

World Environment Day in Iraq

In what has become a yearly tradition, the Iraqi Ministry of Environment celebrated the World Environment Day on June 5th at the Hunting Club in Mansour, Baghdad. Several hundred people attended the event, including representatives from the different Ministries and Iraqi environmental organizations (Nature Iraq, Green Kurdistan Association, Together for Humans & the Environment, Iraqi Greenpeace Organization, National Association for the Defense of the Environment & Child)



This year's program included speeches by HE Narmin Othman, Minister of Environment, Her Deputy, Dr. Muthana Aluomar and some Deputy Generals from the Ministry.

Dr Azzam Alwash of Nature Iraq/Iraq Foundation gave a presentation on the environmental and hydrological status of the Iraqi Marshlands. Alwash emphasized the catastrophe that took place in this area due to deliberate drying imposed by

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National Assembly forms Committees on Marshes and Water

Recognizing the need to bring attention to certain areas, the National Assembly of Iraq has created a series of special committees. Two of these committees includes one on Marshlands in southern Iraq and one on Water resources. These committees will focus on development and infrastructure needs. They will identify and work to obtain funds from donor countries, international organizations, and the Iraqi government itself to create development projects in these sectors.

MMPW Infrastructure Survey of the South

Survey work has already begun through the Ministry of Municipalities and Public Works to collect data on infrastructure in the three southern governates of Thi Qar, Missan and Basra. This is a key step in the creation of the Iraqi Marshland Areas Master Plan for development of the south, a project funded by the Italian Ministry of Environment and Global Territory (IMET) and the Iraqi Ministry of Municipalities & Public Works.

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Green Village: Sustainable Development ... Sustainable Design ...

Nature-Iraq is beginning work on the development of Green Villages for the marshlands of southern Iraq. The "Green Villages" or "Ecovillage" model is based on sustainable ecological settlements, which are very low impact in terms of services, waste, water and energy. These ecological settlements will be built to high standards of social, environmental and economic sustainability. The process of creating Green Villages in the marshlands will bring together planners, engineers, architects, biologists, contractors, and the marsh villagers themselves to enable sustainability.

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ABOUT US

Nature-Iraq is a Iraqi Environmental Non-Governmental Organization registered in Iraq. Nature-Iraq builds civil society networks to protect the environment of Iraq and develops capacity within Iraq, both in private and publicly-owned industries, to help clean and protect the environment.

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This is a massive project involving staff from Nature-Iraq, Iraqi ministries of water resources, municipalities and public works, environment, oil, health, education, transportation, communication, etc., and local stakeholder groups.

Currently teams from the Ministry of Municipalities and Public Work have been going out into the field to survey the existing infrastructure and conditions in these three governates. Staff from Nature-Iraq is coordinating the work with researchers from IMET.

The survey teams are visiting towns, villages and settlements throughout the region, conducting interviews with community leaders on existing public services (schools, medical services, roads & power availability); water supply networks (drinking and wastewater system, delivery networks and treatment plants), and current urban planning (industrial activity and development, new services & facilities, transportation, etc).

In July, a GIS Training Workshop took place in Amman, Jordan for Ministry and Nature-Iraq staff. The training covered advanced ArcGIS topics (ArcGIS II and Geodatabase design). ArcGIS will allow us to correlate the diverse information we get from the marshland areas survey (i.e. for wastewater facilities we want to be able to know and compare physical location, capacity, coverage area, treatment process, discharge locations, etc.). This will help us to make better decisions for development in these areas. The training in July was our first opportunity to look at and manipulate the initial survey data and gain a better understanding of the current state of the infrastructure that exists in the south.

We will be able to pinpoint the specific areas where infrastructure is non-existent and most needed verses area where existing infrastructure simply needs improvement. With this information the Master Plan for the south can begin to take shape.



