



## Visitor Discovery Guide, 2007

# Wadi El-Rayan Protected Area

Fayoum, Gateway of the Western Desert, Egypt  
Home of Valley of the Whales World Heritage Site



Salt Tree



Visitor  
Centre



Camel  
Trekking



Whale  
Fossil

### Welcome

Welcome to Wadi El-Rayan Protected Area! There is so much to see and do in this area and we hope this guide will help you discover the many interesting features.

Wadi El-Rayan is known by many for its swimming beaches and waterfalls. But it is also home to Egypt's first natural World Heritage Site, Valley of the Whales. Remarkably, Wadi El-Rayan is also an internationally designated "Important Bird Area".

In this part of western Fayoum, you can also visit Pharonic and Roman-aged ruins, like Medinet Madi. There are many hotels, lodges, restaurants, and other services to meet your needs.

Stay a few days and discover Wadi El-Rayan, gateway to the western desert and the western Fayoum oasis.

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### About Wadi El-Rayan Protected Area

Wadi El-Rayan was designated a Protected Area in 1989 to protect the area's biological, geological and cultural resources. The Protected Area covers 1759 km<sup>2</sup> in the southwestern part of the El-Fayoum Governorate, and comprises a diversity of habitats, each with its own characteristic wildlife and features.

The two lakes of Wadi El-Rayan began forming in 1973 when the desert depression was inundated with excess agricultural drainage water. Extensive reedbeds have formed along the shoreline creating breeding habitat for fish and waterbirds. The waterfalls are one of the park's best known attractions.

WRPA also conserves large expanses of desert containing a variety of landscapes and formations. Rare and fascinating wildlife are found in the deserts of Wadi El-Rayan along with fossils of creatures of past epochs and cultural heritage sites from ancient civilizations. Wadi El-Hitan was designated in 2005 as a World Heritage Site, in recognition of the outstanding value of the fossils.

Most memorable is the spectacular scenery of Wadi El-Rayan, the contrast between the blue waters of the lakes and the golden desert sand.







### Valley of the Whales World Heritage Site 1

In 2005, Wadi El-Hitan (Valley of the Whales), located within the protected area, was designated by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site in recognition of the 40 million year-old whale skeletons found here. With the support of Italian Cooperation and Gran Sasso National Park, Italy, WRPA staff are working to prepare eco-tourism infrastructure for visitors. Now, new displays have been established to help people understand the intriguing story of ancient whales and marine life in the desert. You can easily drive to Hitan on the newly constructed sand road. A 4-wheel drive car is not needed.



The whale fossils represent one of the iconic stories of evolution: the emergence of the whales as modern ocean-going mammals from a previous life as land-based animals. According to IUCN-The World Conservation Union, Valley of the Whales is the most significant site in the world to demonstrate the evolution of whales.

**Note:** the valley is now closed to vehicles to protect the fragile fossils. To enter the valley, park your car in the visitor orientation area and from there, either walk or hire a camel for a fun adventure. Collecting any Fossil is prohibited.

### Camping at Hitan

Have you ever tried sleeping on the ocean bed? A wilderness desert campsite is available at Hitan on the floor of the ancient Tethys Sea that covered this area many millions of years ago. You need to bring your own equipment, including firewood. The campsite offers natural beauty, a barbeque, firepit and WC.

### Waterfalls at the Main Visitor Area 2

The waterfalls, located at the main visitor area, is one of the most popular attractions of WRPA. In this area, you will find cafeterias that serve hot and cold drinks and grilled fresh fish meals from the lake. You can also take a boat trip on the lake. You can fish in the early mornings around the only waterfall of its kind in Egypt. You can be assured by the presence of a beach watcher with a speed boat for the safety of visitors. There is also a first aid unit and mobile police station in the area.

### Springs Oasis 3

Nestled between limestone ridges and dune fields is the springs oasis, representing the last vestiges of Wadi El-Rayan depression's natural habitat. It is an excellent and uncommon example of an uninhabited Saharan oasis. The area contains four brackish springs supporting the highest diversity of desert plant and animal life in the Protected Area. Several rare and globally threatened animals inhabit the springs area, including Dorcas Gazelle, Rüppell's Sand Fox and Fennec Fox.

