

## A review of the shorebirds of Iraq: status and habitats

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### Abstract

Iraq has a vast aquatic landscape of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers basin; Shatt al-Arab river is formed at the confluence of these rivers, which flows into the Arabian Gulf. Several aquatic habitats, including vast salt marshes, mudflats, and seasonal shallow lakes, are also found on the banks of the two rivers. The variety of these habitats would tempt many species of shorebirds to visit their diverse habitats during migration. This study aims to provide sufficient information to enable a complete understanding of the status and habitats of shorebirds in Iraq. The current study included 46 species recorded in Iraq that visit different water bodies. These birds belong to six families that have: **Haematopodidae** (one species), **Charadriidae** (15 species), **Recurvirostridae** (Two species), **Scolopacidae** (25 species), **Dromadidae** (one species), and **Glareolidae** (Two species). On the other hand, among these species, there were nine species breeding, seven species resident, and 39 species distributed between a winter visitor, summer visitor, and passage migrant. The study concluded that ten species of shorebirds are important conservation priorities in Iraq. They are red-listed by the IUCN Red List, of which two species are Critically Endangered (CR), and eight species are Near Threatened (NT).

**Keywords:** Aquatic, Habitats, Iraq, Mesopotamia, Review, Shorebirds.

### Introduction

Mesopotamian aquatic habitats of Iraq consisted of vast marshes, rivers, and lakes that represent the most important habitats for bird migration routes throughout Western Asia, highlighting their importance as a major wintering and resting area for migratory shorebirds (Scott and Evans, 1994). This route belongs to the West Asia - East Africa flyway, one of the eight global routes of shorebird migration (Boere and Stroud, 2008).

Shorebirds occupy wetland, coastal habitats, littoral banks, and mudflats. They wade in shallow waters to search for prey on or in sediments (Piersma, 2003; Both *et al.*, 2003; Piersma, 2007) and are often referred to as long-legged birds. Their long beaks enable them to wade inside muddy and sandy sediments searching for prey such as

Mollusca, crustaceans, worms, insects, and other small aquatic organisms (Meepeke and Aycock, 2015).

Shorebirds live, breed, and feed along shorelines, such as ocean beaches, estuaries, salt marshes, freshwater lakes, and wetlands. They depend on these habitats to select nests, raise young, and feed, especially in intertidal areas (Gochfeld, 1984). Most of these birds congregate in appropriate flocks and are often seen in mixed flocks of several species (Colwell, 2000). The rate of laying eggs for these birds ranges from 2 to 4 eggs per breeding season, and the nests are usually open and unprotected, consisting of scraps in the sand (Piersma, 2003). Chicks are from the precocial nest, as their bodies are completely covered with fluff, and their eyes are open and capable. They are on the