

NOMINATION TO THE WORLD HERITAGE LIST

Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage

Name: GARAJONAY NATIONAL PARK

Identification No: 380

Date received by WH Secretariat: 30.12.85

Contracting State Party having submitted the nomination of the property in accordance with the Convention: SPAIN

Summary prepared by IUCN (April 1986) based on the original nomination submitted by Spain. This original and all documents presented in support of this nomination will be available for consultation at the meetings of the Bureau and the Committee.

1. LOCATION:

The Garajonay National Park is found on La Gomera (378 sq.km in size), one of seven islands in the western sector of the Canary Archipelago, lying off the northwest coast of Africa in the Atlantic Ocean. 28°09'N, 17°14'E.

2. JURIDICAL DATA:

The 1812 Constitution abolished the estates of the nobility and transferred the ownership and administration of the forests to the municipal governments. In the same century the forests were declared public property and appeared as such in the listing of the Register of Public Property dated 1879. The national park (Public Forests) belongs to the six municipal districts of La Gomera.

The National Park was established in March 1981 but the conservation of nature within the national park area is covered by a number of legal texts, namely, the Law and Regulations on Protected Nature Sites, the Law and Regulations on Forest, the Law and Regulations on Land, four Royal Decrees and three Orders.

3. IDENTIFICATION:

Garajonay National Park (3,984 ha) occupies the central part of La Gomera island and encompasses an altitudinal range from 600m to 1492m at its highest point. It consists of an eroded plateau (with a central crater) and gently sloping central terrain and steeply sloping escarpments. La Gomera is the only island in the Canaries that has not experienced an eruption in recent times and the soils are formed from horizontal basalts. There are many springs and streams on the island and the presence of the forest cover on the Gomera plateau causing mist vapour condensation helps maintain the island's main water sources.

The vegetation is lush and is maintained as a result of mist, condensed water vapour and the numerous streams and springs on the island. The most important feature is the laurel forest, most of which is located within the park boundaries. Some 70% of the national part is woodland with Laurisilvia canaria dominant. The Garajonay National Park has a recorded flora of 450 species of which 34 are endemic to the island and of these, eight species are restricted to the national park. This type of vegetation assemblage resembles that of the Tertiary period which has largely disappeared from southern Europe due to climatic changes. Its distribution is now limited to a few places in the Macaronesian Islands and even here largely in an altered state.

Two species of bird, the white-tailed laurel pigeon and the dark tailed laurel pigeon are endemic to the Canaries and on La Gomera are largely restricted to the national park. It is thought that between 40-60% of the invertebrate fauna are endemic.

4. STATE OF PRESERVATION/CONSERVATION:

Following European colonization in the 15th Century, major changes occurred to the forest cover. There has been a reduction of some 65% in forest cover in just over 100 years. In the south and west of the national park there are areas of deforestation, fires and grazing and in some parts the natural vegetation cover has been replaced by commercial species plantations of Canary pine and Monterey Pine. These activities are being eliminated slowly, although some problems are derived by the existence of private property on the boundary of the parks. The rat and feral cat and dog population is high.

