

Wetlands for wintering waterbirds threatened in Azerbaijan

Title

Two of the most important wetlands in Azerbaijan, [Lake Hajigabul](#) and [Red Lake](#), identified by BirdLife as [Important Bird Areas \(IBAs\)](#), are in danger due to bad water management, as reported by the [Azerbaijan Ornithological Society](#) (AOS – BirdLife in Azerbaijan). Out of the 53 IBAs 21 are wetlands. More than a million waterbirds winter in these areas every year, and approximately ten times more waterbirds cross the country during their migration. The water level in Lake Hajigabul – the largest lake in Azerbaijan – had decreased and as a result fish stocks have completely disappeared, and there has been a sharp decrease of the number of swimming waterbirds like ducks and grebes. *“This is an ecological catastrophe”*, explains Elchin Sultanov, Director of AOS, *“Even the salinity of the lake has reached levels equivalent to ocean salinity, which clearly is not normal”*. The problems are related to the construction of dams during the Soviet period and the interruption of the water supply from Kura River in the same period. In summer 2012 the President of Azerbaijan visited the lake and announced a special plan to repair the area, however progress is yet to be made. Another endangered IBA in Azerbaijan is the Red Lake. Only a small part of the lake, formerly part of the Caspian Sea, still remains. Around 800 [White-headed Ducks](#) used to winter in the lake every year, but not anymore. In 2005 the Azerbaijan government decided to dry the lake to create markets for wholesale goods, which reduced the lake significantly and only a few hundred birds now winter at the lake. *“This site has big potential for birdwatching tourism because of its proximity to the centre of the capital Baku, but economic interests still result in the degradation of the lake, and we are close to lose this IBA”*, Sultanov concludes. For more information: please contact [Dr Elchin Sultanov](#), Director of the Azerbaijan Ornithological Society.



Stichting BirdLife Europe gratefully acknowledges financial support from the European Commission. All content and opinions expressed on these pages are solely those of Stichting BirdLife Europe.