

Nature Iraq

Newsletter
Vol 6-1
Winter 2010



Special Membership offer

Don't miss the chance to become a member of Nature Iraq for free! Offer ends December 31, 2010. Don't forget to inform your friends and relatives of this great offer. For details see the membership section on page 3 or visit our website.

Thanks to:

Adrian Bellomo for the donation of two Birds of the Middle East books

Randy Rogers and the Ohio Ornithological Society for their donations of equipment and financial support

The Center for Middle East Plant for the donation of equipment for botany work

Ihsan Dujaili for a cash donation along with a copy of the book Birds of the Middle East

Nature Iraq in the News

This Birding Life - Interview with Dr Azzam Alwash and Major Randel Rogers
<http://www.birdwatchersdigest.net/podcasts/m4a/episode29.m4a>

A new effort to preserve Iraq's rich biodiversity, from mountains to marshes
<http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Middle-East/2010/1028/A-new-effort-to-preserve-Iraq-s-rich-biodiversity-from-mountains-to-marshes>

Dodging Bullets for the Sociable Lapwing
<http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/0,1518,724511,00.html>

Northern Iraq: Eco-tourism wonderland? - video and report by BBC
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-11392098>

Calender

29 Nov-Dec 1, 2010 - Symposium (including a talk by Dr Azzam Alwash on Dec 30) Resource Management in the Development of Iraq, Salahaddim University, Erbil

12 Dec, 2010 - NI exhibition of handcraft products from the Southern Marshlands and photo exhibition - AUIS, Sulimanyah

24 Feb, 2011 - THE MARSHES OF SOUTHERN IRAQ, PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE Talk by Dr Azzam Alwash at the British Academy, London

In This Issue

Peramagroon Field Trip,
p2

Nature Iraq Training Programs in 2010, p2

NI Staff Embrace Magical Marshlands, p3

The Adobe House Project - Ecological Vision, Iraqi Realization, p4

Development of the National Report on Biodiversity, p4

Update of the 2010 KBA work and preliminary findings, p5

Member Update, p6

The 2010 Nature Iraq / BirdLife Photo Exhibition in the UK, p6

An Open Letter of advice from Nature Iraq to all Iraqi Zoos, p7

Nature Iraq coordination with the Iraqi Ministry of Environment continues, p8

Nature Iraq Participate in COP10 Convention in Japan, p8

The Team Surveys Mt Peramagroon



The Nature Iraq team pose with their flag after reaching the top of Mount Peramagroon in June. ANNA BACHMANN

This summer, Nature Iraq and the Twin Rivers Institute for Scientific Research (TRI) were able to participate in a unique opportunity to conduct a major botanical survey of Peramagroon Mountain in Sulaimani Governorate, Iraq. Located just 20 km northwest of the city of Sulaimani, Peramagroon Mountain is a peak that reaches over 2600m and has been proposed as a National Park. One of many areas subject to chemical bombing during the Anfal campaign, the villagers have returned to the mountain and it is now a site for recreation and increasingly, development.

Under a survey lead by Ihsan Al Shehbaz of the Missouri Botanical Gardens supported by a National Geographic Society Grant, the team included Dr. Barbara Erter, who is part-time with the University of California Berkeley. She was the former collection manager at the University for well over a decade and is an expert on the Rocky Mountain and Californian floras. She is also a well-known expert on North American *Juncus* and a world expert on the genus *Potentilla*.

Also joining in the survey was Dr. Christopher Davidson and his wife, Sharon Christoph, from Boise, Idaho who travel throughout the world year round on their own to photograph plants for their website "Flora of the World" (<http://floraoftheworld.com>).

Dr. Tony Miller of the Center for Middle East plants from the Royal Botanic Gardens Edinburgh also participated as did botanical staff from Nature Iraq and the Twin Rivers Institute for Scientific Research at the American University of Iraq-Sulaimani (TRI-AUIS).

Many areas of the mountain were surveyed from around the base and slopes of the mountain to a

final, two-day overnight survey of the top of the peak with the help of local guides.

The final survey of the peak was particularly interesting and featured many great plant finds, camping near remnant snow patches and water filled sinkholes, a new breeding bird record for the White-winged Snowfinch *Montifringilla nivalis* was recorded by Nature Iraq ornithologist Korsh Ararat, and lots of Kurdish songs. Unfortunately, from the top of the mountain, we could also see lights to the north that indicated that

bombing in the border regions of the country is still on-going.

Hundreds of plants were collected during these trips. It was clear that the mountain has many key species and should be protected. During the trips, the survey team noted many threats including wide scale habitat destruction around the base of the mountain due to new development, extensive hunting that continued even during the time of the survey and garbage accumulating on the top of the mountain.

Nature Iraq Training Programs in 2010

By Anna Bachmann

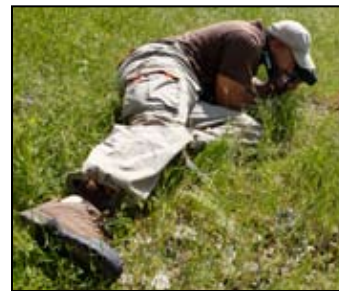
Nature Iraq organized three major training programs the spring and summer of 2010 as well as participated in other training activities. The trainings covered birds, plants and mammals with participants from Nature Iraq, the Ministry of Environment, the Kurdistan Commission on the Environment, and students and researchers from Iraqi universities and non-governmental organizations.

