



KOLKHETI NATIONAL PARK

THE LEGEND GOES ON

KOLKHETI PROTECTED AREAS:

Kolkheti Protected Areas: Kolkheti National Park, Kobuleti Nature Reserve and Kobuleti Managed Reserve

Welcome to Kolkheti Protected Areas, encompassing lowland landscapes found nowhere else within Georgia.

The vegetation of the Kolkheti lowlands includes rare relics of a tropical and subtropical landscape belt that stretched across the Eurasian continent approximately 10 million years ago. A more recent assortment of plants, adapted to the far north, arrived here after the glacial period less than 10,000 years ago.

The Kolkheti lowlands have supported humans for thousands of years. Tribal peoples lived and hunted here more than 15,000 years ago. The ancient Greeks established trading posts here more than 3,000 years ago. The famous story of Jason and his crew of Argonauts seeking a golden fleece comes from this area at that time. Throughout all these years, people have taken care to preserve these ecologically important lands. It is critical for us to continue this legacy of protection, so that

these natural places will be part of our great-grandchildren's inheritance in years to come.

Recognized as an important natural area, a 500-hectare portion of swampy forest and mire between the Rioni and Pichori Rivers was established as Kolkheti Nature Reserve in 1935.

The world-wide significance of the region was acknowledged in 1996 when Georgia joined the international convention on wetlands, known as the *Ramsar convention*. At that time, two wetland areas within the Kolkheti lowlands were identified as Ramsar sites of international importance: "Ispani-II" mire in what would become Kobuleti Nature Reserve and "Central Kolkheti" in what would become Kolkheti



National Park. These sites received this designation because they are important for wintering, nesting and migratory birds.

The law on the creation and management of the Kolkheti protected areas was passed in 1999. Kolkheti National Park became fully operational in 2000. The park has been established with the support by the Ministry of Environment Protection and Natural Resources of Georgia, The Global Environment Facility, The World Bank and other international, national and local institutions.

Kolkheti National Park covers almost 29,000 hectares of land and also marine area. More than 190 species of birds have been observed within its borders.



Kolkheti Protected Areas

VISIT LAKE, MIRE AND FORESTS.



Kolkheti Forests

There are three special and unique landscapes that exist only in this humid lowland area within Georgia. These landscapes are Paliastomi Lake, Imnati Mire and Kolkheti Wetland Forests.

Paliastomi Lake

Many thousands of years ago, Lake Paliastomi was a lagoon opening on to the Black Sea. Over hundreds of years, waves moving sand and pebbles along the coast closed off the lagoon from the saltier water of the Sea. The Pichori River carried fresh water down into the lake from the mountains of western Georgia. As a freshwater lake up to 3 meters deep, Paliastomi supported numerous healthy populations of fish which fed on the invertebrates and plankton living in the lake.

Human activities since 1920 have disrupted

the ecology of the lake, resulting in reduced fish populations. Some of these disruptions include opening a waterway to the sea, which has let in saltier water, and allowing pollution from the rivers to collect in the lake.

Imnati Mire

Hidden from view beyond the lake lies the vast, 12-meter deep, domed surface of moss and other specialized vegetation of Imnati mire. Similar to other mires within the Kolkheti Protected Areas, Imnati mire is a special type of mire called a percolation bog. This means that the interior of the mire is permeable enough that water can move, or "percolate," through to its deepest part.

Although semitropical vegetation covers much of the Kolkheti lowlands, the mires are interesting because they support plant species



Imnati Mires

usually found in northern regions. During the ice age 10,000 years ago, vast areas of the Earth's surface were covered by ice and snow. When the glaciers retreated from this area, a few northern plant species found a way to survive here and they now reside in the Kolkheti mires.

Kolkheti Forest

Along the Pichori River and around the mires are swampy forests found nowhere else in Georgia. The vegetation within



Lake Paliastomi



Seashore

these forests is well-adapted to the wet soils and warm, humid environment of this frequently flooded area.

These swampy forests were once composed of numerous species of shrubs and trees, many that reached more than 30 meters high. Logging activities, however, have reduced the forests' biodiversity and the number of foods and useful products that can be produced from the forest. As the larger species of trees were cut down, fast-growing alders (*Alnus barbata*), which rarely reach 10 meters high, grew up in their place. Alders now dominate in many parts of these lowland forests.

KOLKHETI NATIONAL PARK'S MIRES: AN ANCIENT LANDSCAPE STILL ALIVE TODAY



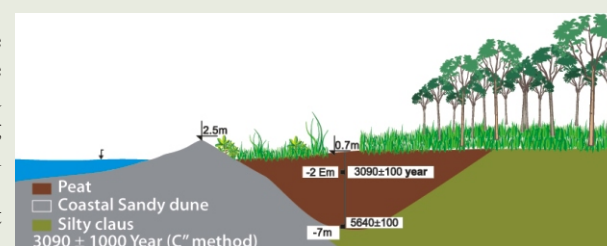
Azalea (*Rhododendron luteum*)

The mires began to form thousands of years ago

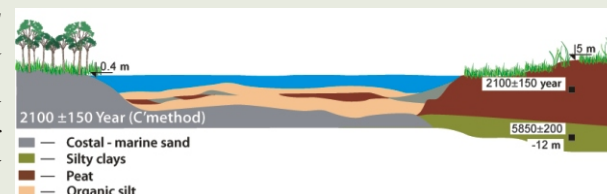
After the end of the last ice age (10,000 years ago) the Black Sea rose to its current level. Dunes formed along the coast in this area, trapping water run-off from the mountains in freshwater lakes behind the dunes. Sand, gravel and clay accumulated at the bottom of these lakes.

