
WORLD HERITAGE NOMINATION - IUCN SUMMARY

'W' NATIONAL PARK (NIGER)

Summary prepared by IUCN/WCMC (March 1996) based on the original nomination supplied by the Government of Niger Republic. This original and all documents in support of this nomination will be available for consultation at the meetings of the Bureau and the Committee.

1. LOCATION

The Park lies in the south-west of the country, on the right bank of the River Niger and contiguous to 'W' National Parks in both Burkina Faso (190,000ha) and Benin (502,000ha), and the Reserve de Faune de Tamou (75,600ha) to the north.

2. JURIDICAL DATA

Established as a National Park by Decree in 1954 but originally classified as a faunal reserve and state forest in 1953 by Decree No. 4676.

3. IDENTIFICATION

The nominated Park (220,000ha) is located in a transition zone between Sudan and Guinea Savannas and contiguous to 'W' National Parks in both Burkina Faso (190,000ha) and Benin (502,050ha), and the Reserve de Faune de Tamou (75,600ha) to the north. Shrub savanna is the most widespread vegetation type occurring on shallow infertile soils. A total of 454 plant species have been recorded including two orchid species found only in Niger. More than 70 mammals have been described, and around 350 bird species are found in the area. Most of the populations of ungulates species are increasing, due to protection programmes. Reptiles and fishes occurring in the Park are typical of the Niger river.

4. STATE OF PRESERVATION/CONSERVATION

Proposals for phosphate mining, damming of rivers, and railway construction within the Park have been suggested in the past. Poaching, illegal grazing and annual migrations of Fulani cattle, uncontrolled bush fires, fishing, and cultivation within the park also occur, although the situation is reported to be improving. A Management Plan is under preparation, financed by the European Development Fund. The plan aims to insure the integrity of natural value of the site, and the creation of a Biosphere Reserve, with the 'W' National Park being the core zone.

