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Reed Cormorant *Microcarbo africanus* breeding in Egypt after 122 years

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Summary: We document the breeding of Reed (Long-tailed) Cormorant *Microcarbo africanus* in Egypt at Lake Nasser near Abu Simbel (Aswan Governorate) in August 2025, Egypt's first verified breeding record since 1903. On 23 August 2025 an adult accompanying a recently fledged juvenile was photographed and two active nests with near-fledging young were found on partially submerged bushes in the same sector. We summarise habitat and behaviour and infer a Nile-corridor origin from Sudanese populations. The record extends the range northwards within the OSME Region and suggests ongoing range dynamics along the Nile under Lake Nasser's stable, shallow, reed-fringed habitats.

INTRODUCTION

Reed Cormorant *Microcarbo africanus* is a widespread breeder across sub-Saharan Africa and Madagascar, with very few records within the OSME Region (OSME 2024, BirdLife International 2025). In Egypt it formerly bred at Lake Qarun (Fayoum), with the last accepted breeding record in 1903 (Goodman & Meininger 1989). Thereafter it was treated as nationally extinct until it was photographed at Lake Nasser on 26 March 2024 (EORC 2016, BirdGuides 2024). Here we document confirmed breeding at Lake Nasser in 2025 and comment on its significance for Egyptian and regional avifauna.

METHODS AND RESULTS

Survey area

Observations were made on the western shoreline of Lake Nasser near Abu Simbel, Aswan Governorate, Egypt (approx 22.34° N, 31.62° E; c187 m asl; Figure 1). Nests were simple, flattened platforms c30 cm wide, built mainly of sticks and reed stems and lined with leaves and grass. They were placed on partially submerged *Tamarix nilotica* at the lake

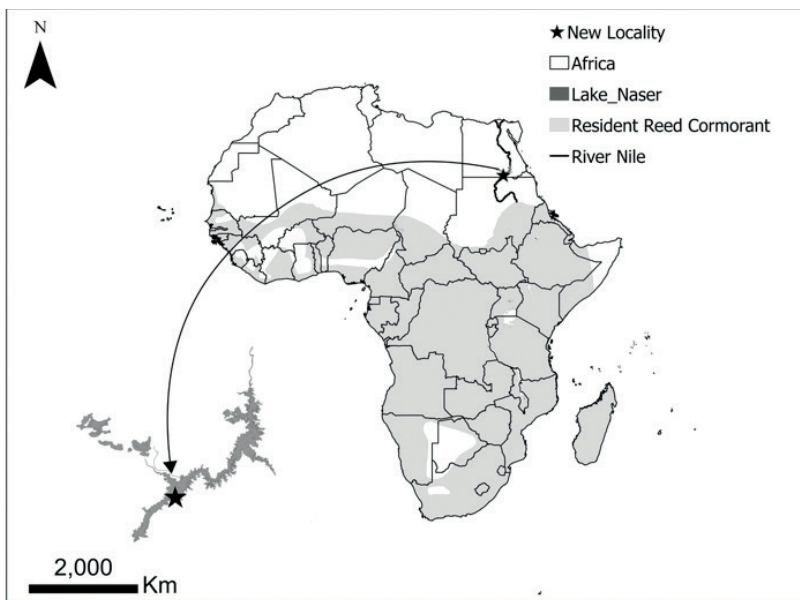


Figure 1. Location of Reed Cormorant observation and breeding site on Lake Nasser near Abu Simbel, Aswan Governorate, Egypt.

margin, where the breeding bushes formed a small islet ($c50\text{ m}^2$); the water's edge was $c6\text{ m}$ from the bushes, which were 6–8 m tall. The shoreline comprised scattered inundated acacias/tamarisks and sheltered inlets.

Opportunistic boat-based surveys and shore scans were conducted on 23 August 2025. Two nests were discovered from a small motorboat at 07:53 local time, 5 m apart and 6 m above the ground, partly concealed by tall grass and among breeding herons. The expedition ran from 06:00 to 12:00. Initial detection was from $\geq 150\text{ m}$ with binoculars; photographic documentation was made around 08:00 using a Nikon D750 with a Sigma 50–500 mm lens. Waypoints were recorded on handheld GPS/phone (WGS84). Photographs and video were archived with time stamps. Additional context records from spring–summer 2025 on Lake Nasser were collated from cited websites. Distances were computed as great-circle (geodesic) on WGS84.

