



Nature Iraq Activity Report 2015

Background and Introduction

Nature Iraq is an Iraqi non-governmental organization (NGO) registered in Iraq, accredited to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and Iraq's first and only Affiliate to Birdlife International, and the only Middle Eastern member of the Waterkeeper Alliance.

Nature Iraq was created to protect, restore, and preserve Iraq's natural environment and the rich cultural heritage that it nourishes. Our mission includes fulfillment of the following goals:

- Improve the capacity of Iraq's institutions to protect its environment, including local and national governmental and non-governmental bodies, along with universities, colleges, and scientific institutes.
- Develop a scientific database of environmental conditions and trends within Iraq and Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) through environmental monitoring and research programs focusing on water resources, ecology, and biodiversity.
- Encourage environmental awareness and stewardship of Iraq's environment by promoting community-based environmental centers and clubs, developing environmental education programs in Iraq, and maintaining global awareness of Iraq's environment.
- Promote the sustainable use of Iraq's environment and resources, respect and balance the traditional use of the environment by indigenous inhabitants, preserve wildlife and biodiversity, and address the economic needs of both local inhabitants and the nation.



Nature Iraq's guiding principles are reflected in the work we do:

- We foster dialogue and decision-making through consensus;
- We maintain a separation from political, ethnic and religious factions;
- We respect cultural diversity and traditional knowledge;
- We follow international guidelines and conventions for environmental restoration;
- We focus on local capacity building of existing and emerging Iraqi institutions;
- We collect and use the best scientific information available; and
- We encourage local stewardship and work to engage indigenous inhabitants in planning projects and decision-making.

Over the course of 2015, Nature Iraq implemented a wide variety of projects, and an even wider range of events and activities not directly associated with projects. Our ongoing work revolves around three central issue areas:

- **Water Resources:** We are fighting for the rights of Iraqis to access clean, plentiful sources of water, and monitoring water quality and quantity to have objective standards with which to shape the conversation.
- **Biodiversity:** We are helping to address the gaps in knowledge caused by years of nonexistent scientific research on the biodiversity of Iraq, and train new leaders to catalog and care for the flora and fauna of the country.
- **Sustainable Development:** We are modeling ways which Iraq can guarantee a prosperous, stable future for all its citizens.

Projects

Jensen Project

Helping to Protect the Natural and Cultural Heritage of the Mesopotamian Marshes:

Empowering Iraq's First National Park



Photo: Laith Al-Obeidi

This project, funded by AAJE.V Charity Foundation and supervised by BirdLife International, aimed at promoting the protection of the natural and cultural resources in the Central Marshes' National Park through local empowerment over a two-year period (2014-2015).

Project Goal

This project fosters and improves the socio-economic circumstances and culture of Marsh Arab women and men, while protecting the biological diversity and natural resources of the Lower Mesopotamian Marshlands within the framework of the recently-declared National Park through an integrated program of research, development activities, training, advocacy, and information sharing.

The project helps support the effective implementation of the Park's Management Plan, through an integrated program of research, capacity building, advocacy, exchanges, and

sharing best practice that demonstrate the successful integration of socio-economic and nature conservation needs.

The successful management of the National Park ultimately lends weight for the declaration of more Protected Areas within the greater wetland ecosystem of the Central Marshes that covers vast areas in the central and southern parts of Iraq, which contain many important birds and various biodiversity areas. Furthermore, it also demonstrates the socio-economic advantages of good management of the Protected Areas to relevant stakeholders, including the government.

