

Miqan Wetland welcomes thousands of migratory birds



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With flocks of migratory birds arriving, Miqan Wetland in Arak has once again become one of the most important wildlife stopover sites on Iran's central plateau. Spanning approximately 25,000 hectares and located 15 kilometers northeast of Arak, the natural habitat hosts thousands of birds but continues to face challenges, including fragmented management, water allocation shortages and competing land uses.

Scientific surveys have identified 150 bird species belonging to 13 orders and 38 families in the Miqan No-Hunting Zone. Of these, 77 are waterbirds and waders, while 73 are terrestrial species. The records show that 60 species are resident, while the remaining 90 are migratory, partially migratory or passage visitors, according to Mehr News Agency.

Bird populations at the wetland fluctuate depending on the season and climatic conditions. In one census, more than 20,000 resident and migratory birds were recorded. Last week, another 6,000 birds of various species arrived at Miqan. Historical records have also documented approximately 11,000 common cranes, 10,000 Eurasian teals and 5,000 flamingos. These figures reflect the wetland's ecological capacity rather than a permanent bird population.

The autumn migration season usually begins in the second half of September, with November and December offering better opportunities for birdwatching. However, higher temperatures this year delayed the migration, and the arrival of large flocks only intensified last week.

Yet the spectacular sight of thousands of birds flying over Miqan also highlights a worrying reality. While the wetland is a remarkable natural habitat, it is struggling with drought and water shortages on the one hand, and fragmented management, mining activities and concerns over water quality on the other. Under these circumstances, Miqan's future depends not only on the arrival and numbers of migratory birds but, more importantly, on coordinated management and serious conservation efforts.

The Director-General of the Markazi Province's Department of Environment, Amir Ansari, said that more than 20,000 resident and migratory birds had been recorded in the Miqan No-Hunting Zone. He said securing the wetland's environmental water allocation was the department's top priority this year.

Ansari said expert assessments indicated that Miqan was currently in a favorable ecological condition, adding that bird populations at the site had shown a significant increase in recent years.

He said the latest census had recorded more than 20,000 birds of various resident and migratory species in the protected zone.

Referring to successive droughts and declining water inflows, Ansari explained that the annual flow rate of incoming treated wastewater was approximately equivalent to the wetland's water requirements and could help meet part of its needs during dry periods.

He warned that if the wetland bed dried out, winds could activate dust sources in the area, potentially affecting public health.

Ansari identified the discharge of industrial waste and wastewater as among the most significant environmental threats to the wetland, stressing that maintaining the quality of incoming water and securing its environmental water allocation were essential to protecting the valuable ecosystem.

Describing the provision of the wetland's environmental water allocation as a strategic and legal obligation, he said declining rainfall should not be used as an excuse to disregard nature's rights.

"Even under drought conditions, securing the environmental water allocation must remain a priority," he said.

Ansari added that the department would continue to pursue the issue and make use of all available legal mechanisms to secure the wetland's water rights.

Meanwhile, Mostafa Marzban, Deputy Director-General of the Markazi Province Department of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts, said the number of organized-tour visitors to Miqan Wetland had fallen from 2,000 in 2024 to 300 last year. So far this year, only 50 people have visited the wetland as part of organized tourist groups. Marzban said visitor numbers were specifically recorded for organized tours, but no accurate figures were available for individuals and families visiting the wetland independently.

He stressed that the figures referred exclusively to organized tours and should not be considered the total number of visitors to the site. Foreign tourists also visited the area last year, but their numbers have declined this year due to wartime conditions. He identified the recent war, avian influenza and high summer temperatures as among the factors affecting visitor numbers.

Referring to the limited facilities available at the tourism destination, Marzban said Miqan was generally unsuitable for visitors during the summer because of the intense heat. Visitor numbers typically begin to rise as cooler weather sets in.

He described Miqan Wetland as one of the province's major natural tourism attractions, adding that improved weather conditions would create opportunities to attract more visitors and organize additional tours.

Marzban also stressed that more comprehensive recording of visitor numbers, including independent visits, would provide a clearer picture of the wetland's tourism potential and help improve

Baluch culture celebrates warmth, respect beyond simple greeting





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Across the vast expanse of Sistan and Balucehstan Province, where the grandeur of the desert meets the freshness of lush valleys and the roaring waters of the Oman Sea, and where the wind carries stories of an extraordinary heritage through the passage of time, warmth and cordiality are far more than passing words. They are deeply rooted traditions, woven into the very fabric of everyday life.

