



2023 TOP 100

GOOD PRACTICE STORY

Title: Tingo Maria National Park: Home of the Sleeping Beauty and the Owl Cave with its impressive oilbirds colony.

Destination, Country: Tingo María National Park, Perú.

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In the category: Destination Management Environment & Climate Thriving Communities
 Nature & Scenery Culture & Tradition Business & Marketing

The Story in a picture:

Tingo Maria National Park, home of the Sleeping Beauty and the Cave of the Owls with its imposing colony of oilbirds, regenerator of ecosystems. More than just a tourist attraction, it is a symbol of the identity of the natural heritage of an entire province.



Summary:

Ignorance is perhaps the most frequent evil that affects natural areas, leading the local population to engage in illegal activities such as poaching of oilbirds, an activity that took place in the cave of the owls in Tingo María National Park; after a long process of awareness, the articulated work with the institutions and their involvement in the development of their management documents has allowed the change to be favorable in every aspect; The home of the "Sleeping Beauty" is the best reflection of decades of work for the love of conservation, today it is not only seen as a tourist attraction but as a source of infinite possibilities for sustainable development and quality of life of its population.



Good Practice Story:

Destination description

Brief background of the destination.

On Peruvian territory, in the high jungle of the Huanuco region, is located the Tingo Maria National Park, initially established as the Owl Cave National Reserve during the government of General Manuel A. Odria, by Supreme Decree N°061, on October 16, 1950; established to protect the oilbirds, nocturnal frugivorous birds, confused at that time as owls.

Subsequently, on May 14, 1965, Law N°15574 established the Tingo María National Park as such, which includes the natural areas called "Sleeping Beauty" and "The Cave of the Owls", with its adjacent forests and colonies of Steatornis, when the country was just beginning to understand the concept of protected natural area; today, it symbolizes half a century of continuous learning in conservation, development and coexistence with the local population.

The Tingo Maria National Park has several tourist attractions; for its scenic beauty, highlights the whimsical rock formation that resembles a reclining woman, and the cave system known as the Owls Cave, which has been ranked as one of the most spectacular natural formations in the country. It resembles a stone cathedral because of its dimensions and the numerous stalactites and stalagmites that hang from the ceiling or grow from the ground. It has not yet been fully explored, but it is known to extend for more than 400 meters into the heart of the mountain.

The multiple diversity of species and landscapes has made Tingo Maria National Park the tourist destination par excellence in the Huanuco region, boosting the economy of the city of Tingo Maria and surrounding areas, with more than 100,000 visitors each year. In this scenario, conservation is made possible thanks to the joint work of the park rangers, the management committee, and the participation of the local population organized in tourism ventures.

Issues faced

Problems/issues solved with the Good Practice Story.

The Oilbird (*Steatornis caripensis*); It is a nocturnal bird, symbol of the Tingo María National Park that is characterized by having a brownish-ruffle color with small white spots; it lives mainly in caves, they are curious, bold and have a powerful sense of smell; the condition that makes it possess a complex radar system, called "echolocation" and that allows it to move without tripping on the walls of the caves, with other individuals or trees when looking for food at night, capable of consuming fruits up to 5 cm in length. This makes it an ideal disperser of large seeds and an instrument for the conservation of biodiversity in the Amazon.

It is important to mention that the cave system known as the Owl Cave is home to a unique ecosystem that revolves around the Oilbird (*Steatornis caripensis*), this frugivorous species plays a key role as the main source of energy for the cave, provided in the form of guano and regurgitated seeds, which constitute the habitat and food for a series of cavicolous and troglobitic species, among which endemic and even unique species can be found.

The local population previously considered that the bird that inhabited the cave was the owl, due to its brown color and its nocturnal activity; therefore, today the cave is popularly known as the "Cueva de las Lechuzas" (Cave of the Owls).

Therefore, one of the problems that occurred in this place was the poaching of the oilbirds, especially in the chick stage, used for food and the extraction of its fat because it is believed to have medicinal virtues. This is a very old practice that undoubtedly had a negative impact on the oilbirds populations.

In response to this situation, Tingo María National Park decided to install a surveillance and control post in the sector to control the entry of these poachers and protect the resident oilbirds population.

