

Barzan Area & Gali Balnda (IQ004)

Erbil – 36.94361°N 44.195556°E

IBA Criteria: **V**

IPA Criteria: **A1 and A3**

IPA Criteria: **A4 and B1**

Area: **114822 ha** - Altitude: **530-2560 m**

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

Status: **Partially protected by the Barzan Tribe**



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Key Biodiversity Area Criteria	Notes	
V. Vulnerability Criteria: Presence of Critically Endangered and Endangered species – presence of a single individual or Vulnerable species – 30 individuals or 10 pairs.		
<i>Capra aegagrus</i>	Ten individuals were observed in 2007, 24 in winter 2009, 80 in summer 2010, and 12 in winter. During a training course in summer 2011, 30 individuals were counted, in addition to approximately 40 recorded by a camera trap set in the Zrara area.	
<i>Panthera pardus saxicolor</i>	Reported reliably by locals near Rezan river.	
<i>Testudo graeca</i>	Six individuals were seen between 2008 and 2011.	
Important Bird Area Criteria	Observation made 2007-2010. Gali Balnda was visited only in summer 2009	
A1. Globally threatened species	Breeding	Wintering/ Passage
Egyptian Vulture <i>Neophron percnopterus</i> (Summer visitor)	1 pair (2009)	
A3. Biome-restricted species		
Irano-Turanian biome	Breeding	Wintering/ Passage
See-see Partridge <i>Ammoperdix griseogularis</i> (Resident)	25 pairs (2010)	
Upcher's Warbler <i>Hippolais languida</i> (Summer visitor)	1 pair (count 2011)	
Menetries's Warbler <i>Sylvia mystacea</i> (Summer visitor)	3 pairs (counts 2008 and 2010)	
Eastern Rock Nuthatch <i>Sitta tephronota</i> (Resident)	100 pairs	
Kurdistan Wheatear <i>Oenanthe xanthopyrma</i> (Summer visitor)	9 pairs (count 2011)	
White-throated Robin <i>Irania gutturalis</i> (Summer visitor)	3 pairs (count 2010)	
Finsch's Wheatear <i>Oenanthe finschii</i> (Resident)	5 pairs (2007-2008)	
Eastern Cinereous Bunting <i>Emberiza semenow</i> (Summer visitor)	11 pairs (counts 2010-2011)	
Mediterranean biome	Breeding	Wintering/ Passage
Masked Shrike <i>Lanius nubicus</i> (Summer visitor)	20 pairs (2008-2010)	
Sombre Tit <i>Poecile lugubris</i> (Resident)	20 pairs (2008-2010)	
Western Rock Nuthatch <i>Sitta neumayer</i> (Resident)	50 pairs (2011)	
Eastern Black-eared Wheatear <i>Oenanthe melanoleuca</i> (Summer visitor)	40 pairs (2007-2010)	
Black-headed Bunting <i>Emberiza melanocephala</i> (Summer visitor)	500 pairs (2008-2010)	

Important Plant Area Criteria**A4. Site contains national endemic, near endemic, regional endemic and/or regional range-restricted species or infraspecific taxa****Note: *historically recorded; **historically recorded and seen on recent surveys**

Endemics at the site include: **Allium calocephalum*, **Astragalus dendroproselius*, **Bunium avromanum*, **Cousinia acanthophysa*, **C. masu-shirinensis*, **Echinops nitens*, and ***Ornithogalum iraqense*; the near endemics at the site include: **Korshinskia assyriaca*, **Pelargonium quercetorum Agnes*, **Trigonosciadium viscidulum*, **Verbascum froedinii*, and **Veronica macrostachya* var. *Schizostegia* and there are three nationally rare species: *Aristolochia paecilantha*, *Bromus brachystachys*, and *Michauxia tchihatchewii* (the last is a new recorded species).

B1. Site is a particularly species-rich example of defined habitat type

Mountain Forest Vegetation-Oak Forest-Lowest Zone and Medium Zone habitat and Forest Vegetation-Mountain Riverine Forest habitat

Site Description: This area is made up of two areas, Barzan and Gali Balnda (on Barzan's western side). Three sub-sites were visited during the survey efforts for these areas. Barzan consists of mountains and valleys covered by oak woodland that has traditionally been protected by the Barzan tribe. The most important rivers within the Barzan Area are the Rezan River and the Greater Zab River. The Rezan is fairly large (approx. 20-30 m wide) and fast flowing. It flows from Turkey through Musaka village, eventually joining the Greater Zab. The Barzan area also includes Shirin Mountain as well as other peaks, which are important for montane species. The main habitat types are mountain forest vegetation (primarily oak forests) and mountain riverine forest. The geology is sedimentary limestone and the soil type is sandy clay.

This area has often been proposed as a national park (it is one of the few places in the Kurdistan Region where it is relatively easy to see Wild Goats thanks to a long-standing hunting prohibition enforced by the Barzan Tribe) and is a popular place for picnickers. A bridge crosses the Rezan River near the access to one of the the main survey area (close to the village of Zrara) and there are remains of a much older bridge downstream. Though the regularly visited survey site is relatively small, the overall site extends north to the Turkish border and south across the Greater Zab River. Also included within the area is the ancient Shanidar Cave, first excavated by Drs Ralph and Rose Solecki in 1971, which contained Neanderthal burial sites. Currently, the cave has been developed for tourism. It is located in a rocky gorge, with high cliffs and oak forests. A stream beneath carries seasonal winter flows to the Greater Zab River.

