

# The World Heritage Convention

The World Heritage Convention, adopted in 1972, is one of the most important global conservation instruments and has almost universal adoption amongst the nations of the world.

The Convention embodies a visionary idea – that some places are so important that their protection is not only the responsibility of a single nation, but is also the duty of the international community as a whole; and not only for this generation, but for all those to come.

The primary mission of the Convention is to identify and conserve the world's natural and cultural heritage sites considered to be of "Outstanding Universal Value". As of January 2011, 911 sites were inscribed on the World Heritage List, including 207 natural sites. These sites include many famous locations, such as East Africa's Serengeti, the Galápagos Islands and the Great Barrier Reef in Australia. The Convention is governed by the World Heritage Committee supported by the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, the secretariat of the Convention, and three technical advisory bodies to the World Heritage Committee. The advisory body on natural heritage is IUCN, the International Union for Conservation of Nature.

## The World Heritage criteria

To be included on the World Heritage List, sites must meet at least one of the ten World Heritage criteria as well as requirements concerning their integrity, protection and management. Four criteria recognise sites in relation to their natural values, including aesthetics, earth science, ecosystems and species. This analysis focuses on the two criteria that recognize exceptional biodiversity values:

- (ix) to be outstanding examples representing significant on-going ecological and biological processes in the evolution and development of terrestrial, fresh water, coastal and marine ecosystems and communities of plants and animals;
- (x) to contain the most important and significant natural habitats for in-situ conservation of biological diversity, including those containing threatened species of Outstanding Universal Value from the point of view of science or conservation.

## World Heritage biodiversity in Africa

Africa is the world's second-largest continent, covering about a fifth of the planet's land area, and home to a wide variety of environments from coral reefs to rainforests. Nearly a quarter of the world's 34 biodiversity hotspots can be found in the Africa region of UNESCO.

Not surprisingly, this region is also home to 32 (21%) of the 150 sites included on the World Heritage List for their biodiversity values. However, since 2000 only four new biodiversity sites from this region were inscribed on the World Heritage List, compared to 33 elsewhere on the planet.

IUCN and UNEP-WCMC, in conjunction with the African World Heritage Fund and with support from the MAVA Foundation, therefore considered it timely to summarise information on a number of exceptional natural places in Africa that could be priorities to consider for nomination to the World Heritage List under biodiversity criteria. We hope that this exercise will assist all those considering or developing natural World Heritage nominations in Africa.

## Integrity, management and protection

Our analysis focuses on the biodiversity values of sites but it is important to understand that, to be included on the World Heritage List, sites must not only meet one or more of the World Heritage criteria but also requirements concerning their protection, management and integrity. Our analysis does not indicate whether or not any of the sites included here meet these essential requirements.

Sites must for example have adequate long-term protection as well as an appropriate and effective management plan or other documented management system. The integrity of a site is a measure of its wholeness and intactness. A biodiversity site is for example expected to include the biodiversity elements essential to express its "Outstanding Universal Value", and to be of sufficient size to be able to sustain its key habitats and species.

## The nomination process

Only States Parties to the World Heritage Convention can submit nominations for properties on their territory to be considered for inclusion on the World Heritage List. However, other stakeholders such as NGOs often play a key role in initiating and supporting the nomination process, and their support can be critical for the success of nominations.

Before a property can be nominated, it must be included on the State Party's Tentative List, an inventory of important properties that the country might consider for nomination in the near future. Once a State Party wishes to nominate a property from its Tentative List, it must prepare a nomination file following the standard format available on the webpage of the World Heritage Centre. The process of preparing a nomination file can take several years and should involve all relevant stakeholders, including local communities within and surrounding the site. Once completed, the nomination file is submitted to the World Heritage Centre, from where it is sent to the appropriate advisory bodies for their evaluation.

## Relevant online resources

- World Heritage List** • <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list>
- World Heritage criteria** • <http://whc.unesco.org/en/criteria/>
- World Heritage nomination process** • <http://whc.unesco.org/en/nominations>
- World Heritage Tentative Lists** • <http://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/>
- World Heritage Fund** • <http://whc.unesco.org/en/funding/>
- African World Heritage Fund** • <http://www.awhf.net/>
- IUCN World Heritage** • <http://www.iucn.org/worldheritage>

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## Support for the preparation of nominations

There is increasing support available, including a range of publications, to ensure early advice and planning for possible World Heritage nominations. States Parties can request financial support for the preparation of Tentative Lists and nominations from the World Heritage Fund ("International Assistance") as well as the African World Heritage Fund. Technical support for the preparation of nominations, including the global comparative analysis required, is available from World Heritage experts in the IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA) for example. IUCN and the African World Heritage Fund, as well as the UNESCO World Heritage Centre in Paris, are all able to provide sources of advice for those considering nominations.