On 23 August 2025 at 07:53, an adult Reed Cormorant accompanied by a dependent juvenile was observed at 22.361° N , 31.774° E , repeatedly commuting between a rocky



Plate 1. Juvenile Reed (Long-tailed) Cormorant *Microcarbo africanus* perched on a dead branch above Lake Nasser. © Mahmoud Elshamy



Plate 2. Adult and juvenile Reed Cormorant resting on a *Tamarix* branch on the western shoreline of Lake Nasser. © Mahmoud Elshamy



Plate 3. Mixed heronry and cormorant colony on partially submerged *Tamarix nilotica* bushes at Lake Nasser. © Mahmoud Elshamy



Plate 4. Active nests of Reed Cormorant in *Tamarix nilotica* trees with near-fledging young visible in the nest, Lake Nasser. © Mahmoud Elshamy

islet and the adjacent reed margin (Plates 1–2, 5). Two active nests containing near-fledging young were situated in *Tamarix* bushes, approximately 5 m apart and 6 m above ground level (Plates 3–4). The juvenile exhibited fresh, brown-mottled plumage, a proportionally long tail, pale facial skin, and a yellowish bill (Plates 1–6). By contrast, the adult displayed the species-typical long tail, pale chin and throat, and yellow–orange lores and bill base (Plates 2–5).

Birds foraged singly in very shallow (≤ 2 m) sheltered water within c100 m of shore, with short dives followed by wing-spreading on emergent shrubs (Brown *et al* 1982, Hockey *et al* 2005, Nelson 2005, BirdLife International 2025). Roosting occurred on partly submerged bushes and reed edges; commuting flights were in loose association with herons and ibises using the same inlets (Brown *et al* 1982, del Hoyo *et al* 1992, Hockey *et al* 2005, Nelson 2005, BirdLife International 2025).

Additional records 2024–2025

We compiled seven independent records of Reed Cormorant around the Lake Nasser–Abu Simbel–Aswan sector during December 2024–September 2025 (Table 1). These reports document regular presence across late winter to early autumn and multiple localities within the sector. Critically, the 23 August 2025 record of photographed juveniles (also reported by BirdGuides 2025) provides confirmed evidence of local breeding, whereas the remaining entries constitute presence-only observations consistent with frequent use of riparian and near-shore habitats. Taken together, the occurrences indicate that the species is now regular and widespread along this upper Nile stretch of Egypt.

Table 1. Records of Reed (Long-tailed) Cormorant *Microcarbo africanus* from the Lake Nasser–Aswan sector, Egypt (Dec 2024–Sep 2025). Evidence: C = confirmed breeding; P = presence only.

Date	Locality	Evidence	Source
23 Aug 2025*	Lake Nasser (Abu Simbel)	C (juveniles photographed)	this study; BirdGuides 2025
2 Sep 2025	The Nile, Aswan	P (2 birds)	Aswan Birdwatching 2025a
31 Aug 2025	Aswan	P (single record)	Observation.org 2025
Late Aug 2025	Lake Nasser (Abu Simbel)	P (documentary photos)	Instagram 2025
Mar 2025	Lake Nasser	P (flock ≥ 20)	BirdGuides 2025
22 Dec 2024	Abu Simbel	P (single bird)	Rare Bird Alert 2024
2025	Lake Nasser (unspecified)	P (multiple shoreline sightings)	Aswan Birdwatching 2025b



Plate 5. Adult and dependent juvenile Reed Cormorants on *Tamarix nilotica* branches, Lake Nasser. © Mahmoud Elshamy



Plate 6. Juvenile Reed Cormorant perched on a thin branch above Lake Nasser, Abu Simbel. © Mahmoud Elshamy

DISCUSSION

The 2025 breeding record at Lake Nasser constitutes the first verified Egyptian breeding of the species in over a century and the first record since the early 1900s (Goodman & Meininger 1989, BirdGuides 2024, OSME 2024). The species is common south of the Sahara, breeding in small numbers within mixed heronries or in reedbeds, and is known for flexible, water-level linked breeding phenology (Brown *et al* 1982, SABAP1 2000, Nelson 2005, BirdLife International 2025).

In Sudan, Reed Cormorant is seasonally common on permanent inland waters and moves north along the Nile with the rains (Nikolaus 1987). Using the Abu Simbel observation sector (c22.34° N, 31.62° E) as reference, great circle distances to key Nile localities are: Wadi Halfa (21.9° N, 31.3 °E) c57.7 km S; Dongola (19.17° N, 30.48° E) c372 km SSW; Khartoum (15.50° N, 32.56° E) c767 km SSE. The distribution in Sudan supports a northward Nile corridor colonisation into Lake Nasser rather than any coastal route.

Lake Nasser provides extensive, sheltered, shallow foraging habitat with abundant small fish (Cichlidae), reedbeds for roosting and nesting, and flooded tree forks, conditions typical of the species' preferred ecology (Brown *et al* 1982, Kopij 1996, del Hoyo *et al* 1992, Hockey *et al* 2005, Nelson 2005, BirdLife International 2025). Continued monitoring is warranted to determine whether breeding becomes annual and to assess potential interactions between Reed Cormorant and Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*.

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