The Jensen project has executed a number of activities over the course of 2015:

Natural Resources and Socio-economic Research

1. Threat Assessment Survey: The threat assessment survey was conducted in 2015 as continuation of the monitoring that was started in 2014 using existing information on threats to the Mesopotamian National Park and the surrounding area from the KBA surveys, which were conducted in the area previously. Threats monitored included over-exploitation and persecution of species demonstrated by hunting and overfishing as well as reed harvesting in addition, the threat of water shortage was focused on for being the main effect in the National Park.
2. Fishing Survey (January 2015): The data was collected from six main field points for fish trade where fishermen sell their fish.
3. Birds Hunters survey (May 2015): Information was collected from bird hunters through questionnaires and interviews.
4. Reed Harvesting Surveys (March and May 2015): In 2015, and after expanding the study to include reed harvesting, two surveys were conducted to collect data.
5. IWC and Breeding Birds Survey: The winter survey was conducted in January 2015 and the breeding birds were monitored in the Central Marshes in May/Jun 2015.
6. Socio-economic and Market Surveys: In 2014, a socio-economic survey was conducted in the villages on the edges of the National Park to identify living contexts in such communities. the study was completed in 2015.

Capacity Development of Stakeholders and Sharing Best Practices

1. Local Government Training
2. Identification and Empowering Local Conservation Groups
3. Craft/Business Training
4. International Exchange
5. Publishing the Findings of Research and Lessons Learned

Sustainable Livelihood

1. Identification of Key Individuals and Institutions
2. Membership in Partner Institutions
3. Producing and Implementing Action Plan for Improved Development of goods
4. Mounting a Local and/or National Marketing Campaign

Achievements

- Assessment of the pressures on the National Park and surrounding areas, covering threats like unsustainable hunting, fishing and reed-harvesting with their localities, severity and scope.
- Assessment of the threat of water shortage to the National Park in 6 months since the beginning of the water crisis in 2015.
- Socio-economic baseline study to establish a database of the site's key socio-economic practices, local economy and trends, which will form the cornerstone to serve in the provision of alternative livelihoods for local communities that can be ecologically sustainable and serve the conservation of this important wetland.
- The engagement of the main local actors and key local and national stakeholders in the conservation approach envisaged by the project

- The capacities of the various stakeholders were also developed in terms of general and financial management that would eventually help the proper management of the National Park.
- A training workshop about producing and marketing handicraft goods was offered. The training was an introduction to the types and techniques of the handicrafts as well as their internal and external marketing outlets and how to handle those goods according to the customer type. The training targeted local stakeholders, LCGs, community leaders and governmental decision-makers (local and ministerial).
- Decision-makers from relevant water-involved governmental and non-governmental agencies were gathered through meetings and conferences to discuss solutions for water problems in the National Park.
- An unprecedented study in Iraq to evaluate traditional handicrafts market of the National Park area was conducted. Solutions were suggested to handle the problems, training groups of local producers was conducted, and opening communication channels between producers and retailers was developed to provide opportunities for local goods marketing especially those produced in the National Park area.
- Retaking clear view on the bird populations in the National Park area seasonally (two winters and two summers of 2014-2015) to fill the gaps due to the research hold for three years since the end of the KBA program (2005-2010).
- Two first breeding records for bird species in Iraq: (White-crowned Wheatear *Oenanthe leucopyga*) in summer 2014 and the confirmation of breeding of (Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenu*) in summer 2015 in the National Park.
- Local/federal decision-makers, NGOs and stakeholders were enabled to manage the National Park file through concentrated training programs to create clear vision about balancing the locals' use of natural resources and preserving those resources for the next generations.
- LCGs in the Central Marshes were formed to make integrated team for decision-making, pressing and advocating for the cause of the marshes.