In addition, Tingo María National Park and the province of Leoncio Prado were the scene of a terrible era of drug trafficking and terrorism. The beginning of the drug boom in Huallaga dates back to 1974, when it became a threat to the flora and fauna of the area, where no institution wanted to take the lead.

Coca leaf cultivation had caused damage at different levels because chemicals such as pesticides, herbicides, etc. were used, which affected the environment and ecosystems. Thanks to the efforts of INRENA (now SERNANP), illicit crops have been eradicated from the area and today we can enjoy a 94% conserved area that maintains the flora and fauna of the area.

Since the establishment of the Park, there has been no tool for monitoring the population of oilbirds; this gap was overcome by implementing it in 2015 in order to know the population status of these birds, since then it has been possible to obtain a record year after year, maintaining an optimal population level of 4,000 birds in the cave.

Ignorance is perhaps the worst evil affecting natural spaces; many people enter caves without any respect and destroy millenary formations, kill animals and pollute internal bodies of water.

Methods, steps, and tools applied

Solutions implemented to address the sustainability problems or issues.

The owl cave, home to an important colony of oilbirds (*Steatornis caripensis*), and the mountain range known as Sleeping Beauty are the outstanding features that led to the establishment of Tingo María National Park in 1965.

Recognizing these aspects, indicated in its law of creation, Tingo María National Park has been concerned to establish in each of its management tools (Master Plan, Surveillance and Control Plan, Annual Operational Plan, Tourist Site Plan, Biological Monitoring Protocols), objectives in line with them, maintaining the concern to conserve the flora, fauna, ecosystems, scenic beauty and the development of sustainable tourism for the benefit of the local population.

Elaboration of the First Master Plan for Tingo María National Park 2003 - 2007:

- Maintain the scenic beauty of its mountains.
- Develop a nature tourism model that provides a satisfactory experience for visitors, while minimizing environmental and socio-cultural impacts.

Update of the Master Plan 2022 - 2026:

- Maintain the population status of oilbirds in Owls Cave.
- Develop diversified and sustainable tourism in Tingo María National Park.

It is necessary to mention that the Master Plan is the highest planning document of a protected natural area, whose elaboration process is participatory. In this sense, Tingo María National Park has

developed informative, coordination and sensitization workshops with the local population settled in the Special Use Zone and buffer zone (Río Oro hamlet, Juan Santos Atahualpa, Tres de Mayo, Cueva de las Pavas, Santa Rosa de Quesada, Bella and Bella Alta) in order to gather their concerns, opinions and proposals, and involve them in a participatory manner in the management and sustainable use of natural resources; developing a local development model based on the coexistence between human beings and their environment, thus working on the benefits of conserving and adequately using not only natural resources but also other ecosystem services provided by the protected natural area.

Through its comprehensive policy, which incorporates participatory management focused on sustainable development, SERNANP as a specialized technical public agency of the Ministry of Environment and governing body of the National System of Natural Areas Protected by the State, has as one of its functions the inter-institutional coordination between regional and local governments and private entities that act, intervene or participate, directly or indirectly in the management of Natural Protected Areas; Therefore, they considered environmental education as an instrument that generates the capacity to analyze reality and propose solutions to problems in a collaborative manner, it is also a means to promote resilience among the population and awareness of their role in the proper conservation and management of their environment.

Among the actions carried out we initiated the environmental education activity following the result of an internal survey conducted in 2014 where it was evident that only 4% of students knew the existence of the Tingo Maria National Park; after these works with the student population, in 2016 we returned to perform the assessment of knowledge about the ANP, with the result that 84% of students recognize the importance of the park in the conservation of biodiversity; Therefore, this activity has become a fundamental tool for raising awareness among the local population and is considered in the Annual Operational Plan; this activity is carried out in 09 educational institutions in the Mariano Dámaso Beraún district, province of Leoncio Prado, Huánuco region (I. E Juan Santos Atahualpa, I.E Bella Alta, I.E Bella, I.E Afilador, I.E Mariano Dámaso Beraún - Tambillo, I.E Bena Jema, I.E Cueva de las Pavas, I.E Brisas del Huallaga, I. E Melitón Carbajal - Río Oro) located in the buffer zone of the natural area; this initiative was key to the development of the youngest children, raising awareness among more than 540 children, the workshops were not only theoretical but also participatory, including activities with oilbird dolls, puppets, stories and theatrical activities; in accordance with the Peruvian environmental calendar of the Ministry of Environment.