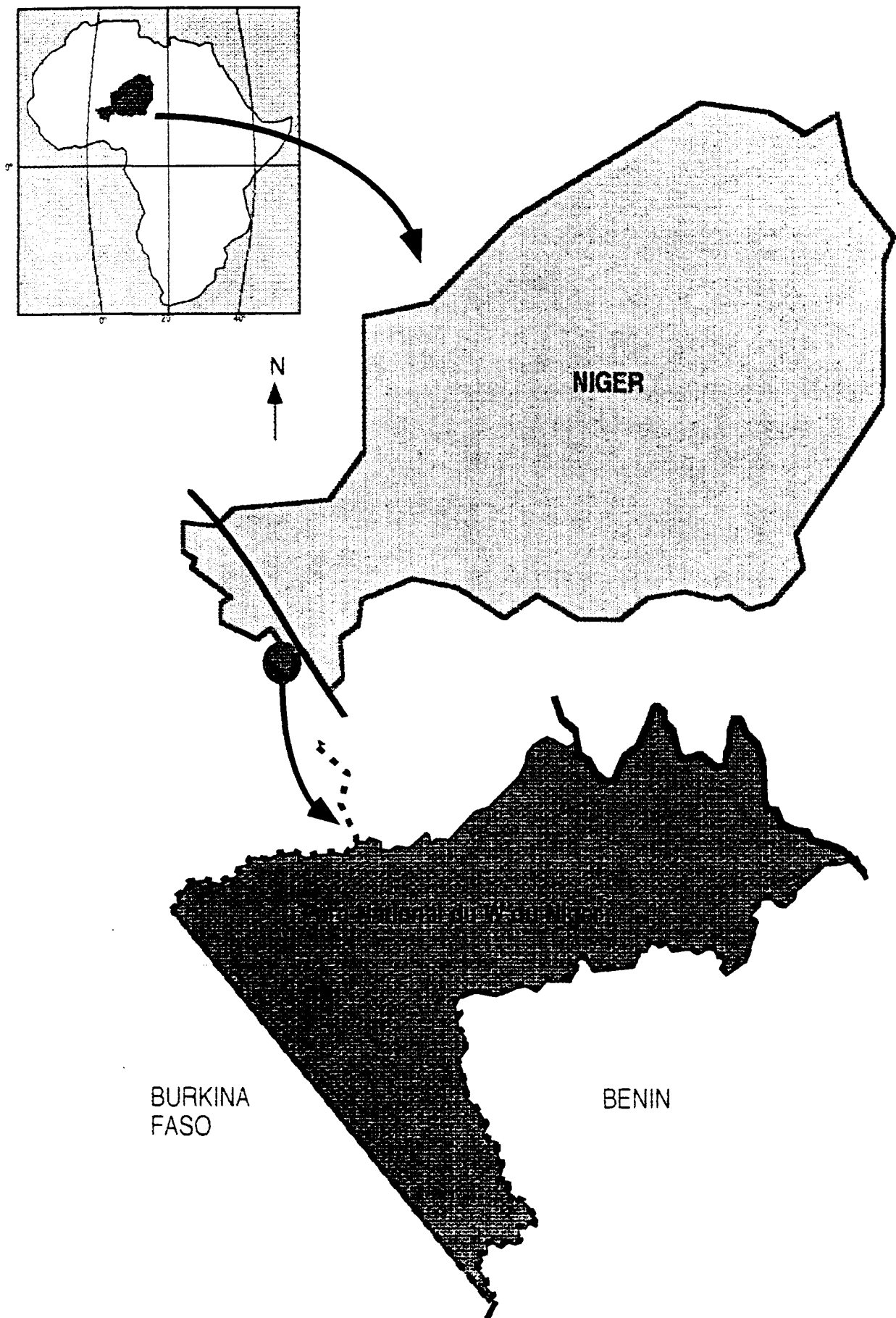
5. JUSTIFICATION FOR INCLUSION ON THE WORLD HERITAGE LIST

The 'W' National Park nomination, as prepared by the Government of the Niger Republic, provides the following justification for designation as a World Heritage natural property:

- (ii) **Contains examples of on-going geological and biological processes.** The W National Park hosts ecosystems representing the interaction between natural resources and humans since Neolithic times. This interaction has produced characteristic landscapes and plant formations and represents the evolution of biodiversity in the Sudan-Sahelian biome.
- (iv) **Contains the most important areas of high biodiversity and significant natural habitats for threatened species.** The Park hosts major populations of ungulates in West Africa and wild plant species considered very important for conservation and genetic research. The wetland area of the Park is of international importance for the conservation of birds as a Ramsar site. The Park is contiguous to other protected areas in Burkina Faso and Niger, important for the survival of species which need large areas for their seasonal migrations.

WHC/JWT/amb
October 1996

Situation géographique du PNWN



WORLD HERITAGE NOMINATION - IUCN TECHNICAL EVALUATION

'W' NATIONAL PARK (NIGER)

1. DOCUMENTATION

- (i) IUCN/WCMC Data Sheet (13 references)
- (ii) Additional Literature Consulted: IUCN/UNEP. 1986. Review of the Protected Area System of the Afrotropical Realm. 259p.; Bousquet, B. 1992. Guide des Parcs Nationaux d'Afrique. 368p.
- (iii) Consultations: 5 external reviewers, Niger government authorities.
- (iv) Field Visit: Gérard Sournia. June 1996.

