

Third report of the Egyptian Ornithological Rarities Committee – 2012 and 2013

by the Egyptian Ornithological Rarities Committee: Frédéric Jiguet (secretary), Sherif Baha El Din (chairman), Richard Bonser, Andrea Corso, Pierre-André Crochet, Andrew Grieve, Richard Hoath, Manuel Schweizer, Wed Abdel Latif Ibrahim

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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. In 2013, the EORC was composed of 10 voting members, but with the sad passing of Mindy Baha El Din (one of the founders of the EORC) in March 2013, the number became 9 members. Voting members were: Wed Abdel Latif Ibrahim, Sherif Baha El Din, Richard Bonser, Andrea Corso, Pierre-André Crochet, Andrew Grieve, Richard Hoath, Frédéric Jiguet, Manuel Schweizer. Frédéric Jiguet acted as the committee secretary.

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 follows the taxonomic recommendations released by the AERC TAC (Taxonomic Advisory Committee of the Association of European Rarities and Record Committees).

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 new 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.

In 2012 and 2013, 39 records were considered. 27 of these have been accepted, 12 considered as not proven. The proportion of accepted records in 2012 and 2013 was therefore 69%.

This report includes the first records for Egypt of Sabine's Gull *Xema sabini* (old record not previously accepted) and Basalt Wheatear *Oenanthe lugens warriacae*. Other notable ornithological events formally reported here include the rediscovery of Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse *Pterocles exustus* in

the Nile Valley and the discovery of a breeding colony of Saunder's Tern *Sternula saundersi* on the western Sinai coast.

The updated checklist of the Birds of Egypt now includes 453 species: 436 in category A (including 7 observed only in the Halaib Triangle), 11 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)

PECTORAL SANDPIPER *Calidris melanotos* (1/1, 1/1)

- Abassa fish ponds, 5 May 2012 (Phil Abbott et al.)

The description is short but includes some of the most important criteria, while the experience of the observers with the species helped to accept this record as the second for Egypt.

SABINE'S GULL *Xema sabini* (0/0) (1/1)

- Zaraniq, North Sinai, 1 ad. or near-ad., 17 September 1980 (Uffe Gjøl Sørensen & Ib Krag Petersen)

The observers submitted a form with a copy of their original field notes, allowing the EORC to validate the record, which was already reported as "hypothetical" in Goodman & Meininger (1989).

SAUNDERS'S TERN *Sternula saundersi* (1/1, 2/50)

- Ras Matarma, Red Sea. 9 ind., 15 July 2012 (Mohamed Ibrahim Habib), 50 ind., 25 July 2013 (Mohamed Ibrahim Habib, Pierre André Crochet, Richard Bonser et al.)

The discovery of a breeding colony of Saunders's Tern was one of the highlights of 2012 for the Egyptian birding scene. A visit to the colony in late July 2013 gave an estimate of 20-25 pairs, with a single chick and two fledged juveniles. The numerous pictures and sound records confirm the species.



Saunders's Terns, Ras Matarma, July 2013 (by Richard Bonser)

MOURNING COLLARED DOVE *Streptopelia decipiens* (1/2) (1/0)

- Abu Simbel, 2 ind., 3 April 2012 (Richard Bonser, Josh Jones et al.) to 1 ind., 1 August 2013 (Fred Vanhove, Raphael Lebrun).

This species is common and widespread in sub-Saharan Africa and breeds close to Egypt in the Nile valley in Sudan. The discovery of two singing individuals in the village of Abu Simbel in December 2010 constituted the first record of this species for Egypt and the Western Palearctic. These birds have been present at the same site throughout the year 2012, with a single individual remaining into 2013.

CHESTNUT-BELLIED SANDGROUSE *Pterocles exustus*

On 21 March 2012, a group of observers discovered a flock of at least 25 individuals of this species near Sandafa in Mniya Governorate (Khil et al. 2012). Since this date, presence of the species has been confirmed by numerous observers and photos, with e.g. 61 individuals on 3 February 2013 (Samuel Progin et al.), 50 individuals on 24 July 2013 (R. Bonser, P.A. Crochet et al.). These sightings confirm the survival of the species in Egypt, where it was believed to be extinct until recently. It would be very important to look for the species in other areas where it was historically known (between the Fayoum depression to Qena).



