



## **GUARDAPARQUE**

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**Guardaparque** is a bi-weekly publication prepared and issued by the International Ranger Federation (IRF), an organization of about 60 non-governmental and governmental ranger organizations from around the world. **Guardaparque** carries reports on emergency service and law enforcement incidents, reports on protection of parks and the natural and cultural resources within them, reports on programs to educate visitors and communities on the values of parks and protected areas, and reports on the people who are responsible for all these activities.

If you have a submission for **Guardaparque**, please send it to the editor, Bill Halainen, at [Bill\\_Halainen@nps.gov](mailto:Bill_Halainen@nps.gov).

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### **EMERGENCY SERVICES AND LAW ENFORCEMENT**

#### **Thailand – Khao Sok National Park Tour Guides Blamed For Deaths Of Eight In Cave Flood**

Thai police on Monday blamed two tour guides for the deaths of six foreign tourists in a cave flood over the weekend in southern Thailand that also claimed the lives of their Thai guides. Heavy rains inundated Nam Talu Cave in Khao Sok National Park near Surat Thani, about 500 kilometers south of Bangkok, while seven tourists were visiting the popular site with two Thai tour guides Saturday afternoon, according to park deputy chief Thirayudh Mungpaisan. A sudden flash flood that washed through the cave killed six of the tourists, including a Swiss family of four, a Briton and a 10-year-old German boy, and their two Thai guides, Kitisak Pratum, 30, and Sahatchai Boonkongmak, 25.

A similar flash flood occurred at the same cave six years ago and claimed the life of a Belgian tourist, said Police Lieutenant Colonel Phicharn Gallayaseri. “We have to blame the guides for the incident because they shouldn’t have brought the tourists there under those weather conditions, even if the tourists had begged them to do so,” Phicharn told *Deutsche Presse-Agentur* in a telephone interview from Surat Thani. Thirayudh said he suspected the tourists had insisted on visiting the cave, even though they had been warned of the dangers. Thailand is considering closing some national parks during the rainy season as a result of the weekend tragedy. National park authorities are authorised to close any parks if they feel they are unsafe, and all have been ordered to monitor weather conditions. Closing some parks during the rainy season will be discussed by the department, although that could affect tour businesses.

Over the weekend rescue workers retrieved eight bodies from the cave, including those of the two Thai tour guides, Swiss nationals Benno Fisher, 49, his wife Rose-Marie Schmidt-Stalder, and their daughters Andrea, 17, and Sarah 15. Eddy Gaempe, 10, and British national John Cullen, 24, also died in the cave. Eddy's mother Ines, 37, had not entered the cave. She departed Surat Thani with her son's body by Monday, presumably heading back to Germany. "The bodies of the four Swiss are still here, being kept at a charity foundation," said Phicharn. An official from the Swiss embassy in Bangkok flew to Khao Sok Sunday night to inspect the scene and identify the victims. British national Helena Christina Carroll, 21, was found alive around noon on Sunday after spending nearly 20 hours trapped in the flooded cave. Thirauydh said the group had taken a boat to the cave, about three kilometres from the park pier, and were caught inside when a flash flood from a three-hour rainstorm inundated the cavern. He claimed that park officials had issued warnings to tourists about the dangers of visiting the cave during the rainy season.

[Source: *Deutsche Presse-Agentur*]

### **United States – Haleakala National Park Bike Tours Halted Following Several Visitor Fatalities And Serious Accidents**

A "safety stand-down" has been ordered for all commercially-guided downhill bike tours following several fatalities and serious accidents in this steep mountain park. The stand-down, which went into effect on October 10th, will affect the seven companies that hold commercial use authorisations (CUA's) to operate within the park. These authorisations have been terminated.

"With three fatalities and several serious accidents within a year, it is important to stop and critically analyse this commercial activity in the park," said superintendent Marilyn Parris. The safety stand-down is scheduled for a minimum of 60 days or until such time as the park can analyse available data and information and make a determination as to whether or not downhill bicycle tours can safely operate under CUA's in the future. In addition, all CUA's for commercially guided bicycle tours which were due to expire on December 31st have been terminated. Operators will have 30 days to provide input for the park's analysis. Reviews will occur at the park, regional and national levels.

"Providing for the health and safety of our visitors is a core function of the National Park Service," said Parris. "We need to determine that we can meet this safety standard for the 90,000 commercial downhill bicycle riders per year within the boundaries of this park."

