

National parks throughout the world

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Yellowstone National Park was the world's first national park. It became a national park in 1872. That is more than 100 years ago! Photo from: National Park Service.

A national park is an area set aside by a country's government. Sometimes the government already owns the land. In other cases the government tries to purchase lands it wishes to make into a park. Many national parks are created to preserve the natural environment. Most of the landscapes, plants and animals in a national park are kept in their natural state. Some parks protect areas where important events in history occurred.

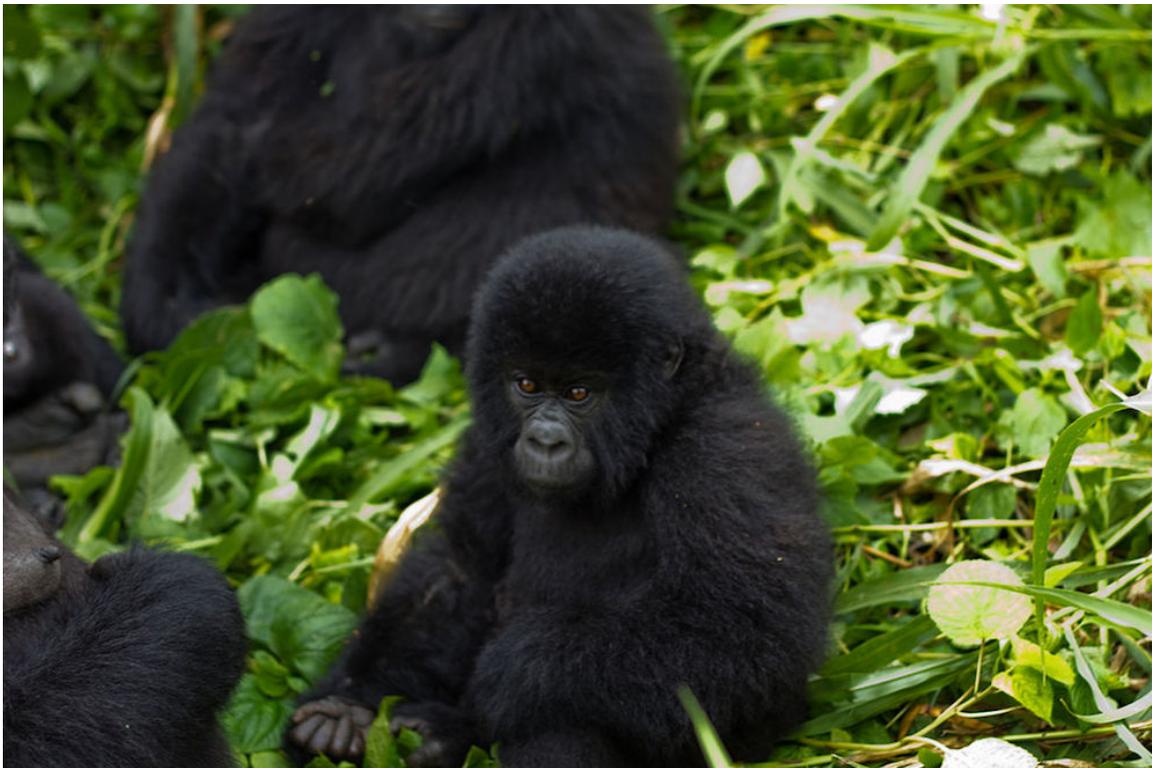
Some national parks do not allow visitors. In others, visitors must follow rules to keep the plants and animals from being hurt by human activity.

In 1872 Yellowstone National Park in the U.S. state of Wyoming became the world's first national park. Many other parks have been established since then in the United States and throughout the world. In 1962 the first World Conference on National Parks brought together

people from more than 60 nations. Many international groups have been important in the development of the world's national parks. These organizations include the United Nations and the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources.

Africa

Many national parks in Africa were created to protect animal life. Virunga National Park is one of those parks. It is in the Virunga Mountains in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. It is Africa's oldest national park. Virunga protects mountain gorillas, okapis, elephants, lions and many species, or kinds, of rare birds.



Serengeti National Park in Tanzania is home to huge herds of animals, such as wildebeests, gazelles and zebras. It is the only place in Africa where massive land-animal migrations still take place.

Kruger National Park is the largest national park in South Africa. In addition to its population of lions, elephants and rhinoceroses, Kruger preserves many archaeological treasures that are thousands of years old.

Asia

Fuji-Hakone-Izu National Park is in Japan. The centerpiece of the park is Mount Fuji. It is considered to be one of the most beautiful places in the country.



Keoladeo Ghana National Park is a bird sanctuary in India. It is home to more than 360 species of birds. Also in India, the Bandhavgarh National Park has the highest known density of tigers in the country.

In China the Jiuzhai Valley National Park is known for its blue and green lakes, waterfalls and unique wildlife.

Australia

Australia has more than 500 national parks. National parkland accounts for almost 4 percent of Australia's land area. The National Park (now Royal National Park) was established in 1879, making it the second national park in the world.

National parks are important to the Australian Aboriginal peoples because land is sacred to them. National parks protect native plants, animals and important Aboriginal sites. Those sites include rock engravings and artwork that show how Aboriginal people lived in the past and their beliefs about the creation of the land and life.

Aboriginal people have lived in Kakadu National Park, in the Northern Territory, for at least 50,000 years. Their presence can be seen in the rock art that dates back more than 20,000 years.

The Southwest National Park in Tasmania makes up much of the Tasmanian Wilderness, perhaps the best known wilderness area in Australia.



Europe

In Great Britain there are 15 areas set aside as national parks. Cairngorms National Park in Scotland is the largest national park in Great Britain. The Cairngorm Mountains make up the highest mountain massif in the British Isles. The park is home to 25 percent of Britain's threatened species.

Snowdonia National Park is on the west coast of Wales. It is home to Mount Snowdon. At 3,560 feet (1,085 meters), it is the highest mountain in Wales and England. Legend says that King Arthur fought an epic battle on Mount Snowdon, where he killed the giant Rhita Gawr.



The Lake District National Park covers about 1 percent of all the land area in England and includes Lake Windermere, the largest lake in England. The Lake District is one of the most popular tourist destinations in England.

Elsewhere in Europe, Olympus National Park is home to Mount Olympus, the highest peak in Greece. It is associated with the 12 main gods of Greek mythology. Norway's National Parks of Svalbard protect more than 60 percent of the islands of Svalbard. These islands are about halfway between mainland Norway and the North Pole. It is an Arctic wilderness and home to many polar bears.

North America

The United States has many parks with breathtaking scenery. They include Acadia National Park in Maine, Grand Canyon National Park in Arizona, Grand Teton National Park in Wyoming and Yosemite National Park in California.



Canada set up its first national park in 1885. The park preserves the mineral hot springs at Banff, Alberta, on the eastern slopes of the Rocky Mountains. Like the United States, Canada has many national historical parks. They mark places such as military forts and fur-trading posts.

South America

The Torres del Paine National Park in Chile is one of the best known national parks in South America. It is internationally recognized as one of the most untouched places on the planet. Venezuela's Canaima National Park includes Angel Falls, the world's highest waterfalls.