IUCN Conservation Outlook Assessment 2014 **(archived)**
Finalised on 25 May 2014

Please note: this is an archived Conservation Outlook Assessment for Monte San Giorgio. To access the most up-to-date Conservation Outlook Assessment for this site, please visit https://www.worldheritageoutlook.iucn.org.

Monte San Giorgio

SITE INFORMATION

Country:
Italy, Switzerland
Inscribed in: 2003
Criteria:
(viii)

Site description:

The pyramid-shaped, wooded mountain of Monte San Giorgio beside Lake Lugano is regarded as the best fossil record of marine life from the Triassic Period (245–230 million years ago). The sequence records life in a tropical lagoon environment, sheltered and partially separated from the open sea by an offshore reef. Diverse marine life flourished within this lagoon, including reptiles, fish, bivalves, ammonites, echinoderms and crustaceans. Because the lagoon was near land, the remains also include land-based fossils of reptiles, insects and plants, resulting in an extremely rich source of fossils.
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SUMMARY

2014 Conservation Outlook

Good

Monte San Giorgio, which encompasses the best known record of Middle Triassic marine life, has a good conservation outlook. This reflects the highly effective protection and management system which manages collecting through permits focused on coordinated research excavations and associated programmes. Currently there is no evidence of unauthorized collecting or negative impact form visitors on this relatively remote wooded mountain area. Development of a monitoring system for the site will help better understand and identify long term changes to the site.

Current state and trend of VALUES

Good
Trend: Stable

Monte San Giorgio continues to provide an exceptional resource for understanding the geological history and the evolution of life through the Middle Triassic Period. There is currently no evidence of damage to the sites fossil resource. Collecting is carefully and appropriately managed through a permit system. Over the last five years there has been a considerable research output as a result of coordinated research excavations and there is an on-going programme of site investigation and the development of interpretative facilities and initiatives. The site is therefore considered in a good state and stable.

Overall THREATS

Very Low Threat

Current threats throughout are considered very low and there is no evidence of damage. The need to carefully manage visitors is recognized within the management plan. The site is relatively isolated reducing overall threat from collecting and is appropriately managed through a permit system. There is a

strong local awareness of the importance of Monte San Giorgio which also helps the overall monitoring of the site and the presence of volunteers and local museums is also considered a deterrent to unauthorized collecting.

Overall PROTECTION and MANAGEMENT

Highly Effective

The protection and management of Monte San Giorgio is overall effective. There is cooperation between the Swiss and Italian components of the site at national, regional and local levels in both countries. There is overall commitment from local and regional government to the successful delivery of the management plan. The funding regime for the Italian component, however, does not always seem clearly established, particularly as far as the development of long-term sustained financial resources is concerned. Facilitation of site excavations has supported a considerable research output, the on-going research programme adding to the overall universal value of the site.

FULL ASSESSMENT

Description of values

Values

World Heritage values

- **Exceptional record of marine life from the Triassic Period**
  Criterion:(viii)

  Monte San Giorgio is the single best known record of marine life in the Triassic Period, and records important remains of life on land as well. The property has produced diverse and numerous fossils, many of which show exceptional completeness and detailed preservation. The long history of study of the property and the disciplined management of the resource have produced a well documented and catalogued body of specimens of exceptional quality, and are the basis for a rich associated geological literature. As a result Mon San Giorgio provides the principle point of reference, relevant to future discoveries of marine Triassic remains throughout the world (SoOUV, 2010).

Other important biodiversity values

- **Sub-Mediterranean type ecosystem supporting both alkaline and acidic woodland and associated fauna and flora.**

