

## **Declaration of the TATACOA as a Regional Natural Park as a result of the transfer of FOCALIZE to the Department of Huila, Colombia.**

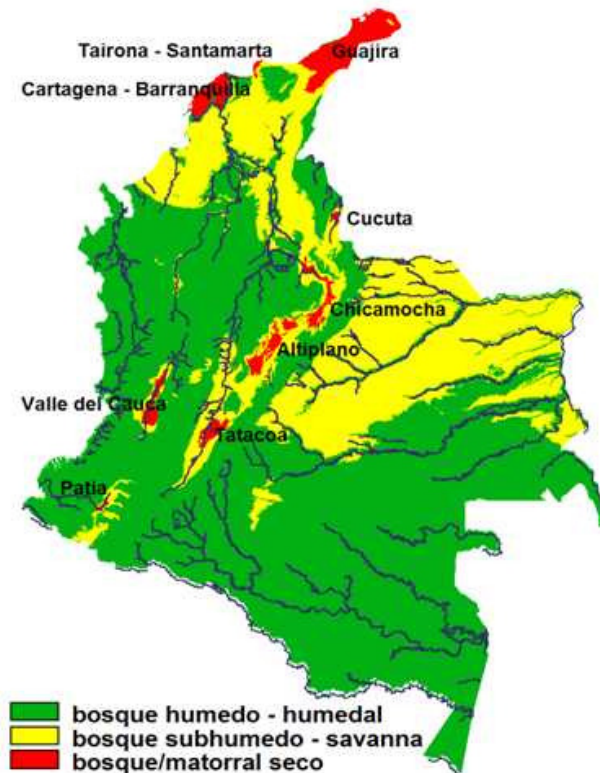
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On the 17th of December of 2009 the Tatacoa desert, situated in the department of Huila, was declared as a Regional Natural Park. This was due to the efforts of the Regional Corporation of the Upper Magdalena River (CAM), the SurColombiana University and the Grupo ARCO. During more than a decade the importance of this area was discussed as a habitat for many species that do not occur in other areas, its eco-touristic potential, its suitability for astronomic observations and its rich paleontological deposits.

The dry ecosystems of the inter-Andean valleys in Colombia are characterized by their own flora and fauna because they have always been separated by more humid zones which acted as a barrier for the species adapted to the arid and semi-arid conditions. The map below shows in red the dry ecosystems of Colombia.



The long isolation has given rise to many endemic species. The description of the family of Cactaceas by Cavellier et al. (1996) and Hernandez (1995) show clearly the characteristics of each dry zone. At least seven species of cactus exist alone in the Tatacoa.

Especie	1	2	3	4	5
Armatocereus humilis	x	x		x	x
Stenocereus griseus		x	x	x	x
Opuntia pubescens	x	x	x	x	x
Opuntia c.f.pittieri	x	x			
Pilosocereus colombianus	x			x	x
Acanthocereus pentagonus				x	x
Cereus hexagonus				x	x
Rhipsalis baccifera	x			x	
Mammillaria sp.1			x	x	
Hylocereus sp.3	x				
Opuntia bella	x				
Melocactus obtusipetalus	x				
Pilosocereus sp.2		x			
Hylocereus sp.4		x			
Hylocereus sp.7		x			
Pilosocereus sp.3			x		
Opuntia sp.2			x		
Melocactus sp.2			x		
Acanthocereus sp.1			x		
Rhipsalis sp.1			x		
Opuntia c.f.elabor				x	
Opuntia c.f.schumannii				x	
Melocactus sp.1				x	
Mammillaria sp.2				x	
Hylocereus c.f.polyrhizus				x	
Opuntia caribaea				x	
Monvillea c.f.diffusa				x	
Opuntia sp.1				x	
Hylocereus sp.2				x	
Opuntia sp.3					x
Melocactus sp.3					x
Monvillea smithiana					x
Acanthocereus tetragonus					x
Pilosocereus sp.4					x
Mammillaria sp.3					x
Hylocereus sp.6					x

- 1 Valle de Cauca
- 2 Patía
- 3 Cúcuta
- 4 Chicamocha
- 5 Tatacoa

fuerite: Cavellier et al. 1996 Y Hernandez 1995

Because of its unique character, each dry ecosystem emerge as a priority for biological conservation, independent whether one uses the course filter (land surrogate) or the fine filter related to endemic species (target species) as a selection criteria. The whole of the Tatacoa turned out to be selected in the Priorities for Conservation in Colombia, published a few years ago (Fandiño-Lozano and Wyngaarden 2005). It is necessary to protect the whole area in order to maintain viable populations of the different life forms present. Even to guarantee the survival of medium sized carnivores it is necessary to connect the area with the remnants of the sub-humid forests of the Magdalena valley

towards the south and the dry and sub-humid ecosystems of the Tolima department towards the north.

During the transfer of FOCALIZE, a systematic conservation planning tool developed by the Grupo ARCO, to the CAM various scenarios of priorities for conservation for the department of Huila were generated. In all of them the Tatacoa was selected, generating a very high value of irreplaceability. Based on this unambiguous result, an agreement of scientific cooperation between the Department of Huila, the CAM and the Grupo ARCO was signed in order to define the detailed limits of the core zone of a new conservation area. For this we looked for prominent attributes of the landscape that could serve to minimize the losses of wildlife and the impact of human activities.



Well done by the CAM and the Department of Huila. Thanks to Ariel Borbon, Alain Hoyos and Helena Borrero for the trust that made it possible for us to give a scientific base to the selection and definition of the limits of the core zone of this new park, and though this contribute once more with great satisfaction to the consolidation of the SINAP-SIRAP of Colombia. For the friendly openness of the colleagues of the SurColombiana; to

Edgar Cortés for his constructive recommendations, and in general to the people of Huila for making us feel at home. Let us hope that all that is missing, and that is a lot, is also declared in this and other regions of the country.

**Source:** Delimitación del Área Núcleo para la Conservación de la TATACOA. Informe final Convenio 202 de 2008, Gobernación del Huila – CAM – Grupo ARCO.