

## 02. Burullus Lake – Egypt

---



Burullus Lake is situated in the North part of the Nile Delta, covering an area of 20,000 ha and stretches 65 km in length. A narrow sand-bar separates it from the Mediterranean Sea and before the construction of the Aswan High Dam, the lake was receiving the Nile floods in late summer and autumn. The Lake includes a notable number of environments, among which swamps and sand plains prevail. It constitutes an ideal habitat for 135 different kinds of land and water plants, as well as an important stop-over point for migrating birds. The area is densely populated, as approximately one million people reside around the lake. Social studies revealed that approximately 185,000 people interact daily with the lake. The land is rich in historical elements. Burullus occupies the northern part of Kafr El-Sheikh district, which was the centre of worship for the god Amun-Re. The site of the ancient city of Xoïs was once capital of the 6th Lower Egyptian Nome, where today the village of Sakha is situated. There, the Sanctuary of the Church of the Virgin Mary is located. It is alleged that the child Jesus left his footprint as a bas-relief in a rock during a journey through the Delta by the Holy Family. The rock was kept hidden for many centuries to avoid theft and was unearthed again around the end of the 20th century.

The surface of the lake has decreased approximately 20% over the last century and a large part of it has been drained to gain land. Fishermen who have customary rights upon the fishing grounds (which are not recognised by the government) do not receive any compensation for their losses. Fishing is very important for locals. The traditional boats *markebs* and *faloukas*, are still in use. Fishermen use traditional techniques (various kinds of nets) and they also take advantage of the reeds. Unfortunately many illegal fishing methods are currently practised. In the past, locals used to make their own nets and, in addition, they made ropes from old fishing nets. Local women engage in handicrafts, using reeds as a basic material.

The site is under threat by fertilizer and pesticide runoffs. This causes rapid eutrophication and pollution, which in turn results in excessive reed growth, a problem affecting the ecological balance and the fish resources. Efforts to manage reed beds by domestic buffaloes grazing on the more accessible areas have failed.

Waterfowl hunting has always been an activity in Egypt, dating back to the time of the Dynasties and the frescos on the walls of old Egyptian temples signify birds' economic importance. At present, wild birds are still shot and trapped all over the Egyptian wetlands and deserts. Until recent times, sport hunting was advertised to Europeans through travel companies, but this practice kindled criticism from national and international bird protection organisations and the government decided to ban such activities.