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Protected Areas

Are They Safeguarding Biodiversity?

Edited by Lucas N. Joppa, Jonathan E. M. Baillie and John G. Robinson





Protected Areas

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Introduction: Do Protected Areas Safeguard Biodiversity?

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In 1959, the UN Economic and Social Council called for a list of the world's national parks and equivalent reserves to recognise their economic, social and scientific importance and for their role in environmental well-being. The protected area network at the time covered roughly 2,000,000 km² and is now rapidly approaching 20,000,000 km² (WDPA, 2014). This tenfold increase in protected area coverage over 50 years has been one of the greatest successes in conservation. But protected areas are not an end in themselves, and to a large extent, biodiversity loss has continued unabated. Populations of many species have continued to decline, some species have gone extinct, and the integrity of ecosystems has increasingly been threatened. The world population has more than doubled, as has the human consumption of water, food and energy. Ever-increasing land conversion, carbon emissions, spread of invasive alien species, nitrogen pollution and over-exploitation have driven biodiversity loss. Ecosystems such as forests, coral reefs, mangroves and seagrass beds are on the decline (Butchart et al., 2010; Emmott, 2013), taking with them the species they contain (WWF, 2012). And these trends are not changing; the United Nations projected there will be 9.6 billion people on the planet by 2050 (United Nations, 2013) and the consumption of food, water and energy will more than double, resulting in the conversion of many of the last remaining wild spaces. As human population increases and land is converted or degraded, protected areas will therefore play an increasingly important role in conserving biodiversity. The imperatives of providing resources to meet the needs of an expanding human population while protecting other life forms will surely collide, and there will be growing pressures to develop or exploit