Peramagroon Mountain (IQ027)

Sulaimani–35.76°N 45.241389°E

KBA Criteria: **V**
IBA Criteria: **A1 and A3**
IPA Criteria: **A4, B1and B2b**

Area: **16738 ha -** Altitude: **790-2613 m**
Ecoregion: **Zagros Mountains Forest Steppe (PA0446)**
Status: **Unprotected**

Site Description: This is the highest peak in Sulaimani Governorate, reaching 2613 m. The preliminary delineated area includes the mountain ridge and most of the Mergapan valley to the northeast, encompassing the valleys near the villages of Homer Qawm and Shadala and a small gorge between the villages of Shadala and Kani Shuk. Peramagroon Valley (which includes the small village of Zewe) lies within a wide bowl on its southeastern side below the highest peak on the mountain. Major settlements around the mountain include the town of Peramagroon and the villages of Kani Shuk, Sardasht, and Shadala.

An area above Zewe, from which a seasonal spring issues, is a popular picnicking site as are many areas along Chami Mergapan stream and the springs above Kani Shuk. This stream runs to the northwest through the Mergapan valley and bisects Peramagroon at its northern extent in a dramatic gorge; it becomes the Tabin stream that flows through the Chami Razan KBA site (IQ026) and eventually joins the Lesser Zab River.

Peramagroon Mountain is a botanically rich site and contains mountain riverine forests, oak woodlands and thorn-cushion vegetation. There are also extensive cliff habitats. The site is part of the Zagros Range, where the geology consists of sedimentary limestone and the soil is sandy clay. There is agriculture on the lower slopes (primarily grapes) and grazing throughout the area, though this is now rare on the higher slopes. Most of the mountain is free of mines but mines are reported on the top and in some valleys at the northern extent of the mountain ridge. Zewe and other villages were subject to chemical attacks in the past. Two sub-sites were surveyed at Peramagroon.

Key Biodiversity Area Criteria	Notes	
V. Vulnerability Criteria: *Presence of Critically Endangeredand Endangeredspecies – presence of a single individual or Vulnerable species– 30 individuals or 10 pairs.*		
Capra aegagrus	Wild Goats *Capra aegagrus* were observed in the summer of 2011 and winter 2012.	
Testudo graeca	Spur-thighed Tortoise *Testudo graeca* has been observed and photographed.	
Important Bird Area Criteria	**Observations made 2007-2010.**	
A1. Globally threatened species	**Breeding**	**Wintering/ Passage**
Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus*	3-6 pairs (counts)	
A3. Biome-restricted species		
Irano-Turanian biome	**Breeding**	**Wintering/ Passage**
See-see Partridge *Ammoperdix griseogularis* (Resident)	150 pairs	

Plain Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus neglectus* (Summer visitor)	8 pairs (counts 2011, 2012)	
Upcher's Warbler *Hippolais languida* (Summer visitor)	45 pairs (2011, 2012)	
Menetries's Warbler *Sylvia mystacea* (Summer visitor)	20 pairs (2008-2010)	
Eastern Rock Nuthatch *Sitta tephronota* (Resident)	120 pairs	
White-throated Robin *Irania gutturalis* (Resident)	80 pairs (2009-2010)	
Kurdistan Wheatear *Oenanthe xanthoprymna* (Resident)	110 pairs	
Finsch's Wheatear *Oenanthe finschii* (Resident)	170 pairs	
Grey-necked Bunting *Emberiza buchanani* (Summer visitor)	22 pairs (2012)	
Eastern Cinereous Bunting *Emberiza semenowi* (Summer visitor)	65 pairs (2009-2010, 2012)	
Pale Rock Sparrow *Carpospiza brachydactyla* (Summer visitor)	18 pairs (2012)	
Mediterranean biome	**Breeding**	**Wintering/ Passage**
Masked Shrike *Lanius nubicus* (Summer visitor)	30 pairs (2009-2010)	
Sombre Tit *Poecile lugubris* (Resident)	40 pairs (2008-2010)	
Western Rock Nuthatch *Sitta neumayer* (Resident)	200 pairs	
Eastern Black-eared Wheatear *Oenanthe melanoleuca* (Summer visitor)	150 pairs	
Black-headed Bunting *Emberiza melanocephala* (Summer visitor)	400 pairs (2008-2010)	
Eurasian High-Montane biome	**Breeding**	**Wintering/ Passage**
Yellow-billed Chough *Pyrrhocorax graculus* (Resident)	10 pairs (2010)	
White-winged Snowfinch *Montifringilla nivalis* (Resident)	30 pairs (2011)	
Red-fronted Serin *Serinus pusillus* (Resident)	15 pairs (2011)	

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 this site: **Acantholimon petraeum, *Anthemis micrantha, *Astragalus lobophorus* var. *pilosus, *Astracantha peristerea, *Astracantha zoharyi , *Camelinopsis kurdica, Campanula mardinensis, *Centaurea gudrunensis, Cousinia inflate, *C. macrolepis, *C. masu-shirinensis, C. odontolepis, Dianthus bassianicus, *Fritillaria crassifolia* subsp. *poluninii, Himantoglossum hircinum, *Leutea rechingeri, *Pimpinella hadacii, **Scrophularia kurdica* subsp. *kurdica*, and *Stachys kotschyii*.