In authentic Baluch culture, an embrace is not merely a gesture of comfort, reassurance or affection; it is also an expression of etiquette and respect. Wash Atak (also written as Vash Atak) is a traditional ritual in which warmth and mutual respect come together. Embracing someone three times represents three reaffirmations of human connection, three expressions of respect for the dignity of another person, and a powerful reminder that in this land, a guest or visitor is cherished as someone dear to the heart.

Understanding the people of Balucehstan requires an appreciation of their distinctive customs, many of which are deeply rooted in longstanding traditions. One of the most remarkable expressions of this cultural heritage is Wash Atak, a gesture in which heartfelt warmth and profound respect blend with remarkable grace.

At the very first moment of meeting, before everyday conversations begin, people warmly embrace one another and exchange greetings by saying "Wash Atak", expressing their heartfelt welcome. This longstanding custom reflects a cultural belief that closeness between hearts takes precedence over any conversation.

Wash Atak represents the highest expression of welcome and respect towards another person. To convey a similar meaning, one might compare it to addressing someone as "Hazrat," a more elevated form of respect than the ordinary honorific "Agha." These encounters are sometimes accompanied by lengthy conversations, and even after the initial exchange of greetings has ended, both parties continue asking about each other's well-being.

This tradition becomes particularly prominent during national and religious celebrations, including the joyous occasions of Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha. Following Eid prayers, and during family and social gatherings, people embrace one another, exchange holiday greetings and seek mutual forgiveness, putting aside any grievances or misunderstandings that may have arisen.

This custom is not limited to men. Baluch women also observe their own distinctive forms of greeting when meeting relatives and welcoming guests. However, greeting practices are not uniform throughout Balucehstan. Each area has its own characteristics, shaped by local dialects, traditions and social relationships.

In the Zarabad region and parts of the Makoran coastline, greetings are also accompanied by lengthy conversations and inquiries about everyday life. Hosts and guests discuss the well-being of family members and relatives, agricultural conditions, planting and harvesting seasons, rainfall, weather and local developments.

Hospitality in Baluch culture also places great emphasis on welcoming and serving guests. In many homes, the first offering to a visitor is a glass of water, a custom that carries particular significance given the heat and climatic conditions prevailing across much of Balucehstan. Upon a guest's arrival, the host makes every effort to offer water and suitable refreshments, helping the visitor recover from the fatigue of the journey.

In Baluch culture, a guest holds a position far beyond that of an ordinary visitor. Showing respect to guests is considered one of the deeply rooted values of family and community life. Hosts generally strive to offer the best facilities and food available to them, regarding a guest's presence as an opportunity to express affection and uphold their dignity.

In some families, this belief is so deeply ingrained that even under difficult economic circumstances, they make every possible effort to provide hospitality to their guests. Respect for guests, keeping one's word, preserving the dignity of others and offering support to anyone who seeks shelter in one's home are among the values that have been passed down from generation to generation in many Baluch families.

Speaking to the IRNA, Kheyronnesa Amiri, Head of the Department of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts for Chabahar and Dashtiari, said that the Wash Atak ritual had been officially inscribed on the National Intangible Cultural Heritage List as one of the valuable expressions of Baluch culture and social customs.

Describing Wash Atak as a deeply rooted tradition and an important symbol of hospitality, warmth, mutual respect and social bonds within Baluch society, Amiri said: "Wash Atak is one of the longstanding and valuable traditions of the Baluch people. It holds a special place in social interactions, family gatherings and community encounters, and is recognized as an integral part of the cultural identity of Baluch people."

She added that the ritual had been registered as part of the intangible heritage of the Baluch people and that various articles had been published highlighting its cultural significance and its place in the customs and traditions of local communities.

Amiri further noted that the registration of indigenous rituals and traditions on the Intangible Cultural Heritage List was an important step towards identifying, introducing and safeguarding the cultural assets of local communities. Such efforts, she said, could encourage younger generations to pay greater attention to their cultural values and the traditions of their ancestors.

Referring to the rich cultural heritage of Balucehstan and the diversity of customs and social traditions among the Baluch people, Amiri said that many of these practices were shaped by the region's historical experiences and the traditional way of life of its people. Preserving these traditions and passing them on to future generations, she stressed, was of great importance.

She concluded by emphasizing that cultural heritage was not limited to historical monuments and buildings. Rituals, traditions, ways of life, social etiquette and other cultural practices passed down through generations also constitute an essential part of the historical and social identity of every region.