  There is a strong and notable relationship between the underlying geology and morphology of the area and habitat type. Acidic soils (rhyolites) on northern slopes support stands of sweet chestnut, oak and ash. The lime-rich soils (dolomites and limestones) on the more southerly slopes support mixed broad leaf woodlands reflecting variation in aspect and micro-climate, most

notably thickets of warm-loving sub-Mediterranean trees. In the Ticino Canton the dry limestone sub-soils also support a number of dry meadows with associated plant populations unique to the Italian southern-Alpine zone. Monte San Giorgio (including the surrounding lakes) has 109 recorded vertebrate species including 37 Red List species. Monte San Giorgio is the only known habitat for Savi's' pine vole in Switzerland and the lesser horseshoe bat has also been recorded. The area is especially important for breeding reptiles and amphibians with six listed sites of national importance. Invertebrates are less well documented and include 53 mollusc species (including 18 Red Data listed) and 63 species of day-flying butterflies and moths (1/3 of species recorded in Switzerland). The dry south facing slopes of the Ticino meadows have a diverse ground beetle, cricket and grasshopper and spider fauna, a number of which are found only within this region of Switzerland. The area also exhibits a number of karst features in the Triassic limestones and dolomites including some 30 caves. As well as a large crayfish population found in the Gaggiolo there are unique, often deep, cave dwelling populations of crustaceans and millipedes (Nomination document, 2002). Lastly the Monte San Giorgio area is considered as a 'mycological sanctuary'. 554 species (in 2002) have been noted, 130 of which are limited to this area of Ticino and 5 are limited in Switzerland to Meride (in 2008 this list was enlarged to comprise 1051 species; Riva, Maggiori & Panzini 2008). This summary is based on data available as part of the Swiss nomination (Molinari et al., 2002), similar information was not available for the Italian extension.

Assessment information

Threats

Current Threats

Very Low Threat

Current threats throughout are considered very low and there is no evidence of damage. The need to carefully manage visitors is recognized within the

management plan.

▶ Tourism/ visitors/ recreation

Very Low Threat
Inside site
Outside site

Monte San Giorgio receives approximately 80-100,000 visitors per annum which is likely to increase as the site is further promoted. Potential impact could include increased erosion and pressure on visitor facilities. The need to carefully manage visitors is recognized within the management plan. For example, the Fossil Museum in Meride has been redeveloped and similar plans exist for the museums in Besano and Clivio (Italy). Also, new clearly marked trails targeted at walkers help manage visitor impact. Risks are therefore considered very low. (Nomination - Transnational Management Plan and OFEV, 2013)

▶ Temperature changes

Very Low Threat

High mountain environments are potentially susceptible to climate change. It is anticipated that the near complete forest cover of Monte San Giorgio should provide resilience in relation to environmental changes (IUCN, 2009)

▶ Avalanches/ Landslides

Very Low Threat
Inside site
Outside site

Occasional landslides/instability noted on Italian side, however, only marginally concern inscribed property and do not pose a threat to inscribed values (Nomination - Transnational Management Plan. IUCN, 2009).

Potential Threats

Very Low Threat

Unmanaged collecting is recognized as a potential threat. However, currently there is no evidence of damage from unauthorized collecting. There is a strong local awareness of the importance of Monte San Giorgio which also helps the

overall monitoring of the site and the presence of volunteers and local museums is also considered a deterrent to unauthorized collecting.

► Other Activities

Very Low Threat
Inside site

Currently there is no evidence of damage from unauthorized collecting though it is recognized as a potential threat. There is a permit system in operation restricting collecting to research excavations. The remote nature of the site and the complexity and expertise required to collect specimens will also limit unauthorized collecting. There is a strong local awareness of the importance of Monte San Giorgio which also helps the overall monitoring of the site and the presence of volunteers and local museums is also considered a deterrent to unauthorized collecting. The threat is considered to be very low.

Protection and management

Assessing Protection and Management

► Relationships with local people

Highly Effective

Key stakeholders are closely involved in the site and its management. Governing authorities at local, cantonal and regional levels are part of the management structures for the site and contribute financially to the delivery of the management plan. Local businesses also contribute financially. Local museums and the new Fossil Museum of Monte San Giorgio are central to the presentation of the site and provide an important connection between local communities, visitors and the site. Volunteers are involved in the management of the site though no details available on the volunteering programme.
(OFEV, 2013, Nomination – Transnational Management Plan)