- Capacities of the key decision-makers were developed and a qualified team was made with knowledge of the integrated methodology of sustainable development project management and the factors to be considered in the making of socio-economic projects to improve the livelihoods of the marsh communities.
- A group of producing men and women in handicraft production (carpets, rugs, weaving, cold ceramics and souvenirs) has been developed to help uplift the living standards of the locals in the National Park area; to reduce the pressures on the marsh natural resources and to revive almost dying handicrafts in the area.
- A group of qualified trainers from the governmental center for vocational training, located in the Central Marshes, has been developed and the training was admitted to the center's training curriculum of making carpets, rugs and cold ceramics. The center targets the local youth to help them with their living earning and reduce the pressures on the marsh natural resources
- Developing and making new goods for uplifting the economic standards of the local communities in an eco-friendly way in the heart of the National Park.
- Two study tours to Jordan (once per year) have been conducted for the Iraqi stakeholders in 2014 and 2015. The tours were focused on two levels of decision-making representation: ministerial (federal) decision-makers involved in the management of the National Park and local governments in the National Park area along with tribal leaders, NGOs and Nature Iraq staff. The tours were to introduce participants to the relevant environmental concepts, encourage them to actively participate in data storage and sharing, enhancing communication between the governmental and non-governmental stakeholders, and motivating more efforts to preserve the Iraqi environment.
- An awareness campaign has been conducted about overfishing/overhunting and the illegal fishing/hunting methods with cooperation of the local police in the National Park area.
- Cooperation channels have been bridged with the local NGOs to support the activities of the project and share expertise through signing MOUs and combining efforts to help protect the natural and cultural resources of the area.

Main impact-focused conservation achievements of the overall project

- Assessment of the pressures and threats on the natural resources of the National Park area
- Socio-economic practices database
- Formation of a Local Conservation Group in the Central Marshes
- Provision of economical alternatives to reduce pressures on the natural resources in the National Park
- Increase of local and governmental awareness and responsiveness to the risks of over-exploitation of the marsh resources
- In-press paper of the first breeding records of two bird species in the National Park

Hawizeh Stakeholder Project 2015



This project consists of the collection and organization of a comprehensive dataset of information on the current socio-economic conditions within and around the Hawizeh Ramsar Site that includes fisheries, water buffalo husbandry, traditional industries, oil development, infrastructure, immigration, and archaeological/cultural resources and identified alternative livelihood opportunities that reduce reliance on Hawizeh Marshlands.

It increased awareness among local communities about what the Ramsar Site is, what it means to them and how they can become involved in the management decisions of the site. It also initiated discussions on economic options that would decrease pressure on the wetlands as well as move to wise and regional use of Hawizeh's natural resources.

A Local Stakeholder Advisory Group made up of key, multi-sector community members who can work with the National Ramsar Committee to manage the Hawizeh Ramsar Site, was created. This increased community input and participation with the National Ramsar Committee in decision-making and conflict-resolution.

The stakeholder discussed two scenarios for the Hawizeh Ramsar site management and preferred the second scenario during the workshop, which was held in April 16, 2015

Nature Iraq staff met a large number of the local people –about 600 people from 12 villages within the scope of no more than 5 km from Hawizeh Marsh geographical limits –, and discussed topics directly related to the marsh, mainly economic and social issues (buffalo breeding, fishing, harvesting reeds and grasses, agriculture etc.). The representatives of local communities and stakeholders were at the forefront of attendance (e.g. representatives of the province of Maysan, the Council of Maysan province, tribal leaders, traditional leaders, representatives of civil society organizations, representatives of the Ministry of Water Resources, Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Agriculture, Department of Antiquities, farm associations, the Ministry of Health....etc.).

We gave 16 lectures about the Hawizeh Ramsar site, the importance of wetlands, the biodiversity sustainability, negative effects of overfishing, and ways towards sustainable human-nature balance. We founded 25 recorded associations for buffalo breeding, fishing, and folkloric industries, which include in total as participants 300 males and females from 12 villages. They will be linked through their representatives to participatory management of Hawizeh Ramsar site.

Iraq Waterkeeper Environmental Law and Advocacy Project (EU Project)

The Iraq Waterkeeper Environmental Law and Advocacy Project is a four-year project funded by the European Union, aimed at bringing together government officials, civil society organizations, and community representatives to deepen engagement with the KRG's environmental laws. A series of trainings and meetings, as well as a newsletter and a multi-lingual guide book on the environmental laws of KRG, have been undertaken to bring

together these diverse groups together for the common interest of preserving the KRG's water resources and ensuring a clean and healthy future for the next generation.

