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## Timor-Leste's first national park will protect the community's "wealth"

08-09-2008

Timor-Leste's Prime Minister Xanana Gusmao has formally inaugurated the country's first national park. Nino Konis Santana National Park incorporates the entire eastern tip of Timor-Leste - conserving 123,600 hectares of land and seascapes which are home to nationally and globally significant species and habitats. These include extensive coral reefs and some of the largest remaining intact examples of tropical lowland and monsoon rainforest in the region.

The event marks an important initiative for the protection of Timor-Leste's globally significant natural and cultural heritage and is the culmination of six years' work by the Government, local communities and civil society with support from the international community.

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"We'll only succeed if all the community is aware that we have to preserve our wealth, which gives rain and refreshment to our country, to ensure the future of our children" —Xanana Gusmao, Timor-Leste's Prime Minister

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Timor-Leste's forests are of immense importance for threatened and restricted range species of the Timor and Wetar Endemic Bird Area. The national park is estimated to hold as many as 100 Critically Endangered Yellow-crested Cockatoos *Cacatua sulphurea*, and other threatened species such as Endangered Timor Green-pigeon *Treron psittaceus*.

The national park is the first in Timor-Leste's community-based Protected Area Network which will eventually



Rosemary Low

Critically Endangered Yellow-crested Cockatoos will find sanctuary in Timor-Leste's Nino Konis Santana National Park.

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ensure protection and sustainable management of many more areas of terrestrial and marine biological and cultural significance. Sixteen of these areas were described in the BirdLife International publication, Important Bird Areas of Timor-Leste, following joint work by BirdLife and Timor-Leste's Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries.

Timor-Leste is a traditional, mostly rural society, heavily reliant on the natural environment for local livelihoods, and the entire Protected Area Network will take an enlightened collaborative management approach between Government, local communities and civil society.

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"What's most striking is that at Nino Konis Santana National Park, visitors can find an unbroken succession of habitat from coastal to montane forest, which is rare now anywhere in the world" —Roger Safford, BirdLife's Programme and Projects Manager

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Cathy Molnar

Timor Leste's Prime Minister Xanana Gusmao signing a plaque at the opening of the Nino Konis Santana National Park.

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Prime Minister Gusmao said the challenge for the government is to help the communities find sustainable ways to improve the quality of the environment whilst maintaining their livelihoods through farming and tourism activities. "We'll only succeed if all the community is aware that we have to preserve our wealth, which gives rain and refreshment to our country, to ensure the future of our children", he said.

The management aim of the national park places it in the internationally recognised IUCN Management Category V: a Protected Landscape/Seascape, where the traditional, cultural and spiritual interactions of local people and nature are maintained in a way that protects the environment and provides sustainable livelihoods for local communities.

The national park is named in honour of Nino Konis Santana, a hero of the struggle for independence who was born within the area of the National Park.

"What's most striking is that at Nino Konis Santana National Park, visitors can find an unbroken succession of habitat from coastal to montane forest, which is rare now anywhere in the world", said Roger Safford, BirdLife's Programme and Projects Manager.

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