

?Porto fayoum? tourism development planned at Lake Qarun - an Important Bird Area and a proposed world heritage site in egypt

Title The Amer Group, the Egyptian real estate developer responsible for Porto Marina and Porto Sokhna massive tourism developments along Egypt's North and Ain Sokhna coasts, plans to build ?Porto Fayoum? on 650 acres in the Lake Qarun Protected area near Fayoum Oasis. This is the first development of such huge proportions to be allowed in an Egyptian protected area. This and other tourism developments planned for a 10-kilometer stretch of coastal land along the northern part of Lake Qarun will undoubtedly wreak untold damage to this pristine, scenic desert area, known as Gebel Qatrani. This area contains one of the world's most complete fossil records of terrestrial primates and marshland mammals and remains critical to our understanding of mammalian ? and human ? evolution. "[Gebel Qatrani] is one of the most interesting and undisturbed deserts in Egypt, containing crucial information about the development of civilization and the history of the world," states Paoli Davoli, a leading egyptologist with Italy's Salento University, who has worked for the last decade at Dime, a Greco-Roman site in Gebel Qatrani. Just last year excavations in Gebel Qatrani revealed the complete fossil remains of a prehistoric whale, new to science. Gebel Qatrani has also been listed as a proposed UNESCO World Heritage Site, not only given its priceless fossil deposits, but also its prehistoric and archaeological treasures, including Pharaonic tombs and quarries, and the world's most ancient paved road. Nature Conservation Egypt think that the tourism development will negatively impact birds and their habitats at Lake Qarun, a BirdLife International Important Bird Area (IBA). Through the Aage V. Jensen Charity Foundation, BirdLife supported NCE to establish an SSG to protect the site as well as generate incomes in a sustainable manner. Egypt's official Tourism Development Authority (TDA) participated in numerous studies highlighting Lake Qarun's importance for ecotourism. However, it has instead approved this project to promote more conventional ? and unsustainable ? tourism developments on the lake. This is happening despite opposition from officials at the Ministry of State for Environmental Affairs responsible for managing Egypt's protected areas. NCE is calling for Gebel Qatrani to be declared Egypt's first UNESCO Geopark to attract tourists, create jobs and as a step towards making the area a World Heritage Site. Through its SSG network in Egypt, NEC hopes that the ?Friends of Lake

Qarun? SSG also participate in the project recently funded by the US Embassy's Democracy Grants Programme. For more information on Lake Qarun please read page 6 of the 2009 BirdLife Newsletter [click here](#) For more information on the proposed developmen contact: Rebecca Porteous at rporteous1@yahoo.co.uk, or Mindy Baha El Din at egyptcalling@yahoo.com or info@ncegypt.org at Nature Conservation Egypt. We thank Mahmoud Farag (NCE) for the photo of the Slender-billed Gulls at lake Qarun IBA.