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The Breeding of waterbirds in the marshland of Mesopotamia

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Abstract

The southern part of Iraq is considered to be an important area for migrating birds . This importance is due be to the geographical position on the migratory rout from Siberia to Africa . The extensive wetlands and marshes (Ahwar) of lower Mesopotamia encourage these migratory birds to rest and feed during the non-breeding season. Most previous ornithological investigation and collections in Iraq were made by amateurs and researchers such as Sharpe (1886) Meinetzhausen (1914) Thornhill (1918) and Ticehurst et al. (1922), the most comprehensive study about the bird of Iraq was made by Allouse (1953,1956,1957 and 1958). Recent studies on water birds of southern Iraq where made by Scott and carp (1982) ; they survey the birds of southern Iraq during 1976 – 1979. Al Robaae (1986,1994; 1996 ,1998 , 1999 , 2001) published several about the waterbirds in southern Iraq concerned mainly with shorebirds and ducks especially diving ducks , birds count and Bird migration. During the last few years ornithological studies became very hard, if not impossible to pursue. The aim of the present work is to give a review on breeding waterbirds in southern Mesopotamia , hoping future studies and research to conserve this group of birds in the marshland.

1.The waterbirds in the Marshes

The avifauna of Marshlands was summarized in 1994 to be about (134) species, (Nicholson and Clark,2001) dependent on marsh habitat and occurred in southern Mesopotamia in significant numbers, of these about 42 species

were known to have breed in the marshes , of which at least 31 were waterbirds. There were no systematic surveys on water birds of the marshes during the breeding season no recent

data available on breeding of water birds most were belong to the fifties or before.

Information gathered on breeding birds recorded before desiccation of the marshes were

as follow: 42 waterbirds 40 from them as breeding birds.

2.The breeding waterbirds in the marshes of Mesopotamia, before desiccation

1- little Grebe: *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

breeding in the marshes with thick plant cover specially *phragmitis australis* in late May and Jan several nest were found in Basrah and Al-Musaibe marshes the number of eggs between 2-6 (Ticehurst, 1921).

2- Black-necked Grebe: *podiceps nigricollis*

This species is not common in the southern marshes its breed in Al-Amara marshes and Al-Musaibe in May and June as mentioned by (Ticehurst, 1921).

3- Great Crested Grebe

Podice podiceps cristatus

winter visitor to the marshes in small numbers breed in certain area of the southern marshes (Ticehurst, 1921) found one egg in Al-Eskandriya marshes in 14 July and pair of adult in breeding status in Aqrqf marsh in 21 August.

4- White pelican: *Pelecanus onocrotalus*

winter visitor came to the marshes during winter months and then several flocks move to the south where they breed near Iraqi southern border and Bobian Island in April. Ticehurst (1921) mention that he saw adults and checks in Al-Shuwaicha marsh near Kut city in August most other reports recorded the occurrence during the period from April to August.

5- Dalmatian Pelican : *Pelecanus crispus*

occurred during migration in small numbers in comparison with the white pelican, breeding sites where similar to the white pelican (Ticehurst, 1921).

6- Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo sinensis*

winter visitor to the marshes no confirmed report about breeding in the area except (Moore and Boswell, 1956) saw flock in breeding states in middle of Feb.

7- Pygmy cormorant: *Phalacrocorax pygmeus*

a resident species breed in the southern marshes, (Ticehurst, 1921) mention that this species breed from Al-Azair to Qurna, he saw nest and eggs in middle of May, also breed in Al-Masaib, Al-Hammar, Bani Mansour marshes, where nest had been seen in 12 July in a breeding colony with a darters and night heron.

8- Shag or green cormorant: *phalacrocorax aristotelis*

Vagrant species reach the marshes in winter and the report of Ticehurst, (1921) recorded from Amara marshes during Nov. and Dec. the status of this species in Iraq need more reports for confirmation.

9- Darter : *Anhinga rufa*

occurrence in the marsh with dense reeds in Al-Qurna, Al-Amara, Bani Mansour marshes breed in places where the height of phragmites australis reach about 4 m the nest build on dry common

reeds within one meter from the water surface .eggs were collected in the middle of May its nest were seen in Bani-Mansoor marsh with the breeding colonies of pygmy cormorant in 12 of July .

