

Reviewer	Date of Review	Reviewer	Date of Review
Richard	19 Jul, 16 Aug (approved)	Botanical	
Anna	12 Nov, 13 & 16 Dec, 31 March		
David	2 March		

Razzaza Lake



Surveyed in winter and summer 2008-2010; plant data collected in spring 2010

Admin Area: Karbala and Anbar

Coordinates: N 32' 41" E 43' 40"

Area: 193,000 ha

Altitude: Around 30 m

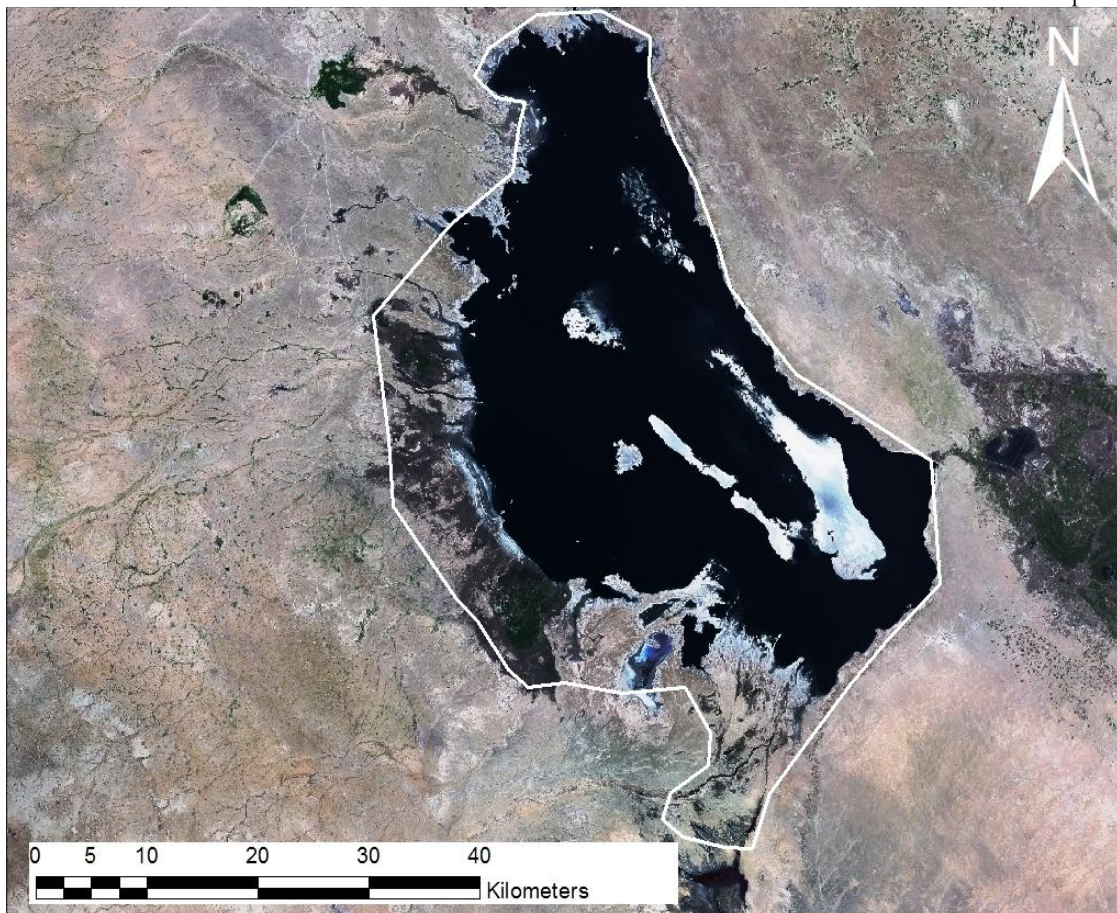
Directional information: This area is located approx 20 km northwest of Karbala, and 50 km southeast of Ramadi. The lake lies north of the main road that links Karbala with 'Ar'ar Border port.

