

21. Zaranik protected area – Egypt



The Zaranik protected area is located at the eastern end of Lake Bardawil, on the Mediterranean coast of the Sinai and forms part of the lake. The wetland is the least polluted in Egypt –and one of the least polluted sites in the entire Mediterranean region– and is considered a major wintering and staging area for large numbers of waterfowl (20% of the total number arriving from southern Europe and Russia). It is separated from the Mediterranean Sea by a narrow coastal strip and communicates with it through three natural and one artificial inlets. Another water source is subterranean water from rainfall in the northern plateau of Mt. El-Maghara. The lagoon is shallow, with numerous small islets, most of which are covered with dense salt marsh vegetation. Mudflats and salt marshes are located along its shores.

Historically, it has been part of a very important trading route that crossed the entire region, linking Egypt with the East. Numerous pottery shards have been found scattered around the site, evidence of its history. Within the boundaries of the protected area, the site of Ostarkine is situated, a Roman settlement located on Felusyat Island. The name of the island comes from the Arabic word *felus*, meaning money, i.e. it is noteworthy that numerous ancient coins have been found by locals around the site. The remains of two Byzantine churches can also be found in the area.

There are four villages in the Zaranik area, which are populated by 3000 Bedouins, and there is also a seasonal migration by fishermen to the southern part of the lake. Bedouin tribal laws are valid among the population and there are gender-oriented tasks (women, for example, are the shepherds of the community). Locals are involved in fishing, pasturing and bird hunting, using mainly the traditional techniques and respecting the hunting seasons (although, occasionally illegal activities of excessive fishing, hunting and grazing occur). They also manufacture handicrafts

using reeds as the basic material. Some traditional fishing and bird-catching methods, though, have been abandoned along with pasturing techniques for the protection of pasture lands. Agriculture is also practised, using traditional methods of date-palm cultivation.

Salt extraction is a relatively new activity. A salt factory was recently built, occupying a part of the salt pans of the lagoon. Owing to the growing development of coastal tourism in North Sinai, the value of the land around the lake has increased considerably during the past few years. This led to disputes about the ownership of the land and pressure is being applied to reduce the size of the protected area, especially along its eastern borders.

An administrative building and visitor centre have been opened and –with funding from the Ramsar Small Grant Fund– educational material has been distributed, in addition to training in wetland conservation and management.