

West Hammar (IQ076)**Thi-Qar - 30.83333N° 46.71667E°**KBA Criteria: **V and Ia**IBA Criteria: **A1, A2, A3, A4i, A4ii, and A4iii**IPA Criteria: **B1 and C**Area: **136326 ha** - Altitude: **less than 8 m**Ecoregions: **Tigris-Euphrates alluvial salt marsh (PA0906)**Status: **Unprotected**

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Site Description: Evans (1994) described the Hammar Marshes (IBA039) as an area of wetlands about 3,500 km² in size with the largest open water bodies in the lower Euphrates including a shallow, eutrophic lake approximately 60 km long by up to 20 km wide. The Euphrates River forms its border to the north and the Shatt Al-Arab on the east, to the south and west are desert regions. However, the historical Hammar marsh has now been bisected by the West Qurna and North Rumaila oilfields and is split into two main parts: East Hammar (IQ077 dealt with now in a separate account) and West Hammar. The area is now very different due to intensive building of canals, ditches, embankments, and roads, especially around the edges of the site, as well as considerable agricultural work inside it. Yet it remains a sizable wetland complex extending from Suq Ash-Shuyukh in the west to an embankment running north-south from the Euphrates just east of Chibaish, with the Euphrates River to the north and the Main Outfall Drain (MOD) Canal to the south. Two sources of water feed the West Hammar marshes: the Euphrates River (three openings in the river embankment allow water to enter from the north) and the MOD Canal (via a connecting canal that brings the water northward to the site). Today water depth averages 0.5 to 2m at the deepest point.

As stated above, the Hammar marshes as a whole and particular West Hammar are divided by embankments, canals, and roads into several sub-sites. There are open water areas such as Rashid lake and Buhaira Al-Hilwa; marsh vegetation like Teena, Umm Nakhla, Kermashia, Abu Hedeeda, and Abu Ajaj; and terrestrial areas such as Ghabishiya. The water is brackish and there is fishing using nets and electro-fishing, and hunting of birds. There are rice farms and date palm plantations especially at Umm Nakhla. Many reed houses exist on the embankments. During 2008-2010, drought in the Hammar marshes caused most of the people (M'adan) living on the embankments to leave the area and large canal was dug near Al-Khamissiya to bring water from the MOD northwards to flood the northwestern parts of the site.

The geology of the area is Mesopotamian alluvium, mainly silts. The habitats at the site include: rooted-submerged vegetation; free floating vegetation; marsh beds of *Phragmites australis*, *Typha dominguensis* and *Schoenoplectus littoralis*; seasonally or occasionally flooded lands, and desert shrub vegetation. Twenty-one sub-sites were surveyed within West Hammar.

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>Rafetus euphraticus</i>	Observed by the KBA team and frequently reported by locals	
Ia. Irreplaceability Sub-criterion: Restricted-range species based on global range		
<i>Rafetus euphraticus</i>	See above	
Important Bird Area Criteria	All observations made 2005-2010.	
A1. Globally threatened species	Breeding	Wintering/ Passage
Marbled Duck <i>Marmaronetta angustirostris</i> (Resident)	40 pairs (2005); 700 pairs (2007-2010)	1,800-4,400 (counts)
Basra Reed Warbler <i>Acrocephalus griseldis</i> (Summer visitor)	1,000 pairs (based on sample counts and c.2,000 ha of reedbeds suitable for breeding)	
A2. Restricted-range species	Breeding	Wintering/ Passage
Iraq Babbler <i>Turdoides altirostris</i> (Resident)	2,000 pairs	2-29 (counts 2007-2010)