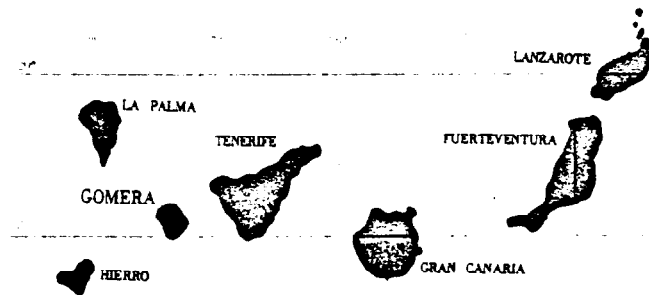
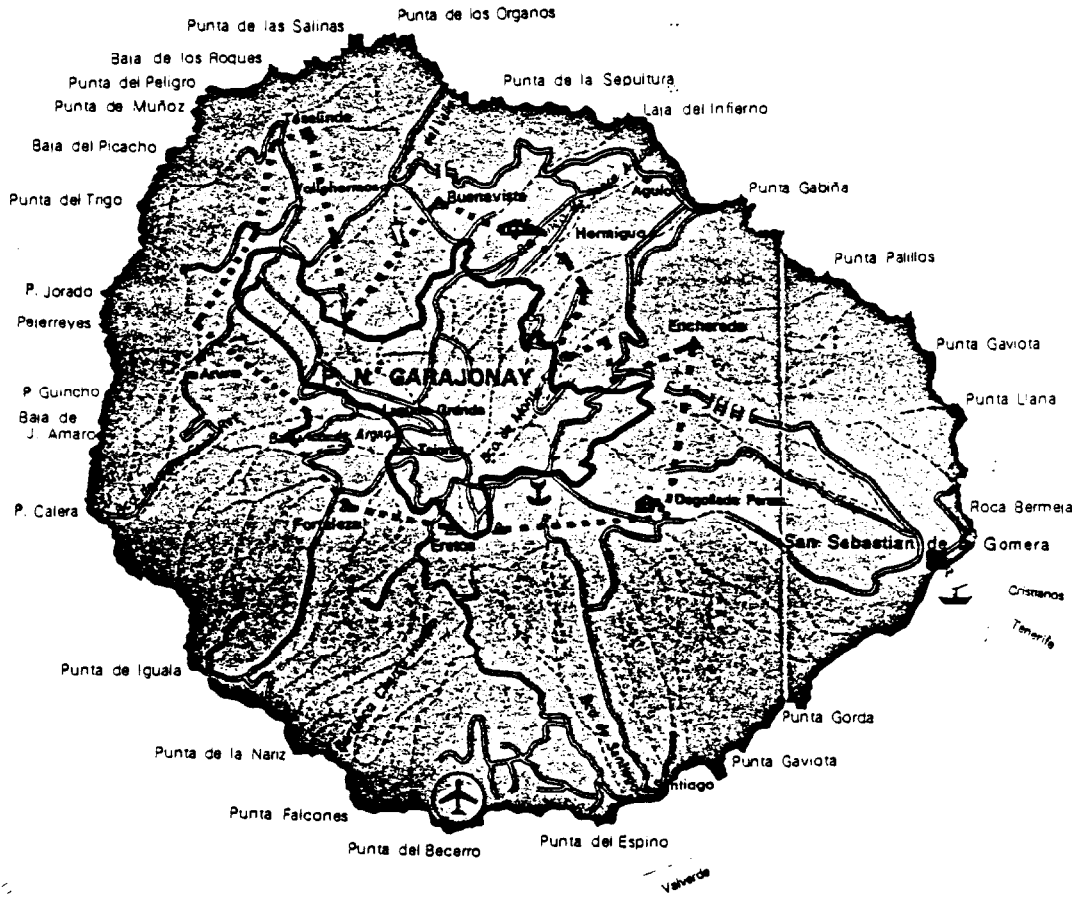
The national park is within the administrative jurisdiction of ICONA, an independent body within the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. A Director is in charge with administration carried out by a management board composed of representatives from local government and universities. A number of conservation measures have been taken: prohibition of grazing in 1942, decree giving protection to 26 species of plants in 1962, prohibition on tree felling 1964, campaign to restore forest balance in 1970, prohibition on the collection of leaves and the active removal of exotic species such as Tradescantia fluminensis, Pinus and Eucalyptus and their replacement by native species, bird protection Royal Decree 3181 in 1980 and finally the establishment of the national park in 1981. The management plan for the park consists of separate sections covering fire prevention, interpretation, and ecology, genetic resources, and research on the two endemic bird species, and a programme for the eradication of Tradescantia fluminensis. The national park is zoned into a biogenetic reserve zone, an intermediate zone, an extensive use zone, and a service zone.

In addition to the Director, the park has a staff of eight and a reported budget of US\$320,600.

