

# Al-Tharthar Lake and Al-Dhebaeji Fields (SD2), (KBA~~XXX~~)



Surveyed in summer 2009, winter, summer, and fall 2010, spring 2011 and spring 2012

Admin Area: Salah-Ad-Din and Anbar

Coordinates: N 34°16'29.95" E 43°18'28.39"

Area: 340,600 ha

Altitude: 38 m

KBA Criteria: V

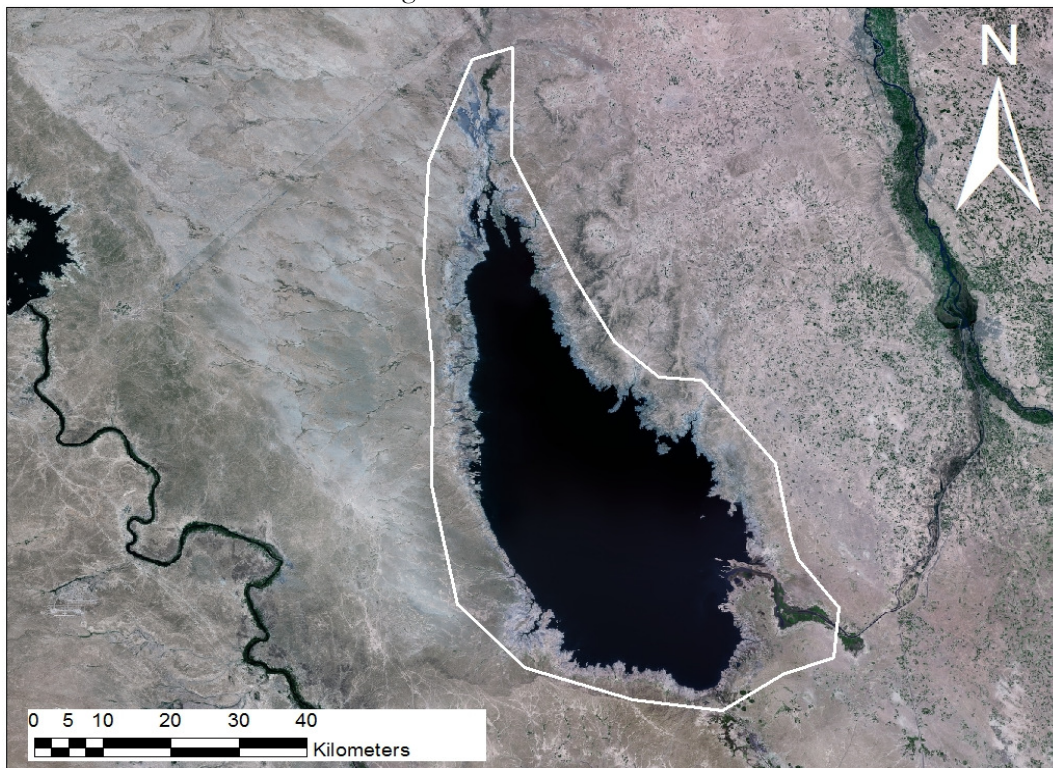
IBA Criteria: A1

IPA Criteria: Not assessed

Status: Unprotected

Ecoregion: Arabian Desert and East Sahero-Arabian Xeric Shrublands (PA1303) and Mesopotamian Shrub Desert (PA1320)

Directional information: The lake is on the border between the governorates of Salah-Ad-Din (to the east) and Anbar (to the west). The access point, near Ein Al-Faras (The Horse Eye) at the eastern edge of the lake, can be reached from Salah-Ad-Din by taking a paved road near Al Oja township toward Al-Dhebaeji fields. From Anbar it can be accessed through Al-Geraeshi area.





The shores of Al Tharthar Lake are a base camp for fishermen (photo by Omar F. Al-Sheikhly, 2010)



**Site Description:** This area near the northern part of Tharthar valley extends to the west of Salah-Ad-Dinand to the east of Anbar. The landscape includes gravel hillsides covered in grass near the lake and a number of flat, sandy near-islands attached to the lake shore extending out into the middle of the lake distinguish this site from west Al-Tharthar. The wide areas of open, arid steppe and cultivated areas of wheat and corn near the Al-Debe'e steppes harbor scattered halophytic vegetation and are considered one of the most important grazing areas in Iraq as a whole. While these are invaluable for cattle, they are also considered the main wintering grounds for many threatened species of migrant birds and mammals such as Saker Falcon *Falco cherrug*, Houbara or McQueen's Bustard *Chlamydotis macqueenii*, and Sociable Lapwing *Vanellus gregarius*; Arabian Oryx *Oryx leucoryx* also occurred formerly (Al-Sheikhly, 2011). This habitat dominates the landscape of the north and northeast rib of Al Tharthar Lake. Poor security conditions did not allow the field team to cover most of the targeted area during the winter 2009 visit. The table below lists the two sub-sites that were surveyed.