This area in historic times was the main gateway for Western Desert trade



routes into el-Fayoum. Settlements and artifacts from ancient Egyptian, Greek and Roman eras are found in the area.

The springs area is located off the main asphalt road west of the Lower Lake. Most of the area is restricted to visitors in order to protect the fragile habitats and vulnerable wildlife populations. A viewpoint has been



established offering panoramic views of the depression. There is a hiking trail down to the first spring. Surrounding the spring are palm trees and saltmarsh vegetation. Birds, reptiles and insects are the most commonly encountered animals. Tracks are all one usually sees of mammals, most of which are active at night. Look for tracks of foxes, jackals, gerbils and maybe even gazelles.

### Exploring the Sand Dunes 4

Take a walk on the sand dunes to experience a totally different world. In this quiet, calm and clear environment, you can relax and forget the normal stress of every day life. During the winter, the temperature is cooler making hiking very nice, with dramatic cloud formations. In summer, it is hot and a swim in the lake after is recommended! It's a trip you will never forget, but leave the place as you found it so you can enjoy it again. Nice dunes can be found beside the main visitor area and also on the south end of the Lower Lake.

### Mudawara Mountain 5

This magnificent spot overlooks the beautiful landscape below where deep blue waters meet the golden yellow sands. The magnificent view is framed



with rounded sand dunes and limestone escarpments. Here you are standing on the edge of the expansive Sahara Desert.

The mountain is about 18 kilometers from the main gate of WRPA. Plans are being made to establish a camping site on the lakeshore in this area.

### Birds of Wadi El-Rayan

Wadi El-Rayan is a birdwatcher's paradise with 169 species known to occur here. Birds are the most visible wildlife in the protected area and can be seen in the lakes, desert and farmlands. Birdwatching is possible throughout the year, but the greatest numbers and diversity of birds occur in winter when the lakes are teeming with migrant waterbirds. Due to Wadi El-Rayan's global importance for wintering waterbirds, it has been designated by BirdLife International as an Important Bird Area (IBA). A new bird hide has been built and a new brochure about birds is available.



### Did You Know?

- Here at WRPA, you can find whales in the desert. Wadi El-Hitan is the best place in the world to see 40 million year old fossilized whales, from a time when they were evolving from land mammals to ocean mammals!
- Wadi El-Hitan Valley of the Whales is Egypt's first natural World Heritage Site.
- At WRPA you can ride a camel, swim in the lake, watch a new DVD in the visitor centre, and buy cold drinks and snacks (don't forget to use the garbage bins all the time!).



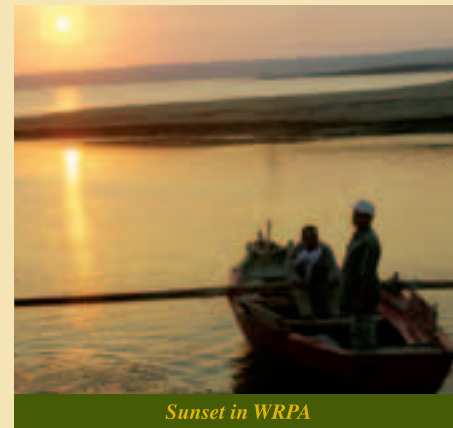
Wadi El-Hitan camp site



Wadi El-Hitan panorama



Camels safari



Sunset in WRPA



## Wadi El-Rayan Benefits Local Communities

Throughout the world, protected areas like Wadi El-Rayan support economic opportunities for local communities. For example, the natural areas like the Rayan waterfalls and beaches attract about 188,000 visitors a year who enjoy swimming and relaxing in the quiet and beautiful outdoors. The visitors spend money on food, fuel, accommodation and souvenirs, and often hire guides, all of which provide jobs for local residents.



Now, with the opening of Wadi El-Hitan as a World Heritage Site, many more visitors are expected from all over the world. To increase the economic benefits, WRPA staff have created a new programme called Eco-products for Local Benefit, which involves producing new products that local villagers can make and sell. These eco-products can be crafts and organic agricultural products like tea, olives, and fresh baking.

