

# Culture for Nature

## *Cultural and Spiritual Values of Protected Areas*

A view of Mt. Mandagni with the Tansa River at its base. © Scott Fry

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## Editorial

### - Radhika Borde

The second issue of "Culture for Nature" ranges from Bioblitzing in Hawaii, to an essay on a sacred natural site in India. Also finding a place in this newsletter, are philosophical questions of the meaning of "values" and "significance" in relation to protected areas, as well as the spiritual experiences that Dutch Nature offers to those who are looking for them.

I am very happy to be able to present two articles by new members – Gilles Havik and Jim Gale. And I am even happier to present contributions by older members who are reconnecting with CSVPA's work in new ways.

Please feel free to get in touch with authors if you would like to know more about their work; their email addresses are provided in the newsletter.

The issue also includes further updates from the co-chairs and items of news that may interest you. Readers are advised to take particular note of information pertaining to the upcoming World Parks Congress in which CSVPA is playing an important role.

I hope this issue can offer you a mixture of science, philosophy, spirituality and community that will welcome you back to work after what I hope was an enjoyable summer.



**WCPA**  
WORLD COMMISSION  
ON PROTECTED AREAS



Cultural and Spiritual Values  
of Protected Areas  
[www.csvpa.org](http://www.csvpa.org)  
Specialist Group of IUCN WCPA

# Update from the Co-Chairs

- Edwin Bernbaum & Bas Verschuuren



This year's second issue of the CSVPA newsletter "Culture for Nature", marks a period in which CSVPA members have become increasingly active. Not only are we building up for the IUCN World Parks Congress, CSVPA members have also revitalized, if not revamped the CSVPA website.

The new CSVPA website at [www.csvpa.org](http://www.csvpa.org) has been in the making for some time and many creative minds have contributed ideas. Rianne ten Veen took the initiative to put the website online, with the support of several members, including Arlene Sampang. Many thanks to all those who have contributed!

If you haven't done so yet and you have ideas for content or would like to help with managing the website, please make yourself known to us! We would also appreciate pictures that you feel may help to illustrate the work of CSVPA on the website.

The website will also show the progress that our specialist group is making towards the IUCN World Parks Congress in Sydney, Australia, this November. At the WPC, we will be working on a new project on the

## CSVPA at the World Parks Congress

11th-19th November, 2014,  
in Sydney, Australia

cultural and spiritual significance of nature in protected area management and governance, funded by a grant from The Christensen Fund, as well as on the WCPA Best Practice Guidelines (BPG) on the same topic. CSVPA members working on the project will also contribute to other sessions and events.

At the WPC, the CSVPA will host a participatory workshop bringing protected area managers together with representatives of indigenous peoples, mainstream religions, and the general public. The session aims to establish a network of interested people and begin work on developing training modules and other follow-up activities and products, such as the WCPA Best Practice Guidelines on the cultural and spiritual significance of nature.

The workshop will take place in Stream 7 on Tuesday, November 18, 10:30 am to 12 pm and will be complemented with a side event (place and time t.b.a.) on the same topic, but specifically geared to establishing a network and initiating work on the BPG. Please let people and organizations who might be interested in this work know about the workshop and encourage them to attend. More information will be available on the website soon, including a flyer to distribute by email.

Developing the BPG on the cultural and spiritual significance of nature in protected area management and governance is, of course, well suited to



**NEW CSVPA WEBSITE:**  
<http://www.csvpa.org>

our specialist group. We are therefore grateful for the recognition and financial support given to this work by WCPA Chair, Ernesto Enkerlin and Vice-Chair, Kathy Mackinnon: they have arranged for the WCPA to provide a small grant to get the project started. We are now on the lookout for potential collaborators and additional funding, so please let us know if you have any ideas that we can explore together.

*Please let people and organizations who might be interested in this work know about the workshop and encourage them to attend. More information will be available on the website soon, including a flyer to distribute by email.*



# Spiritual sanctuary on the Edge of Development

The Tansa Valley,  
Maharashtra, India

— Manisha Sheth Gutman

The Tansa Valley, which is located just 60 kms. north of the city of Mumbai in India, was originally inhabited by indigenous peoples that lived close to the Earth and whose world view was centered on Nature.