IBA Criteria: A1, A2, A3, A4i,
and A4iii

IPA Criteria: Av, B1, and C

Status: Unprotected

Ecoregion(s): Arabian desert and East
Sahero-xeric shrublands



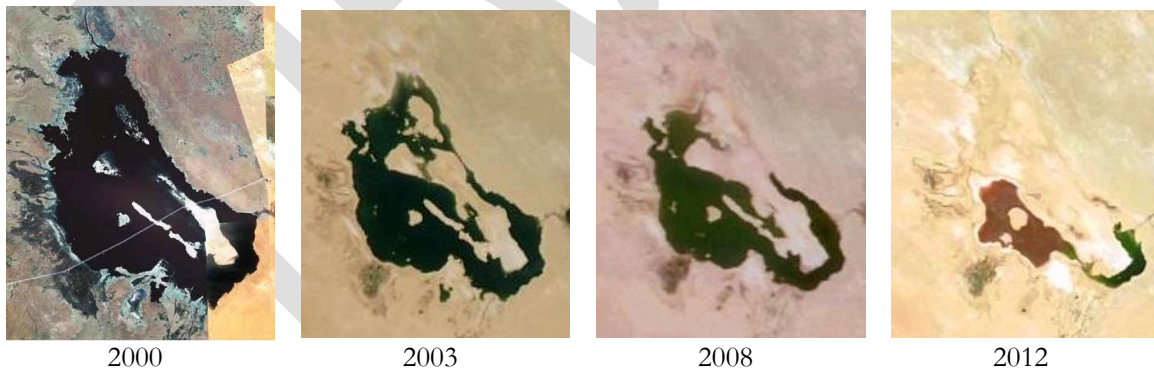
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The eastern side of Razzaza Lake (Photo by Mudhafar A. Salim, 2009)

Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Orange	Orange	Red	Red

Site Description: In Evans (1994), this area is listed under the name “Bahr Al Milh” (IBA 021) but it is more commonly referred to as Razzaza Lake. Evans states that the lake was formed in the 1970s as a second storage reservoir to control floods on the Euphrates. Razzaza Lake is connected to Habbaniya Lake by a narrow canal running through semi-desert, called Sin-Al-Thibban Canal. Razzaza used to be a large, deep lake, but it is now characterized by very high salinity levels, which have increased during the past ten years due to the shortage in water it receives and increased evaporation during Iraq’s very dry, hot summers. Locals report that water levels have declined and the lake is likely now to be only 5–10 m deep. The extensive shrinkage of the lake during the 2000s is graphically seen in a series of satellite images (below). These are not season changes but are based on water management issues that need to be resolved regarding water allocation to Razzaza via the Sin-Al-Thibban Canal from Habbaniya Lake. The delineated map above is based on the recent historical extent of the lake, which the lake would likely return to if these management decisions are resolved.



There is little to no fishing (though there was in the past) and only a salt tolerant species *Tilapia zilli*. (and introduced species with the local name, Shanag) is reported. A few of these fish were observed dead on the edge of the lake during the survey of 2008. There is a police station on the Eastern margin of the lake. Salinity is high and there were no plants in the lake, except along some of the seasonal drainages and the canal that brings sewage water to the lake. Islands in the lake provide

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breeding areas for gulls and potential breeding ground for Greater Flamingo. During the summer 2010 visit, no changes were found in comparison with the previous survey. The lake still seriously lacks water and most of the birds were found concentrated at the basin of the sole source of water that brings sewage from Karbala. The Sin-Al-Thibban Canal (that brings water from Habbaniya) was still closed by the Anbar government for unknown reasons. Two main towns lie close to the lake: Ain-Al-Tamr (to the southwest) and Al-Rahaliya (west). The area west of the town of Ain Al-Tamr was part of the survey area. There are a lot of date farms within the west edge of the site. The area to the south and east is shrublands. A paved road passes through the site. All the date farms depend on the water of wells and rains as there is no river or canal in the area. Al-Rahaliya is situated near the upper portion of the lake to the southeast of Ramadi and Falluja and to the south of Habbaniya Lake (AN1). It is a small town on the western bank of Razzaza Lake, which includes a saline shallow-water area. The semi-desert areas around here feature xerophytes and halophytes but also contains recently planted date palm trees and orchards near Al-Rahaliya town. Al-Taar area is a depression in the desert to the west of Karbala and south of the lake that collects rainwater from the relatively higher lands to the south and west. There are a lot of trucks moving around and causing extensive disturbance and dust. There is gravel mining located near this area..

