

# Culture for Nature

## Cultural and Spiritual Values of Protected Areas

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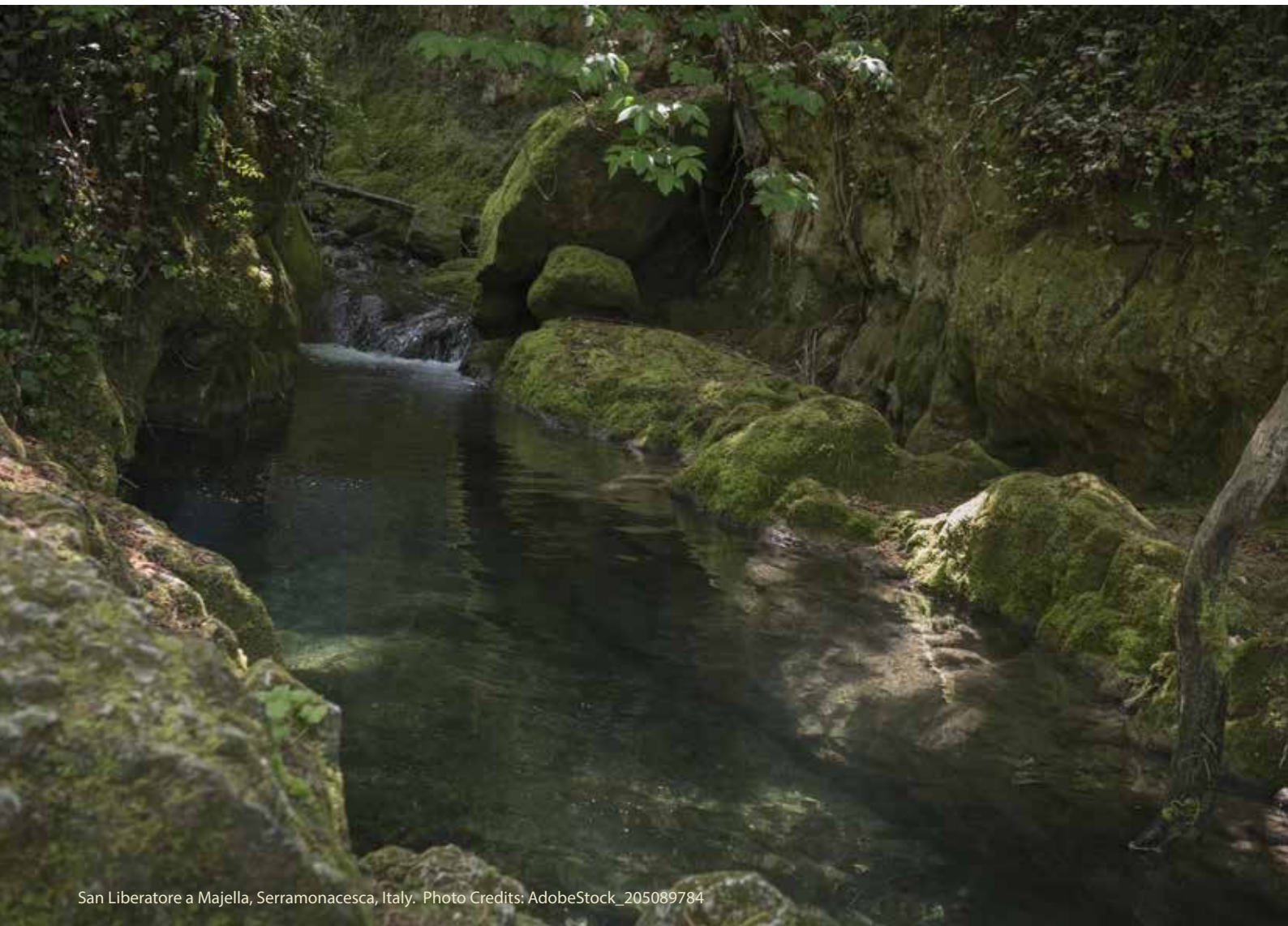
Dear friends who share an interest in nature and culture/natureculture,

Here's another issue of the CSVPA newsletter "Culture for Nature". We hope you will enjoy reading it and that it will give you new insights into the ways by which people have found the energy and inspiration to live well with nature, instead of just living off it. It's crucial that we find this energy in ourselves as the global environmental crisis intensifies. At CSVPA we have always believed that treating nature as sacred, or acknowledging that it has an intrinsic value, is the best way to relate to it. We hope that this publication will underscore this message and we would be happy if you disseminated it widely.

