

# First report of 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 maintain the checklist of birds recorded in Egypt. The EORC is composed of 9 voting members plus a non-voting secretary. Voting members are: Mindy Baha El Din, Sherif Baha El Din, Richard Bonser, Pierre-André Crochet, Andrew Grieve, Tomas Haraldsson, Richard Hoath, Frédéric Jiguet and Ahmed Riad. Any observer reporting 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 on the report to the secretary of the committee, Mary Megalli, at [eorc.secretary@gmail.com](mailto:eorc.secretary@gmail.com), to help us maintain the official national checklist.

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. Any addition to or deletion from this list will be evaluated and adjudicated by the EORC, as well as any record of species with less than 10 Egyptian records (a formal list of such species is available on the EORC website), and any change in category (e.g. B to A or D/E to C). The EORC decided to follow the taxonomic recommendations released by the AERC TAC to define the new checklist of the birds of Egypt.

A dedicated website has just been launched thanks to the sponsorship of the French Rarities Committee, at [www.chn-france.com/eorc/](http://www.chn-france.com/eorc/). It is accessible in parallel to the new French RC website, and gives free access to the committee's role, composition and rules. The site will also have EORC reports and updates of the checklist of the Birds of Egypt. You will also find there the list of species which records are considered by the EORC, as well as a rarity form proposed for record submission.

The EORC will be very happy to receive detailed records of any species or subspecies not yet listed on the Goodman & Meininger checklist, or listed within the EORC rarities, or recent reports of species not reported by these authors to have been observed after 1950. The committee started to work in 2010 by evaluating a first set of rarity records, including potential additions to the official checklist of Egyptian birds.

In 2010, 21 records have been accepted and 14 considered as Not Proven. The proportion of accepted records was therefore 60%. The checklist of the Birds of Egypt published by Goodman & Meininger (1989) included 421 confirmed species. The updated checklist now includes 437 species: 420 in category A (including 6 observed only in the Halaib Triangle, 11 in category B and 6 in category C). We report below some details of the Accepted and Not Proven records.

In the following specific sections, some figures follow the species' name and represent: the number of previous records and associated number of individuals (within first brackets), followed by the number of records/individuals accepted by the EORC

## List of accepted records (category A)

**AFRICAN OPENBILL *Anastomus lamelligerus* (0/0) (1/1)**

- Luxor, Crocodile Island, 1 ind., 26 May 2009 (Benjamin Steffen).

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. The description and provided pictures left no doubt about the specific identification, while the committee considered that there were no elements to discredit a wild origin for this bird, the species being added to category A of the Egyptian checklist, and as a direct consequence on the Western Palaearctic list too. Goodman & Meininger (1989) reported that Negumi Pasha found an Open-billed Stork in Qena in August 1938, he chased it but could not shoot it. Negumi Pasha spent a long time in Sudan and thus had good experience with birds of that region. Although Goodman & Meininger (1989) relegated the record to the rejects it might have more merit, particularly in light of this more recent observation in the same region. The observer published details of his observation in Dutch Birding 32: 254-256 (Steffen 2010).

**LESSER FLAMINGO *Phoenicopterus minor* (0/0) (1/1)**

- Lake Nasser, a few kms north of Abu Simbel, 1 subad., 27 November 1992 (P.A. Lassey, J.M. Pearson, I.J. Willoughby).

The Lesser Flamingo is mainly an African species inhabiting especially the Great Rift Valley, with also a small Asiatic population. There have been recent records of presumably wild individuals in Kuwait (in December 2007 and January 2010), Morocco (May 2010) and Turkey (June 2009). A record at Eilat, Israel, in March 2006 is still under consideration. This record was published in Sandgrouse 16(1): 52-53 (Lassey 1994) and is accepted here as the first sighting of this flamingo for Egypt.

**CRESTED HONEY BUZZARD *Pernis ptylorhynchus* (0/0) (1/1)**

- Quseir, Bir El Ambagi, 1 adult male, 9 May 1996 (S. & M. Baha el Din).

