

Project Update: October 2012

With the end of summer in Iraq we have cholera outbreaks occurring again. Cholera is a gastrointestinal disease that is typically spread by drinking contaminated water and can cause severe diarrhea that can lead to fatal dehydration. Throughout Iraq, the rivers and waters that they carry are deteriorating in terms of water quality, biodiversity and Normal River functions. Cholera outbreaks generally seem to occur in the summer when river levels are low and there has been no precipitation for several months. Right before the cholera outbreak in the northern governorate of Sulaimaniyah there was a massive fish kill along 20 km of river in a nearby watershed, the Upper Diyala Basin. During the summer, the Tanjero River, a key tributary to the Diyala Basin carries almost 100% raw sewage into this watershed.

Just as these issues were coming to a head, a regional television station started broadcasting a 24-minute documentary in Kurdish about the Swimmable Water's campaign (see the video with English sub-titles at <http://vimeo.com/50913789>), an education action reported on in our August update that is part of the Lesser Zab Threat Assessment and Action Plan Project supported by Rufford Small Grant Fund. The timing couldn't have been more auspicious for the video to make a public case for cleaning up and protecting the basins. For now, at least, local and regional authorities seem to be taking notice.

With the completion of the summer surveys of the Lesser Zab Threat Assessment project, the Waterkeeper has already documented well over 200 threats in the Lesser Zab Basin in eight assessed threat categories. Additional survey work will take place this fall in the lower basin. The highest threats come from mining (typically gravel mining), human intrusion and disturbance, agriculture, residential and commercial development, transportation and service corridors, natural systems modifications & pollution. You can review some of the data obtained during the surveys at <http://www.iraqwaterkeeper.org/survey-data---160515871581-15751604157616101575160615751578.html>

Next Steps: Nature Iraq and the Waterkeeper are investigating new ways to provide information to local stakeholders about what is happening to the Lesser Zab River and other waterways. We will be attempted to convert some of the GIS Maps to Google Maps and allow for more interactive feedback on the maps by the general public. We're also starting the autumn surveys and completing a review of threats along the lower reaches of the river where it enters the Tigris River. This area was historically quite dangerous but has calmed down enough to allow survey work to occur.

We must unfortunately announce that our Waterkeeper, Nabil Musa, will be leaving us at the end October 2012 to return to the UK to rejoin his wife. Nabil has been instrumental in getting the programme up and running and leaves very big shoes to fill. Fortunately for the programme, a talented volunteer who has been assisting Nabil in the Lesser Zab Threat Assessment surveys will be stepping in and Nature Iraq is proud to announce the hiring of Nwenar Fatih as the new Iraq Upper Tigris Waterkeeper effective 1 November 2012.