Target Beneficiaries

- Local civil society organizations that desire a more democratic role in natural resource management,
- Local government bodies charged with implementing environmental laws,
- Local populations suffering from environmental degradation.

Objectives

- Increasing the capacity of CSOs through the provision of training and education on the use of different advocacy tools, like determining achievable systemic changes and outlining action steps as well as more basic items like how to utilize print and social media to further a cause, how to network with other organizations to build momentum and support, and how to work within the societal, religious, and financial constraints of a fledging organization in a place like Iraq.
- Increase cooperative CSO-Government partnerships for problem-solving and planning.
- Improve participation and feedback between CSOs, the public and government in the process of developing effective environmental laws and regulations.

March training mission for two groups for government environmental enforcement team

1. Sulaimani Group: In March 24-26 the first enforcement training for inspection was carried out with 36 participants from different government environmental bodies.
2. Erbil & Duhok Group: In March 29 through to March 31st, the second enforcement training for inspection teams was carried out with 24 participants from different government environmental bodies



1. Five joint meetings were held between Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and agencies responsible for environmental policymaking. As a result of the joint meetings a decision was made in May 27th to close down all the car washing spots in Kani Shok with 25 participants

from different governmental environmental bodies and local NGOs



2. In August, the phase one of the joint meeting was held with 15 participants reviewing a draft of the law of (Water Management and Resource Protection).
3. In August, a technical consultation meeting was organized with key stakeholders and experts for the purpose of identifying and prioritizing actions to address environmental challenges in Halabja, with a focus on water pollution.
4. In November, the phase two of the joint meeting reviewed the second draft of Water Management and Resource Protection law. In November, a technical consultation meeting was organized with key stakeholders and experts for the purpose of identifying and prioritizing actions to address environmental challenges in Haji Awa, with a focus on water pollution.

Capacity Building Training Courses

The second capacity building training course for CSOs was held in Sulaimani from May 17 to 19, with 33 participants from 20 different local NGOs. The training organizers and participants took advantage of the training to dedicate the last day of the training to encourage recycling and reusing in the region through an awareness-raising campaign about the threats of plastic bags and bottles.



The second capacity building training course for CSOs was held in Duhok from May 25 to 27, for 35 participants from six local NGOs.



Sulaimani capacity-building trainings for CSOs

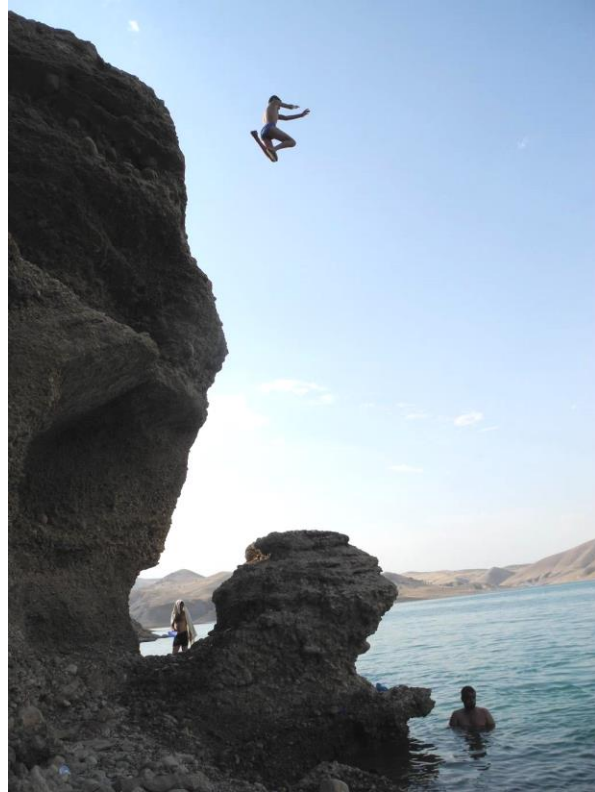
Many of the following activities are featured on the Waterkeepers Iraq YouTube Channel. They can be accessed at www.youtube.com/WaterkeepersIraq:

1. **Paddling Activity for World Water Day (22 March 2015):** The Iraq Upper Tigris Waterkeeper (IUTW), Nabil Musa, took it to another level on World Water Day. He paddled on a homemade paddleboard made of large water bottles downstream on the



Lesser Zab River from below the Dukan Dam to the Qashqoly area where hundreds of picnickers were gathering for the Nawroz Holiday. It was a very successful in promoting World Water Day and raising awareness about water pollution.

2. **Swimmable Water Weekend (25-27 July 2015):** Before the Swimmable Water Challenge (see below), the IUTW organized a cleanup day for a large area in Dukan Lake. A group of volunteers, friends, and water lovers came out to show their love for the lake during #SwimmableWater Weekend. All participants had a great swim and spoke to the general public visiting the lake, telling them about the event, raising awareness about pollution and climate change.



3. **Paddling Campaign for Keeping our Sarchinar River Clean (8 February 2015):** This standup paddleboard expedition started at the Chaq Chaq Dam and traveled downstream to Kostay Cham. Nabil Musa, the IUTW said, "I always wanted to do this paddling campaign because not many people know our rivers can be used for fun if we keep them clean! In my experience, this is the best way to attract people to your river and waterways." Nabil paddled over two kilometers on the Sarchinar-Qilyasan River near Sulaimani, Kurdistan Iraq, which has badly been damaged by humans. "I have a lot of memories with this river", says Nabil, "I spent most of my childhood with this river, which once was swimmable, drinkable and fishable. And I used to do all that. I miss our beautiful river. Can we get the damage fixed?" Nabil believes that we can and wants to do more campaigns and non-stop activities until we truly get our river back.

4. **Swimmable Water Challenge- Dukan Marathon Swim (21 August 2015):** Nabil Musa, the IUTW, is raising the stakes this year with an even longer marathon swim/paddle across Dukan Lake than he has done in previous years. As the 2013 RiverWatch Report Card showed, the rivers and waterways of Kurdistan are quickly deteriorating as garbage, sewage and industrial toxins choke them and water is diverted, dammed and dike without thought to their natural function and services. These once clear, flowing rivers and streams of our land are becoming muddied, polluted and dried. Nabil promoted the importance of swimmable, drinkable and fishable waters throughout communities in Iraqi Kurdistan by swimming and paddle boarding 40 kilometers from Rania to the Dukan Dam

5. The Waterkeeper Project started at Nature Iraq in May of 2011 under a license from the International Waterkeeper Alliance. It was part of the original plan This finally occurred in December 2014 when Waterkeepers Iraq registered in Kurdistan, Iraq and the international Waterkeepers Alliance shifted its license agreement from Nature Iraq to this new, non-governmental organization. Nabil Musa, however, continued to run the fledgling organization while supported from Nature Iraq, but this changed in November of 2015 when he left Nature Iraq to dedicate himself full time to the Waterkeepers Iraq organization. Nature Iraq is proud to have helped this fledgling organization get started and hopes to continue a long and fruitful partnership with Waterkeepers Iraq. Nabil Musa, the Iraq Upper Tigris Waterkeeper is a voice for our local rivers and river-dependent communities. He's taken up the challenge to swim 40 kilometers from Rania to the Dukan Dam to raise attention and promote the cause of clean water and healthy rivers in Kurdistan.

Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA) & Environmental Baseline Studies (EBS)

Nature Iraq is assigned to do the Environmental Baseline Studies (EBS), Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), and Environmental, Social, and Health Impact Assessment (ESHIA) for different development projects in Iraq. These assessments were conducted for the purpose of reporting on the ecological (biodiversity, noise, soil, water, and air quality), cultural heritage, and socio-economic conditions found in the areas of proposed developments. Furthermore, part of the assessment process is to identify the impacts of proposed developments and suggest the appropriate mitigation measures to reduce the impacts. Some of these studies or assessments include developing of environmental and social management plan. A series of baseline surveys were conducted to gather current and historical information on the area of study to enable the teams in understanding the conditions on the ground and come up with a set of conclusions and recommendations aimed at improving the status of both the natural and historical elements of the area as well as the people living within it.

