

## Eden Again: Hope in the Marshes of Iraq

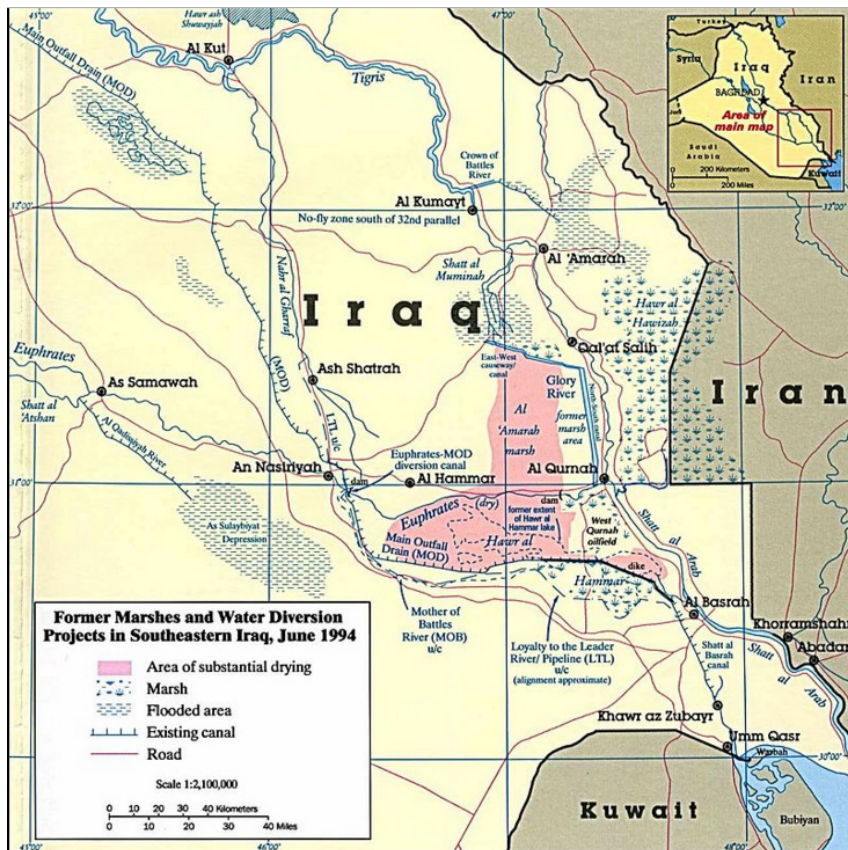
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Every once in a while this reviewer discovers a book that peaks one's curiosity, addresses wetland restoration, is not a wetland science book per se but incorporates human wetland lifestyle dependency. Examples of such would include those catching crayfish the Atchafalaya in Louisiana or those fishing on the Georgia coastal wetlands. This reviewer has long been intrigued with human ecology, and the roles of nongovernment organizations in wetland management (Smardon 2009). Suzanne Alwash's book *Eden Again: Hope in the Marshes of Iraq* is such a book. This book reveals the history of the Southern Iraq wetlands fed by the Tigris and Euphrates rivers from ancient times to about 2012. This reviewer became familiar with the

marsh dependent dwellers with Wilfred Thesiger's classic book the *Marsh Arabs* first published in 1964 and then again in 1967 and 2007.

Alwash covers the key periods of the Southern Iraq Marsh history within the first three chapters. Chapter 1 – the *Ma'dan and the marshes* recounts the natural history and the indigenous culture of the marshlands. Much of this is drawn from Wilfred Thesiger's (1964) work as he traveled through the southern Iraq region from the 1940s to the 1960s. Chapter two is a depressing account of the near total destruction of the wetlands in the 1990s (Figure 1) as Saddam Hussein pursued the rebel forces within the marshlands. Ironically Chapter three is a historical regression to the last ice ages, wetland formation and the early human history of the area.

