

Brief report to Ramsar Convention Secretariat

Azerbaijan Republic

Various wetlands are to be met in the territory of Azerbaijan. They support existence of large population of waterbirds and waterfowl as well as high-productivity spawning and feeding grounds for fish.

Major wetland ecosystems are located in inshore and offshore areas of the Caspian Sea and the inland watershed of the Kura-Araz Lowland the total area of which account for 200,000 ha.

Wetlands are represented within the territory of:

- three state reserves: Gizil-Agaj, Ag-Gol, and Shirvan;
- four state sanctuaries: the Lesser Gizil-Agaj Bay, Ag-Gol, Bandovan, Absheron;
- nine hunting sites: Divichi, Gilazi, Ajigabul, Sarisu, Boz-Gobu, Sharbet-Gobu, Mahmudchala, Zavvar, Varvara;
- and two water reservoirs of Mingchevir and Shamkir (see information sheet enclosed).

Located on the main flyway of migratory birds Azerbaijan is an ideal place for wintering, nesting and staging waterbirds during migration. Along their migration route, these waterbirds have to rely on a number of wetlands used as staging posts where they can rest and feed. Wetlands of Azerbaijan are also breeding and feeding habitat for millions of waterfowl, shorebirds, and other wildlife. They are home to thousands of different plant and animal species including many threatened and endangered species. According to recent observations 144 waterbird species occur in Azerbaijan.

Following the ratification of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance by Azerbaijan Republic two wetland areas, namely one based in the Gizil-Agaj State Reserve and Lesser Gizil-Agaj Sanctuary and the other in the Ag-Gol State Reserve and Ag-Gol State Sanctuary were included on the Ramsar list of Wetlands of International Importance.

Today's state of wetlands in the Republic is a direct result and legacy of previous decades when Azerbaijan was part of the Soviet Union. For the past 50 years of the Soviet rule, due to inappropriate management the state of some wetland areas have deteriorated and are now under the threat of further degradation. This was primarily caused by anthropogenic factors. Wetland ecosystem of the Kura-Araz Lowland were exposed to adverse conditions and are endangered with a complete drying-up if no actions are undertaken to improve the situation.

The newly established Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources fully understands its responsibility and role in saving unique wetlands of Azerbaijan and is taking appropriate

measures in this direction. Thus, the Ministry in partnership with and under support of the Succow Foundation, Germany developed a project “Saving the Ag-Gol Lake” and has already started its implementation. The Ag-Gol Lake is also threatened with drying-up and the project envisages the restoration of water circulation balance by means of repairing and setting up hydro-technical structures to ensure that there is sufficient level of water coming from collectors feeding the lake. In addition the area of the State AG-Gol Reserve was extended from 4,000 ha up to 15,000 ha with a view to strengthening the protection of the territory and thereby mitigating the anthropogenic impact of local communities. Currently, regular monitoring is conducted on the lake to detect indicators of water quality and the levels of inflows and outflows. Similar hydro-technical activities are being undertaken in the Shirvan State Reserve to eliminate the threat of drying-up of its wetland.

Wetlands of the Boz-Gobu Lake (7,000 ha), Sarisu Lake (11,000 ha), and Mehman Lake (1200 ha) also face deteriorating conditions and are in need of urgent interventions. The Ministry utilizes all its capacity to attend to all these issues. However, restricted financial and technical resources impedes carrying out appropriate measures to timely tackle the above problems. In order to overcome this obstacle the Ministry use, where appropriate, the passive approach, which is a less expensive method, by removing the factors causing wetland degradation or loss and letting nature do the work of restoration. For instance, strengthening protection of the territory of the Absheron Sanctuary to mitigate anthropogenic impact and applying the passive method approach at the Shadili Spit Wetland contained in the Sanctuary have allowed rapid natural regeneration of wetland plant communities, natural re-colonization by animals, and re-establishment of wetland hydrology and soils there.

Wetlands of the State Gizil-Agaj Reserve located in the far south-east of Azerbaijan on the shores of the Caspian sea encompass all the territory of the Great Gizil-Agaj and the northern part of the Lesser Gizil-Agaj Bays as well as adjacent lands. The area of the Reserve is 88,400 ha including 62,000 of water area. The Reserve adjoins the Lesser Gizil-Agaj Bay Sanctuary with the area 10,700 ha. The Reserve was included on the Ramsar list as long as in 1975. Nowadays, a lack of protected boundaries around the Reserve and the proximity of human settlements with cattle-breeding farms impede the mitigation of anthropogenic impact. As a result of sea fluctuation the deterioration of steppe and fresh water sites is going on.. In addition, the Lesser Gizil-Agaj Bay was separated from the sea by an artificial dam and this caused cessation in saturating the Bay with the sea water. In order to restore wetlands of the Gizil-Agaj Reserve and the Lesser Gizil-Agaj Bay Sanctuary it is required to develop and implement a complex of measures.

Consequently, there is a need in the development of a National Program and Actions Plan on conservation and sustainable use of wetlands ecosystem in Azerbaijan. We recognize this as one of the obligations of Azerbaijan with regard to the Ramsar Convention.

