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The EUROPARC Federation gratefully acknowledges the assistance, expertise and commitments of the European Charter Protected Areas that have contributed to this brochure. Please feel free to contact them for more information and details about their work!



Supported by the German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation with funds from the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety.



EUROPEAN CHARTER FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN PROTECTED AREAS

Learning from Case Studies
of certified Charter parks in Europe



EDITORIAL

Some of Europe's most precious resources are found in its myriad of protected landscapes, and the people who live and work in them.

It is important that those natural and human assets are sustained in communities if our cultural and natural heritage is to be preserved. Defined as "development that meets the needs of present generations, without compromising the capacity of future generations to meet their needs", sustainability involves the preservation of resources for future generations, with viable economic and equitable social development.

The European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Area, developed by the EUROPARC Federation, is a practical tool that works to deliver implementation of key international guidelines and principles at the regional level of protected areas.

Developed in response to EUROPARC's seminar report *Loving them to Death? Sustainable Tourism in Europe's Nature and National Parks, 1993*, the European charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected areas was one of the priorities defined in the World Conservation Union's action programme for protected areas in Europe, *Parks for Life (1994)*. It has been recommended as a delivery model for their sustainable tourism guidelines by the Convention on Biological Diversity.

The principles, methodology indicators and verification systems were advanced through a French - led LIFE project funded by the European Commission DG Environment. Starting with 5 pilot parks the "Charter" now has over 100 certified parks in 13 countries and continues to grow.

With national parks, regional parks, nature park, biosphere reserves numbered amongst the certified "Charter area, included there are thousands of individual N2000 sites therefore important European habitats and species being managed under sustainable tourism practices and in close collaboration with local stakeholders. In a recent survey on Charter areas in 2012, undertaken by EUROPARC as part of the BfN (Bundesamt für



Parc Naturel Régional des Marais du Cotentin et du Bessin



Parc Naturel Régional des Marais du Cotentin et du Bessin

Naturschutz) funded project, it was noted that 7M hectares of N2000 sites were being managed by Charter areas ensuring that European biodiversity was safe in "Charter " hands. Further 3206 private and public business and organizations are actively involved in stakeholder for a overseeing sustainable tourism in their areas. With 73M visitors to the collective Charter area making a huge audience exposed to positive conservation and sustainable tourism messages.

Embedded in the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas, are fundamental principles of, protection of the natural and cultural heritage, participation by all stakeholders, instead of effective partnership working and planning to prepare and implement a sustainable tourism strategy for the region.

Underpinning these principles are the aims of the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas to:

- Increase awareness of, and support for, Europe's protected areas as a fundamental part of our heritage, that should be preserved for, and enjoyed by, current and future generations.
- Improve the sustainable development and management of tourism in protected areas, which takes account of the needs of the environment, local residents, local businesses and visitors.

The Award of the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism comes from the EUROPARC Federation through an independent verification process. The award recognises not just the commitment to but, the implementation of, practical sustainable actions by public and private partners. Such actions bring measureable economic, social and environmental benefits of well-managed sustainable tourism, strengthen relations with local tourism stakeholders and the wider tourism industry and provide access and membership of an extensive and dynamic European network. Further, all actors through the application of sustainable tourism practice in their region ensure the natural habitat and landscapes upon which they all depend are conserved for future generations.

This brochure, generously funded by Bfn (Bundesamt für Naturschutz) through the Sustainable Tourism Destinations project highlight some good practice examples of practical work being undertaken by some newer Charter parks across Europe. They show some local solutions to the issues and challenges of their regions.



Parque Natural Somiedo

A diverse set of case studies show some innovative ideas to involving communities in local planning, show how business can support conversation and how sustainable tourism supports the local economy. Interesting new communication tools are shown, and how establishing new and working partnerships is the key to successful sustainable tourism. EUROPARC is grateful to all represented Charter parks for sharing their valuable lessons and examples.