In this issue of CSVPA we have contributions that share the wisdom of ancient Indian concepts of sustainable development, news from the frontlines in Hawai'i, an update from the co-chairs, news regarding interest in the astronomical significance of sacred sites, and updates from conferences and events around the world. We also introduce contributors who are not members of CSVPA.

Happy reading!

Radhika Borde



San Liberatore a Majella, Serramonacesca, Italy. Photo Credits: AdobeStock\_205089784

## UPDATE from the Co-Chairs:

# CSVPA completes major stepping-stones in its programme on the cultural and spiritual significance of nature

By IUCN CSVPA Co-Chairs Bas Verschuuren and Edwin Bernbaum

We are excited to bring you the news that CSVPA is progressing well on its programme “Promoting and Integrating the Cultural and Spiritual Significance of Nature in the Governance and Management of Protected and Conserved Areas.”

As our members will know, the objective of the programme is to broaden the scope of protected and conserved area governance and management to include the cultural and spiritual significance that nature has for the people of the world's diverse societies and cultures.

When we launched the programme at the 2014 IUCN World Parks Congress (Sydney, Australia) we started a series of international workshops on different continents. At the World Conservation Congress in Hawaii in 2016, CSVPA and its partners successfully proposed the IUCN resolution on ‘Recognising cultural and spiritual significance of nature in protected and conserved areas’ which now provides institutional legitimacy to the work we do under our programme. But perhaps more importantly, it also has the potential to influence the policies and activities of IUCN members and beyond.

Five complementary and interrelated projects make up the programme: 1) the development of IUCN Best Practice Guidelines, 2) the collection and dissemination of case studies, 3) a peer reviewed book, 4) the development of training modules

and 5) the creation of a network of practitioners. Some of the programmes' projects are now coming to fruition.

Our volume on cultural and spiritual significance of nature - which is part of The Best Practice Guidelines Series published by the IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas – has engaged over 300 experts from a diversity of backgrounds, expertise and geographic regions in drafting and reviewing. Our editorial team is working hard to ensure that we get the best out of our joint efforts now that a publication budget has been made available and the BPG are scheduled to go to the printer by the end of 2018!

The peer-reviewed book: “Cultural and Spiritual Significance of Nature: Implications for the Governance and Management of Protected and Conserved Areas” has been edited by Bas Verschuuren (IUCN CSVPA) and Steve Brown (ICOMOS) and exemplifies the close collaborations between IUCN and ICOMOS on their joint nature culture journey. The book consists of 23 illustrated chapters and covers many CSVPA discussions that we have had over time. It explores the conceptual and philosophical underpinnings, cutting edge conservation programmes and specific conservation policies as well as practical case studies on the role of the cultural and spiritual significance of nature. The book is available from Routledge.

The other projects under our programme are also doing well. We keep receiving interesting case studies, and we are working to line up funding to consolidate and field test our work on the training modules and workshops.

Our network of practitioners now extends beyond CSVPA members and includes a variety of people interested in the role of cultural and spiritual significance of nature in protected and conserved areas.

Our aim is to establish connections with practitioners interested in implementing the Best Practice Guidelines and having workshops or modules as part of their training programs. If you are interested in field testing the Best Practice Guidelines or in supporting or financing the development and application of training modules to help implement the Guidelines so that they don't just sit unused on bookshelves – please contact the CSVPA Co-chairs, Edwin Bernbaum and Bas Verschuuren.

Do pay a visit to [www.csvpa.org](http://www.csvpa.org) and as we said at the start of this update, we are pleased with the progress that CSVPA has been able to make, and thanks goes to all our members who keep contributing!

2018 is a special year as IUCN turns 70. CSVPA co-chair Bas Verschuuren was invited to speak at IUCN's birthday party at its birthplace Fontainebleau in France August 30-31st. This is timely and a great opportunity to showcase the work that CSVPA has been doing IUCN-wide.

With much work still to be done we hope you will pause with us for a moment and celebrate the major advancements that we have achieved together over the past years.

