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New Eden Master Plan Now Available to the Public



The New Eden Team headed by Nature Iraq and Iraqi & Italian experts has publicly released the New Eden Master Plan for Integrated Water Resource Management in the Marshland Areas. The Plan is an extensive series of documents (three volumes made up of eight books and an executive summary) that constitute a collection of data and analytical tools that have been provided to policymakers in Iraq. The Plan will help these decision-makers make reasoned choices regarding how to allocate water, plan new development, and manage the environment of southern Iraq.

Sponsored by the Italian Ministry for the Environment , Land & Sea (IMELS), the Plan is a result of over two years of work by Nature Iraq, Italian partners, and the Iraqi Min-

istries of Environment (MoE), Water Resources (MoWR) and Municipalities and Public Works (MMPW) and it addresses issues such as improving the efficiency of water use, restoring the environment, bringing economic development to the region, flood control and community building for returning refugees and displaced peoples.

The documents of the master plan are in English and can be downloaded from a link on the Nature Iraq website at www.natureiraq.org. There is also an Arabic language copy of the executive summary. It is hoped that Iraqi Ministries and Policy Makers as well as donor organizations and other interested individuals and organization will use these extensive models, information and technical tools to aid in the sustainable development of the Marshlands and surrounding areas of southern Iraq.

Bird of Iraq Book now in print

The Birds of Iraq Book, recently published by Nature Iraq, in a joint project with Birdlife International and with support from the Canada-Iraq Marshland Initiative (CIMI), is now available for purchase in Jordan & Iraq. In Jordan, the book can be purchased from the Amman Office of Nature Iraq. The price of the book in Jordan is 14 JD or \$20 USD. Shipment from Jordan can be arranged at an additional cost. For ordering from Jordan, write to info@natureiraq.org or call +962 6 5923736.

In Iraq, the book can be obtained through the Baghdad or the newly opened Sulaymaniyah office (Kurdistan, Iraq) of Nature Iraq. To encourage sale of the book in Iraq, it will be available at a reduced rate of 12,000 Iraqi Dinars. For ordering from Iraq, write to info@natureiraq.org or call +964 770 4615071



From the Director Azzam Alwash

Looking back at the past year, I am proud of the work done by our small organization. We have finished a state of the art model for the management of the marshes and published it (See article *New Eden Master Plan Now Available to the Public*, this page), we conducted our monthly monitoring trips to the marshes without fail and we continue to update our database as we analyze trends. We also continue to do our bird surveys and have just completed our first survey effort in Kurdistan, Northern Iraq. We also published the first bird book for Iraq in over 20 years, we are completing the detailed design of the New Eden Village, installing remote monitoring stations, began expanding our work in Kurdistan, and on and on...

We now have over 14 professors and 60 graduate students engaged in work on the marshes, not to count the employees of the ministries that fortify our field teams. We also lost people, some who migrated out for security reasons and some who were innocent victims to the violence of Baghdad. I still can

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JOB ANNOUNCEMENT

Nature Iraq, an NGO incorporated in Baghdad, Iraq, is seeking a Wetlands Scientist experienced in delineation and field mapping of wetland habitats and plant communities. The position will be based in Sulaimaniyah, Northern Iraq and WILL NOT involve travel in Iraq outside the provinces of Northern Iraq (Sulaimaniyah, Dohuk, and Erbil). Primary responsibilities will be training of Nature Iraq's field staff in the definition, delineation, and mapping of plant communities and habitats within Iraq (primarily the Mesopotamian Marshlands, although the job will not involve travel to the south of Iraq, all of the work will be done remotely), compiling data from field mapping into GIS, and data interpretation and report preparation.

This is a one-year employment contract. Salary is commensurate with experience. The desired start date is July 2007. The preferable academic background is botany or ecological science. Experience in Geographic Information Systems and Remote Sensing Analysis is highly desirable. Knowledge of Arabic is not required. Resume and references should be sent to suzie@natureiraq.org.

ABOUT US

Nature Iraq strives to protect and restore the environment and conserve Iraq's rich natural and human heritage. Nature Iraq engages in non-profit activities designed to improve the environment for all Iraqis through scientific research and monitoring, education and capacity building, development activities and technical assistance.