With almost 20 years experience and over 100 Charter awarded parks EUROPARC has shown that protected areas working together with tourism entrepreneurs and local communities can ensure that the “Charter” built on partnership, is good for Biodiversity and Business.



Parc National du Mercantour



Nationalpark Harz

Learning from case studies

Exemples of certified Charter parks in Europe

Some outstanding best practice examples were chosen out from Charter parks to demonstrate how EUROPARC'S Charter standards can successfully be implemented in the daily routine of protected areas and local stakeholders working in

partnerships among protected areas. In the following pages readers will discover new examples of sustainable tourism practice, from nine certified Charter parks in Europe.





In order to increase knowledge of the protected areas and sustainability issues amongst all those involved in tourism, Charter protected areas provide and support training programmes for staff of the protected area, other local organisations and tourism enterprises working in sustainable tourism.



Forest of Bowland AONB

Training and capacity

UNITED KINGDOM

Charter businesses learn together to share a “Sense of Place”

An excellent series of training and support activities for tourism businesses has been undertaken in Forest of Bowland AONB. In order to draw people together and promote local values a training toolkit “Sense of Place” has been introduced.

The AONB’s aim is to achieve several goals with its work on Sustainable Tourism using the “Sense of Place”:

- To agree on and promote the special qualities of the Forest of Bowland
- To provide consistent messages for all partners to use
- To increase awareness of what the area has to offer to visitors
- To develop a greater understanding of the geographical area covered by the AONB, and to create loyalty of residents and visitors to this area

The project started in 2005 with a consultation exercise facilitated by Pathways Consultancy from Manchester, involving more than 200 people including parish council members, elderly people, rangers, visitors and tourists. They all contributed with their thoughts about Bowland forest, their favourite places and memories, talking about wildlife, history and farming. All of the information was then assimilated into the “Sense of Place Toolkit” which helps tourism businesses to better understand the AONB, and to develop a Sense of Place for their own business.

The core purpose of the Sense of Place Toolkit is to facilitate actors to use the special qualities of the Forest in developing and promoting unique products, while contributing to sustainable tourism development. In summary, a “Sense of Place” is: a place to enjoy and keep special, try delicious local food and drink, a living landscape rich in heritage, wild open spaces and a special place for wildlife...

TRAININGS PROVIDED BY THE AONB:

<p><i>Marketing training</i> tailored to help businesses to market their green credentials</p>	<p><i>One-to-one support</i> for businesses wishing to undertake GTBS(Green Tourism Business Scheme) accreditation including marketing and website advice</p>
<p><i>Bowland Welcome</i> A half day customer focused course to familiarise businesses with what the area has to offer</p>	<p><i>Green Ideas Days & Green Showcase events</i> linked to GTBS(Green Tourism Business Scheme) accreditation</p>
<p><i>Familiarisation days</i> for Visitor Information staff and tourism businesses</p>	

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The Charter encourages protected areas to inform the general public and all the stakeholders involved about the impacts of tourism on biological diversity, involving the discovery and interpretation of natural and cultural heritage providing educational facilities and events for the visitors.



NATURAL REGIONAL PARK PILAT
Marketing and Communication
FRANCE

Working with tour operators to deliver quality tourism products

Parc Naturel Regional du Pilat shows an excellent example of improvement and quality of tourism activities on both its territory and as on surrounding target markets. The Park carried out interesting activities in the development of tourism products, particularly in the promotion and better cooperation with Tour Operators involved in sustainable tourism. The main facilitator was the “Maison du Tourisme du Pilat”, a body in charge of tourism information and commercialisation of the territory and the Charter Forum.

The Park has divided its main products offer into 5 themes: Hiking, Biking, Soil Products, Nature and Snow. For each theme, “Maison du Tourisme” has defined different criteria to guarantee suitable services for the visitors. To offer these services more than 60 mixed products were created, starting from half-day excursions to week long seminars and meetings for individuals and families (guided or free), groups of kids and/or adults.