The first training was a field ornithology course with Richard Porter, author of *Birds of the Middle East*, supported by Nature Iraq trainers that took place at the end of May. Porter said the level of enthusiasm and fast learning stood out among this group above any other country in which he has worked as an instructor. This is the sixth training course on birds in the region since 2005.

"Five years on, NI staff are capable of running their own training courses on bird identification, survey techniques and site assessment without any 'foreign' intervention: just how it should be!" Porter said, "and they have produced their own field guide on birds and provided the material for a highly successful UK Exhibition on the work of Nature Iraq which will soon travel to Baghdad."

This was followed by a Field Botany course with Dr. Tony Miller and Matt Hall from the Centre for Middle East Plants (CMEP), of the Royal Botanic Gardens Edinburgh,

supported by Nature Iraq botany staff. The botany training focused on field work in Qara Dagh, a very botanically rich area about an hour south of Sulaimani. The CMEP is also launching a new website (www.cmepp.org.uk) in which they will have a weblog devoted to much of the work that was done at Qara Dagh and they invite everyone to check it out and participate in the discussions there.



Botanist Nabeel Abdulhasan photographs plant species. TRACEY SHELTON

Botany training was the theme this year as June also included some on-the-job training during a Botanical Survey that was led by Ihsan Al Shehbaz of the Missouri Botanical Gardens in the U.S. on Peramagroon Mountain. A grant from the National Geographic Society funded the survey that was followed by additional training and surveys conducted under the auspices of the Twin Rivers Institute for Scientific Research's Flora of Iraq Project. The trainer for this latter work was Lytton Musselman from Old Dominion University, Virginia, U.S.A who, like Tony Miller, had also joined Nature Iraq

in offering training in 2009.

Finally Nature Iraq hosted its first field course dedicated to mammal research entitled, *Methodologies and Survey Techniques for Mammals* in July. Amir Hossein Kh.Hamidi, a wildlife conservationist and Wild Cat specialist at the Plan for the Land Society, an environmental NGO in Iran was the lead trainer for the course and he was joined by Dr. Iman Memarian, a wildlife veterinarian. To our knowledge this is the first course of its kind that has occurred in Iraq in over 20 years. In general, the course focused on otters and leopards as well as prey species and it featured a trip to the local zoo, which was in very sad shape and resulted in a letter to the zoo director with several suggestions for improvements.

Overall, approximately thirty people from all across Iraq participated in the training including staff from the Iraqi Ministry of Environment and Kurdistan Commission on the Environment, as well as students from Iraqi universities and at least one individual from another environmental organization.

A special note: To date, Nature Iraq was able to cover most of the costs of these trainings. We've been able to avoid charging for the courses even though often the trainers are international experts who are expensive to bring into Iraq. Future courses will likely be offered for a fee but we will do our best to secure funding for such courses to keep costs as low as possible.

NI Staff Embrace Magical Marshlands

By Tracey Shelton

Water buffalo grazed on reeds amid waters that glistened in the morning sunlight. Birds flew across the sky as fisherman cast their nets. For the Nature Iraq team, maneuvering through the waterways of Iraq's Central Marshes, these sights were cherished for the first time.



NI staff enjoy on boat trip through the marshes. TRACEY SHELTON

Thirteen staffers from Nature Iraq's northern office in the Kurdish city of Sulimanyah enjoyed a rare chance this month to join their counterparts on a trip to the endangered marshlands, an area the team has worked hard to protect through a variety of projects for the past five years.

"Before this trip my knowledge of our work to restore the marshlands was only through our reports and papers," said Araz Hamarash, NI's Sulimanyah office manager. "I was very happy to see firsthand our work on the ground and the way life has returned to the marshes."

For the visitors - including seven Kurds, one Australian and an American Iraqi - it was their first glimpse of this awe-inspiring region and the recovery that is now taking place with the help of the Ministry of Environment and Nature Iraq.

In 1991, Saddam Hussein quelled an uprising led by the inhabitants of this once thriving community by completely draining a marsh area spanning up to 20,000 square kilometers of its life-sustaining waters.

In a feat of engineering that

is often referred to as one of the world's greatest environmental disasters, a series of dams, drainage pumps and new rivers built for water diversion dried the famous Mesopotamian marshlands leaving only barren desert where life had once flourished.

But by 2003, the reflooding of the marshes began. Locals returned and began breaking

down water barriers and dam walls allowing the waters to flow again. Management plans were implemented by government and environmental groups. Today, a large area of the marshland has been replenished, triggering the return of birds, plants, animals, fish and people.

Korsh Ararat, a Kurdish ornithologist with Nature Iraq, spent much of his time searching the skies for over 50 bird species he identified during the trip.

"It was an incredible thing for me to see a new kind of nature that I have not been exposed to, and the relationship between nature and people," said Ararat while preparing for a night's sleep in a local-style reed house known as a Mudhief. "There is a real connection between the Kurdish region and the marshlands. The majority of the water and soil deposits that feed the marshes come from the rain and melting snow that flows from the Kurdish mountains."