The EBS/ EIA projects were conducted by Nature Iraq in cooperation with our national and international partners. In 2015, Nature Iraq conducted two environmental impact assessments (EIAs), and more than five environmental baseline studies (EBSs) throughout the country.

Key Biodiversity Area Project (KBA)



The Key Biodiversity Areas (KBA) Programme is an initiative of the Iraqi Ministry of Environment and Nature Iraq aimed at identifying, documenting and protecting a network of sites critical for the conservation of Iraq's biodiversity. The KBA Project, launched in 2005, conducted bi-annual field surveys throughout Iraq to identify areas that contained globally important birds, plants, habitats, mammals and fish. Major field research ended in 2011 and was followed by an intensive period of data analysis, quality control, and assessment of the information collected in the field. Since 2013, the core effort has been to assemble the KBA data into a final assessment (in book form) and the selection of 81 Key Biodiversity Areas throughout the country (45 in Iraqi Kurdistan, 12 in Central and Western Iraq, and 23 in Southern Iraq).

Over the course of 2015, an assessment was also conducted of the KBA sites that are impacted by the continuing conflict zone with Daesh (aka the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) that found that fourteen sites primarily in Central and Northern Iraq were within or near this zone.

The last edits of the Key Biodiversity Areas of Iraq book were finalized in November of 2015 and the Ministry of Health and Environment submitted two Forewords to be included in the book. Also the Tablet House agreed to publish the book. All basic design work was finished in January of 2016 and a secondary designer will be hired to prepare the book for printing. The expected release of the book is planned for the spring of 2016. For more information see: <http://www.natureiraq.org/draft-inventory-of-sites.html>.

Camera Trapping of Mammals

Efforts to conduct a more focused mammal survey was initiated by Nature Iraq in 2007, but discontinued pending more capacity building. Field teams always collected anecdotal information on mammals and other fauna including taking photographs of live animals, examination of tracks or any signs of presence in a survey site. Since many mammals are nocturnal, most species are rarely observed during the rapid assessment surveys. However, a more focused survey through the use of camera traps on mammals was undertaken in Kurdistan, northern Iraq, since summer 2009 until now. The camera trap activities are done through periodical visits to the same camera trap station to observe the number of species appearing on the camera traps as well as comparison of the increase of the number of appearance from a year to another. The cameras are set in the stations and retreated after a period of two months, the batteries and SD cards are changed then left there again for another two months. Over the period of camera trapping in 2015, Nature Iraq has been able to capture Persian Leopards *Panthera pardus saxicolor* (EN), Wild Cats *Felis silvestris*, Wild Goats *Capra aegagrus* (VU), Beech Marten *Martes foina* (a new photographic record for Iraq), Golden Jackals *Canis aureus*, Red Foxes *Vulpes vulpes*, Indian Crested Porcupine *Hystrix indica*, and Persian Squirrel *Sciurus anomalus*.



COP21 Exhibition – “The “Mesopotamian Marshes Facing Climate Change and Conflicts”

Project type: Exhibition

Staff: Sarah Hassan (Project Manager) and Sarah Mathieu-Comtois (Project Coordinator)

Location: Paris, France

Timeline: 04/11/2015-12/12/2015 (the exhibition took place 04/12/2015-10/12/2015)

Partners: Iraqi and International Photographers, French Embassy in Iraq, Ministry of Health and Environment of Iraq, Iraqi Embassy in Paris and UNDP.

