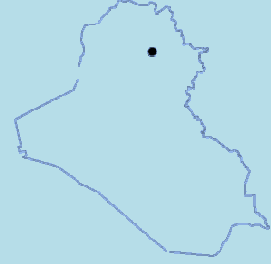


Altun Kopri Marsh (E3)



Surveyed in winter in 2007, 2008 and 2010 and summer 2007-2009.

Admin Area: Kirkuk

Coordinates: N 35° 42' 57" E 44° 7' 10"

Area: 1575 ha

Altitude: 256 m

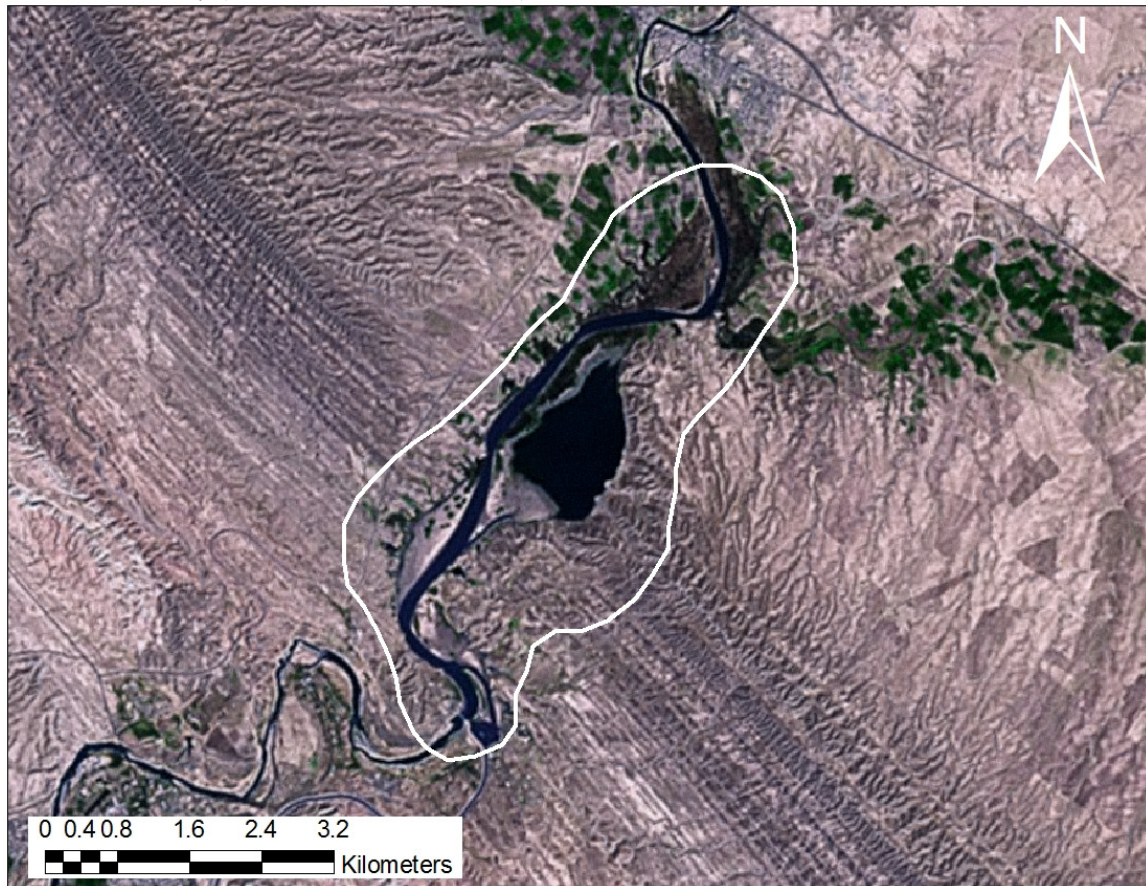
Directional information: This site is located to the southwest of Altun Kopri Town approximately 55 km southeast of Erbil City (between Erbil and Kirkuk).

IBA Criteria: A2 and A4iii

IPA Criteria: Under assessment

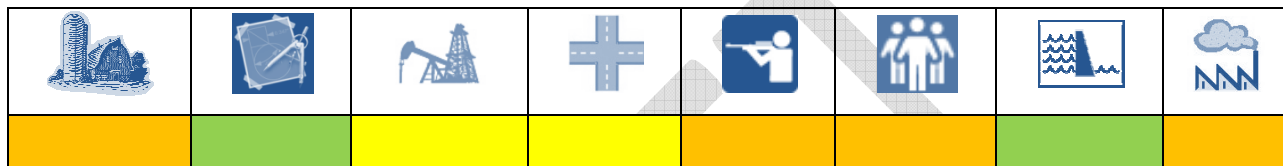
Status: Unprotected

Ecoregion: Middle East Steppe (PA0812)





Altun Kopri Marsh facing northeast (photo by Korsh Ararat, 2009)



Site Description: The site is a wetland (similar in characteristics to the southern marshes, but rare in Kurdistan) on the Lesser (Little) Zab River and is surrounded by low foothills and steppe/grasslands. Located below the town of Altun Kopri, the main marshland area is upstream of (and is likely partially formed by) the Dibis embankment dam, which was constructed between 1960 and 1965 to divert water from the Lesser Zab into the Kirkuk Irrigation Project. The river is lined on both sides by tall reed beds, but the core area of the marsh is on the southeast bank of the river, surrounded on the southeastern side by higher land. Much of the area is used for grazing and at least one herd of Water Buffalo is present. Fishing and agriculture, primarily wheat farms with some greenhouses along the road, are practiced in and around the river and wetlands.