For Hamarash, the trip also signified an important connection between the two regions.

"I hope that we, as Nature Iraq, can be successful in establishing eco tourism to share the marsh-

lands with people, not only from outside Iraq, but mostly from within, especially from the Kurdish region," he said.

Since its establishment in 2005, Nature Iraq has carried out extensive field surveys and advocacy, awareness and community work in the marshlands. These campaigns include a number of pilot projects within the proposed Mesopotamian Marshlands National Park.

Two such projects, the Nature Iraq Adobe House and the Mudhief or reed house, provided accommodation during the trip. Both of these projects - designed as models for ecotourism accommodation in the marsh area - utilize local resources and traditional building techniques that date back some 2,000 years.

"Stepping into the Mudhief House gave the notion of going back to nature," said NI mammal expert Hana Ahmad, also visiting for the first time from the Kurdish region. "The construction is a combination of beauty and simplicity. The mixture of reeds and mud but with modern conveniences is a great experience for non-resident visitors."

Security concerns in southern Iraq have made travel in the region difficult and dangerous, particularly for Kurds and foreign nationals. For this reason, fieldwork in the marshes is carried out by Nature Iraq field technicians native to the area. For botanist Nabeel Abdul Hassan it was a rare chance to share the place he grew up with his co-workers.

"It made us feel proud," he

said. "It was the first time for us to really enjoy our area because we saw how beautiful it was in the eyes of our colleagues from Kurdistan."

Many of the team, like Shokhan Babarasil, administrative assistant in the Sulimanyah office, were reluctant to go for fear of their safety but were pleasantly surprised.

"I felt secure because we were together as a team and the NI staff from the area helped and guided us," Babarasil said.

A tour of the ancient Sumerian city of Ur was a highlight of the trip with its pyramid style Ziggurat temple and the remains of what is believed to be the former home of Abraham. Evenings were filled with lively discussions of current and future environmental projects while dining on delicious local fish and produce.

The trip brought Nature Iraq closer together, strengthening bonds and cementing the team partnership. It served as an inspiration to push forward toward in preserving the nature of Iraq for future generations.

"I think this small group - through good ideas and big visions - has done huge work in the Iraqi marshlands," said Jassim Alasadi, office manager for Chubaiysh who was born and raised in the marshes and coordinated much of the trip. "Most of the people [of the marshlands] know Nature Iraq very well. I am very happy I have a chance to work with them."

A video of the trip is now on the website: <http://www.natureiraq.org/site/en/node/180>



A man cuts reeds in the Mesopotamian marshlands. MUDHAFAR A SALIM

Adobe House Project - Ecological Vision, Iraqi Realization

By Jassim Alsadi

On September 10, 2009, Nature Iraq and the Thi Qar Reconstruction Team began an experimental project to revive the ancient building techniques of a traditional adobe house in the Mesopotamian marshlands.

With the help of local expertise and materials local to the area, the Nature Iraq adobe house prototype combined the two traditions of adobe style building with a reed house design known locally as a mudhief. The result was a stunning guesthouse that is currently being used for visitors to the marshlands in Abu Sobat, Chibaish.

Adobe is a type of clay local to the area that is ideal for building. The ancient style of an adobe house can be built with minimal cost and is well suited to the environment. The design of this prototype is simple, practical and makes use of the beautiful reed arches distinctive to the local mudhief design.

The concept of the adobe house is not a new one to the rural areas in Iraq. It goes back to the Sumerian era when they used adobe structures as houses, barns and

greeting rooms.

This ancient building technique remains as a testament to historical human housing assembly methods and dates back as far as 2000 BC.



Jassim Alasida walks through the NI Adobe house on November 6. TRACEY SHELTON

The adobe house is a product of the rivers banks, the marshes and the practicality of local culture and civilization within the wetland ecology. It is the result of need, imagination, experience and meditation within the natural environment.

The most famous modern architects to adopt the adobe style were Alan Mason and Jan Hutts. They constructed around 2,900 adobe houses in Morocco in 1968. In Senegal, the Agricultural Education Center also applied the adobe style, designed by Oswald De Liker and executed by UNESCO.

Another exquisitely successful achievement is Al-Qirna village, Egypt which was designed and built by a fine team headed by the brilliant Egyptian architect Hassan Fathi.

Looking through different ages of human history, it becomes certain that adobe architecture was once the most common all over the world. This can be seen in archeological relics, read about in history, and proven anthropologically. In short, the adobe structure was used throughout the ancient world and is still the cheapest, most common and most feasible building technique in the world. United Nations statistics indicate that one third of the world's population is still living in adobe houses.

Adobe architecture could be a solutions to housing problem and sustainable development in our world today. It is the most practical architectural connection between historical heritage and modern life and the best solution to the problem of building material manufacturing. Therefore, it is important not to neglect this widespread building technique.

The use of adobe house in the marsh area represents a better economical, climatological and

environmental solution. The utilization of adobe as a building material gives the following advantages:

1. The availability of adobe as a natural material makes it ideal for locals who can manufacture it through a simple series of techniques. They know very well its benefits in terms of temperature. Also, it is a cheap alternative to common building materials. It is friendly to the environment during manufacturing, demolishing and recycling phases.