# AFRICAN NATURAL HERITAGE



## Possible Priorities for the World Heritage List

# AFRICAN NATURAL HERITAGE

## Possible Priorities for the World Heritage List

- Possible Priorities
- Existing natural and mixed World Heritage Sites in Africa



### A Bijagós Archipelago, Guinea-Bissau

The Bijagós Archipelago lies on one of the most mangrove-rich coastlines in the world and is composed of 88 islands and large areas of mangrove and mudflat. This is one of the most important areas in West Africa for migratory birds, with up to a million birds staying in the archipelago while it is winter in the northern hemisphere. The archipelago also supports important breeding colonies of gulls, terns and herons, five turtle species, marine mammals, such as the West African manatee, and hippo.

### B Korup and Cross River National Parks, Cameroon and Nigeria

These are two exceptionally important protected areas in the Guinean forests biodiversity hotspot. The rainforests here are characterised by high plant and animal diversity, including over 400 bird species and over 150 mammal species, and they are home to many threatened and endemic species. The critically endangered Cross River gorilla and endangered chimpanzee find refuge here, whilst the Okwango part of Cross River National Park has the highest diversity of primates recorded at a single site in Africa, with 18 recorded species.

### C Trinational de la Sangha, Cameroon, Central African Republic and Congo

Trinational de la Sangha is one of the great transboundary conservation complexes in Central Africa and encompasses Dzanga-Ndoki, Lobéké and Nouabalé-Ndoki National Parks. It is recognized as an exceptionally important area for great ape conservation because it is home to one of the largest remaining populations of the critically endangered western lowland gorilla and the endangered chimpanzee. Its pristine forests are also home to a number of other large mammals including many forest elephants. Dzanga Bai, a sandy salt lick, attracts up to 100 of the timid forest elephants a day.

### D São Tomé, Príncipe and Annobón Forests, São Tomé and Príncipe and Equatorial Guinea

The forests on these volcanic islands in the Gulf of Guinea support many threatened and endemic species, including several endemic genera and families. A number of plant and bird species show typical island adaptations such as gigantism and dwarfism. Since the flora and fauna of each island is highly distinctive with many single-island endemics, a serial site would be needed to capture the full range of values of these islands.

### E Conkouati-Douli, Loango and Mayumba National Parks, Congo and Gabon

The Congolian coastal forests present in these protected areas form part of the vast Central African rainforests. Together, these national parks support a wide range of habitats, including coastal waters, beaches, mangroves, lagoons, swamp forests and rainforests. This dynamic environment has led to high levels of species diversity and endemism. Conkouati-Douli and Loango contain significant populations of critically endangered western lowland gorilla, endangered chimpanzee, and forest elephant, while Mayumba protects one of the most important nesting sites for leatherback turtles, the world's largest turtle.