Sub-Site Code	Sub-Site Name	Nearest Town	IBA Code	Coordinates	
				North	East
SD2	Al-Tharthar Lake & Al-Dhebaeji Field	Tikrit	007	34°16'29.95"	43°18'28.39"
AN2	Western Edge of Al-Tharthar Lake	Ramadi	007	33°44'28.67"	43° 8'21.21"

Key Biodiversity Area Criteria	Notes
<b>V. Vulnerability Criteria: Presence of Critically Endangered (CR) and Endangered (EN) species – presence of a single individual or Vulnerable species (VU) – 30 individuals or 10 pairs.</b>	
<i>Rafetus euphraticus</i>	There were two observations of Euphrates Softshell Turtle (EN): the first in fall 2010, a resting adult on the lake shore; the second in Spring 2011, an adult trapped and collected by fishermen.
<b>Important Bird Area Criteria</b>	
<b>A1. Globally threatened species</b>	
	Breeding
	Wintering/Passage

Marbled Duck <i>Marmaronetta angustirostris</i> (Resident and winter visitor)	2-3 pairs (2009-2010)	43 (count,2010)
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**Additional Important Bird Observations:** During the surveys 54 bird species were seen. In addition to those listed in the table above Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus*, European Roller *Coracias garrulus*, and Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa* (all Near Threatened) were recorded on passage and the endemic race of Hooded Crow *Corvus cornix capellanus* was present.

**Other Important Fauna:** Golden Jackal *Canus aureus* was observed regularly at the site. Striped Hyaena *Hyaena hyaena* was reported by locals and Caracal *Caracal caracal* was reported killed by local hunters near the lake edge. The reptiles Turkish Gecko *Hemidactylus turcicus* and Egyptian Spiny-tailed Lizard *Uromastix aegyptia* were observed at the site as well.

**Fish:** A survey was carried out in the winter of 2009. Fish caught by local fishermen tended to have good growth with some of the largest fish recorded for Iraq. Fishing was by nets with mesh size of approximately 2 to 10cm and a daily catch of about 30 kg/boat-day. About 100 boats were observed during this survey. Ten fish species were recorded with a catch ratio (based on sample) of: *Aspius vorax* (15% of the catch), *Barbus xanthopterus* (31%), *B. luteus* (12%), *B. sharpeyi* (3%), *Carassius auratus* (3%), *Cyprinion kais* (3%), *Cyprinus carpio* (15%), *Silurus triostegus* (3%), *Chondrostom aregium* (3%) and *Liza abu* (12%).

**Plants&Habitats:** The site contains about 38 species. Four main habitat types observed within the Al-Tharthar Lake and Al Dhebaeji Field area in the GPS coordinate (N: 34°16'29.95" E: 43° 8'21.21") were:

1. Inland standing water-Aquatic communities-rooted submerged vegetation, characterized by *Vallisneria spiralis*, *Potamogeton crispus* and *Potamogeton perfoliatus*.
2. Flooded communities-periodically or occasionally flooded land dominated by *Cyperus* sp., *Rumex dentatus*, *Polygonum argyrocoleon*, *Polygonum* sp. and *Bacopa monniera*.
3. Marsh vegetation-Helophytic vegetation-reedbeds, characterized by *Phragmites australis*.
4. Terrestrial vegetation-desert shrub characterized by *Tamarix* sp., *Albaga maurorum*, *Atriplex leucoclada* and *Cornulaca aucher*.

The ecological condition was moderately disturbed, with an ecological scale of 3. The area was flat with open exposure in all directions. The geology of the area are Lower Faris Series (marls, siltstones, gypsum/anhydrites, and limestone bands) and Euphrates limestone (shelly dolomitized limestones).

**Conservation Issues:** Agricultural threats were considered very high. There are many wheat and corn fields along the way to the site, mainly restricted to Al-Dhebaeji on the Salah-Ad-Din side and Al-Geraeshi on the Anbar side. Center pivot irrigation was observed especially on the Salah-Ad-Din side of the lake.

The main fish landing sites for fish sold in the local markets of Tikrit are located at Ein Al-Faras on the Salah-Ad-Din side of the lake and near the former presidential complex at Al-Tharthar on the Anbar side. In both locations many fishermen were present. Fishermen were generally observed to be using legal fishing nets (neither small mesh-size nets or electro-fishing are allowed) but fishing was still considered a very high threat. The lake is deep, reaching levels of nearly 80m at some points, which renders illegal fishing procedures such as electro-fishing largely useless. Other human impacts appear relatively minimal, particularly given the lake's size. Even so, over-fishing remains a threat that may become more severe in the future.

**Recommendations:** It is urgent to establish Stronger fishing regulations and more fisheries surveys are urgently needed, in addition to a broader environmental action plan. Though some unsustainable practices often seen in Iraq are not present here, it is not clear if the harvest levels are sustainable. It is also recommended that water quality surveys be carried out. The size of the surrounding steppes also warrants

further field surveys. Such surveys will require the cooperation and assistance of both the national Iraqi police and army and local authorities to facilitate access and mobility for survey teams.

**Reference**

Al-Sheikhly, O.F. (2011). A survey report on raptor hunting and trade in Iraq. WME (6):1.

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