



Sacred Sites Research Newsletter

JULY 2015



FEATURE

Parks NEED peoples: a Survival campaign

by Jo Woodman



Baiga woman. © Harshit Charles / Survival International

Survival International - the global movement for tribal peoples' rights - has launched a new campaign with a simple but urgent message: [Parks Need Peoples](#).

At Survival we have found a growing body of evidence which shows that 'conservation' - enforced by the creation of protected areas and policed by anti-poaching squads - frequently leads to the eviction and abuse of vast numbers of people, especially tribal peoples, while failing to check the deepening environmental crisis. A new approach is urgently needed. Conservation should centre on protecting the land rights of the peoples to whom these vitally important areas are home.

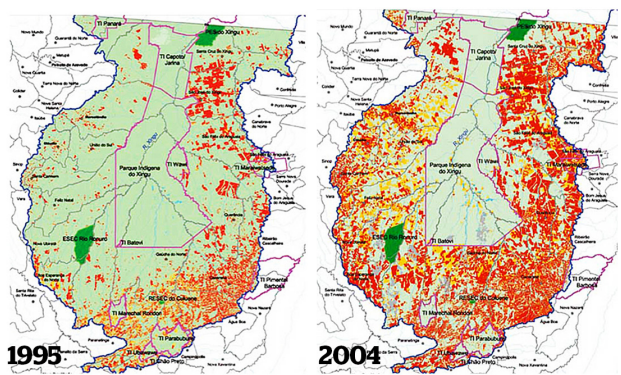
Research is increasingly finding that in many cases tribal peoples are better at looking after their environments than anyone else. This is based on a simple reason: their survival depends on it. When the Maasai were removed from Ngorongoro Crater in Tanzania in 1974, poaching increased; the eviction of indigenous people from Yellowstone Park in the United States in the late 19th Century led to overgrazing by elk and bison; Aborigines in Australia have used controlled burning to protect forests from devastating wild fires... the list goes on.

South Asia's tribal peoples have coexisted with the tiger for thousands of years, but now they are facing eviction in the name of protecting the animal. Evidence from Chitwan National Park in Nepal, however, suggests that tiger densities can actually be higher in areas where people live than in those from where they have been evicted. People provide a variety of different habitats which may be beneficial to the species, as well as eyes and ears to detect and deter poachers. Instead of recognizing tribal peoples' rights to their land, the Indian government has created more parks, carried out more evictions, and endeavours to bring in more tourists.

From Amazonia, there is growing evidence that when indigenous territories are legally recognized and managed by indigenous peoples, the rainforest is better protected. Tribal peoples have managed, protected, nurtured and shaped their land for generations, and we believe that this gives them more than anyone the best knowledge and motivation to protect their land.

Tribal peoples: guardians of the rainforest

Xingu indigenous territory, Brazil



The Xingu indigenous park (outlined in pink) is home to several tribes. It provides a vital barrier to deforestation (in red) in the Brazilian Amazon. © ISA (Instituto Socioambiental)

harming the spirit world would lead to the suffering of the individual, their family, or possibly whole communities. Therefore, the spiritual laws hold great significance.

There are a number of instances of spiritual stewardship. For example, the spiritual leaders, Mamos, of the Kogi tribe of Colombia, have protected the tribe's sacred sites for centuries. They, along with their neighbours of the Arhuaco and the Arsario tribes, conserve the sites, hold rituals and uphold the 'Law of the Mother' that rules over their world.

The problems with the current conservation model with regards to tribal people can be illustrated by three examples.

[Much of the ancestral land of Baka 'Pygmies' in southeast Cameroon has been converted into national parks and safari hunting zones.](#) The Baka have been forced from the forests and are accused of 'poaching' because they hunt their food. Episodes of violence have been repeatedly reported by the Baka, who report that they face arrest and beatings, torture and death at the hands of anti-poaching squads. Yet, conservation areas based on anti-poaching policing continue to be supported by some of the main conservation NGOs around the world. The Baka now live in roadside villages, where many say their health has deteriorated. They are criminalized as poachers, while the traffic of bushmeat by commercial operators continues apace.

