

Nature values of the Northern Gauja valley

are threatened by:

Disappearing of grasslands, mostly as a result of overgrowing. Rarely the reason for disappearing of the biologically valuable meadows and pastures is ploughing, fertilizing or building.

Too intensive forest use. Cutting the forests in large amounts has caused lack of old forest stands as well as negatively influenced species dwelling in the water.

Lack of public awareness about the nature values of the territory, the possibilities of their protection and raising funds for that purpose.

Disorganised and uncontrolled tourism that on the one hand, endangers nature values, on the other hand, does not allow using the potential of nature tourism for the development of the region.

Activities planned for the project:

1. Inventory and mapping of nature values – grassland, forest and water habitats, plant, bird, invertebrate and fish species. The present information is sufficient to recognise Northern Gauja a unique nature area, however, it is necessary to gather more precise data in order to plan protection and management activities.

2. Developing agri-environmental plans for farms. An agri-environmental plan includes a description of nature values of the agricultural lands and the necessary management activities within the framework of the individual farm.

3. Elaboration of management plan for the territory. Within the management plan the status of the species populations and habitats is evaluated, their protection envisaging specific activities as well as necessary funds and source of funds planned. Management plan is an official document approved by the Minister of Environment. Thus, managers of the territory can expect support from the state for the activities prescribed in the plan.

4. Developing individual regulations on the protection and use of the territory and territory zoning. Individual regulations on the protection and use of the territory envisage specific regulations for protection and use of the specially protected nature territory. The regulations are approved by the Cabinet of Ministers. While individual regulations have not been approved, the regulations "On the General Protection and Use of Specially Protected Nature Territories" are effective.

5. Establishment of micro-reserves and providing compensations for protection of biologically valuable forests. Micro-reserves are to be established for protection of specially protected forest habitats and species. Compensations are envisaged for foregone income because of prohibited economical activities. Within the framework of the project, compensations will be paid to the private landowners for the restrictions suggested by the project and officially approved that do not allow any forest management in a forest stand.

6. Restoration and maintenance of grasslands. Within the project, five pilot territories of grassland restoration and maintenance are to be formed. Two of them will be in the Valka municipality and one in each – Zvārtava, Vireši and Gaujiena municipalities. Since 2004, many farmers of the Northern Gauja territory can apply for agri-environmental funding, including payments for maintenance of biologically valuable grasslands. In most cases the biologically valuable grasslands are mapped according to the suggestions of the Northern Gauja project members, thus, promoting fund raising for the maintenance of the grasslands. The work of improving and complementing maps of biologically valuable grasslands is being continued.

7. Management of specially protected forest habitats. The activities include cutting of trees and bushes uncharacteristic of the specially protected forest habitats, cutting undergrowth at capercaillies lek sites, cutting trees and bushes around old oak trees and lime-trees, as well as arranging demonstration areas for forest management in the valley of the Gauja for demonstration of methods other than clear-cutting.

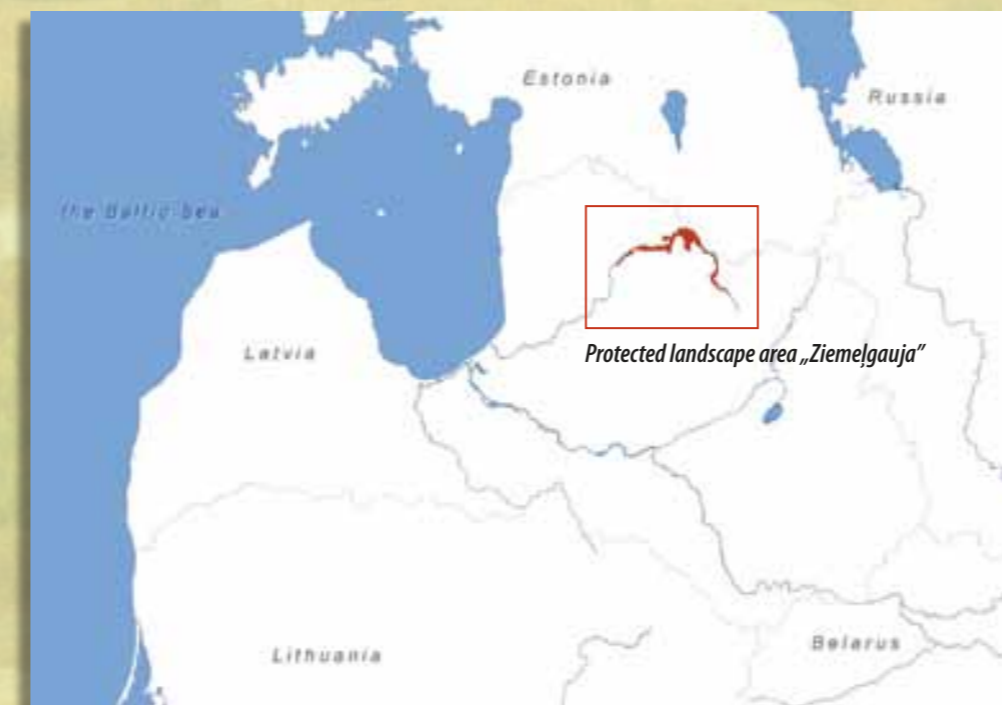
8. Informative and educational activities. It includes organisation of seminars, publishing booklets, preparation of a film and TV stories, creation of information centre and nature trails as well as other activities.

