

Animal Trade and Hunting in Iraq



Marbled Duck for sale in Southern Iraqi Market (2005). Photo by O. Fadhil, Nature Iraq

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This preliminary report was prepared to summarize and inform partner agencies and organizations on the status and progress of the biodiversity initiatives of Nature Iraq. For more information please refer to Nature Iraq's web site: www.natureiraq.org or write to info@natureiraq.org or to:

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Introduction

The issues of animal hunting and trade has been a recurrent issue that Nature Iraq survey teams have faced in the six years that it has been conducting field survey work at different locations throughout Iraq. Nature Iraq, an Iraqi conservation non-governmental organization, has been sponsoring the Key Biodiversity Areas (KBA) Project in cooperation with the Iraqi Ministry of Environment and support from the Italian Ministry of Environment. This and other related projects of Nature Iraq are designed to identify globally, regionally, and nationally important areas for biological diversity within the country. Surveys are have been conducted in winter and summer since 2005 in southern Iraq, since 2007 in Kurdistan, Northern Iraq and since 2009 in Central & Western Iraq.

Field teams have spent most of their time working in remote sites in marshlands, deserts, steppes and mountains but in addition have visited local zoos and animal markets, have spoken with local communities including farmers, hunters and falconers, traders as well as local and regional government officials. Unsustainable and uncontrolled hunting and animal trade issues have been raised repeatedly and a lot of anecdotal information has been gathered concerning the negative effects of these activities. The Iraqi government has recently signed on to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance and the Convention on Biological Diversity. The government is also considering joining the Convention on Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). It is hoped that this document may prove an initial step towards understand and resolving these key threats to the biodiversity of Iraq.

Background

Though there are some efforts to curtail hunting and animal trade in wild species (The forestry police and the environmental Pesh Merga forces in Kurdistan, northern Iraq are tasked with the job of enforcing a no-hunting rule in the north of the country and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) has issued a law to arrest and charge animal traffickers), hunting and animal trade are still occurring throughout most of the country, if not openly as in the center and south of the country, then covertly in the north.. Very little has been done to study these activities, regulate hunters or

address transborder trafficking in these species. Nature Iraq's KBA program has attempted to conduct mammal surveys in 2007 and more recently, in the 2010 winter survey. The focus in the recent winter survey was to learn more about the issues of hunting and trade. The survey team gathered information through informal interviews with traders in the markets, hunters and zookeepers and workers.

Kurdistan, Northern Iraq 2010 Survey Results

During the interview study concerning wildlife hunting and trade in Kurdistan, Northern Iraq, the team was able to meet a few hunters in As-Sulaimaniyah governorate, Northern Iraq (it's main city of the same name is located at Latitude: 35° 33' 42 N, and Longitude: 45° 26' 27 E), who in turn acknowledged the presence of a staggering number of hunters who are hunting animals in the surrounding areas. During the teams visit to the animal market one hunter told a brief story about the hunting activities occurring in the region. The market is no longer used for showing the animals as they fear the sudden visits of the police who come to the market and force them to close the pet shops. Hunting has been the main source of income for most people in the rural and even the urban areas of the Kurdistan region, which has caused wide spread eradication of many wild species including several globally endangered species that once existed in the region, driving them into extinction or into continuous decline. The main buyers of live-caught species, according to the hunter, are wealthy people and officials who either want to boast about having such animals and put them in their personal gardens or they use them for special medical treatments. A major reason that makes the trade go forward in the region is that the animals are taken to the hunters' houses where the selling occurs.



Plate 1: Two Jungle cats brought from the hunters home in Sulaiymaniyah (Photo by Korsh Ararat)

This hunting is of a larger concern here in Kurdistan as there is no mechanism by which the endangered animals are recognized, this is the reason behind the increasing rate of hunting of Wild Goats (*Capra aegagrus*), which is considered a vulnerable species by the IUCN. In Kurdistan, where the wild goats are present in large numbers in the wild, they are now coming under threat and declining in number because of the extensive rate of hunting. The hunter also said that he brings Wild Goats from Iran and its borders into Iraq through smuggling, where he paints the fur with henna paste (made from ground henna leaves) to prevent the wild goat from being identified. The price for one live Wild Goat is about 400-500 USD.

Traditional medicine and treatments utilizing wild species is the other reason for the capture of live species and the hunter indicated that most of the officials and the other buyers that in many instances comprise the first lines of the animal trade use the animals for health treatment.