On September 26th, a 65-year-old woman was killed on a commercial guided downhill tour when she lost control of her bicycle while travelling downhill from the 10,000 foot summit. She crossed the double yellow line on a curve and was struck by an up-bound van operated by another commercial bike tour operator. The park closed the road for over two hours. This marked the third fatality within a year involving guided commercial downhill bicycle tours.

"Administratively, we are doing all we can," said chief ranger Mark Tanaka Sanders. "There are safety plans, permit requirements, and rider orientations for all the companies, but the last three accidents were under good driving conditions and happened after the riders had completed many of the downhill miles. The park responds to at least four to eight accidents a month involving bicycles and is often asked to respond outside the park by local authorities as a first response to serious bike accidents.

"This is very serious with many implications; we do not take this lightly," said Parris. "The National Park Service has no prudent alternative but to stop downhill bike tours in Haleakala National Park and conduct this review."

[Source: *InsideNPS*, United States]

## **SPECIES MANAGEMENT**

### **Democratic Republic of Congo – Virunga National Park Rare Gorillas At Risk As Rebels Seize Park**

Heavy fighting continues to rage in Virunga National Park, one of the last remaining homes for rare mountain gorillas. On Sunday, rebels loyal to renegade General Laurent Nkunda – who have been clashing with DRC military forces in the area since September 3rd – took control of the park's gorilla sector. The fighting has sparked further fears for the safety of the critically endangered mountain gorillas, which have been left largely unprotected for more than a month, ever since the clashes forced rangers to evacuate the park. Last Thursday, the fighting between rebels and the Congolese army heated up near Bukima, the park's main gorilla monitoring station. Rangers could also hear the exchange of heavy gunfire near park headquarters at Rumangabo, according to Norbert Mushenzi, director of Virunga's gorilla sector for the Congolese Institute for the Conservation of Nature (ICCN). "Rangers and local inhabitants are fleeing from all around the park, and the mountain gorillas are totally unprotected," Mushenzi said. "This whole situation is precarious and frustrating."

About 700 wild mountain gorillas remain in the world, roughly 380 of which live in the Virunga Volcanoes Conservation Area shared by the DRC, Rwanda, and Uganda. Of these, about 120 are found in the DRC. But rangers there have been able to track only one family of gorillas since the fighting started five weeks ago, and they have yet to account for 54 of the region's 72 gorillas.

Until the week before last the situation had appeared to be calming and rangers were hoping to re-enter the sector to track the gorillas. But last Friday rangers who had been monitoring gorillas from a post inside the park had to flee when the rebels reportedly tried to force them to become combatants. Rebel leader Nkunda, who is an ethnic Tutsi, maintains that the government is collaborating with ethnic Hutu rebels hiding in the DRC who are accused of involvement in the 1994 genocide against Tutsis in neighbouring Rwanda. On September 3rd, the rebels surrounded two ranger stations inside Virunga. The men seized rifles and communications equipment and forced park workers and their families to evacuate. Since then the rebels have consolidated their grip on the park, conservationists say.

"The army seems to be weakening vis-à-vis the rebels – and this does not bode well for the gorilla sector at all," said Samantha Newport, a spokesperson for WildlifeDirect, an environmental group that supports the DRC rangers. Conservationists said control of the park is important for the rebels. "The gorilla sector is a key strategic point in this conflict. The rebels want to control it and have access to neighbouring countries to replenish their materials and equipment," said Emmanuel de Merode, head of WildlifeDirect. "The mountain gorillas are stuck right in the middle."

At least ten gorillas have been killed in Virunga this year, and some of the deaths have been blamed on the rebels. The worst attack occurred on July 22nd, when five gorillas, including a silverback, were shot dead, execution-style. That attack was linked to the burgeoning charcoal trade in the park. In September a dead infant female was found in the hands of alleged traffickers who are now facing judicial procedures in the city of Goma, just south of Virunga.

Newport said there is a strong possibility that the rebels may soon cut off the road between Goma and park headquarters at Rumangabo, thereby totally isolating the 34 rangers there. The rangers have removed all valuable tracking equipment from Rumangabo in case the clashes reach the area. One ranger also died last week in a car accident. The man was coming back with his colleagues from an anti-charcoal burning patrol when he fell out of the pick-up truck they were riding in. He was taken to a hospital, but later died from head injuries.

[Source: *National Geographic*, USA]

## **Costa Rica – Las Baulas National Marine Park Government Acts To Protect Critically-Endangered Leatherback Turtles**

On October 10th, the Costa Rican government published a decree signed by President Oscar Arias which authorizes the Environmental Ministry (MINAEC) to begin the administrative proceedings to expropriate properties within Las Baulas National Marine Park in Guanacaste. This park includes the two most important nesting beaches for the leatherback turtle in the eastern Pacific, Playa Grande and Playa Langosta, and its protection is crucial to ensuring the survival of this critically endangered species.

