

Sanctuary. With a total area of c. 9,600 km<sup>2</sup> this contiguous landscape of protected areas and multiple-use forests is now the largest protected area network in India. The forests in the new Sanctuary are also an important catchment area for the Cauvery and Palar rivers. Being contiguous with Tiger Conservation Landscape-67 in the states of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, this area is classified as a Tiger Survey Landscape (an area where the status of tigers is unknown but there is some reason to believe that tigers may still be present) for which data are insufficient, thus making it a priority area for tiger conservation. The area has potential to become a source of tigers in the future if suitable protection is accorded. The notification of the Sri Malai Mahadeswara Swamy Wildlife Sanctuary came about through the support of political leaders and the efforts of B.K. Singh, Dipak Sarmah and R. Sridharan, representing the government, and Sanjay Gubbi and Poornesha H.C. representing civil society.

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### **Cultural values protect forest in Liberia**

In November 2011, with a small grant from the Arcus Foundation, Fauna & Flora International undertook a mission to the newly gazetted Lake Piso Multiple Use Reserve in Liberia to investigate cultural connections between people and nature that support the Reserve's conservation objectives. During four intensive days visiting the villages of Vai and Gola, the team, accompanied by the Reserve's Chief Warden, heard numerous descriptions of often profound connections between the people, their place and species and habitats. The stories included magical ponds full of treasures that could never be found, forest areas protected for cultural training, and trees that protect the villages and the Sambolah clan's special relationship with the Nile crocodile. When an all-woman group learned

that one of our party was the Chief Warden they told him 'We need you to help us protect our crocodiles. People are killing them and they are our friends'.

In August 2012 Fauna & Flora International assessed cultural connections to nature in 20 communities in the Reserve, using participatory methods. Communities reported that they protect forests, the banks of rivers and creeks, and certain animals and plants. Perhaps the most significant finding was that communities are protecting numerous forests—not to protect natural resources in a material sense but for cultural reasons. Every village surveyed protects at least one forest as a graveyard. A third of villages protect forests for rituals and ceremonies or because they are associated with historical or mythological events. Twenty per cent of villages have set aside forest to supply materials required for the continuation of cultural practices, such as collecting certain plants for cooking their highly valued traditional dishes or to make rattan seats for the elders. Every village protected one or more forest as 'bush schools'. The training of young people in the ways of their society and culture must be done in secret and must be done in the forest.

Extrapolated across the Reserve, these results suggest that culturally conserved forests account for c. 36% of remaining forest cover. The clear mutual interest in protecting these forests presents opportunities for collaborations between communities and the Reserve authorities. Other synergies identified between cultural needs and conservation objectives create further opportunities for collaboration. These are formally recognised in the Reserve's new management plan. In addition, the Forestry Development Authority has requested that guidance on integrating cultural values into protected area planning is included in the draft Liberian Protected Area Framework.

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