Approximately 6,000 years ago, the lake that would become Imnati mire filled with reeds (*Phragmites australis*). As these plants grew and died, nutrient levels decreased, leading to vegetation dominated by sedges (*Carex species*), purple moor grass (*Molinia litoralis*) and saw

Geologic Profile of Anaklia Peatbog



Geologic Profile of Lake Paliastomi and Imnati Peatbog



grass (*Cladium mariscus*). This phase of *Cladium* peat deposition lasted 4,000 years. About 2,000 years ago, peat accumulation raised the surface of Imnati mire above sea level. The vegetation became dominated by mosses (*Sphagnum species*) and purple moor grass. This *Molinia*-*Sphagnum* peat deposition is still occurring today. It has raised the surface of Imnati mire as much as 6 meters above sea level.



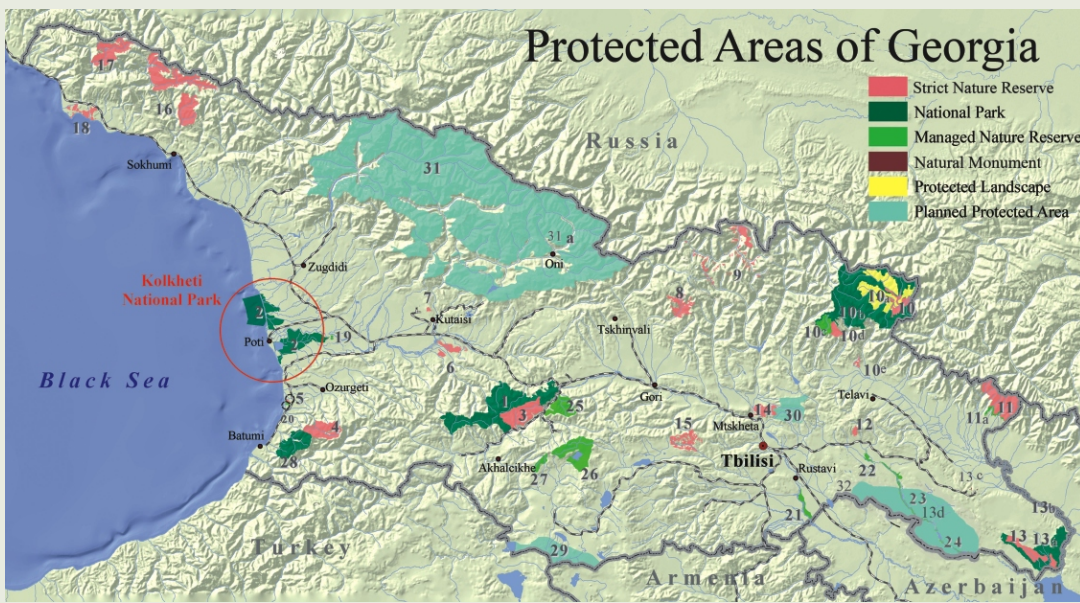
Sundew (*Drosera rotundifolia*)

These mires require special conditions

Imnati mire receives water from rain and mists, not from groundwater. Here on the shores of the Black Sea, conditions are excellent for this type of mire. The subtropical climate provides plenty of rain. Although most rain falls during autumn and winter months, almost one third falls during the summer. This even rainfall, along with high air humidity and warm temperatures, ensures that mire vegetation grows successfully in Kolkheti lowlands year after year



Sphagnum Moss (*Sphagnum*)



- 1 Borjomi-Kharagauli National park
- 2 Kolkheti National Park
- 3 Borjomi Strict Nature Reserve
- 4 Kintrishi Strict Nature Reserve
- 5 Kobuleti Strict Nature Reserve
- 6 Ajameti Strict Nature Reserve
- 7 Sataplia Strict Nature Reserve
- 8 Liakhvi Strict Nature Reserve
- 9 Kazbegi Strict Nature Reserve
- 10 Tusheti Strict Nature Reserve
- 10a Tusheti Protected Landscape
- 10b Tusheti National Park
- 10c Ilto Managed Nature Reserve
- 10d Batsara Strict Nature Reserve
- 10e Babaneuri Strict Nature Reserve
- 11 Lagodekhi Strict Nature Reserve
- 11a Lagodekhi Managed Nature Reserve
- 12 Mariamdjvari Strict Nature Reserve
- 13 Vashlovani Strict Nature Reserve
- 13a Vashlovani National Park
- 13b Alazani Natural Monument
- 13c Artsivi Canyon Natural Monument