Las Baulas National Marine Park was created by presidential decree in 1991 before being signed into law in 1995, and includes a strip of land 125 meters inland of the high tide line that is required to be protected from development. Despite investors' claims, the Procuraduría General de la República has affirmed that the land in question has been part of the national park since 2005 and that the government should proceed with expropriation.

Over the last eight months, more than 7,500 Costa Ricans, 1,500 foreigners, and 200 scientific experts petitioned President Arias to proceed with the expropriations, which had been stalled for some time. Although MINAEC eventually approved the 32 expropriation decrees, President Arias returned them without signature, and without further explanation, on September 21st. On September 26th, a group of more than 100 people, led by a dancing individual dressed in a leatherback costume, marched in protest from MINAEC headquarters to the Casa Presidencial, urging the president to sign the decrees. Hours later, President Arias signed the 32 decrees ordering the expropriation of properties within Las Baulas National Marine Park. For now, the leatherback can nest peacefully given that Costa Rica will ensure the ecological integrity of this critically important nesting beach. For more information: go to [www.redtortugasmarinascr.org](http://www.redtortugasmarinascr.org).

[Source: Sea Turtle Restoration Project]

## **PARKS AND PROTECTED AREAS**

### **China – Kanas Geological Park China To Create World's Largest National Park**

China plans to create a vast national park in the remote north-western region of Xinjiang that would be even bigger than Yellowstone National Park in the United States. The Kanas Geological Park will be expanded tenfold to around 10,000 square kilometres (3,860 square miles) over the next few years as it incorporates surrounding grasslands and tourist resorts, the Xinhua news agency said, citing the park's administrators. Yellowstone, home to the famed Old Faithful geyser, covers close to 9,000 square kilometres. The Kanas Geological Park – located in a mostly mountainous area bordering Mongolia, Russia and Kazakhstan – is home to Kanas Lake, China's deepest freshwater lake. Currently, the world's largest national park is North-East Greenland National Park, which covers 972,000 square kilometres – just shy of the area of France, Germany and Austria combined.

[Source: *The Associated Press*, USA]

### **Taiwan – Dongsha Atoll National Park Marine National Park Headquarters Opens**

The government of Taiwan has opened a marine national park office in Kaohsiung in a move it said signified its determination to protect the oceans and marine life. Minister of the Interior Lee Yi-yang and Kaohsiung Mayor Chen Chu presided over the opening ceremony for the Marine National Park Headquarters, located in Metropolitan Park in downtown Kaohsiung. Lee said that the headquarters will initially administer the country's first marine national park, the Dongsha Atoll National Park, in the South China Sea. Lee said the ministry's Construction and Planning Agency will evaluate the feasibility of designating several scenic outlying islands, such as Green Island, the

Penghu Islands and three islets off the northern coast, as marine national parks to better manage and conserve marine resources in those areas.

Noting that the establishment of the headquarters signifies the government's determination to raise the level of protection extended to the oceans and marine life to be on a par with global standards, Lee said the new office will focus on conducting marine resource surveys, research, conservation, management as well as manpower cultivation, the development of eco-tourism and raising public awareness of marine conservation issues.

The Dongsha Atoll National Park, covering Dongsha Island along with two coral reefs completely submerged at high tide – the Beiwei Bank (also known as the North Vereker Bank) and the Nanwei Bank (or South Vereker Bank) – is located 444 nautical miles (822 kilometres) southwest of Kaohsiung. The government constructed a national monument on the island on June 30, 1989, and an adjacent structure to protect the monument on May 18, 1993, to assert its sovereignty over the archipelago. The establishment of a marine national park administration was required because the marine resources and natural ecology in the area have been gravely damaged over the past decade because of rampant poaching by fishermen using destructive fishing methods such as poison and explosives.

Government data shows the Dongsha islands cover an area of 350,000 hectares, with atolls accounting for 80,000 hectares. Noting that the islands cover an area three times that of Taipei City, the official said the archipelago boasts the largest and most unspoiled group of atolls in the Western Pacific. With their unique maritime eco-system, the official said the coral reefs surrounding the islands are the best in Taiwan's territorial waters. Dongsha's coastal waters are also known for their biodiversity, with 489 fish species and about 200 strains of coral documented, as well as numerous other marine species. It has therefore become necessary for the government to set up the marine national park administration to better protect and conserve the natural ecology of the area, the official said.

