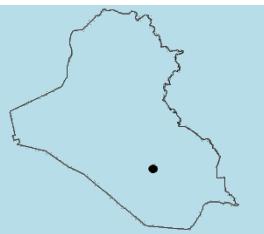


Reviewer	Date of Review	Reviewer	Date of Review
Botanical reviewer		David	2 March
Anna	12 Nov, 20 Nov, 22 Mar	Fish reviewer	
Richard	21 Nov (approved)	Reptile reviewer	

# Sawa Lake and the surrounding area (MT1)



Surveyed in winter and summer of 2010

Admin Area: Muthanna

Coordinates: N 31° 18' 50" E 45° 00' 00"

Area: 20,000 ha

Altitude: 20–30 m

KBA Criteria: V

IBA Criteria: A1

IPA Criteria: C ??

Status: Unprotected

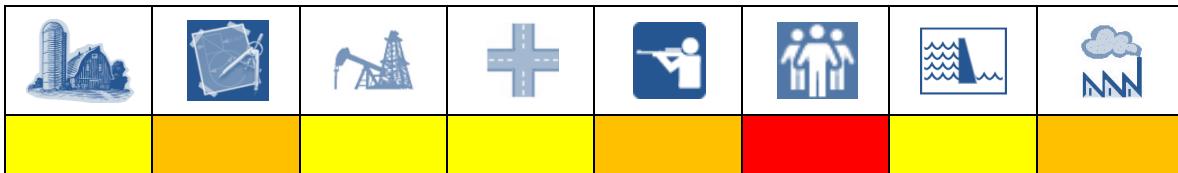
Ecoregion: Arabian Desert and East Sahero-Arabian Xeric Shrublands

Directional information: Sawa Lake and the surrounding desert area is located about 22 km southwest of Samawa city, to the west of Mamlaha-Shinnafiya desert motorway, and to the south of the western branch of Euphrates.



View north at the western edge of Sawa Lake (Photo by Mudhafar A. Salim, 2010)

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Botanical reviewer		David	2 March
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**Site Description:** Sawa Lake is located at the eastern edge of the southern desert close to the Euphrates River. This lake has no inlet or outlet and is fed by groundwater that originates from the higher western desert areas. The only plant cover is scattered low desert shrubs. Most of the delineated area consists of desert and semi-desert with scattered desert shrubs, while the lake itself forms a small portion of the site. Local people reported that the original size and depth of the lake were greater than currently, and this is likely due to declining underground waters in the region. There was a small area of construction for a recreational center on the southeastern corner of the lake but it appeared that this complex was abandoned by the time of the survey.

Important Bird Area Criteria		
<b>A1. Globally threatened species</b>		
	Breeding	Passage /Wintering
Marbled Duck <i>Marmaronetta angustirostris</i> (Resident)		140 (counts, 2010)
Macqueen's Bustard <i>Chlamydotis macqueenii</i> (Winter visitor)		Reported frequently by locals and hunters in the western parts.

**Additional Important Bird Observations:** During the surveys, 25 species were observed in Sawa Lake and the surrounding areas. In addition to the species in the table, the site held large numbers of waterfowl, mainly ducks and Coot *Fulica atra*, but these did not trigger inclusion under IBA criteria. The endemic race of Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis iraensis* and the Iraqi race of Hooded Crow *Corvus cornix capellanus* (Mesopotamian Crow) occur, as well as the near-endemic Grey Hypocolius *Hypocolius ampelinus*. Locals and hunters reported the frequent occurrence of “different kinds of raptors” especially in spring and autumn, so the site may be important as a staging area.

**Other Important Fauna:** The desert area on the western side of the lake, the fresh wetland strip (represented by the western branch of Euphrates River including the orchards), and the flat arid/semi-desert areas over the southern parts of the lake might harbor considerable wildlife diversity, but were not well surveyed by the KBA team. According to local reports, mammals present include Rüppell's Fox *Vulpes rueppellii*, Striped Hyena *Hyaena hyaena* (Near Threatened), Honey Badger *Mellivora capensis*, Indian Grey Mongoose *Herpestes edwardsii*, and as well as common species. Reptiles found included: Water Snake (maybe *Natrix tessellata*).

**Fish:** No survey was conducted, but local fishermen reported a variety of species in the lake.

**Plants & Habitats:** Only ten terrestrial plant species were identified and one species in the lake, *Chara* sp. (lower plant). Two habitat types were surveyed:

- 1- Inland standing water- pond or lake (N: 31° 19' 02.8" E: 44° 59' 37.2")
- 2- Desert- desert shrub (N: 31° 19' 03.5" E: 45° 00' 40.1"). Characteristic species are *Tamarix aucherana*, *Seidlitzia rosmarinus*, *Suaeda* sp., *Nitraria retusa*, and *Haloxylon salicornicum*.

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The site was rated as four on the ecological scale (very disturbed), due to hunting, fishing, garbage/littering and livestock grazing. The geology is sedimentary, the soil is sandy-clay and the non-vegetated percentage was 85% in the lake and 30% in areas around the lake.

**Conservation Issues:** As Sawa Lake represents a unique, closed water body in Iraq it is an important site to protect for its scientific, educational and biodiversity value. Only human intrusion was considered a high threat because Sawa Lake is the only water body available for the city of Samawa and its surroundings. It is a popular picnic area but this has caused a great deal of garbage accumulation everywhere around the lake. There appears to be no effort by visitors or government to manage or remove garbage from the site. Because there is no plant cover on the lake (reedbeds, etc), water birds have few places to shelter from visitors or hunters. Three threats were classified as 'high': urban expansion (the team was informed that the lake was submitted for an investment project which might involve new construction around the lake); hunting, primarily represented by fishing (mainly netting) and hunting of birds, and pollution caused by the frequent visitors. Other threats (agriculture, resource extraction, transportation & service corridors, and natural systems modification) were considered 'low'.

**Recommendations:** Further detailed ecological studies of the lake and surrounding desert area are recommended. A fisheries survey is needed to assess which species occur in the lake. There should be a local awareness program for weekend visitors and local hunters. Educational programs should be implemented in coordination with Muthanna University and the Environment Headquarters in Muthanna, focusing on reducing pollution and garbage and increasing general environmental awareness of local stakeholders.