5. JUSTIFICATION FOR INCLUSION ON THE WORLD HERITAGE LIST:

The Garajonay National Park nomination, as presented by the Government of Spain provides the following justification for designation as a World Heritage property:

- a) Cultural property. Criteria being examined by ICOMOS.
- b) Natural property
 - (iv) Habitat for Rare and Endangered Species. Garajonay's relic Tertiary laurel forest is one of the few remaining remnants in the region. In addition to the laurel forest, there are 450 plant species, of which 8 endemics are found in the park.



WORLD HERITAGE NOMINATION -- IUCN TECHNICAL EVALUATION

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1. DOCUMENTATION:

- (i) IUCN Data Sheet
- (ii) Consultations: Spanish Government Officials, O. Hamann, H. Synge, E. Fernandez Galiano, D. Bramwell, C. Gomez-Campo, R. Milne
- (iii) Literature: Garajonay Management Plan (1985), Interpretation Plan (1982)
- (iv) Site visit 19-21 October 1986.

2. COMPARISON WITH OTHER AREAS

Laurel forest is a subtropical flora that covered the lands of the Mediterranean through most of the Tertiary period. The ocean-moderated climate of the Canaries favoured this plant association long after climatic changes on the continent brought its demise. Garajonay's forest is a relict of this previously widespread floral type.

Only five protected areas exist in the Macaronesian Islands Biogeographical Province. All are larger in size than Garajonay but no other contains the extent of laurel forest found in this park. Patches of laurel forest do occur in the Azores and Madeira Islands but forests there have been degraded and are less species-rich than Garajonay. The other three national parks in the Canaries group were established primarily for their volcanic features and do not contain laurel forest. The small Canal y Los Tiles Biosphere Reserve on La Palma does have a good stand of laurel forest but it is much smaller and of less significance than Garajonay. Other small patches of laurel forest on La Palma are unprotected.

Garajonay National Park thus contains the last major "fossil forest" remnant of the laurel forest ecosystem. Its flora, once common in the Tertiary era, relates to the ancestral forms of many modern plants found in the Mediterranean today. It also displays links to the Indian Ocean flora reflecting the importance of the Tethys Sea as a migration route in the evolution of plants. There is, therefore, no easy comparison as Garajonay is a truly unique park.

3. INTEGRITY

The major management problems in Garajonay are wildfires and invasion of exotic plants which compete with the native vegetation. A number of restorative measures and a "genetic rescue programme" have been implemented and the area is now in a much improved condition and makes an important contribution as a watershed for the lowland villages on the island. Size of the park is small but in scale with the island and sufficient to support the remaining endemic plant communities.

A four year management plan for the park was approved by Presidential Decree in July 1986. A separate plan for education and interpretation has also been prepared. A US\$2 million park visitor centre is in the final stages of completion and some excellent publications on the park are available to the public. There are some 30 staff including a full-time park botanist which reflects the importance given to the floristic values of the park.

A noteworthy feature is the considerable support for the protection of the park's forests given by the local people of Gomera who view the area as a necessary element of both their cultural and natural heritage. The conservation ethic on Gomera indeed goes back at least 500 years and the island has been fortunate to avoid the intensity of development found on other islands in the group.

4. ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Consideration is currently being given to increasing the size of the park and an important new area of forest may be purchased by the Government. This would add even more justification for the property. The importance of the park to the broader world science community is both the endemic plant species found there and also its critical role in understanding the functioning of the laurel forest ecosystem. A greater effort in designing a research and monitoring programme to address this latter issue should be encouraged.

5. EVALUATION

The Garajonay National Park is seen as the singularly most unique protected area in all of Spain for the international significance of its endemic flora (34 species) and as the only major remnant of a once common ecosystem. It thus merits inscription on the World Heritage list on the basis of Criteria (ii) outstanding example of biological evolution of the laurel forest ecosystem and Criteria (iii) where habitats of rare and endemic plant species are provided. In addition to the importance of the endemic relict flora there exist also a rich and endemic invertebrate life and two rare bird species.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Garajonay National Park should be added to the World Heritage List. The Committee should commend the Government of Spain and the local efforts of the Gomera Island people in maintaining and restoring the conservation values of the site. Possibilities for extension of the boundaries of the park and for ecosystem research projects should also be encouraged.