In addition, they are taught to produce organic vegetables (radish, tomato, coriander, lettuce, paprika and Chinese onion) in school bio-gardens, fertilized with compost from the treatment of coconut residues (a very popular drink among visitors) and the guano produced inside the Owl Cave, a product of the decomposition of seeds brought by the oilbirds, bats and parrots; This also contributes to the economy of the children's families, since the produce is sold by the children themselves at local fairs and stores and is also used as inputs for the preparation of their own food.

Such was the success of the environmental education work that in 2016 began with summer school workshops in the months of January and February, called "Art, nature and conservation", where about 50 children between 8 and 13 years of age from the villages of Tambillo Chico, Puerto Bella, Río Oro and Tres de Mayo participated; The children learned in a playful way, through plastic arts, drawing, painting and handicrafts with recycled material, about the importance of conserving the ANP, the great diversity of flora and fauna it harbors, as well as the development opportunities it offers to the local populations. These activities were carried out by park rangers, specialists and volunteers from the protected natural area at the Tres de Mayo and Cueva de las Lechuzas control and surveillance posts.

At the closing ceremony, 50 children graduated as "mini park rangers" of Tingo María National Park, thus becoming spokespersons and agents of change who, from their homes and educational institutions, contribute to valuing and protecting the area.

In addition, the scientific work of outstanding professionals within Tingo María National Park contributes to the knowledge of the area's diversity and serves as a basis for expanding research in various fields. Therefore, in updating the Master Plan 2022 - 2027, research priorities have been established within Tingo María National Park in order to consider the results of the research work when making decisions for the good management of the protected natural area.

An action tool has been developed, the PROTOCOL FOR MONITORING THE ABUNDANCE OF OILBIRDS *Steatornis caripensis* IN TINGO MARÍA NATIONAL PARK, which summarizes the technical details necessary for an adequate implementation of the monitoring of the Oilbird (*Steatornis caripensis*) species found in the Owl Cave of the High Forest Ecosystem of Selva Alta. This document presents the structure and instructions to complete the monitoring of the environmental element based on its indicator, including a conceptual framework, the methodology to follow, as well as the organization and logistics for the implementation of the activity.

Specific Objective: Monitor the conservation status of the guácharos through the direct recording of individuals in the owls' cave of the Tingo María National Park.

Regarding the development of tourism in the Cueva de las Lechuzas sector, there are rules of conduct that visitors must comply with inside Tingo María National Park, considering that the extraction of flora and fauna species from the park is prohibited; There are also rules of conduct exclusively for entering the cave, emphasizing that it is not allowed to make noise, use flashlights with white light, or shine directly on the birds. These recommendations are posted on informative signs located at the entrance of the site and are appreciated by visitors, socialized with tour operators, and transmitted in promotional videos for the general public.

There is also an information panel about the oilbird, which highlights the particular characteristics of these birds that live inside the owls' cave.

The Tingo María National Park Tourism Site Plan has also been developed, which is a management tool resulting from a participatory technical process; its objective is to regulate tourism activity and diversify tourism services within the protected natural area. Its formulation was carried out after technical field visits, visitor surveys, interviews with tourism service providers, meetings with key stakeholders, the Tingo María National Park technical team and SERNANP.

There is also a study of the carrying capacity and acceptable limit of change, and in high seasons or long holidays, for the sustainable development of tourism activities, especially in the Owl Cave sector, which receives numerous visitors, measures are established through a contingency plan so as not to saturate the entrance to the cave.

Key success factors

Critical elements that led to successfully solving the issues.

Work in coordination with the local population and the management committee, which is made up of various public and private sector stakeholders, maintaining constant coordination meetings and emphasizing local participation in decision-making in the management of Tingo María National Park and the professional performance of the area's work team, who do a great job in the field.

Generating benefits to the local population through the granting of rights (signing of minor activity agreements, conservation agreements) has allowed the work of raising awareness of conservation to be paired with perceiving not only an environmental benefit but also an economic benefit, allowing to improve the quality of life of the beneficiaries, who through the fulfillment of the counterpart of the signed right granting, reaffirm their commitment to the environment and the Natural Protected Area.