Products and services are a great opportunity for the promotion of all the businesses involved, especially those who have achieved a Charter certificate from the Park, showing their

commitment to a sustainable tourism. To further improve the park is trying to facilitate a framework for possible future Tour Operators who would like to work with the Natural Park as a tourist destination.

In order to reach this objective, the park is involved in a project implemented by the IPAMAC’s network (group of 10 natural parks in Massif Central region) and the French Park Federation.

This project’s goal since February 2012, is to set up a unique method of partnerships between Tour Operators and Parks for which as a first step, meetings between some 20 French parks and 15 tour operators are organized. The outcome will be ready in 2012 and Natural Park Pilat will then adapt this method for its particular setting.

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Charter forum is an arrangement between all those directly concerned sustainable tourism in the area: the protected area authority, local municipalities, conservation and community organisations and representatives of the tourism industry. How the participation works in practice can vary depending on how the Charter forum is structured in each protected area.



Both for and through tourism, Charter areas protect and enhance their cultural heritage and protect it from excessive development. This means encouraging activities, including tourism uses, which support the maintenance of historic heritage, culture and traditions.



CLWYDIAN RANGE AND DEE VALLEY AONB
Biodiversity and heritage value
UNITED KINGDOM

Using new media to help visitors care for historic heritage

Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB shows an excellent example of bringing the landscape “alive” through new and exciting media. During the Iron Age, about 2500 years ago, people built and defended villages on the hilltops of the Clwydian Range and Llantysilio Mountain. These hill forts and the natural landscape of the open heather moorland are registered as Scheduled Ancient Monuments. A special project - the Heather and Hillforts Land Partnership - intends to raise awareness and understanding, promoting good management and greater access to this historic landscape.

Through the Heather and Hillforts Landscape Partnership Scheme, the AONB works with up-to-date technology to tell the story of how people and communities have shaped the landscape over the centuries. An exciting mobile phone Wi-Fi and Bluetooth audio guide has been established on bus routes around the Clwydian Range. People can listen to the audio guide on their mobile phones via Bluetooth whilst travelling through the Range. On these guides, local experts talk about geology, archaeology, agriculture, biodiversity and cultural connections this hill has with communities far and wide.

Currently, a reconstruction animation is developed for the historic landscape accessible via mobile phones and tablets.

The AONB has also recently introduced an Audio Visual Room at Loggerheads Country Park. This facility provides all kinds of video and audio material to visitors, including old films from the 1950s and a unique experience of simulated fly over the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley.

Continuous work with local communities lead to the publication of small booklets exploring the landscape of the AONB, the most recent is a history of the Jubilee Tower at Moel Famau. A series of walking guides for the six hill forts show reconstruction drawings and other information.

The project has also re-developed two of the key gateways to the Clwydian Range and in a re-shaping project of two car parks where traditional stone shapes and structures of Iron Age Hill forts and round houses were incorporated into the design of the car park. These areas now reflect the special region of the Clwydian Range and recreate the historic landscape.

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Each Charter tourism strategy includes a set of strategic objectives for the development and management of tourism, covering conservation and enhancement of the environment and heritage. Areas should conduct an assessment of the natural and cultural resources, their sensitivities and tourism opportunities.



PARQUE NACIONAL DE GARAJONAY
Assesments of Sustainability
SPAIN

Including people for better action planning

National park Garajonay is located in the centre and north of the island of La Gomera, one of the Canary Islands. The Park was certified as Charter Park in 2008. The progress of European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in protected areas in the park has involved a series of implications having a highly positive effect on the whole island. The Park has decided to follow a Participatory Rural Appraisal approach (PRA) (Diagnostico Rural Participativo) which comprises a set of participatory methodologies used worldwide in the international development context.