► Legal framework and enforcement

Highly Effective

This is a transnational site with a legal framework operated in both the Swiss and Italian components of the property.
Switzerland – the landscape of Monte San Giorgio is identified on the Federal Inventory of Landscapes, Sites and Natural Monuments' which encompasses the core property and buffer zone. Palaeontological heritage is the property of the state and regulated by cantonal law requiring permits for collecting.
Italy – the nominated property and buffer zone lie within a Landscape Protection Zone recognized within national law. Palaeontological heritage (considered to be the equivalent to cultural heritage) is the property of the state and regulated by national law requiring permits for collecting.
The legal framework was considered appropriate on inscription and extension. It is supported and enforced through local plans, local staff, guides and volunteers and supported, where necessary, at a federal level.
(IUCN, 2002 & 2009, Nomination – Transnational management Plan)

► Integration into regional and national planning systems

Highly Effective

The site is well integrated into the local planning system.
Switzerland – Monte San Giorgio is identified within the Canton Development Plan as a Landscape Protection Zone and is similarly recognized in relevant Development Plans as a Nature Reserve. The fossil remains are specifically protected by the "Cantonal law on nature protection (2001)" of Canton Ticino which requires a permit for any collecting (IUCN, 2002, Nomination – Transnational Management Plan).
Italy – regional, provincial and local legislative frameworks are in place to protect the integrity of Monte San Giorgio and were considered effective at the time of inscription. It is also noted that the municipalities of Besano, Porto Ceresio and Viggiu applied for additional palaeontological 'restraint' in 2007(IUCN, 2009, Nomination – Transnational Management Plan).

► Management system

Highly Effective

Following the addition of the Italian extension in 2010 a Transnational Management Plan was developed (its development being funded by an EU INTERREG III Project) and is governed by a Strategic Transnational Board. It identifies the values and objectives for the site and is used to guide the

decisions made in managing, developing and promoting Monte San Giorgio. A transnational scientific commission took office at the beginning of 2014. In Switzerland management of the property is coordinated by both the Foundation of Monte San Giorgio and the Ticino Canton, at a local, cantonal and federal level. In Italy, the signing of the Convention of Monte San Giorgio (in 2008 and renewed in 2012) brought together relevant Italian parties (from a national to local level) to undertake the objectives of the Transnational Management Plan. The Convention is managed by the 'Commission for planning and management of the Monte San Giorgio UNESCO site' with the Mountain Community of Piambello taking on a co-ordination role.
(Nomination – Transnational Management Plan, IUCN, 2002 & 2009, OFEV, 2013)

► Management effectiveness

Highly Effective

No formal management effectiveness assessment has been conducted for the site. The management approach was considered effective on inscription (WHC, 2003) and extension (WHC, 2010) with the request to develop a co-operative transnational approach.

► Implementation of Committee decisions and recommendations

Highly Effective

In response to 34 COM 8B.6 the State of Conservation report (OFEV, 2013) confirmed the establishment of appropriate management commitment on the Italian side, the establishment of a transnational council, the development of sustained financial resources and measures to achieve consistent transnational management and identity.

► Boundaries

Highly Effective

The boundaries were considered effective at the time of inscription and extension. The core site follows the outcrop of Middle Triassic rocks on both Swiss and Italian sides. In Switzerland, the buffer zone is coincident with the Landscape Protection Zone. In Italy, the buffer zone relates to geomorphological and man-made features around the base of the mountain.

(IUCN, 2002 & 2009, Molinari et al, 2002, Nomination - Italian extension)

► Sustainable finance

Some Concern

Switzerland – sustained funding has been secured from several sources including the Swiss Confederation, the Ticino Canton, the Foundation of Monte San Giorgio, the Fonds Paleontologique Bernhard Peyer, contributions from local businesses and townships as well as income from tickets, tours and sales from the Fossil Museum of Monte San Giorgio. There is substantial commitment to 2015 including total funding of 1,463,520 CHF from Ticino Canton and the Federal Office for the Environment (FOEN) for 2012-2015 and a commitment to renegotiate for the next four year period (OFEV, 2013). In addition, the Foundation Promo (contributing approximately 2 million CHF), Ticino Canton (1 million CHF) Municipality of Meride (100,000 CHF) and Foundation Doninelli (amount unknown) supported the creation of the new Fossil Museum of Monte San Giorgio.
Italy – funding sources include the Commission for planning and management of the Monte San Giorgio UNESCO site (a 60,000 Euro endowment) and the support of approved bodies, assistance of third parties and wider sponsorship. There is less data available on the longer term funding.
Projects, on-going and delivered, supporting the key targets of the management plan have secured 473,705.58 Euros from a mix of national, regional and local sources
There is not a clear analysis of whether funding is meeting anticipated needs as out in the Transnational Management Plan.
(OFEV, 2013, Nomination – Transnational Management Plan)

