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CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
AND NATURAL HABITATS

Standing Committee

40th meeting
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Other complaints

**Alleged negative impact from the construction of
Ilisu Dam HPP
(Turkey)**

- REPORT BY THE GOVERNMENT -

*Document prepared by the
Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Turkey*

REPUBLIC OF TURKEY
MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY

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Government Report on Complaint on Ilisu Dam (Turkey)**Background Information:**

A letter was received from the Bern Convention Secretariat on January 2020, about a complaint made by “Kazdagi Association for The Preservation of Natural and Cultural Assets”, hereinafter will be referred to as “the complainant”. The complaint was about the construction of Ilisu Dam, claiming that it will cause the destruction of key breeding/feeding and foraging grounds of several species which are Annex II species of the Convention.

The above mentioned complaint was carefully examined by Turkish authorities. Unfortunately, it has very little scientific background and it ignores the measures taken, based on the obligations which were brought about the Environmental Impact Assessment process.

Examination:

The complainant has raised some concerns about the destruction of habitats of several Annex II and III species including; Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus*, Griffon Vulture *Gyps fulvus*, Lesser Kestrel *Falco naumanni*, European Roller *Coracias garrulus*, Bonelli’s Eagle *Aquila fasciata*, Cinerous Bunting *Emberiza cineracea*, Pied Kingfisher *Ceryle rudis*, Black Kite *Milvus migrans* Stone Curlew *Burhinus oedicephalus* and Euphrates softshell turtle *Rafetus euphraticus*, Little Swift *Apus affinis*, Red-wattled Lapwing *Vanellus indicus*, Gull-billed Tern *Sterna (Gelochelidon) nilotica* and Spur-winged Lapwing *Vanellus spinosus*, Teal *Anas crecca*, Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus*, Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis*, Lesser-spotted Eagle *Aquila pomarina*, Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo*, White-winged tern *Chlidonias leucopterus*, Red-footed Falcon *Falco vespertinus*, Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*, Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*, Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola*, Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*, Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*, Green Sandpipe *Tringa ochropus*, Redshank *Tringa tetanus* and Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus*.

In the cooperation of General Directorate of Nature Conservation and National Parks and General Directorate of State Hydraulic Works, which are both members of the Scientific Committee of the Ilisu Dam Project, a sub-project called “Implementation and Monitoring of the Biodiversity Conservation Measures of Ilisu Dam Project” has been conducted. The conservation measures taken in this project is still implemented. However, the complainant has not mentioned any of these implementations. Within the scope of this project, the two cooperating institutions also prepared action plans for threatened species such as *Neophron percnopterus*, *Rafetus euphraticus*, *Lutra lutra*, *Cyclotrichium leucotrichum* and *Luciobarbus subquincunciatus*. These action plans have an implementation period of 5 years. After the first period, they are revised for another five years, if necessary.

All of the species mentioned in the complaint were subject to a strict examination in EIA. Although an English version of the EIA report is not available, all the necessary information is presented here in this report. The species in concern were examined in detail and for the taxa depending on the same type of habitats or having similar niches, measures were taken accordingly. The measures will be explained below for some species.

Accipitriformes (Eagles, Hawks, Kites and Vultures)**Bonelli’s Eagle *Aquila fasciata*,**

The population in Turkey is estimated to be up to 50 breeding pairs. It is a local resident species throughout the Egean, Mediterranean and adjacent areas of inner Anatolia and southeast Anatolia. Bonelli’s Eagle’s nest in the Ilisu Dam area is located ca. 40 meters from the river, so it is highly likely that this nest will be destroyed due to inundation. However, there are several alternative nests for this couple in the region. The couple was observed having used the alternative nests in the previous years, which are outside the inundation area. This species has also other populations in the region, like Halfeti, Kilis in the southeast and Anamur and Antalya shores in the southwest.

Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus* and Griffon Vulture *Gyps fulvus*

Egyptian vulture is a globally threatened species and categorized as EN in the redlist. The second largest population is in Turkey after that in Spain. It is a summer migrant species in Turkey. Its distribution in Turkey is generally in inner parts of Anatolia, lacking in the coastal regions. It usually breeds in hilly and mountainous areas with cliffs and gorges, which makes eastern Anatolia the best place for it. The population is estimated to be around 1000-2000 breeding pairs.

Within the scope of the Ilisu Dam project, an action plan was prepared under the coordination of the above mentioned two institutions and it was started to be implemented.

