

Thousands of carp die in mysterious circumstances in Iraq

November 3 2018, by Salman Ameen



An Iraqi boy clears dead fish floating on the Euphrates River near the town of Saddat al-Hindiyah, on November 2, 2018

Iraqi fish farmers south of Baghdad have been left reeling after finding thousands of dead carp mysteriously floating in their cages or washed up

on the banks of the Euphrates.

Piles of the dead silvery [fish](#), along with a few car tyres and plastic bags, could be seen on Friday lying under a massive concrete bridge.

They covered the surface of deeper water nearby, providing rich pickings for birds circling above.

And in the fish farms of Saddat al-Hindiyah in Babylon province, about 80 kilometres (50 miles) south of Baghdad, the lifeless carp floated together in small clumps.

Farmer Hussein Faraj frantically scooped [dead fish](#) out of his enclosure in a red plastic crate, fearing they were poisoned.

"Some are saying it's because of a sickness, others say it's because of chemicals," said Faraj, his thick black hair standing on end and his eyebrows furrowed in worry.

"We're waiting for a solution from the government or a test of the water—we're scared the water will poison us in the coming days, too."

Major water pollution has already kicked up a stink in Iraq once this year, as around 100,000 people were hospitalised this summer in the southern city of Basra.

There, too, farmers were shocked to see their fish suddenly turn up dead in the water, or washed up on muddy shores, during the Summer crisis.



Dead carp piled up on the Euphrates River—among hundreds of thousands that

have died in mysterious circumstances

In Saddat al-Hindiyah on Friday, distressed farmers were pulling fish from their enclosures in nets, and opening up gills to check for clues to the shocking mass deaths.

'All of them are dead'

"This sickness is a mystery. It's uncontrollable," said Jaafar Yassin, head of the town's agricultural unit.

"Around 90 percent of fish in the farms died," he told AFP.

The losses have left farmers angry.

"I own 28 cages and farm 50,000 fish in them. I estimate that I lost \$80,000 (70,000 euros) as a result of the sickness," said farmer Hussein al-Husseini.



An Iraqi man steers his boat around dead carp floating on the Euphrates River, after the fish were jettisoned from nearby farms

Gesturing wildly and sounding panicked, his colleague Anas Nuhad counted his own losses.

"I farmed 70,000 fish in these ponds — all of them are dead," said Nuhad, a layer of lifeless carp covering a fish pond behind him.



Dead carp float on the Euphrates River—among hundreds of thousands that have perished, leaving fish farmers facing ruin

"Where am I supposed to get fish from now? Everyone eats fish. So many people, so many families are living off this industry," he said.

Iraq produces 29,000 tonnes of fish each year, according to 2016 statistics gathered by the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organisation.

The country's national delicacy is masgoof—flame-grilled carp seasoned with sauces made from onions, spices and tomato.

Iraq's health ministry said Friday it had taken samples from the water

and dead fish in Babylon province, but tests had yet to be completed.

"There have not been any illnesses caused by eating fish so far," said spokesman Seif al-Badr.

"Our health monitoring teams are also carefully following fishmongers in the local market", he said, adding that anyone found selling the affected fish will be held accountable.

Dr. Yahya Merhi, head of the Babylon Veterinarian Hospital, said the results could be known in two days.



Iraqi men look towards dead fish jettisoned from nearby farms, as they float on

the Euphrates River near the town of Saddat al-Hindiyah

But in the meantime, the fishy phenomenon seems to be spreading.

Around 80 kilometres (50 miles) south of Babylon, more dead carp have floated to the surface of fish ponds on the Euphrates.

The region's agricultural chief Safaa al-Junaibi blamed the [mass deaths](#) on overcrowding in fish farms, which he told AFP facilitated the rapid spread of bacterial disease.

"In a single fish farm, the sickness killed 56,000 fish—around 120 tonnes. The losses racked up to 300 million Iraqi dinars (\$2.5 million, 2.2 million euros)," he said.

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Citation: Thousands of carp die in mysterious circumstances in Iraq (2018, November 3)
retrieved 27 April 2024 from
<https://phys.org/news/2018-11-thousands-carp-die-mysterious-circumstances.html>

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