### F Okavango Delta, Botswana

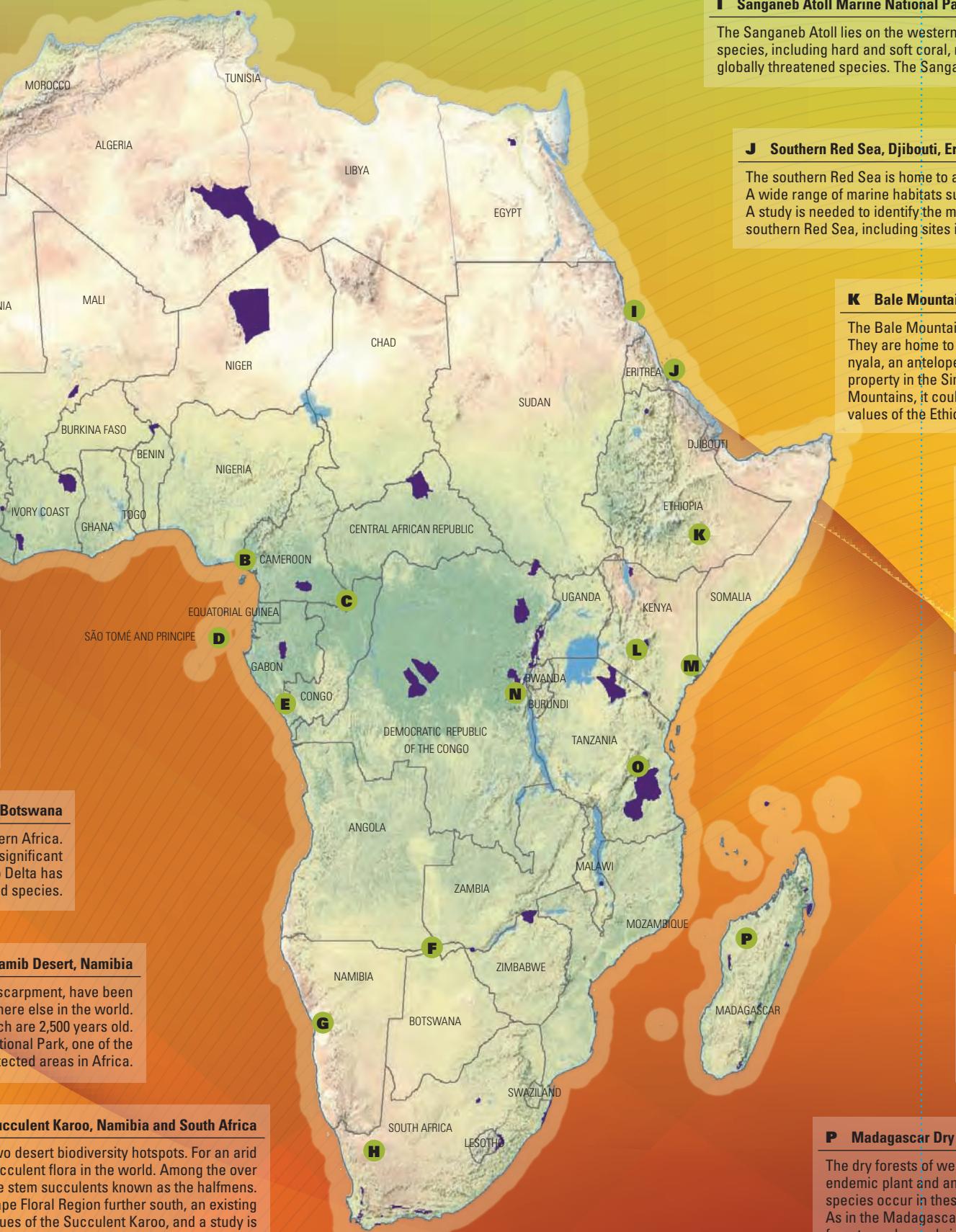
The Okavango Delta is one of the largest inland deltas in the world and the most important wetland system in southern Africa. Surrounded by the Kalahari Desert, it has a greater range of habitats than any other wetland in the region and supports significant populations of large mammals, over 450 bird species, and over 1,000 plant species. The annual flood of the Okavango Delta has been called one of nature's great events and provides a lifeline for many globally threatened species.

### G Namib Desert, Namibia

The dramatic landscapes of the Namib Desert, isolated between the Atlantic Ocean and the Namib Escarpment, have been arid for millions of years. This has led to the evolution of many specialised desert species that occur nowhere else in the world. *Welwitschia mirabilis*, one of the most remarkable plants on Earth, grows here, the largest individuals of which are 2,500 years old. Large parts of this unique desert system are protected in conservation areas such as the Namib-Naukluft National Park, one of the largest protected areas in Africa.

### H Succulent Karoo, Namibia and South Africa

The Succulent Karoo, which consists primarily of winter rainfall desert, is one of only two desert biodiversity hotspots. For an arid region, it has extraordinarily high plant diversity and endemism, including the richest succulent flora in the world. Among the over 6,000 plant species are some 1,700 species of leaf succulents as well as remarkable stem succulents known as the halms. Some 40 percent of the plant species occur nowhere else on the planet. As in the Cape Floral Region further south, an existing World Heritage property, a serial site would be necessary to capture the full range of values of the Succulent Karoo, and a study is needed to identify the most important sites that would best reflect the region's unique values.



