

AMBORÓ NATIONAL PARK

Amboró National Park in central Bolivia is a nature reserve with over 800 species of birds, over 125 mammalian species including puma, ocelot, and the rare Spectacled Bear. Covering an area of 4,425 km², it is protected from human settlements, hunting, mining and deforestation, though problems with all these still exist within the park. The Carrasco National Park is placed adjacent to Amboró, and together the two form a larger conservation unit.



DESCRIPTION AND GEOGRAPHY OF AMBORÓ NATIONAL PARK

National Park is in the western part of Santa Cruz Department, at the "Elbow of the Andes", where the eastern cordillera bends slightly westward from its north course. Amboró National Park lies within three distinct ecosystems: the foothills of the Andes, the northern Chaco, and the Amazon Basin.

The peculiar features of the geography of the Amboró park area determine the biological makeup, with a great variety of flora and fauna. The altitude in the park ranges from 300 up to 3,500 meters above sea level with an annual rainfall ranging between 1,400 and 4,000 mm. Amboró National Park holds some fine expressions of Yungas forests.



ACCESS TO AMBORÓ NATIONAL PARK

The area is bordered to the north and south by two roads that connect the cities of Cochabamba and Santa Cruz. The southern road, built in the 1950 s and once asphalted, was left decaying after the opening of the northern route in the 1980 s. Today it has returned to gravel and dirt, limiting traffic and commercial exchange on south side of Amboró National Park.

Off these two roads are a number of secondary gravel ones, allowing access to the more developed parts of the northern and southern Integrated Management Natural Areas or IMNAs. Small trails and riverbeds permit pedestrian access to the park, although this is limited by the rough topography. The principal access points to the northern zone are the towns of Buena Vista, Santa Fe, and Yapacaní, along the northern Cochabamba-Santa Cruz road. Several dirt tracks lead off from there notably to Espejitos, Saguayó, La Chonta, Macuñucu and to the Yapacaní River. In the southern zone, the principal access points are also secondary roads principally departing from the towns of El Torno, Samaipata, Mairana, Pampa Grande, Mataral and Comarapa, which are located on the main highway.

CREATION OF AMBORÓ NATIONAL PARK

Initially created in 1973, the park was originally established as the Reserva de Vida Silvestre German Busch. In 1984, with the help of the native biologist Noel Kempff, British zoologist Robin Clark and others, the park became a national park protecting 1,800 km². In 1991, it expanded to 6,376 km²; however in 1995 it was reduced to 4,425 km².

MANAGEMENT OF AMBORÓ NATIONAL PARK

In 1989, from the town of Buena Vista and with a very limited budget, the Decentralized Unit of the Santa Cruz Forest Development Center took charge of the park's first management, consisting essentially in flora and fauna inventories, a census of the park's human population and a few information campaigns. This period saw the construction of the Mataracú, Saguayo, La Chonta, and Macuñucú ranger stations, administered by a liaison office, 10 park rangers, material and equipment. With support from TNC's Parks in Peril (PiP) program, the Fundación Amigos de la Naturaleza (FAN) took part in the management of the park's Southern Zone, with offices in Samaipata and Comarapa.

In 1991, with its first significant grant, FAN formed a management committee, with headquarters in Buena Vista, with the CDF being officially in charge of the area's management. That same year, the park size was extended to 637,000 ha without prior consultation of the local population and disregarding legitimate private property rights, a move which triggered serious protests and resistance against the park.

With funding from the Regional Alternative Development Program (Programa de Desarrollo Alternativo Regional - PDAR), a consensus was finally reached with the establishment of two different management categories, indicated on the ground by a so-called "Red Line", a narrow trail that marks the boundary between the National Park and the Integrated Management Natural Zone (IMNA), effectively a Multiple Use Zone.

In 1994, FAN was selected by the newly created Ministry of Sustainable Development and Environment to supervise the drafting of the area's management plan. The "Red Line" was officially approved in 1995, allotting

442,500 ha to the national park and 195,100 ha to the IMNA, divided in various patches. Local conflicts have since forced a constant redefinition of limits, so the exact boundaries between the two categories are not precisely known. In 1995, the National Directorate for Biodiversity Conservation (Dirección Nacional de Conservación de la Biodiversidad - DNCB, today's SERNAP), the administration in charge of the country's protected areas decided to reclaim supervision of the area. Despite the signings of a contract between DNCB and FAN for the co-administration of the area, since this date the government has been solely in charge of the protected area.

FLORA OF AMBORÓ NATIONAL PARK

So far, 2659 plant species have been recognized in Amboró National Park. Some of the most noteworthy tree species are Bigleaf Mahogany, mountain pine, black walnut, limachu, khellu, cebillo, bibosi, ambaiba, pacay, and clavo rojo. In the cloud-enveloped forests, there are extensive patches of giant arboreal ferns. In addition, there are pachiuva, açái palms and several species of endemic orchids.

FAUNA OF AMBORÓ NATIONAL PARK

127 species of mammals have been registered, among them 43 species of bats. Among the large mammals, we find the spectacled bear (locally known as the jucumari), the jaguar, and the Giant Anteater. The park presents a high level of endemism, 105 species of amphibians with 50 species of toads alone.



The number of bird species observed within the area exceeds 840, or more than 60% of the country's total. Two of the most interesting are arguably the Southern Helmeted Curassow and the Military Macaw. Finally, 109 species of fish species have been identified by the IMNA alone, with a clear dependence on altitude. The largest specimens, which are the principal targets of commercial and subsistence fishing - such as sábalo, barred surubim, and pacú - are restricted to the alluvial plains, below 700 m. Above just 1000 m, the fish diversity diminishes dramatically.

AMBORÓ INTERPRETATION CENTER

It is a learning and reference center for children, young and adults, locals and foreigners. The center provides all kind of information on the different biological, geographic and cultural values of the Parque Nacional y Area Natural de Manejo Integrado Amboró, and explains the importance of preserving them. It is the first interpretation center about a protected area in Bolivia located in a community where locals and visitors can visit and get information on the conservation of the biodiversity.

The Amboró Interpretation Center offers to its visitor's large facilities with varied didactic equipment. It has two halls. The first one is designed as an interpretation room where the visitor can see informative panels about biodiversity, ecological processes, and landscapes, social and administrative aspects of the Amboró Park, and they explain the importance of the conservation of this place, which is unique for the rest of the world. There is also a well-designed diorama of the park.

The second salon is the audiovisual room equipped with modern audio and video devices. There are also sculptures made in wood that represent games like the night animals sculptured in a wooden totem. Those ones who love riddles will have the chance to see the animals that visit the palm trees artistically represented in a sculpture made in Tajibo (*Tabebuia* spp.)

The trails at the center of interpretation allow the visitors to follow the tracks of different animals and see their habits. Following these trails is like entering the heart of the same Amboró. The vegetation with informative signs allows the tourists appreciate the variety of tree species found in the Amboró Park.

The center of interpretation is co-administrated by the National Service of Protected Areas and the city hall, which combine interests to achieve a sustainable development for the park. This project was funded by WWF and COBIMI, USAID, The Belgian Technical Cooperation and the government of Santa Cruz.

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