

## Man and nature



Cranberries



Man-made hollow

People lived in the Čepkeliai vicinity already in the Stone Age. Nearby Katra village 4 Neolithic settlements (7-3 thousand years BC) were found and explored. In later times people of the villages in the neighbourhoods had rough luck to farm on the poor sandy soils. The woods and mire helped to survive. In the villages one can hear narrations how people shepherded cows, made hay, picked up mushrooms, berries and herbs to sell, cut forests, kept bees in tree hollows.

16 hollow pine trees in which bees used to live, the embankment of a narrow railway built in the beginning of the 20th century to transport timber from depth of Čepkeliai are the trace of history surviving to nowadays in the reserve. Today: The Winter Track' across the mire reminds how hay was carried by sledges from Čepkeliai. In summer it was not possible to get it out of the mire and people had to wait for firm freezing.

Permanent mowing, grazing, unquenched fires lead to survival of sedge fens and open areas of raised bogs in the mire. Herds of cows trampled the trails and no vegetation grew there for a great while. Having interrupted such activities the open areas overgrew with trees and bushes. Natural vegetation and animals typical for such areas become destitute.

## Maintaining open landscapes



Unmanaged meadows overgrow with bushes



Sedgy meadow

Thus, imitating conventional farming meadows along the Katra River are mowed, pine trees on the edges of open areas cut, one dune kept open. It is sought to preserve the environmental diversity and species related to open areas. **FACTS: management works are carried out on 2% of the area (230 ha).**

## What to see?



Path to the bog

At the visitors centre we provide the information about the nature reserve, visitors can have a closer look at the formation of the wetland and dunes as well as to have a look at flora and fauna at our virtual tours around the Čepkeliai reserve.

The 1,5 km nature trails is 5 km away from Marcinkonys. A visitor can look around the great reaches of the mire and learn about the largest raised bog in the country and surrounding continental dunes. A part of the nature trail is adapted for disabled.

We would like to remind that visitors are allowed attended by the Administration staff or having received a written consent. Advance registration for visiting is kindly requested.

## How to arrive?



### ADMINISTRATION OF DŽŪKIJOS NATIONAL PARK AND ČEPEKELIAI STATE STRICT NATURE RESERVE

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**Open:** Monday-Friday 8 a.m. – 5 p.m.  
Saturday 8 a.m. – 3.45 p.m. (lunch break 12 a.m. – 12.45 p.m.)

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# ČEPEKELIAI STRICT NATURE RESERVE

## Strict Nature Reserve

The purpose of strict nature reserves is to protect wildlife. In strict nature reserves deforestation or forestation is not implemented, deadwood is not removed, therefore to attain a venerable age, those weathered or overtaken by diseases are useful being food, housing or a hiding place for birds, insects and mushrooms. A natural nature process is observed there. No hunting is allowed, no goods are collected, visiting is restricted and just nature trails are meant for visiting.

The Čepkeliai State Strict Nature Reserve is a part of the Lithuanian protected areas' system. The Administration of this strict nature reserve which is subordinate to the State Service of Protected Areas by the Ministry of Environment implements its activities there. Čepkeliai wetland brings international importance as it is protected under the Ramsar convention and as a NATURA 200 site (EU protected areas network). Čepkeliai Strict State Nature reserve and Dzūkija National Park became the only one PAN Park in Lithuania in 2011 year.



Fungles utilize deadwood

## Why Čepkeliai are so valuable?

Čepkeliai is mire with bog woodlands and open areas, with islands and small lakes, the swampy valley of the Katra River, the wet areas of swampy black alder and birch woods constitute a mosaic inserted in the vast pinewoods of Dainava. Numerous species live here due to environmental diversity.

The raised bog reminds a tundra landscape. Golden plovers, leather leaves, arctic dwarf birches have survived since the cold climate times of the post glacial period. Sand of the Continental dunes embracing the bog heats up in summer and is suitable for southern species, i.e. mountain arnica, lupine clover, numerous insects. Thus, it is said that North and South meet in Čepkeliai.