The breeding and foraging habitats of the Egyptian vulture were determined during the preparation of the action plan. Based on the inventory studies, there are 12 different breeding and foraging habitats in the region, of which, only three will be affected by the Ilisu Dam. All of these areas are foraging habitats, which are located in lower altitudes comparing with the breeding locations. Therefore the Egyptian vultures will have the chance to find breeding areas.

To increase the chance of survival of the vultures and scavenging raptors, several feeding platforms were constructed around the project area. These platforms were made close to Batman Municipality Waste Disposal Site, as most of the vultures are feeding in dumpsites and this way it would be easy for the scavenging birds to find the carcasses which will be placed on the platforms in regular intervals. The platforms have 5-6 m² surface area and a height of about 3 m, so as to prevent dogs or other stray animals to reach for the carcasses.

The platforms will also be used by the Griffon vulture individuals, therefore the species was not evaluated separately.



Other Raptors

The raptor species that are not mentioned above were evaluated together. These are Lesser-spotted Eagle, Black kite and Common Buzzard, all of which are common species in Turkey. These are also specified as migrants in the complainant's report. The construction of the dam will not severely affect the migrant species, as there are different measures explained in this report.

Falconiformes

Lesser Kestrel *Falco naumanni*

The population in Turkey is estimated to be around 2500 – 3500 breeding pairs, which is the second largest population in the World, after that in Spain. There are many nests also within southeast Anatolia, near Gaziantep, Adiyaman, Van provinces. Within the scope of the Ilisu dam project, an artificial wall was constructed for *Falco naumanni* breeding population based on the scientific advices of the Project's Scientific Council. Artificial nests were built on the wall so as to be used by the lesser kestrels as it is seen in the figure below. To provide security for the nests, they were built at a height of 15 m on the wall.



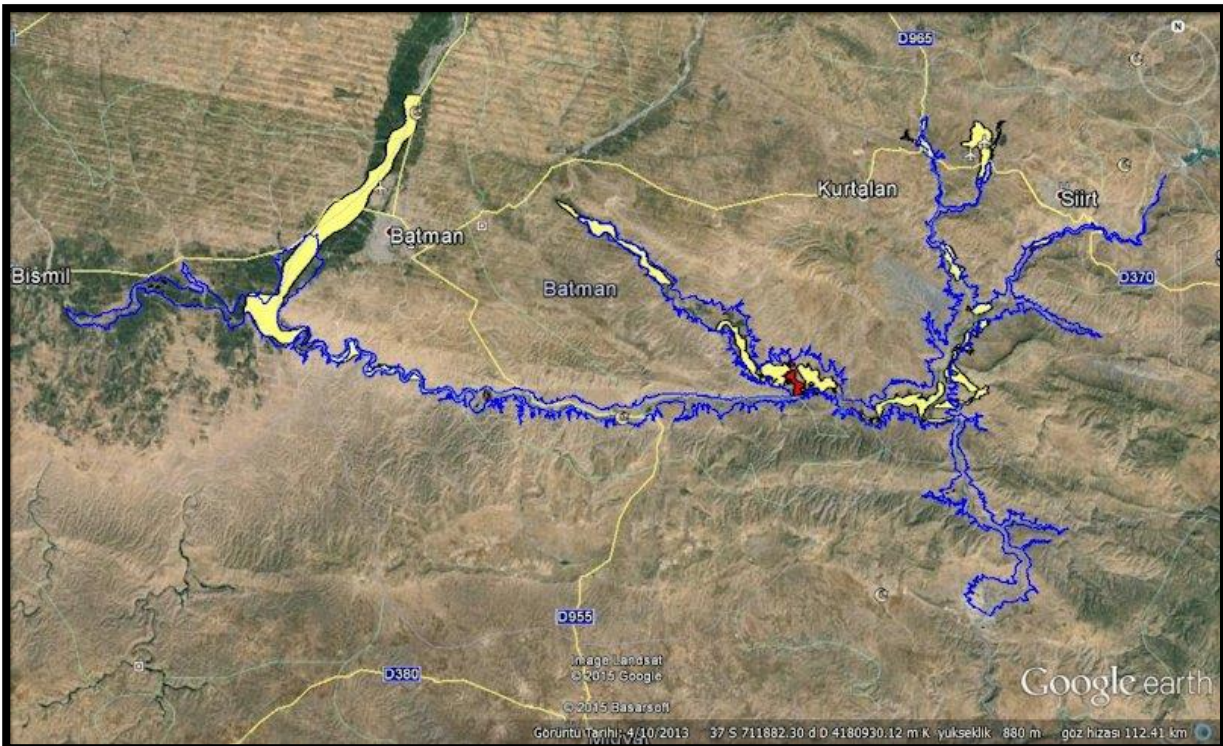
Red-footed Falcon *Falco vespertinus*

Breeding records for this species are from the beginning of 20th century. Besides, it is not a summer migrant either. Therefore, this species was evaluated as a passage migrant in Turkey, and obviously will not be affected by the project.