The Crested Honey Buzzard breeds in Asia from central Siberia east to Japan. It is a summer migrant to Siberia, wintering in tropical south-east Asia. Elsewhere it is more-or-less resident. This record was published in the Bulletin of the African Bird Club 4(1): 31 (Baha el Din & Baha el Din 1997) and was accepted as the first record of this species for Egypt and Africa. Despite the lack of the description of the fingered 6<sup>th</sup> primary, the details on underparts and tail pattern were considered sufficient to prove the identification of an adult male. The species is probably largely overlooked in Egypt and might occur there each year. This Asian counterpart of the European Honey Buzzard is now regularly observed on migration in the Middle East, especially in Israel. So, this addition to the Egyptian checklist was long overdue.

**GREAT BUSTARD *Otis tarda* (0/0) (1/1)**

- Salehia, 120km east of Cairo (30°30'N, 32°07'E), 1 female, shot, 19 March 1992 (E. Hamdy).

The Great Bustard is a resident breeder in southern and central Europe and a migrant breeder across temperate Asia with a southern winter dispersal.

This record was published in Sandgrouse 14:111 (Atta 1992), with a picture of the mounted specimen, so the identification was easily confirmed, while the committee considered the bird as of wild origin. This is the first record for Egypt, so the Great Bustard is added to the list of the Birds of Egypt.

**GREY-HEADED GULL *Larus cirrocephalus* (0/0) (1/2)**

- *El Gouna, golf course, 2 adults, 6 April 2002 (L. Muller).*

The Grey-headed Gull is a widespread gull in Africa south of the Sahara and in South America. It disperses across its African range during the non-breeding season, and already wandered to Israel on the east coast or to Morocco on the west coast.

A paper published in Sandgrouse 25(1) relates two records of this species for Egypt (Elmberg & Muller 2003). The record of two birds, considered by EORC members to be adults (and not an adult and an immature as reported in the publication), was approved and therefore constitutes the first record of the species for Egypt.

**THREE-BANDED PLOVER *Charadrius tricollaris* (0/0) (1+/1+)**

- *Cairo, Gebel Asfar, 1 adult, 5 to 26 March 1993 (M. Ahmad, M. Elliott et al.).*

This small plover is resident in southern and eastern Africa, frequenting inland waters, rivers, lakes and pools. Nowadays, this species is present year round near Aswan, but was not recorded in Egypt before 1993, which produced the first record for Egypt and the Western Palearctic. More recently, the first breeding of the species in Egypt was confirmed by the presence of a fresh juvenile with two adults in April 2009 at the fish farm near the high dam at Aswan. Because of the continuous presence of the species near Aswan, it is added to the checklist of Birds of Egypt but not further considered for validation by the EORC.

**PINTAIL / SWINHOE'S SNIPE *Gallinago stenura / megala* (0/0) (1/1)**

- *Sharm el Sheikh, new pools, 1 ind., 22 October 2008 (A. Harrop).*

These two closely-related snipes breed across Siberia, reaching the western Palearctic in the Ural Mountains (with just two accidental records in the Ural for *G. megala*), wintering in southern Asia west to Pakistan. There are a few confirmed records of trapped Pintail Snipe in Israel. Positive field separation of these species is currently regarded as impossible, unless the spread tail is seen well or photographed, due to overlap of field characters.

This observation constitutes the first record of an individual belonging to either Pintail or Swinhoe's Snipe for Egypt. The EORC considered that the individual observed in October 2008 could not be reasonably attributed to one of these two species, an opinion shared by the observer. Details of the shape of the outer tail feathers would have clinched the identification but were not seen on this bird.

**PIN-TAILED SANDGROUSE *Pterocles alchata* (1?/1?) (1/1)**

- Sinai, Naama Bay, 1 female, 18 & 23 December 2004 (I. Waschkies, C. Schmidt, J. Djerf).

Pin-tailed Sandgrouse breeds in Iberia and southern France, in northwest Africa, and from southeast Turkey east to Kazakhstan. Asian populations are partially migratory, moving to the Middle East and northern Pakistan in winter.