In an area that hosted tigers, they worshipped the Tiger God and other personifications of Nature. The valley is named after the Tansa river, which is the primary source of drinking water for the city of Mumbai, and is nested within a circle of hill ranges. The highest of these, Mt. Tungareshwar, was declared a Wildlife Sanctuary in 2003. The mountain is inhabited by a rare species of owl and connects up with the Sanjay Gandhi National Park in Mumbai, forming a corridor for leopards.

The power of the natural beauty of the region is accentuated by the fact that it lies on a fault zone and has several hot sulphur springs which are revered for their healing properties. Around these springs, Hindu religious monuments arose and Hindu mythology has reference

to the sanctity of the region. Ancient forts and temples are seen scattered through the landscape.

Over the past century, this region also became home to several living saints and began to attract pilgrims from far and wide, both nationally and globally. The three villages of Vajreshwari, Ganeshpuri and Akloli are now important pilgrimage sites for devotees.

In spite of its proximity to Mumbai, the area has been relatively undamaged until the last decade. However, this is changing as Mumbai continues to expand towards the valley. Highways and industry are the most immediate threats to it. Brick kilns that feed the construction industry have stripped the valley of its fertile topsoil and diminishing yields have forced farmers to sell their lands to developers.

Whereas the original indigenous cultures of the area considered the entire landscape sacred, the values that evolved later were more focused on specific natural features such as the hot springs and mountains. This then shifted to iconic worship, as temples dedicated to Shiva and the Goddess Vajreshwari developed – and then, the spiritual direction moved to a focus on living spiritual leaders, around whom communities gathered.

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*Protecting this spiritual sanctuary, for the future generations of Mumbai, will ensure the water security of the city...*

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These communities have incorporated the need to conserve and protect Nature into their mandates. Reforestation of private lands and the dissemination of environmental information form part of their activities.

Community development efforts now include development of organic agriculture and eco-sensitive livelihood options.

The location of the valley at the edge of one of India's most densely populated and developed cities, makes development inevitable here. However, the value of its natural and cultural heritage for the future city of Mumbai far surpasses its real estate potential.

## *Continued: Spiritual Sanctuary on the Edge of Development...*

In 2013, the expansion of an existing road demanded the felling of 3000 old growth banyan trees. The banyan is considered sacred within Hindu philosophy and many of these trees are annually worshipped on a full moon night (Vata Poornima) in a ceremony especially dedicated to this tree. A citizens' effort to save the trees, resulted in litigation against the expansion of the highway and a demand that its alignment be reconsidered. The case is still pending.

As early as 2001, an application was put together to get a special notification for the area as being eco-sensitive. As the valley falls in the buffer zone for two protected areas, it also qualifies

for protection as per an order passed by the Indian Supreme Court in 2006.

Protecting this spiritual sanctuary, for the future generations of Mumbai, will ensure the water security of the city, as well as a corridor to ensure connectivity between the Sanjay Gandhi National Park in Mumbai, the Tungareshwar Wildlife Sanctuary and the Tansa Wildlife Sanctuary. This is crucial for wildlife that is already under severe pressure in the existing national park within the city.

Achieving such conservation connectivity will require many groups to agree on land use – including the Mumbai Metropolitan

Regional Development Authority, the National Highways Authority, farmers, indigenous peoples and the spiritual communities – in short, a multi-stakeholder dialogue process is required to bring all the different groups to the table and respect each others' views. Such an approach is currently underway, though much negotiation and agreement still needs to be achieved, to attain the goal of protecting such a corridor.

[Link to relevant Facebook page: https://www.facebook.com/TheTansaValley](https://www.facebook.com/TheTansaValley)



## Progress on Asian Sacred Natural Sites publication

– Bas Verschuuren

The Sacred Natural Sites Initiative, the IUCN Asian Regional Office and the World Commission on Protected Areas in Japan, are developing a publication titled – “Asian Sacred Natural Sites: Philosophy and Practice in Protected Areas and Conservation”,

The publication is part of the Asian Network Project that was kicked off at the first Asian Parks Congress in Sendai 2013. Several of the presenters are writing chapters for the book that will also be linked to online case studies in order to present a truly interactive resource.