Best Greetings,

Bas Verschuuren and Ed Bernbaum  
IUCN-CSVPA Co-Chairs



Century old manuscript from Majuli, India. Photo Credits: Chirodeep Chaudhuri

# Tracing ecological footsteps in ancient India

By Souvik Lal Chakraborty  
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In the recent past, concepts like sustainable development and environmental activism have become extremely popular. But in the case of India, these concepts are not all that new. Classical Indian texts have mentioned these concepts long before they appeared in academic discourse.

Since most of the classical texts of India were composed in Pali and Sanskrit in ancient times, they never came into the spotlight of mainstream academic discourse and the contribution of these great classical Indian thinkers hasn't received its deserved recognition.

It has been widely accepted today that natural resources must be used wisely in order to preserve these resources for future generations. The Classical Indian texts known as the Upanishads clearly state that resources must be used sensibly for wealth generation and that the overexploitation of such resources should be curbed at any cost.

*"Whatever is there on this ever-changing world of ours which is always in motion.*

*All that is, is considered to be pervaded by a single controlling factor.*

*Therefore, you should nurture yourself With only the portion of resources Which has been showered upon you.*

*You must not covet anything more than that, for after all to whom do all these natural endowments really belong?"*  
 (Isha Upanishad Verse 1)

Ancient Indian scholars, particularly the Vedic scholars, have addressed issues like water resource management, land and soil conservation, alternative sources of energy in Classical Indian texts, namely the Rig Veda and the Atharva Veda. Nature played a significant role in shaping the understanding of the ancient Indian scholars.

The Vedic scholars understood that the relation between man and Mother Nature is like a child and mother. It is a real marvel how they thought about sustainable development in that era. The foresight of the Vedic scholars needs to be appreciated in this regard.

*"What, O earth, I dig out of thee, quickly shall that grow again: may I not, O pure one, pierce thy vital spot, (and) not thy heart!"*  
 (Atharva Veda, 12/1/35)

Nature and religion have always been intrinsically connected in ancient Indian religions and culture, and the primary lessons of sustainable development came from the Vedic scholars. The relationship between man and nature is biological in essence and the Vedic scholars have continuously praised Mother Nature for giving everything a man needs for secured sustenance. The poets of the later Classical Sanskrit literature remained in close contact with the physiography and climate of India, and

these had a prodigious influence on their writings. This trend was unknown elsewhere until the emergence of relatively modern nature poets.

From the writings of the ancient Indian religious texts, we notice that a stable balance between man and nature has been one of the central themes of the ancient Indian scholars. The ancient Indians had a keen interest in medicinal plants and human anatomy, and that actually led to the formation of the science of Ayurveda.

It never seems difficult to reconstruct the ecological history of India – there are several references to ecology in ancient Indian classical texts. Religion played an important role during the Vedic Age and related ideas were mostly shaped by the influence of nature. Nature played a pivotal role in shaping the character of society. This is why ecological ideas and natural values can be traced throughout history in Classical Indian texts. Ancient Indian texts starting from the Vedic period onward deeply demonstrate that in the ancient past human civilization had enough knowledge and wisdom vis-a-vis the sustainable use of natural resources.

Souvik Lal Chakraborty is a doctoral candidate at Monash University, Australia. Souvik's doctoral research will address new insights in the context of social movements in India and the tenacious issues of injustice and inequality. Souvik is interested in the issues of environmental governance, politics of natural resource extraction, social movements and regional politics of South Asia.





Mauna Kea at Sunrise. Photo Credits: Tom Peek

# Mountaintop Clash Reflects Hawai`i's Cultural Renewal and Colonial Past

By Tom Peek

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The decades-long controversy over building telescopes atop Mauna Kea began drawing worldwide media attention in October 2014 when Native Hawaiians, environmentalists and other islanders blocked the groundbreaking for California's Thirty Meter Telescope (TMT).

It was the latest skirmish in a multigenerational fight to protect one of the holiest places in the Hawaiian archipelago, home of revered deities, a sacred lake, ancient shrines, the highest burial site in Polynesia, and the place of Native Hawaiians' creation story. Its spectacular alpine desert sustains plants and animals found nowhere else on Earth.