2. Adobe is a good insulator for hot and cold temperatures and mist. When used in accurate amounts it can provide the necessary insulation for a building.

3. A thick and flat outside wall can give more thermo-conductivity delay. A fortycentimeter adobe wall can delay heat for 15 hours, while a 20cm cement brick wall can delay heat for only 5-6 hours.

4. Adobe, as a cheap and available material that is quick and easy to use.

The goal of Nature Iraq and the Thi Qar building team was to introduce a pioneering, non-profit, and non-commercial project with the hope of inspiring and encouraging local residents. It is an environmental project that applies the philosophy of connecting man and the practical elements of the environment. It is an outstanding example for future housing projects.

Development of the National Report on Biodiversity

By Anna Bachmann

The Iraqi Ministry of Environment is currently finalizing its first report to the Secretariat to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) with support from Nature Iraq staff. This report, which should be finalized by the time of the Conference of Parties in Nagoya, Japan in October of this year, is divided into four chapters.

The first is a status report on the Biodiversity of Iraq assessing the threats that this diversity faces. It also examines the trends through a use of indicators that can be used to track changes to biodiversity within the country over time.

The second chapter focuses on the implementation of national strategies and action plans to protect biodiversity within Iraq. As

a signatory party to the convention, Iraq is required to develop a comprehensive strategies and action plan.

The third chapter discussed how biodiversity protection is or can be integrated across different sectors of Iraq (from environment to planning, health, water resources, oil and industrial development, agriculture, etc.).

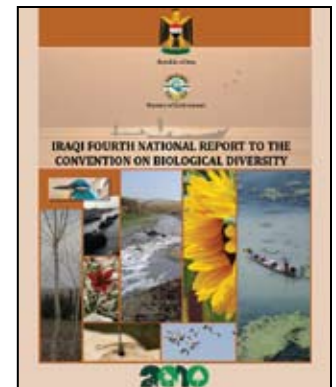
The final chapter assesses progress towards the 2010 targets and goals. Iraq is new to the CBD and this chapter provides information on how Iraq can reach these goals.

Overall the report is an important step forward for both assessing the status and setting up the groundwork for protecting Iraq's biodiversity. It also provides information on the National Biodiversity Committee that involves

representatives from many ministries in Baghdad and the Kurdistan Regional Government and it lays to the next steps for the National Committee and other stakeholders interested in protecting Iraq's national and globally important biological diversity.

Although feedback from the National Committee will result in an update of the report, a draft is available on the CBD website at: <http://www.cbd.int/reports/>. Note, this is listed as Iraq's "Fourth National Report" even though it is technically Iraq's first.

This will not be the last word on this issue. Iraq must report regularly on the status of its biodiversity to the CBD as well as develop a National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (also known as the NBSAP) and, overtime, we ex



pect to flesh out a lot of the information presented in the report. As stated above this report lays the groundwork and, as it often noted in the report itself, much more information and inter-ministerial and inter-agency cooperation is needed to both fully characterize and protect Iraq's biodiversity.

Key Biodiversity Areas Program Update 2010

By Anna Bachmann and Korsh Ararat

2010 is the sixth consecutive survey year for the Key Biodiversity Areas (KBA) program that Nature Iraq has conducted in cooperation with the Iraqi Ministry of Environment (MoE) with support from the Italian Ministry of Environment, Land & Sea (IMELS). This year's survey included some of the most comprehensive field work to-date throughout southern, central and western Iraq and the northern Kurdistan region. In the winter survey, 74 sites were visited and in the summer survey, 82 sites were visited throughout the country. Ten field staff from Nature Iraq, the MoE, the Commission for Environment in Kurdistan and different universities participated in the surveys this year.

Some of the key findings from the survey included the sighting of large groups of raptors such as Black-eared Kites and the globally threatened Lesser Kestrels in Central and Western Iraq. There were a number of new breeding bird records in 2010, such as the first confirmed breeding of the Glossy Ibis for Iraq. A breeding colony of considerable numbers were found (and photographed) at South-central Hammar.

The survey also included for the first time, a spring botany survey of the marshland areas so the spring flowering plants could be collected and identified. In addition, the 2010 survey in Kurdistan included a dedicated mammal expert for the first time since 2008, and in Central Iraq a professor from the University of Baghdad came along to focus on mammals. As a result, Nature Iraq published a preliminary report entitled "Animal Trade and Hunting in Iraq" that will be finalized by the end of the year once the summer findings are incorporated.

In addition, the 2010 survey effort utilized a more standardized threat assessment based on eleven IUCN threat classifications of species decline that will allow the team to prioritize sites and track trends in the conservation status of an area over time.

Lastly, Nature Iraq now uploads the KBA bird data each year to the

Worldbirds Database (www.worldbirds.org) maintained by BirdLife International and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds in the UK. It is now one of the top contributors from the Middle East with more than 15,000 observations on this on-line database.

"Together with the other surveys not yet on the system such as the KBA Summer 2010 data and the Sociable Lapwing survey," said Mike Evans of BirdLife International, "I'm sure that the reality is more than 20,000 records will be contributed by the Iraq KBA Program. This is an excellent achievement that is putting Nature Iraq well ahead of other contributors and BirdLife Partners."

A total of 337 bird species - most of the species found within Iraq - have been recorded on the KBA surveys, and there should be some new records among the summer findings.