FIGURE 1: 1994 Map of the Mesopotamian Marshes showing drained areas in pink Source; Wikipedia; [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Draining\\_of\\_the\\_Mesopotamian\\_Marshes](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Draining_of_the_Mesopotamian_Marshes)



Chapter four addresses the efforts of those outside of Iraq to garner international support to stop the marshland dewatering and the forced migration of the marsh dwellers. Chapter five covers the efforts of marsh dwellers, and local government to re-flood the marshes in 2003. Chapter six addresses the beginning of Iraq's first environmental organization, *Nature Iraq*, and its work to build an environmental ethos in a country still reeling with civil war.

The next four chapters address the physical aspects of the Southern Iraq wetlands and challenges for restoration. Chapter seven is a description of the re-flooded wetlands and partial ecosystem rebirth from 2003 through 2007. Chapter eight covers the bird life of the wetlands and chapter nine covers efforts to restore indigenous fish communities. Chapter ten is a critical chapter in addressing hydrologic issues of water supply plus upstream water use and management by Turkey, Syria and Iran that constrains marsh restoration.

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The last four chapters constitute a “political ecology” of the various factors and factions affecting restoration progress. Chapter eleven addresses the need for Iraq to utilize international treaties such as Ramsar plus national law to protect sensitive areas such as the Southern Iraq marshes. Chapter twelve covers the international and local efforts to support the lives of the marsh dwellers. Chapter thirteen covers the multi-year drought starting in 2007 plus upstream water use and diversions that had a devastating impact on the marshlands. Finally Chapter fourteen is a normative agenda for what needs to be done to sustain the remnant marshes and or partially restore adjacent degraded marshland areas.

The author provided key sources for each of the chapters at the end of the book. There are illustrations throughout the book with a set of color plate illustrations in the middle of the book. This reviewer would like to have seen a few more map-like figures illustrating the various hydrologic changes such as inflows and marsh areas as it is confusing after 2003.

The value of this book is the integrative nature of marsh restoration hydrology and ecology with the human ecology of the marsh dwellers and the political ecology of the key actors. The author’s narrative of these key actors – the marsh dwellers, the NGO Nature Iraq, local government, and Iraq national government agencies – is enriched by her first hand experiences with all these actors. Restoration of the Southern Iraq marshes is a truly daunting task but this book provides a hopeful prognosis for partial restoration of this internationally important wetland complex. ■

#### REFERENCES

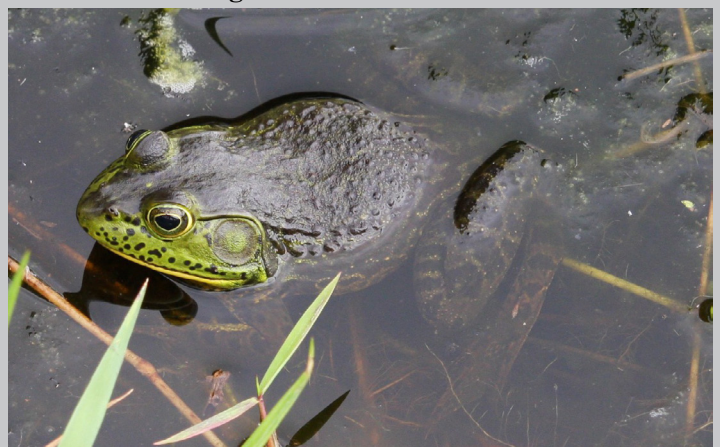
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- Smardon, R.C. 2009. *Sustaining the Worlds Wetlands: Setting Policy and Resolving Conflicts*. Springer Science, Dordrecht, Heidelberg, London & New York. 326pp.
- Thesiger, W. 1964. *The Marsh Arabs*. Penguin, London. 233 pp.

Photos by Ralph Tiner from recent time spent in Florida. See more of his photos in his *Notes from the Field*, beginning on the next page (page 138).

**Mottled Duck**



**American Bullfrog**



**Roseate Spoonbill**



**Sandhill Crane with young**

