Halgurd Mountain (E13)

Surveyed in summer 2009 only.
Admin Area: Erbil
Coordinates: N 36° 43’ 47” E 44° 53’ 4”
Area: 6392 ha
Altitude: 2700-3150 m [peak: 3613m]

KBA Criteria: V
IPA Criteria: Under assessment
Status: Unprotected
Ecoregion: Zagros Mountains Forest Steppe (PA0446)

Directional information: Halgurd Mountain is located northwest of the town of Haji Omran, approximately 1.25 km south of the Iranian border and 81 km northeast of the city of Erbil.
Site Description: Halgurd Mountain is considered by many to be Iraq’s highest peak at about 3613 m though a nearby peak Cheekha Dar or Black Tent (N 36° 46’ 31” E 44° 55’ 07” ) may also be a contender (Cheekha Dar (2012, World Factbook-Iraq, 2012). Halgurd is part of the Hasarost (or Hasär-i Rōst) Mountain Range near the Iranian border. The mountain retains some snow throughout the summer. Despite the fact that many places on the mountain are heavily mined, the slopes are used for summer grazing. A number of villages at lower elevations grow vegetables and raise livestock.

Key Biodiversity Area Criteria | Notes
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V. Vulnerability Criteria: Presence of Critically Endangered and Endangered species – presence of a single individual or Vulnerable species— 30 individuals or 10 pairs. | Testudo graeca
One pair (seen previously in 2008) and there is suitable habitat for this species.

Important Bird Observations: During the survey 33 species were observed. The site held breeding populations of three Mediterranean, three Irano-Turanian and one Eurasian High-Montane biome-restricted species (Table X) but did these did not trigger inclusion under criterion A3.

Other Important Fauna
Mammals, Reptiles, and other Fauna: This site was not visited during the mammal survey. There are alpine and mountain streams but no fish surveys were conducted.

Plants & Habitats: The surveys identified 50 plant species. Two key habitat types were surveyed.

1. Mountain Forest Vegetation—Thorn-Cushion Vegetation (waypoint N 36° 43’ 35” E 44° 53’ 07” ) where the dominant shrub was Astragalus helgurdensis and the dominant herb was Ferulago
Angulata. Characteristic species are *Astragalus* spp., *Cousinia* spp., *Rumex hastatula*, and *Smyrnium cordifolium*.

2. Alpine Zone Vegetation (waypoint N 36° 43’ 55” E 44° 52’ 23”) where the dominant herb was *Silene odontopetalas*. Characteristic species include *Arabis caucasica* and *Ornithogalum lushanii*.

The ecological condition was slightly disturbed, with an ecological scale of two (the site is more disturbed at the base of the mountain than at higher elevations). The slope was steep (27-45°). The site is located in the Zagros range, where the geology consists of basic igneous rocks, radiolarian cherts, siliceous and calcareous shales, and metamorphic schists and limestones of unknown age, and the soil types are serpentine, sandy clay, and clay. The non-vegetated area covered about 50%.

**Conservation Issues:** Although threats to the area were generally assessed as low, non-extractive human intrusion present a very high threat due to the extensive presence of land mines. Road construction and hunting were assessed as medium threats. There are vegetable farms in the villages surrounding Halgurd Mountain operating on a small scale that could prove a threat if expanded. Garbage and trash dumps have been reported.

**Recommendations:** This site is a very important for plants because it includes two regional endemic and five locally rare species. Their presence gives this site special priority. It is recommended that mines be completely removed and the site receives some form of protected area status and planning.

**References**