"As an organization that has been able to sustain a consistent, multi-year survey effort now for six years, we are in a unique position in the region," said Azzam Alwash, the director of Nature Iraq. "We have developed a large dataset of information that has increased our understanding of the conservation status of sites and species in many areas of Iraq. It's now time for us to focus more on advocating for the protection of these special places in Iraq and save future survey efforts for the examination of areas that haven't yet been covered."

Several reports from the 2010 work are currently being developed. By the end of the year, Nature Iraq and the MoE hope to release the yearly program report, which will be made available on the website. Several other papers are also being prepared for peer-reviewed journals.

In addition, the following preliminary article prepared by Korsh Ararat on the bird work in the KBA and related activities appeared in a recent addition of Sandgrouse, a publication of the Ornithological Society of the Middle East:

2010 KBA Bird Report

During the 2010 winter surveys in Kurdistan Iraq, there were several interesting findings including 630 Lesser White-fronted Geese

Anser erythropus (nearly 3% of the world population), two Red-breasted Geese *Branta ruficollis*, two Pine Buntings *Emberiza leucocephalos*, three Little Bustards *Tetrax tetrax* (the first recorded in Iraq since the 1940s), 246 Great Black-headed Gulls *Larus ichthyaeus*, 14 Alpine Accentors *Prunella collaris*, nine Eastern Imperial Eagles *Aquila heliaca*, one Red Kite *Milvus milvus*, and 20 Eurasian Siskins *Carduelis spinus*.



European Bee-Eater. KORSH ARARAT

The central and western deserts of Iraq are some of the main migration routes for the countries raptors. In spring, over 450 Lesser Kestrels *Falco naumanni*, 500 Black Kites *Milvus migrans* and Black-eared Kites *Milvus migrans lineatus*, four Asian Imperial Eagles *Aquila heliaca* and six Pallid Harriers *Circus macrourus* were found.

In the southern marshes, which is one of the world's most unique places for wildlife, several amazing findings were recorded including 7,000 Greater Flamingos *Phoenicopterus roseus*, 30,000 Northern Shovelers *Anas clypeata*, 41,000 Marbled Ducks *Marmarometta angustirostris* (more than the known world population), 19,000 Eastern Greylag Geese, 9,000 Red-crested Pochards *Netta rufina*, 2,500 Ferruginous Ducks *Aythya nyroca*, 6,000 Black-tailed Godwits *Limosa limosa*, 6,000 Pygmy Cormorants *Phalacrocorax pygmeus*, 8,000 Dead Sea Sparrows *Passer moabiticus*, and seven Grey Hypocolius *Hypocolius ampelinus*. The White-crowned Wheatear *Oenanthe leucopyga* was also added to the Iraq bird list.

In March 2010, Nature Iraq conducted the Critically Endangered Sociable Lapwing *Vanellus gregarius* survey. Thirteen sites were surveyed based on signals obtained from one of the satellite tagged Sociable Lapwings inside Iraq near Haditha. Although no lapwings were found, 177 Demoiselle Cranes *Anthropoides virgo*, 220 Western Yellow Wagtails *Motacilla flava*, 15 Citrine

Wagtails *Motacilla citreola*, and a Semi-collared Flycatcher *Ficedula semitorquata* were observed.

In May and June, Richard Porter joined Nature Iraq's bird team during the Key Biodiversity Areas survey and Nature Iraq/ BirdLife International's annual training course. Many new breeding areas were found and first breedings proven in Iraq for Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*, Upcher's Warbler *Hippolais languida* and Eastern Orphean Warbler *Sylvia crassirostris* (found breeding at six and two sites respectively) were recorded. A total of 26 pairs of Egyptian Vultures *Neophron percnopterus* were located, as well as two pairs of Peregrines *Falco peregrines*, two pairs of Kurdish Wheatears *Oenanthe xanthopygma*, two pairs of Barbary Falcons *Falco pelegrinoides* and a singing Eastern Bonelli's Warbler *Phylloscopus orientalis*. Great Reed Warblers *Acrocephalus arundinaceus* were nesting at two sites, and at one Sedge Warblers *Acrocephalus scirpaceus* were on territory - if breeding is proved this would be new for Iraq. A pair of Eastern Mourning Wheatears *Oenanthe lugens* were on territory at Peramagroon and European Rollers *Coracias garrulus*, were breeding at nine sites.

In addition, Eastern Cinereous Buntings *Emberiza semenowi* were found at 12 sites (60 pairs in total). Little Swifts *Apus affinis* were breeding in two colonies of over 10 and 50 pairs in caves at Chami Razan, and Dukan respectively. Alpine Swifts *Tachymarptis melba* were also breeding in two colonies at Ahmed Awa and Bekhal Waterfall.

Six Desert Finch *Rhodospiza obsoleta* were found at three sites and were probably nesting. Finally, Nature Iraq as a part of ecotourism did a trip to a Peramagroon Mountain, which is one of the most important IBAs in Kurdistan. Important breeding discoveries were made including White-winged Snowfinch *Montifringilla nivalis*, Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos*, Lammergeier *Gypaetus barbatus*, Winter Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes* (first breeding record for Iraq) and Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros*.