2. COMPARISON WITH OTHER AREAS

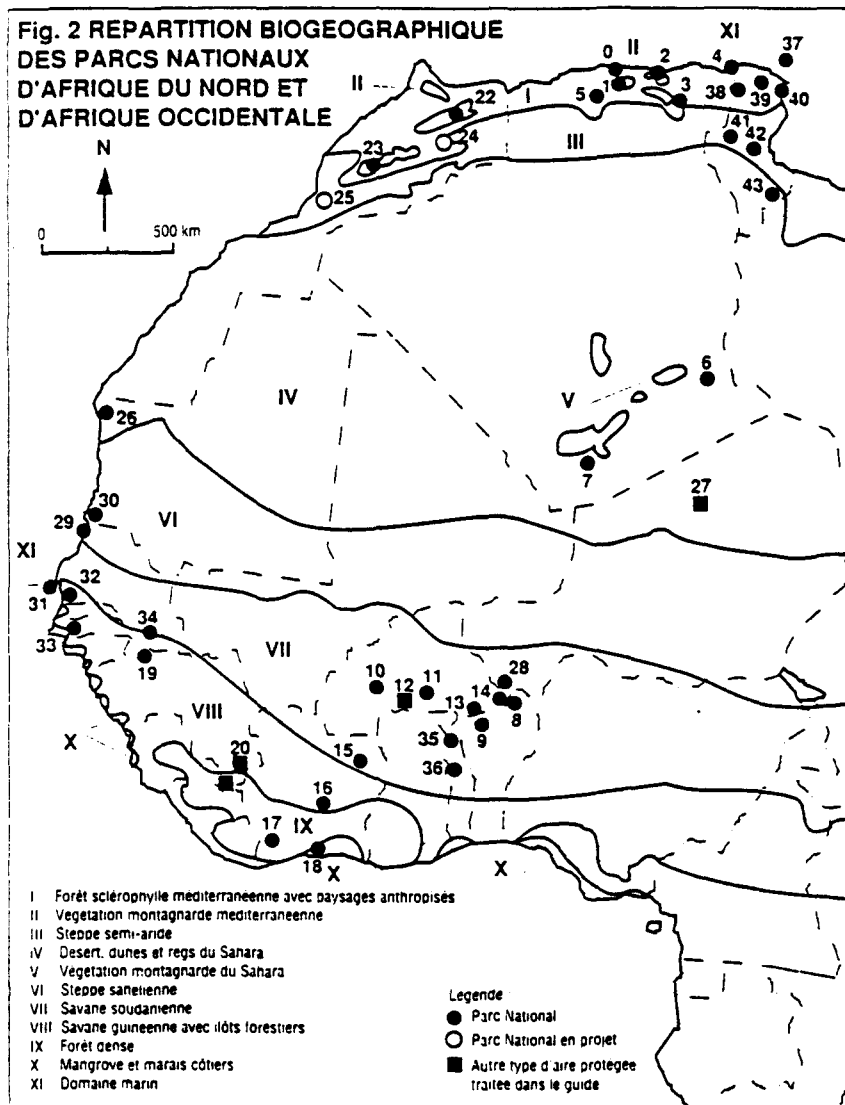
'W' national park (so named because of the local configuration of the Niger River) is one of 97 protected areas in the West African Woodlands/Savanna Biogeographical Province. Four existing World Heritage sites are found in this Province, all of substantial size: Manovo-Gounda-St. Floris (CAR) at 1.74 mil. ha, Comoe (Côte d'Ivoire) at 1.15 mil. ha, Niokolo-Koba (Senegal) at 0.91 mil. ha and part of Mont Nimba. The area of 'W' in Niger (220,000ha) is thus much smaller than existing sites in the region (unless the adjoining protected areas in neighboring Burkina Faso and Benin are also added).

'W' National Park in Niger is part of a transfrontier site with adjacent areas in Benin and Burkina Faso. It is contiguous with the reserves of Kéran, the Oti Valley, Pendjari, Arli, Singou, Pama and Tamou. This protected area block, taken together, is quite important due to its large surface area. However, the multiplicity of borders and differences in the management plans used means that the future evolution of the part of 'W' in the Niger is intimately interwoven with the destiny of its two other parts and the adjacent protected areas described above.

Within the above mentioned system, 'W' National Park (Niger) and Pendjari National Park (Benin) and to a lesser extent Arli (Burkina Faso) - are the most important protected areas in this block with regards to biodiversity. 'W' National Park (Niger) has considerable hydrological resources which justified its listing under the Ramsar Convention.

The 'W' National Park (Niger) is located near the transition zone between the sudanese savanna and the forest lands of the Sudan-Guinean zone. Its geographical location (notably in terms of latitude) is the same as many of the National Parks created at the beginning of the 1950s such as : Niokolo Koba (Senegal), Boucle du Baoulé (Mali), Comoé (Ivory Coast), Nazinga and the Arli-Pama-Singou complex - Western part of 'W' (Burkina Faso), Pendjari-Southern part of 'W' (Benin), Waza (Cameroon), Zakouma (Tchad) and Manovo-Gouda-Saint Floris (Central African Republic). (See following map.)

NATURAL WORLD HERITAGE SITES IN WEST AFRICA



28.	'W' National Park	Niger
27.	Air-Ténéré	Niger
15.	Comoé National Park	Côte d'Ivoire
20.	Mont Nimba	Côte d'Ivoire/Guinea
17.	Tai National Park	Côte d'Ivoire
30.	Djoudj National Park	Senegal
34.	Niokola Koba National Park	Senegal
26.	Banc d'Arguin	Mauritania
44.	Manovo-Gounda-St. Floris National Park	C.A.R.

