



Mesopotamian Marshland Mammals

M.K. Haba

Department of Biology/College of Science for Women, University of Baghdad

Abstract

More than 10 sites within marshlands were visited in three governorates in the south of Iraq. Amara, Nasiriya and Basra, to make survey to study the occurrence of Mammals in the marshlands. We tried in this present study to revive this field particularly after more than 30 years without information about mammals in Iraq. Because of nature of more species of mammals is nocturnal, we followed their signs such as Tracks, Feces and Shelters to introduce them. This work is a part of project named.

Key words: Biodiversity Area (KBA) funded by Nature Iraq Organization

1- Introduction

A recent survey made by the KBA (Key Biodiversity Area project funded by Nature Iraq Organization) team is a very good opportunity to revive the study of biodiversity in areas of southern Iraq, particularly after many years free of scientific information for animals. Therefore data about this field are poor especially for animals.

Little work has been done by many observers about the mammals of Iraq, these are Cheesman (1920), Pitman (1922), Thesiger (1954), Harrison(1956), Maxwell

(1957) made numerous references to the mammals of the region, Hatt (1959) collected extensive samples in many parts of Iraq and Khajuria(1980) discovered a new bandicoot rat. Mehdi and George(1969) made a Systematic list of vertebrate in Iraq. However there is a great need for further information about the animals in Iraq particularly mammals.

Most of the mammals are nocturnal in their behavior, and our survey was carried on during the day time but following the signs of these animals bring about many information needed.

After 1990, when the marshes of Iraq were dried, many of the animals disappeared like *Lutra perspicillata* which was found in Iraq only, and the Bandicoot Rat *Erythronesokia bunnii* (Khajuria,1980).

The aim of the present survey is to make records of the marshland animals after reflowing of these interesting ecosystems.

2-Methodology

The survey was carried out from 20 June to 18 July 2007. (Fig 1) shows visited sites. We depend on vision to indicate the

presence of the animals and their signs, also we depend on local interviews to collect fact information to support our findings.

The following equipment were used to observe animals :

- 1- Digital Camera (10 MP).
- 2- Spotting scope (Kawa, 500mm).
- 3- Binocular (8 * 42mm).

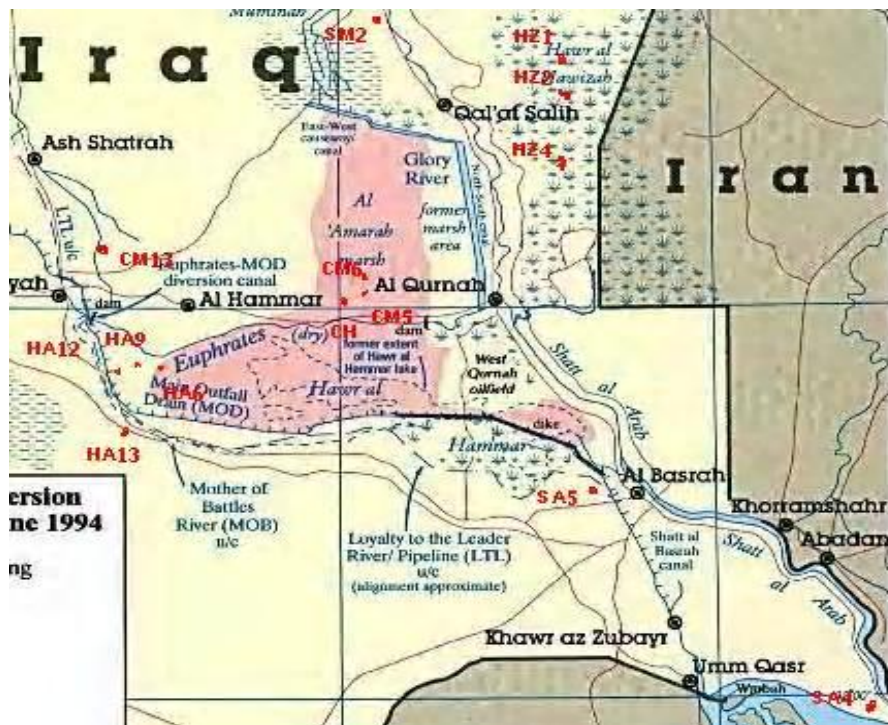


Fig 1: shows the sites of the present survey

CH=near al-chebaish city,CM5=Zechryi,CM6=Albseeta,CM13=Between Alnassir & Alrifaii,HA6=Um Nakhlah,HA9=South side of Al-Hammar, HA12=Alsanaf,HA13=Ibn Majed Lake,SA4=End of Besha,SA5=Gebasi, HZ1=Um AL-Niag,HZ2=AL-Udhaim,HZ4=Ojayradah,SM=Sarowtt.T=Tracks.

