

Background

The Mesopotamian marshes in southern Iraq are unique wetlands and home to the Marsh Arabs. They are a UNESCO World Heritage and Ramsar site, and an important habitat supporting endangered wildlife.

The marshes sustained significant environmental damage during the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s, including bombing and widespread use of chemical weapons. Large areas of reed-beds were removed or burnt. In the 1990s, there was a massive drainage programme. The oil industry – which lies in close proximity to the remaining marshes - is also a threat, due to pollution.

Since the change in regime and fall of Saddam Hussain, the marshes have partially reflooded and the vegetation stabilised.

Worksheet exercise

NASA allow **free access** to satellite data which can be used to monitor environmental degradation.

Explore the NASA satellite data to see the changes over time by following steps 1, 2 and 3.

- Step 1.** View the marshes [before](#) the most significant large scale drainage in 1985.
Step 2. View the marshes in [2001](#).
Step 3. View the marshes in their [current](#) state.

Question 1. What changes do you see?

Question 2. What do you think are the on-going environmental risks for the marshes?

Resources to use and links to find out more

Information about the Iraqi marshlands can be found here:

- <https://ceobs.org/the-past-present-and-future-of-the-mesopotamian-marshes/>
- <https://portals.iucn.org/library/node/9844>

More information about UNESCO World Heritage and Ramsar sites can be found here:

- <https://whc.unesco.org/en/about/>
- <https://rsis.ramsar.org/>