

Information Sheet on Ramsar Wetlands

Categories approved by Recommendation 4.7 of the Conference of the Contracting Parties.

NOTE: It is important that you read the accompanying *Explanatory Note and Guidelines* document before completing this form.

1. Date this sheet was completed/updated:

21-02-1997

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Designation date

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Site Reference Number

2. Country:

Islamic Republic of Iran

3. Name of wetland: Khouran Straits

4. Geographical coordinates: 26°45'N 55°40'E

5. Altitude: (average and/or max. & min.) sea level

6. Area: (in hectares) 100,000 ha

7. Overview: (general summary, in two or three sentences, of the wetland's principal characteristics)

A vast complex of low-lying muddy islands, mangrove-swamps, inter-tidal mudflats and creeks in the shallow straits between the island of Gheshm and the mainland coast, in the southern Persian Gulf. The site is extremely important for breeding and wintering waterfowl, especially herons Ardeidae, shorebirds, gulls and terns. It is the largest mangrove-mudflat system in Iran.

8. Wetland Type (please circle the applicable codes for wetland types as listed in Annex I of the *Explanatory Note and Guidelines* document.)

marine-coastal: A · B · C · D · E · F · G · H · I · J · K

inland: L · M · N · O · P · Q · R · Sp · Ss · Tp · Ts
· U · Va · Vt · W · Xf · Xp · Y · Zg · Zk

man-made: 1 · 2 · 3 · 4 · 5 · 6 · 7 · 8 · 9

Please now rank these wetland types by listing them from the most to the least dominant: A G F E B I

9. Ramsar Criteria: (please circle the applicable criteria; see point 12, next page.)

1a · 1b · 1c · 1d | 2a · 2b · 2c · 2d | 3a · 3b · 3c | 4a · 4b

Please specify the most significant criterion applicable to the site: 2c, 2b, 1a

10. Map of site included? Please tick *yes* -or- *no*

(Please refer to the *Explanatory Note and Guidelines* document for information regarding desirable map traits).

11. Name and address of the compiler of this form:

Please provide additional information on each of the following categories by attaching extra pages (please limit extra pages to no more than 10):

12. Justification of the criteria selected under point 9, on previous page. (Please refer to Annex II in the *Explanatory Note and Guidelines* document).

1a: The wetlands of the Khouran Straits are an outstanding example of the coastal mudflat/mangrove system characteristic of deltaic and estuarine systems in the southern Persian Gulf and along the adjacent coasts of the Gulf of Oman.

2a: The wetlands provide a habitat for two globally threatened species: a wintering habitat the pelican *Pelecanus crispus*, and a regular feeding place for the green turtle *Chelonia mydas*.

2b: At Khouran Straits there is a very diverse flora and fauna, and it thus maintains the genetic and ecological diversity of the region.

2c: The wetlands are important spawning and nursery grounds for many fish species, and support large breeding colonies of Ardeidae.

3a: The mudflats regularly support over 20,000 waterfowl in winter.

3c: The wetland supports over 1% of the regional Middle East populations of the waterbirds *Egretta gularis*, *Platalea leucorodia*, *Haematopus ostralegus*, *Dromas ardeola*, *Numenius arquata*, *Tringa cinerea*, *Larus ridibundus* and *Gelochelidon nilotica*.

13. General location: (include the nearest large town and its administrative region)

Khouran Straits are situated in the Province of Bandar Abbas, in the southern Persian Gulf between the mainland and the island of Ghesm (or Qeshm), about 60 km west-southwest of the city of Bandar Abbas. There are a few small settlements near Khouran Straits.