9. Monitoring of management actions. To estimate whether the management activities improve the condition of the grassland and forest habitats and endangered species, experts (botanists and ornithologists) will inspect the territory on a regular basis.

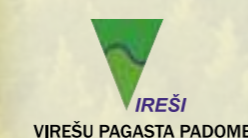


The protected landscape area "Ziemeļgauja" is included in the network of protected territories of the European Union NATURA 2000. This network has been established to ensure protection of endangered species and habitats within the framework of Europe, introducing requirements of the "Birds" Directive (79/409/EEC) and the "Habitats" Directive (92/43/EEC).

The project "Protection and Management of the Northern Gauja Valley" is carried out with the financial support of sub-programme LIFE-Nature of European Commission programme LIFE. LIFE-Nature supports activities that are aimed at restoration and maintaining of natural habitats and populations of species of European concern. In particular the programme supports establishment of the NATURA 2000 network.



Partners and co-financiers



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NORTHERN GAUJA

NATURE VALUES OF THE PROTECTED LANDSCAPE AREA „ZIEMEĻGAUJA” AND THE PROJECT „PROTECTION AND MANAGEMENT OF THE NORTHERN GAUJA VALLEY”

The landscape characteristic of the Gauja has formed due to the changing flow of the river. Especially it refers to the middle course of the river – Northern Gauja with the inconsistent riverbed because of the sandy soil. Forests, grasslands and oxbow lakes in the Northern Gauja valley develop a peculiar landscape mosaic. Many of the habitats found here are rare in Latvia and specially protected. Rare and endangered plants, lichens, fungi, insects and birds can be found here.

At the end of 2003, Latvian Fund for Nature launched a project "Protection and Management of the Northern Gauja Valley". The project will last till the beginning of 2007. The aim of the project was to:

- 1) assign the state protection status to the Northern Gauja valley and include it in the European network of protected areas NATURA 2000;
- 2) elaborate a management plan for the area;
- 3) initiate implementation of the management plan.

In spring, 2004, the Cabinet of Ministers approved establishment of the specially protected nature territory – protected landscape area "Ziemeļgauja" ("Northern Gauja"). The area has been included in the NATURA 2000 network as well.



Forests



Glauclidium passerinum
Foto: A. Petriņš



Hapalopilus croceus
Foto: V. Lārmanis



Lobaria pulmonaria
Foto: V. Lārmanis



Foto: V. Lārmanis



Buprestis mariana Foto: I. Gullis

For natural existence and development of a forest there is no necessity for human interference, on the contrary, the less the forest has been touched by a man, the more valuable it is from the viewpoint of biology. Nowadays, there are almost no forests in Latvia that have developed completely naturally. However, there is an exception characteristic of the Northern Gauja territory – forests that have developed in the constantly changing meanders of the Gauja. Sandy shoals that have formed by the Gauja changing the riverbed, gradually get overgrown by herbs, bushes and finally the forest. These forests have never been sown, planted or taken care of. This is the only case in Latvia when you can refer to the forest as the “primeval”.

Deciduous and mixed forests by the Gauja and its oxbows are rich in rare lichens, fungi, insects and birds. Usually rare willow and natural grey alder forests are widespread here. Excellent old oak-tree stands can be found in several places. A considerable part of the forest is made of overgrown wooded meadows and pastures. The old rotten deciduous trees are a habitat for *Osmoderma eremita* – a beetle species that has become one of the symbols for nature conservation in Europe. The oaks that have exceeded the age of two centuries offer a possibility for occurrence of very rare species of fungi – *Hapalopilus croceus*. The hollow trees are nesting sites for owls and the Goosander *Mergus merganser*, nesting and feeding sites for rare species of woodpeckers.

