

Information Sheet on Ramsar Wetlands

1. Date this Sheet was completed/updated:

18th November, 1998

2. Country:

Bahrain

3. Name of Wetland:

Howar Islands

4. Geographical coordinates:

25°40'N, 55°55'E

= 050°50' E

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* This must be
in error because
this puts it in
the STRAIT OF
HORMUZ

5. Altitude:

Sea level to 20 m

6. Area:

5.3 hectares of islands

7. Overview:

And archipelago of small desert islands and islets surrounded by shallow seas with extensive seagrass beds; still in relatively pristine condition, and especially important for breeding seabirds (notably one of the world's largest concentration of Socotra Cormorants *Phalacrocorax nigrogularis*), dugon (*Dugongs Dugong*) and sea turtles. Size islands have been designated as protected areas, and access to all except the main island is severely restricted by the coast guard and the military.

8. Wetland Type:

Marine-coastal: D, E, G

9. Ramsar Criteria:

1a, 1c, 2c, 3a, 3c.

10. Map of site included?

- Yes

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

12. Justification of the criteria selected under point 9, on previous page.

A beautiful and virtually pristine group of islands with large breeding concentration of Socotra Cormorants and an internationally important population of Dugongs. The islands have a fauna and flora which is perhaps typical and representative of the few remaining unspoiled islands in the whole Arabian Gulf.

13. General location:

In the Gulf of Bahrain 25 Km southeast of the main island.

14. Physical features:

Physical features: The Hawar Islands are an archipelago of 16 small, limestone, desert islands and islets in the Gulf of Bahrain. Some of the islands are hilly with cliffs up to 20-30 m high; others are flat and sandy with gently sloping shores. The largest island, Hawar, covers more than 4,100 ha. The surrounding seas are shallow, with depths of less than five metres in most areas. The sheltered shores feature scattered boulders, pebbles or sand. The tidal regime is semi-diurnal, with the maximum spring tide not exceeding 2.5 metres.

15. Hydrological values:

An important area for fisheries

16. Ecological features:

Ecological features: Sub-tidal areas support extensive beds of the seagrasses *Halodule* sp. and *Halophila* sp. Sandy areas above the high-water marks support halophytes such as *Halopeplis amplexicaulis*, *Halocnemum Strobilaceum* and *Suaeda vermiculite*. Scattered boulders form a good substrate for many sessile animals including tube worms and sponges. The very rich mudflats support a rich invertebrate fauna of polychaetes, crabs, bivalves etc. Which provide important food items for thousands of wading birds at low tide and fishes at high tide. Crabs, including the mud crab *Macrophthalmus* sp., occur at very high densities.

17. Noteworthy flora:
Extensive Seagrass beds.

18. Noteworthy fauna:

Noteworthy fauna: Over 30 species of waterfowl have been recorded. Thousands of waterfowl occur on the mudflats during the migration seasons and in winter, especially shorebirds which are present at most times of the year except mid-summer. The mudflats are the second most important wintering area for Greater Flamingos *Pheonicopterus ruber* in Bahrain (after the Hawar Islands); birds are present for most of the year, and numbers may exceed 300 in December. Over 50,000 Black-headed Gulls *Larus Ridibundus* were recorded in November 1990. The rich inshore waters support a wide variety of fishes.

19. Social and cultural values:

Social and cultural values: The islands remain in almost pristine condition and afford excellent opportunities for eco-tourism because of their scenic beauty, large breeding colonies of sea-birds, and populations of Arabian Oryx and Rheem Gazelle.

20. Land tenure/ownership of:

The islands and surrounding waters are state owned.

21. Current land use:

The islands are uninhabited except for police & military garrison. Local fishermen are allowed to fish in adjacent waters, and there is some recreational fishing and other forums e.g. diving. There is, however, very little human activity on most of the island. Lately Hawar Islands contains a 4 Stars Resorts of Hotel and Chalets.

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

23. Conservation measures taken:

Conservation measures taken: Six small islands have been designated as protected areas by a regulation of H. H. The Prime Minister Has been taken.

24. Conservation measures proposed but not yet implemented:

There is a proposal to study and monitor the ecological features of the island, in addition to a proposed action plan for protection and awareness.

25. Current scientific research and facilities:

Several surveys of the breeding birds have been under taken, and sooty falcons have been he subject of a ringing programme.

26. Current conservation education:

Various educational films about the islands have been shown on local television, and a series of documentary films on the breeding birds of the Hawar Islands has almost been completed.

27. Current recreation and tourism:

Recreation and tourism: A 4 stars hotel and the islands have considerable potential for eco-tourism. The Municipality has already built some chalets for visitors, and organizes daily trips to the main island by boat.

28. Jurisdiction:

- 1- Ministry of Housing, Municipality & Environment,
- 2- Ministry of Defence,
- 3- H. H. The Crown Prince Court

29. Management authority:

30. Bibliographical references:

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