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Nature Iraq Monitoring Program

Under funding from the Canada-Iraq Marshland Initiative (CIMI) and with additional support from the Italian Ministry of Environment & Territory (IMET), Nature Iraq is continuing its extensive monitoring program and has extended this program into the Kurdish Region (starting Winter 07).

The Nature Iraq Monitoring Program includes monthly studies, started in October of 2005 under the CIMI project, of the three main marshes to monitor the following biological and physical variables:

Water quality,
Macrophytes,
Phytoplankton,
Zooplankton,

Macrobenthos,
Fish and
Paleoecology

In addition, under the Key Biodiversity Areas (KBA) Project, which started in January of 2005, we are conducting seasonal (winter and summer) surveys covering 62 survey sites. These sites are located in seven marshes within six governorates of southern Iraq. All of the biological and physical variables listed above (except for paleoecology) are investigated and in addition, bird surveys are included. These seasonal studies have been extended to the Kurdish regions under funding from the



Survey Site: Mawat Region of Sulaymaniyah

Italian Ministry of Environment, Land & Sea and the first survey there visited 30 potential KBA sites and performed extensive water quality

monitoring for Darbandikhan and Dokan Reservoirs.

Two projects started in May of 2006. One, the Water Budget project looks at the inputs and outlets of rivers in the marshes on a monthly basis to determine the water budget of the marshes. The second is the Buffalo Project that is a census study on the number and distribution of water buffaloes in the marshes of the three southern governorates of Iraq (See Water Buffalo Report, Page 3). By the end of 2006, the study covered all the marshes in Thi Qar governorate and a large area of the marshes of Missan governorate.



Iraq Babbler in Taq Taq, Erbil

In July of 2006, monthly trips also began for the Shatt Al Arab Project to study the water of reflooded marshes flowing into the Shatt Al Arab, and the effect of re-flooding the marshes on waters of the river.

In October and November 2006, a series of meetings, workshops and trainings were held in Syria for the research groups working in Iraq on these various monitoring efforts. Over 35 Iraqis from Nature Iraq, the Universities of Basrah, Baghdad, Thi Qar, Babylon, & Sulimaniyah attended this series, which was funded by CIMI and IMELS and organized with the assistance of Birdlife International. The training courses were held in Lake Asad, Al Rekka, Syria and researchers from Aleppo University in Syria participated.

At the end of the workshops, it was recommended that the monitoring and survey program in Iraq be extended for an additional twelve months. Several new projects were also proposed.

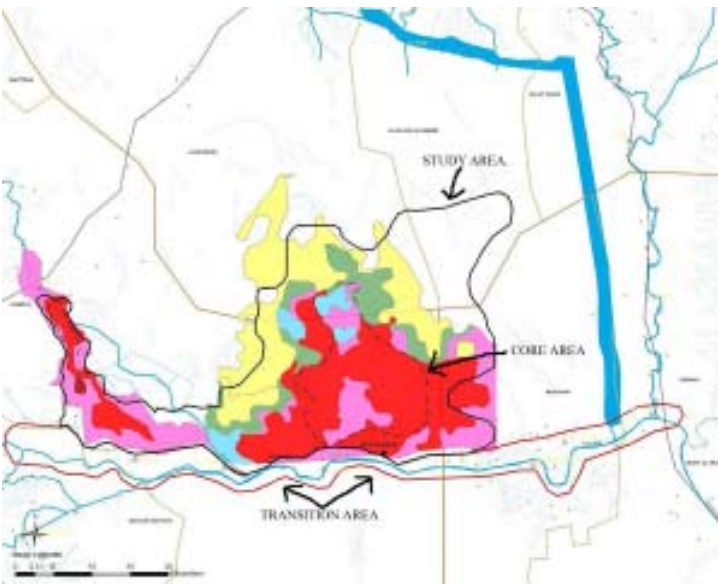
The full report of these activities can be found on Nature Iraq's Eden Again Project Website (www.edenagain.org) under Marshland Information->Reports

Feasibility study for a Marshlands National Park

One of several Italian Projects in Iraq is the development of a feasibility study for a national park in the marshland areas as a means to bring economic development to the area in a way that improves and protects the environment of the region.

Nature Iraq has been assisting its Italian Partners on the New Eden Team with the collection of data on the study area in the Central Marshes. The study area for the park was determined over the course of several meetings between the New Eden Team and the Ministries of Environment, Water Resources and Municipalities and Public Works. From an original short list of six sites spread throughout southern Iraq, it was mutually agreed between the participants that the Central Marsh and Abu Zirig Marsh would be the focus of the feasibility study.