► Staff training and development

Highly Effective

Switzerland – the Foundation of Monte San Giorgio employs a site manager (50%) responsible for coordinating management projects and promoting and disseminating information about the site. A Museum Director (40%) and two assistants (60%) are responsible for the development and management of the museum. Further support is provided from the Cantonal Museum of Natural History (OFEV, 2013).

Excavations are carried out by the Cantonal Museum of Natural History which also coordinates the scientific research activities.
Italy – a site manager has been established to coordinate the goals of the management plan. Further support is provided by the community of Piambello (OFEV, 2013).
There are also volunteers and official guides associated with the site.

► Sustainable use

Highly Effective

There is no overall assessment of resource sustainability. Site management, however, adopts a sustainable approach to collecting. Permit controlled collecting ensures the fossil resource (which is finite in extent) is excavated in controlled circumstances providing maximum scientific and educational gain from any collecting activity. Permits are issued to recognized research institutes only.
(IUCN, 2002 & 2009, Molinari et al, 2002, Nomination – Transnational Management Plan)

► Education and interpretation programs

Mostly Effective

There is an established and growing educational, interpretation and awareness raising programme.
There is a network of local museums associated with the site on both the Swiss and Italian sides including museums at Meride, Besano and Clivio. In 2012 the redeveloped Meride Fossil Museum of Monte San Giorgio was opened providing a permanent exhibition space and a focus for visitors to the site. Tours and open days have been hosted for the general public and educational activities involving schools in excavations. A multilingual website (www.montesangiorgio.org) has been established (and is being further developed) setting out the background to the site, management, research and current information about activities and events.
(IUCN, 2002 & 2009, Nomination – Transnational Management Plan).
A transnational brochure has been printed and a transnational hiking trail was inaugurated in 2013. The trail could, however, be improved. Information on the information panels is at places incorrect and sometimes inconsistent

between Swiss and Italian side.

► Tourism and interpretation

Highly Effective

80-100,000 per annum visitors are estimated and there is a clear awareness of the tourism value of the site with a growing provision for visitors. There is not a specific tourism management plan; however, the Transnational Management Plan has a number of identified projects specifically aimed at supporting and managing visitors. At a local level Mendrisio Tourism are represented on the Monte San Giorgio Foundation and there has been local media coverage of the activities within the site. Visitor impacts are managed to minimise harm through provision of visitor facilities, information and managed access such as guided tours.
(Nomination – Transnational management Plan, WCMC, 2011, www.montesangiorgio.org, OFEV, 2013)

► Monitoring

Mostly Effective

There isn’t a formal condition monitoring programme (the need for this was noted in extension evaluation (IUCN, 2009). Local museums, volunteers and guides, however, provide constant monitoring making unauthorised excavations difficult. On-going monitoring of compliance with national regulations in relation to palaeontological heritage is assured through the relevant national authorities. The successful on-going research effort associated with the site, and lack of evidence of unauthorized excavation, indicate that the management system is appropriate and maintaining the OUV.