Other Annex II and III species

For the small passerines like little swift, citrine wagtail and chiffchaff, artificial nests were placed randomly across the suitable habitats. Several walls were constructed again for the swifts, including holes to provide opportunity for nesting.

For the shorebirds and waders, the construction of dam will provide more suitable habitats as it will produce new sandy and muddy areas for these birds. A map of the potential habitats that will be formed after the dam starts catching water was produced and presented below.



The map of new breeding, roosting and foraging areas after the completion of catching water
Blue line: The water level after the completion
Yellow areas: New sandy or alluvial areas
Red: New islets

Bats:

All the potential caves that will be inundated were searched for the existence of bat species. No cave in the region was suitable for bats.

Fishes:

The project had a subcomponent for fish species. Those were searched by a zodiac boat obtained within the scope of the project. To prevent illegal fishing, warning signs were placed in different locations around the project site. Moreover, an action plan was prepared for the endangered fish species *Luciobarbus subquincunciatus*.



Euphrates Soft-shelled Turtle

An action plan was also prepared for the aquatic species *Rafetus euphraticus* which was mentioned by the complainant in the letter.

Field studies were conducted to search for the best suitable habitats for translocation of Euphrates soft-shelled turtles. Suitable habitats were found around Dugunyurdu and Koctepe villages.

After the dam starts catching water, the carefully monitored Euphrates soft-shelled turtle individuals will be transferred to these habitats, if necessary. There will be also some new sandy habitats due to the formation of a new lake. These habitats will be used for translocation of a population if necessary.



Suitable habitats that will not be affected from the dam project.

Besides, artificial sandy areas will be formed if there will not be enough habitats for Euphrates soft-shelled turtles. This species is known to be preferring the shallow and warm waters. Batman, Sason and Garzan rivers seem to be providing this opportunity for this species. In any case, the population could be transferred to these areas.

Moreover, there will be a lot of sandy islets after the dam starts catching water. These islets will not be affected from human activities, so these will be the main foraging/resting grounds for the species.

Plant Species

In the flora part of the surveys, any plant species that are endemic or need to be monitored were detected. Their vegetation and seeding periods were determined. These are given below:

1. <i>Achillea aleppica</i>	May - July
2. <i>Aethionema froedinii</i>	May
3. <i>Alkanna froedinii</i>	May - July
4. <i>Argyrolobium crotalarioides</i>	May - June
5. <i>Astragalus elongatus</i>	June - July
6. <i>Bupleurum papillosum</i>	May - July
7. <i>Campanula mardinensis</i>	June
8. <i>Cicer echinospermum</i>	May
9. <i>Cyclotrichum leucotrichum</i>	June - July
10. <i>Echinops phaeocephalus</i>	June
11. <i>Genista aucheri</i>	June - July
12. <i>Hyacinthella siirtensis</i>	April - May
13. <i>Linum triflorum</i>	June - July
14. <i>Malcolmia exacoides</i>	April - May
15. <i>Onosma polioxanthum</i>	May - July
16. <i>Reseda armena</i>	June - July
17. <i>Scrophularia mesopotamica</i>	May - July
18. <i>Serratula oligocephala</i>	May - July
19. <i>Taraxacum pseudonigricans</i>	May - June
20. <i>Thymbra sintenisii</i>	May - July

Then, geographical coordinates of the locations where these species are distributed were recorded. These locations were visited regularly. These were first determined in 2013, and visited ever year until 2018. Field studies were not limited with these coordinates but included a wider area, to be able to find new populations for these species.

These endemic and rare plant species were also transferred to new and safer areas. An implementation plan was prepared for the protection, rehabilitation and sustainability of all the species concerned. Transferred and planted species were monitored, as the general population trend of the tranferred populations were promising, there was no need to collect seeds every year. Moreover, any natural or antropogenic impacts, legal restrictions and threats were determined and as they are still monitored, there will be immediate response in case of any negative trend.

Conclusion:

This project was a well prepared and implemented project with every aspect. Protection measures were started to be taken during the preparation phase of the dam project in 2013, and any species that could be affected from it was taken into the scope of conservation measures. Besides, sustainability of the conservation measures was provided by the cooperation of the two institutions which will make this a life-long project. As the dam construction has finished and the dam already started collecting water, the monitoring studies also gained importance.