



According to scientific studies, Yasuní National Park, located in the Ecuadorian Amazon region in the provinces of Orellana and Pastaza, is the most biologically diverse region in the world.

On 20 November 1979 Yasuní was declared a National Park, in recognition of the fact that it contains great natural wealth that must be preserved.

In 1989 Yasuní National Park was made a World Biosphere Reserve as part of UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Programme of UNESCO. As a consequence of this declaration, the park's management must comply with the Seville Strategy for Biosphere Reserves, adopted at the International Conference on Biosphere Reserves held in Seville, Spain in March 1995. The strategy stipulates that in order to preserve their natural equilibrium and prevent pollution, the only activities that can be undertaken in a biosphere reserve are "cooperative activities compatible with sound ecological practices, including environmental education, recreation, ecotourism, and applied and basic research."

In 1999, a portion of the park was declared an "untouchable zone", which was delimited by the government in 2006. These zones are protected areas of exceptional cultural and biological importance in which no form of extractive activity can be undertaken due to their environmental value, not only for the region, but also for the country and the world.

All of these categories of protection were granted to this area with the goal of protecting and preserving countless endangered species of animals and plants. The protected area covers a total of 982,000 hectares.

The aim of creating the national park was the preservation of endangered species and protecting innumerable species animal and plant species, given that "any alteration or diminishment suffered by natural forests inevitably leads to the extinction or detriment of genetic diversity and thereby to the degradation of biodiversity."

Yasuní National Park is also one of the world's Pleistocene refuges, which formed during the drastic climate changes that took place in the Quaternary period. During this period, there was an alternation between dry and wet climates, in which the Amazon forests grew or shrunk. In the dry periods, islands of vegetation were formed that served as refuges for species of flora and fauna and centres for the formation of new species. One of these islands was located in the Ecuadorian Amazon, in what has been declared Yasuní National Park.

Yasuní shelters a wide stretch of what is considered the most biologically diverse tree community in the world, which stretches from western Ecuador and northeastern Peru to Brazil. A total of 1,762 species of trees and shrubs have been identified in Yasuní, and some 366 of them have not yet been classified by Western science (due to taxonomical changes, new registries for Ecuador and new species for the scientific community). The "untouchable zone" has not been studied in depth, but another 116 species of trees have been gathered in neighbouring areas. In fact, it has been estimated that there are as many as 2,274 different tree and shrub species in Yasuní National Park..

In just one hectare of Yasuní a total of 644 species of trees and shrubs have been found. To put this figure into perspective, there are almost as many tree and shrub species in one hectare of Yasuní as the total number of native tree and shrub species in all of Canada and the United States combined, estimated at 680 species. Researchers have also recorded over 450 species of vines and 313 species of epiphytic vascular plants.

Yasuní holds the world record for lowland forests in terms of the number of epiphytes per parcel of land studied. The density and abundance of epiphytes in Yasuní surpasses the figures recorded in the Andean mountain forests, which were believed to have the greatest abundance of such plants. At least 10% of the epiphyte species in Yasuní are endemic to the Upper Napo region – a small portion of the Western Amazon

Yasuní is one of the world's sites with the greatest diversity of birds, which 567 species recorded. It also shelters close to 40% of all of the mammal species found in the Amazon basin forests as a whole. This is a remarkably high percentage considering that the park's 9,820 square kilometres are just a tiny portion of the 6,683,926 square kilometres spanned by the Amazon basin forests.

In addition, Yasuní National Park is believed to be the area with the highest herpetofauna diversity in all of South America, with 105 amphibian species and 83 reptile species documented. It is also home to a high diversity of freshwater fish, with 382 species recorded so far, as well as over 100,000 species of insects per hectare.