► Research

Highly Effective

There has been a long history of research excavation associated with the site which continues today. It is fully supported by the management plan and established management structures.
Since 1994 excavations have re-examined classic fossiliferous levels (Cava Inferiore, Cava Superiore, Kalkschieferzone, Cassina beds) and investigated the Sceltrich new fossil horizon (Stockar & Garassino 2013). Excavations and

associated research continue to widen understanding of vertebrate paleontology (in particular fish eg. Lombardo, Tintori & Tona 2012), refined dating (Stockar, Baumgartner & Condon 2012) and modeling of basin evolution (Stockar, Adatte, Baumgartner & Föllmi 2013) and the study of new fossil groups, including insects (eg Bechly & Stockar, 2011) and radiolaria (Stockar, Dumitrica & Baumgartner 2012).
There is ongoing research on fossil material of Monte San Giorgio (MSG) in the collection of the Paleontological Institute and Museum, University of Zurich (PIMUZ). Overall, research is collaborative, linking universities and museums form across Switzerland and Italy and more widely, on specific projects, with institutions from around the world (eg Jadoul & Tintori, 2012). Undergraduate and postgraduate study of vertebrate palaeontology has also been possible.
(OFEV, 2013, www.montesangiorgio.org, Molinari et al., 2002, Nomination – Italian extension)
A transnational scientific commission took office at the beginning of 2014.

Overall assessment of protection and management

Highly Effective

The protection and management of Monte San Giorgio is overall effective. There is cooperation between the Swiss and Italian components of the site at national, regional and local levels in both countries. There is overall commitment from local and regional government to the successful delivery of the management plan. The funding regime for the Italian component, however, does not always seem clearly established, particularly as far as the development of long-term sustained financial resources is concerned. Facilitation of site excavations has supported a considerable research output, the on-going research programme adding to the overall universal value of the site.

► Assessment of the effectiveness of protection and management in addressing threats outside the site

Highly Effective

Monte San Giorgio is relatively remote and protected within its buffer. The site is therefore not subjected to threats from beyond the site’s boundary

and buffer zone.

▶ **Best practice examples**

1. The excavation and research programme provides an excellent example of sustainable management of a finite fossil resource in a remote area. This approach could be applied at other similar localities.
2. The collaboration and commitment from local and regional authorities and communities to Monte San Giorgio and it is successful management is particularly notable. It would be interesting to reflect in how this has been achieved and the benefits that communities see in the World Heritage Site. The lessons learnt here could be usefully applied elsewhere.

State and trend of values

Assessing the current state and trend of values

World Heritage values

▶ **Exceptional record of marine life from the Triassic Period**
Good
Trend:Stable

There is currently no evidence of damage to the sites fossil resource. Collecting is carefully and appropriately managed through a permit system which supports collaborative research excavations which continue to add to our understanding of the sites geology and palaeontology. As a result the site’s geological values are in a good and stable state. (OFEV, 2013, www.montesangiorgio.org)

Other important biodiversity values

▶ **Sub-Mediterranean type ecosystem supporting both alkaline and acidic woodland and associated fauna and flora.**

There is a strong and notable relationship between the underlying geology and morphology of the area and habitat type. Acidic soils (rhyolites) on northern slopes support stands of sweet chestnut, oak and ash. The lime-rich

soils (dolomites and limestones) on the more southerly slopes support mixed broad leaf woodlands reflecting variation in aspect and micro-climate, most notably thickets of warm-loving sub-Mediterranean trees. In the Ticino Canton the dry limestone sub-soils also support a number of dry meadows with associated plant populations unique to the Italian southern-Alpine zone. Monte San Giorgio (including the surrounding lakes) has 109 recorded vertebrate species including 37 Red List species. Monte San Giorgio is the only known habitat for Savi's' pine vole in Switzerland and the lesser horseshoe bat has also been recorded. The area is especially important for breeding reptiles and amphibians with six listed sites of national importance. Invertebrates are less well documented and include 53 mollusc species (including 18 Red Data listed) and 63 species of day-flying butterflies and moths (1/3 of species recorded in Switzerland). The dry south facing slopes of the Ticino meadows have a diverse ground beetle, cricket and grasshopper and spider fauna, a number of which are found only within this region of Switzerland. The area also exhibits a number of karst features in the Triassic limestones and dolomites including some 30 caves. As well as a large crayfish population found in the Gaggiolo there are unique, often deep, cave dwelling populations of crustaceans and millipedes (Nomination document, 2002). Lastly the Monte San Giorgio area is considered as a 'mycological sanctuary'. 554 species (in 2002) have been noted, 130 of which are limited to this area of Ticino and 5 are limited in Switzerland to Meride (in 2008 this list was enlarged to comprise 1051 species; Riva, Maggiori & Panzini 2008). This summary is based on data available as part of the Swiss nomination (Molinari et al., 2002), similar information was not available for the Italian extension.

