

THE CORNERSTONE OF NATURE CONSERVATION

Conservation areas are crucial for the preservation of global biodiversity and as such are the cornerstone of international conservation policy. IUCN NL is working to create and wherever necessary to improve the management of protected areas in South America, Southeast Asia and Africa, by collaborating with various local stakeholders.

ESSENTIAL FOR NATURE AND PEOPLE

A protected area is a clear geographical area that is marked out on the basis of legal means or unwritten agreements, with the objective of preserving the diversity of the local flora and fauna. In many cases, the same area also guarantees ecosystem services for local people, such as clean water and food supply.

Protected areas often overlap the territories of indigenous people and local communities. Their identity and basic necessities of life are inextricably linked with the area. They enjoy a spiritual relationship with nature as manifested in its many guises, for example sacred animals, plants, rivers, mountains or rocks. Via their sacred lands, they maintain their links with their ancestors and the spirit world. In that sense, conservation areas are also of inestimable cultural and religious value.

PROTECTED BUT NOT SECURE

Worldwide, 15.5% of the continental land mass and 7.5% of oceans are protected, divided across more than 257,000 individual conservation areas. However, a large proportion of these areas do not enjoy the protection they deserve, or worse still, the protection

exists only on paper. Moreover, not all the different types of ecosystems are equally well represented, leaving gaps in the system.

The pressure on protected areas is growing as a result of:

- Population growth; the areas are being encroached upon by small-scale farming.
- The extraction of oil and minerals for consumer goods and the energy transition.
- Industrial farming; the ever advancing spread of monocultures.
- Construction of roads and other infrastructure.

“Conservation areas are the backbone for the preservation of biodiversity in the broader landscape. However, to offer effective protection to these areas, active support from local people is crucial. Our southern partners play a vital role in organising grassroots support and involving local communities in nature conservation.”

Jan Kamstra, expert nature conservation at IUCN NL

FROM LOCAL TO INTERNATIONAL

IUCN NL is calling for the effective protection of biodiversity-rich areas. We support projects in which local communities play a central role and that lay the foundations for sound landscape management. Indigenous and Community Conserved Areas, for example, are areas that by definition are managed by indigenous communities. Our strength lies in our cooperation with local NGOs and nature conservation organisations that enjoy the trust of various stakeholders in an area.

On the international stage, too, we continue to place nature conservation on the political map. We are actively participating in the UN Convention on Biological Diversity, and encourage member states to recognise the importance of biodiversity.

We have joined forces in the fight against bauxite mining for the production of aluminium in the Atewa forest reserve, an internationally recognised conservation area in Ghana. Atewa is also the source of water for millions of people, including the residents of the capital city Accra. Local opposition has activated the international community. In the same way, we are attempting to halt oil production in the Virunga National Park in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and to reduce the negative impact on nature from the agroindustry in Bahia Negra (Paraguay) and mining in the Philippines.

LANDSCAPE APPROACH

All conservation areas are an integral part of a broader landscape. Different groups of stakeholders in an area often have divergent and sometimes even conflicting interests.

For that reason, we must secure conservation areas according to what is known as the landscape approach in which the interests of local communities, governments, businesses and environmental defenders are brought together through dialogue, with the aim of establishing joint plans and

identifying common solutions. All our work is based on the carrying capacity of nature while ensuring that in serving every interest, biodiversity is also taken into account. After all, biodiversity is the basis for the stability of any ecosystem.

Example of our work

Tackling fragmentation

One element of the landscape approach is connecting natural areas. In many countries, nature is becoming fragmented, leaving behind small, unconnected protected areas. To prevent them becoming islands of nature in a sea of decline, we encourage the development of corridors. These play a crucial role in the survival of many animal and plant species. By maintaining the animal migration routes diverse populations are kept healthy. Many of these animals are also important for seed dispersal. In the Murchison landscape in Uganda, the Atlantic rainforest in Brazil and the Kerala landscape in Southern India, where areas of forest are being separated by agriculture, our local partners are collaborating with land owners to connect widespread areas of nature. Via our [Land Acquisition Fund](#), we have been working since 2001 to help nature conservation organisations throughout the world purchase and protect threatened patches of nature.

Do you want to help IUCN NL to make projects possible to offer real protection to conservation areas? Visit our [website](#) for more detailed information or contact our expert **[Jan Kamstra](#)**.