

Fayoum – a tranquil world just one hour from chaotic Cairo

Ecotourism activities in and around Fayoum Oasis

Birdwatching in Fayoum



BIRDWATCHING EL FAYOUM

The scenic oasis of El Fayoum is a popular destination for birdwatching among local birders and is included on the itineraries of most foreign birding tour companies visiting Egypt. El Fayoum has many attributes making it attractive for birdwatching and nature tourism, among them:

- ❑ Close to Cairo and easily accessible;
- ❑ Well-developed tourism infrastructure (extensive road network, good hotels and restaurants, etc...);
- ❑ Possesses a diversity of habitats (wetlands, farmlands and desert) where a wide representation of species can be seen, including Egyptian specialties and rarities.
- ❑ Attractive scenery;
- ❑ Occasionally encounter other wildlife;
- ❑ Has a variety of other attractions and sites of interest for tourists including traditional rural life, cultural heritage sites from prehistoric to modern times and spectacular geological formations, including internationally renowned fossil deposits.

El Fayoum is good for birdwatching throughout the year. However, winter, spring and autumn are the best seasons to visit when the highest number and variety of birds occur. During these seasons the 35 or so resident species are supplemented by upwards of 150 species of migrating and wintering birds.

While birds occur everywhere in El Fayoum, Lake Qarun is the top birdwatching location teeming with waterbirds in winter. Birds are also found in the lush agricultural lands surrounding the lake. Wadi El Rayan, a man-made wetland formed in a desert depression is another good location to see birds. Both are Protected Areas. Due to their global importance for waterbirds, BirdLife International has listed Lake Qarun and Wadi El Rayan as Important Bird Areas (IBAs).

Half day, full-day and overnight visits can be arranged for birdwatching in El Fayoum. Trips can be organized just for birdwatching or can be combined with general sightseeing.

The Fayoum Ecotourism Project has developed a network of local bird guides who can take visitors around the oasis to see its bird life and other facets of this wonderful oasis.

- ❑ For serious birders, contact: *Khaled Abdel Sattar and Abdalla Farrag at 012-3680198 or 012-3680197* and those who have more casual interest in birding contact: Mahmoud El Sherif or Ahmed Mansour at: 010-5542649.
- ❑ If desired a local tour guide proficient in English or other foreign languages and knowledge about the area and its history, can be arranged to accompany the local bird guide; contact Ibrahim Abdel Baset or Osama Abdel Naby from the Community Service Centre of the Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management, Cairo University, El Fayoum Branch at 084 - 3376 / 010-653-5456 or 010 542 7679.

Ecotourism means local community benefit so please remember these guides are developing their skills through guiding and purchase local goods and services as much as possible.

SAMPLE ITINERARIES BIRDWATCHING

Half Day Birdwatching Trip

7:30am arrive at El Fayoum and meet local bird guide. Visit a garden to see birds of orchards, then birdwatch around Lake Qarun observing a variety of waterbirds along with birds of agriculture in the surrounding fields. We will have tea and cakes at the historic Auberge Hotel, after which we will watch birds at the fish farms. We will depart to Cairo at 12:30pm.

Full Day Birdwatching Trip

7:30 arrive in El Fayoum and meet local bird guide. Visit a variety of habitats around Lake Qarun to see waterbirds and birds in the surrounding agricultural lands. Late morning drive to Wadi El Rayan Protected Area birding in route and have lunch at a cafeteria on the lake. Birdwatch at the scenic bays fringed by reedbeds and undulating sand dunes. At 5:00pm start the drive back to Cairo.

Option 1) Full Day Birdwatching and Sightseeing Trip

7:30am arrive in El Fayoum and meet local bird and antiquities guides. Birdwatch at a lake in the desert near Kom Oshim followed by a guided tour of the ruins of Karnis, a Ptolemaic/Roman town. Stop to birdwatch around Lake Qarun. Early afternoon have lunch at the historic Auberge Hotel on the lakeshore. Early afternoon drive to the Hawwara Pyramid, stopping to photograph the waterwheels in route. Return to Cairo at 5:00pm.

Option 2) Full Day Birdwatching and Sightseeing Trip

8:00am arrive in El Fayoum and meet local bird and antiquities guides. Drive along Lake Qarun stopping at various sites to birdwatch in route. Visit Qasr Qarun, a well-preserved Ptolemaic Temple. Then mid day visit Tunis village on a hill overlooking the lake. We will have lunch at the pottery school where we will have a chance to see the artists making their wares and purchase crafts. We will then spend the rest of the day exploring this scenic village, which is a mixture of a traditional village and artist's colony. There will be another chance to birdwatch before returning to Cairo at 4:30pm.

Option 3) Full Day Birdwatching and Sightseeing Trip

8:00am arrive in El Fayoum and meet local bird and antiquities guides. We will drive to Medina El Maadi, a Twelfth Dynasty and Ptolemaic town and temples in the desert stopping to see any birds in the wetlands and farmlands along the way. Mid day we will have a packed lunch in this attractive setting. Afterwards we will drive to al Nazla, a scenic village making traditional pottery. We will then drive back to Cairo stopping to birdwatch in route along Lake Qarun.

For more information, contact the Fayoum Ecotourism Project

Email: ecotourismfayoum@nsce-inter.com

Tel: 02 735 1045 / 737 0673

Fayoum Tourism Authority

Mahmoud Mustafa, Manager

Tel: 084 343 213

Fax: 084 337 304