



## Sacramento Valley Chapter Meeting

Next meeting, Wed., 11/12 7:00 p.m.

Shepard Garden & Arts Center, McKinley Park  
3330 McKinley Blvd., Sacramento 95816

Information, contact: Mary Maret, President, (916) 961-4057

# Eco-Cultural Restoration of the Mesopotamian Marshes from an Iraqi Perspective

Michelle Stevens, Ph.D.

*Assistant Professor, Environmental Studies, CSUS*

**M**ost people think of Iraq as a desert nation, but in fact southern Iraq is home to extensive marsh habitat. At the confluence of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, these were once the most extensive wetlands in the Middle East, covering an area larger than the Florida Everglades. The Iraqi government has been systematically draining these marshes for political reasons since the late 1980s, and they are now nearly gone, along with the indigenous Ma'dan people, who lost their livelihoods and were turned into refugees. A 2001 United Nations Environmental Program report called "the disappearance of the Mesopotamian marshlands" a major "environmental catastrophe that will be remembered as one of humanity's worst engineered disasters." Michelle Stevens has been involved with the ecological and cultural restoration of the Mesopotamian Marshes of Iraq since 2002. Michelle recently attended a Biodiversity of the Middle East Conference in Jordan, where she is interviewing Iraqi scientists about their progress with the restoration, conservation and revitalization of the marshes. Her slide show will include historic the marshes and Marsh Arabs, progress toward restoring 58% of the marshes and recolonization of the marsh area, and new initiatives to create a Ramsar Wetland of International Significance and a Peace Park between Iran and Iraq. Michelle has worked with wetlands ecology and ethnobotany for over 20 years. From 2002-2003, she was project manager of the marshes' Eden Again Project, an initiative sponsored by the Iraq Foundation and the U.S. Department of State to develop a viable plan to restore the marshes. Besides hydrological modeling, the project is compiling a list of focal plant and animal species that can serve as biological indicators of successful habitat restoration. Michelle also worked with the Iraq AWARE Project in 2003-2004, and is now an assistant professor in the Environmental Studies Department at California State University, Sacramento.

