Who we are

Nature Conservation Egypt (NCE) was established in 2005 to fill the gap in Egypt for a professional NGO in the field of nature conservation. It is dedicated to the conservation of Egypt's natural heritage and the promotion of its sustainable use for the benefit of the present and future generations. NCE seeks to complement and augment the conservation work of its national and international partners. It achieves these aims through conservation, lobbying and with applied studies, awareness raising activities and by the promotion, funding and demonstration of practical conservation measures.

This is the first issue of NCE newsletter which will be published quarterly.

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NCE IN ACTION

Ongoing Activities

Focus: Fayoum Site Support Group

Kohar Garo Varjabedian and Mahmoud Farag have formed a Site Support Group (SSG) for the BirdLife International designated Important Bird Area (IBA) on Lake Qarun in Fayoum Governorate, 80km southwest of Cairo. The project is funded by BirdLife International and the Jensen Foundation. The SSG is composed of local residents including those who make their living from fishing in Lake Qarun. It aims to protect natural resources and enhance biodiversity conservation while promoting benefit sharing with local communities in the protected area. Local people contribute to conservation efforts by understanding how protecting biodiversity helps them economically, for example through nature tourism.

Their children, in meetings at school, are taught to know and appreciate their environment and its flora and fauna. An illustrated booklet has been produced on Lake Qarun and has been used in schools for raising awareness among school children. Several classes have been taken on field trips to observe local natural resources. The children were shown how to use binoculars and identify local breeding birds and migratory birds. Some may be inspired to become nature guides for tourists from Egypt and other countries.

Garo and Farag are holding meetings with local fishermen to discuss their problems and help them voice their concerns to the authorities. The SSG has gained recognition in the community, and has mounted an effort to prevent a construction company from dumping spoils into the lake.

On World Migratory Bird Day, May 9, the Lake Qarun SSG presented a program on migratory birds of the Lake Qarun area, illustrated with posters and films. The event was attended by Lake Qarun Protected Area staff, representatives of the Egyptian Environment Affairs Agency, students and supervisors from a private school in Fayoum, and primary and secondary students from Shakshouk schools. Students with acting, drawing or writing talents were invited to produce a puppet show which was presented at the celebration and was greatly appreciated. It enacted some of the hazards migratory birds face, and demonstrated the attractiveness of protected areas from the birds’ point of view.

Birdwatching field trip with the school children on the northern side of Lake Qarun.

Kohar Garo and Mahmoud Farag with young SSG members showing the bird posters prepared for the Fayoum SSG.

Government and NGO leaders from eleven Middle East and African countries met in Amman, Jordan in the first week of May 2009 to launch the UNDP-GEF/BirdLife International Migratory Soaring Birds project. Egypt was represented by Dr. Mustafa Fouda, director, Nature Conservation Sector of the Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency (EEAA), and Dr. Hala Barakat, president of the NGO, Nature Conservation Egypt.

The Migratory Soaring Birds project seeks to ensure that soaring bird conservation is incorporated in development activities in the fields of energy, agriculture, waste, and tourism within the Rift Valley and Red Sea flyways. NCE has been designated by the EEAA as the collaborating partner in the project, which is funded through the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and implemented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

There are at least three bottlenecks and concentration points of migratory birds, including eagles, buzzards, vultures, hawks, cranes, storks and pelicans, at Suez Ain Sukhna and the Gebel Zeit area (north of Hurghada) in mainland Egypt and Ras Muhammad in Sinai. All of these areas are experiencing rapid development and introducing hazards to migratory soaring birds that did not exist in the past. Urban, industrial, energy, agricultural and tourism developments are expanding with far from adequate environmental impact assessments, especially regarding potential risks within the migratory birds’ flyways and concentration points.

The inception workshop in Jordan “marks a significant increase in ... efforts to conserve migratory soaring birds in one of the world’s most important migratory flyways,” according to Dr. Jonathan Bar-

ard, Senior Programme Manager at BirdLife International.

NCE was approached by the French NGO, Ligue pour la Protection des Oiseaux (LPO, BirdLife France), to be their counterpart in a project to reintroduce the Sacred Ibis in Egypt. It will be funded by the French government.

The Sacred Ibis became extinct in Egypt sometime in the late nineteenth century, for unknown reasons. However, there is now a sizeable wild breeding population in France, established over recent decades by escapees from zoos. The idea is to transfer a number of these to Egypt and in a controlled experiment, see if they would adapt to a suitable habitat.

During the first year of the project, LPO and a steering committee composed of scientists and veterinarians are studying all aspects of the proposal. NCE are to carry out studies of present breeding habitats in the Sudan, propose sites where the birds could be settled in Egypt and plan for their acclimatization and monitoring after release. The project will include the study of genetic material. NCE members participating in this project are Hala Barakat, Steve Moldovan and Dominique Krayenbuhl.
Mediterranean sea turtle WWF project

The three sea turtle species occurring in the Mediterranean and in Egypt's coastal waters are all listed by IUCN in the Red List of Threatened Species. Conservation of sea turtles in Egypt is considered vital for their conservation in the Mediterranean as a whole, according to the World Wildlife Fund's Action Plan for sea turtle conservation (WWF 2005).