According to Goodman & Meininger (1989), this species was last recorded in Egypt in 1917. The paper published in Sandgrouse 27(2): 163-164 (Waschkies et al. 2005) illustrated with two pictures of the bird provides evidence of the only modern occurrence of the species in Egypt, almost one century after the previous record.

**WOOD PIGEON *Columba palumbus* (0/0) (1/1)**

- Beheira, Kom Hamada, 1 adult, shot, 15 May 1991 (M. Leylekian)

Wood Pigeon is a common bird further north in Europe, and breeding populations are increasing there, while northern populations are migratory. This bird was shot, photographed, while E. Khounganian received the picture for identification. The picture and details on the record have been published in Sandgrouse 14:110 (Khounganian & Meininger 1992), proving the first occurrence of the species in Egypt.

**STREAK-THROATED SWALLOW *Petrochelidon fluvicola* (0/0) (1/1)**

- Sharm el Sheikh, Ras Umm Sid, 1 ind., 19 November 2003 (S. & M. Kühn).

This swallow is common in Pakistan and India, and breeds also in north-eastern Afghanistan. BirdLife International reports population increases and range expansions, perhaps linked to infrastructure and urban development and the resultant increase in the availability of artificial nest-sites. Southern populations are resident, and northern populations are migratory, breeding between February and September. There are recent claims from the United Arab Emirates between 2004 and 2009 involving 5 sightings (Emirates Bird Records Committee).

The EORC received a detailed description for this observation by two observers, eliminating all possible confusion species, which, associated to the seriousness and experience of the observers, allowed the acceptance of this first for Egypt (and the Western Palearctic) even without photographic evidence.

**LONG-BILLED PIPIT *Anthus similis* (0/0) (1/12)**

- Gebel Elba, 22°13'N 36°23'E, up to 12 displaying males, 1-2 April 1997 (A. Grieve, S. & M. Baha el Din).

This large pipit has a wide distribution in Africa, the Arabian Peninsula and South Asia, though most populations have highly disjoint ranges.

A paper published in Sandgrouse 23(1): 39-43 (Grieve et al. 2001) reported the documented occurrence of displaying birds in Gebel Elba, considered by the observers to belong to the

African north-eastern subspecies *nivescens* occurring in Sudan. This justifies the addition of this species to the Checklist of the Birds of Egypt. The Long-billed Pipit will be considered further by the EORC only for records obtained outside Gebel Elba.

**GREY HYPOCOLIUS *Hypocolius ampelinus* (1/1) (1/1)**

- Sinai, Nabq National Park, visitor center (28°11'N 34°25'E), 1 adult male, 23 March 2009 (A. & K. Eberst).

The Grey Hypocolius is the sole representative of its genus and family, breeding in dry semi-deserts of Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Afghanistan and western India, wintering down to the Arabian Peninsula, mainly in Saudi Arabia. A few winter vagrants reached Israel.

Goodman & Meininger (1989) considered the specimen of a female collected on 22 December 1938 in Wadi Shallal, south of Gebel Elba, as the only verifiable record for Egypt. So this observation constitutes the second record for Egypt.

**BLACK SCRUB ROBIN *Cercotrichas podobe* (0/0) (4/4)**

- Gebel Elba, Wadi Aideib, 1 ind., 3 November 2000 (S. & M. Baha el Din).

- Bir Shalatein, 1 ind., 28-29 September 2004 (C. Leth).

- Wadi Gamal, Shams Alam Hotel, 1 ind., 24 November 2006 to 20 February 2007 (S. & M. Baha el Din, M. Megalli, I. Moldovan, J. Kiel).

- Wadi Gamal, Shams Alam Hotel, 1 ind., 25 November 2009 to 3 March 2010 (I. Moldovan, D. & M. Mauras, F. Jiguet).

There are two subspecies of Black Scrub Robin: nominate *podobe* breeding across the Sahel, from southern Mauretania to Sudan, and *melanoptera* (with orange inner web of primaries) on the Arabian Peninsula. Both are sedentary with some winter/spring dispersal.