### I Sangean Atoll Marine National Park, Sudan

The Sangean Atoll lies on the western shore of the central Red Sea and supports a high diversity of marine habitats and species, including hard and soft coral, reef fish and pelagic fish such as sharks. There are healthy populations of several globally threatened species. The Sangean Atoll was gazetted in 1990 as the first marine national park in the Sudan.

### J Southern Red Sea, Djibouti, Eritrea and Sudan

The southern Red Sea is home to a massive concentration of threatened and exceptional coral reef biodiversity. A wide range of marine habitats supports hard and soft coral, reef fish, pelagic fish, turtles and marine mammals. A study is needed to identify the most important sites in the region that would best reflect the unique values of the southern Red Sea, including sites in the Arab States of Saudi Arabia and Yemen.

### K Bale Mountains National Park, Ethiopia

The Bale Mountains support a wide range of habitats including the largest expanse of Afroalpine vegetation in Africa. They are home to a large number of threatened and endemic species in all taxonomic groups. These include the mountain nyala, an antelope which occurs only in Ethiopia, and the Ethiopian wolf, also present in the existing World Heritage property in the Simien Mountains. Since the values of the Bale Mountains are complementary to those of the Simien Mountains, it could be considered to combine these two sites into one serial site that would better reflect the full range of values of the Ethiopian highlands.

### L Saline Rift Valley Lakes, Ethiopia, Kenya and Tanzania

These shallow soda lakes, also known as "flamingo lakes", are part of a chain of lakes in the Great Rift Valley of Africa and represent a globally rare habitat type. Their vast congregations of lesser flamingos are one of the world's great wildlife spectacles. Lake Natron is the only regular breeding site of the 2.5 million lesser flamingos in East Africa but up to 1.5 million of these magnificent birds can be seen at feeding sites such as Lake Nakuru. The lakes are also important wintering and stopover sites for well over 100 migratory bird species on the African-Eurasian flyway. A transnational serial site may be the most appropriate option to encompass the full range of values of these sites.

### M East African Coastal Forests, Kenya, Somalia and Tanzania

Like the forests of the Eastern Arc Mountains, these moist lowland forests have long been isolated from other tropical moist forest regions by expanses of drier savannas and grasslands. Thus, much of the biodiversity is globally distinct and endemic to the region, and there are massive concentrations of threatened plant and animal species. A study is needed to identify the most important sites that would best reflect the unique values of the East African coastal forests.

### O Eastern Arc Mountains, Kenya and Tanzania

Like the East African coastal forests, these moist mountain forests have long been isolated from other tropical moist forest regions by expanses of drier savannas and grasslands. The biodiversity of this ancient complex of mountain ranges is noted for very high levels of endemism, with many species of plants and animals restricted to single mountain ranges. Only a serial site is likely to be appropriate to capture the full range of values of this region, which includes massive concentrations of threatened species.

### P Madagascar Dry Forests, Madagascar

The dry forests of western Madagascar are among the world's most exceptional forests and support hundreds of threatened and endemic plant and animal species, including several endemic genera and families. Several of Madagascar's characteristic lemur species occur in these forests, together with seven species of baobab trees, compared to only one species in all of continental Africa. As in the Madagascar rainforests further east, only a serial site is likely to be appropriate to capture the full range of values of the dry forests, and a study is needed to identify the most important sites that would best reflect the region's unique values.



#### Photo credits

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Disclaimer: Inclusion of a site in this list of possible priorities is without prejudice to the success of any nomination that could be put forward and does not guarantee its future inclusion on the World Heritage List. The list of sites presented here is by no means exhaustive. Due to a limited information base, it neither includes extension projects nor precludes the possibility of further nominations in the future. The boundaries of the existing natural and mixed World Heritage properties are those recorded in the UNEP-WCMC / IUCN World Database on Protected Areas (WDPAs) www.protectedplanet.net. The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on maps do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations Environment Programme or contributory organisations. Comparably little is currently known about marine World Heritage priorities in Africa. A forthcoming theme study on marine World Heritage will help to identify further priorities in the marine environment, while a planned update of the 2004 global review of the natural World Heritage network will help to identify further priorities in the terrestrial environment as well.