Wide pine forests can be found outside the Gauja valley. They are very important as lek sites for the Capercaillie *Tetrao urogallus*. The pine forests have suffered much from economical use. Therefore old, natural pine forests with dead standing and fallen trees can be rarely met and should be specially protected. Barks and wood of old pine-trees is a habitat for rare beetle species. Hollows made by the Black woodpecker *Dryocopus martius* are nesting sites for the Stock dove *Columba oenas*, Goosander and Goldeneye *Bucephala clangula*.

Waters

Undoubtedly, the Gauja itself is the forming and uniting element of the area – its “heart and soul”. The landscape area includes around 140 km of the river Gauja. The waters form the landscape of the valley; also influencing other habitats, especially during spring floods. Due to the Gauja turning, oxbow lakes have formed in the previous riverbeds. Their common length exceeds the length of the Gauja itself; thus, forming a diverse and unique for Latvian landscape complex of river and oxbows.

The biggest tributaries of the Gauja in the territory of Northern Gauja are Tirziņa, Vizla, Vecpalsa, Vija and Abuls. Several lakes are also included in the landscape area: Silezers, Kokšu lakes and a part of Lake Cepurites.

The significant diversity of waters – starting from water courses and ending with still waters of oxbow lakes form a basis for rich fauna of water invertebrates (insects, spiders, molluscs) including also specially protected species as well as forming the food basis for fish, birds and mammals.

The waters of Northern Gauja are habitats for several specially protected fish species – *Salmo salar*, *S. trutta*, *Misgurnus fossilis*, *Lampetra fluviatilis*, *L. planeri*. Economic activities near watercourses and waterbodies influence their fauna. Therefore, in the valley of the Gauja they should be organised so that the nearby waters would be polluted as little as possible. Salmonidae species, occurring in the Gauja and its tributaries, are the most sensitive to the water quality.



Mergus merganser
Foto: A. Petriņš



Unio sp.
Foto: I. Vilka



Oxbow lake
Foto: V. Lārmanis



Gauja near Strenči
Foto: I. Vilka

Grasslands

Foto: V. Lārmanis



Gentiana cruciata
Foto: J. Kabucis



Gallinago media
Foto: A. Petriņš



Crex crex
Foto: A. Petriņš



Orchis mascula
Foto: I. Vilka



Due to the uneven relief formed by the Gauja, grasslands characteristic of different humidity – starting from dry grasslands at the slopes of the ancient valley and terraces of the ancient banks of the river and ending with wet floodplain meadows in the ancient river-beds occur mosaically in the Northern Gauja valley. The dry grasslands are especially magnificent when blooming. Many of them are not only specially protected habitats, but also important orchid sites – several *Dactylorhiza* species, *Orchis mascula* and *Orchis militaris* grow there. The wet meadows are important breeding sites for the Corncrake *Gallinago media* and Great snipe *Gallinago media*. Wooded meadows and pastures with oaks and lime-trees are characteristic of the Northern Gauja valley. The old meadow trees are habitat for rare insects and lichens that dwell on sun exposed trunks.

As opposed to the forests, the grasslands in Latvia are formed and maintained by a man, therefore appropriate and long-term management is required for their conservation. Non-ameliorated, constantly mown or pastured grasslands are considered biologically most valuable. As agricultural activities have stopped in many places for a long time, the biggest threat to the grasslands of Northern Gauja is overgrowing. By overgrowing the characteristic species of plants disappear, vegetation becomes homogeneous, thick old grass and bushes appear. Thus, by appearing of bushes, grassland becomes unusable for breeding of specially protected birds – Corncrake and Great snipe. Now there are still quite many corncrakes in the grasslands of the Gauja, but by overgrowing of the grasslands, the decrease of their number is unavoidable.

Apart from forests, grasslands and waters other rare and specially protected habitats occur in the territory – calcareous rocky slopes and siliceous rocky slopes at the banks of the Gauja, inland dunes and transition mires.



Foto: V. Lārmanis



Dolomedes sp.
Foto: V. Lārmanis



Solitary bee
Foto: V. Lārmanis