

# La Amistad

## Costa Rica & Panama



**Date of inscription on the World Heritage list:** 1983 **extension:** 1990  
**Criteria:** natural phenomena or beauty (vii), major stages of Earth's history (viii), significant ecological and biological processes (ix), significant natural habitat of biodiversity (x)  
**Size:** 567,845 ha  
**Location:** Cordillera de Talamanca, Panamanian/Costa Rican border  
**Recognized also as:** a Conservation International-designated Conservation Hotspot, a WWF Global 200 Eco-region, a WWF/IUCN Centre of Plant Diversity, a BirdLife-designated Endemic Bird Area, parts of a Ramsar wetland and two UNESCO Biosphere Reserves

Talamancas Mountains are the highest and wildest non-volcanic mountain range in Central America. They contain one of the largest remaining natural forests in the region, holding about 90% of Costa Rica's known flora. The location of this unique site has allowed the fauna and flora of North and South America to interbreed. The park offers home to four different indigenous groups. Management responsibility is shared by Costa Rica and Panama.



### Go4BioDiv Messenger

## Roger Romero, 28

I am the Chief Director of the Conservation Association Red Quercus, which involves several communities. Our association has the objective to conserve the Natural Reserve and its buffer zone through organic agriculture, rural tourism, environmental education, research and monitoring. I think the civil society at the Pacific coast of Costa Rica should get organized and see the conservation of the National Park as an opportunity for sustainable development.



### Flora and Fauna

- The species diversity is probably unequalled: 10,000 flowering plants, over 4,000 non-vascular plants and about 1,000 fern species, with about 30% being unique to the area.
- The fauna is extremely diverse as a result of intermigrations between North and South: over 200 species of mammals, 600 birds, 350 species of reptiles and amphibians and over 100 fish, of which about 30% are endemic.
- Remarkable mammals are the squirrel monkey, black-handed spider monkey and lowland tapir.
- About 75% of the migrating birds of the Western Hemisphere pass over La Amistad.

### Cultural Heritage and Local Population

- Several archaeological sites can be found, most of them not yet investigated in detail.
- Indigenous groups originally inhabited the site; by 1940 their population was reduced to 6,000, who lived in isolated river valleys. Since then, there has been a population increase. Most of their lands were officially recognized.
- On the Costa Rican side about 10,000 indigenous belonging to the BriBris, Cabecaras, Guaymis and Brunecas live within the park. They retain much of their traditional customs.



### Climate Change and other Threats

- Risks from climate change to biodiversity in this site still appear comparatively low: Research results indicate that the capacity of plant species richness will only change slightly in the coming years. As a result of the mountainous terrain, the distances by which species would have to shift in order to follow changing climatic zones are relatively small.
- Due to the large and increasing population in a limited space, originally sustainable practices (free-range grazing of animals, hunting, fishing and medical plant use) of the indigenous population now cause negative environmental impacts.
- Tourism starts to develop, but in an unregulated way. Poaching, overfishing, logging and plundering of archaeological sites are serious problems.
- Oil exploration, mining and other development projects such as hydroelectricity dams, power plants and transmission lines, or the construction of a cross-Talamancas highway pose additional threats.



### Sources

UNESCO <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/205>  
 WCMC fact sheet <http://www.unep-wcmc.org/sites/wh/pdf/Talamancas%20-%20La%20Amistad.pdf>  
 Climate Change : Loarie et al. 2009 / Sommer et al. 2010

### Photo Credits

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 Local Population: Marc Patry / UNESCO