Iraqi Students Begin Wetland Studies in Canada

Aside from having to make an adjustment to the quieter and more peaceful state of life in Canada after Iraq, the five Iraqi students have settled into their studies at the University of Waterloo in Ontario,

Canada. They are taking courses on wetland science and English. Dr. Barry Warner, head of the CIDA*-funded program that brought the Iraqi students to Canada for study is teaching the "Wetland Ecology" course that covers wetland classification, hydrology, geochemistry, biology, wetland ecotechnology & conservation/management.

"We are really thankful for this opportunity," said Sama Muhamed, "Dr. Warner's class is very exciting and makes me think about my work like a scientist. He is also giving us an understanding about Canadian wetlands ...

I think this kind of knowledge will be very useful for any one who wants to learn more about wetlands.”

In addition to taking classes and studying for exams, two of the students Mohammed Taqi and Aseel Kaiser are working on their thesis while in Canada.

Mohammed is focusing his work on the Benthic

Macroinvertebrates of Abu Zirig Marsh and Aseel's thesis is Zooplankton of the Iraqi Marshlands. In addition, a student research assistant (Ghasaq S. Abdul Ridhah) remains in Baghdad working on her thesis on phytoplankton of the Iraqi Marshlands.

*CIDA- Canadian International Development Agency

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the previous regime. He showed satellite images of the marshlands from the 80s, 90s and current day. The marshlands were reflooded and approximately 35% of the former marshes are now covered with water. He also reviewed the projects that we are implemented in the area. These projects include mathematical modeling of the Marshland water budget, biodiversity studies and ecological monitoring of the recovery of the Marshlands.

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There is a tremendous need in southern Iraq for development. Although Nature-Iraq's Eden Again project is attempting to restore the Mesopotamian Marshes, we do not have an idealized view of what life in the marshes was like before the drying. As beautiful as the marshes were, there were also many hardships for the people living there. Their subsistence lifestyle allowed for freedom and independence in a rich, diverse environment but also meant fewer economic opportunities, poor to nonexistent education, lack of proper health and veterinary care, and fewer rights for women. Many Marsh Arabs do not wish to return to the marshes if it means a return to such conditions.

We must find a way for modern human settlements to exist in the marshes in an environmentally sustainable fashion. It has never been an option to minimize human impact on the



marshes by simply removing the human presence from the marshes. The marshes have been occupied and manipulated by human beings for thousands of years. For Nature-Iraq the goal is to design a system where by a symbiotic relationship exists between the resident population and the ecosystem in which they live and learn. This is the essence of a green village.

The Green Village concept will allow us to show that these two ideals of marshland restoration and a modern lifestyle for the people who dwell there can and must co-exist. There is a place for the indigenous construction methods of the marshes represented by the Mudhif and sewage water collection and treatment. Water buffalo and fishing with modern health care and education.

There are a whole host of problems to consider when talking about development in the marshlands including the production of greenhouse gases, increased water consumption and reduced water quality, pollution of water bodies, poor access to power generation, limited means for transportation, waste management issues and recycling opportunities and reduction and fragmentation of habitats and ecosystems. Nature-Iraq will develop innovative, long lasting and easily replicated systems within the Green Villages for the following:

- * Rational use of energy and promotion of the use of diverse sources of energy and renewable energy.
- * Reducing the production of waste, recycling and reusing of materials
- * Improving water quality and reducing water pollution.
- * Developing modern systems for wastewater treatment for domestic sewage and gray water, and
- * Encouraging the implementation of sustainable development policies at a local and regional level.

We realize that our plan will need to change and adapt as new challenges present themselves and no plan will succeed without the direct input from the local population. It is not our intention to force implementation of a strategy or design, but rather to present and suggest potential solutions to the very real challenges of sustainable human development in the Mesopotamian marshlands.

Original Oil Painting by Kamal Al Mousawi

Nature-Iraq still has original oil paintings by the Nassarian painter Kamal Al Mousawi. You can view the Nature-Iraq collection on the Eden Again website at www.edenagain.org. Check the website for details on how to purchase.