10- Goliath heron : *Ardea goliath*

occurrence in the marshes near Amara , Qurna and Kut breed in the places with very high common reeds (Ticehurst, 1921).

11-Grey Heron : *Ardea Cinerea*

winter visitor increase in numbers in spring and Autumn migration occurred near the banks in Island in the north of Arabian Gulf during May and may be in Al-Hammar marsh without conclusive evidence of breeding in the marshes after breeding distributed in the marshes .

12-Purple Heron: *Ardea purpurea* :

breed in the marshes with a dense reed in Amara ,Qurna, Al-Musayab marshes in March, April this species is common in the southern marshes specially in Summer.

13-Reef heron : *Egretta gularis*

this bird occurred in the northern region of the Arabian Gulf (Fao) breed in Khur Al-Zubair and Bobian and Warba island start building nest in early April ,each nest contain three eggs Ticehurst, (1921) saw several checks in late June .

14-Great white heron : *Egretta alba*

winter visitor no report till now about the breeding in the southern marshes but it may be breed in the southern marshes due to his occurrence in the area .

15-Squacca heron : *Ardeola ralloides*

winter visitor breed in the southern marshes starting from May, Allouse (1958) report that its nest found in Fao area in July and contain 4-

5 eggs and could breed in Al-Hammar ,Amara ,Al-Musayab marshes.

16- Buff- backed Heron : *Ardeola ibis*

Resident species in the Arabian Gulf breed in the northern part, common in the southern marshes around water buffalo herds.

17-Night heron : *Nycticorax nycticorax*

Resident species nest found in the marshes near Basrah in July number of eggs was four and Allouse (1956) said that's breed in trees, he collected 4 eggs from one nest in August.

18-little Bittern : *Ixobrychus minutes*

Summer visitor breed in the marshes with dense reeds in May and June the nest contain 5-6 eggs , build its nest with 60 cm above the water surface .

19-Bittern: *Botaurus Stellaris*

winter visitor no confirmed report above breeding in the southern marshes .

20- White stork: *ciconia ciconia*

winter visitor in large numbers widely distributed in the southern marshes and banks of the rivers breed mainly in Fao..

21- clossy Ibis : *plegadis falcinellus*

a resident species in the marshes near Ammar no record a bout its breeding in the southern marshes, further studies were heed .

22- Bald ibis : *Geronticus eremita*

breeding cases were recorded in the north western area of Iraq recent studies indicated that this species breed in the southern marshes .

23- Sacred Ibis: *Threskiornis aethiopicus*

breed in the southern marshes, nests were found near Qurna contained 3-4 eggs ,checks were found in July

24- Spoonbill: *platalea leucoradia*

breed in Basrah , Fao & Qourna marshes .Nests were found at Khor Al Zubair, eggs were collected in June.

25- Flamingo : *phoenicopterus ruber*

Reports indicated that breed in Fao were several colonies found in April, eggs collected in May .the nest contain 1 egg and sometime 2 .after breeding disperse in the southern marshes

26-Mallard : *Anas platyrhynchos*

winter visitor no conclusive evident that breed in the marshes the local people postulated that they found nest in summer, could be for individuals left in the marshes .

27- Gadwell:*Anas strepera*

winter visitor no conclusive evident that breed in the marshes.

28- Gargancy:*Anas querquedula*

winter visitor few lifted individual in the summer could breed in certain suitable places in the marshes.

29-Wigeon:*Anas penelope*

winter visitor no conclusive evident that breed in the marshes.

30-Marbled duck: *Anas angustirostris*

winter visitor breed in the marshes and on the banks of rivers ,few nests found near Qurna by Al-Robaae (1998).

31-Shelduck: *Tadorna tadorna* .

winter visitor left individual to the summer could be breed in the marshes (Allous, 1953).

32-Ruddy shelduck: *Tadorna ferruginea*

Breed in the marshes during summer time but more disperse in winter reports indicated that's breed on the banks of Tigris during May and June (Allouse, 1953).

33-Grey leg- *Goose Anser anser* .

winter visitor few individual left to the summer in the marshes breed with in dense reeds and

Typha. Nest, built by one foot higher the water surface .three checks were collected from next at Al-Hammar marsh in 21 May (Allouse, 1953).

34- Coot *Fulica atra*

Winter visitor some individuals breed in certain suitable places. Report indicated breed in June, nest contain five eggs .