But the 14,000-foot dormant volcano is also one of the last mountaintops in the Northern Hemisphere suitable for cutting-edge astronomy, with dark

skies still unsullied by air and light pollution. Numerous telescopes from various countries have been built there since 1964, including several of the world's largest—California's Twin Kecks with their innovative 10-meter multi-mirrors, Japan's 8.2-meter Subaru Telescope, and the United States' 8.1-meter Gemini Observatory.

Now a race is on for who will dominate the next phase of ground-based astronomy, and the proposed TMT is competing against two other giants under construction on high mountains in Chile—the 30-meter Magellan Telescope in the Atacama Desert, and the 39-meter European Extremely Large Telescope on Cerro Armazones. All three are backed by international partners, but TMT also received \$250 million from the foundation of famed Intel founder, billionaire Gordon Moore. Other partners in the Caltech/University of California project include science organizations from the US, China, Japan, India and Canada.

The Mauna Kea controversy is one of many growing out of the Hawaiian Renaissance that began shortly after

Hawai`i became a state in 1959. This is a Native Hawaiian movement to restore their language, cultural practices and sacred sites—including Mauna Kea, a wao akua or "realm of the gods". Movement scholars increased islanders' understanding of their turbulent colonial history and the American-supported coup d'état by sugar planters that overthrew Hawaiians' constitutional monarchy in 1893. Calls arose to enforce Hawaiians' existing legal rights and eventually re-establish some form of native sovereignty. On Mauna Kea the question became who rightfully owns the summit, "ceded land" confiscated from the monarchy after the coup and ceded to the state in 1959.

Islanders, including the Hawai`i chapter of Sierra Club, long criticized the state's summit management. Several legislative audits lambasted state agencies for encouraging observatory development without adequately protecting the mountain's cultural and environmental resources, often ignoring their own plans, rules and regulations. They and some observatories also violated state and federal laws designed to protect



Lake Waiau and Pu'u Poli'ahu. Photo Credits: Tom Peek  
(below) Protectors' Ahu on TMT Site. Photo Credits: Tom Peek

unique ecosystems and Hawaiians' cultural rights, forcing cultural practitioners and environmentalists to seek relief from the courts—which usually sided with them.

Their most recent victory was a 2015 State Supreme Court decision voiding TMT's permit because of due process violations by the state's Land Board and ordering the board to redo their contested case hearing for the permit. But before the court could rule on the appeal, TMT officials initiated construction, inciting months of nonviolent protests, prayer vigils and other ceremonies by cultural practitioners and elders—Hawai'i's version of Standing Rock.

Mountain "protectors" blocked construction vehicles, citing Hawai'i's anti-desecration statute as justification, and imposed on themselves an ancient "Kapu Aloha" protocol prohibiting violence and other expressions of anger to ensure that their protests remained peaceful. Even so, police arrested thirty-one protectors, although most of their cases were later thrown out by judges after the Supreme Court voided TMT's permit, some citing the anti-desecration law.

After a lengthy redo of the contested case hearing last year, the Land Board again approved TMT's permit, which led to another Supreme Court appeal, heard by justices in June. Meanwhile, TMT officials obtained permits for an alternative Canary Islands' site should the court again void their permit. A ruling is expected soon.

The unprecedented media coverage of the clash has deepened the world's understanding of contemporary Hawaiian culture, Hawai'i's colonial history and Native Hawaiians' commitment to defend their land with

aloha. Superficial images of the islands promoted after statehood by resorts and real estate developers are finally giving way to a fuller, more authentic picture of these unique volcanic islands and their rich Polynesian culture.

Tom Peek, a former astronomy guide for the Mauna Kea observatories and exhibit writer for Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park, is author of the award-winning novel *Daughters of Fire*. The longtime Hawai'i Island writer and teacher is now working on a second novel, set on Mauna Kea.





## UPDATE: Conservation through religion? Scientists confirm that sacred natural sites confer biodiversity advantage

Sacred natural sites (SNSs) are thought to play an important role in conservation. New research published in the journal *Biological Conservation* by an international and multidisciplinary team, led by the University of Ioannina/Project THALIS-SAGE, has shown that there is a notable conservation benefit to SNSs.

The researchers chose for their study the region of Epirus, in North-West Greece. By studying a wide range of plant and animal taxonomic groups in eight sacred natural sites they found that the SNSs have a small but persistent biodiversity advantage showing that even small SNSs can play a considerable role in biodiversity conservation.