NI Join Birdlife Photo Exhibit in UK



A Little Bittern perches between reeds in the Iraqi marshlands. OMAR FADHIL

Nature Iraq and BirdLife International jointly produced a photography exhibition at the BIRDScapes gallery in Norfolk, UK on the Nature of Iraq.

It was designed on four themes that included the main landscape/vegetation types, the wildlife, people and the traditional ways of life and conservation in Iraq.

There were 24 framed photographs in the exhibit, which Nature Iraq now has displayed on our website - <http://natureiraq.biz/site/node/144>. In addition

there were two larger introductory photographs and some extra scenic shots and a number of mounted explanatory texts.

The Exhibition achieved excellent publicity in the UK press (especially the Guardian and The Times). The National Geographic has shown an interest in the photographs and the UN plans to host the exhibition in Baghdad.

Photos came from the Nature Iraq field research team Korsh Ararat, Omar Fadhel, Saman Abdulrahman and Mudhafar Salim.



Slender-billed Gulls court during mating season. KORSH ARARAT



Clouds pass over Sara Mountain in Iraqi Kurdistan. KORSH ARARAT



Brushes grow in the Iraqi desert. MUDHAFAR A SALIM

Membership Update

There is still time to join Nature Iraq for Free!

At the end of 2009, Nature Iraq became a membership organization and joining Nature Iraq as a student or individual is free through 31 December 2010. At this level of membership you will receive the bi-yearly email newsletter, discounts to Nature Iraq trainings and activities, use of the nature Iraq library, recognition in our newsletter, email updates on Nature Iraq events and activities and most important, our sincerest thanks for your contribution. You can also join Nature Iraq as a sustaining member (for a yearly fee of 60 USD), a business or professional level (150 USD), become a newsletter sponsor (250 USD), or as a sponsor (500 USD) or benefactor (1000 USD), each with different benefits. To learn more, see our membership page on our website.

Many thanks to the new Nature Iraq members who have already signed up!

Students:

Rand Laith Ihsan
Karmil Mahmoud
Amina Muaid Zahid
Aseel Salam Niimah
Awrad Nashaat Safi
Ban Naif Ridha Al-Dabagh
Bayan Hikmet safi
Hanin Alaa Yaaqub
Mutez Talib Atar
Quddus Abdulrazaq Sadiq
Mutez Talib Atar
Mutez Talib Atar

Ashley Moore
Anna Bachmann
Laith Zuhair Fadhil
Warren Lisa Strobel
Robert Foster
Rich Bradley
Sandy Brown
Kethy Cubert
Dave Horn
Donna Kowalczyk
Debbie Ventting
Jed Burt
Erfan Dhia Yaaqub
Erik Bruder
Barbara Fate
Ali Haloob Kadhim
Gina Barley
Gretcher Fluke
ed Abubakir
Hadeel Radawi Hussein
Al-Newan
Mohammed Inad Ghazwan
Dr. Mukhtar Khamis Haba
Laura Marshall Belden, P.E.
Mohammed Fadhil Abed
Michelle Schisler
Michael Aci
Ahmed Kadhmi Nemo
Marilyn Logue

Marla Milsted
Howard Mook
Alan Dolan
Dr. Nibrass S. Moqbel
Becky Wright
Dau Hartmon
Joe Jennings
Darlene Sillick
Randel Rogers
Rob Ripma
Storm Cunningham
Biu Whittarcn
Nancy Eller
Ben Warner
Warren I. Grody
David Helm
Jenny Bowman
John McCormac
Josh Overcast
Jwan Omer Othman
Kathryn Mazaika
Layth Al Talib
Saad Mohamm

Individuals:

Soran M.Mohammed
Nofl Alhadithy
Dergam M.Mahdi
Ramadhan H Muhammed
Zaman Silman Hirbe
Andrew Fellure
Mohamed Alfetlawi
Ali Imani
Ali Nema'a Salman
Andrea Cook
Andy Hall
Ann Oliver
Ass'ad M. AL-Moussawi

Ali Haloob Kadhim
Gina Barley
Gretcher Fluke
ed Abubakir
Hadeel Radawi Hussein
Al-Newan
Mohammed Inad Ghazwan
Dr. Mukhtar Khamis Haba
Laura Marshall Belden, P.E.
Mohammed Fadhil Abed
Michelle Schisler
Michael Aci
Ahmed Kadhmi Nemo
Marilyn Logue

Sustaining:

Shamal Mufti
Richard Porter
Ihsan Dujaili

We might be putting out a 2011 Calendar this year using some of these images, so check out our website regularly for updates and to

get your order in.

To see the exhibit photos go to: <http://natureiraq.biz/site/node/144>

An Open Letter of Advice to all Iraqi Zoos

The following letter was written by our mammal expert Hana Raza after witnessing the appalling conditions at a local Iraqi zoo. This letter has already been sent to the zoo in question and the version here has been revised for other zoos in Iraq, almost all of which have similar problems at their facilities.

An Open Letter of Advice from Nature Iraq to All Iraqi Zoos:

Following an inspection by a team of zoological specialists from Nature Iraq (NI) of the Nawruz Zoo facility, which is located in Sulaimani city, northern Iraq, NI thought it necessary to issue an open letter of advice to all Iraqi Zoos. The poor condition of animals seen at the Nawruz facility is seen at many zoos in Iraq. NI wishes to ensure the well being and health of the animals under zoo administrative care, and to minimize the faults in Iraqi animal facilities that have until now been left unchecked.