- 13d Takhti-Tefa Natural Monument
- 14 Saguramo Strict Nature Reserve
- 15 Algeti Strict Nature Reserve
- 16 Fskhu-Gumista Strict Nature Reserve
- 17 Ritsa Strict Nature Reserve
- 18 Bichvinta-Miusera Strict Nature Reserve
- 19 Katsoburi Managed Nature Reserve
- 20 Kobuleti Managed Nature Reserve
- 21 Gardabani Managed Nature Reserve
- 22 Korugi Managed Nature Reserve
- 23 Iori Managed Nature Reserve
- 24 Chachuna Managed Nature Reserve
- 25 Nedzvi Managed Nature Reserve
- 26 Ktsia-Tabatskuri Managed Nature Reserve
- 27 Tetrobi Managed Nature Reserve
- 28 Mtirala National Park
- 29 Javakheti Planned Protected Area
- 30 Tbilisi Planned Protected Area
- 31 Svaneti Planned Protected Area
- 31a Racha-Lechkhumi Planned Protected Area
- 32 David-Gareji Planned Protected Area



Visitor Center of Kolkheti National Park



LEGEND

- Kolkheti National Park Boundary
- Stream
- Lake and Reservoir
- Highway
- Motorway
- Gravel road
- Railway

Routes

- Hiking
- Boating

- Forest
- Swamp
- Bush
- Marshland
- Mire
- Agricultural Land
- Beach
- Building
- Settlement

Park Infrastructure

- Visitor Centre and Park Administration
- Boat launch
- Information Kiosk
- Wayside Information
- Shelter
- Birdwatch hide
- Watch Tower
- Ringing Station

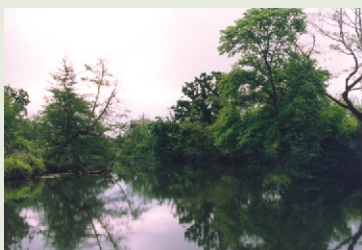
IMNATI SITE BOATING ROUTE

Length: 18 km

Duration: 1 day

Direction: Paliastomi entrance boating along South, East, North banks of Lake Paliastomi, and return to Paliastomi entrance

The magnificent scenery of Lake Paliastomi and its swampy banks, hillocks of Carex, the dense covers of Osmunda regalis, the high impassable thickets of Phragmites communis and Typha angustifolia near the mouth of Lake Patara Paliastomi, a scenic view of the Pichori mouth area, the wet meadows on the east bank of the lake. From the east bank of the lake and the mooring and resting place designed at the mouth of Pichori visitors can observe the sphagnum surface of the Imnati peat bog developed along the bank of the lake and the swamp alder-tree forests spread in the north part of the bog.



Kolkheti Forests

ANAKLIA CHURIA SITE BOATING AND WALKING ROUTE

Length: 26 km

Duration: 1 day

Direction: Start Churia entrance river Churia mouth return to Churia entrance.

Visitors take the boat at the "Churia" entrance in the Churia bay and go towards the mouth of Churia, enter the river, and after 6 km they reach a quite large island. This section of the route provides picturesque sceneries of the Churia bay and the coastal peat bog plant communities of the sandy dunes and peat bogs, meandering streams flowing through the peat bog, the humid and swamp forests. Visitors can also observe swamp and water birds.



Ringing Station on the River Churia

A REFUGE FOR BIRDS

Most birds visit in the spring or autumn

Some birds live here all year; others only during a specific season. Migratory birds rest and feed here as they move along the Black Sea coast or across the Caucasus between their summer or winter homes in Eurasia, Africa, and China.

Birds face problems of land development, pollution and other threats. Kolkheti National Park provides important natural areas essential for their survival. All three birds mentioned on this panel are becoming rare in Georgia. The Whooper Swan is listed in the Georgian Red Data Book of threatened species.



Dalmatian Pelican (Pelecanus crispus)

Visiting Migrants:

Look carefully in spring or autumn and you may see a Dalmatian Pelican (*Pelecanus crispus*) resting and feeding on Lake Paliastomi. This very large bird feeds in

groups by corraling fish and scooping them up with its leathery pouch attached below its lower bill.



Pheasant (Phasianus colchicus)

Summer Residents:

The common pheasant (*Phasianus colchicus*), now much rarer in Georgia throughout its transplanted range across Europe, originated in the Kolkheti area and may still breed here today. The strikingly beautiful male, along with the better-camouflaged female, are ground-nesting birds that may be sighted in wooded areas and agricultural fields.

The word "pheasant" (*Phasianus*) comes from the Phasis River, which was the ancient Greek name for the nearby Rioni River. The species name *colchicus* indicates the bird comes from the Colchis (Kolkheti) area.



Winter Visitors:

The local population of whooper swans (*Cygnus cygnus*) nest and raise young in western Siberia throughout the summer. In the autumn, these swan families fly south to spend the winter along the coasts of the Black, Caspian, and Mediterranean Seas. Look for them in the shallow lakes of Kolkheti Park throughout the winter.



Whooper Swans (Cygnus cygnus)

