

Fourth report of the Egyptian Ornithological Rarities Committee – 2014 to 2017

by the Egyptian Ornithological Rarities Committee:

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The Egyptian Ornithological Rarities Committee (EORC) was launched in January 2010 to become the adjudicator of rare bird records for Egypt and to maintain the list of the bird species of Egypt. From 2014 to 2017, the EORC was composed of 9 voting members: Wed Abdel Latif Ibrahim, Sherif Baha El Din, Richard Bonser, Andrea Corso, Pierre-André Crochet, Andrew Grieve, Richard Hoath, Frédéric Jiguet and Manuel Schweizer.

Any observer recording a rare bird in Egypt (e.g. species on the EORC list or not listed in the updated national checklist) is invited to send details to the secretary (eorc.secretary@gmail.com) to help maintain the official national avifaunal list.

As stated in its first report (Jiguet et al. 2011), the EORC decided to use the checklist of the Birds of Egypt, as published in 1989 by Steve Goodman and Peter Meininger (excluding the hypothetical species) as a starting point to its work. Any addition to, or deletion from, this list will be evaluated by the EORC, as well as any record of species with less than 10 Egyptian records (see http://www.chn-france.org/eorc/eorc.php?id_content=4 for the full list of species to be documented) and any change in category (e.g. B to A or D/E to C or A). The EORC followed the taxonomic recommendations released by the AERC TAC (Taxonomic Advisory Committee of the Association of European Rarities and Record Committees) for the present report.

A dedicated website has been launched thanks to the support from the French Rarities Committee, at www.chn-france.com/eorc/. It is hosted by the French RC website, and gives free access to the committee's role and composition. The site will also host EORC reports and updates to the checklist of the Birds of Egypt. A list of species which are considered by the EORC, as well as a rarity form proposed for record submission, can also be found on the committee's website (at <http://chn-france.org/eorc/eorc.php>).

From 2014 to 2017, 14 records were considered. Thirteen of these have been accepted, 1 considered as not proven. The proportion of accepted records was therefore 93%.

This report includes the first records for Egypt of Balearic Shearwater *Puffinus mauretanicus*, Yellow Bittern *Ixobrychus sinensis*, Wahlberg's Eagle *Aquila wahlbergi*, and Pied Crow *Corvus albus*, which are all additions to the category A of the Egyptian list. It also includes the first post-1950 record of Tawny Eagle *Aquila rapax*, which moves from category B to category A, and the second record of African Openbill *Anastomus lamelligerus*. Other notable ornithological events formally reported here include numerous records of Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse *Pterocles exustus* in Elba National Park in the Halaib Triangle.

The updated checklist of the Birds of Egypt now includes 457 species: 441 in category A (including 8 species observed only in the Halaib Triangle), 10 in category B and 6 in category C. We report below details of the accepted and not proven records. In this section, figures into brackets that follow the species' name represent: number of previous records and associated number of individuals, followed by the number of records/individuals accepted by the EORC since the last report.

List of accepted records (category A)

BALEARIC SHEARWATER *Puffinus mauretanicus* (0/0, 1/1)

- *Zaraniq, (30°03' N, 31°15'E), East end of Bardawil Lagoon, North Sinai, 1 ind., 17 August 1981 (Uffe Gjørl Sørensen & Ib Krag Petersen)*

This individual was observed by two experienced birdwatchers who have been surveying seabirds at Zaraniq in 1979, 1980 and 1981 in August, September or October. In August-September 1981 they saw 48 Yelkouan Shearwaters *Puffinus yelkouan* and this Balearic Shearwater with whitish underside typically restricted to the breast and belly. This constitutes the first record of Balearic Shearwater for Egypt, and the species has been added to the category A of the Egyptian list.

AFRICAN OPENBILL *Anastomus lamelligerus* (1/1, 1/2)

- *Nile river 15-20Km north of Kom Ombo, 2 ind., 31 May 2013, photographed (Jim Quilter)*

The African Openbill is an intra-African trans-equatorial migrant making movements that are triggered by the rains, inhabiting freshwater wetlands where it feeds mainly on aquatic snails (Elliott et al. 2018). The description and pictures provided left no doubt about the specific identification, while the committee considered that there was no element to discredit a wild origin for these two birds, as was the case with the first record obtained 4 years before in 2009. This therefore constitutes the second record of the species for Egypt and for the Western Palearctic. There are two old claims of the occurrence of the species in Egypt: one in Giza on July 1, 1919 and one near Qena in August 1938; both were placed in the «hypothetical» list in Goodman et al. (1989).



