

NATURE



AROUND THE WORLD IN SEVEN PARKS



find out more

URBAN NATIONAL PARKS

WHERE WILDERNESS MEETS THE CITY

Executive producers: **Sabine Holzer, Thomas Weidenbach**
7 x 50 min., 4K, 5.1 + Stereo



You'd think of National Parks as remote, wild places but many of them are surprisingly close to – or even within – major cities. And here, iconic wildlife lives alongside the seething metropolis. The most exciting places are where nature meets civilization directly.

This series will travel the world to visit well-known cities and meet the less well-known wildlife on their doorsteps. Each of these urban jungles has its distinct history and tells its own marvellous story. Of course, men and beasts sometimes carry out their disputes. But this is where some strange neighbours have learned to live together.

From Cape Town to Cleveland, from Rio de Janeiro to Singapore, and from Nairobi via Vienna to Miami, we'll find a spectacular diversity of nature not only thriving but even taking advantage of their adjacent city.

Table Mountain and Cape of Good Hope, South Africa

Table Mountain, often draped in cloud, rises from the sprawl of Cape Town in South Africa, a mysterious world high above the city – and a botanical wonder. Three quarters of the strange plants on the summit are found nowhere else in the world. The spectacular king protea has become an emblem of the mountain, often visited by colourful sunbirds – Africa's hummingbirds. The steep rock slopes are home to colonies of rock hyraxes, strange little creatures whose nearest relatives are elephants. The only place where Chacma baboons crack shells of mussels.

This National Park also includes the Cape of Good Hope, Africa's most southwesterly point.

Grassy plains run down to the sea where Cape Mountain zebras and ostriches, with lines of chicks in tow, hang out on the beach. Boulder Beach hosts a large colony of jackass penguins an incongruous sight on a dazzling white, palm-fringed beach.

Biscayne Bay, Florida

A stone's throw from Miami, Biscayne Bay has some of the largest remaining coral reefs on the planet. They teem with fish and turtles and the azure waters are fishing grounds for ospreys that often nest on pylons or bridges around Key Biscayne. Manatees cruise the shallow waters while reddish egrets prance around in the shallows – their frenetic fishing technique looks more likely to scare fish, but somehow, they manage to catch plenty in these rich waters. The bay is fringed by tidal forests of mangroves – safe nurseries for many of the reef fishes.

Just offshore from Miami a new reef is beginning to grow – an artificial reef built to look like the lost city of Atlantis. Well, this is Florida – home of theme parks. But the Neptune Memorial Reef is the largest artificial reef in the world and its columns and plazas are already being colonized by corals while fish swim through the colonnades.

Tijuca, Rio de Janeiro

The statue of Christ the Redeemer must be one of the best-known sights on the planet. It towers over the city of Rio de Janeiro and over the Tijuca Forest, a verdant paradise compared to the hustle and bustle of Rio.

Although it looks like wilderness – much of the forest has only recently grown back after it was cleared for plantations. It's now a crucial refuge for animals and plants of the Atlantic rainforest, one of the most threatened habitats on Earth. Researchers have repeatedly succeeded in reintroducing animals that have disappeared, such as howler monkeys and turtle species.

The rainforest is as busy as the city in its own way. Black capuchin monkeys, common marmosets and squirrel monkeys scurry through the forest canopy ... but need to look out for margays. One of the most beautiful cats in the world, they're quite at home in the trees – and they can be cunning. They've been known to imitate the calls of monkeys to lure these curious creatures within striking range.

Brown-throated sloths live life here at their own pace – “dead slow” or “stop” – while South American coatis range through the forest like street gangs, investigating everything they find.

Colourful birds and butterflies are everywhere – all the dazzling colours you'd expect from a city that's home to the biggest carnival in the world.

Nairobi, Kenya

Nairobi National Park is one of the most extraordinary places on the planet. Herds of zebra, buffaloes and antelopes live out their lives against a backdrop of the skyscrapers of Kenya's capital city.

Both white and black rhinos have been introduced to the park, which now plays a critical role in conserving these species – in 2020, a white rhino calf was born in the park.

Lions and giraffe also roam within site of the city and chattering troops of vervet monkeys are common in the groves of yellow bark fever trees. They need to watchful, though, as the magnificent Verreaux's eagle hunts the skies here – this massive, jet black eagle loves the taste of monkey.

More shy, and not seen as often, white-tailed mongooses and leopards only venture out at night to hunt in the glow of city lights.

Bukit Timah, Singapore

Singapore prides itself on being a city integrated with nature, symbolized by the famous 'supertrees' – 18 solar powered artificial trees, standing 50 meters high, that have now become icons of the 'City in a Garden'.



© gettyimages

NATURE

#rrramatters

But there's plenty of real nature here too. Several National Parks weave through the city, including Bukit Timah – the first of the forest reserves to be created back in 1883 and just 12 kilometers from the very centre of the city. The highest hill in the city, its slopes are covered in dense rainforest. It's among the best places to find one of the strangest animals on Earth – the colugo. Distant relatives of primates, they can glide up to 200 meters between trees on huge gliding membranes stretched between their legs.

Below these flying tea trays, an equally unlikely creature snuffles through the forest floor. Pangolins look like animated pinecones as they sniff out ants and termites. They're covered in scales that make them look more like reptiles than mammals.

Donau-Auen, Vienna

The river Danube is world famous thanks to Vienna's favourite son, Johann Straus II and his waltz, the Blue Danube.

The river runs through Vienna where it breaks up into a network of side channels. Although the main channel is busy, the backwaters form some of the largest remaining floodplain forests and marshes along the Danube.

The park stretches from the centre of Vienna, downstream to Bratislava in Slovakia.

Some of the channels have been restored, both by human engineers and by nature's own engineers – beavers. Eurasian beavers are common here and create habitat for many other species.

White storks nest in local villages and feed on the rich floodplain grasslands. Colourful bee-eaters and kingfishers nest in the river banks, while red deer wade in the shallows – and wild boar lead their large families of stripy piglets on foraging trips into the marshy woodland. The great biodiversity contributes to the fact that Vienna has repeatedly been voted the most liveable city in the world. The Viennese are proud of it, also because the national park owes its existence to the people's resistance against a dam.

Cuyahoga Valley, Cleveland, Ohio

No one would have expected that bald eagles circle just outside the Cleveland metropolitan area, or that coyotes and otters hunt there. The Cuyahoga Valley is one of the youngest national parks in the U.S., but its history is one of the most exciting.

Nature and wildlife have returned here with a force to a landscape shaped by industry for decades that is unparalleled. The namesake Cuyahoga River was one of the most polluted rivers in North America until the 1980s.

Today, it feeds a multitude of wetlands and empties into the massive Lake Erie, one of the five Great Lakes, in Cleveland. The national park represents the resurrection of a grandiose natural landscape that white-tailed deer and even black bears have reclaimed.

A production of Terra Mater Studios and
Längengrad Filmproduktion