At WRPA many other people earn incomes from the many fish farms and commercial fishing on the lakes. Staff regularly visit schools in the area to make presentations, and the schools come to WRPA to see the natural features and the visitor centre.

Local communities are also home to many WR staff. About half of the 46 staff come from nearby communities, while the other half live in Fayoum City and other parts of Egypt. They work as Rangers, Community Guards, Ticket Collectors, Security, and Drivers.

Through the Italian-funded project, new programmes and improvements are underway to make WRPA an important eco-tourism destination in the Fayoum.



## Markets in WRPA

Traditional markets are being organized for local people to sell their products. In different seasons, you can buy grains, dairies, olives, guava, aromatic plants and handicrafts. Many of these products have been grown or produced in the villages located on the Lower Lake. If you want to buy fish you can get it fresh early in the morning from fishermen in the main visitor area or at the fish collection units. Ask staff for directions. WRPA staff are working with villagers to make more products available to visitors. Villagers benefit directly from the sales of these products.

## Partners and Sponsors in Conservation

WRPA is fortunate to have some very dedicated partners and sponsors. Italian Cooperation has sponsored a comprehensive eco-tourism development, capacity building, environmental education, and collaborative management programme for many years (a brochure is available about the project). Also, Gran Sasso National Park in Italy is our twin park, providing staff expertise and funds to improve services, infrastructure and programmes. The University of Michigan, USA has conducted leading edge research at Wadi El-Hitan for many years and sponsors on-site training for staff in palaeontology research and laboratory techniques at the university.

## Ancient City Uncovered 6

Medinet Madi, is an ancient city that dates back to the third pharaonic dynasty built by Emnephoteb III and completed by Emnephoteb VI. It is an



important cultural feature and is located on the eastern side of WRPA. It was said that Alexander The Great visited this city on his way to Siwa oasis during his coronation trip to take the throne of the Roman Empire. Presently, Medinet Madi is accessible by road from

## Did You Know?

- WRPA is home to the world's smallest fox, the Fennec Fox. It has extra large ears which enables it to hear very well and find its food.
- A small population of the threatened Dorcas Gazelle lives in the Springs Oasis, which is a nature protection zone. You can visit the first spring in the oasis.
- Some of the dunes are more than 30 kilometres long and 45 metres high. South of the Lower Lake you can climb to the top of the dunes and see the Western Desert below.

Fayoum City. A new track is being planned to connect the main visitor area (beach area) of WRPA to Medinet Madi. With the support of Italian Cooperation, this archaeological site is being protected and prepared to receive visitors. Before going, ask staff about the current status of the track.

## Tunis Village 7

The Village of Tunis on Lake Quarun is well known for its many artists. The pottery school and several potters welcome visitors to their studios and shops. This year an international art school has opened ([www.ablamuseum.com](http://www.ablamuseum.com)). You can also go horse riding (010-2094774) and hire a local guide for touring or birding (010-3779542). There are many shops to buy supplies.

## Accommodation near WRPA

Your preferred type of accommodation can be found in the western part of Fayoum. Near Shakshouk, three hotels are available, including the Panorama (084-6830757), the Helnan-Auberge (084-6712730) and the Military Hotel (084-6830999). Close to WRPA, there is a small ecolodge at the village of Tunis by the shore of Lake Quarun. "Zad El Mosafer" was built in the middle of farm lands using natural local materials of stone and palm. They serve traditional food like Fayoum chicken and fish. They also organize horse and camel safari trips and can arrange bird watching guides or cars for hire. Call 084-6820180 or visit [www.zadalmosafer.com](http://www.zadalmosafer.com).



## National Parks of Egypt

Wadi El-Rayan is one of 26 protected areas in Egypt that protect about one million hectares, or 10% of



the country's area. The system of protected areas encompasses a representative range of land and marine habitats, physiographic regions, biodiversity hotspots, geological and fossil formations, cultural heritage sites and landscapes of outstanding beauty. The Government of Egypt is committed to maintaining a healthy, well managed and ecologically representative system of protected areas, and making them financially self supporting. It is



committed to managing wild resources outside these areas sustainably, for the benefit of the people living on the land with the resources.

