

PRESERVING THE LIVING HERITAGE OF THE MARSHES

أهوار الجبائش

# AL-CHIBAYISH MARSHLANDS

A JOURNEY THROUGH TIME



THIS GUIDE EXPLORES THE ICONIC MUDHIF ARCHITECTURE, THE RICH WILDLIFE, AND THE TRADITIONAL DAILY LIFE OF THE MARSHES  
THIS BOOKLET IS PART OF STUDENT ACTIVITIES DURING  
A DAAD-SUPPORTED PROJECT WEEK IN AL-CHIBAYISH MARSHES.



# THE MUDHIF

## 1. Building the Mudhif

The Mudhif is crafted entirely from local reeds using techniques passed down through generations. Built by the community working together, its design is both practical and beautiful. Seasonal variations in architecture are also observed: the Mudhif is traditionally used in winter, while the Sarifa is the summer version.

## 2. Why It Matters

The Mudhif is the heart of life in the marshes. It's where people come together to resolve disputes, make important decisions, and celebrate their shared identity.

Connected to the tribal Sheikh, it brings different subgroups (afkhadh) together, helping the community stay united and strong.

## 3. Spiritual Role

The Mudhif is a spiritual landmark where community bonds are forged. It hosts communal Iftar meals during Ramadan and serves as a "Husseiniya" for mourning rituals in Muharram, beautifully blending traditional Arab generosity with deep religious devotion.



# EXPLORE DAILY LIFE



## 1. Ceremonies & Traditions

In the marshes, weddings are celebrated on the water. Newlyweds travel in decorated Mashhuf boats through the waterways, surrounded by traditional songs. This unique custom reflects a deep bond with the environment.



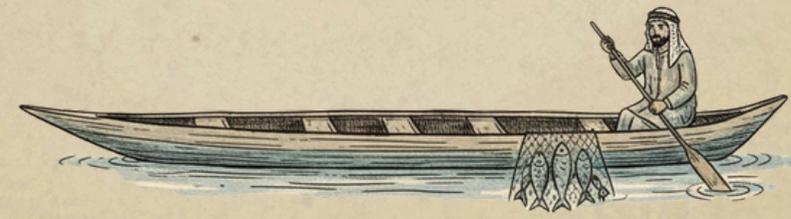
## 2. Passing Knowledge

Education here isn't found in books, but in the rhythm of daily life. From childhood, locals master boat navigation and buffalo herding through practice. Knowledge is shared orally, passed down from one generation to the next.



## 3. Cultural Feast

The marshes offer a unique taste of heritage. From grilled fish to spiced migratory birds like "Dijaj al-May" every meal tells a story. Accompanied by traditional songs and authentic dress, these flavors represent a rich cultural identity.



# WILDLIFE IN MARSHES

## A Journey in Nature

Every year, between September and April, waterfowl, geese, and many other birds travel long distances to reach the marshlands. These wetlands have served as a vital home for generations, providing a place to rest and regain strength before continuing their journeys. Resident birds, including Baydawi, Brinji (Brinji Bahr), and Smichi, live in the marshes year-round. Recent observations indicate that many of these species are now declining or disappearing.