The site was chosen due to the fact that it has a central location within the marshlands; it is well connected to the transportation system; it has very few people currently living there (but it is a goal that economic opportunities provided by the park would attract people back to the area); and it would be possible to expand the park in the future. In addition, Chubayish, the main urban center of the area, has a high cultural and historic value for the Marshes and will play an important



Marshland National Park Study Area in the Central Marshes

role in the recovery of the Marshlands, and a marshland research center is planned to be built close to the city.

The study defines the implementation of development and management strategies in the Park's territory, taking into account the results of the consultation process with the local population, and focuses in particular on:

- ◆ A detailed description of the territory, focusing on the main features that characterize the study area (territorial framework, hydrological regime, water quality, natural habitat conditions, flora and fauna, socio-economic framework)
- ◆ guidelines and criteria for actions on flora, fauna and natural environment;
- ◆ regulations, public and private land use, implementation rules;
- ◆ accessibility (access points, paths, facilities);
- ◆ facilities and provisions for the management and the social functions of the Park (conference rooms, museums, tourist offices, information offices, educational facilities, services).

In December 2006 the New Eden Team conducted a training course with the assistance of the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature for Ministry & Nature Iraq Staff. The training on management of parks and protected areas was held at RSCN's Azraq Reserve, the only Marshland reserve in Jordan. A variety of management tools were presented and discussed with the Iraqi trainees and they had an opportunity to examine the management plan for the Azraq Reserve.

The primary objective of the Mesopotamian Marshland National Park is the restoration of the marshland ecosystem and the species that

live there. It is also an important objective to create opportunities for education, scientific research and monitoring.

But a key objective of such a park is the eventual development of sustainable tourism for the area, encouraging and developing diverse economic activities that integrate well with the Park and helping to maintain the cultural heritage of the region. The Italian trainers brought with them the example of a regional park developed on the Po River Delta. Originally resisted by local residents, this regional park has proved to be a huge attraction in the area and the local economy has improved as a result of its presence. Now communities outside the Park boundary ask to be included.

These and other examples can show Iraqis that there is value in improving and protecting the Marshlands and developing the region in a sustainable fashion. But in the end, this is only a feasibility project and it will be only the Iraqis themselves, once security in the area is re-established, who can make it a reality.

Status on active projects under Phase 2 of the Master Plan

Over the past summer, under the New Eden Team Project and with funding from the Italian Ministry of Environment, Land & Sea, Nature Iraq placed ads in Italian newspapers to begin a bidding process on four tenders for work in Iraq. These included the following projects:

1. Installing new hydrology-meteorology monitoring stations along the Tigris & Euphrates River basin to monitor water levels and collect information on basic water parameters such as salinity, temperature, etc. for the Ministry of Water Resources.

2. Building of three reverse osmosis units to clean and desalinate water for communities in the marshland areas. This is a project with the Ministry of Municipalities and Public Works.
3. Purchase and installation of a complete water quality lab for the Iraqi Ministry of Environment.
4. Purchase and installation of the hardware and software for a network of computer stations within the three Iraqi Ministries that have major involvement in the Marshlands (Environment, Water Resources, and Municipalities & Public Works) so that they can analyze and share information collected in the Marshland region.

The first project has already been awarded for the installation of the hydrology-meteorology stations and work has commenced. We are awaiting the arrival of 25 more stations and a master station with training scheduled in Italy in the early part of May.

The RO Units are on order and the platforms have been prepared and are awaiting the arrival of the equipment from Italy for installation and activation.

The lab equipment project has been re-submitted to attract additional bidders but we hope to accomplish the procurement and installation of the equipment by summer 2007.

The fourth project, part of the New Eden Marshland Information System, is under contract negotiations at this time.

Water Buffalo Report



Nature Iraq has just released a new interim draft report on Water Buffalo in Chubayish. After conducting field interviews with farmers and a data collection effort in Thi Qar governorate, NI has released a draft report on the Water Buffalo of the Chubayish area. As the report notes, "The potential for developing new economic opportunities based on Water Buffalo husbandry could have a great impact on marshland communities."

The main limiting factors on this development are the lack of concentrated feeds, which could increase production; the need for a large milk production facility and the lack of veterinary services in the marshland areas.