3- Results and Discussion

The Chebaish area in the Nasiriyah governorate is the starting point of our trips, and the street leading to this region from the Nasiriyah city is the boundary between the two largest marshes Al-Hammar and the Central marshes. Therefore, Fox, Jackal (Fig 2), Mongoose and other animals were spotted in the area.

There are two types of Foxes, Mongoose and Rabbits were found in Iraq. Animals like sand fox (Fig 3), small indian Mongoose (Fig 4) and European hare (Fig 5) were observed to occur in the marshes while the red fox and the Indian mongoose, found in Kurdistan, were not encountered in the present survey.

Wild boar was present in that area too, but far from sight and people in al-Hammar side, few have been identified through their tracks (Fig 6). Those animals keep far because the farmers are working to kill them because they destroy their farms so I think this animal on his way to disappear in that region. But most frequently found the distance are far from the al- Chabaish marshes and adjacent to al-Hammar marsh like HA6, HA9, HA12 and HA13 ,and HZ2 in Al- Amarah and SA4 in Basra where the only time we saw this animal by the naked eye (Fig 7).

Tracks are our guide to other animals, such as Hare (Fig 8) , wild cat (Fig 9), Fox (Fig 10) and carnivores animals belonging to the dog family. However, it is difficult to compare between the tracks of wolves, Jackals and dogs, but the tracks of dog more times have been escorted with livestock tracks ,whereas the other are belonging to wolf or jackal specially that we see in areas far from any population residence in places where there is no grazing for livestock (Fig 11). Measurements of the tracks may bring out a size factor which may distinguish between the three animals.

Also the remnants of eaten animals such as feathers (Fig12), hair, bones and sometimes pieces of body (Fig 13) and scat (Fig 14) indicate temporary places of carnivore's animals.

We have got a number of different rodent like Gird (Fig 15) and Lesser White-toothed shrew (Fig 16) in Al-chebaish, Brown Rat in CM5 in Al-Nasiriyah and SA5 in Basrah and HZ4 in Al-Amarah (Fig 17) and house mouse in HZ2 in Al-Amarah (Fig 18). Measurements of rat and mice shelters ranging from 2 cm to 8 cm in diameter (Fig 19). In one day at dawn showed that they were a number of sand foxes near Al-Chebaish, were found and their dens were about 14-20 cm in diameter (Fig 20). While

Murdoch et al,(2007) recorded den entrances in Dhafra, UAE of approximately 25cm in width.

Interviews with local people

Interviewing people, sometimes give an overstated information while in other times the information were escorted with convincing scientific facts. The people gave us help especially in Al-Chebaish town to obtain a number of mice and number of hedgehogs (Fig 21). In an old store in the city dozens of large Bats (Fig 22) were found on the walls.

Some of the people mentioned that there are many kinds of wild animals found in the area (HA1) such as wild cat, Lynx ,Wolf ,Porcupine and Otters, one of the animals that disappeared from southern Iraq after the draining of the marshes in 1990, but after the reflooding to the marshes, , a few numbers may have returned gradually to the marshes. Some fishermen confirmed the existence of this animal, but in distant places in al- Tehla (small area full of roots of reeds and fragmites) inside the marshes.

Laidler (1982) mentioned that, Sight, smell, touch and hearing are the four senses an otter uses to communicate with other members of the population and with the environment, hearing and smell are the most important senses.

Wayre (1972) frequently observed his tame otters prick up their ears in response to

sounds totally inaudible to him , as is receiving on a different wave-length. Townshend (1937) relates an incident with her pet otter which adds weight to this supposition. She was filming her pet which was swimming contentedly in a pond at the bottom of a larg disused sandpit. Suddenly some thing cought the otter's attention and she turned in the opposite direction, rushed out of the pond , ran across the floor of the sandpit and up the steep bank , a distance of some 360m. She was found on top of the bank avidly consuming a family of fledglings whose nest she had tipped over. It seems likely that she had responded to high-frequency sounds produced by the fledgling.

In Basra on 28 June, a story of spotting a strange animal (Gerta) especially in the perimeters of the city (Al-Garma, Al-Gzaiza, Abu skhair and Al- Shelaygiya), it is Honey Badger *Mellivora capensis*, Image of this animal taken by mobiles revealed that.

An announcement by the British Troops about the ratel honey Badger appeared in the website (www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mellivora_capensis).

Moreover , major David Gell, a British Army spokesman, said the animals were thought to be a kind of honey badger or ratel - *melivora capensis* - which can be

fierce but are not usually dangerous to humans unless provoked.