The owner of a Zoo in Kurdistan was interviewed and stated that most of the exotic animals in the zoos that are imported into the country may be illegally smuggled from place like Africa and Thailand into Syria, but from there paperwork and documents are created to import them into Iraq. The animals brought from Syria are transported often in very small wooden boxes or cages with a volume of less than half a cubic meter (see photo below).

Another threat that increases the rate of hunting in the region is the involvement of animal zoos creating an additional illegal trade that obtains animals according to their customers' request. The zoo is in fact acting as another market where trade in wild species takes place. Since the zoo is

licensed to receive and maintain exotic species, it can take advantage of this to bring in these species for sale as well as for their own use. Just at the time the team was at the zoo, interviewing the owner, the female lion cub shown in the image below was on sale for a price of 80,000 USD to a local customer who seemed to be a regular one and was waiting to set the price and buy the animal.



Plate 2: 6 months old female lion cub imported from Thailand when it was 2 months old - Erbil Animal Zoo- Kurdistan, January-2010 (Photo by Hana A. Raza)

In addition, the zoos have poor facilities and untrained staff with an inability to take care of and maintain the animals resulting in a high mortality rate, thus requiring the zoos to be constantly replacing their animals (see photo below).



Plate 3: Dead Pelican at Sulaimaniyah Animal Zoo, February-2010 (Photo by Hana A. Raza)

The increasing activities of hunters, smugglers, and taxidermists in the country continues largely unchecked and due to the lack of studies and scientific data on many mammal groups, little is known as to how these activities are affecting animal populations and the conservation status of species in Iraq. Most of the professional hunters can easily identify the rare animals that they focus on in their hunting career and know the best ways to find them and thus though they pose a major threat to these species, they are also an important resource for knowledge.



Plate 4: A Brown Bear and a Gray Wolves caught in the districts near Erbil- Sulaimaniyah Zoo. Kurdistan, Northern Iraq, January-2010 (Photos by Hana A. Raza)



Plate 5: Mounted Goitered Gazelle after it was killed in a nearby district of Kirkuk, January-2010 (Photo by Hana A. Raza)

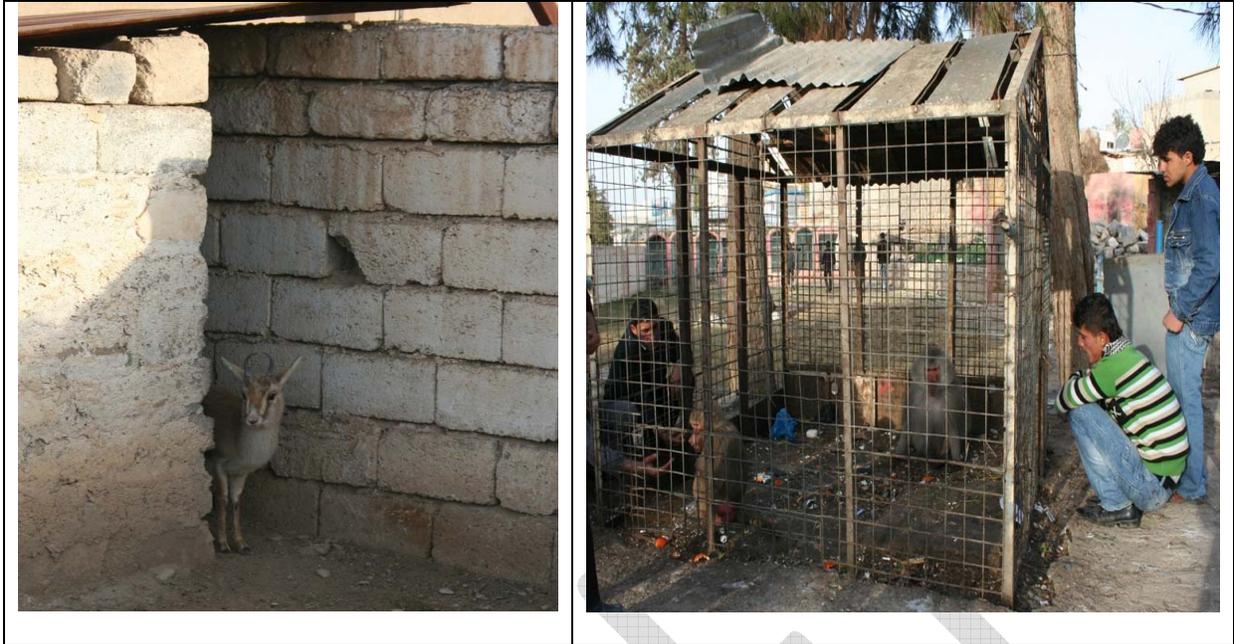


Plate 6: Animal pens in the Erbil Zoo, January-2010 (Photo by Hana A. Raza)