37- White tailed plover : *Chettusia leucura*

Resident species , breed in the marshes , the breeding season for this species began in April, nests seen in late May and June .

38- Spur-winged plover : *Hoplopterus spinosus*

Resident species ,the breeding season in June, nests content 3 or 4 eggs and are a simple hall near the water surface .

39- Red Wattled Lapwing : *Lobivanellus vanellus indicus*

Resident species widely spread . breed in vegetation bushes near the water, breeding season in middle of April, their nests and eggs were found in May and June. Allouse (1958) found juveniles in June.

40- Little Ringed Plover : *Charadrius Dubius*

Resident species , its breeding season start in April. Nests were found in the marshes of Qurna .

41- Kentish Plover : *Charadrius alexandrinus*

Resident species , breed in south Iraq from April to late of June

Three eggs in nest, saw the nests through June at Qurna , Basrah , Amara and Shwaika marshes .

42- Black-Tailed Godwit: *Limosa limosa*

Winter visitor , few may still in Summer but no evidence on its breeding in the marshes .

43- Avocet: *Recurvirostra avosetta*

Resident species occurred around the year in southern marshes breed in few numbers

44- Black-winged stilt: *Himantopus Himantopus*

Resident, species breed the marshes , the nests and eggs were found in May and early June , the nest contain on 3-4 eggs.

45- Collared Pratincole : *Glareola Pratincola*

Summer visitor breed in of the marshes, The number of the eggs in a nest 2-3 eggs .

46- Black - winged pratincole : *Glareola rordmanni*

Not very common may breed in the same places of *G. pratincola*.

47- Green-colored courser : *Corsorius*

The breeding season start in may to June

48- Slender- billed Gull: *Larus genei*

Its breeding colonies were found in Almusiab, Alxcndarya, Amara ,Basrah and Fao

49- White Winged Black Tern : *Chlidonias leucopter*

summer visitor breed in the marshes, nest contain 3-4 eggs .

50- Whiskered Tern : *Chlidonias hybird*

Breeding season in June and July in the swamps beside marshes

51- Gull-billed Tern : *Gelochelidon nilotica*

Summer vistor according to cumming (1918), he collect eggs from Fao in late August, the nest contain 2 or 3 eggs

52- Caspian Tern : *Hydroprogn caspia*

Breed in southern marshes, this species spread to Hor al Howaiza , the nest contain on 2-3 eggs .

53-Common Tern : *Sterna hirundo*

Summer visitor breed in the swamps near Basrah and Hor Al-Hammar and Amara , the nest contain 3 eggs .

54- little tern : *Sterna albifrons*

Breed in summer according to Allouse (1956) mentioned that he saw juveniles in late June.

55- White - checked Tern : *sterna repressa*

According to Ticehurst (1918) this species breed in isles near Fao in May .

56- Swift Tern : *sterna bergii velox*

Cumming, (1918) mentioned that he got 6 eggs from nest in Fao area (this bird lay one egg in the nest).

57- Lesser crested Tern : *sterna bangalensis*

Breed in the marshes and isles in the May breeding colony contain several nests .

58- Common king fisher : *alcedo atthis*

Breed in small number between the reed and typha in Basrah marshes .

59- Pied king fisher : *Ceryle rudis*

Resident species common in southern Iraq found in large number breeding colony, found in Qurna Marshes .

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الطيور المائية التي تفرخ في احوار جنوب العراق

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الخلاصة

يعتبر الجزء الجنوبي من العراق منطقة مهمة لهجرة الطيور وتأتي هذه الأهمية بسبب الموقع الجغرافي لهذه المنطقة والتي تقع في خط الهجرة من سيبيريا إلى أفريقيا. إن المنطقة الشاسعة للاحوار تشجع هذه الطيور المهاجرة على التعشيش والتغذية خلال فترة عدم التكاثر وقد أجريت العديد من البحوث على هذه المنطقة ولكن أكثر هذه الدراسات أهمية هي دراسات اللوس 1953، 1957، 1958، ومن الدراسات الحديثة دراسة Scott and cara , 1982 الذي نشر العديد من المطبوعات عن الطيور المائية في جنوب العراق وخاصة بط السواحل وعدد الطيور المهاجرة وتهدف هذه الدراسة لتقديم مراجعة عن تكاثر الطيور المائية في الجزء الجنوبي لوادي الرافدين .