

## Ga'ara (IQ055)

Anbar - 33.501653°N, 40.436954°E

IBA Criteria: **A1**

IPA Criteria: **A4 and B1**

Area: **89558 ha** - Altitude: **465-655 m**

Ecoregion: **Mesopotamian Shrub Desert (PA1320)**

Status: **Unprotected**



©2010 A HALOOB/NI

**Site Description:** Ga'ara is a large desert site situated c. 60 km to the north of Rutba in northwestern Anbar province. The site is a natural depression in the western desert of Iraq and it surrounded on its southern and eastern parts by elevated rocky ground and cliffs (called Al-Afaeif), which form one of the main landmarks of the area. The two main habitats

studied were desert shrublands and herbaceous vegetation-steppe lands. During the wet seasons the people of Rutba use part of the area for wheat and sunflower agriculture. Dam construction has been noted in several areas of Ga'ara but the team was not able to obtain any information on these projects.

Important Bird Area Criteria	Observations made 2012	
A1. Globally threatened species	Breeding	Wintering/ Passage
Egyptian Vulture <i>Neophron percnopterus</i> (Summer visitor)	<5 pairs	
Important Plant Area Criteria		
<b>A4. Site contains national endemic, near endemic, regional endemic and/or regional range-restricted species or infraspecific taxa</b>		
A near endemic species historically found here is <i>Allium vinicolor</i>		
<b>B1. The site is a particularly species-rich example of a defined habitat type</b>		
Desert-shrubland habitat type and Herbaceous vegetation-Steppe habitat type		

**Additional Important Bird Observations:** During the surveys a total of 24 species were recorded. In addition the site had breeding populations of six Sahara-Sindian Desert biome-restricted species but these did not trigger inclusion under criterion A3.

**Other Important Fauna:** Striped Hyaena *Hyaena hyaena* (Near Threatened) has been reported by locals. Gray Wolf *Canis lupus* attacks on local animal herds have also been reported and considering the desert landscape this suggests the Arabian race *arabs*. Reptiles observed included Egyptian Spiny-tailed Lizard *Uromastix aegyptia* (Vulnerable); Blanford's Short-nosed Desert Lizard *Mesalina brevirostris*, and Arabian Horned Viper *Cerastes gasperettii*.

**Conservation Issues:** Very few human activities influence the site due to its remoteness. The village of Al-Ga'ara consists

of only six houses. The people here are mainly Bedouin roaming the western desert of Iraq, cultivate wheat during the wet seasons (in spring), but only on a very small scale. The main impact is the hunting of birds, especially raptors, during the migration and the winter but this isolated site seems not to be effected by humans during the hot, dry seasons. More information is needed to understand and control the impacts of dam construction in this region.

**Recommendations:** Few true desert sites have been included in the KBA surveys and this remains a gap to be filled in future. We recommend more detailed surveys of the biodiversity of this site. Because it is remote and not fully secure, serious dialogue with Iraqi security authorities is needed to facilitate access.

# KEY BIODIVERSITY AREAS OF IRAQ