(www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/iraq/article2059824)

Hatt (1959) classified honey Badger within rare animals in Iraq, but as we hear and see in Basra, I think it is rise in number.

We couldn't reach to some animals like Hyena, Wild cat, Wolf, Otter, and Porcupine but the people confirmed the existence of these animals with little numbers.



Fig 2: Asiatic Jackal *Canis aureus* Site code: HA near Alchebaish.



Fig 3: Sand Fox *Vulpes ruppelli* Site code: HA near Alchebaish , CM6.



Fig 4: Small Indian Mongoose *Herpestes auropunctatus* Site code: CH, CM5, CM13, SA5



Fig 5: European Hare *Lepus europaeus* Site code: HZ1



Fig 6: Wild Boar tracks, on the left shows hoofs with two pads (arrows) because it is Instilled deeply inside the mud while the track on the right didn't have pads because it not instill enough, we know that the pads are naturally found little high from the hoofs.



Fig 7: Wild Boar *Sus scrofa* Site cod: HA6, HA9, HA12, HA13, SA4, SM2, HZ2



Fig 8: Possibly Hare track



Fig 9: Possibly Wild Cat tracks



Fig 10: Fox track



Fig 11: Dog Family tracks



Fig 12: Feathers



Fig 13: Half body of eaten Rat



Fig 14: Rat scat



Fig 15: Gird

Site cod: CM near Alchebaish



Fig 16: Lesser White-toothed Shrew
Crocidura suaveolens

Site cod: CM near Alchebaish



Fig 17: Brown Rat *Rattus norvegicus*
Site code: CM5, SA5, HZ4.



Fig 18: House Mouse *Mus musculus*
Site code: HZ2.



Fig 19: Rat's Shelter



Fig 20: Fox's Den



Fig 21: Long-eared Hedgehog
Hemiechinus auritus



Fig 22: Naked-bellied Tomb Bat
Taphozous nudiventris

Site code:CM near Alchebaish

Site code: CM near Alchebaish



Fig 23: shows space of green land surround the water suitable To be reserve area for rare animals.

Table 1: Shows the numbers of animals recorded by place during present survey.

Local & Scientific name	Site Code													
	CM	CM5	CM6	CM13	HA6	HA9	HA12	HA13	SA4	SA5	IZ1	IZ2	IZ4	SM2
Indian Grey Mangrove <i>Sonneratia caseolaris</i>	2	1		1						1				
Coastal Wren <i>Troglodytes aedon</i>	5	2												
Wild Duck <i>Anas boschas</i>				1	1	1	1	1	5			1	1	
Asian Lark <i>Lark chinensis</i>	1													
Asian Heron <i>Ardea asiatica</i>	1										1			
Brown Red Shrike <i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i>									2					2
House Mouse <i>Mus musculus</i>												1		
Long-tailed Leaf-eating <i>Phyllanthus amarus</i>	1													
Red Eye				1										
Lesser White-toothed Shrike <i>Coccyzus coromandus</i>	2													
Naked-rumped Tomb Bat <i>Eptesicus macrotis</i>	24													

4- Recommendations

The departments of the Ministry of Environment in southern Iraq did not pay any attention to preserve the animals and

wildlife even a little, However, it is highly recommended that these depts., should:

- 1- Spread awareness among the people to avoid hunting rare animals using simple methods such as illustrative copy pictures.

- 2- Determin the areas where the rare animals are.
- 3- Move together towards tribal notables to give hands Because Iraqi society is a clan society, Clan perhaps be more benefit than the state in present time.
- 4-Establish a natural reserve areas in southern Iraqi marshes preserving Wildlife in these marvelous places (Fig 23).

5- Acknowledgments

My thanks and appreciation go to all of :Nature Iraq Organizayion.

All my colleagues in KBA Team. Local people, Fishermen, who gave as Serious kind of assistants.

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لبائن اهورار وادي الرافدين

مختار خميس حبة

قسم علوم الحياة-كلية العلوم-جامعة البصرة

الخلاصة

تم زيارة اكثر من 10 مواقع لاراضي الاهورار في ثلاث محافظات جنوب العراق، العمارة، الناصرية والبصرة لعمل مسح لدراسة تواجد اللبائن في تلك المواقع. حاولنا في هذه الدراسة احياء هذا الجانب من الدراسة خاصة بعد مرور اكثر من 30 عام بدون وجود معلومات حول اللبائن في العراق. بسبب طبيعة اغلب اللبائن ليلية المعيشة، اتبعنا علاماتها التي تتركها خلفها مثل طبغات الاقدام، الغائط والمخابئ للتعرف على تواجدها. هذه الدراسة جزء من مشروع مدعوم من قبل منظمة طبيعة العراق.
