

Assos Mountain (IQ024)

Sulaimani – 35.988911°N 45.213889°E

KBA Criteria: **V**

IBA Criteria: **A3**

IPA Criteria: **A4 and B1**

Area: **20017 ha** - Altitude: **548-2400 m**

Ecoregion: **Zagros Mountains Forest Steppe (PA0446)**

Status: **Unprotected**



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Site Description: This is a mountainous area and its habitat is mountain forest vegetation with oak forest and mountain riverine forest. The latter is found along the streams formed by snowmelt from the top of the mountain as well as along the Lesser Zab River. Assos Mountain, which is part of the Zagros Range, is south of the Lesser Zab, which flows northwest through the site towards Dukan Lake (IQ023). Here the river is fast flowing, moving through a dramatic, narrow gorge as the river leaves the Iranian border. The geology of the area

consists of basic igneous rocks, radiolarian chert, siliceous and calcareous shale, and metamorphic schist and limestone of unknown age, and the soil type is sandy clay.

There are several villages (Isawe, Ashkana, Barozh, Priska and Gwaran to the north of the mountain and Kurkur, Kani Tu, Awazhe, Loter, Sofian and Bardashan to the south). Livestock grazing and small-scale agriculture are the main land management practices.

Key Biodiversity Area Criteria	Notes	
V. Vulnerability Criteria: Presence of Critically Endangered and Endangered species – presence of a single individual or Vulnerable species– 30 individuals or 10 pairs		
<i>Capra aegagrus</i>	Wild goat was not observed but was reliably reported by locals.	
<i>Panthera pardus saxicolor</i>	One Persian leopard was killed on Assos Mountain in January 2011, recorded on video, after reportedly attacking livestock. Also one was observed by locals previously in 2009.	
Important Bird Area Criteria	Observations were made in 2010.	
A2. Restricted-range species	Breeding	Wintering/ Passage
See-see Partridge <i>Ammoperdix griseogularis</i>	80 pairs	
Eastern Rock Nuthatch <i>Sitta tephronota</i> (Resident)	140 pairs	
Menetries's Warbler <i>Sylvia mystacea</i> (Summer visitor)	30 pairs	
White -throated Robin <i>Irania gutturalis</i> (Summer visitor)	30 pairs	
Kurdistan Wheatear <i>Oenanthe xanthopyrma</i> (Summer visitor)	50 pairs	
Eastern Cinereous Bunting <i>Emberiza semenowi</i> (Summer visitor)	30 pairs	
Important Plant Area Criteria		
A4. Site contains national endemic, near endemic, regional endemic and/or regional range-restricted species or infra-specific taxa		
<i>Hesperis kurdica</i> var <i>unguiculata</i> (endemic) and <i>Quercus macranthera</i> , <i>Hesperis straussii</i> , <i>Rhus coriaria</i> , <i>Zeugandra iranica</i> , and <i>Juncus effuses</i> (nationally rare species)		