The four sub-sites surveyed at Razzaza Lake from 2008 to 2010 include:

Sub-Site Code	Sub-Site Name	IBA Code	Coordinates						
			North			East			
ME5	Razzaza, East	IBA 021	32	33	9	43	53	57	
KR1	Al-Taar	IBA 021	32	28	55	43	44	12	
KR2	Ein Al-Tamr	IBA 021	32	32	57	43	30	11	
AN10	Al-Rahaliya	IBA 021	32	46	00	43	27	00	

Important Bird Area Criteria	Observations made 2008-2010. Unless stated otherwise numbers are estimates based on extrapolations using area/transect counts and area of known habitat (see methodology on p. XX).	
A1. Globally threatened species		
	Breeding	Passage /Wintering
Greater Spotted Eagle <i>Aquila clanga</i> (Winter visitor)		35 (highest count)
Marbled Duck <i>Marmaronetta angustirostris</i> (Resident and winter visitor)	80-200 pairs (counts).	2000-4350 (counts)
A2. Restricted-range species		
	Breeding	Passage /Wintering
Iraq Babbler <i>Turdoides altirostris</i> (Resident)	300 pairs (2008-2009)	10 (count 2006)
A3. Biome-restricted species		

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	Breeding	Passage /Wintering
Irano-Turanian		
Ménétries's Warbler <i>Sylvia mystacea</i> (Summer visitor)	35 pairs	
Sahara-Sindian Desert		
Macqueen's Bustard <i>Chlamydotis macqueenii</i> (Winter visitor)	Few individuals seen in summer by locals and hunters	
White-tailed Lapwing <i>Vanellus leucurus</i> (Resident)	950 pairs	80-420 (count 2008-2010)
Cream-coloured Courser <i>Cursorius cursor</i> (Resident)	280 pairs	1 (count 2008-2010)
Spotted Sandgrouse <i>Pterocles senegallus</i> (Resident)	700 pairs	Seen in summer
Egyptian Nightjar <i>Caprimulgus aegyptius</i> (Summer visitor)	640 pairs	
Brown-necked Raven <i>Corvus ruficollis</i> (Resident)	30 pairs	Seen in summer
Grey Hypocolius <i>Hypocolius ampelinus</i> (Summer visitor)	300 pairs	
Bar-tailed Lark <i>Ammomanes cinctura</i> (Resident)	80 pairs	1 (count 2008-2010)
Black-crowned Sparrow-lark <i>Eremopterix nigriceps</i> (Resident)	30 pairs	1 (count 2008-2010)
Desert Lark <i>Ammomanes deserti</i> (Resident)	Found in the area	2 (count 2008-2010)
Temminck's Lark <i>Eremophila bilopha</i> (Resident)	55 pairs	2 (count 2008-2010)
Greater Hoopoe Lark <i>Alaemon alaudipes</i> (Resident)	280 pairs	6 (count 2008-2010)
White-eared Bulbul <i>Pycnonotus leucoti</i> (Resident)	270 pairs	8 (count 2008-2010)

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Iraq Babbler <i>Turdoides altirostris</i> (Resident)	90 pairs	Seen in summer
Dead Sea Sparrow <i>Passer moabiticus</i> (Resident)	This wetland provides suitable breeding habitat for this species, however, no nests were found.	200-600 (count 2008-2010)
A4i. 1% or more of biogeographical population of a congregatory waterbird species		
	Breeding	Passage /Wintering
Greater Flamingo <i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i> (Resident)	Not confirmed but probably 350-750 pairs.	1500-3500 (counts)
Slender-billed Gull <i>Chroicocephalus genei</i> (Resident)	600-1800 pairs (counts)	2300-4500 (counts)
Red-crested Pochard <i>Netta rufina</i> (Resident)	400-700 pairs (counts)	1000-2800 (counts)
Whiskered Tern <i>Chlidonias hybrida</i>		560-1500 (counts)
Kentish Plover <i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i> (Resident)	430-900 pairs (counts)	700-1800 (counts)
White-tailed Lapwing <i>Vanellus leucurus</i> (Resident)	950 pairs	80-420 (count 2008-2010)
A4iii. Holding congregations of 20,000 waterbirds or 10,000 pairs of seabirds of one or more species		
	Breeding	Passage /Wintering
Different species of congregatory waterfowl and waders		>28,000 (counts)

Additional Important Bird Observations: During the surveys 42 bird species were observed. Razaza Lake provides vast areas of mudflats that are suitable habitat for large numbers of migrant and wintering waterfowl and waders. There is a resident population of Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus roseus* that might use this wetland for breeding.