Near endemics at this site: **Acantholimon blackelockii, Acanthophyllum kurdicum, *Asperula insignis, *Astracantha crenophila, *Bunium cornigerum, *Campanula acutiloba, *Cousinia haussknechtii, *C. straussii, *Echinops parviflorus, Erysimum kurdicum, *Stachys kotschyii, *Trigonosciadium viscidulum, *Verbascum alceoides, *Veronica macrostachya* var. *schizostegia*, and **Ziziphora clinopodioides* subsp. *kurdica*

Nationally rare species here were: *Aristolochia paecilantha, Cousinia odontolepis, Lactuca hispida, Phelypaea coccinea*, and *Quercus macranthera*

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

Mountain Forest Vegetation-Oak Forest-Medium Zone and Highest Zone habitat type and Mountain Forest Vegetation- Thorn-Cushion Vegetation habitat type

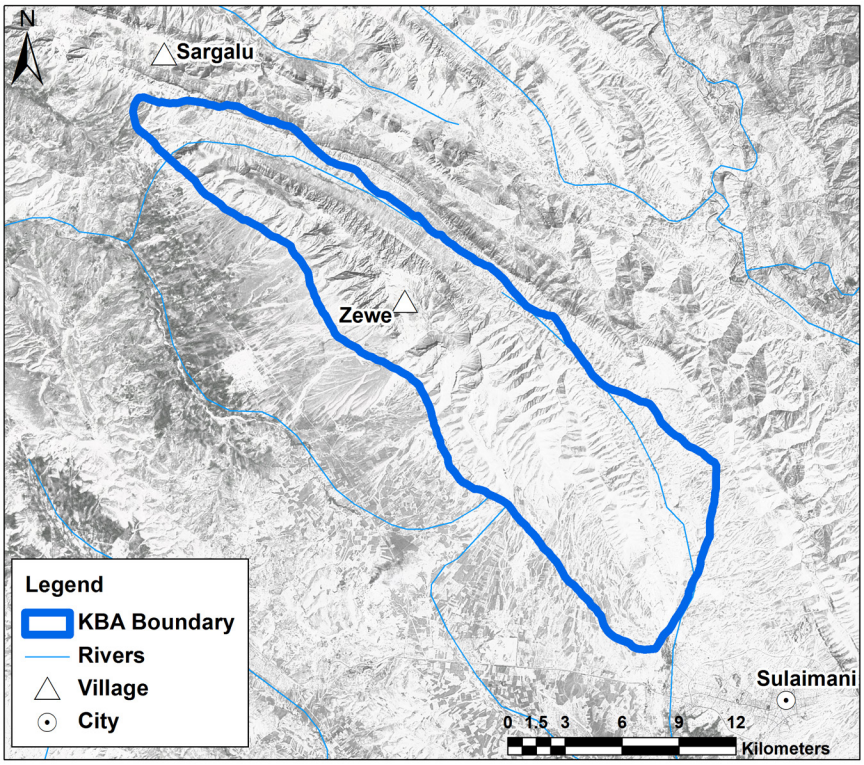
B2b.The site is a refuge for: biogeographically and bioclimatically restricted plants to 'retreat to' in the face of global climate change.

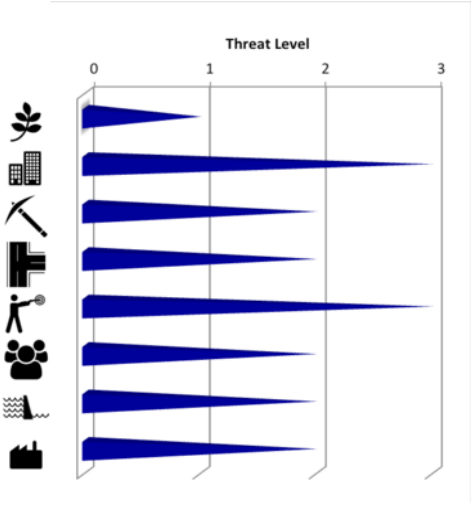
This site represents a good example of the Thorn-Cushion Vegetation habitat type and the top of mountain can provide a refuge for plants associated with this habitat. Also some gorges/cliffs in the mountain can be refuge for the Oak forests and associated plants in the case of climate changes.

