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Iraq identifies 82 sites globally important for the biological diversity that they contain

The result of over 10 years of field surveys, research and analysis has resulted in the selection of 82 individual sites within Iraq that represent some of the most important areas of the country that should be protected for their globally important biological diversity. These sites contain some of Iraq's last remaining important, rare and endangered species of birds, mammals, fish, reptiles, plants as well as threatened ecosystems.

The program was conducted by the Iraqi Ministry of Environment and Nature Iraq, with support from the governments of Italy and Canada and several international conservation organizations and funds. Nature Iraq is an affiliated to BirdLife International, which is one of the world's largest bird conservation organizations. The work involved over 50 Iraqi and international conservation experts and included nine years of field survey work throughout the country, representing some of the most extensive biological fieldwork in the Middle East.

"Our teams were a working partnership between the Ministry of Environment and civil society," said Dr. Azzam Alwash, the CEO of Nature Iraq, looking back on the often herculean efforts of the program, "We faced kidnapping, random violence and political conflicts throughout the work. This program was completely unprecedented in a country where scientific field surveys of such a large scope had not taken place for over 20 years."

The 82 sites are located in every governorate of Iraq (excluding Nineva) with 45 sites in the Kurdish Autonomous region, 11 sites in Central and Western Iraq and 26 sites in southern Iraq. They were identified by applying international criteria for sites that support endangered and threatened species; areas were large populations of important species congregate and sites containing unique and threatened habitats. The final book is still a work in progress but information on the 82 sites is currently available and the full book on the program should be published before the end of the year.

"Protecting these 82 sites is critical to Iraq's future and the Ministry of Environmental has already begun work to develop Iraq's Protected Area Program," stated Anna Bachmann, the KBA Program Manager at Nature Iraq, "The threats against these sites are grave and several sites have likely been impacted by the current conflict with the Islamic State. Additionally, there are certainly more sites that need to be identified but overall the environment in Iraq has been ignored for far to long."

Learn more on the Nature Iraq website at: <http://www.natureiraq.org/draft-inventory-of-sites.html>

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Attachment: Summary from the KBA Inventory (Arabic & English)