[Source: *Taipei Times*]

### **Philippines – Apo Reef Natural Park Fishing Ban Protects Largest Coral Reef In Philippines**

Reef fish and other marine species can breathe easier with the introduction of a fishing ban around Apo Reef, the largest coral reef in the Philippines and the second largest contiguous reef in the world after the Great Barrier Reef. Under the ban, all extractive activities, such as fishing, and coral collection and harvesting, will be completely forbidden. “This ‘no-take’ zone will allow the reef and its residents ample time to recover from years of fishing,” stressed John Manul of the World Wildlife Fund (WWF).

The 27,469-hectare Apo Reef, off the coast of Mindoro Island, is surrounded by mangrove forest, which serves as a source of food, nursery and spawning ground of several coastal fish and marine species, including sharks, manta rays, sperm whales and several sea turtles. In 1996, the reef was declared a national park, but enforcement proved lax and illegal fishing methods persisted. The park was once one of the world's premier diving destinations, but years of fishing — including by unsustainable fishing practices such as using dynamite and cyanide — took its toll.

“You would hear 25 to 30 dynamite blasts daily,” said Robert Duquil, a former protected area assistant superintendent. “The international diving community lost interest in the area and destructive activities prevailed.” Adding to the reef's troubles, the El Niño phenomenon in 1998 raised ocean temperatures, prompting a massive bleaching episode and the death of countless corals, and an explosion of coral-eating crown-of-thorns starfish. “Unfortunately, Apo is plagued by millions of these starfish, probably due to a lack of natural predators like the giant triton, napoleon wrasse and harlequin shrimp,” said Gregg Yan of WWF-Philippines. “We hope that the ban will ensure protection of these predators and the many other reef species.” WWF has been working towards sustainable coastal practices for the Apo Reef Natural Park since 2003. The marine park

will be opened for tourists to help generate funds for its protection, as well as provide an alternative livelihood for hundreds of fishermen in the area.

[Source: *Science Daily*, USA]

## GLOBAL CLIMATE CHANGE

### **United States – National Park System**

#### **National Park Service Begins Effort To Respond To Climate Change**

Global climate change is here and the National Park Service is stepping up efforts to deal with its impacts. A full-time climate change coordinator has been hired and the NPS Natural Resource Program Centre is beginning to explore ways to expand the agency's capacity to respond to these impacts.

Climate change presents significant risks and challenges for protecting natural and cultural resources in the National Parks System. Scientists have been conducting research on climate change impacts to parks for nearly two decades. Some of the effects that parks are already experiencing include loss of glaciers in mountainous regions, reduced snow packs and earlier spring runoff, longer fire seasons and greater frequency of large fires, thawing permafrost and declining sea ice in northern regions. While future changes are difficult to predict, a major concern is rising sea levels that will impact cultural resources and park infrastructure as well as coastal and estuarine ecosystems.

To effectively cope with the complexities of this issue, the NPS has recently established a permanent full-time climate change coordinator position, which is based within the Natural Resource Program Centre in Ft. Collins, Colorado. The centre has begun developing an internal web site for information sharing and is currently exploring ways to expand the Service's capacity to respond to climate change impacts in some key areas:

**Planning for change** – Probably the most important step in responding to climate change is to recognize that it is happening and to begin now to incorporate climate change thinking into regional and park planning efforts. Scenario analysis is one approach that is currently being explored to help managers create decision-making frameworks in the face of uncertainty. Scenario planning is a tool for evaluating alternative futures and the actions and events that may lead to them (Peterson et al. 2003).

**Leadership by example** – The NPS can also get its own house in order to reduce our carbon footprint and help eliminate the cause of climate change. The Climate Friendly Parks (CFP) program, which is a joint initiative between the NPS and EPA (the Environmental Protection Agency), has held over 10 workshops and helped parks develop action plans for mitigating and adapting to climate change impacts. CFP assists parks in reducing greenhouse gas emissions through education and outreach, planning and implementing energy efficient buildings, transportation and fuel alternatives, and other sustainable building and operational practices.

**Science communication** – Preparing for change requires accessing, understanding, and communicating the best information available. Park staff and partners have begun working together to educate themselves and the public about changes that are occurring. The NPS has developed a brochure and a travelling display called "Arrange for Change" and several parks offer interpretive products and programs as well as staff training on climate change.

[Source: *InsideNPS*, United States]

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Prepared and published by the International Ranger Federation as a service to rangers around the world. Submissions should be sent to Bill Halainen at [Bill\\_Halainen@nps.gov](mailto:Bill_Halainen@nps.gov).