

# Sacred SItes REsearch Newsletter

OCTOBER 2013

## **FEATURE**

### Towards a 'Top 10 Guidelines' for researchers and conservation practitioners working on Sacred Natural Sites.

by Bas Verschuuren and Robert Wild

With this article we would like to invite you to think creatively and critically about the role of science and by extension those of conservation and policy-making in relation to sacred natural sites. In particular, we invite you to consider the significance that sacred natural sites hold in the eyes of their custodians and communities (for an example of such a perspective, see <u>A Statement of Custodians of</u> Sacred Natural Sites and Territories, 2008).

In its work, the Sacred Natural Sites Initiative (SNSI) supports custodians and their communities to protect, conserve and revitalize sacred natural sites. Taking an endogenous approach on the ground, SNSI supports custodians in identifying and building on their own visions, strengths and resources and then helps them match this with appropriate external resources and relations. SNSI also assists in making custodian voices heard in the international conservation and policy-making arena. It is of invaluable importance that supporters of sacred natural sites and their custodians work together, share experience and have access to the latest knowledge and materials.



A meeting to discuss research and protocols for safeguarding the sacred groves of the Tanchara community in northwest Ghana. The process, supported by the Centre for Indigenous Knowledge and Organisational Development in Ghana required the community to make agreements and work with several external NGOs - such as the Sacred Natural Sites Initiative - and resulted in a moratorium on gold mining and a conservation plan for the local sacred groves. Source: Daniel Banuoku Faalubelange.

Working directly with custodians of sacred natural sites - such as indigenous peoples and faith groups - immediately exposes one to different ways of knowing and seeing the world. These diverse worldviews have much to offer to governance, science and management in general, but are especially critical to the survival and conservation of most sacred natural sites. Although international institutions are increasingly acknowledging that custodians and their communities can be effective stewards of biological and cultural diversity, there is still a long way to go for the recognition of sacred natural sites themselves. The same is true for respecting the intrinsic, human, cultural and religious rights of their custodians.

How then can we improve recognition and respect for the importance of sacred natural sites, including the meaningful relationships that their custodians and communities have developed with those sites, often over many generations?

Working together with SSIREN and <u>SANASI</u> (the world database on sacred natural sites) has given us the opportunity to exchange ideas and improve our own responses to this question, and this is increasingly reflected in the way we organize our work and attitudes. We recognise that much of this comes down to maintaining an ongoing process of consultation with custodians and experts, as well as applying the right ethics, guidelines and Free Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) protocols, where that is required. Taking ethics into account in the field of science can be especially challenging because of different opinions on what constitutes good science and how it should be practiced.

In our collaboration with SANASI we stumbled across this quote taken from an article on the Mijikenda

## **ISSUE 2(4) AT A GLANCE:**

#### **FEATURE**

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#### **NEWS**

*New records of endangered legume species* found in Kenyan sacred sites

Past issues of SSIREN made available online

Release of Elemental film

New bibliography on Spiritual Ecology

Launch of the International Confucian **Ecological Alliance** 

#### UPCOMING EVENTS

October 16-December 7, world wide Screenings of Elemental film

October 22-November 27, South Africa Fracking - How Should People of Faith **Respond?** One-day workshops

October 26-28, Eugene, OR, USA 17<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the International Association for Environmental Philosophy

October 31-November 1, Eindhoven, Netherlands The Roles of Climate Models: Epistemic, Ethical and Socio-political Perspectives Conference

*November 22, Baltimore, USA*59<sup>th</sup> Annual Mapping the Field of Religion and Ecology Colloquium at the Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion

#### **ON THE BOOKSHELF**

List of relevant publications issued in the last three months

Kayas (sacred forests on the coast of Kenya) by Kaingu Kalume Tinga, a scientist manager of a community-based organization (Kalume Tinga, 2004):

Constructive research has been inhibited because the traditional custodians are extremely conservative and also because of the researchers' lack of openness about the aims and objectives, rights, obligations and benefits of the research projects to the community. Informants thus withhold invaluable information as security against the scholars; they also tend to be apprehensive of researchers from outside their community. Lastly, following the research, host communities do not receive feedback from the results – the findings are either too scientific for consumption by the host communities or they have no access to the information.

This quote gives a clear message - Custodians may welcome science, especially when they see they have a part in it, may control the process and see that the results can help further their cause. However, there are also those who have negative experiences, have become sceptical or believe that other, external ways of knowing such as science have less of a role to play in relation to their sacred natural sites. An example of the latter can be found in the Statement of Common African Customary Laws for the Protection of Sacred Sites (2012).

