

# THE NEWEST NATURAL UNESCO SITES



In July 2008 the UNESCO World Heritage List was extended yet again by 19 cultural and 8 natural treasures of the world. Let's get familiar with the few stunning wonders of nature that were included on the List.

## Joggins Fossil Cliffs

The Joggins Fossil Cliffs in Canada boast of an immense wealth of fossils. The exposed layers of rock reveal the most complete fossil record of life in the "Coal Age" 300 million years ago. The forests covering the area at that time produced quantities of organic matter that over the history created the coal deposits. The palaeontological site along the coast of Nova Scotia is 689 ha large. The fossils include the remains and track of early animals and the rainforest. The numerous outstanding examples of the major stages in the history of Earth are worth not only of protection but appreciation as well.

## Mount Sanqingshan National Park

Mount Sanqingshan National Park in south-east China is an area of unique high-mountain landscape. Its 22,950 ha are distinguished by exceptional assemblage of geomorphological phenomena - 48 granite peaks and 89 granite pillars. Many of the formations resemble human and animal silhouettes. The high altitude gradients allowed for the development of a zonal vegetation pattern and it is a shelter for numerous kinds of rare animals and plants. It has about 1000 species of flora and 800 types of fauna.

## Lagoons of New Caledonia

The Lagoons of New Caledonia in the French Pacific Ocean consist of six marine clusters that represent one of the most extensive reef systems in the world. The New Caledonia Barrier Reef is the second-longest coral reef in the world, after Australia's Great Barrier Reef. The reefs have great species diversity. The lagoons display intact ecosystems with large populations of big predators. Many of the animals are endemic. The reefs are home for instance to endangered dugongs (Dugong dugon), and is an important nesting site for Green Sea Turtle (*Chelonia mydas*). The lagoons are exceptional with its natural beauty since they contain reefs of varying age - both living and ancient fossil reefs.

## Surtsey

Surtsey is a volcanic island close to the southern coast of Iceland. It is a new island formed by volcanic eruptions taking place between 1963 and 1967 when the island reached its maximum size of 2.7 km<sup>2</sup>. Since then, wind and wave erosion and other influences have seen the island steadily diminish in size. The island has been of greatest interest both of volcanologists during Surtsey's formation and biologists as life has gradually colonized the originally barren land. Today only a small number of scientists are allowed to land on Surtsey. This helps the natural ecological processes to proceed without any human interference. Over its short history, at least 60 species of plant and 89

species of bird (fulmar, guillemot, gull, puffin) have been found on Surtsey.

## **Saryarka**

Saryarka - Steppe and Lakes of Northern Kazakhstan is a part of the Kazakh Uplands and today is the only natural UNESCO site in Kazakhstan. In Kazakh saryarka means “yellow range” and the site comprise two nature reserves (in Akmola and Kostanay provinces) with vast wetlands. These are an important stopover point for numerous birds migrating from Africa, Europe, and South Asia. Around 16 mln birds including many threatened species like Siberian white crane, Dalmatian pelican or Pallas’s fish eagle use the wetlands as a feeding ground. The steppe is also home to wildlife like marmots, wolves or endangered saiga antelope.

## **Monarch Butterfly Biosphere Reserve**

The Mariposa Monarca Biosphere Reserve is a 56,259 ha large and it is located in the central Mexican highlands. The Reserve was created to protect the wintering habitat of the monarch butterfly. Every autumn, millions of these butterflies from the North America return to the biosphere and cluster on small areas of the forest reserve. In the spring, they fly back north to the U.S. and Canada. In 8 months, after four generations of the butterflies are born and die, the millions of colorful monarchs find their way back to the Reserve.

## **Swiss Tectonic Arena Sardona**

The Swiss Tectonic Arena Sardona is located in the north-eastern part of Switzerland. It spreads over a mountainous area of more than 32,000 ha and includes seven peaks above 3,000 m (e.g. Surenstock, Ringelspitz and Pizol). The Arena is a unique example of mountain building through continental collision. Geologists as well as tourists admire the visible results of a tectonic thrust (called Glarus) when the older rocks (Helvetic nappes) were carried more than 100 km to the north over the younger rocks (Aarmassif and Infrahelvetic complex). Since the 18th century this site has been a key site of geological exploration.

## **Socotra Archipelago**

Socotra is a small archipelago of four islands and two rocky islets in the Indian Ocean belonging to the Republic of Yemen. The importance of the site lies in its unique biodiversity of rich and distinct flora and fauna. By many it is considered a jewel of biodiversity in the Arabian Sea. The long geological isolation of the archipelago and its fierce heat and drought created a unique and spectacular endemic life. 37% of Socotra’s plant species, 90% of its reptile species and 95% of its land snail species are not found anywhere else in the world. The only mammals native to Socotra are bats. The climate is generally tropical desert, with rainfall being light and seasonal.

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