Additional Important Bird Observations: During the surveys 131 species were observed. Also the Endangered Saker Falcon *Falco cherrug* was observed in the winter of 2012. Also the following Near Threatened species were recorded but in sub-IBA threshold numbers: European Roller *Coracias garrulus* (breeding) and Semi-collared Flycatcher *Ficedula semitorquata* (passage); the site also held breeding populations of two Sahara-Sindian biome-restricted species but this did not trigger inclusion under criterion A3. Eastern Cinereous Bunting *Emberiza semenowi* listed in the table above is Near Threatened.

Other Important Fauna: Mammal surveys conducted in 2009 and 2010 found considerable number of Persian Squirrels *Sciurus anomalus*. This is a Least Concern species, but their population trend is decreasing and a Nature Iraq interview survey in 2010 found that a large number were hunted at this site and transported to other parts of the country for sale as pets. A summer and winter survey in 2011 documented the presense of Wild Goats on Peramagroon. According to local reports, Persian Leopards *Panthera pardus saxicolor* (Endangered) occurred historically but are thought to no longer be present. One significant reptiles observation was the Urmia Rock Lizard *Apathya cappadocia urmiana*.

Fish: Fish exist in Chami Mergapan but have not been assessed. Portions of this stream currently go dry in summer





and historical information would be needed to determine if this has always been the case or if development in the area has led to decreased water resources overall.

Additional Plant & Habitat Information: Peramagroon contains a good population of pistachios, *Pistacia eurycarpa* and *P. khinjuk*, which are economically and culturally important. *Gundelia tournefortii* and *Rumex ribes*, which are economically important as a traditional food, are found at the site as well as a good population of *Aegilops crassa*, and *A. umbellulata*, *Bromus diandrus*, *Hordeum bulbosum*, *Poa bulbosa*, and *Vitis vinifera*, which are important as genetic resources.

Conservation Issues: As expected, areas of high human use, such as the valleys and lower slopes, are more impacted, but evidence of human impacts can also be seen at higher elevations, including garbage in camping areas on the peak. A major road was completed in 2010 connecting the city of Sulaimani to the Mergapan valley. This has also increased land clearance and residential, commercial and tourism development throughout the valley, which are signifigant threats to Peramagroon. Though urban development has reached areas around the mountain urban planning lags far behind with no visible management or control of solid and liquid wastes and other habitat impacts related to these developments. For example, high threats from human disturbance and transport corridors have also resulted. More recently another road was being built up to the ridge top on the northwest side of the mountain not far from Kani Shuk. The purpose of this road is not clear and it is uncertain if it will be completed. As with other tourist destinations in Iraq, a great deal of garbage is left in the area because there appear to be few if any waste management facilities offered to the public. Most solid waste is dumped off convenient hillsides and later burned (including plastics and other hazardous materials). While there is no energy production or mining at Peramagroon currently, oil surveys have been conducted within and around the KBA site, so oil exploration and development may affect the site in the future.

Large mammals such as Wild Goat appear to have low populations due to hunting pressure. Expansion and intensification of agiculture have some significant impact. There are a high number of farms in the area and the use of agricultural chemicals such as pesticides has been seen in the fields, many of which are used for grape cultivation. Sediment run-off and direct livestock access to Chami Mergapan are likely affecting water quality. Grazing throughout the site should also receive closer scrutiny and control. While the environmental conditions improve with altitude, the area around the peak of Peramagroon is affected by the collection of Rhume *Rheum ribes*, an edible plant that grows naturally in the area.

Recommendations: Peramagroon Mountain is a globally important site for biodiversity and it should be given high priority for protection. The site offers opportunities for ecotourism, recreation and tourism if carefully planned and controlled. The Mergapan valley is still rapidly developing and this requires swift action to address urban and environmental planning needs. Road building, particularly to the top of the ridge, should be discouraged as it will increase negative impacts to the mountain. Overall management planning is needed toput in place controls on development, waste management, animal grazing, hunting, agricultural chemical use and tourism. Clear short & long-term zoning should be done to determine where and what kind of development is allowed to occur with a focus on ensuring sustainability. Land mine clearance is also an issue to address in parts of the site.

In 2013, a three-year conservation project funded by the Darwin Initaitive in the UK was started at this site. It includes extensive botanical surveys, development of modern conservation tools (photographic field guides that can be accessed through mobile phone applications), university and community environmental education programs, and socio-economic surveys of the area. It is recommended that this serve as a pilot project to encourage conservation planning at this and other sites in the region.