Conserving the natural heritage of an entire province, such as the mountain range of the sleeping beauty has been a key factor for the successful positioning of Tingo María National Park, empowering the message to the local population that through compliance with good practices we ensure the sustainability of the scenic beauty and biodiversity in that area, for the enjoyment of many generations considering ourselves not only a tourism but also a conservation entity.

Consolidating management tools, socialized with the local population and main stakeholders, has allowed Tingo María National Park to maintain a stable structure, endorsed by the local population.

Lessons learned

Challenges faced while implementing the Good Practice and their solutions.

Tingo María National Park has been concerned about developing awareness strategies that involve the local population, starting its activities with adults. For many years, this activity had been well received; however, the need to work with the younger ones was identified, as they are more easily committed to their environment, considering a well-known phrase "Education is the most powerful weapon we can use to change the world".

The elaboration of management tools involved the consultative and creative work of a series of social sectors involved in the protection of the park and the conservation of the biodiversity of the montane forests; articulating with peasant leaders, university researchers, local authorities, NGO representatives, representatives of state organizations and of course with the park rangers who were present and made valuable and original contributions during the elaboration process.

Being aware of the conservation of the natural heritage of identity of an entire province, such as the mountain range that resembles a reclining woman, known as "Sleeping Beauty", and at the same time providing quality ecosystem services are actions to which we feel very committed.

We believe that awareness-raising actions should be reflected in benefits that improve the quality of life of the local population, believing that it is possible to grow economically without deteriorating the environment.

A Natural Protected Area must satisfy a range of conservation-related objectives. It is not only about protecting natural resources, but also about education, recreational opportunities, and sustainable development.

Achievements and Results

Direct and indirect results of the Good Practice.

Tingo María National Park provides an invaluable environmental service to the population of the buffer zone and the city of Tingo María by helping to regulate the water cycle of six micro-watersheds that flow through or originate in the park. In high jungle, the only way to prevent the rivers from drying up is to maintain vegetative cover on the ridges and steep slopes, because this cover favors rain infiltration and a high water table.

Currently, the local population has become the main allies for conservation, who are aware, are no longer offenders, and have found in tourism a tool to improve their quality of life, as evidenced by the 25 minor activity agreements signed with local people, who provide various tourist services (local orientation, food sales, handicraft sales, equipment rental, etc.) within the protected natural area. They have also benefited from competitive fund initiatives such as Turismo Emprende and Emprendedores por la Naturaleza, which are state programs that finance and encourage the implementation of sustainable tourism businesses.

The development of tourism in Tingo María National Park also contributes to the economic development of the province of Leoncio Prado. A clear example of this is that in 2022, approximately 145,000 visitors spent approximately 500 soles during their trip and have been able to generate more than 72 million soles, benefiting multiple sectors (lodging, food, handicrafts, etc.).

Tingo María National Park has been carrying out tourism activities for more than 20 years, starting with 10,000 visitors per year (2003), and later increasing to 100,000 visitors per year (2022) and considering the results of the biological monitoring of oilbirds inside the Owls Cave, to date, we have maintained the number of the colony of oilbirds inside the main and most visited tourist resource, which is the Owls Cave, counting 4,000 individuals inside the cave, who are protected and are monitored constantly.

Tips for other destinations

Your suggestions or recommendations for other destinations facing the same issues or implementing similar solutions

Although tourism is a fundamental tool for local, economic and social development, we should not forget that it can be used as a tool for conservation, especially if it is developed in natural areas.

Developing management instruments and making them participatory during the elaboration process has been a beneficial strategy that the natural area has experienced, we believe that the decisions made within the area should be consensual with the local population.

Having biological monitoring plans to adequately follow up on the species that are involved in tourism activities makes them more important than any other action, since the results will allow decisions to be made that do not affect the *raison d'être* of a natural protected area.

Developing tourism activities in a rational manner, with effective and participatory management instruments, avoiding impacts, benefiting the local population through continuous awareness-raising activities will allow future generations to enjoy what is currently being conserved.

Recognitions and Additional references

Recognitions and awards the Good Practice received and supporting evidence.

Recognition by the Latin American and Caribbean Network for the Conservation of Bats (RELCOM) of Tingo María National Park as an area of importance for the conservation of bats (AICCM).