At the occasion of the 21st Conference of Parties (COP) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), Nature Iraq in collaboration with the Iraqi Minister of Health and Environment participated in *Solutions COP21* multi-actor side event at the Grand Palais with the presentation of an original exhibition on the Mesopotamian Marshes of Iraq. This photographic exhibition outlined the history of the Marshes, and explained the restoration effort of the post-Saddam era. The main focus was the current situation, triggered by the unprecedented drought of 2015 in the context of climate change.

Through this project, Nature Iraq effectively advocated for the protection of the Iraqi Marshlands through:

- An awareness campaign for both international community representatives attending COP21 and the general public on the importance of the Iraqi Marshlands as visible indicators of the effects of climate change and conflict on water resources, aquatic ecosystems and populations;
- The strengthening of Nature Iraq's voice as an advocate of improved integrated water management in Iraq and of the use of shared water resources as vehicles regional cooperation.

An official visit of the exhibition was organized for members of the Iraqi delegation to COP21 as well as French and Middle Eastern official representatives. On December 9, 2016,

the Iraqi Minister of Health and Environment, Dr. Adela Hussein Hammoud, as well as the Deputy Minister of Environment, Dr. Jassim Al-Falahy, the Iraqi Ambassador to Iraq, Dr. Fareed Yasseen and the Head of Water affairs in the French Minister of Environment visited the Grand Palais event. Members of the Kuwaiti, Lebanese, and Iranian delegations, UNESCO representatives also partook in the visit. It was an occasion to exchange on the current situations and possible avenues for the future.

Overall, the *Solutions COP21* event gathered, over the course of seven days, more than 50,000 participants and visitors from a wide range of backgrounds: policymakers, non-governmental organizations, educational institutions, the private sector, and the general public. This diversity and volume allowed Nature Iraq to reach a broad audience. Nature Iraq was also part of the official delegation. This permits to support government officials on environmental issues (water and biodiversity) in the conference center and to exchange on further cooperative actions in the region.

The exhibition will be used in Paris during 2016 and will permit to strengthen communication about the endangered largest wetland in the Middle East. This project has been the first step for further French collaborations on environmental issues.



Regional Environmental Conference: “Water Resources & Biodiversity in the Fertile Crescent”

Project type: Conference

Staff: Sarah Hassan (Project Manager) and Sarah Mathieu-Comtois (Project Coordinator)

Location: Sulaimani, Iraq

Timeline: 15/07/2015-15/02/2016 (the conference is scheduled to take place 27/01/2016-28/01/2016)

Partners: Institute for Regional and International Studies (IRIS) at the American University of Iraq in Sulaimani (AUIS) and the Kurdistan Botanical Foundation (KBF)

In collaboration with the American University of Iraq in Sulaimani's (AUIS) Institute for Regional and International Studies (IRIS) and the Kurdistan Botanical Foundation (KBF), Nature Iraq is convening, on January 27th and 28th, 2016, the first conference on environmental issues in the region. Over the course of two days, key decision-makers and experts on water and biodiversity will have the opportunity to discuss and address the effects of regional management regimes and climate change on natural resources. The program of the conference consists of policy roundtables, technical workshops and public panels that would allow participants to discuss potential solutions to the issues of local and regional management of water and biodiversity.

The objectives of the project are to:

- Provide the context, actions and initiatives taken or ongoing and the prospects for further regional cooperation on shared water resources management;
- Create space to exchange on best practices and initiatives taking place regionally, nationally, and locally;
- Involve local and regional stakeholders, and initiate a dialogue between them leading to operational cooperation.

Over the past months, activities surrounding the conference have included:

- Fundraising
- Background research
- Coordination with implementing partners
- Definition of topics, planned outputs and outcomes, and approaches
- Development of a relevant and coherent list of key speakers and participants
- Invitation of key speakers and participants and follow-ups
- Creation of media outputs

*Note: the conference was originally planned to take place on November 4th and 5th, 2015 but was postponed due to scheduling conflicts with another major conference in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. It is now scheduled to take place in June 2016.