ORIENTAL SKYLARK *Alauda gulgula* (1/2) (1/1)

- El Gouna, 1 ind., photographed, 27-31 March 2012 (Edwin Winkel)

A very well documented observation, with excellent pictures leaving no place to doubt. Given the regular occurrence of the species in Israel in winter, more records from Egypt are to be expected. Only one previous record is known and accepted for Egypt, of two individuals observed together in agricultural fields north of Naama Bay in October 1990 (see Jiguet et al. 2012).



ASIAN BUFF-BELLIED PIPIT *Anthus rubescens japonicus* (2/2) (1/2)

- Naama Bay sewage works, Sharm el Sheikh, Sinai, 2 ind., 28-29 November and 5 December 2005, photographed (Colin Bradshaw, Celia Bryce).

This is the third record examined by the EORC, which antedates the two preceding records obtained in 2009 and 2010-11. It therefore constitutes the first documented record for Egypt submitted to the EORC (there is at least one previous record from the late 1990's which has not been yet submitted to the EORC). A picture of one of the two individuals accepted here is reproduced here. More records



will certainly follow.

CITRINE WAGTAIL *Motacilla citreola* (2/3) (7/8)

- Sharm el Skeikh sewage pools, 1 ind., 10 December 2010 (Jan and Erlen Landsverk)
- West Aswan, 1 female, photos, 5 February 2012 (Dick Hoek)



- Shams Alam, Marsa Alam, 1 male and 1 female, photos, 31 March 2012 (Alain Rouge)



- Marsa Alam, 1 male, 7 April 2012 (Richad Bonser)
- Marsa Alam, 1st summer male, photos, 7 April 2012 (Richad Bonser)
- Sharm el Skeikh sewage pools, 1 ind., imm., 21 September 2012 (Olof Jönsson)
- Abu Simbel, 1 ind., female or immature, 15 January 2013 (Kari Haataja et al.)

Seven additional records of 8 individuals now bring the total of accepted records to 11 individuals. The species will therefore no longer be considered by the EORC. It can be considered as a rare but probably regular migrant in Egypt, from September to April.

BASALT WHEATEAR *Oenanthe lugens warriae* (0/0) (1/1)

- 15km south of Port Ghalib, 1 ind., 31 January 2012 (Charly Farinelle)

The first record of this recently described dark subspecies of Mourning Wheatear (Shirihai et al. 2011) is supported by a large series of good photographs. Hadoram Shirihai confirmed the identification based on elements published in his recent review of the identification and status of this taxon (Shirihai et al. 2012).



Outside Egypt, extralimital records of Basalt Wheatear include one bird in southern Turkey and seven individuals in Israel (Shirihai 2012). At least another Egyptian record awaits submission to the EORC.

DAURIAN SHRIKE *Lanius isabellinus isabellinus* (9/11)

- Shams Alam, Marsa Alam, 1 female, 15-17 March 2008 (Olof Jönsson)
- Shams Alam, Marsa Alam, 1 male, 17 March 2008 (Olof Jönsson)
- Hamata, 2 males, 17 March 2008 (Olof Jönsson)
- Shams Alam, Marsa Alam, 1 female, photographed, 30 April 2008 (Kari Haataja)
- Marsa Alam, 2 males, photos, 13-16 March 2009 (Massimiliano Dettori et al.)



- Aswan, Isis Island, 1 male, photos, 6 February 2011 (Dick Hoek)



- Aswan, 1 ind., fem./imm., photos, 5 November 2011 (Dick Hoek, Mary Megalli)



- Wadi Dom marina, Ain al Sokhna, 1 female, photographed, 4 April 2012 (Colin Richardson et al.)
- east of Edfu, 1 male, photographed, 17 January 2013 (Kari Haataja et al.)