Gali Balnda is comprised of a valley carrying the Deraluk River, which flows from Turkey. It is surrounded by mountains and flows to the Greater Zab River. The habitat types are similar to the main Barzan area and both sites are located within the Zagros Range but the geology in Gali Balnda is sandstone, clay and gravel. There is an iron bridge (Shiladza) at the southern edge of the area that crosses the Deraluk River about 2 km from its confluence with the Greater Zab near a town of the same name. This town dumps sewage into the Greater Zab. Here the land is used for farming (mainly crops, orchards and some vineyards) but there are minefields, especially near the towns of Badan and Biav.

Additional Important Bird Observations: During the surveys a total of 91 species were observed (in the sub-site, Gali Balnda, a total 35 species were observed). In addition to those

listed in the table above, European Roller *Coracias garrulus* (Near Threatened) was recorded breeding; the site also held a breeding population of Yellow-billed Cough *Pyrrhocorax graculus* a Eurasian High-Montane biome-restricted species. Eastern Cinereous Bunting *Emberiza semenowi* is Near Threatened.

Other Important Fauna: Data were collected from 2007 through 2010, with some additional work focused on Wild Goats (Vulnerable) in 2011. This species is thriving in Barzan, which has been a tribal protected site for many decades. The forestry police of Mergasur thought that the population of Wild Goats was around 1000, with some estimates much higher than this. In August 2010 and in 2011, an outbreak of goat plague or Peste des Petits Ruminants (PPR) led to the death of over 200 animals. In 2012, a local from Barzan successfully photographed a Eurasian Lynx *Lynx lynx* and in the same year another local photographed a Roe Deer *Capreolus capreolus*. The globally Endangered Persian Leopard *Panthera pardus saxicolor* was also reported by locals who have seen and heard the animal in and around the Rezan River valley. Two Otters (likely Eurasian Otter *Lutra lutra*, Near Threatened) were sighted with flashlights at night in the summer of 2011. In the Zrara area, the team camera trapped Brown Bear *Ursus arctos*, Golden Jackal *Canis aureus*, Indian Crested Porcupine *Hystrix indica* and Red Fox *Vulpes vulpes*. Zagrosian Lizard *Timon princeps kurdistanicus* was observed. Many locusts were seen near the Rezan in summer 2010, consuming large quantities of plant material.

Fish: Information was collected from 2007 through 2009 and eight species were observed. Significant species, as defined by Coad (2010) were: *Alburnoides* sp., *Alburnus mossulensis*, *Cyprinion macrostomum*, *Garra rufa*, *Hypophthalmichthys molitrix*, *Luciobarbus esocinus* and *Paracobitis* sp. Also *Barbus lacerta* and *Mastacembelus mastacembelus* were observed and though of no economic importance their conservation status in Iraq is unknown. During a 2012 survey with Jörg Freyhof from the Leibniz Institute of Freshwater Ecology and Inland Fisheries, Germany *Oxynoemacheilus bergianus*, a new species for Iraq, was observed.

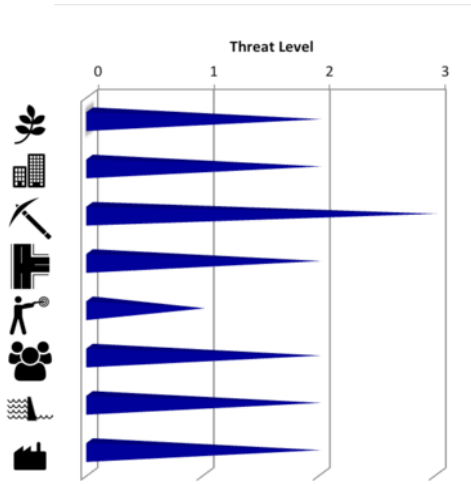
Additional Plant & Habitat Information: This site contains a good population of *Crataegus azarolus*, *Pistacia eurycarpa*, and *P. khinjuk*, which are important economically and culturally. Also there is a *Vitis vinifera* vineyard, which is important as a genetic resource.

Conservation Issues: The key environmental threat is oil development but also agriculture and grazing, urban construction, road building, tourism, landmines and pollution (both village and tourism waste) all constitute high threats. In 2010 there was an attempt to build an earthen dam or dike at the mouth of the Rezan

River where it meets the Greater Zab. According to a local, the purpose was to create a recreation area here, where a major restaurant and tea shop stop are located along the road. Winter rains washed this dam away but by the summer of 2012, a permanent structure, the Rezan River Weir Project, was under construction at the same location. There are other dam projects in the region but little was known about their extent and locations. Tourism has led to accumulation of garbage and easy access to the river has allowed car-washing to become a common practice in at least the main survey area. Though there is a hunting prohibition in the Barzan area that is largely effective in the region, poaching does still occur.



Some areas in Gali Balnda are affected by human intrusion, improper use of sewage water for irrigation, livestock grazing and agriculture in general.



recognizing the area as a national park is recommended and due to the size and richness of the area more comprehensive surveys should be conducted. For example the Gali Balnda area was only visited once during the KBA surveys and certainly requires more investigation. Minefield clearance should also be a priority for this large area.

Recommendations: Although this area is managed traditionally as a protected area by the local tribe there may be some pressures to remove or roll back some of the protection the site receives. Oil development must be closely monitored to avoid negative impacts to the region and dam construction should also be restricted. An official management plan should be developed and implemented and local stakeholders may help to strengthen protection of the site, particularly if oil development is occurring within the area.

Providing training and capacity building to the already-active environmental police on conservation management issues is also encouraged. The National Protected Area Committee (NPAC) identified this site in 2014 as a proposed protected area and officially