## Life Underwater

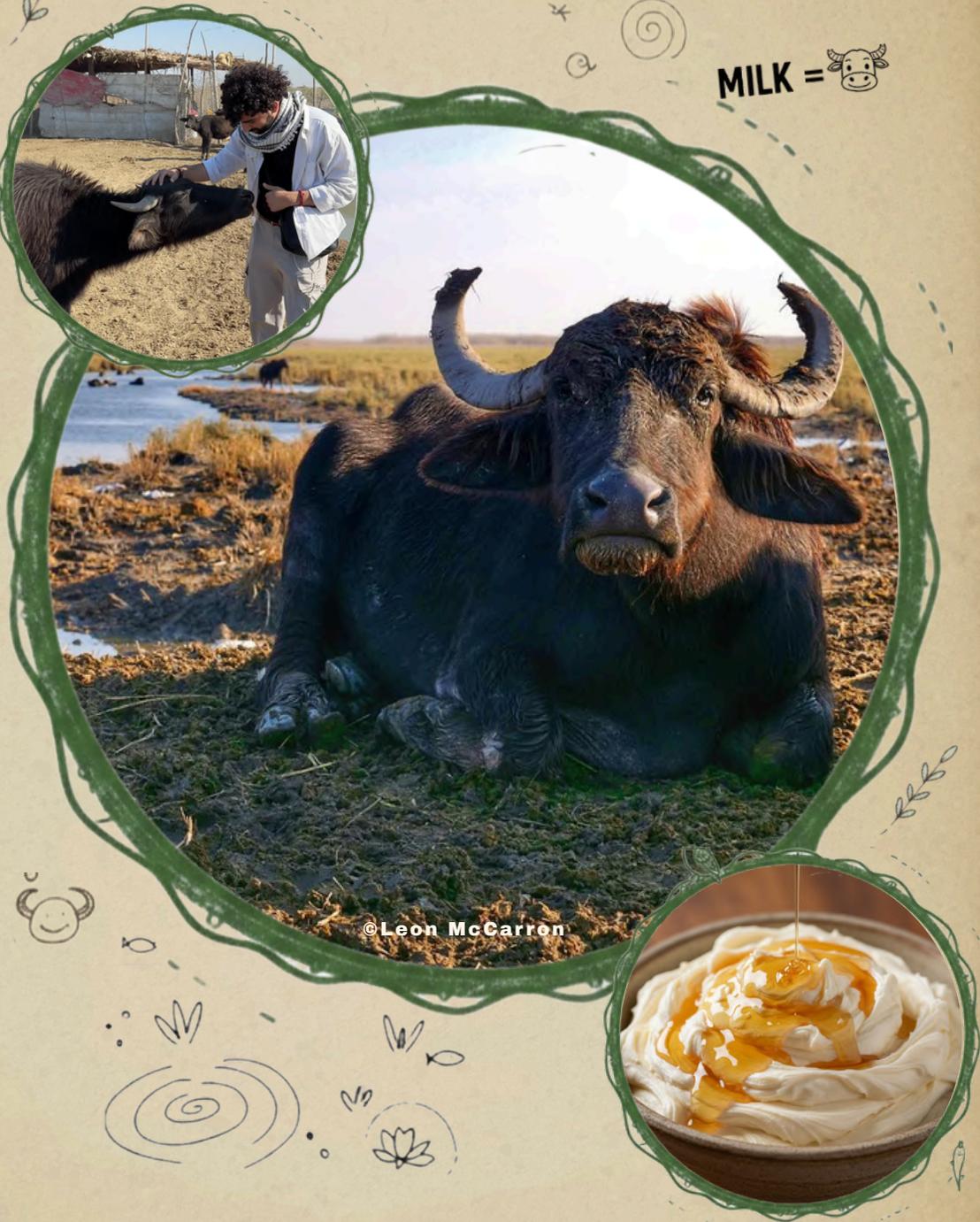
The Al-Chibayish marshes were once home to a wide variety of fish, including species that require deeper water such as Minni, Sabati, and Kattan, Buniya are now considered locally extremely rare or locally extinct. Currently, a limited number of species remain that can survive in shallow water, most notably Shankah.

CHIRP CHIRP!  
I'M AL-KHDIRI AND  
I WILL TELL YOU  
ABOUT MY JOURNEY.



# MEET THE BUFFALO

MILK = 



©Leon McCarron

## A Bigger Family

In Al-Chibayish, buffalo are treated as family members, not just livestock. Each animal has a unique name and an intuitive ability to roam the marshes and return home independently at sunset. As the primary source of the famous "Geymar" and the backbone of the local economy, the buffalo remains a symbol of the deep, enduring bond between the people and their land.

## An Economic Blessing

From an economic perspective, buffalo provide multiple forms of livelihood. They are a primary source of milk and dairy products, which are produced daily and sold in markets located near the marshes. Male buffalo are typically sold, while females are retained for reproductive purposes, ensuring the continuity of herds. However, local residents report a noticeable decline in reproductive capacity in recent years.

MOO!  
I'M WASSIFA





## 1. WATER PROBLEM

The marshes are changing in a painful way. Since 2021, water levels have dropped from 5 meters to only 1 meter. This has made the water salty, killing the reeds and the famous "Bunniya" fish. For the marsh people, life has become very hard. Fishing has nearly stopped. Buffalo herding and reed collection, once reliable sources of food and income, have also been severely affected. These changes are threatening the traditional way of life.

## 2. CHANGING WAY OF LIFE

This water crisis is about more than the environment. It threatens a way of life. Without fresh water, it becomes increasingly difficult to care for the buffaloes, animals that are cherished like family by the marsh communities. The people of the marshes are calling on the world for support to restore the water, protect their homes, and preserve a culture that has lived in harmony with nature for thousands of years.