'Our Lady of the Nightingales' - the sacred forest of Panagia Aidonolaloussa. Branches, roots and holes of giant old oaks, Judas-trees, mahaleb cherries and hornbeams bring a Tolkienesque air to this ancient woodland. (Photo©K. Stara)

## UPDATE UNESCO International Expert Meeting on Astronomical Heritage and Sacred Places. Gran Canaria, Spain, 23-24 May 2018



Front Page of the Program: Astronomical Heritage and Sacred Sites.

The meeting aimed at establishing and identifying the links that exist between astronomical heritage, religious heritage and sacred sites, since many sacred sites have connections with astronomy or the skyscape. Therefore, the meeting simultaneously addressed two World Heritage Centre initiatives: the Astronomy and World Heritage thematic initiative and the initiative on Heritage of Religious Interest.

Representatives of UNESCO/WHC, Advisory Bodies to the World Heritage Committee (ICCROM, ICOMOS and IUCN), the International Astronomical Union (IAU), ICOMOS PRERICO and Expert Working Groups' representatives from both initiatives, presented and discussed concepts and case studies to illustrate the existing range of linkages between sacred properties and astronomical values that could contribute to a balanced, representative and credible World Heritage List.

Josep-Maria Mallarach, CSVPA Steering Committee member, made a presentation on sacred natural sites with associated astronomical values.

The main outcome of the meeting was a statement, which encapsulates the main conclusions and charts the way forward in this new trans-thematic field. The meeting had the support of the Spanish Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport, the Cabildo of Gran Canaria, and the Canary Island Government.

More information can be found on: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/events/1433>



The panel of the second day of the symposium, hosted in the island of Spetses and dedicated to "Economy, Ethics, and Spirituality". Photo Credits: Kalliopi Stara

# UPDATE: The Green Attica Conference (Saronic islands, Greece)

By John M. Halley / [jhalley@cc.uoi.gr](mailto:jhalley@cc.uoi.gr) and Kalliopi Stara / [kstara@cc.uoi.gr](mailto:kstara@cc.uoi.gr)

The international ecological symposium entitled *Toward a Greener Attica: Preserving the Planet and Protecting its People* (June 5-8, 2018) was the 9th in a series of symposia organized and sponsored by the Ecumenical Patriarchate (the apex body of the Eastern Orthodox Church). The patriarch's consistent commitment to environmental issues has earned him the nickname the "Green Patriarch". For at least 30 years, he has argued that science and religion must work together in the cause of conservation. The patriarch is not the only religious leader to emphasize the importance of the environmental crisis, but his position has been more radical, even going so far as to refer to environmental destruction as a sin and advocating for a sustainable planet as a sacred legacy for all people.

This symposium was attended by over 200 people, including scientific, religious and political leaders from around the world. The symposium which opened at the Acropolis museum in Athens traveled around the islands of Spetses and Hydra and concluded aboard the ship that returned us to Piraeus. While the schedule was full, this travel provided opportunities to meet and talk with one another and establish relationships. We were there because of our work on the

conservation value of Sacred Natural Sites (SNSs). Although SNSs did not appear in any of the official talks, we found most participants to be very interested in the subject. The symposium program also included a section dedicated to indigenous people throughout the world as stewards and guardians of the library of life.

Most of the talks were lively and covered topics such as climate, politics, economics, activism, refugees and theology. In political talks, there was a clear distinction between those who stressed the need for diplomacy that respects people's opinions (Patricia Espinosa) and activists stressing the need to confront opinions (Maud Barlow, Raj Patel). Some speakers saw corporations as the problem (Jeffrey Sachs, Vananda Shiva). Others put more emphasis on the need to accept corporations as part of the current reality (Pratap Chatterjee) or pointed out that in some things companies are taking a lead, such as the growing number of companies committed to zero carbon emissions in the near future (Christiana Figueres). A number of talks were about theology and explored the concepts of stewardship and anthropocentrism (Metropolitan John of Pergamon, Elizabeth Theokritoff).