**FACTS: species of 881 (55 protected) plants, 188 (65) birds, 2541 (30) insects found.**



Capercaillie



Arnika Montana

## Mires



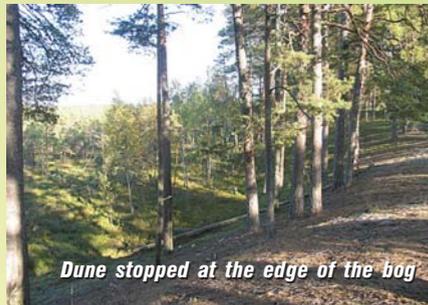
Cottonsedge in the-bog

In Čepkeliai one will find a vast wetland over ten thousand years of age. To go it round one will have to pace 83 km along the wetland edge. In Lithuania, as well as in West Europe few mires have survived (mainly due to drainage and peat extrac-

tion), thus the survival of such a huge wetland is of a particular importance for nature and man. Mires accumulate precipitation water; later consign it gradually reducing the risk of floods. Accumulating peat conserves solar energy, extant fractions of plants and animals turn into chronicles of the past. In the mires numerous animals find quietude, black grouse, capercaillies, cranes and other birds breed. Open bog areas are home for rare birds such as curlews, wood sandpipers and golden plovers.

**FACTS:** the wetland extends westwards 12 km, north-southwards 7 km. The average peat thickness is 2,3 m.

## Continental dunes

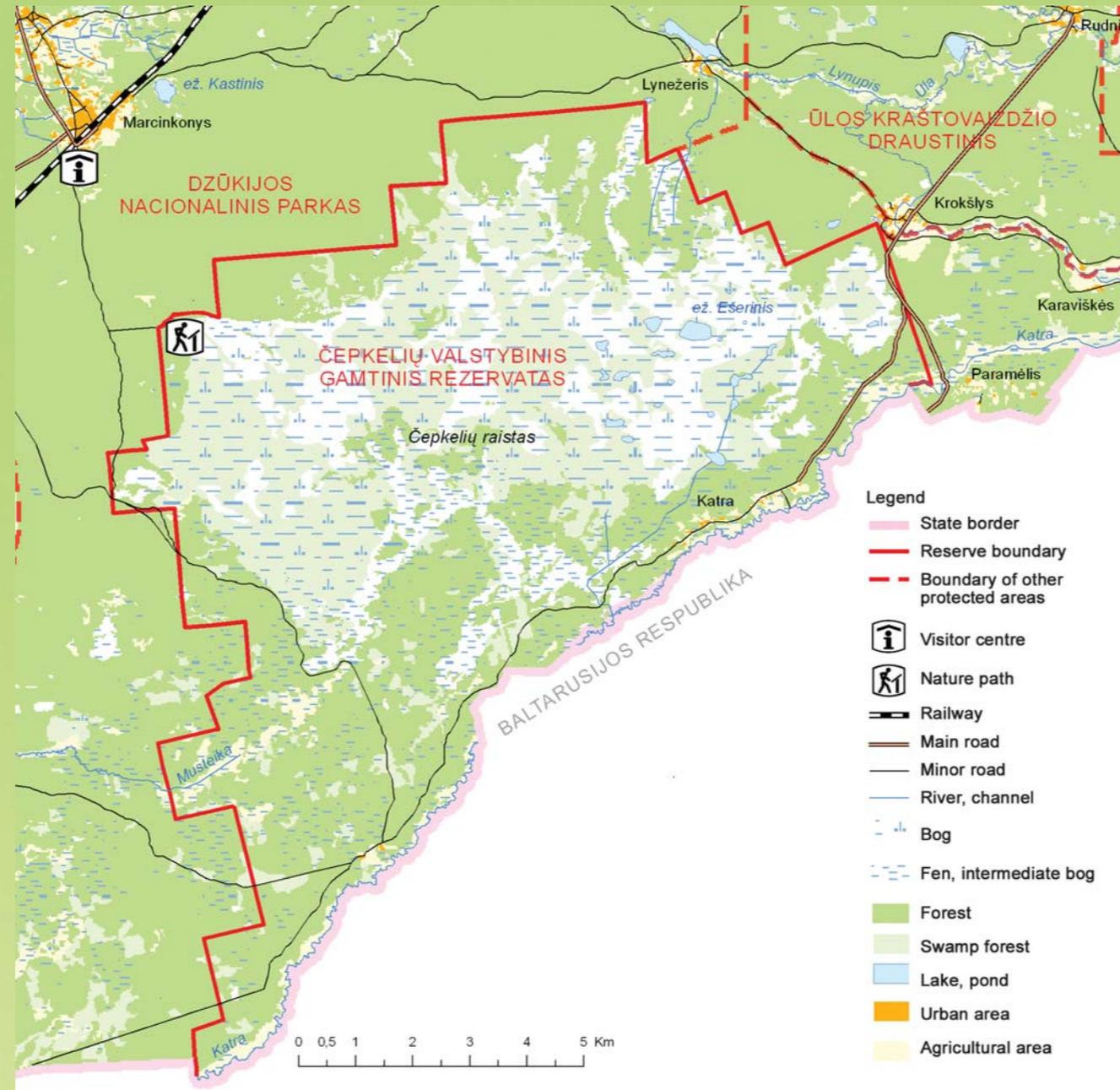


Dune stopped at the edge of the bog

North and west of the wetland is embraced by Continental dunes. Only a minor part of Dzūkija dunes falls under the strict nature reserve while the entire dune area extends from the Varėna vicinity towards Druskininkai. Over ten thou-

sand years ago landless lagoon used to stretch on the site of Čepkeliai, huge sand mines were spread coastwise. Both the lagoon and sand were formed here by a retreating glacier. Wind freely raved in the sand and slowly gathered the dunes. Having the climate turned warmer the dunes overgrew with forest and came to rest witnessing the wind direction prevailing millenniums ago. Today the dunes are mainly covered with dry pinewoods; the ground is covered with lichen and moss. Remaining sand patches – a realm of wild bees and other insects.