Plate 7: Eurasian Badgers at the Sulaimaniyah Zoo (Photo by Mudhafar Salim)

Hunting and capturing techniques that are practiced in the country include guns (shotguns and rifles), poisons, nets and iron traps and these hunting equipments. Also falconry is very popular

using birds of prey throughout Iraq. In the KRG, there have been some laws issued that attempt to set standards and regulate the selling of this equipment and issue licenses for obtaining them, but these are not well enforced.



Plate 8: Hunters Hide near Rania, Sulaymaniyah, Kurdistan Iraq -January 2010, (Photo by Hana A. Raza)



Plate 9: A typical days' hunting small passerines in Iraqi Kurdistan - 2007 (Photo by Omar Fadhel)

The Kurdistan survey covered Sulaymaniyah, Erbil & Dohuk Governorates. Each have small animal markets, mostly focused on trade in domesticated farm species, pets and song birds (more work is

needed to identify potential song bird species that may be subject to illegal trade). All three governorates maintain zoos with the largest two in Erbil and Dohuk.

Central & Southern Iraq

The Mesopotamian Marshlands of Iraq have been a major center of activity for hunting and trade in waterfowl species and many of these species are sold in the markets for local use. In the photo below, the Mallards were being sold for around 25000ID (20 USD), and the rest had a price of about 20000ID (15 USD), actually considered quite high for these species (note that the image of the vulnerable Marbled Ducks on the cover of this report, which were taken in 2005, was of live birds being sold for the table at approximately 1 USD per bird).



Plate 10: Northern Pintail, Eurasian Wigeon, and Mallard - Amarah city market, Missan Governorate. (Photo by Mudhafar Salim)

If requiring transportation the birds are slaughtered and are sold at half of their live market price. This winter witnessed a huge flock of waterfowl, generally more than any previous winters. Hunters have harvested a large number of them and sold them in the markets, but some of these birds according to locals, the large and rare ones like Swans and other rare waterfowl, are sent out of the country, mainly to Kuwait where they can sell them in at double the prices in Iraq.

Unlike the KRG region of northern Iraq, there appear to be fewer controls on animal trade and several of the markets deal quite openly in the trade of wild species.



Plate 11: Endangered Egyptian Vulture for sale – 2009 (Photo by Omar Fadhel)



Plate 12: Marbled Ducks for sale -2009 (Photo by Omar Fadhel)

Hunting of Houbara (MacQueen's) Bustard, a vulnerable species according to the IUCN, is found in the desert regions of southern and western Iraq and is heavily persecuted by locals. In addition, in the winters of 2009/2010, foreign hunters and falconers from Gulf countries have come in large convoys protected by high security to hunt in these areas. One hunting trip reportedly killed up to 100 birds and these groups were active in the area sometimes for several weeks. In addition there is evidence of a smuggling trade in Iraqi birds to Gulf countries.



Plate 13: Iraqi Houbara Hunters in Salah Aldin Governorates – Winter 2010 (Photo by Omar Fadhel)



Plate 14: Bustards that were said to have died while being smuggled to Kuwait.

Examples of Hunted & Traded Species in Iraq

Below are some of the wild species that are commonly exported from Iraq.

Mustelids

Common otters and **Smooth-coated Otter** are hunted in river and wetlands areas of Kurdistan and in southern Iraq marshes. Common otters are also caught in the central part of Iraq, in Samara and Salah Al-Din along Tigris river banks, as well as Zagaton and Alduz near Kirkuk, and further north at Altun Kopri on the Little Zab River near Erbil governorate. These species are mostly exported to Turkey.



Plate 15: Otters killed in Hawizeh Marsh, a Ramsar Site - 2007. (Photo by Dr. Mukhtar Haba)

The picture below is reported to show an otter pelt which would be used as a sac for drug smuggling, as the pelt prevents the drugs from getting wet.