The connection between climate change and the refugee crisis was not actually spoken about that much, but it was on everyone's mind. Beneath the surface of this symposium there was a barely perceptible but prevalent strain. Behind the interesting diversity of opinions and the beautiful surroundings was a sense of urgency about the storm everyone now feels is coming. One source of anxiety was the slow changes in environmental works (and retrogression in some countries), when compared with the gathering pace of climatic and environmental changes. Even so, one also had a sense that in some places remarkable responses are starting to emerge.

In his concluding remarks, the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew emphasized the long journey from the mind to the heart and then to the hands, while recognizing that there is much that can be achieved if all institutions and disciplines work together.

John M. Halley is a native of Waterford, Ireland, but works as a professor of ecology in Greece. His degrees were all in Electronic Engineering, but since 1990 he has worked on problems associated with the environment, focusing on ecology. His research interests include predictions of species extinction and how ecological communities respond to climatic change and the conservation value of sacred natural sites.





## UPDATE: Water and wetland culture events at World Heritage Convention meeting

By Dave Pritchard

The 42nd meeting of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee took place from the 24th of June to the 4th of July in Manama, Bahrain, and featured a number of side events concerning the cultural and spiritual values of wetlands and water environments.

A panel discussion on “Heritage of Water”, organised by the Arab Regional Centre for World Heritage, examined some of the traditional water systems in the Arab world. This was accompanied by a special reception to unveil the captivating exhibition “Oasis Landscapes”, which it is hoped might tour to other venues in the future.

A further side event gave the opportunity for presentations on the role of culture in the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands and collaboration between Ramsar and World Heritage, followed by case examples concerning the

marshlands of southern Iraq, the Djoudj National Park in Senegal and the riverine city of Ganvié in Benin.

This event also saw the official launch of a publication presenting the results of a short project on “Rapid cultural inventories of wetlands in Arab states” (“Building greater understanding of cultural values and practices as a contribution to conservation success”) in the framework of a project on culture and wetlands undertaken by the Ramsar Convention and in collaboration with the Arab Regional Centre for World Heritage and the Centre’s Tabe’a Programme of collaboration with IUCN. The report is available here (English and French; Arabic hopefully to follow) - <https://www.ramsar.org/activity/materials>.

These events mark a significant milestone in collaboration between the two Conventions, and more

particularly a stronger appreciation of the synergy between the cultural and ecological values of wetland environments. A further key opportunity for attention to these issues at the global level comes later this year with the Ramsar Conference of Parties in Dubai in October this month, when hopefully there will be further progress and further news to report.



## Vol. 2, no. 1. Call for Papers. Water Resilience: Creative Practices—Past, Present and Future

Contributed by Steve Brown

CPCL Issue 2 invites contributions that explore creative practices and cultures of water as well as the physical structures that can promote societal resilience. Of particular relevance to CSVPA's interests is the call for papers that explore worldviews and narratives. How have religious, spiritual and other worldviews shaped narratives on water and water heritage? What do these historical practices teach us, for example on environmental pollution and climate change?

15 Nov 2018 end of submissions

Download CPCL Vol. 2, no. 1 call for papers in PDF

## "Maintaining Standing Stones Benefits Biodiversity in Lowland Heathland"

Emma Shepheard-Walwyn and Shonil Bhagwat have had a paper published in the journal *Oryx*, which looks at the interactions of cultural landscapes, and demonstrates how the use of standing stones within lowland heathland (semi-natural sacred sites) for cultural and spiritual purposes helps to increase habitat diversity, and in turn increase biodiversity.

The link to the paper is: <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/oryx/article/maintaining-standing-stones-benefits-biodiversity-in-lowland-heathland/31CECF32E8403EF016867AA3191F6026>

In addition, there is a new book series by SAGE entitled the "SAGE Handbook of Nature" which came out in March and which features a number of chapters on cultural and spiritual values and conservation/nature. Emma Shepheard-Walwyn, Shonil Bhagwat, and other CSVPA members have chapters in the book.



Trethevy Quoit, Cornwall, UK. Photo Credits: AdobeStock\_89637175

Design & layout by Fiona Wilton, The Gaia Foundation

For enquiries or contributions to CSVPA Culture for Nature please contact Radhika Borde: [radhika.borde@gmail.com](mailto:radhika.borde@gmail.com)

For more articles, discussion and the latest news relating to Cultural and Spiritual Values of Protected Areas, please visit the CSVPA website - [www.csvpa.org](http://www.csvpa.org)