Both-Ways Management from Australia (Yunupingu and Muller 2009), and Two-Eyed Seeing in Canada (Bartlett et al. 2012) represent powerful experiences and expressions of combining western and indigenous science, beliefs and practices into a mutually respectful and powerful approach to ways of knowing. These examples hint towards a model where researchers are asked for an open attitude in developing the research; questions, design, data collection, analysis and sharing of results are carried out in a participatory and interdisciplinary manner.

While it is true that most universities and research institutes nowadays have an ethical code of conduct for research, these have not been specifically developed to include all sensitivities related to sacred natural sites. The Code of Ethics of the International Society of Ethnobiolgy (ISE, 2006) is probably the most comprehensive guidance invoking an overall principle of 'mindfulness' in research and laying out processes for Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC), and would be worthy of greater promotion.

A community of practice for learning from each other's experiences and improving the tools, methods and approaches available could be extremely valuable to the conservation of sacred natural sites. We would therefore like to invite researchers, practitioners and custodians to share their experiences and opinions. To those of you interested, we would also recommend taking a closer look at the guidance, protocols and codes of ethics that are available in your field to see if they are cognizant of the views held by custodians. We aim to collect and collate your views and consolidate them into a document that we can then return to you for discussion and revision.



With sufficient support, a long-term goal could be to develop a 'code of conduct" for researchers and conservation practitioners that work on sacred natural sites. Even sooner, and depending on your enthusiasm and responses, we plan to develop a Top 10 Guidelines for Researchers and Conservation Practitioners, which we propose to present in a forthcoming issue of SSIREN.

We are grateful for your input and also appreciate any links and materials that you think we should share with others through the platform on <u>Methods and approaches</u> that we are building as a resource for everyone. Please contact us at info@sacrednaturalsites.org and, for those who would like some more background feel, do not hesitate to download the introduction chapter Safeguarding Sacred Natural Sites.

#### References

Bartlett, C., Marshall, M., Marshall, A., 2012. Two-Eyed Seeing and other lessons learned within a colearning journey of bringing together indigenous and mainstream knowledges and ways of knowing. Journal of Environmental Studies and Sciences 2(4): 331-340.

International Society of Ethnobiology (ISE), 2006. International Society of Ethnobiology Code of Ethics (with 2008 additions). http://ethnobiology.net/code-of-ethics/

Kalume Tinga, K., 2004. The presentation and interpretation of ritual sites: the Mijikenda Kaya. Museum International 56(3): 8-14.

Yunupingu, D., Muller, S., 2009. Dhimurru's Sea Country Planning journey: opportunities and challenges to meeting Yolngu aspirations for sea country management in Northern Territory, Australia. Australasian Journal for Environmental Management 16: 158–167.

#### **OPPORTUNITIES**

October 31. Call for papers Greening the Gods: Ecology and Theology in the Ancient World

November 30. Call for papers Religion, Ecology, and the Environment in Africa and the African Diaspora

December 15. Summer School Submissions Oxford Summer School on Religion and **Animal Protection** 

#### **ABOUT SSIREN**

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 policymakers 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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Sacred Sites Research Newsletter

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Bas Verschuuren and Robert Wild are Coordinators for the Sacred Natural Sites Initiative. The Initiative builds a programme of work with custodians, communities, scientists, conservationists and other stakeholders in support of the protection, conservation and revitalization of sacred natural sites and landscapes.

## **NEWS**

#### New records of endangered legume species found in Kenvan sacred sites

Note by: Itambo Malombe, Esther Kioko, Mwadime Nyange, Saidi Chidzingah and Abdhulrahaman Matano

Human-related natural habitat disturbances continue to pose great challenges to sustainable conservation of the threatened flora in the fragmented, biodiversityrich, Kava forest ecosystems along the Kenvan coast. Kayas are fortified sacred forests traditionally conserved over millennia by the local Mijikenda communities. The most affected species are narrow endemics such as Gigasiphon macrosiphon, which has recently been ranked among the world's top 100 priority species for conservation, following a negative record of mature individuals, estimated at 33 in 2010. However, ongoing research to monitor the extant populations of the species in the Kaya hill forest of Muhaka, Gongoni and Mrima recorded 208 mature individuals. 177 individuals were found in Gongoni forest, clustered in 11 subpopulations, while Muhaka and Mrima had three and one subpopulations respectively. Just a few saplings were noted despite the numerous seedlings. Most of seedlings are said to be uprooted by primates and pigs are known to burrow in the soil. A wide spread dieback probably caused by fungal attack was also observed on young shoots and seedlings. Environmental conservation awareness campaigns have been initiated through community associations to protect the kayas and their endangered species for posterity.