14. Physical features: (e.g. geology, geomorphology; origins - natural or artificial; hydrology; soil type; water quality; water depth; water permanence; fluctuations in water level; tidal variations; catchment area; downstream area; climate)

The Khouran Straits, formerly known as Clarence Straits, are situated between the Iranian mainland in the region of the Mehran and Kul/Rasul river deltas, and the large island of Ghesm (110 km east-west and 20 km north-south). Within the straits, there are some 100,000 ha of low-lying islands, mangroves, mudflats and creeks. The mangrove forests reach their greatest development around a group of low-lying muddy islands in a large bay on the northern shore of Ghesm Island opposite the Mehran Delta, but there are also significant stands along the outer margins of the Mehran Delta. In these areas and in the delta of the Kul/Rasul river to the east, vast areas of mudflats are exposed at low tide. Elsewhere along the Ghesm and mainland coast, the shoreline consists of wide sandy beaches and sand flats. A few small fishing settlements are scattered along the shore.

15. Hydrological values: (groundwater recharge, flood control, sediment trapping, shoreline stabilisation etc)

It is very likely that the mangrove forests along the banks of the Mehran Delta are protecting the river banks from erosive forces.

16. Ecological features: (main habitats and vegetation types)

The mangrove forests, which cover an estimated 6,800 ha, comprise monospecific stands of the black mangrove *Avicennia marina*. These are the most westerly mangroves of any size in Iran. The mangroves and shallow inshore waters are an important breeding and nursery ground for many species of crustaceans and fishes important in the local fishery. Apart from the mangroves, red and brown algae constitute the dominant vegetation in shallow coastal waters. The mangroves, islands and mudflats in the straits form the largest mangrove/mudflat ecosystem in Iran. The adjacent coastal plains are mainly barren sand flats with scattered *Acacia*, *Prosopis* and other thorn trees.

17. Noteworthy flora: (indicating, e.g., which species/communities are unique, rare, endangered or biogeographically important, etc)

The site contains much of the most extensive stands of *Avicennia marina* in Iran, although most of the trees are rather stunted compared to those further east along the coast of Gheshm Island. On the sandy beaches are some scattered *Acacia* and *Prosopis* growing, and in the shallow coastal waters red and brown algae (Rhodophyceae and Phaeophyceae) are the dominant species.

18. Noteworthy fauna: (indicating, e.g., which species are unique, rare, endangered, abundant or biogeographically important; include count data, etc.)

The mangrove forests support the largest breeding colony of the Indian pond heron *Ardeola grayii* in Iran. There are many other species of waterfowl breeding in the area, like egrets, Goliath heron and green-backed heron (may breed there). Other breeding birds include crab plover, great stone plover, Saunder's tern and gull-billed tern. Wintering waterfowl include ducks and red-breasted merganser, and other wintering birds include white-tailed eagle, marsh harrier and hawks. A list with some waterfowl counting results is attached. In total 93 bird species have been recorded.

Green turtles *Chelonia mydas* occur in significant numbers off the coast of Gheshm Island.

19. Social and cultural values: (e.g. fisheries production, forestry, religious importance, archaeological site etc.)

The Khouran Straits are used for fishing.

20. Land tenure/ownership of:

(a) site: National Government

(b) surrounding area: no information available

21. Current land use:

(a) site: fishing, both subsistence and commercial, cutting of mangroves for charcoal, grazing by domestic livestock (mainly camels), small date gardens around some settlements

(b) surroundings/catchment: there are a few small settlements and some small-scale agriculture.

22. Factors (past, present or potential) adversely affecting the site's ecological character, including changes in land use and development projects:

(a) at the site: Some illegal cutting of mangroves for fuel and grazing by domestic livestock has been recorded. The easternmost part of the site is not included within any legally protected area, and has been subject to logging of mangroves for charcoal production. There is some disturbance from fishing activities and boat travels in the straits. A part of the area is potentially at risk from the proposed development of a free port and tourist facilities on Gheshm. There may be some pollution from the nearby port of Bandar Abbas, and oil pollution is an ever-present threat.

(b) around the site: no information available

23. Conservation measures taken: (national category and legal status of protected areas - including any boundary changes which have been made: management practices; whether an officially approved management plan exists and whether it has been implemented)

The main area of mangroves and mudflats (82,360 ha) was designated as a protected region in 1973. This reserve was later increased to 85,686 ha and upgraded to the national park status (Hara National Park). However, the park was downgraded to protected area in the 1980s. The entire area of 100,000 ha has been designated as a Ramsar site, and since 1976 also as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve.