This particular inspection found the captive animals to be in pitiable health, many of them requiring immediate care, and in some cases surgery, due to certain ailments common to animals in captivity including difficulties with breathing, malnutrition, and bone ailments. As most, if not all, of the animals that are kept in Iraqi zoos suffer from these ailments, NI thought it necessary to mention each ailment and the animals suffering from it in detail including the treatments that should be conducted:

Gazelles (Bovids): Among many diseases present in these animals is reduced activity of the thyroid gland due to lack of a varied and sufficient diet. This disease is only present in gazelles still in the growth stage. If the administered diet is low in calcium and rich in phosphorus, the latter causes failure in the kidneys to absorb the needed calcium, causing fragility in the bones. Administration of a proper diet that is rich in calcium is critical when handling this condition as it is untreatable once contracted. Another factor that facilitates contraction of this disease is the lack of vitamin D. It is therefore critical that the animals are supplied with artificial UV light bulbs to substitute for natural sunlight. Another way to prevent this condition is to induce activity and movement in the animals.



A boy watches a baboon at Erbil Zoo while a lion rests in a tiny cage nearby. TRACEY SHELTON



Cats: Captive Felines, small or large, must be provided with a diet consisting not only of meat from muscle tissue, but of meat from varied organs (like tissue from the digestive track) to provide not only proteins but other much needed nutrition like calcium which a wild species naturally takes in by the consumption of various organs of captured prey. Lack of such variation in diet causes fat deposits to appear around the heart and pericardial sinus, and a reduction of thyroidal secretions and general thyroidal activity, which leads to abnormalities in the structure of the backbone and the spinal arch. This in turn causes pressure to build up on the rib cage and consequently the lungs, inevitably leading to breathing difficulties and in time inflammation of the lungs.

Wolves: Lack of housing space causes behavioral problems in wolf species that are kept in captivity. This issue causes a wolf to move in constant circular motions around its cage. In time, lesions develop in the pads of its paws, which are susceptible to inflammation and reduce the animals' lifespan.

Rhesus Macaque: These monkeys are particularly prone to diseases caused by viruses such as Polio, Rabies, Chickenpox, and Smallpox as well bacterial diseases such as Tetanus, which is caused by *Clostridium tetani*. Vaccines must be routinely administered, albeit some ailments like Ebola and Marburg virus cannot be vaccinated against, and there must at all times be a distance of

at least two meters between humans and infected animals as they can pass between species and are deadly to humans.

Birds of Prey: Birds of Prey must be put on a strict dieting regime as they are known to consume all the food they are given regardless of hunger or need. Since most in captivity are confined to small living quarters, they usually don't get the opportunity to burn off the food consumed. Also, trees must be supplied to their living quarters with flexible branches so as to induce motion in the birds as prolonged periods spent standing causes the bones in the bird's feet to get infected and the only cure for these ailments is a lethal injection to cease further suffering. One bird at the Nawruz Zoo was observed to suffer from a broken wing. If not administered to, the broken bone will tear through muscle tissue and the only cure for such a case is amputation.

Domestic Felines and Canines: Such animals are not suited for life in zoos, because they require constant care, grooming and human contact. Without this care they tend to develop skin problems and, particularly with the imported specimens, they contract various diseases and suffer behavioral abnormalities. Also, the reputation of the zoo itself suffers when such animals are put under foreign scrutiny. Domestic animals also frequently suffer from parasites with symptoms that include constant itching, various skin blemishes and hair loss. Medical checkups every four months are necessary to prevent

parasitic outbreaks, whether external or internal.

Reptiles: Animals such as the crocodiles and snakes are in constant need of temperature regulation in their living quarters. They require a section of their housing to be constantly warm since warmth helps with the digestion and absorption of nutrients; they also require in their housing a cool area such as a body of water to rest and lower their body temperature. An artificial UV light is also required, the lack of which causes vitamin D deficiency and digestive problems.

In short, the housing quarters and conditions usually set aside for the animals in Iraqi zoos are dismal and fall far below global standards. Moreover, most Iraqi zoos do not provide enough space for their animal inhabitants causing the problems just described that lead to the general decline in the animals' lifespan. In order to increase the zoos' overall profit and productivity, expansion of the land area at a zoo is often needed.

Zoos should also incorporate some sort of educational program for the public. Often animals are misidentified or not identified at all and the public gain little from their zoo experience. It should be required that animal facilities put signs on the cages that explain correctly what the animals are, where they came from, what they eat, and their behaviors, as well as their conservation status (are they endangered? what are they threatened by?). Nature Iraq is willing to offer assistance and advice to zoos on how to improve their educational programs and signage. Nature Iraq also recommends that zoo administrators make contact with the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (www.waza.com), which provides many resources on animal management and conservation to zoos around the world.

We hope this open letter will be taken into regard for both the welfare of the animals, the education of the public and the successful management of Iraq's zoos.