To obtain an objective evaluation of the contribution to conservation of all protected areas in sub-saharan Africa, IUCN and UNEP conducted an extensive analysis of their comparative conservation value (see bibliographic reference above). The results of the "scoring" of relevant conservation importance of each site are contained in the table below. It is clear from this table that not only is 'W' of substantially smaller size than its three neighboring World Heritage sites but its conservation contribution is far lower than the other three sites.

TABLE I

Comparison of 'W' National Park with other Natural World Heritage Sites in the West African Woodlands/Savanna Biogeographic Province.

SITE	COUNTRY	SIZE (ha)	CONSERVATION CONTRIBUTION SCORE*
'W'	Niger	220,000	660
Comoé	Côte d'Ivoire	1,150,000	6650
Niokola-Koba	Sénégal	913,000	5250
Manovo-Gounda	C.A.R	1,740,000	5220

* This score was derived from a comparative assessment of all protected areas in Africa as published by IUCN/UNEP entitled: Review of the Protected Area System in the African Realm (259p.)

Although from the regional perspective 'W' does not stand out biologically it does have the distinction of being the only major protected area bordering the Niger river. Major riverain habitats, however, are also found in Niokola Koba along the Gambia River and there are also substantial wetland and river features in Comoé as well as Manovo-Gounda-St. Floris.

Conclusions reached on the comparison of 'W' with other areas in the same Biogeographic Province are:

- the characteristics of 'W' are quite typical and are widely found throughout many of the other parks in the region;
- 'W', on all natural values is of substantially less importance to science and conservation than the four existing World Heritage sites in the region;
- the nomination area is only about one-quarter the size of the total transfrontier protected area block that it is a part of and is secondary in importance to other elements of the block (eg. Pendjari and Arli).

In sum, there is nothing of particular note that distinguishes 'W' from other parks in the region. On its own, 'W' is of national significance, but when seen as part of a transfrontier site with Benin and Burkina Faso it would also have regional significance.

Finally, on a global basis, the tropical regions of the world contain half (51) of all existing natural World Heritage sites. Of these 51, the majority (21) are found in tropical Africa. Africa is thus more represented on the World Heritage List than all of the rest of the tropics combined. There are certainly more African sites that merit consideration for World Heritage nomination but 'W' would not be a priority within the context of its biogeographic realm.

3. INTEGRITY

In terms of management, many recent improvements have been made. With limited manpower, equipment and infrastructure, the Park has succeeded in controlling the pressures it was subjected to over the last few years and in particular during the 1970s and 1980s. Populations have increased of many species (hippos, topis, red fronted gazelles, buffaloes) and others have made a come-back (wild dogs, manatees) whereas they were thought to have disappeared from the area. Avifauna is also of interest and new species are regularly reported. Management and monitoring techniques are simple and efficient.

Tourism is low-key and comparable to other protected areas of Western Africa (circa 1500-2200 tourists per year). Tourism in the region has been negatively impacted by the very poor management of the Tapoa Hotel-camping infrastructure. At present, it is managed by the Ministry of Tourism, but is still in poor condition due to its previous management. The new management team, with a private sector partner, has developed a new strategy whereby small tent villages have been set up inside the Park. These villages have been a success for everyone involved, in particular the tourists and are available at low cost.

Some current management issues that the park is facing are:

- available scientific data on the most important species or on indicator species are insufficient: since census methodologies have varied from year to year it is not possible to obtain reliable estimates. Furthermore, since there are no scientifically tested ethnological or other studies, the protected area is not well understood and detailed information is not available ;
- available manpower and equipment for wardening are well below the desirable levels ; the chief warden has 7 rangers, three drivers (1 of whom is also a ranger), 1 scout and 2 general purpose employees i.e there are a maximum of 15 people available for effective wardening. The guard posts are too few and far between to allow complete coverage of the Park which means that there are still certain vulnerable sectors of the Park which are not guarded at all ;
- there is no overall management and infrastructure program for the Park. Each year, the Chief Warden submits to the Central Authority his annual management and infrastructure plan for review and approval ;
- the available financial resources are extremely limited (5 million CFA francs per annum) and these funds will be cut by 50% during the next financial year.