Several CSVPA members are already writing chapters and developing online case studies. If

you are interested, please contact [info@sacrednaturalsites.org](mailto:info@sacrednaturalsites.org)

The publication will include chapters from around 20 different Asian countries, covering indigenous spiritualities as well as several mainstream faiths, across various kinds of differently governed protected areas. The editors of the publication are currently in discussion with IUCN and potential publishers to ensure that this publication will be complementary to the earlier volume: “Sacred Natural Sites: Conserving Nature and Culture”

As the editors are keen to ensure that materials in the publication will be peer reviewed, we are looking for knowledgeable people who would

Jailab Rai, chapter author, presenting at the Asian Parks Congress. © APC

like to help with this process between September 2014 and January 2015 (contact: [info@sacrednaturalsites.org](mailto:info@sacrednaturalsites.org)).

At the IUCN World Parks Congress, a side event will mark the soft launch of the publication, and authors attending the congress will present their chapters and engage in discussion and networking with other delegates interested in this work. For more news on the side event stay tuned to <http://www.sacrednaturalsites.org>.



A restricted focus on Cultural and Spiritual Values of Nature can undermine efforts to gain the support of traditional leaders and communities.

If it fails to acknowledge their views of nature, it can alienate them by making them feel they are not being properly respected. These views are not just a matter of values reflecting how they feel about things, but rather valid sources of knowledge and experience about the world, with profound implications for the ways they live and treat the environment. At the very least their traditions include practical knowledge about medicinal plants, climate patterns, animal life, and other matters that modern science finds extremely useful.

At a deeper level, as the discussion of art and story in Part I suggests, traditional views can open us to a direct knowledge and experience of nature, from which science tends to keep us at a remove, with its emphasis on acquiring objective knowledge by separating the subject or observer from the object of observation.

Many traditional views of nature imbue natural features with human personality, seeing

# Values and Knowledge

Art and Tradition as Sources of Knowledge in the Conservation and Management of Protected Areas: Part II

- Edwin Bernbaum

in them the presence and work of spirits, deities, and ancestors.

Anthropomorphic views of this sort help people to connect with nature in a particularly intimate way since people relate most easily to other people. This way of seeing the world can also help make people aware that they are part of nature, not just disembodied minds observing it from the outside.

Scientists tend to dismiss anthropomorphism as a primitive and erroneous view of the natural world that modern society has outgrown. But science itself is also anthropomorphic in the sense that its experiments and theories are based on models created by, and comprehensible to, human beings. As Wendy Doniger, a scholar of comparative religion has observed, science projects onto the universe the model of a human legal system, seeing nature as governed by laws just as human societies are.

A prerequisite to success, in efforts to promote bio-cultural diversity, is the need to respect and take traditional views of nature seriously. Towards this end, in addition to considering values, organizations engaged in this work need to explore ways of elucidating and communicating the cultural and spiritual dimensions of experience and showing how they can be valid and necessary sources

*A prerequisite to success, in efforts to promote bio-cultural diversity, is the need to respect and take traditional views of nature seriously.*

of knowledge, that complement scientific approaches to the protection of the environment. Traditional and religious leaders should play key roles in these efforts, particularly those that affect their sacred sites and traditions.

The special knowledge and communication skills of poets, writers, artists, musicians, and scholars of the humanities have an important place in complementing the expertise of social and natural scientists. To reflect this broader emphasis on meaning and knowledge, as well as values, the CSVPA might consider changing its name to the Specialist Group on the Cultural and Spiritual Significance of Protected Areas (CSSPA). The word significance can be construed to cover values, as well as sources of meaning and ways of knowing, and is therefore, more inclusive than using the word values alone.

# Bioblitzing – in California and Hawaii

- Jim Gale



Aquatic scientist and young Bioblitz participant explore the biodiversity at Muir Woods National Park. © Edwin Bernbaum

We pull on chest waders, new out of the box provided for us at Muir Woods National Park.

Steve, an invertebrate stream ecologist, welcomes us beneath the towering 65 meter redwoods. Our hearts beat in anticipation as we walk into the stream. He demonstrates our sampling method and we each stir the rocks upstream above the net. The water turns murky. Are we are catching something?

We are at a Bioblitz, occurring just a half hour north of San Francisco and sponsored by Golden Gate National Recreation Area, the National Park Service and National Geographic. We are part of a citizen science and youth educational program, with 200 scientists and 5000 school kids and 10,000s of visitors to the park, that are here to inventory and celebrate the biodiversity of life. All of this must be done, or at least attempted, in just 24 hours!

Our eyes bulge as we look through our hand lenses and see the hairs and barbs on the invertebrate legs that allow them to attach to rocks in the fast current!