[In Botswana, the Bushman communities, who have lived in the Kalahari Desert for generations, have](#)



The Bushmen of Botswana's Central Kalahari Game Reserve are Africa's last hunting Bushmen. In 2006 they won a landmark case against the government, giving them the right to return to their ancestral land after they were forcibly evicted. The story should stop there, but Botswana has continued to ruthlessly and relentlessly persecute its first people in an attempt to drive them from their land. Banned from hunting, and forced to apply for permits to enter the reserve, they are now being pushed to the brink of extinction. © Survival International

[been evicted and corralled into camps they call 'places of death'.](#) Despite a high court ruling recognizing their right to live and hunt in the Central Kalahari Game Reserve, it has been reported that they still face routine beatings and arrests for hunting by wildlife officers. Meanwhile the 'conservation area' that they have been removed from is being mined for diamonds and other non-renewables, and has a luxury tourist lodge with a swimming pool. There is no evidence that the Bushmen's subsistence hunting and gathering was deleterious for wildlife but there is ample evidence that their eviction has been catastrophic for their health and endangers their survival as a people.

[In India's network of tiger reserves, millions of tribal people have been evicted, or face](#)

[harassment.](#) They are denied their right to manage and protect their forests. Promises of compensation amount to very little: families are dispersed, housed under plastic sheets, stripped of their self-sufficiency and pride, becoming dependent on hand-outs or menial labor.

These three examples are just the tip of an iceberg: globally tribal peoples are bearing the costs of a conservation model that is largely not working. Expensive new initiatives like [United for Wildlife](#) - which include U.S. conservation giants such as the Nature Conservancy and Conservation International - seem to make no distinction between 'hunters' and 'poachers', and this can have devastating consequences on tribal peoples. Despite endless policy documents, programs which result in the marginalisation and eviction of tribal peoples remain widely supported in conservation circles. This is creating a mass of people who see conservationists as an enemy. It is, in short, shooting itself in the foot.

What is needed is radical transformation. Time is running out - both for wildlife and for tribal people. Conservationists must protect the rights of tribal people, including their rights to their lands, ask them what help they need, listen to them, and then support them. There is a mass of evidence to show that this change is vital - but can the leopard change its spots? Or, is the conservation industry too wedded to the status quo, and to meeting the interests of corporate and government partners, to address the true crisis in our natural world?

Jo Woodman, PhD, is senior campaigner at Survival International, the global movement for tribal peoples' rights.

NEWS

The first ever papal encyclical on the environment, *Laudato si'*, released in June

The encyclical was released by Pope Francis after months of anticipation by public opinions and environmental groups worldwide. The title is a direct reference to St. Francis of Assisi's *Canticle of Creatures*, one of the most renowned declarations of love for the Creation in the history of Christianity. Although being often referred to as 'an encyclical on climate change', *Laudato si'* does in reality embrace a much broader spectrum of human-environmental relations, including the links between nature mismanagement and poverty, the threats to indigenous cultures and cultural diversities, the criticism of the commodification of the world, the role of individual responsibility in post-industrial societies, and the philosophical and theological grounds for environmental stewardship in a Catholic perspective. As such, the encyclical represents a complete summary of the views of Roman Catholicism on the relation between people and environment. While most commentators agree about the revolutionary potential of *Laudato si'*, questions are open as to what its actual impacts on life-styles and policy-making will be.

Faith and conservation at upcoming International and European Congress of Conservation Biology on August 4th

Two joined sessions on the links between faiths and conservation are scheduled at the [upcoming ICCB-ECCB in Montpellier](#), on Tuesday 4 August. The symposium *Exploring outcomes of interacting religions, spiritualities and conservation communities* will begin at 13:30 and will be followed by the roundtable discussion *Synergies of faith and conservation: exploring pathways of measurable action*, with start at 18:30. Both sessions are sponsored by the Religion and Conservation Biology Working Group of the Society for Conservation Biology. Another roundtable with a similar focus, 'Addressing conservation biology issues from ethical perspectives - secular and religious', is also scheduled at 12:00 on the same day.

PUBLICATIONS

Baird, T.D., 2015. Conservation implications of the diffusion of Christian religious ideals in rural Africa. *Population and Environment* 36(4): 373-399

Biviano, E.L., Cloutier, D., Padilla, E., Peppard, C.Z., Schaefer, J., 2015. Catholic Moral Traditions and Energy Ethics of the Twenty-First Century. *Journal of Moral Theology* 5(2): 1-36

Deane-Drummond, C., Bergmann, S., Szerszynski, B. (eds.), 2015. *Technofutures, Nature and the Sacred: Transdisciplinary Perspectives*. Ashgate, Farnham, UK

Kiernan, K., 2015. Landforms as sacred places: implications for geodiversity and geoheritage. *Geoheritage* 7(2): 177-193

McLeod, E., Palmer, M., 2015. Why Conservation Needs Religion. *Coastal Management* 43(3): 238-252