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<i>Acrocephalus griseldis</i> (Summer visitor)	1,000 pairs	
A3. Biome-restricted species		
Sahara-Sindian Desert biome	Breeding	Wintering/ Passage
White-tailed Lapwing <i>Vanellus leucurus</i> (Resident)	1,000 pairs	240 (highest count)
Spotted Sandgrouse <i>Pterocles senegallus</i> (Resident)	40 pairs	Present
Pallid Scops Owl <i>Otus brucei</i> (Resident)	20 pairs	
Egyptian Nightjar <i>Caprimulgus aegyptius</i> (Summer visitor)	300 pairs	
Hypocolius <i>Hypocolius ampelinus</i> (Summer visitor)	500 pairs	
Greater Hoopoe-Lark <i>Alaemon alaudipes</i> (Resident)	10 pairs	Present - see summer
White-eared Bulbul <i>Pycnonotus leucotis</i> (Resident)	200 pairs	41 (counts 2006-2010)
<i>Acrocephalus griseldis</i> (Summer visitor)	1,000 pairs	
Iraq Babbler <i>Turdoides altirostris</i> (Resident)	2,000 pairs	Present
Dead Sea Sparrow <i>Passer moabiticus</i> (Resident)	1,300 pairs	800-3,000 (counts 2007-2010)
A4i. 1% or more of biogeographical population of a congregatory waterbird species		
	Breeding	Wintering/ Passage
<i>Marmaronetta angustirostris</i>	700 pairs	1,800-4,400 (counts)
Kentish Plover <i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i> (Resident)	1,500 pairs	3,200 (highest count)
Slender-billed Gull <i>Chroicocephalus genei</i> (Resident)	3,600 pairs	880 (highest count)
Whiskered Tern <i>Chlidonias hybrida</i> (Resident)	1,800 pairs	266 (highest count)
A4ii 1% or more of global population of a congregatory seabird or terrestrial species		
<i>Passer moabiticus</i>	1,300 pairs	800-3,000 (counts 2007-2010)
A4iii. Holding congregations of 20,000 waterbirds		
Congregatory Waterbirds		>50,000
Important Plant Area Criteria		
B1. The site is a particularly species-rich example of a defined habitat type		
Inland Standing Water- Aquatic communities- Rooted Submerged Vegetation habitat type; Inland Standing Water- Aquatic communities- Free Floating Vegetation habitat type; Marsh vegetation- Helophytic vegetation- Reedbed, Reedmace bed, or Schoenoplectus bed habitat type and Inland standing water- Flooded communities- Periodically or occasionally flooded land habitat type		
C. The site is identified as an outstanding example of a globally or regionally threatened habitat type.		
This site is located in a critically endangered ecoregion (Tigris-Euphrates alluvial salt marsh) and is a good example of the marshlands of southern Iraq, a globally significant wetland. These marshes are threatened by decreasing water levels and drought, grazing, and water pollution.		

Additional Important Bird Observations: A total of 110 species were recorded. Eastern Imperial Eagle *Aquila heliaca* (Vulnerable), Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata* and Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca* (both Near Threatened) were also seen on migration and in winter, but in sub-IBA threshold numbers; the site also held a widespread breeding population of Ferruginous Duck. The endemic race of Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis iraquensis* and Hooded Crow *Corvus cornix capellanus* (also known as Mesopotamian Crow) were present.

Other Important Fauna: Data were collected in 2007 only and the only mammals found were Rüppell's fox *Vulpes rueppellii* and Golden Jackal *Canis aureus*. No significant reptiles were found.

Fish: Data were collected in 2005-2007 and in 2009, when 17 species were reported. Significant fish according to Coad (2010) were: *Acanthobrama marmid*, *Acanthopagrus cf. latus*, *Alburnus mossulensis*, *Barbus grypus*, *Carasobarbus luteus*, *Carassius*

aureatus, *Ctenopharyngodon idella*, *Cyprinus carpio* (Vulnerable), *Heteropneustes fossilis*, *Leuciscus vorax*, *Liza abu*, *L. klunzingeri*, *Luciobarbus xanthopterus* (Vulnerable), *Mesopotamichthys sharpeyi* (Vulnerable), and *Silurus triostegus*. One marine species *Bathygobius fuscus* was observed.

Additional Plant & Habitat Information: This site contains a good population of *Phragmites australis* and *Typha domingensis*, which are economically and culturally important.

