

Cat Ba National Park

Alternative site name(s)

None

Province(s)

Hai Phong

Status

Decreed

Management board established

Yes

Latitude

20°44' - 20°51'N

Longitude

106°58' - 106°45'E

Bio-unit

06a - Tropical South China



Conservation status

Cat Ba National Park is centred on Cat Ba island a large island off the coast of Hai Phong city. The establishment of Cat Ba National Park was decreed by Decision No. 79/CT of the Chairman of the Council of Ministers, dated 31 March 1986 (MARD 1997). The area given in this decision was 15,200 ha, comprising 9,800 ha of Cat Ba and several smaller islands, and 5,400 ha of surrounding marine waters. Therefore, Cat Ba National Park became the first decreed protected area in Vietnam to include a marine component.

The investment plan for Cat Ba National Park was approved on 1 August 1991, by Decision No. 271/CT of the Chairman of the Council of Ministers. A management board has been established, with management responsibility for the 9,800 ha terrestrial component of the national park, while the 5,400 ha marine component is currently under the management of Cat Hai District Fisheries Department (ADB 1999). The future status of the marine component is not clear, as it is not known whether it will be managed by the national park management board or as part of a separate marine protected area (see Dao Cat Ba site card).

Topography and hydrology

Cat Ba National Park is located in Cat Hai district, Hai Phong city. The national park is centred on Cat Ba island, a 28,500 ha island, which lies 30 km east of Hai Phong city and immediately to the west of Ha Long bay. The national park also incorporates some of the small islands and marine waters situated to the east of Cat Ba island.

Like Ha Long bay, the landscape of Cat Ba National Park is dominated by karst limestone islands that rise abruptly from the sea. The topography is rugged and marked by steep outcrops and areas of bare rock. The national park ranges in elevation from sea level to 331 m at the summit of Mount Cao Vong.

As is typical in well developed karst landscapes, drainage patterns are confused by subterranean passages, which probably account for most of the drainage in the national park. The centre of Cat Ba island is no more than 5 km from the coast, and surface drainage is poorly developed and seasonal.

Biodiversity value

Cat Ba National Park supports a great diversity of habitats and ecosystems, including forested hills, small freshwater lakes, freshwater swamp forest, mangroves,

sandy beaches and coral reefs. The main natural vegetation type on Cat Ba island is limestone forest. However, the forest has been subjected to high levels of disturbance, and large areas have been replaced by limestone scrub or bare rock. In addition, there are some areas of mangrove along the shore of Cat Ba island, although most of these lie outside of the national park, and have mostly been enclosed within aquacultural ponds. To date, 839 vascular plant species have been recorded at the national park, including 25 species listed in the *Red Data Book of Vietnam* (KNCCN, IEBR and HNU 1997).

Due to the isolated nature of the island and high levels of hunting, the diversity and abundance of mammals at Cat Ba are low compared to other national parks in Vietnam. Nadler and Ha Thang Long (2000) report that the only large mammals on the island are Southern Serow *Naemorhedus sumatraensis*, Wild Boar *Sus scrofa* and Indian Muntjac *Muntiacus muntjak* but that only the former is common. Of highest importance from a conservation perspective, Cat Ba National Park supports the only known population of Golden-headed Leaf Monkey *Semnopithecus francoisi poliocephalus* in the world. The results of a detailed survey of this endemic primate in 1999 and 2000 indicate that the total population of Golden-headed Leaf Monkey is only between 104 and 135 individuals, including only 50 to 75 adults (Nadler and Ha Thang Long 2000).

The limestone habitats at Cat Ba National Park are important for a number of invertebrate taxa. A survey in 1998, for instance, revealed that, because of an abundance of suitable moist niches within the limestone forest, the national park had a rich and diverse snail fauna (Vermulen and Whitten 1998).

Conservation issues

Prior to 1979, the human population of Cat Ba island was relatively low. However, since this time, a large number of migrants from the mainland have settled on the island. In 1999, the total population of Cat Ba island was 10,673 people. While 70% of these people inhabit Cat Ba town, and are mainly employed in the fishing, trade or service industries, the inhabitants of the villages inside of or close to the national park are farmers, and exploit forest resources

intensively. The forest resources most widely exploited are timber, fuelwood, honey, bamboo shoots, edible roots, frogs and geckos (Nadler and Ha Thang Long 2000).

Until 1989, a forest enterprise extracted timber from Cat Ba island, which resulted in loss of forest cover from some valleys and the south-west of the island. Commercial logging activities are no longer viable because too few large timber trees remain, although small-scale timber extraction continues for local use. Honey collection takes place in the forest between August and November and in May. Groups of honey collectors spend one to two weeks at a time in the forest, during which time they hunt in order to supplement their diets. In addition, the practise of honey collection often results in forest fires (Nadler and Ha Thang Long 2000).

Nadler and Ha Thang Long (2000) consider hunting to be the main threat to animal populations on Cat Ba island, and particularly to the population of the endemic Golden-headed Leaf Monkey. Between 1970 and 1986, an estimated 500 to 800 leaf monkeys were killed, and, during the 1990s, and at least 90 individuals were killed or captured. Nadler and Ha Thang Long (2000) conclude that, unless protection measures are improved and the remaining leaf monkey population is carefully managed, the primate faces imminent extinction.

In recent years, tourism has become central to the local economy. However, uncontrolled tourism development has begun to pose a threat to the island's environment, a fact now acknowledged by the national park staff (M. Appleton pers. comm.). If developed with environmental sensitivity, however, tourism has the potential to make a positive contribution to conservation at Cat Ba National Park, by generating revenue and raising environmental awareness.

Other documented values

Each year, Cat Ba island receives large numbers of domestic and overseas tourists. A significant proportion of these tourists visit the national park, either on foot, along one of the hiking trails, or by boat, through the marine component. The national park can, therefore, be considered to be making an important contribution to the island's economy.

Related projects

WWF began a small-scale environmental education project at Cat Ba National Park in 1999. The first steps were to develop an environmental education centre at the national park headquarters, and to make some small infrastructural improvements to the visitor reception facilities. Occasional visits are made to schools in Cat Ba town to raise awareness about the national park and its activities. This project was funded by the Royal Netherlands Embassy, with contributions from WWF and Cat Ba National Park. Although the main funding finished in May 2000, some activities are continuing, with a small amount of outside input.

In June 2000, Fauna and Flora International-Indochina Programme received a British Embassy grant to implement a conservation project on Cat Ba island. This project will include environmental education and biological research components. It is hoped that this project will be the first phase of a larger project, the main objective of which will be the *in situ* conservation of Golden-headed Leaf Monkey.

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