Tingo María National Park has been recognized by BirdLife International as an Important Bird Area (IBA) in the Tropical Andes, since its territories are home to a great variety of birds typical of the Peruvian yungas.

Safe Travels: It is a distinction awarded to locations that comply with a set of protocols designed by the World Health Organization (WHO) to be clear about which destinations follow a general health

policy in the tourism industry. Thus, by seeing the Safe Travels seal, tourists can have confidence and recognize safe tourist destinations.

Top 100 - Green Destinations (2022 - 2023): The Top 100 Green Destinations Stories" generates an incredible collection of best practice stories, covering many aspects of sustainable destination management and regeneration. They illustrate the leadership of their storytellers and are a great inspiration for destinations, businesses and travelers.

Inside the owl cave we can find unique species such as the amblypygid of the genus Charinus Simon.

Tingo María National Park has given science two new orchid species, Andinia tingomariana and Andinia barbacaprina.

LINK DRIVE:

<http://foldersgd2.sernanp.gob.pe/index.php/s/41Tu4kGTIRQDCVn>

FOTOGRAFÍAS:

<http://foldersgd2.sernanp.gob.pe/index.php/s/qUSm1k0oAi2NQG9>

RELCOM – PNTM:

<https://elcomercio.pe/peru/parque-tingo-maria-reconocido-area-conservacion-murcielagos-noticia-nndc-560097-noticia/#:~:text=La%20Red%20Latinoamericana%20y%20del,entrega%20de%20la%20certificaci%C3%B3n%20internacional&text=El%20Parque%20Nacional%20Tingo%20Mar%C3%ADa%20se%20convirti%C3%B3%20en%20la%20primera,para%20la%20conservaci%C3%B3n%20de%20murci%C3%A9lagos%E2%80%9D>

BirdLife Internacional – Área Importante para la conservación de las Aves:

http://datazone.birdlife.org/userfiles/file/IBAs/AmCntryPDFs/Peru_es.pdf

Safe Travels:

<https://www.peru.travel/es/safe-travels>

Top 100 – Green Destinations:

<https://goodtravel.guide/peru/>

Ley de Creación del Parque Nacional Tingo María:

<https://legislacionap.gob.pe/wp-content/uploads/1965/05/Ley-15574.pdf>

Parque Nacional Tingo María - Plan Maestro 2003 – 2007:

<https://sinia.minam.gob.pe/sites/default/files/archivos/public/docs/313.pdf>

Libro 50 Años Parque Nacional Tingo María:

https://old.sernanp.gob.pe/sernanp/archivos/biblioteca/publicaciones/PN_TINGO_MARIA/LIBRO%20PNTM%2050baja.pdf

Notas Sobre el Ecosistema y la conservación de la Cueva de las Lechuzas (Parque Nacional Tingo María, Perú):

[http://cedinfor.lamolina.edu.pe/Articulos_RFP/Vol05_no1-2_Ene71-Dic74_\(08\)/vol5_art3.pdf](http://cedinfor.lamolina.edu.pe/Articulos_RFP/Vol05_no1-2_Ene71-Dic74_(08)/vol5_art3.pdf)

Andinia tingomariana:

https://www.nationalgeographic.com.es/naturaleza/actualidad/hallada-nueva-especie-orquidea-parque-nacional-tingo-maria-peru_13088

Andinia Barba Capina:

<https://revistas.ucr.ac.cr/index.php/lankesteriana/article/view/48840/48576>

Especies de Invertebrados Amenazados (*Tigomaria hydrophila*) Pág. 327:

https://sinia.minam.gob.pe/sites/default/files/archivos/public/docs/libro_rojo.pdf

Especie Nueva para la ciencia (Amblypygi: Charinidae):

https://museohn.unmsm.edu.pe/docs/pub_ento/Ballon%20y%20Armas%202019_%20n%20sp%20C HARINUS%20Tingo%20Maria.pdf

Trabajos de Investigación Universitarios respecto a los Guácharos:

- 1.- <https://repositorio.unas.edu.pe/bitstream/handle/20.500.14292/696/T.FRS-73.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>
- 2.- <https://repositorio.unas.edu.pe/bitstream/handle/20.500.14292/409/T.CSA-24.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>
- 3.- <https://repositorio.unas.edu.pe/bitstream/handle/20.500.14292/910/T.EPG-38.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>