Summary of the Values

► Assessment of the current state and trend of World Heritage values

Good

Trend: Stable

Monte San Giorgio continues to provide an exceptional resource for understanding the geological history and the evolution of life through the Middle Triassic Period. There is currently no evidence of damage to the sites fossil resource. Collecting is carefully and appropriately managed through a

permit system. Over the last five years there has been a considerable research output as a result of coordinated research excavations and there is an on-going programme of site investigation and the development of interpretative facilities and initiatives. The site is therefore considered in a good state and stable.

▶ **Assessment of the current state and trend of other important biodiversity values**

Data Deficient

Trend: Data Deficient

The biodiversity values of the site are inferred to be intact, however, no monitoring data is available.

Additional information

Key conservation issues

▶ **Monitoring**

Local

There is no evidence of formal monitoring for key fossil localities within the Monte San Giorgio Site. A monitoring programme, particularly fixed point photographs, should be considered as it will provide a mechanism for documenting change within the site. This could include impact from collecting, impacts associated with increased visitors and changes in habitat.

▶ **Funding**

Local

There is an established funding regime for the Swiss component of the property which reflects its longer history as a World Heritage Site. There is less clarity over the funding situation for the Italian component, in particularly the level of sustained funding (though there is clearly a commitment to achieve this).

Benefits

Understanding Benefits

► Water provision (importance for water quantity and quality)

Hydrological systems are important supporting a range of fresh water habitats and species

► Contribution to education

There is a developing programme for public engagement. Activities for schools are organised. Undergraduate and post graduate students are involved in excavations

► Outdoor recreation and tourism

Main tourism relates to outdoor recreational use - walking and potentially cycling and horse riding

► History and tradition

There is a long association with scientific study which has a historical relevance in the development of our understanding of Middle Triassic palaeontology. There is also an association with mining (oil shales) and quarrying for stone (notably Viggu stone) with remnants of industrial development within the site.

► Importance for research

There is a long history of research associated with the site which remains a global centre for research into the MiddleTriassic.

► Does management of the site provide jobs (e.g. for managers or rangers)?

There a number of jobs associated with the WHS including direct

employment of site managers, museum staffing, guides and volunteers

Summary of benefits

The geological interest underpins the key benefits of Monte San Giorgio. It is globally significant to our knowledge and understanding of Middle Triassic palaeotonology and continues to contribute to global, national and local research programmes. There are significant opportunities to develop the learning/educational potential of the site as the visitor centres and museums develop over the coming years. The remote montane forests of Monte San Giorgio and its associated wildlife, all influenced by underlying geology, are also paramount among the benefits thes area provides to both local communities and visitors. Both the geology and wildlife provide economic benefits to the area acting as a draw for visitors, who contribute to the local economy, and the developing infrastructure of museums and visitor centres which celebrate Monte San Giorgio.

Projects

Compilation of active conservation projects

№	Organization/ individuals	Project duration	Brief description of Active Projects
1	Monte San Giorgio Foundation		Monte San Giorgio website – on-going development
2	Monte San Giorgio Foundation (Switzerland) and Commission for planning and management ot the Monte San Giorgio UNESCO site (Italy)		Develop a network of walking trails
3	Monte San Giorgio Foundation		Meride Museum (opened 2012) – on-going development of new exhibition projects
4	Municipality of Besano		Besano Museum- on-going development - Italy
5	Cantonal Museum of Natural History		Palaeontological excavations and geological investigations throughout the Middle Triassic sequence– on-going - Switzerland

№	Organization/ individuals	Project duration	Brief description of Active Projects
6	Commission for planning and management ot the Monte San Giorgio UNESCO site (Italy)		Clivio Museum and visitor center- on-going development - Italy

Compilation of potential site needs

№	Site need title	Brief description of potential site needs	Support needed for following years
1	.	Monitoring – develop an approach to monitoring the condition key elements within the World Heritage Site	

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