It aims at an ample integration of local stakeholders on different levels (political, experts and general public) to foster active participation in the process of collecting, sorting, analysing and prioritising information, as well as in the planning and development of projects, action plans and programmes. The participatory process developed for the implementation of the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in La Gomera is based on “interactive participation”, where the stakeholders go from simply being beneficiaries of the projects to become the real protagonist in the process. More than 500 people from different sectors have participated.

Except of the great number of participants, positive effect of the action plan can be easily seen through the number of actions taken in this process. A profound study and diagnosis of the tourism activities on the island has been produced, the progress of the project was also on educational basis aiming to form more technicians. Another important indicator to the

park’s development is the Charter forum, which was crucial to the revitalization, coordination and cooperation in the whole process. The Forum in La Gomera island has several functions including monitoring, reporting, communication and discussion regarding the implementation and impact of the Action Plan of the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in the protected area. It is a participatory structure to discuss and negotiate proposals, raise and discuss views and validate the process. Its structure includes 3 levels:

- *General forum* (open to the participation to all stakeholders in the tourism sector)
- *Monitoring Committee* (entities that have responsibility for the effective implementation of the Action Plan)
- *Coordination Tables* (match specific topics or principles of the Action Plan: cultural heritage, tourist information, training, education and wealth).

This PRA approach specifically aimed to incorporate the knowledge and opinions of interested parties in the planning and management of development projects and programmes. Many of the participatory techniques and tools have been used in the Protected Area, all with the same purpose to enable local people to share, enhance and analyze their knowledge of life and conditions, to plan and to act.

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YORKSHIRE DALES NATIONAL PARK
Management of renewal
UNITED KINGDOM



Impacts on flora and fauna in protected areas need to be monitored and managed. Charter areas should take action to reduce tourism activities which adversely affect the quality of landscapes, air and water; use of non-renewable energy; and create unnecessary waste and noise.

Visitors and businesses contributing to conservation

Special qualities and special experiences are brought together by Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority. It's strategy advocates a landscape-based spatial approach that fits people's own direct experience of the landscape and so is one that people can easily relate to and includes a diversity of experiences offered in the area. The strategy uses a simple topographic concept that is easily understood (such as dale and moorland features); which explains the sensitivities of natural elements, and provides an evaluation guide of acceptable activities or development for these different locations. In this process, the landscape is embedded in the planning rather than being a separated layer. In this context, the development of green lanes and of the Pennine Bridleway may serve as an example of good practice. The damage to green lanes through inappropriate use by recreational motor vehicles has been monitored and traffic regulation orders have been introduced on the most damaged or sensitive routes. The effect is monitored both in terms of the reduction of use and how the lanes are recovering. However for a long term solution, people and businesses needed to be brought into the process.

One of the busiest areas of the Yorkshire Dales, 'The Three Peaks' has started a pilot project on a visitor payback scheme. The "Three Peaks project " was set up to find a long-term funding solution and help provide additional resources to cover the cost of managing the Three Peaks area. It involved the development of "user payback" where money and in-kind funding is used, donated by users to pay for the cost of route maintenance thus reducing the need for large capital projects in the future. The pilot project enabled the authority to work with businesses, sell specific merchandise in cooperation

with a retail partner and to establish a "corporate friends' organisation". The Friends of the Three Peaks currently has a membership of 304 individuals, there are also 78 corporate and charity members. In the three years this project has been in operation membership and corporate membership fees have generated approximately £8,500. In addition a dedicated Three Peaks Ranger was employed to work with a charitable events provider. This project provided some solutions and some interesting outcomes which were not identified at the start of the project, for example there has been interest from local businesses wishing to support this project. A pub has added a small donation from its winter menu of locally produced food and another business a publisher of a book of walks using the Settle Carlisle railway, has dedicated an amount from the sale of each book. Whilst the initial support from our work with the retail partner has reduced. However, questions on how to improve it and roll it out to the wider area of Yorkshire Dales are still open.