**FACTS:** the highest Čepkeliai dunes reach over 16 m.



## The Katra River



Meanders of the Katra River

while in Belarus - the Karta reserve. In The Karta valley small spots of meadow once mowed and these days overgrowing with bushes continue to exist. Their preservation is of major importance as here mating calls of rare birds – great snipes occur, in summer evenings corncrakes resound, orchid plants are in blossom. **FACTS:** the Katra River is 109 km long, including 20 km along the edge of Čepkeliai.

The eastern mire embraces 21 lakes. Some of them remind post glacial times, their depth even at the shore may reach 5 m. Other lakes came into existence later in depressions of the formed mire. They are shallow up to 1,5 m deep, the shores are swampy and hardly passable. Water in all lea is acid, thus they contain scarce fish, only perch can survive here.

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Lake in the bog

## The Islands in the bog

Small spots of land are scattered throughout the Čepkeliai mire. Trees in hardly accessible islands count a number of hundred years. Here wolves throw ospreys and black storks that love peace breed. In spring lady's slippers – rare Lithuanian orchids with biggest flowers are in blossom.

**FACTS:** the Čepkeliai mire numbers ca. 80 islands.



Island in the bog

## The forests

The mire is surrounded by forest. Dry pine forests are common throughout Dzūkija and in the reserve. In some places individual birch treeless interve-ne, elsewhere oaks and spruces climb. Swampy black alder and birch woods are common. There trees grow on humps produced by their roots as steeping roots lack air. Woodpeckers are abundant in the reserve's forests. They find enough dry trees to make hollows as well fine and rich nourishment – insects that blast wood.

**FACTS:** the wooded area of the reserve ~ 75% (8402 ha).



Pine forest



Beaver house



Black Woodpecker