The full report can be found on Nature Iraq's Eden Again Website (www.edenagain.org) under Marshland Information->Reports

Helping Women in the Marshes: Income generation through local skills

The project is called the "Best Future for Environmental Awareness: Woman First" and it is a joint effort by two Iraqi non-governmental organizations: Together to Protect Humans and the Environment, and the Ibin Sina Society.

Iraqi women that live in the marshes suffer from a lack of income and the difficulties due to the harsh lifestyle they face. At the same time, they have the skills and experience that can help them earn a living through handicraft production using local materials such as reeds and bamboo, palm tree fronds, mud, and other natural materials available in their environment. The development of such handicrafts products over industrial products that cause pollution can also help protect the environment.

In many parts of the world, developing the skills to produce and market such products has been a means to bring women in similar situations much-needed income and a sense of self-reliance.

The goals of the Woman First project is to improve the quality of life for Iraqi women in the marshes and enable them to improve their experience in making high quality products that can sell at high "Fair Trade" prices; to increase the public awareness about the value and importance of handicraft work and skills and encourage the local population to utilize natural sources and friendly environmental products. Their idea is to develop a pilot project in Iraq that can be replicated elsewhere in Iraq to provide income-generating opportunities for local women.

An initial exploratory trip took place, with support from Nature Iraq, in October 2006 in the marshland communities of Abu Sobat, Nahr Al-Ez, and Kurmashia. The focus was to meet local women and discuss the project with them, identify key craft workers/trainers in the community and get some idea of the local needs required to develop the project.



Marsh Women of Nahr Alez, which is about 90 km away from the Basrah and about 7-10 km from Qurnah (the meeting point of the Tigris and Euphrates)

Expert advice on how to develop and improve the quality of their handicrafts to make them more marketable will be required and the women need to be provided with information on how to export & market their handicrafts.

This initial project envisions a gallery showing in Kurdistan for the women to present and sell their craftwork. Some of the monies raised from this gallery sale can be used to buy sewing machines and other supplies and materials needed to continue the project. Ultimately it will be important to investigate other methods for marketing and selling the women's handicraft work both inside and outside of Iraq. Several organizations exist (Fair Trade Network, SERRV and others) to assist women in developing ways that they can cooperate and coordinate efforts to produce, transport and market their handicraft work.

These and other projects need your support. Financial donations can be made tax-deductible through the Iraq Foundation at 1770 Catlin Street, Fullerton, CA 92833 (email: info@natureiraq.org to explore other payment methods). Please specify that the donation is for the Nature Iraq Small Grants Fund.

From the Director, Continued from Page 1

not get over the loss of Raid, a promising young engineer, whose life was cut short by the violence of Iraq.

The science work is continuing this year and soon we will begin collaborative work with the newly-established American University in Iraq - Sulaimaniyeh, which will be building a state-of-the-art environmental research facility called the Twin Rivers Institute. It will be equipped with the latest laboratory equipment and will expand the scientific work into Kurdistan-Iraq using the lessons learned from our work in the marshes. We also want to establish a strategic relationship with the Ministry of the Environment as we work together to clean up the mess left by 25 years of war and destruction.

But we also will concentrate on trying to bring to life the results and the scientific studies, recommendations, and designs that we have completed. We will push to have the Master Plan adopted and implemented by the regulating authorities, a difficult task especially considering the security issues and the evolving nature of areas of control under the new Iraqi federal constitution.

In January, a conference was held in Basrah bringing together the marshes committees that were formed last year with the help of UNDP, representatives of local NGO's, representatives of the concerned ministries, scientists, and a lot of guests. The idea for the gathering was conceived during a meeting sponsored by CIDA and Nature Iraq in

September 07 in Amman, in which the issues of governance were discussed. The gathering was focused on how to coordinate between the three governorates and the Federal government as well as to how to take into consideration the needs of the locals as the controlling authorities plan their strategies for the development and restoration of the marshes. The gathering decided on starting a founding committee with membership that includes executive and legislative branches (local and central government levels) as well as representatives from local NGO's. The committee mandate will be confirmed in the next few months by the local governorate councils in Maysan, Thi Qar and Basrah.

To me, that is a positive step in the way forward as the local authorities and people take the mantle of managing and protecting the marshes for the long term, so that our grandchildren will have the opportunity to enjoy this most beautiful of gods' creations.



A Project of Nature Iraq