In the first three years of the Pilot £36,680 cash, plus £3,900 in-kind funding has been generated by the project. The partnership is very much interested in further developing this approach and awarding businesses in the framework of the Charter (Part II). On the websites of the Park and the partnership, visitors are encouraged to take action and become "green visitors". The Yorkshire Dales Millennium Trust continues to promote with the protected areas the Dales visitor payback scheme contributing to conservation work.

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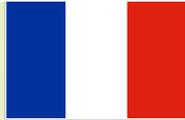
Website: www.yorkshiredales.org.uk



NATURAL REGIONAL PARK CAMARGUE

Benefits to local community

FRANCE



A focus of the Charter also lies in supporting and not reducing the quality of life of local residents through involving local communities in planning of tourism in the area, encouraging the employment of local people and ensuring good communication between all the stakeholders involved in the protected area.

Supporting the local economy in a fragile environment

When viewed from the sky, Marshlands of Vigueirat appear as a vast mosaic of open water, marshes and reed beds. The area is surrounded by small villages (“Arles’ hamlets”), where most of the inhabitants are of foreign origin, working in agriculture. The Marshlands of Vigueirat see themselves as a driving force for sustainable rural development in connection with nature and ecotourism. In conjunction with the coastal conservatory and landowners, the Marshlands of Vigueirat introduced a project on 2 levels nature protection and research with a socioeconomic dimension to integrate the local economy .

For the Marshlands of Vigueirat, the initial objective and priority was the protection of its natural heritage. The protected natural area is accessible to anyone and devoted to nature preservation. Due to the sensitivity of the biological richness and diversity, the access is controlled and only a certain (maximum) number of visitor and guided tours are allowed.

In 2003, the board of Marais du Vigueirat introduced the project: “Ecotourisme and développement en Camargue” whose aim was to create a tourist attraction centre in a sector remote from any tourism activities. The core objective was to better the rural development while taking into account a carrying capacity of no more than 100,000 visitors to this fragile land. From the very beginning, local people were involved with the idea to create employment. All aspects of local economic and social activities were integrated, such as agriculture, tourism, fishing, creating new employment and social services for the residents.

Following many contacts through a forum and working groups of residents, the complete project budget (worth 2.6 million Euros) was obtained with funding from different sources , such as the European Union (LIFE Promesse central government, regional and other public sources, as well as World Wildlife Fund and Gaz de France. The whole project was based on eco-efficiency: solar energy, recycling of waste and rainwater, reduction of water needs, use of local wood for heating, etc. Due to its efforts and achievements, Marshlands of Vigueirat site was awarded the EMAS certification (European eco management and audit scheme).

The project went through 3 phases:

1. *Feasibility study* with the aim to show the wealth of fauna and flora on 150 hectares of Marshlands
2. *Life PROMESSE* with the aim to reduce the impact of existing and future human activities on the site in the context of responsible tourism
3. Sustainable tourism *working with the local population* with the aim to directly involve the local population to revive the local economy and deal with tourism in the urban area of Mas-Thibert

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Blog promotes sustainable tourism (PACA)

Since 2008, the Park of the Camargue is engaged in the process of implementing the principles of the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism (ECST). This work comprises the park's territory and people. In order to share experiences, it is taking part in the collective approach of "Inter-Parks" a network of five Regional Nature Parks (NRP) of the Provence Alpes Côte d'Azur (Alpilles, Camargue, Provence, Queyras, Verdon). This network is supported by the Regional Council which joined in to pool their respective resources, support professionals in eco-friendly practices and enhance the appeal of the parks to visitors.

A partnership was initiated in 2011 between the parks and the Regional Tourist Board (CRT) of PACA starting a Blog on responsible tourism (www.mesescaparc.fr). The blog was launched in April 2012. It comes in the form of a travelogue of a journalist, called Helen, who participates in the discovery of responsible and sustainable tourism in the five regional parks of PACA.