African Openbills *Anastomus lamelligerus*, north of Kom Ombo, 31 May 2013 ©Jim Quilter

YELLOW BITTERN *Ixobrychus sinensis* (0/0, 2/3)

- Wadi Lahami, Red Sea, 26 April 2012, 2 ind., captured (Martin Päckert, Jens Hering et al.)
- Wadi Lahami, Red Sea, 9 May 2012, 1 ind., captured (Martin Päckert, Jens Hering et al.)

Three individuals have been captured at Wadi Lahami in 2012 and their DNA further studied (Hering et al. 2012 – which see for photos of the birds). In July 2013, two of the ringed males from 2012 were caught again with incubation patches and three close-standing nests were discovered, one of them contained remains of egg shells with the typical bluish colour. The identification of these Yellow Bitterns is confirmed by photographs, measurements and voice comparison (Hering et al. 2012). Päckert et al. (2014) published genetic evidence that these birds were Yellow Bitterns. It appears that the species is breeding at Wadi Lahami, representing an extension of the known breeding range of this small Asian bittern. These records constitute the first observations and breeding proof of the species for Egypt and the Western Palearctic. The Yellow Bittern has been added to category A of the Egyptian list. As the species is breeding in small numbers along the southern Red Sea coast of Egypt, the EORC will not review subsequent records of Yellow Bittern along the Red Sea coast south of Hammata but welcomes any record from other localities.



Male Yellow Bittern *Ixobrychus sinensis*,
Wadi Lahami, April 2012 © Jens Hering



Male Yellow Bittern *Ixobrychus sinensis*,
Wadi Lahami, July 2013 © Jens Hering

WAHLBERG'S EAGLE *Aquila wahlbergi* (0/0, 1/1)

- *Ras Shukeir, Red Sea coast, 28°05'50.5"N 33°01'48.6"E, 1 juv. pale morph, 3 May 2013, photographed (Ahmed Waheed & Ibraheem Saad)*

The description is associated with 12 excellent photos which allowed validating the identification without any doubt (see also Dick Forsman's comprehensive post on the identification of this individual at <http://www.dickforsman.com/2014/04/22/wahlbergs-eagle-a-new-bird-for-the-western-palaeartic-list/>). The Wahlberg's Eagle has been added to category A of the Egyptian list. This is the first record of the species for Egypt and for the Western Palearctic (Waheed 2016).



Pale morph juvenile Wahlberg's Eagle *Aquila wahlbergi*, Ras Shukeir, 3 May 2013 ©Ahmed Waheed

TAWNY EAGLE *Aquila rapax* (1/1, 1/1)

- *road between Marsa Alam and Edfu, 25°03'17.4"N 34°27'38.4"E, 1 juv., 8 May 2015, photographed (Lars Andersen & Martin Thomsen)*

The description is again associated with excellent photos which allowed validating the identification without any doubt. Tawny Eagle was already on the Egyptian list but in category B, this post-1950

observation moves the species to the category A of the list. The previous and only other record of a Tawny Eagle in Egypt was of a specimen taken at Giza on 20 January 1924, reported by Meinertzhagen in 1930 – an observer now renowned for numerous frauds in reporting rarities. The EORC will try to review all records of rarities attributed to this person. The individual photographed on 8 May 2015 might thus become the first reported and confirmed record of the species for Egypt.



Juvenile Tawny Eagle *Aquila rapax*, between Marsa Alam and Edfu, 8 May 2015 © Lars Andersen

CHESTNUT-BELLIED SANDGROUSE *Pterocles exustus*

- Halaib, Gebel Elba, 5 June 2013, 5 ind. (2 males, 3 females), photographed (Ali Dora)
- Halaib, Gebel Elba, 4 – 14 October 2014, 50 ind. (Ali Dora)
- Halaib, Gebel Elba, 6 April 2015, 50 ind. (Ali Dora)

In March 2012, the presence of this species was rediscovered near Sandafa in Mniya Governorate (Khil et al. 2012). Since this date, presence of the species has been confirmed by numerous observers and photos, notably in 2013 (Jiguet et al. 2014) and 2014 (Habib 2015). Following this discovery, an observer living in Elba National Park reported repeatedly the presence of Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse in Gebel Elba, generally coming to drink in mixed sandgrouse flocks (with Crowned Sandgrouse *P. coronatus* and Spotted Sandgrouse *P. senegallus*). The first report in June 2013 was associated with a photo (reproduced here) illustrating at least a male and a female of a group reported to include five individuals, while the subsequent reports for 2013 and 2014 included no descriptions and no photos of the birds. However, as further photographic proofs came from the same area by the same observer again in summer 2016 and 2017 (see the photos reproduced here), the EORC considered that all these records could be accepted as valid. This also suggests that Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse is present regularly in Elba National Park in the Halaib Triangle, where further observations will not be considered by the EORC. The committee however welcomes any record of the species at any new site in Egypt (including records in Elba NP north of Halaib triangle).



Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse *Pterocles exustus*, Elba NP, June 2013 (with a male Crowned Sandgrouse *P. coronatus*) © Ali Dora



Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse *Pterocles exustus*, Elba NP, July 2016 © Ali Dora



Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse *Pterocles exustus*, Elba NP, July 2017 © Ali Dora

ASIAN BUFF-BELLIED PIPIT *Anthus rubescens japonicus* (3/4, 0/2)

- Naama Bay sewage works, Sharm el Sheikh, Sinai, 3 different ind., 11-13 January 2009, photographed (Stephan Skaarup Lund & Rune Sjø Neergaard); previously accepted as 1 ind. only

New photographic evidence was sent to the EORC and allowed identifying individually 3 different birds during this period at this site (cf. Jiguet et al. 2012). Therefore, there are now three records of Asian Buff-bellied Pipit in Egypt, involving 6 individuals.

PIED CROW *Corvus albus* (0/0, 1/1)

- Halaib, Gebel Elba, 1 ind., 2-3 April 2015, photographed (Ali Dora)

This is the first record of this species to be submitted to the EORC, and the identification is confirmed. It constitutes the first record for Egypt, and the species has been added to the category A of the Egyptian list. There are at least two other pending records. One individual was seen and photographed at Wadi Lahami, Marsa Alam, on 5-6 May 2016; this record is in circulation and will be assessed soon. Another observation was a flying bird at El Gouna on 11 April 2010 (with a photograph) but this record has yet not been submitted to the EORC.



Pied Crow *Corvus albus*, Gebel Elba, 2 April 2015 ©Ali Dora

BLACK SCRUB ROBIN *Cercotrichas podobe* (5/5, 1/1)

- Wadi Kiraaf, Hadarba, Gebel Elba, 22°9'1.25"N 36°46'7.96"E, 1 ind., 23 November and 13 December 2014 (Ali Dora)

This is the sixth confirmed record of this species in Egypt. The last four records were obtained in gardens of tourist resorts near Marsa Alam. There are two subspecies of Black Scrub Robin: nominate *podobe* breeding across the Sahel, from southern Mauritania to Sudan, and *melanoptera* (with stronger orange colour on inner primary webs) on the Arabian Peninsula. Both are sedentary with

some winter/spring dispersal (Collar 2018). The record accepted in this report was not attributed to any subspecies.

Four other records of Black Bush Robins have been reported for Egypt without being submitted to the EORC. The EORC would like to receive details of these observations. These reports concern:

- 1 ind., Hotel Akassia, El Quseir, 27 October to 8 November 2007
- 1 ind., El Gouna, 4 February to 14 March 2008
- 1 ind. Berenice TClub Resort, Berenice, 19 March 2012
- 1 ind. Wadi El Gemal, Marsa Alam, 14 March 2015



Black Scrub Robin *Cercotrichas podobe*, Gebel Elba ©Ali Dora

MENETRIES'S WARBLER *Sylvia mystacea* (7/7, 1/1)

- *Wadi Gemal, 1 male, 12 March 2015, photographed (Artur Bujanowicz)*

A male was photographed at Wadi Gemal and the photograph published on the web. From this photographic evidence, and without challenging the location and date, the committee considered this observation as valid. The link to the photographic evidence (reproduced below) is:

http://www.surfbirds.com/gallery/share_photo.php?imgname=20150407144821567.jpg

Previous records are detailed in Goodman et al. (1989), and include 5 records plus 2 reports by Meinertzhagen.



Male Menetries's Warbler *Sylvia mystacea*, Wadi Gemal, 12 March 2015

©Artur Bujanowicz

Record considered as Not Proven

The following record has been considered as not proven by the committee.

Basra Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus griseldis*. Abu Simbel, 1 ind., photographed, 27 December 2012. The description is too short to validate such a rarity, for example to definitively eliminate confusion species (*A. stentoreus*, *A. arundinaceus*, *A. scirpaceus*) and the provided photo was judged inconclusive. The observer himself was not totally confident with the identification.

Acknowledgements

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