

National and International Strategies for the Integration of Geological and Nature Conservation

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Earth heritage conservation, the protection and management of the record of the evolution of the planet through its rocks, minerals, fossils and landforms, is less well advanced than biological conservation. The threats to geodiversity are less obvious than those to biodiversity but are very real.

International measures exist to protect biodiversity but the World Heritage List is currently the only international conservation measure capable of protecting international Earth science sites. The biological experience shows that strong local support within the context of global networks offers the best means of protecting sites and these lessons need to be applied to Earth heritage conservation.

The WHL provides the opportunity for Earth science sites of 'Universal Value' to be protected, but a more broadly based scheme is necessary to complement the WHL if Earth heritage conservation is to be widely promoted. Earth heritage conservation can also be best promoted by linking together social, economic and scientific (geological and biological) issues in an holistic fashion. The IUGS Geosites programme, the UNESCO Geoparks initiative and the UNESCO Man and Biosphere Reserve programme all contain elements which show how Earth heritage could be effectively managed at the global scale. A single coherent programme is now needed. UNESCO is likely to be the organisation best placed to develop and promote such a programme.