24. Conservation measures proposed but not yet implemented: (e.g. management plan in preparation; officially proposed as a protected area etc.)

none known

25. Current scientific research and facilities: (e.g. details of current projects; existence of field station etc.)

The Ornithology Unit of the Department of the Environment has carried out annual mid-winter censuses in most years since 1970, and breeding-surveys have been undertaken on several occasions. A marine laboratory was established at Bandar Abbas in the early 1970s, and there is a marine research station on the island of Hormoz to the east.

26. Current conservation education: (e.g. visitors centre, hides, information booklet, facilities for school visits etc.)

no information available

27. Current recreation and tourism: (state if wetland is used for recreation/tourism; indicate type and frequency/intensity)

there is some tourism

28. Jurisdiction: (territorial e.g. state/region and functional e.g. Dept of Agriculture/Dept. of Environment etc.)

Department of the Environment

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Islamic Republic of Iran

29. Management authority: (name and address of local body directly responsible for managing the wetland)

Department of the Environment, address as mentioned above (28)

30. Bibliographical references: (scientific/technical only)

Carp, E. (1980). *A Directory of Western Palearctic Wetlands*. IUCN, Gland, Switzerland.

Evans, M.I. (1994). *Important Bird Areas in the Middle East*. BirdLife International, Cambridge, United Kingdom.

Mansoori, J. (1983). *National Report on Iran's Wetlands of International Importance as Habitat for Waterfowl*. Prepared for the Groningen Conference, Netherlands, in May 1984.

Scott, D.A. (1976). *A List of the Wetlands of Iran*. Internal Report. Department of the Environment, Teheran, Iran.

Scott, D.A. (1995). *A Directory of Wetlands in the Middle East*. IUCN, Gland, Switzerland and IWRB, Slimbridge, United Kingdom.

UNEP/IUCN (1988). *Coral Reefs of the World. Volume 2: Indian Ocean, Red Sea and Gulf*. UNEP Regional Seas Directories and Bibliographies. IUCN, Gland, Switzerland / UNEP, Nairobi, Kenya.

WCMW (1990). Iran. In: Spagnesi, M (ed.), *Proceedings Conference on the Conservation of Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat, Cagliari, Italy, 24-29 November 1980*. Supplemento alle Ricerche di Biologia delle Selvaggina. Vol.III (1): 741-747.

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**List of bird species including counting results
Khouran Straits**

waterfowl

- globally threatened species

<i>Pelecanus crispus</i>	100 w
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- 1% or more of population

<i>Egretta gularis</i>	450 w
<i>Ardea cynerea</i>	400 w
<i>Ardea goliath</i>	7 w
<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>	440 w
<i>Casmerodius albus</i>	445 w
<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	330 w
<i>Dromas ardeola</i>	940 w
<i>Charadrius leschenaultii</i>	200 w
<i>Limosa lapponica</i>	2,410 w
<i>Numenius arquata</i>	5850 w
<i>Tringa totanus</i>	3,000+ w
<i>Tringa cinerea</i>	1,000+ w
<i>Larus cachinnans</i>	3,000 w
<i>Larus ridibundus</i>	20,000 w
<i>Sterna nilotica</i>	355 w

- other

<i>Ardeola grayii</i>	60 br
<i>Egretta alba modestus</i>	50 br
<i>Butorides striatus</i>	few
<i>Glareola pratincola</i>	10 br
<i>Phoenicopterus ruber</i>	600
<i>Esacus recurvirostris</i>	several
<i>Gelochelidon nilotica</i>	20 br
<i>Sterna saundersi</i>	20 br
<i>Pandion halietus</i>	50

other birds:

<i>Accipiter badius</i>	4
<i>Milvus migrans</i>	500
<i>Neophron percnopterus</i>	35
<i>Acrocephalus stentoreus</i>	
<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	4
<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>	9

all counts individual birds

br = breeding, w = wintering

sources: Evans, 1994 and Scott, 1995