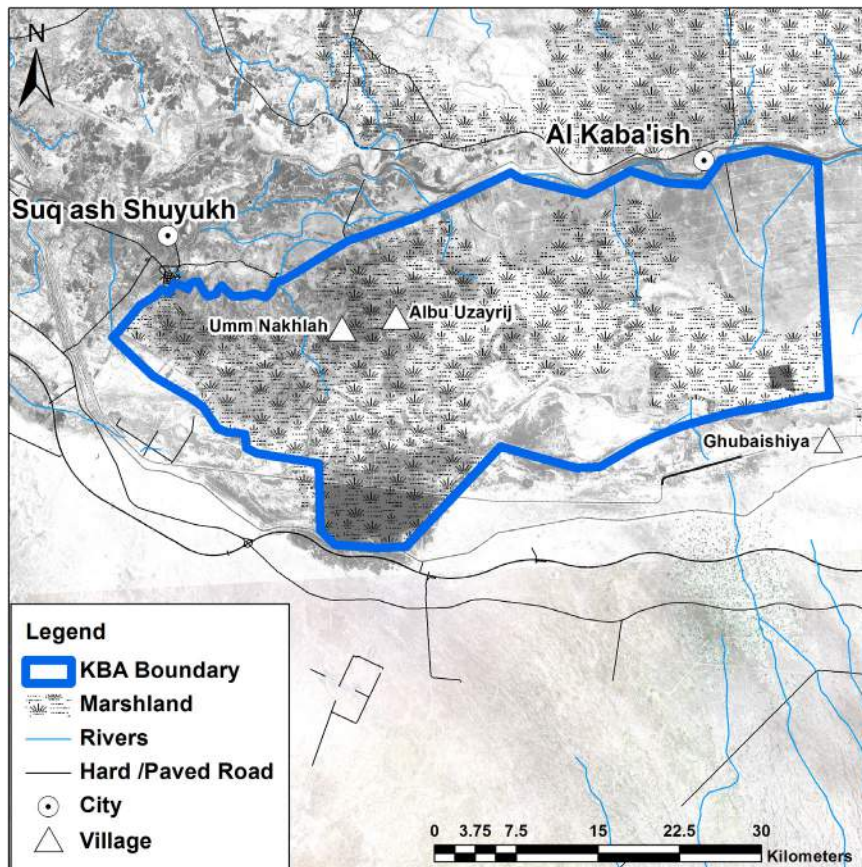
Conservation Issues: This marsh harbours considerable numbers of waterfowl and shorebirds during migration. Large parts of the site are relatively inaccessible, making them important breeding sites for birds. The main threat to the Hammar Marshes in general is the lack of water because of dam building upstream and changes in water management. Also channelization of waterways (for road building and agriculture) has resulted in some areas, particularly in the southern and eastern edges of West Hammar, becoming completely dry. Also

some of the soil embankments that were built to dry out the Hammar Marshes are still blocking waterways. As West Hammar Marsh is adjacent to two major oilfields, West Qurna and Rumaila, the embankments surrounding these oilfields are barriers to full restoration of the original marshes.

Hunting and electro-fishing are practiced heavily throughout much of the area. Residential & commercial development; human disturbance (especially during the bird breeding season), and water pollution from sewage and agricultural wastewater are also of concern as well as the build up of salinity in the marshes overall. Also during two surveys between 2009 and 2010 the introduced and invasive *Tilapia zillii* were recorded

and by the end of the survey period they formed the majority of the catch for most fishermen in the Hammar marshes, displacing many of the native species.

Recommendations: The most important issue needing urgent action is the water supply. Enough water needs to be allocated for the southern marshes in general and Hammar in particular. The New Eden Master Plan for Integrated Water Resource Management in the Marshland Areas (New Eden Group 2006) outlined ways to achieve this goal. The plan has been at least partially adopted by the Ministry of Water Resources, but a more concerted effort by the MoWR and the Iraqi government is needed to confirm a share of water for the marshes.



Hammar Marshes is an important area for flora and fauna and the Iraqi government should highlight the importance of this site and develop an action plan to protect it. For example, a campaign is needed in the oilfields to adapt technologies that have less harmful effects on the biodiversity of the area. Also more in-depth studies of the fisheries are needed and should examine the impact of the invasive *Tilapia zillii*.