NI Join Japan's COP10 Convention

By Nadheer Abood

Nature Iraq was part of the official Iraqi delegation to the Conference of Parties 2010 (COP10) of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in Nagoya, Japan from October 18th-29th, 2010. Nature Iraq played an active role at the conference engaging in the following activities of the COP:

1. Discussions concerning the review and development of the article of the CBD, and mutual discussions with the Iraqi CBD focal point Dr. Ali Lami concerning the review and evaluation of work in Iraq in the field of the biological diversity and the Iraqi opinion about the discussions of CBD's articles.

2. Participating with the MoE and UNEP in organizing two workshops as side events to the conference activities. These workshops were held in the presence of Lukman Al Faily the Iraq ambas-

sador in Japan.

The first workshop on 21 October was entitled: "CBD-COP10 side event: Longterm sustainable development of Iraqi Marshland and Natural Resources" and was introduced by Dr. Ali Al Lami, Iraqi Minister Advisor and the CBD Focal Point, who stressed the urgent needs for long-term sustainable management in the marshland areas.

Khaldoun Al Omari IUCN Regional Office for West Asia also gave a talk on the central value of biodiversity in the Iraqi marshlands and Dr. Azzam Alwash, CEO of Nature Iraq talked about what happened to the marshlands in the 1990s and the development of the proposed Mesopotamian Marshlands National Park.

Ryuichi Fukuhara, Project Officer at UNEP-DTIE-IETC, continued the workshop discussing the joint UNEP-UNESCO initiative looking into the nominations of the Iraqi Marshlands as a World Heritage

Site.

The second workshop was held in October 22nd 2010 and was entitled: "Current Status of Biological Diversity in Iraq." The discussions in this workshop focused on the most important implementation steps Iraq has achieved as party of the CBD which include the release of Iraq's first National Report on Biological Diversity to the CBD. The workshop also included some important lectures such as: "Steps for CBD Implementation in Iraq" by Dr. Ali Lami, Iraqi Environmental Minister Advisor & Iraqi CBD focal point; "Working on Biodiversity in a postwar country: Key Biodiversity areas Monitoring 2004 – 2010" by Dr. Azzam Alwash, CEO, Nature Iraq; "The First Iraqi National Report to the Convention on Biological Diversity" by Anna Bachman, Director of Conservation at Nature Iraq and "Affecting Factors on the Iraqi Marshlands as a world Heritage" by Ryuichi Fukuhara of UNEP-DTIE-IETC.



The Nature Iraq display at the COP10 in Nagoya, Japan. NADHEER ABOOD

3. Participating with and assisting the Iraqi MoE and the UNEP in holding a side exhibition about the natural and cultural aspects of Iraq which included photographs of nature in Iraq from the north, middle and south and handcraft products from Kurdistan Iraq and the Iraqi Marshlands. Mr. Ahmed Doglaf, the executive director to the CBD opened this exhibition. He admired the progressive work done in Iraq by the Ministry and the Iraqi Focal Point to the Convention (Ali Al Lami). A hard copy of the National Report was presented to the secretary general by the IFP during the event.

4. Nature Iraq was also a part of the BirdLife International delegation to the COP10. This was a very important participation for Nature Iraq and a step forward as Nature Iraq is a partner designate to BirdLife.

The role of the BirdLife International secretariat and its partners worldwide was very important in following up with the ongoing discussions of the parties and trying to educate official delegations in order to adopt the best decisions for the benefit of biodiversity conservation efforts. In the conclusion of the COP, BirdLife International and its partners held a press conference to express their frank opinion about the discussions of the parties during the COP. The green card was raised for the discussions that took place on the strategies of the biodiversity showing that BirdLife and its partner organization felt that real progress had been made, and red card was raised alerting people to the lack of progress in the discussions that took place on funding and benefit sharing.

NI Cooperation Continues with the MoE



Participants from NI and the Ministry of Environment meet at the American University Campus in August. TRACEY SHELTON

By Tracey Shelton

A two-day meeting was held between Nature Iraq (NI) and the Ministry of Environment (MoE) on August 8 and 9 in Suliamanyah to discuss the accomplishments made since the last meeting and future plans for upcoming and ongoing projects.

The delegation from the Ministry of Environment was headed by minister HE Narmin Othman and included the technical deputy minister, Dr. Kamal Latif, and the ministers advisor, Dr. Ali Lami. A

delegation of three Italian consultants also joined the ten Nature Iraq staff members in the meeting that took place at the American University campus.

"Since we attended the first meeting at the beginning of the year, we have been very glad to see the accomplishments of this year," Minister Othman said in her opening remarks. "We would like to move our coordination from scientific studies to actual projects on the ground that the ordinary people can 'touch', and we have a few ideas that we would like to

discuss today."

The meeting moved ahead with presentations on project ideas and proposals for future action made by participants from each group. Many new ideas were developed and some projects that had previously been under discussion were approved.

Among the many achievements of the meeting was the decision by MoE to carry out a 5-year conservation work plan for the protection of the most endangered bird species in Iraq. Funding is to be provided by the MoE, and NI agreed to work along with them to implement the framework for the project.

The meeting concluded on a high note with all parties happy with the results and eager to move forward with the new plans as soon as possible. The two-day meeting was concluded with a trip to Dukan lake where the participants from Baghdad were able to enjoy the natural beauty the MoE and NI are working so hard to protect.