Within the framework of the Program it is envisioned to elaborate complex measures on the protection of wetlands in order to return degraded wetlands to a pre-existing condition or as close to that condition as is possible. The measures shall include studies and assessment of the current situation, development of regulations on the use of wetlands and waterbirds as well as identification of priority activities. The program will contain Actions Plan on the conservation of wetlands covering a number of strategic and practical activities undertaken on a national level for the achievement of objectives set including stocktaking and monitoring, restoration of degraded wetlands, planning and long-term management, development of educational programs and various auxiliary wetland recovery pilot projects as well as international cooperation, and the strengthening of public support. A primary goal of wetland recovery projects should be to preserve and restore wetland benefits by re-establishing natural ecological processes.

The development and adoption of the National Program and Actions Plan by the Government will enable the inclusion of priority areas and measures on the conservation and sustainable use of wetlands ecosystem in the long-term objectives of the Government bodies which are responsible for their protection. It will also promote international cooperation on the preservation of wetlands and integration of Pan-European priorities into the national strategy. On the other hand the Program is expected to attract national and international donors and foundations to finance the measures on the restoration and enhancement of wetlands ecosystem of Azerbaijan.

Wetlands of Azerbaijan

Name	Geographical coordinates	Area (hectares)	Elevation (meters)	Wetland Type	Criteria for inclusion on the List of Wetlands of International Importance	Number of high-valued and unique species of fauna	Number of high-valued and unique species of flora
Aghzibir lake (Divichinski harbour)	41°16'- 41°19'N 49°03'- 49°07'E	1 600	-26,4 / -24,9	Q, Sp	1a, 2c, 3a most significant - 2c	181	13 higher aquatic plant species
Yashma-Gilazi (Yashma island and Gilazi spit)	41°45'- 41°50'N 49°30'E	250	-27,5	A, J	2a, 2c, 3b	26	-
Island of the Absheron Archipelago and Shahdili Spit	39°11'- 40°28'N 50°15'- 50°38'E	Islands located in the range of 40 to 115km away to the north-east from Baku; Shahidli spit is at the edge of the Absheron peninsula	-27,5	A, E	2c, 3a most significant - 2c	-	-
Plant of Deep Water Offshore Structures, Sahil settlement	40°10'- 41°13'N 49°33'- 49°40'E	Water area – 50000; the length of coastal line – 10km, the width – 5km perpendicular to the sea	-27,5	A	3a	-	-
Islands of Baku Archipelago and Alät Bay	39°39'- 40°03'N 49°25'- 49°30'E	150 000	-27,5 – -10	A, E	2c, 3a most significant - 3a	-	-
Gushgöl Lake (Chala, Shorgel)	39°29'- 39°41'N 49°02'- 49°25'E	4 000	-28	Q, Sp	1c, 2a, 2c, 3a most significant - 2c, 3a	76 species; 9 predator birds species during the nesting season	-
Kura river delta	39°16'- 39°25'N 49°19'- 49°28'E	15 000	-28	F, Tp, Sp	1c, 2a, 2c, 3a most significant - 2c, 3a	70 fish species; 68 birds species in spring-autumn season	-
Gizil-Agaj State Reserve	38°57'- 39°18'N 48°46'- 49°12'E	88 360	-26,5	A, J, Q, Sp, Tp	1a, 2a, 3a, 3c	270 bird species; 54 fish species; 65 species of macro-benthos	360 higher plant species
Wetland System of Mahmudchala (Mahmudchala-Akhchala System)	39°22'- 39°30'N 48°38'- 49°45'E	8 000 (23 000 -together with Akhchala lake)	-22	Q, Sp	1a, 2a, 3a most significant - 3a	-	-
Ajigabul lake	39°58'- 40°01'N 48°54'- 49°56'E	904 (2 500 – together with fish ponds and adjacent shallow waters)	-18	Q, Tp	1a, 2a, 3a most significant - 3a	54 birds species; 2 predator bird species	302 aquatic plant species and 11 species of micro-phytes

Sarisu lake	40°00'- 40°05'N 48°02'- 49°20'E	11 000	-10	Q, Sp	1a, 2a, 3a most significant - 3a	Total quantity of wintering birds – 500 000, 905 of them– ducks	10 higher aquatic plant species
Boz-Gobu lake system	40°00'- 40°04'N 47°45'- 47°57'E	-	-7,5	Q, Sp	1a, 2b, 3b most significant - 3b	4 445 specimens of waterbirds and predator birds observed in 1993	-
Ag-Göl lake	39°58'- 40°04'N 47°31'- 47°46'E	4 500	-8	Q, Sp	1a, 2a, 3a most significant - 3a	115 species of waterbirds and predator birds, including 87 species of nesting birds	180 aquatic plant species
Mehman lake	40°02'- 40°04'N 47°45'- 47°50'E	1 200	-7	Q, Sp	1a, 2b, 3b most significant - 3b	in winter season – 3 671 specimens of waterbirds and predator birds observed in 1993,1994	-
Varvara water reservoir	41°16'- 41°16'N 49°03'- 49°07'E	2 140	+83	Q, Tp	1a, 2a, 3b most significant - 3b	34 fish species, 16 of them of industrial target; 40 waterbird and predator birds species	-
Mingächevir water reservoir	41°16'- 41°16'N 49°03'- 49°07'E	625	+83	Q, Tp	2a, 2b, 3b most significant - 3b	31 species and subspecies of fish; in winter – 6451 specimens of waterbirds observed in 1993, 1994	155 species of phytoplankton
Jandar lake	41°16'- 41°16'N 49°03'- 49°07'E	1 250	+291	Q, Tp	3b	51 species of waterbirds and predator birds	84 species of phytoplankton and 32 higher plant species