Plate 16: The pelt of an otter reportedly used for drug smuggling. (Photo by Dr. Mukhtar Haba)

Ungulates

Persian Gazelles are hunted in the eastern territories and the southern arid and grassy lands near Hemreen area, Qaratapa, and Mandali of Diyala Governorate, Badra and Jassan of Wasit Governorate, Kumait, Al-Teab, Al-Sheeb, the sparse areas of Ali Al Grabi of Missan Governorate, which in addition of being consumed by the locals, are exported to Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE. The following pictures shows gazelles captured by hunters in Al-Teeb and Al-Sheab and located in Missan Governorate (31°54' N, 47°2' E) of Southern Iraq, using floodlight mounted trucks.



Plate 17: Gazelles (Reem) captured in Al-Teeb and Al-Sheab near Missan Governorate (Photo by Dr. Mukhtar Haba)

Rodentia

Persian Squirrels are hunted in the wide range of mountains of Kurdistan, northern Iraq, precisely areas near such as Gali Ali Beg, Soran, Barzan in Erbil Governorate and in the eastern mountain regions near Kalar, in Sulaymaniyah Governorate. A few have been trapped near Mar Matti and Sinjar mountains in Mosul. These species are sold within Iraq and are also reportedly exported to Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, a few to Syria, and some have passed through the Jordanian border in the past. **Indian Crested Porcupines** are widely hunted and trapped in the center and the west of Iraq, beside the river banks of the Tigris, especially in Al-Allam and Al-Mahzan areas of Salah Al-Din and the Nimrod area near Mosul. These are exported to Kuwait, UAE, and Saudi Arabia in addition to being sold in Iraqi markets for local use.

Birds

Saker Falcons are hunted in the western and eastern grassy, arid steppes of Iraq during the beginning of winter, such as the western steppes of Al-Jazera sector of Anbar Governorate, Rabea'a and Sinjar of Mosul, the open steppes of Himreen in Diyala Governorate, Kalar in Sulaimaniyah Governorate, Al-Azezia and Al-Gearbi, Al-Teeb in the Missan Governorate, and in the Fao of Basrah. They are reportedly exported to Kuwait, Qatar and UAE from the southern provinces of Iraq and to Saudi Arabia from the northern and western provinces of Iraq. Some birds in good conditions and great qualifications reach UAE from the southern provinces of Iraq. **Peregrine Falcons** are foremost near the big water bodies such as Rania of Dukan in Sulaimaniyah Governorate, Tharthar of both Anbar and Salag Al-Din Governorates and the southern marshes, primarily the Hawizeh Marshes (Iraq's only Ramsar site) in Missan and the Fao Peninsula of Basrah during the winter and fall migration period. They are sent to the same countries mentioned above. **Barbary Falcons** are hunted in the eastern mountains of Sulaimaniyah & Erbil Governorates, in at Maqloob, Sinjar mountains, and the Makhool hill range of Mosul, Hawija of Kirkuk Governorate and Hemreen range of Diyala Governorate. They are exported to the countries mentioned earlier. **Houbara (Macqueen's) Bustard** are captured in the arid steppes of western Iraq in Anbar Governorate, Kalar Hemreen, and Kifri of Diyala, the Rabea'a steppes of Mosul, Al-Aziziya and Al-Garbi of Missan, Nogratt Al-Salman of Muthanna, and wherever there is suitable wintering or migration habitat in Iraq. They are being exported UAE, Qatar and Kuwait. **White-eared Bulbul** is frequently hunted from Shahraban, Baladrouz and Mandaly of Diyala Governorate, in convenient

citrus and date palm stands and orchards in the center and south of Iraq. They are transported to Syria and Jordan. Considering the large number of birds smuggled from Iraq and released in Al-Azraq, the species have become an introduced species in Kuwait from the south.

Reptiles

Within Reptile, the **Horned Sand Viper**, which is a rare species in Iraq distributing in the sandy dunes of the western and southwestern Iraqi deserts, are hunted in the Al-Qae'm and Rutba areas of Anbar Governorate and the deserts of Muthanna Governorate. They are exported to Kuwait as well as to Turkey in the north. **Saw-scaled Vipers** are captured from old abandoned buildings and dense orchards of citrus trees near the Tigris river banks, starting from Mosul down to Basrah.

Preliminary Conclusions & Recommendations

As this document is still preliminary and assessment of our winter survey data is on-going at this time, this report will be finalized at a later date and will include a final summary and list of recommendations for moving forward. Nature Iraq would welcome comments and feed-back to help us plan further surveys of animal trade and hunting in Iraq.