

The proposed Khorat Geopark: conservation of prominent geosites and important natural resources of Thailand

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Nakhon Ratchasima, also known as Khorat, is one of the most prominent provinces in northeastern Thailand for its unique geological heritage and diverse natural resources. The aspiring Khorat Geopark is proposed in 2015, covering southwestern Nakhon Ratchasima, 9,862.24 km², including Paleozoic, Mesozoic (new taxa of dinosaurs, crocodile, hybodont shark, and turtles), and Cenozoic fossil sites. The Cenozoic sediments contain diverse mammalian fossils and petrified tree trunks.

Some of the most exciting discoveries in the area are the new ape taxon, *Khoratpithecus piriyai*, and 10 of the 44 total genera of ancient proboscideans, in addition to fossils related to currently living African mammals, such as hyenas and giraffes. To conserve fossils, the Nakhon Ratchasima Rajabhat University has collaborated with the provincial government and the Department of Mineral Resources by establishing on-site museums and organizing educational programs related to geology and paleontology for the public. The proposed geopark will include important ecological sites in the Dong Phrayayen-Khao Yai Forest Complex World Heritage Site and the Sakaerat Biosphere Reserve under the Man and Biosphere Reserve Network UNESCO. Numerous wildlife species and plants, including vulnerable, threatened, and endangered species, are protected in these tropical forests. The Sakaerat Environmental Research Station facilitates some of the region's most comprehensive research and monitoring programs and hosts science camps for approximately 17,000 students each year. The establishment of Khorat Geopark will aid in conserving the geological resources and benefit locals as part of the integrative program of protection, conservation, tourism promotion, economic, and sustainable development of the region.