## Local Services

Local businesses are invited to ask about advertising in future editions of this Discovery Guide. Our aim is to provide information about local services that will help tourists enjoy their visit to the Fayoum. Contact WRPA ranger Mohamed Hwihi for more information on 010-6556172, or by email: [wrpaec@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:wrpaec@yahoo.co.uk).



Beach area inWRPA



Environmental education for children



Mangrove Fossils



Ancient Medinet Madi



WRPA is located about 170 km from Cairo, which takes about two hours to drive. From Cairo, take the Fayoum desert road. Turn right on the Qaroun Lake road until you reach Tunis Village. On this road, watch for the blue directional signs erected by the Fayoum Tourism Authority. At Tunis, turn left and continue on that road until you reach the main gate of WRPA. From the main gate, the main visitor area is about a 15 minute drive south, and Wadi El-Hitan is about a 45 minute drive. Foreigners may require a tourist police escort upon arriving at the Kom Oshim check point on the Cairo-Fayoum road. You can call ahead to arrange this: 084-6210233.

The staff at WRPA are working hard to take care of this special protected area. Please do your part by obeying the rules.

- Park in designated areas only.
- Do not drive off the marked tracks.
- Place all garbage in the bins or take it with you.
- Loud music and the use of sound systems is not allowed.
- Hunting is forbidden inside the Protected Area.
- Do not collect, remove or damage fossils, plants or any natural resource.
- The use of motor boats in the lakes is not permitted.
- Camp in designated areas only.

We try to keep the Visitor Centre open as much as possible, however sometimes we may be called away. If you want to visit when we're not here, please ask the Community Guard at the Visitor Centre and he will try to have it opened for you. For part of 2007 the visitor centre will be closed for renovations.

Egyptian visitor	2 LE/person
Foreign visitor	\$3.00/person
Per night camping	10 LE/person
Vehicle	5 LE/car

- Fayoum Protected Areas office in Shakshouk (084-6830535)
- Egypt's protected areas ([www.eeaa.gov.eg](http://www.eeaa.gov.eg))
- Fayoum Tourism Authority ([www.fayoum.gov.eg/fayeng.htm](http://www.fayoum.gov.eg/fayeng.htm)) (084-6342313)
- Egyptian-Italian Environmental Cooperation Programme and WRPA the Western Desert book ([www.eiecop.org](http://www.eiecop.org))
- UNESCO for technical information about Valley of the Whales as a World Heritage Site ([www.worldheritagesite.org/sites/](http://www.worldheritagesite.org/sites/))
- Tourism office near Shakshouk, by Lake Qarun (084-6980707).



**LEGEND**

- Track
- Asphalt road
- Sand dune
- Boundary of WRPA
- Vegetation
- Economic activities
- Scenic view
- Outpost
- Camping site
- Parking
- Check point
- Hiking
- Visitor center, Beach, Waterfalls
- Headquarters
- Archaeological site
- Bird-watching site
- Gas Station
- Hotel

Scale: 0 50 100 150 200 Meter over s.l.  
KM 0 5 10

Map labels include: Ibrahīm, El-Monshaa Qarun, Lake Qarun, To Cairo, Bahk Al-Qibbiyah, Al-Shamashnah, Markar Ishawey, Ash-Rashah, Ibrah Wadi El-Rayen, El-Masakhin Mountain, Narmoutie (Medinet Madi), Nagih Sharabi, El-Mawalik, El-Esh Mountain, Dark El-Wahar, To West Road, Manakir El-Rayen El-Rabbi, Dark El-Wahar, Springs Oasis, Dark El-Mallaha, Manakir El-Rayen El-Bahria, Land reclamation, El-Mudawana Mountain, Fish Farm, Fish collection unit, Ice factory, Oil extraction, Bird hide, Pump station, Upper Lake, Lower Lake, Main Visitor Area, Main Entrance to WRPA, Land reclamation, Gas El-Saidah, Wadi El-Hitan, Wadi El-Hitan Valley of the Whales World Heritage Site, Gaf Gohannan Mountain, Road of Qaroun Lake, Fayoum City, WRPA, Cairo.