Important Other Fauna: The valleys and dense plant cover (including orchards) on the western side of the lake and the flat arid/semi-desert areas on the eastern and southern parts of the lake might harbor considerable wildlife diversity; however, these areas were not surveyed during the KBA surveys. According to local reports, mammals that occur at this site include: Rüppell's Fox *Vulpes rueppellii*, Golden Jackal *Canis aureus*, Indian Grey Mongoose *Herpestes edwardsii*, Jungle Cat *Felis chaus* and Wild Cat *Felis silvestris* and other common species.

Fish: Data were not collected due to the absence of a fish expert during the 2008-2010 surveys.

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Plants & Habitats: In total, 48 identified terrestrial and about four aquatic and semi-aquatic plant species were identified. This site is located in the sub-desert phyto-geographical zone and two main habitats were observed:

- 1- Desert shrubs (N: 32° 33' 09" E: 43° 53' 57") dominated by *Tamarix auherana*, *T. macrocarpa*, *Prosopis farcta*, *Zygophyllum fabago*, *Nitraria retusa*, and *Haloxylon salicornicum*
- 2- Marsh vegetation- helophytic vegetation- Reed bed, reedmace bed, and Schoenoplectus bed (N: 32° 28' 55" E: 43° 44' 12") dominated by *Phragmites australis*, *Juncus acutus*, *Aeluropus lagapoides*, *Salicornia herbacea*, and *Schoenoplectus littoralis*

The ecological condition was between very disturbed on the scale of four to most disturbed on the scale of five. The geology of the area is marls, siltstones, gypsum/anhydrite, and limestone bands, mainly silts.

Conservation Issues: Razzaza Lake harbors considerable numbers of waterfowl (particularly the globally threatened *Marmaronetta angustirostris*) and its mudflats attract large number of waders and shorebirds during their passage. It also has a considerable number of inaccessible marshlands that are important for breeding birds, in addition to the islands that are perfect for breeding gull and tern species in quite good numbers. The main threat to the Razzaza area is the lack of water (rated very high during the survey periods), since the main water source (from Habbaniya Lake via the Sin-Al-Thibban Canal) is completely blocked. This affects the quantity and quality of water and without this input Razzaza becomes increasingly saline. The second threat, also rated very high, is pollution from a drainage canal. This canal collects sewage and agricultural drainage from the adjacent areas and is currently one of the only water input sources for Razzaza. In addition, two threats are rated high: human intrusion and disturbance (especially during the bird breeding season), and over-exploitation and persecution. The latter threat is represented by hunting of birds (in particular waterfowl) and fishing. Fishing is considered a serious threat due to the limited fish resource in the lake caused by lack of water and its saline condition. Other threats (rated medium) were observed in the lake and surrounding areas.

Recommendations: For this lake to offer adequate habitat for birds and fish, water must be released into it from Habbaniya Lake via the Sin-Al-Thibban Canal and as such, an assessment of overall water resources in the area and their potential should be made. Additional water in Razzaza will improve the circulation of water, reduce salinity of the lake and provide more habitat for birds, plants and fish. Communication and coordination with the regional governmental bodies are also necessary to begin restoration of this important lake. These should include the Ministry of Water Resources and Anbar and Karbala Governorate authorities. Given the current drought conditions, there may be a tendency to save water upstream, which causes increased drought conditions downstream. These issues may require better coordination between different governorates to manage limited resources more sustainably and for all communities as well as for biodiversity. In addition, educational programs on the environment and conservation that target the local residents and policemen will be necessary. It is also recommended to continue surveying Razzaza Lake and the surrounding area to study thoroughly the life circle of the threatened species that live in or regularly visit this wetland. It is also highly recommended to strengthen the relationship with the locals of the

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area and pay more attention to those who are keen in protecting the site by encouraging the development of a Local Conservation Group (LCG).

DRAFT