The blog is interactive and contains photos and video reports. The topics introduced are chosen by the NRP and ARC highlighting the diversity and richness regional tourism offers, such as visiting exceptional natural sites, visiting organic farms in the Camargue, different Natural Heritage sites, and presentations of local knowledge. Active tourism professionals are involved.

This blog promotes the dynamic collection of the Inter-Parks. This initiative was created around sustainable tourism matters and through the ECST and support of professionals, its work is progressing, presenting a popular communication tool that contributes to the promotion of sustainable tourism in the entire region as:

- it gives visibility to tourism values, with authentic and quality products available to visitors
- it encourages tourism professionals to enter the eco-friendly steps that can lead them to get a label, like the brand "Regional Park"
- it gives clarity to the action of PACA Parks in sustainable tourism.



Communication in words and pictures needs to reflect the attractive image of a destination that promotes the area as well as providing a sense of matching visitor expectations scope and scale.

Website: www.mesescaparc.fr



LOCH LOMOND & THE TROSSACHS NATIONAL PARK
Participatory Planning- Social Capital
UNITED KINGDOM

Investing in people to serve Park's future

The Community Futures Programme in Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park, enabled communities to develop and implement their own action plans with support from the National Park Authority in terms of capacity building and project management.

A significant development of the Community Futures Programme has been achieved by the increasing role of the Community Partnership. Funded partly by the National Park an annual formal partnership agreement with the authority is formed, which delivers direct support to communities. This has enabled local people to take a lead role in supporting communities to renew Community Action Plans in a more sustainable way.

The Park maintains a direct involvement with communities through the Rural Development Directorate and provides help on specific community projects. The Community Partnership directors are appointed from the communities of the Park.

Highlights include that 6 communities produced and published their action plans with 6 who are working toward their second action plans. The plans have helped communities to draw in thousands of additional pounds to deliver projects,

The park works with many partners at all levels, from business CEOs to operational officers. A number of mechanisms were developed to facilitate the process and to reach agreements on priorities. Regular meetings of chief officers from local government and other agencies to ensure that the sustainability principles are embedded in the actions of partner organisations. The Community Partnership mentioned above has given a voice to the communities and that through the partnership work with environmental agencies such as Scottish Natural Heritage and Forestry Commission, are in place.

The Destination National Park Group (with representatives from key tourism businesses) contributes to the policies for sustainable development of tourism and has a say in the delivery of actions. Latterly the group has decided to constitute itself more formally as a not-for-profit organisation in order to access funding streams not available to the Park Authority and to take an industry leadership role in developing sustainable tourism. Engagement also continues with local area tourism associations and groups around the park. All in all we have found that investing in people is an investment in the national park and its future.



People power promotes park plan

Following a review of National Park plans, it became clear that cooperative engagement of partners had to be achieved while priorities need to be expressed more succinctly. This was achieved without compromising any of the sustainability principles.

The second Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Plan renamed “National Park Partnership Plan” to emphasize the need for joint delivery further refines priorities and focuses on activities. In a period of slow economic growth and reductions of public sector funding the Plan highlights the potential for the National Park to be a growth generator in Scotland while protecting this world renowned environment.



The central element of the Charter is a multi - stakeholder process to involve all those affected by tourism in and around the protected area in its development and management. The protected area authority, local municipalities, population, conservation and community organisations, representatives of the tourism industry and regional/ national bodies work together in a permanent forum or equivalent arrangement. This means involving local communities in the planning of the tourism in the area and establishing mechanisms for identifying and seeking to reduce any conflicts that may arise.

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NATURAL REGIONAL PARK VOLCANS D'Auvergne
Marketing and Communication
FRANCE

Tour operators – new routes to sustainable tourism

Since 2009 the IPAMAC – an association involving 10 regional parks across six regions in the centre of France – has started to build partnerships with tour operators interested in promoting sustainable tourism. A first agreement was made with the association ATR* to:

- further develop the tourism economy of the parks, offering to tourists new travel experiences in the region
- promote a sustainable and harmonised development of the region
- further develop public-private partnerships, working with travel agencies that share the values of protected areas
- help tourism professionals, and agencies members of ATR, to be more visible and to further develop quality offers oriented to strong human and environmental values.