This description is just a small sample of the science and excitement

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*The Bioblitz will combine science and Hawaiian spiritual values of *I ka nānā a 'ike...* By observing one learns.*

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of a Bioblitz, which was organized this past spring in Golden Gate National Recreation Area, which 16 million people visit annually.

Hawaii Volcanoes National Park, on the Island of Hawaii, will host, with National Geographic, a Bioblitz on May 15-16, 2015. The Bioblitz will combine science and Hawaiian spiritual values of *I ka nānā no a 'ike...By observing one learns.* We plan to connect both youth and adults to scientists and cultural practitioners, to promote scientific exploration and the awareness of the interconnectedness among the native plants and animals, the environment, traditional people, and our daily lives.

This is our goal for the celebration of the diversity of life and culture, as we design our Bioblitz at Hawaii

Volcanoes National Park. Combining culture and science fulfills our management objectives as well as the needs of the visitor. Visitors come to see one of the world's most active volcanoes and many come because this is the sacred home of Pele Honunea Mea, the goddess of both constructive and destructive forces.

We hope that by having a Hawaiian perspective, visitors to this Bioblitz will further understand and appreciate the life and life styles of these islanders, and how they value diversity. Hawaiians are keen observers and have developed a two-part naming system to talk about plants, hundreds of years before we started using genera and species to identify plants and animals.

Hopefully, participants will want to plant their backyards in Hawaii with native plants like Mamaki, so that the Blackburn butterfly can lay its eggs and they can hatch to form caterpillars which will metamorphose into butterflies. Wouldn't that be fun? Or plant Ohia trees so that the honeycreepers will inhabit home backyards, as a source of nectar for insects. That will be the true success of this Bioblitz – if people will take inspiration from it and value and celebrate the diversity of life, by making it a part of their everyday lives.



# 'Islamic Perspectives on Ecosystem Management'

Forum organized by the Qur'anic Botanical Garden and IUCN's Commission on Ecosystem Management, 22nd-24th April, 2014, in Doha, Qatar.

- Josep-Maria Mallarach

The Second Forum of the Qur'anic Botanical Garden of Doha, Qatar, gathered specialists of Islam and other faiths, ecologists, ecosystem managers, and scholars of other relevant disciplines, to exchange ideas and experiences about future programs to serve the objectives of the Qur'anic Botanical Garden and the Commission on Ecosystem Management.

The sessions of the Forum discussed Islamic principles, values and ethics that promote the conservation of plants, cultural traditions and ecosystems. The contributions by the IUCN Commission on Ecosystem

Management explored broader relationships between faith, spirituality and the natural environment, and how this relationship can provide a basis for conservation.

Some sessions explored links between traditional knowledge and ecosystem conservation, as well as the links between botanical gardens and ecosystem and landscape restoration. Finally, certain contributions focussed on the plants in the Qur'an and the goals of the Qur'anic Botanical Garden of Doha.

Two members of the Specialist Group on Cultural and Spiritual Values of Protected Areas participated in this event: Gonzalo Oviedo, IUCN senior advisor on social policy, and Josep-Maria Mallarach, member of the Steering Committee of Cultural and Spiritual Values of Protected Areas, and joint-coordinator of The Delos Initiative. Both made presentations and participated in the discussions.

Gonzalo Oviedo's presentation on 'Cultural and spiritual values, traditions and customs in conservation', provided very clear ideas and concepts, providing the social and political framework for many other presentations. The presentation by Josep-Maria Mallarach was on: 'Managing landscapes that are of spiritual significance for different faith groups'. It provided a general overview of the topic from the perspective of mainstream faiths, with selected examples of current landscape management inspired by religious principles.

It is anticipated that the proceedings of the Forum 'Islamic Perspectives on Ecosystem Management', including all the presentations and conclusions, will be published by the Qur'anic Garden of Qatar and the CEM of IUCN this year.



# Souls in Nature: Spiritual Experiences amongst Dutch New Agers.

– Gilles Havik

Do westerners need to cross oceans to search for the spiritual in distant lands, or could some of these experiences also be found in our backyards?

As in many other western countries, secularization in the Netherlands has opened up space for the emergence and popularization of a plurality of spiritual perceptions. New Age groups are constituted by many such examples of individuals with autonomous views on sacred matters. They perceive natural environments such as forests and city parks, in an innate way, and find life purpose, creativity and inspiration when they visit them.