Menendez-Baceta, G., Aceituno-Mata, L., Reyes-Garcia, V., et al., 2015. The importance of cultural factors in the distribution of medicinal plant knowledge: a case study in four Basque regions. *Journal of Ethnopharmacology* 161: 116-127

Mevorach Seidenberg, D., 2015. *Kabbalah and Ecology: God's Image in the More-Than-Human World*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge

Quiroz, D., van Andel, T., 2015. Evidence of a link between taboos and sacrifices and resource scarcity of ritual plants. *Journal of Ethnobiology and Ethnomedicine* 11:5

Rashkow, E., 2015. Resistance to hunting in pre-inddependence india: religious environmentalism, ecological nationalism or cultural conservation?. *Modern Asian Studies* 49(2): 270-301

Stibbe, A., 2015. *Ecologistics: Language, Ecology and the Stories We Live By*. Routledge, London

Tomalin, E. (ed.), 2015. *The Routledge Handbook of Religions and Global Development*. Routledge, London

Woodhouse, E., Mills, M.A., McGowan, P.J.K., et al., 2015. Religious relationships with the environment in a tibetan rural community: interactions and contrasts with popular notions of indigenous environmentalism. *Human Ecology* 43(2): 295-307

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FEATURE

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UPCOMING EVENTS

August 2-6, Montpellier, France
27th International Congress for Conservation Biology and 4th European Congress for Conservation Biology

September 21-25, Dartington, Devon, UK
A Cosmology of Connection: Worldview, Ecology, Justice, and Creativity

ON THE BOOKSHELF

List of relevant publications issued in the last three months

OPPORTUNITIES

October 1. Submission deadline
The Spirit of Sustainable Agriculture

ABOUT SSIREN

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The Sacred Site Research Newsletter (SSIREN) was conceived at the symposium *Conserving nature at sacred sites*, held at the University of Zurich on the 25th October 2011, as a means to inform and aggregate the community of researchers working on sacred natural sites. It is aimed not merely at scholars but also practitioners and policy-makers coping with specific issues, as well as anyone with a general interest in the interaction between people and nature.

SSIREN is an acronym from the title Sacred Sites Research Newsletter, but as a creature a Siren is also a convincing symbol of the connection between beliefs, culture and nature, which is characteristic of sacred natural sites.

The Newsletter is issued quarterly and is literally 'made' by its members: everyone is warmly encouraged to submit news, events, opportunities, and recent relevant publications, or to introduce their work in a feature article. Relevant contributions from all academic disciplines, as well as NGO practitioners and other institutions, are warmly welcome.

All past issues of SSIREN are currently hosted by the [Sacred Sites Research Initiative's website](#) and are available for download.

CONTACTS

For inquiries about the newsletter, to submit an article, or to contribute in any other way, please contact the editors:

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FRIENDS



SANASI – World Database on Sacred Natural Sites



ARC – The Alliance of Religions and Conservation



ISSRNC – The International Society for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture



SNSI – The Sacred Natural Sites Initiative



CSVPA – IUCN-WCPA Specialist Group on Cultural and Spiritual Values of Protected Areas

EVENTS

2-6 August, Montpellier, France
27th International Congress for Conservation Biology and 4th European Congress for Conservation Biology

The joint International and European Congress of the Society for Conservation Biology *Mission Biodiversity: Choosing new paths for conservation*. Three sessions on faith and conservation are scheduled on August 4. Conference website and program [here](#).

21-25 September, Dartington, Devon, UK
A Cosmology of Connection: Worldview, Ecology, Justice, and Creativity

Week-long course focusing on the underlying connections between the ecological crisis, social justice, our cultural worldview, and the powers of story, creativity, and cosmology. More details [here](#).

OPPORTUNITIES

1 October
The Spirit of Sustainable Agriculture
Harvard Divinity School, Cambridge, MA. March 31 - April 1
Submission deadline

This conference aims to bring together farmers, religious and spiritual leaders, and academics, to join in a robust and stimulating discussion about the spirit of sustainable agriculture, delineating its past, celebrating and investigating its present, and theorizing its future. More info [here](#).

[We warmly thank the Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale and Alliance of Religions and Conservation for their precious updates and contributions to this newsletter](#)



You receive this newsletter because you have previously participated in initiatives on sacred natural sites. Tired of it? Please [contact the Editors](#). Think it's fantastic and would like to involve a colleague or a friend? [Contact the Editors](#) all the same.