



PHOTOS: SHAPE, PHOTOGRAPHERS FOR NATURE CONSERVATION

A COLOURFUL PARROT FISH AND TALL STACKS OF PAPER International treaties protect all species

Nature on the three islands is spectacular. But it is also vulnerable, and many of the islands' plants and animals can be sold for big money on the market. International agreements have been made to protect these species and ecosystems.

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The most important biodiversity agreements for the BES islands are all part of the Cartagena Convention, including the SPAW Protocol, CITES Convention, Ramsar treaty, Bonn Convention on Migratory Species, the Inter-American Convention for the Protection and Conservation of Sea Turtles (IAC) and the Biodiversity Convention. We describe three of these below.

SPAW

The Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPAW) Protocol is part of the Cartagena Convention, a treaty for the protection and development of the marine environment in the greater Caribbean region. The objective of the SPAW Protocol is to protect vulnerable and rare ecosystems and habitats – and thereby also the endangered animal and plant species living within these areas.

“The SPAW Protocol requires countries to identify and protect their special areas and species”, says Paul Hoetjes, marine biologist and policy maker for Nature Management and Conservancy. Since 10 October 2010 he has been working on this task for the Bonaire office of the Ministry of Economic Affairs, Agriculture and Innovation. “The Saba Bank is one such area. We have been working for years to give it this special status, and it now looks likely to be happening soon. This will give us an additional protected area.” Under the SPAW Protocol, the Saba Bank will become a Protected Marine Area. Hoetjes: “The very first regulation that will apply to the area is that ships may not anchor there, because this damages the coral. More regulations could be introduced, but you can't unilaterally stop shipping in those waters. A ban on anchoring is possible, but to prohibit ships from passing through you have to submit the Saba Bank as a Particularly Sensitive Sea Area (PSSA) to the International Maritime Organization (IMO).”

Anchoring is already prohibited within the 12-mile zone, but not yet beyond this line. Hoetjes: “If the national government designates the whole Saba Bank as a protected area, the international shipping industry will be informed. This would include notification that it would no longer be permissible to anchor within this area. Three to six months later the Coast Guard could start enforcing the regulation and fining offenders.” Introduction of the Exclusive Economic Zone has sped up this process. Saba Bank received the status of protected area in September. The request for PSSA status has already been sent to the IMO for consideration.

Piles of empty queen conch shells. The snail is eaten on all the islands of the former Netherlands Antilles as a substitute for expensive meat. DCNA and SINAPA are investigating options for sustainable use of the queen conch. The species is currently not threatened with extinction, but it is included on the CITES to prevent this from happening.

Ramsar

The Ramsar treaty protects wetlands throughout the world because of their ecological importance for water regulation and as a habitat for unique plant and animal species and for birds. Of the three islands, only Bonaire has Ramsar areas: Lac, salina Slagbaai, Gotomeer, Pekelmeer and Klein Bonaire.

CITES

The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species, the CITES Convention, regulates the international trade in endangered wild fauna and flora. It deals mainly with the ban on collection, trade and transport or possession of internationally protected plant and animal species or products made from them. Many of the species included on the CITES list can be found on the BES islands. There are currently more than 200 globally endangered species present on the islands of the former Netherlands Antilles.

Red list of the IUCN

The red list of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) indicates which species need protection. It evaluates each species' risk of becoming extinct and the seriousness of the threat. The list includes a number of species that live on or around the BES islands, such as the humpback whale, staghorn coral, tiger shark and leatherback turtle. The list can be found on www.changemagazine.nl/rodelijst. ■



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