

## Sinnaf Seasonal Wetlands (IQ069)

Missan - 31.86667°N 47.31667°E

IBA Criteria: **A1, A4i, and A4iii**

IPA Criteria: **B1**

Area: **26049 ha** - Altitude: **3-12 m**

Ecoregions: **Tigris-Euphrates alluvial salt marsh (PA0906)**

Status: **Unprotected**



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**Site Description:** This site consists of a large complex of marshes to the east of the River Tigris and north of Umm An-Ni'aaj in Hawizeh Marsh (IQ073), a large part of which was described by Evans (1994) as an Important Bird Area (IBA030). Sinnaf is a seasonally flooded wetland that receives water during the rainy season in winter from uplands in Iran located to the north and east, which has made the area important for large numbers of passage waders using the shallow mudflats and large numbers of ducks. Many globally, regionally and restricted range species have been recorded here. The geology of the area is gravel, sand, silt and alluvium, mainly sandy clay and it is generally flat in all directions. The habitats are salt pioneer swards vegetation and desert herbaceous vegetation with approximately 50% of the area unvegetated. Most of the area contains saline soils dominated by halophytic plants.

Approximately 2-3 years ago, Iran began blocking water from the Iranian highlands, much of which reached the area via the Dweirej and Teeb Rivers. This, as well as a reported decline in rainfall, has reduced the water supply to Sinnaf. The area still receives a good amount of water during the rainy season but now mainly only from Iraqi lands. During the KBA surveys, three sub-sites were visited to cover the eastern, middle (what Evans called Haur Chubaisah (IBA030)) and western parts of Sinnaf. Only a portion of the western part has permanent water due to the presence of sewage pipes from the city of Amara, which attracts large numbers of waders and gulls. Parts of the area have been converted into farms, and others between the lower embankment and the main Amara-Msharah road, were converted into fish farms that receive water from the Msharah River that runs along part of the southern side of the site.

Important Bird Area Criteria		All observations made 2005-2010.	
<b>A1. Globally threatened species</b>		<b>Breeding</b>	<b>Wintering/ Passage</b>
Marbled Duck <i>Marmaronetta angustirostris</i> (Resident)		Not found	200 (counts 2006)
<b>A4i. 1% or more of biogeographical population of a congregatory waterbird species</b>			
		<b>Breeding</b>	<b>Wintering/ Passage</b>
Slender-billed Gull <i>Chroicocephalus genei</i> (Resident)			> 3000
<b>A4iii. Holding congregations of 20,000 waterbirds or 10,000 pairs of seabirds of one or more species</b>			
Congregatory Waterbirds			More than 35,000 individuals (waterfowl and waders)
<b>Important Plant Area Criteria</b>			
<b>B1. The site is a particularly species-rich example of a defined habitat type</b>			
Salt pioneer swards vegetation			

**Additional Important Bird Observations:** During the survey 46 species were observed. Eastern Imperial Eagle *Aquila heliaca* (Vulnerable) occurred in winter and Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa* (Near Threatened) on passage and in winter, but both in numbers below the IBA threshold. The site also held five Sahara-Sindian Desert biome-restricted species breeding but this did not trigger inclusion under criterion A3. The endemic race of Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis iraquensis* is resident. The Sinnaf area is also important for Slender-billed Gull *Chroicocephalus geneias* and large numbers were found after the breeding season - see the table above. This population might breed elsewhere in the marshlands of southern Iraq, but appears to use this site frequently.

**Other Important Fauna:** Several mammal species were found or reported in Sinnaf, including Honey Badger *Mellivora capensis*, Striped Hyena *Hyaena hyaena* (Near Threatened), Gray Wolf *Canis lupus* and Wild cat (either *Felis silvestris* or *F. chaus*). Gazelles were reported to the north of Sheeb (east of Sinnaf – outside the delineated area) but none were found during the surveys.

**Conservation Issues:** The most serious threat Sinnaf Seasonal Wetlands face today is the lack of water caused by diversion and/or blocking of water from Iran. Human disturbance such as intrusion by border police or those visiting the area for recreation and oil development in the area also have a very high impact. Hunting of birds poses a serious threat to waterfowl populations though this is mainly practiced in the wetlands of western Sinnaf. The southwestern part of the site where the water is permanent is protected by bird hunters, who mainly hunt flamingos and ducks each winter. Farm fields and fish farms are present in the southern part of the site. Although the sewage water has helped to attract many birds and probably other species to the area, dumping of this untreated water poses a long-term health risk to these species and to people who consume them.

**Recommendations:** In order to fully restore the much larger area of Sinnaf, negotiated agreements with Iran will be required to allow waters to flow once again from the eastern uplands across the border. Monitoring of this site on a regular basis is recommended and any educational campaigns and other

conservation actions should focus on protection of the key mudflats that harbor large numbers of migrant and wintering birds and areas in the southwestern part of Sinnaf that have high threats due to various human impacts.