## **PUBLICATIONS**

Abbate, C.S., Di Nuovo, S., 2013. Motivation and personality traits for choosing religious tourism: a research on the case of Medjugorje. Current Issues in Tourism 16(5): 501-506

Chryssavgis, J., Foltz, B.V. (Eds.), 2013. Toward an Ecology of Transfiguration: Orthodox Christian Perspectives on Environment, Nature, and Creation [Prefatory Letter from Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew]. Fordham University Press, New York

Di Giminiani, P., 2013. The contested rewe: sacred sites, misunderstandings, and ontological pluralism in Mapuche land negotiations. Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute 19(3): 527-544

Dussias, A.M., 2013. Friend, foe, frenemy: the United States and American Indian religious freedom. Denver University Law Review 90(2): 347-431

Frascaroli, F., 2013. Catholicism and conservation: the potential of sacred natural sites for biodiversity management in central Italy. Human Ecology 41(4): 587-601

#### Back issues of SSIREN made available online

All past issues of SSIREN have been hosted by the Sacred Sites Initiative's website and can now be accessed online.

#### Release of New Film: Elemental

This film features stories of three individuals united by their deep connection with nature: an Indian government official gone rogue is on a pilgrimage down the Ganges river and rouses the Indian public to treat their sacred 'Mother Ganga' with respect; a young mother and native Denè campaigns tirelessly against the Tar Sands and its proposed Pipeline, which are destroying indigenous communities and threatening an entire continent; and an inventor and entrepreneur searches for investors willing to risk millions on his conviction that nature's own systems hold the key to our world's ecological problems.

#### New bibliography of books on spiritual ecology

A bibliography of nearly 700 books on spiritual ecology and related topics was compiled by the Research Institute for Spiritual Ecology in July 2013. The bibliography (available here) includes books for a general audience as well as for scientific and academic ones.

#### Launch of the International Confucian Ecological Alliance

On September 9, the International Confucian Ecological Alliance (ICEA) was launched in the historic city of Deng Feng in Henan Province, central China. More info available on the Alliance of Religions and Conservation's website.

## **EVENTS**

October 16-December 7, world wide Screenings of *Elemental* film

There are multiple screenings of the film Elemental around the world. To find one near you please check the film's website.

#### October 22-November 27, South Africa Fracking: How Should People of Faith Respond?

One-day workshops about fracking are being held by The Justice and Peace Department of the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference in cities around South Africa. More info here.

#### October 26-28, Eugene, OR, USA 17<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the International Association for Environmental Philosophy

The upcoming annual meeting will be held at the Hilton Eugene and Conference Centre in Eugene, Oregon. More info at the Associatsion's website.

#### **FRIENDS**



**SANASI** – World Database on Sacred Natural Sites



**ARC** – The Alliance of Religions and Conservation

## **ISSRNC**

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

## SACREDNATURALSITES

**SNSI** – The Sacred Natural Sites Initiative



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

## **OPPORTUNITIES**

October 31

#### Greening the Gods: Ecology and Theology in the Ancient World conference: Call for papers

Papers are now being accepted for the conference Greening the Gods: Ecology and Theology in the Ancient World. The conference will be held at Cambridge University, Cambridge, UK, on March 18-19, 2014. For more information on the conference and submissions, please visit this page.

#### November 30

#### 6<sup>th</sup> Conference of the African Association for the Study of Religion (AASR): Call for papers on Religion, Ecology, and the Environment in Africa and the African Diaspora

The conference will take place at the University of Cape Town, South Africa, from July 30 to August 3, 2014. More info available here.

Grim, J., Powell, R., Riley, M.T., Trapani, T.C., Tucker, M.E. (Eds.), 2013. Oxford Bibliography on Religion and Ecology. Oxford University Press, Oxford

Hilliard, A., Weldon, S. (Eds.), 2013. Many Heavens, One Earth In Action: Stories of African Faith Commitments. Alliance of Religions and Conservation, Bath

Hitzhusen, G.E., Tucker, M.E., 2013 The Potential of religion for Earth stewardship. Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment: 368-376

Taylor, B. (Ed.), 2013. Avatar and Nature Spirituality. Wildrid Laurier University Press, Waterloo, Canada

#### October 31-November 1, Eindhoven, Netherlands The Roles of Climate Models: Epistemic, Ethical and Socio-political Perspectives

The conference is held at Eindhoven University of Technology. It aims to bring together scholars in philosophy, history of science, and science and technology, to explore the epistemic, ethical and socio-political roles that climate models play, their interactions and implications. More info here.

#### November 22, Baltimore, USA Mapping the Field of Religion and Ecology: Theories, Methods, and Future Directions

This colloquim will take place at the Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion in Baltimore, Maryland, on initiative of the Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology. More info here. December 15

#### Submissions to Oxford Summer School on **Religion and Animal Protection**

The Summer School will be held at St Stephen's House in Oxford, July 21-23, 2014. More info here.



We warmly thank the Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale and <u>Alliance of Religions and Conservation</u> 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.

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