B1. Site is a particularly species-rich example of defined habitat type

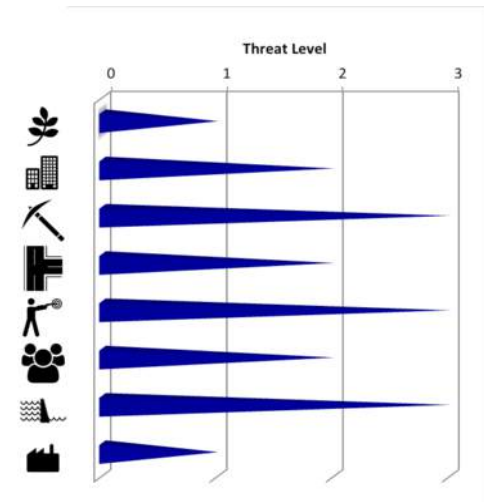
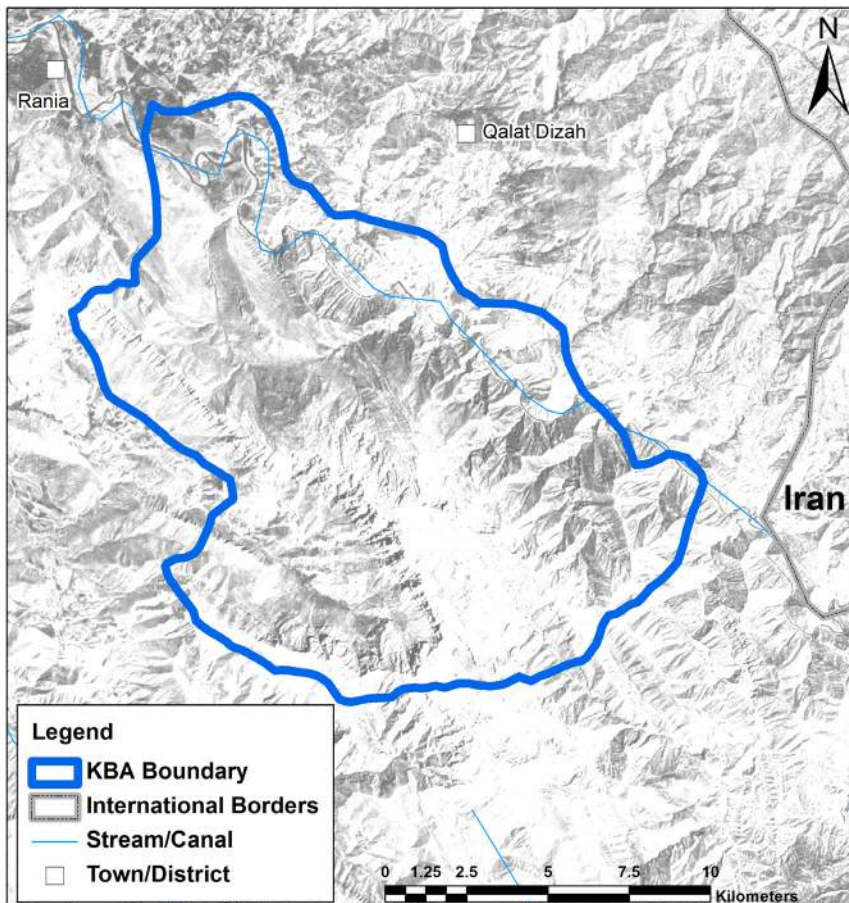
Mountain Forest Vegetation-Oak Forest-Medium Zone & Highest Zone habitat type and Mountain Forest Vegetation–Mountain Riverine Forest habitat type.

Additional Important Bird Observations: During the surveys, 37 bird species were observed. Four Mediterranean and one Eurasian High-Montane biome-restricted species were recorded but at levels that did not trigger inclusion under A3 criterion. The European Roller *Coracias garrulus* and Eastern Cinereous Bunting *Emberiza semenowi* (the latter mentioned above) are Near Threatened.

Other Important Fauna: According to local reports Wild Goat *Capra aegagrus* (Vulnerable) is present in small numbers on the mountain and appears to have decreased in number as a result of extensive hunting. During the interview survey, locals reported that Grey Wolves *Canis lupus* attacks their herds every year, and they also reported a sighting of Brown Bear *Ursus arctos* in 2009. No fish surveys were undertaken but electro-fishing was observed during a trip on Lesser Zab in 2011 and fish stocks in the river were reported as good.

Additional Plant & Habitat Information: This site contains a good population of *Pistacia eurycarpa*, *P. khinjuk*, *Rheum ribes*, *Morus alba*, *Morus nigra*, and *Crataegus azarolus*, which are important both economically and for local heritage.

Conservation Issues: As the Lesser Zab River leaves its gorge and approaches Rania, the land opens up and gravel mining becomes a significant threat. In addition, a dam has been approved where the gorge ends, which will dramatically impact the biodiversity of the river and potentially the lower slopes of Assos Mountain. As this area attracts many hunters from nearby cities and towns, hunting pressure is a significant concern and electro-fishing appears to be common (three groups observed during one trip on the river were exclusively electro-fishing). It was reported that the forestry police will fine people for this and thus most people engaged in this activity do it within the gorge where access to the river is limited. Finally, there are also concerns with housing and road construction within the site.



Recommendations: If the dam project can be cancelled the natural beauty of the area and the river gorge lends this area well to eco-tourism development. The river, particularly in the gorge, is well suited to boating and a pilot program conducted with recently formed kayak and rafting companies in the region could be conducted to train local guides and encourage river tourism in the area. This would demonstrate the value of keeping this section of the river wild. Mining and resource extraction rules should be tightened and/or strengthened to limit the damaging effects of currently gravel mining on Iraqi rivers. Efforts need to be made to decrease the impacts of erosion and restore old mining sites to pre-mining, natural conditions. Forestry police require more access to and time on the river in order to discourage electro-fishing and overall need additional support to oversee this large area.