Year 2000 provided the first detailed record of the species for Egypt, despite three previous reports insufficiently documented (near Gebel Elba in 1896, and in Sinai in 1993 and 1997). Following this first record, a bird was seen and photographed in September 2004 at Bir Shalatein, while a single bird was seen in winter 2006-7 and 2009-10 in the gardens of a hotel in Wadi Gamal national park. These two birds were considered as different individuals, and might signal the potential breeding of the species somewhere in the national park.

**PIED STONECHAT *Saxicola caprata* (0/0) (1/1)**

- Hurghada, El Gouna, 1 male, 2-3 October 2006 (K. Gauger & C. Völlm)

Pied Stonechat is a known vagrant to Arabia and Israel of birds dispersing from breeding areas in Iran, Afghanistan, India and the Turkestan region.

This is the first record for Egypt, while Israel counts six and Cyprus two records. This male was seen by two observers and photographed. The record was published in Sandgrouse 30(2): 138-139. A previous occurrence in October in Israel shows that this is a possible time period for one to occur in Egypt and the pattern for Arabia is similar with the earliest autumn occurrence in Oman being a 19 September.

**UPCHER'S WARBLER *Hippolais languida* (0/0) (1/1)**

- *Wadi Gerati, 1 ind., 8 April 1992 (M. & S. Baha el Din)*

This species is breeding in the Middle East and wintering in Eastern Africa, so should migrate across or over Egypt in numbers.

The species was not listed by Goodman & Meininger (1989) as being confirmed in Egypt, so we examined the first documented record (Sandgrouse 18(1) by Baha el Din & Baha el Din 1997) to add the species to the checklist of birds of Egypt. There have been a number of recent records, and the species should not be rare in migration in Egypt. It will no longer be further considered a rarity by the EORC, and future records will not be examined.

**YELLOW-THROATED SPARROW *Petronia xanthocollis* (0/0) (1/1)**

- *Wadi Gamal, Marsa Alam, 1 singing male, 5-9 June 2010 (M. Dettori)*

This Asiatic sparrow breeds from India west to Turkey. Western populations are migratory and winter in the Indian Subcontinent, while the species is a regular spring migrant in Kuwait. This observation constitutes an unexpected record of a male singing in trees of the resort during a few days, giving the observer the opportunity to photograph this first record for Egypt (M. Dettori *in prep.*). The Yellow-throated Sparrow is therefore added to the checklist of birds of Egyptian.

**RECORDS ACCEPTED IN CATEGORY C**

(introduced species maintaining self-sustaining populations in Egypt or originating from self-sustaining populations outside Egypt)

**COMMON MYNAH *Acridotheres tristis* (0/0) (1/1)**

- *Ain Sukna, 1 ind., 20-23 April 1998 (L. Millington).*

Common Mynah is the most widespread mynah in the world, originating from India to Iran, with numerous introduced and established populations elsewhere in the world, the closest to Egypt being in Israel (the species is present in Eilat).

The first Egyptian observation of this now widespread introduced species was published in Sandgrouse 22(1) (Millington 2000). As a vagrant most probably occurring from an introduced and established population – arrived there with no or ship-assistance – the first record for Egypt has been considered to qualify the species for the category C of the Egyptian checklist. Common Mynah will not be considered further by the EORC.

**INDIAN SILVERBILL *Euodice malabarica* (0/0) (1/1)**

- *Sinai, Naama Bay, 27°53'N 34°19'E, 1 ind., 3 December 2000 (T. Pedersen).*

Indian Silverbill breeds from eastern Saudi Arabia east to Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. Introduced populations have become established in Israel but also in France. The first record for Jordan occurred in 1989-90. The first for Egypt occurred in 2000, and this observation has been published in *Sandgrouse* 23(1): 67 (Perdersen 2001). This bird has been considered as originating from an introduced and established population, so Indian Silverbill was added to the category C of the Egyptian checklist. Recently, flocks have been seen at Gezira sport club, so the species might well be an established breeder in Egypt. Indian Silverbill will not be considered further by the EORC.