Together with a number of New Age practitioners, and for

the purpose of research, I have visited several Dutch natural and protected areas, including the Loonse Dunes in the province of Brabant, the Oosterzand Forest in Drente, but also the Vondelpark in the city of Amsterdam. There, we contemplated our experiences of the place while we were present in them and the impacts of earlier spiritual experiences on our current lives.

One central point mentioned by all the participants in the research study, was the deeper self or the soul, which was experienced more strongly in natural environments. Most saw this deeper self as characteristically in touch with nature.

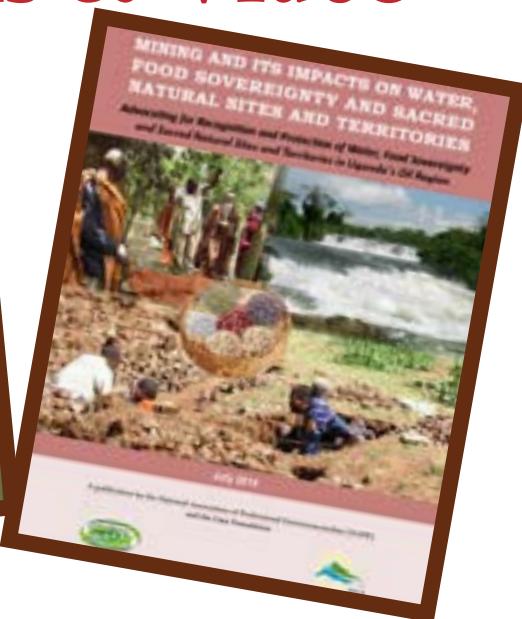
They also felt that they could communicate reciprocally, with natural beings such as trees and animals, not through words and

concepts, but through an inspiration which provided them with clarity and direction in life.

Personally, I thought it was interesting to note that even though some of the sites were extra sacred, there seemed to be a common understanding that any living organism, regardless of whether it lived in the city, or in a protected site, has the potential to provide spiritual inspiration. A beautiful way of looking at life, I thought, and one which hopefully keeps inspiring people to treat their environment with the care it deserves.

[Link to the thesis that this write-up is based on: http://wp.me/p2pEjy-6H](http://wp.me/p2pEjy-6H)

# News, Publications & Video



## Mining and its Impacts on Water, Food Sovereignty, and Sacred Natural Sites and Territories – a new report from Uganda

Launched in Kampala on 9th July, this report from the National Association of Professional Environmentalists, NAPE (Uganda) and The Gaia Foundation (UK), reveals how mining is significantly threatening ecosystems and communities in Uganda. The Report warns that oil extraction, which is projected to begin in Uganda by 2017, would have destructive, widespread and long-term impacts on the Bunyoro region, which is celebrated for its rich biodiversity and cultural heritage.

The report, published with support from the African Biodiversity Network and Advocates for International Development, advocates for the recognition and protection of watersheds, food sovereignty areas, and sacred natural sites as No Go Areas for mining and extractive activities.

[Download here: http://nape.or.ug/mining-and-its-impacts-report/](http://nape.or.ug/mining-and-its-impacts-report/)

## English translation of Benin's Law on Sacred Forests

GRABE-Benin and The Gaia Foundation are pleased to share a much awaited English translation of the 2012 Benin law recognizing sacred forests and their custodian communities.

In 2012, civil society and communities successfully lobbied the Benin Government to pass a national law (Interministerial Order No.0121) for the sustainable “management”, legal recognition, and integration of sacred forests as protected areas. The law recognizes sacred forests and sites where gods, spirits and ancestors reside, and that communities protect and govern sacred forests, and have a responsibility for implementing the “management” plan for the forest.

It has been translated into English (an unofficial version), with support from the African Biodiversity Network.

[Download the English version here: http://tinyurl.com/kphtv6a](http://tinyurl.com/kphtv6a)

## Sacred Voices (2012) – a short film

Sacred Voices conveys the messages of eight traditional custodians of Sacred Natural Sites, from Kenya, Ethiopia, South Africa and Uganda. They share an ancient birthright and duty to protect the sacred places within their territories.

In April 2012, they came together to share their experiences and their concerns. Together they drafted a “Statement on Common African Customary Laws for the Protection of Sacred Natural Sites” and created this film “Sacred Voices”.

[To view, click here: http://vimeo.com/49006743](http://vimeo.com/49006743)



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