Nine new records of 11 Isabelline Shrikes suggest that the species is annual or almost annual in Egypt. The two females at Shams Alam in 2008 are considered as different individuals, one of them having an elongated upper mandible, but not the other. With more than 10 records validated by the EORC, Isabelline Shrike will not be considered any more by the committee. All records identified at subspecies level have been attributed to *isabellinus*, while the presence of *phoenicuroides* has yet to be proven in Egypt. In the future only potential records of Turkestan Shrike *L. i. phoenicuroides* will be considered by the EORC.

ISABELLINE SHRIKE *Lanius isabellinus isabellinus/phoenicuroides*

- Aswan, Saluga Island, 1 imm., photographed, 27 October 2008 (Dick Hoek)



This bird could have been an immature *phoenicuroides*, but the description is lacking and the photos are not enough to validate the taxon, so the record is best considered as belonging to one of the taxa.

Records considered as Not Proven

The following records have been considered as not proven by the committee.

Crested Honey Buzzard *Pernis ptilorhynchus*. Hurghada, 1 ind., photographed, 4 April 2010. The photographs show an individual with intermediate characters suggesting a hybrid *Pernis apivorus* x *ptilorhynchus*.

Lesser Sand Plover *Charadrius mongolus*. Sharm el Sheikh, 2 ind., 19 November 2012: winter-plumaged birds accompanying Greater Sand Plovers; bill description not detailed enough to exclude potential small Greater Sand Plovers, and behavior also raising doubts.

Pacific Golden Plover *Pluvialis fulva*. Hurghada, 2 adults, 12 September 2008: possibly this species, but poor description does not exclude American Golden Plover, especially given the lack of details on the critical primary length and projection criteria.

Wilson's Phalarope *Phalaropus tricolor*. Port Saïd, 25 August 2012: the photographs show a winter-plumage Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis*.

Brown-throated Sand Martin *Riparia paludicola*. Suez, 20 April 1990: difficult to exclude Pale Sand Martin, or an oiled Sand Martin.

Long-billed Pipit *Anthus similis*. Nabq Reserve, Sharm el Sheikh, 1 ind., 25 November 2012: although important criteria for that species have been noted and reported, the description does not allow the exclusion of greyish eastern tawny pipits.

Arctic Warbler *Phylloscopus borealis*. King's island, Luxor. 14 January 2013: the very short description can't definitely eliminate the possibility of other wing-barred warblers which have already occurred in the Western Palearctic.

Basra Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus griseldis*. Marsa Alam, photographed, 10 September 2011: the photos show a small reed warbler of the *scirpaceus* complex.

Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella naevia*. St Katherine, Sinai, 5 October 2011: probably this species, but the description can't exclude rarer and very similar species such as Lanceolated or Pallas's.

Daurian Shrike *Lanius isabellinus*. Marsa Alam, 1 male, 29 February 2008: description too short (2 lines only) to accept such a rarity. Marsa Alam, 2 males, 12 October 2011: description too short (2 lines only) to accept such a rarity.

Rock Nuthatch *Sitta neumayer*. St Katherine, Sinai, 19 August 2009: other *Sitta* species are difficult to exclude, though this would have been a first record of a nuthatch for Egypt.

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MINDY BAHA EL DIN (nee ROSENZWEIG) 1958 – 2013

(by Richard Hoath)

Mindy Baha El Din, a founding member of the EORC and a tireless campaigner for Egypt's birds, its wider wildlife and wild places, passed away on the 18th March 2013 – a tragically untimely passing. Egypt lost one of its finest and most active advocates for natural history and conservation, and the migratory birds that twice each year pass between the continents of Europe and Africa lost one of their greatest allies. Mindy Baha El Din was renowned for her incredible drive and her commitment to environmental issues within and outside Egypt. She was a force *of* Nature in her campaigning spirit – and in her commitment to Egypt's beleaguered environment and the birds especially, a force *for* Nature.

Mindy was instrumental in setting up the EORC helping gather together a formidable team of experts from both inside and outside Egypt. She was also a very fine field ornithologist with an eye for detail and an immense knowledge of Egypt's ornithology. Her enthusiasm was for many inspiring and her energy unequalled. While her loss will be keenly felt, all those who knew her can find some solace in the fact that she is survived by her husband Sherif Baha El Din, a fellow EORC member, and two wonderful daughters Laila and Yasmine. Her legacy will endure. Her work will continue.