## RECORDS CONSIDERED AS NOT PROVEN

The following records have been considered as not proven by the committee. As a consequence, the following species are not considered to have occurred in Egypt.

Indian Pond Heron *Ardeola grayii*. Luxor, Crocodile Island, 1 pre-breeding adult, 24 April 2004. The specific identification relies on correct aging as an adult which is challenged by the non-breeding plumage in April, while the lores are not described.

Black Crake *Amaurornis flavirostra*. Makadi Bay, Fort Arabesque hotel, 1 ind., 3 March 2009. The provided description is very short and does not provide support for this identification.

Lesser Moorhen *Gallinula angulata*. Lake Nasser, 20km north of Abu Simbel, 1 adult male, 6 May 1997. After the examination of details of the digitized picture of the bird, the possibility of a Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus* was favoured, especially given the extent of the red colour on the yellow-tipped bill. Evidence was considered as not sufficient for a first for the country.

Grey-headed Gull *Larus cirrocephalus*. 1 adult, Nabq Nature Reserve (15Km north of Sharm el Sheikh) on 7 February 1999. There are missing elements in the description, concerning the bare parts and the wing tip pattern. The size, as described, appears too large for the proposed species. These elements preclude considering this observation as the first record of the species for Egypt.

Oriental Pratincole *Glareola maldivarum*. Near Ramadan city, 55 km north-east of Cairo, 1 ind., 2 April 1993. The missing description of the length of the outer tail feathers precludes a definite identification, while the possibility of a hybrid Collared x Black-winged Pratincole cannot be totally ruled out.

Buff-breasted Sandpiper *Tryngites subruficollis*. 1 female collected at Quseir on 21 February 1928 by Richard Meinertzhagen. R. Meinertzhagen is now largely recognized as having made large frauds in the labels of specimens in his collection, which was donated to the British Museum. These frauds concerned the origin of many specimens, including a Gray's Grasshopper Warbler from 'France' in 1933, redpolls from UK, a Kerguelen Kelp Gull from South Africa. Meinertzhagen also reported the breeding of Indian Pond Heron in the mangroves of Kuwait, hence the early presence of this species on the WP list, while there is no mangrove in Kuwait. The BOURC now considers all records by Richard Meinertzhagen as Not Proven.

African Palm Swift *Cypsiurus parvus*. Abu Simbel, 4 birds seen in February 1928 by R. Meinertzhagen. See comments under Buff-breasted Sandpiper.

Wire-tailed Swallow *Hirundo smithii*, Wadi Hagul, 1 ind., 30 March 1995. Several key features are not described (e.g. the dark ventral bar) and the description and drawing of the tail pattern is not appropriate for that species.

Long-billed Pipit *Anthus similis*. Hurghada, Giftun island, 1 ad. and 1 juv., 24 September 1996. Large pipits can be difficult to separate and the description does not totally exclude Tawny or even Richard's Pipit.

Blyth's Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus dumetorum*. Hurghada, 1 ind. captured and ringed, 2 May 2007. The description, biometrics and description fit better an Eastern Olivaceous Warbler, while the mangrove subspecies of this *Hippolais* warbler can be confusing.

Marmora's Warbler *Sylvia sarda*. 1 male collected at Salum on 28 January 1928 by Richard Meinertzhagen. See comments under Buff-breasted Sandpiper.

Wattled Starling *Creatophora cineracea*. Lahami Bay Hotel Hamata, 1 non-breeding male, 31 October to 4 November 2008. The observation could well concern this species, but the description of the bird is too short and incomplete to accept this record as the first for Egypt and the Western Palaearctic.

Rock Sparrow *Petronia petronia*. Hurghada, 1 juv./first-winter, 13 November 2008. Probably this species, but the observation is not detailed enough to warrant acceptance as a first for Egypt.

Little Rock Thrush *Monticola rufocinereus*. Hurghada, Sheraton hotel, 14 November 2008. A by-default identification is not sufficient to warrant acceptance as a first for Egypt and the Western Palaearctic.

### **Acknowledgements**

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