

## Ahmed Awa (IQ042)

Sulaimani –35.299722°N 46.078056°E

KBA Criteria: **V**

IBA Criteria: **A1 and A3**

IPA Criteria: **A4 and B1**

Area: **887 ha - 638-1610 m**

Ecoregion: **Zagros Mountains Forest Steppe (PA0446)**

Status: **Unprotected**



**Site Description:** This is a mountainous area in the Zagros Range located close to the Iranian border. It is dominated by rocky slopes and wooded valleys. The geology here is basic igneous rock, radiolarian chert, siliceous and calcareous shale, and metamorphic schist and limestone of unknown age, and the soil type is sandy clay. The two main habitats at the site are oak woodlands and mountain riverine forest.

A large spring and waterfall, joined by streams coming down from higher elevations, make up the headwaters of the Zalm Stream (IQ041), a large fast-moving waterway that flows towards the Tanjero River and into Darbandikhan Lake

(IQ040). Several villages are situated in the narrow valley, the largest being Khormal. While the area has been known for poor security in the past, it remains a popular tourist spot. The waterfall and upper stream are reached by a narrow gravel road (currently a paved road is under construction), which begins at a large parking and popular picnic area further down the valley. During the spring and summer, many teashops and other shops line the upper stream below the waterfall. There are vineyards, pomegranate and walnut orchards (inside the delineated area) and wheat and barley farms where the valley opens up (outside the delineated area). The villages around the stream use the water for drinking and other domestic usage.

Key Biodiversity Area Criteria	Notes	
<b>V. Vulnerability Criteria: Presence of Critically Endangered and Endangered species – presence of a single individual or Vulnerable species – 30 individuals or 10 pairs.</b>		
<i>Capra aegagrus</i>	No direct observation were made, but reliably reported by locals	
<i>Neuregus derjugini</i>	From direct observations.	
<b>Important Bird Area Criteria</b>	<b>Observation made 2007-2010.</b>	
<b>A1. Globally threatened species</b>	<b>Breeding</b>	<b>Wintering/ Passage</b>
Egyptian Vulture <i>Neophron percnopterus</i> (Summer visitor)	3-6 pairs (counts 2009-2010)	
<b>A3. Biome-restricted specie</b>		
<b>Irano-Tauranian biome</b>	<b>Breeding</b>	<b>Wintering/ Passage</b>
See-see Partridge <i>Ammoperdix griseogularis</i> (Resident)	10 pairs (2009-2013)	
Menetries's Warbler <i>Sylvia mystacea</i> (Summer visitor)	8 pairs (counts 2009-2013)	
Eastern Rock Nuthatch <i>Sitta tephronota</i> (Resident)	20 pairs (2007-2013)	
White-throated Robin <i>Irania gutturalis</i> (Resident)	5 pairs (count 2009-2013)	
Finsch's Wheatear <i>Oenanthe finschii</i> (Resident)	15 pairs (2009-2013)	
Pale Rockfinch <i>Carpospiza brachydactyla</i> (Summer visitor)	6 pairs (2008-2013)	
<b>Mediterranean biome</b>	<b>Breeding</b>	<b>Wintering/ Passage</b>
Masked Shrike <i>Lanius nubicus</i> (Summer visitor)	2 pairs (2009)	
Sombre Tit <i>Poecile lugubris</i> (Resident)	12 pairs (2008-2009)	
Western Rock Nuthatch <i>Sitta neumayer</i> (Resident)	30 pairs (2009)	

Mediterranean biome	Breeding	Wintering/ Passage
Eastern Black-eared Wheatear <i>Oenanthe melanoleuca</i> (Summer visitor)	20 pairs (2009-2010)	
Black-headed Bunting <i>Emberiza melanocephala</i> (Summer visitor)	45 pairs (2008-2010)	
<b>Important Plant Area Criteria</b>		
<b>A4. Site contains national endemic, near endemic, regional endemic and/or regional range-restricted species or infraspecific taxa</b>		
Endemics at this site found during recent surveys include: <i>Cousinia inflata</i> , <i>Ferula shehbaziana</i> , <i>Gypsophila sarbaghiaie</i> , and <i>Onosma hawramanensis</i> ; a near endemic found was <i>Onosma cardiostegium</i> , and nationally rare species here were: <i>Alcea arbelensis</i> , <i>Dionysia bornmuelleri</i> , <i>Onosma macrophyllum</i> var. <i>angustifolium</i> , <i>Phlomis kurdica</i> , <i>Silene araratica</i> , <i>S. avramana</i> , <i>Stachys kurdica</i> , and <i>Teucrium melissoides</i> .		
<b>B1. Site is a particularly species-rich example of defined habitat type</b>		
Mountain Forest-Mountain Riverine Forest habitat type and Mountain Forest Vegetation-Oak Forest- Lowest and Medium Zones habitat type.		

