Iraq's marshes showing fast recovery

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Re-flooding of Iraq's destroyed Mesopotamian marshes has resulted in what scientists say is a remarkable rate of recovery for its plants, fish and birds.

U.S. researcher Curtis Richardson of Duke University and Najah Hussain of Iraq's University of Basra have spend two years engaged in fieldwork conducted at four of southern Iraq's large marshes. They say water flowing from the Tigris and Euphrates rivers has been greater than expected.

Not only has the quantity of water been more than expected, the scientists say both salinity and toxin levels have been lower than had been feared. As a result, many native species have returned, including rare bird species, although their numbers have not rebounded to historical levels.

Iraq's marshes were devastated during the 1980s and 1990s by the efforts of Saddam Hussein's regime to eliminate the marshes in a political move against its enemies. As a result, tens of thousands of marsh Arabs fled to southern Iran.

Richardson's and Hussain's research appears in the June issue of the journal BioScience.

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