuesday**

### Cairo

There will be a chance for a pre-dawn pilgrimage to climb Mount Sinai. The others can go at sunrise to search for desert birds in the hillsides around the monastery, home to Scrub Warbler, Hooded Wheatear and Sand Partridge as well as Sinai specialties, Sinia Rosefinch and Tristram's Grackle. After breakfast we will visit St Catherine's Monastery, a 6th century Greek Orthodox Monastery built at the site where Moses saw the burning bush. We will then begin our long drive north through the Sinai to Cairo keeping a watch for birds of prey and other migrants. Late afternoon we will go by tunnel under the Suez Canal and make a brief stop at Suez, to see the canal, a modern engineering wonder. We will also bird Suez Bay where there should be a good assortment of waders, gulls and other seabirds, with a chance for Slender-billed Gull, Baltic Gull, Armenian Gull, and Lesser Crested and Greater Crested Terns. We will continue our drive west across the Eastern Desert to Cairo and transfer to our hotel near the airport.

## Day 11

**Wednesday**

### London

After an early breakfast we will transfer to the airport to catch our return flight to London Heathrow, ending a truly memorable holiday to the Land of the Pharaoh's.

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## Accommodation and food

Accommodation for this tour will be on the basis of sharing twin-bedded rooms at comfortable tourist hotels. All meals are included in the holiday cost.

## Climate

Although hot and sunny by day (20-30°C), it will feel cooler at night with a minimum temperature of 10-15°C. Rain is unlikely.

## Extra expenses

The cost of obtaining a tourist visa and tips (N.B. Tipping is expected for most services in Egypt from restaurant staff to tourist guides. It is suggested that you allow approximately £5 per day for this purpose- this can be given to the tour leader for distribution)

## Grading

A - This is a traditional birdwatching/sightseeing holiday with no prolonged treks.

## Mammal, bird & plant lists

Where available these are automatically provided on booking, and will gladly be sent to you before, if you wish for a more detailed preview.

## **Your safety & security**

You have chosen to travel to Egypt. Risks to your safety and security are an unavoidable aspect of all travel and the best current advice on such risks is provided for you by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. In order to assess and protect against any risks in your chosen destination, it is essential that you refer to the Foreign Office website – [www.fco.gov.uk/travel](http://www.fco.gov.uk/travel) or telephone 0870 6060290 regularly prior to travel.

## **How to book your place**

In order to book your place on this holiday, you will need to read our main Naturetrek brochure thoroughly and complete and return the enclosed booking form, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost. If you do not have a copy of this brochure please give us a call on 01962 733051, and we will gladly post one to you.