The other two parts of 'W' National Park are situated in Burkina Faso (border defined by a virtual boundary) and in Benin (border defined by the River Mékrou) and are very important since the threats which face the 'W' National Park (Niger) originate from there : grazing and poaching are very common and practiced on a large scale. The lack of control of these transborder threats is a permanent menace to the integrity of the site. Despite an "accord transfrontalier de lutte contre le braconnage" (anti-poaching treaty) between Benin and Burkina Faso, signed and ratified a few years later by the Niger, only the latter country seems to apply its provisions. In Benin, the Treaty is not really applied although the local Authorities do not oppose the pursuit of offenders within their territory. In the area under Burkina Faso's jurisdiction, the Authorities do not take seriously illegal grazing activities.

In contrast with Burkina Faso and Benin who have both received considerable international aid, 'W' has not received significant amounts, except for certain specific programs which are limited both geographically and in time (American Peace Corps, financial assistance from the US Army Engineer Corps for the repair of roads, wetlands and the construction of some Guard Posts). The Regional Programme of the European Community, officially launched in 1987 and which is periodically announced as being implemented is still pending. Nevertheless, there seems to be a growing interest by funding agencies for 'W' National Park (Niger) and its contiguous buffer zones (Réserve de faune de Tamou, Secteur des Girafes): France, in particular, through its French Development Cooperation programme, its Mission locale de coopération and through FFEM has also indicated its desire to help either through specific projects targeted on management of the Park, or through larger scale tourism related projects and assistance in the implementation of a Biosphere Reserve. La Coopération Suisse, UNDP and the World Bank may also participate in the future. There are also local threats to integrity: the islands formed by the meandering shape of the Park are every year subject to intrusion by villagers of Karekpoto (a village located on the left bank of the river) who farm the land. The Chief Warden has plans to develop conservation linked activities on the latter lands and thus occupy the contested sites.

4. ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

The proposal of creating a Biosphere Reserve in the 'W' region (Niger) was endorsed by the MAB Bureau on the 15th of April 1996 and officially notified to the Government of the Niger in a letter dated 30th of April 1996. The concept of a Biosphere Reserve initially applies only to the Park itself but the MAB Bureau strongly recommended it must be extended to cover the peripheral areas.

The Biosphere Reserve of the 'W' region in the Niger will be based on the integration of several issues: different levels of protection, various stakes but complementary in terms of biodiversity, natural resource management and socio-economics.

- The Park itself (220 000 ha) would be the central core of the Reserve with its primary mission to ensure its conservation and the ecological maintenance of its adjacent areas;
- the Réserve de Faune de Tamou (on the North-Eastern corner of the Park) and the parts of 'W' in Benin and in Burkina Faso would be buffer zones with a strong social component in the zone corresponding to the Réserve de Tamou;
- the Réserve partielle de Faune de Dosso in the North-East and its extension to the Secteur des Girafes would constitute another type of buffer zone;
- the River Niger and the villages on the eastern shore line of the meanders that form the 'W' (Karekpoto, Tounga, Boumba) around which socio-economic projects will be developed focusing on tourism and management of natural resources.

The Biosphere Reserve designation of 'W' is very appropriate (especially if adjoining areas are included) and is the second international designation (after RAMSAR) awarded the site.

5. EVALUATION

'W' National Park is an important representative area of woodland/savanna in Niger with many natural values in the local context. It is both a RAMSAR site and a Biosphere Reserve. IUCN's evaluation suggests that it is not of international significance and does not meet World Heritage criteria. When compared to other sites in the region it does not stand out either for its fauna or its landscape. Its management certainly has improved over the past decade but there are still serious concerns regarding

its integrity. Additionally, 'W' is a transfrontier park but the nomination does not include the adjoining portions of the park in the two adjacent countries. Even if it did, however, IUCN feels that the site would be unlikely to meet any World Heritage natural criteria.

In conclusion, 'W' region in Niger is ideally suited as an international Biosphere Reserve and IUCN endorses the decision of the recent MAB Bureau to work toward this goal. The park, however, does not have "outstanding universal value" as required under the World Heritage Convention as its characteristics are commonly found throughout the region.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

'W' National Park does not meet any natural criteria under the World Heritage Convention. However, considering the importance of the park on a national level and recognizing the recent improvement in management, the Committee may wish to strongly support the recent decision of UNESCO's MAB Bureau to approve the 'W' region as a Biosphere Reserve (with the strong recommendation that the adjoining areas be added) and to encourage funding agencies to provide support for the operation of the park.

WHC/JWT/amb
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