Important Bird Area Criteria	Observations made 2007-2010. Unless stated otherwise numbers are estimates based on extrapolations using area/transect counts and area of known habitat (see Methodology on p. X).	
A2. Restricted-range species		
	Breeding	Wintering/Passage
Iraq Babbler <i>Turdoides altirostris</i> (Resident)	25 pairs (2009)	
A4iii. Holding congregations of 20,000 waterbirds or 10,000 pairs of seabirds of one or more species		
	Breeding	Wintering/Passage
Eurasian Coot <i>Fulica atra</i> (Winter visitor)		11,500-24,100 (actual counts, 2008-2010)

Additional Important Bird Observations: During the survey period 109 species were observed. In addition to those listed in the table above the following were observed at levels that did not meet the IBA criteria: European Roller *Coracias garrulus*, breeding and Red Kite *Milvus milvus*, migrant (both Near Threatened). The site had breeding populations of biome restricted species: Mediterranean (two), Irano-Turanian (two) and Sahara-Sindian Desert (three), but these did not trigger inclusion under criterion A3 (Table XX).

Other Important Fauna

Mammals, Reptiles and other Fauna: Mammal data were collected in 2007 and 2010 only. Locals reported the presence of the globally Near Threatened Eurasian Otter *Lutra lutra*. No significant reptile observation was made at the site.

Fish: Data were collected in 2008 and 2012 only and 20 species were found. According to Coad (2010) *Aspius vorax*, *Liza abu*, *Luciobarbus esocinus*, and *Luciobarbus xanthopterus* are species of conservation concern and also economically important; *Acanthobrama marmaid*, *Cyprinus carpio*, *Chondrostoma regium*, *Carassius auratus*, *Heteropneustes fossilis* are economically important; finally, *Mastacembelus mastacembelus* and *Mystus pelusius* are of no economic importance though their conservation status in Iraq is unknown. The 2012 survey with Jörg Freyhof from the Leibniz Institute of Freshwater Ecology and Inland Fisheries, Germany observed the following additional species: *Alburnus sellal*, *Cyprinion macrostomum* and *Gambusia bolbrooki*, *Luciobarbus schejch* economically important, according to Coad (2010). The population of one species, *Silurus triostegus*, appears to be increasing. This species is not fished commercially (scaleless) but is of ecological importance as a predator fish in the marshes and its conservation status in Iraq is not well understood. Other species which are of no economic importance but their conservation status in Iraq is unknown are: *Hemigrammocapoeta elegans*, *Squalius lepidus*.

Also, *Capoeta trutta* observed by Dr. Frehof has no significant economic and conservation importance according to Coad (2010). A species that is not mentioned in Coad (2010) is: *Pseudorasbora parva*.

Plants & Habitats: Total number of plant species was 40. Plant data were collected at only one waypoint (N 35° 42' 59" E 44° 6' 34") along the Leser Zab River between summer 2007 and 2009 only. But two main habitat types were identified at the site:

1. Inland Standing Water-Aquatic communities-Rooted Submerged Vegetation habitat type. Characteristic species are *Potamogeton crispus*, *P. lucens*, *P. nodosus*, *P. pectinatus*, *P. perfoliatus*, and *Myriophyllum* sp.
2. Marsh Vegetation-Helophytic Vegetation-Reed bed and Reedmace bed habitat. Characteristic species are *Phragmites australis* and *Typha domingensi*.

The dominant tree was *Populus euphratica*; the dominant shrubs *Tamarix* sp.; the dominant herbs were *Sinapis arvensis*, *Thymus syriacus*, *Centaurea* sp. and different species of *Potamogeton*; the dominant grass was *Phragmites australis*. The area is somewhat steep (15-26°) and the exposure is toward the west (248-292°). The geology is sedimentary and the soil type is clay. The non-vegetated area covered approximately 60%.

Conservation Issues: This site's location downstream of the town of Altun Kopri makes it highly susceptible to sewage, garbage and other pollution. Agriculture is practised along the river. The survey team also observed people cutting and burning reeds. Instances of bird hunting were also witnessed and electro-fishing has been noted in the area.

Recommendations: An action plan and better environmental management are needed to identify, control and limit pollution sources from the town of Altun Kopri and improve management of agricultural practices. Hunting should be controlled and in particular electro-fishing and other unsustainable fishing practices should be stopped. As the Dibis Dam is likely at least partially responsible for the presence of marshes at Altun Kopri and the dam has been in place since the 1960s, the threat from natural systems modification was deemed low but environmental impacts from this dam and others like it should still be investigated further to identify potential mitigation actions (eg. establishing fish passages).

References

Coad B. W. (2010). *Freshwater Fishes of Iraq*. Sofia-Moscow: PENSOFT Publishers. No.93.