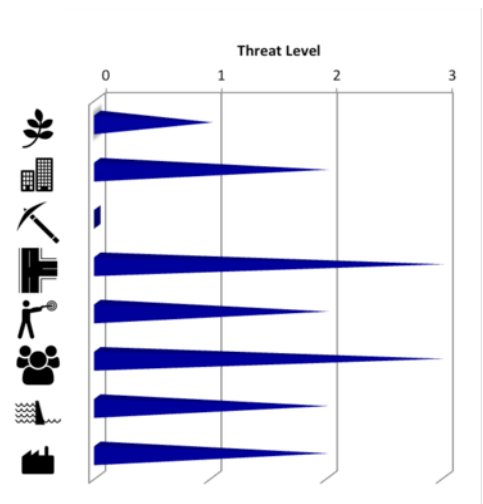
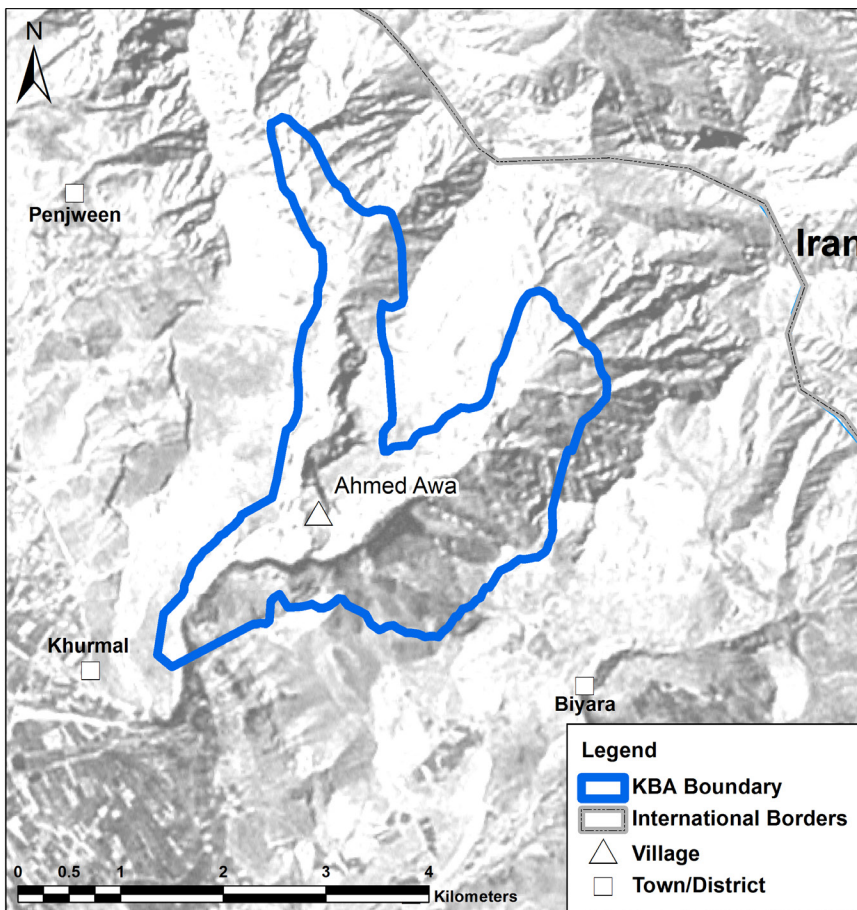
**Additional Important Bird Observations:** During the survey period 67 species were recorded. In addition to those listed in the table above, European Roller *Coracias garrulus* (Near Threatened) was present in the breeding season.

**Other Important Fauna:** Two locals, who were interviewed separately, stated that a local hunter killed a large cat in 2002, which would most likely have been a Persian Leopard *Panthera pardus saxicolor* (Endangered). Hunting may be rather restricted in the region overall due to the presence of minefields. No fish data were collected due to high water flows.

**Additional Plant & Habitat Information:** This site contains good populations of *pistachios Pistacia eurycarpa* and *P. khinjuk*, as well as *Morus alba* and *M. nigra*, which are economically and culturally important. Species important

as a traditional food were *Bongardia chrysogonum* and *Arum conophalloides*, and important genetic resource species included: *Hordeum vulgare* ssp. *spontaneum*, *H. bulbosum*, and *Lens culinaris*.

**Conservation Issues:** Ahmed Awa is very popular with tourists especially in spring and summer. Work to build new roads to the upper stream have damaged village buildings and caused extensive erosion. The local government is now developing these roads to accommodate more tourism of the site, which in turn will increase the threat from human intrusion, as well as erosion and habitat destruction. High threats come from the development of both houses and shops, hunting, channelization due to irrigation, and pollution generated from tourism activities. Water is also diverted from the falls to the settlements below (and there is also a smallscale hydropower station at the base of the falls that is currently not functional). Villages discharge sewage and garbage into the stream as well. Shops along the waterway have paved, trampled or otherwise destroyed much of the near-stream riparian areas. The upper part of the falls has been surrounded by chainlink fencing (possibly for safety reasons). The northeastern part of the site beyond the waterfall suffers less disturbance from tourism as it is close to the Iranian border and minefields are present.



**Recommendations:** Local tourism of this site and related threats such as waste management and development needs to be more strongly regulated to decrease impacts on the stream and surrounding slopes. Instead of increasing road building in the narrow valley, it is recommended that this be stopped and walking paths provided instead. Driving access should be limited to local residents and regulated drivers. For example, previously locals have generated some income by

driving visitors up the valley closer to the falls in 4WD vehicles ... this was far less damaging than building paved roads to the upper stream and potentially provides greater support to the local economy. Hunting as well as grazing should also be further examined. Overall, given the popularity of the site, recreational and tourism plans need to integrate more natural resource protection.