NCE's Mohammed Nada, a nature conservationist with international experience, has identified conservation issues and designed a plan of action in concert with WWF Italy. It has been found that sea turtles are killed in large numbers in the Mediterranean waters of Egypt; that most turtles are killed and consumed directly on board fishermen's boats; and that there are persistent traditions about the particular virtues of turtle meat. It has also been found that the primary nesting site of sea turtles in Egypt, although nominally protected by law, is in fact under severe threat.

In the second half of 2009, a campaign will be mounted in Alexandria and neighbouring coastal areas to raise public awareness of sea turtle conservation. Other components of the project, to be administered by NCE members, will include efforts to enforce sea turtle protection and work directly with fishermen to adopt fishing gear modifications that will reduce accidental turtle trapping.

NCE ACTIONS IN BRIEF

NCE member and zoologist, Mahmoud Farag participated in a study tour in the United States sponsored by the United States Forest Service, designed to build partnerships among Middle East NGOs active in bird conservation programs. The tour took Farag to Tucson, San Francisco, Chicago and Washington DC for two weeks in late-May early-June.

Earth Day 2009 was celebrated at the CSA (Community Services Association) premises in Maadi on April 22. NCE members presented their NGO to visitors and manned a table displaying various items including T-shirts made for the Lake Qarun SSG (Site Support Group) project and nature cards offered for sale.

World Migratory Bird Day was marked in Port Said on May 9 by NCE member Watter El-Bahry who hosted a PowerPoint presentation on migratory birds for 15 members of the Port Said Photographers Society. The event, held at the Mubarak Public Library, is part of BirdLife International's Born to Travel campaign to raise awareness of the plight of migratory birds along their flyways in African, Middle Eastern and European countries.

The Lake Qarun Site Support Group also celebrated World Migratory Day with interesting activities (see article in section NCE IN ACTION, Ongoing Activities).

The Tree Lovers Association of Maadi, whose president is NCE member Samia Zeitoun, conducted its annual spring tree walk in Maadi on May 8. Botanical tour guides were horticulturist Therese Labib, veteran botanist Loutfy Boulos and NCE’s Hala Barakat, also a botanist. Other NCE members participating were John Grainger, Mohamed Amin and Rania Abou Eid. Altogether more than 50 people joined the walk.
NCE IN THE NEWS

Kohar Garo spoke to Sot el-Arab on the Lake Qarun Site Support Group, while Ali Fahmy was interviewed by Al-Ahram Hebdo (24 – 30 June 2009 issue) about the newly launched NGO, Friends of the Lake.

NATURE BRIEFS EGYPT

NCE member Steve Moldovan published an article with Attila Sándor: Moldován, I., Sándor, A.D. (2009), Breeding and food habits of urbanizing Desert Eagle Owls (Bubo ascalaphus) in Hurghada, Red Sea Coast, Egypt. Sandgrouse 31: 73-77. These authors have another article in press: Sándor, A.D., Moldován, I., Heading to the City. Diet selection of urban breeding Desert Eagle Owls (Bubo ascalaphus) in Hurghada, Egypt. Journal of Arid Environments.

EgyBirdGroup@yahoo.com is a website for Egyptian birders and birders visiting Egypt with some 160 subscribing members. Its administrators are NCE members, Mary Megalli and Steve Moldovan. The site posts observations and questions, and has photo galleries of indigenous birds, mammals and flora of Egypt.

Haitham Ibrahim of the Egyptian Environment Affairs Agency/Nature Conservation Sector (EEAA/NCS), Aswan reported observing 354 birds of 30 species during a three-day field trip to Wadi Allaqi, 180km from Aswan, in mid-April. Wadi Allaqi is a protected area on the eastern shores of Lake Nasser. The observations included a Black Kite’s nest with two chicks at the top of a tamarisk tree.

NATURE PUBLICATIONS EGYPT

Fauna, flora and landscapes

- Butterflies of Egypt, Francis Gilbert and Samy Zalat.
- Common Birds of Egypt, Bertel Bruun and Sherif Baha el Din.
- Mountains of Sinai, by Samy Zalat and Francis Gilbert.
- The Street Trees of Egypt, M. Nabil el-Hadidi, Loufey Boulos.

People and the environment

- Bedouins by the Lake, Environment, Change and Sustainability in Southern Egypt, Ahmed Belal, John Briggs, Joanne Sharp and Irina Springuel.
- Gardens of a Sacred Landscape, Bedouin Heritage and Natural History in the High Mountains of Sinai, Samy Zalat and Francis Gilbert.

All or some of these books can be found at:
American University Bookstore, branches downtown, in Katamia and Zamalek.
Volume 1 and Livres de France in Maadi.