Starting from previous positive experience, the Regional Park of Volcans d'Auvergne has established a direct partnership agreement with a local tour operator: Chamina Voyages www.chamina-voyages.com, which is member of ATR.

Through the agreement, the park authorised Chamina Voyages to sell tours and itineraries in the park area bearing the Park partnership label. In order to get the park label, those itineraries

must be approved by the park authority, which has the right to evaluate the general organisation of the tour, the selection of accommodations and the itineraries proposed.

In 2012 Chamina Voyages is commercialising 18 trails or tours within the Volcans d'Auvergne Regional Park, some offered just with a leaflet for excursionists, others with a professional guide. 11 of those tours have been developed in partnership with the Park. Looking at 2011 this would mean about 600 tourists and about 3100 nights spent in the park area. Since 2012 the partnership with Chamina Voyages has been strengthened to provide a more structured offer for tourists choosing non-guide tours.

The park hopes that this experience will contribute to the definition of the methodology for the Charter part III, working with Tour Operators.

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* ATR - Agir pour un Tourisme Responsable (www.tourisme-responsable.org)



The impacts of tourism activities on fauna and flora but also on the socio - economic development need to be monitored and managed. Within the Charter indicators are identified to monitor all results of the strategy and actions plan to adapt the activities in order to reduce negative impact. Tourism especially needs to be controlled in sensitive natural areas.

NATURAL REGIONAL PARK VERDON, (PNRV)
Biodiversity – Heritage Value
FRANCE



Learning to respect what we know best

Écogardes was started in 2002 responding to the request of local stakeholders to protect the park. Parc Naturel Regional du Verdon is visited by great number of people, especially in the summer months.

To avoid possible damage to the park, the behaviour of visitors had to be influenced as inappropriate activities on lake banks were threatening the ecological balance of the park. Thus, this initiative was launched to inform visitors about the fragility of local species, and “Écogardes” (the meaning of “garde” is similar to ranger) were introduced. Écogardes create a strong link between the visitors, the park and between locals and the park. Based on the idea that we respect what we know best, educating by raising awareness is one of the essential engines of heritage protection. It is the heart of the action of Écogardes. The objective of this action is to count on human emotions and transferring the message to sensitized people keeping in mind that the personal instinct of protection is the strongest human instinct. Awareness is conceived as knowledge, not as background knowledge. It is a means of disseminating information to promote the public ownership of the area.

Écogardes are chosen up on different criteria, depending not only on their studies, but their entire profile. They need to be in good physical condition, with developed communicating and listening skills, owning a good sense of psychology, understanding, good knowledge of the territory’s geography, flora and fauna and heritage issues. As regular employees of the park, they go through a special training divided into two parts; to help them to better approach the public and ensure

the cultural and environmental interests, socioeconomic stakes are always taken into account. They have various practical tasks: During off-season they travel through the park checking sensitive locations and footpaths. During the summer more rangers are present on sites with risk of fire, and on hot spots along the lake banks. Écogardes organise patrols together with staff members of the national forestry management agency; participate in tourism surveys contributing to an accurate idea of visitors’ profile. Écogardes stand out as a mean of direct communication and education. When they are in the field, they gain first-hand experience and keep track on the park condition, implement daily monitoring protocols on attendance and behaviour. Every year, visitor guidance is improved with informative posters installed along tracks.

By encouraging people to discover the territory in all different seasons, visitor numbers shall be distributed more equally throughout the year. The project intends to contribute to the establishment of another image of Parc Naturel Regional du Verdon inviting local actors to participate in regional sustainable development.

Today, Verdon Écogardes have developed a relationship with the residents of the region, supporting the Park in its mission to promote educational and cultural activities in the area.

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