

### Additional material

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#### Noteworthy Flora

Vegetation in the lake area is very diverse and influenced by various factors. From the phytocenologic point of view, many species found in the area represent a link between the Central European-Alpine and Illyric (Dinaric)-Submediterranean regions. The species whose northern phytogeographical boundary is at Cerkniško jezero or very close to it are as follows: the tall plantain, *Plantago altissima*, the thistle, *Cirsium pannonicum*, the wild gladiolus, *Gladiolus illyricus*, and *Peucedanum coriaceum* var. *pospichalii*. The *Trifolium velebaticum* has its northern phytogeographical boundary at Cerkniško jezero, too.

Some plants, though, reach at Cerkniško jezero their southern phytogeographical boundary or get very close to it. These are: *Carex buxbaumii*, *Ranunculus reptans*, *Rhynchospora alba*, *Trichoporum alpinum*, *Utricularia intermedia* and *U. minor*.

Some other endangered plants or plants of interest that can be found at Cerkniško jezero are as follows: the flowering rush, *Butomus umbellatus*, the arrowhead, *Sagittaria sagittifolia*, the yellow flag, *Iris pseudacorus*, the hedge hyssop, *Gratiola officinalis*, the marsh gentian, *Gentiana pneumonanthe*, the marsh orchises, *Orchis laxiflora* and *Orchis palustris*, the marsh lousewort, *Pedicularis palustris*, the fen ragwort, *Senecio paludosus*, the bogbean, *Menyanthes trifoliata*, the sundew, *Drosera intermedia*, and the Alpine cottongrass, *Trichoporum alpinum*.

Fifty-two higher plant species from the Slovenian Red List are found at Cerkniško jezero (Annex 1, Table 3).

#### Noteworthy Fauna

Even though Cerkniško jezero is of relatively small size, it provides habitat supporting a highly diversified animal community.

There are not many sites in Slovenia and not even in Europe where so many bird species could be found in an area of such a small size. Until now, 256 birds species have been identified there, and for some 100 species of these, the area is a nesting site. It is the sole nesting site in Slovenia for the red-necked grebe, *Podiceps griseigena*, and the redshank, *Tringa totanus*, as well as for the ferruginous duck, *Aythya nyroca*. For 15 pairs of the common snipe, *Gallinago gallinago*, Cerkniško jezero is the most important if not the sole nesting site in Slovenia. It is also a habitat of the most important and largest nesting population of the yellow wagtail, *Motacilla flava*, and the reed bunting, *Emberiza schoeniculus*. The white-tailed eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla* can be seen here all year round; even though Cerkniško jezero has not been confirmed as its nest site yet it is very important for this species as it is by far the only sustenance zone that is large enough.

The most prevalent species among reptiles is the grass snake, *Natrix natrix*, in the water part of the site, while the green lizard, *Lacerta viridis*, prevails at the shore and on drier ground. The common viper, *Vipera berus*, and the common or viviparous lizard, *Lacerta vivipara*, can be also found at the littoral stretch; in total, 11 reptile species can be found at Cerkniško jezero, among them the pond turtle, *Emys orbicularis*.

Cerkniško jezero is renown for the richness of amphibians. Early in the spring, in March and April, are prevalent common toads, *Bufo bufo*, that migrate in large numbers from the neighbouring forests to the lake water for spawning. Soon, the common frog, *Rana temporaria*, join them. In the cave Vranja jama at Zadnji kraj over 25,000 common frogs

hibernate which makes this cave the world's largest known wintering site of *Rana temporaria*. Among other anuran species that can be found at Cerknisko jezero are the frogs *Rana x esculenta* and *Hyla arborea*, the yellowbelly toad, *Bombina variegata* and the agile or spring frog, *Rana dalmatina*. Other amphibians that can be found at Cerknisko jezero are the newts, *Triturus carnifex*, *Triturus vulgaris meridionalis* and the fire salamander, *Salamandra salamandra*. It is worthwhile to mention here that a cave salamander, *Proteus anginus*, has been found in the caves at the edge of the lake's water system.

The ichthyofauna of Cerknisko jezero includes the following autochthonous species: the chub, *Leuciscus cephalus*, the tench, *Tinca tinca*, the minnow, *Phoxinus phoxinus*, the pike, *Esox lucius*, the bullhead, *Cottus gobio* and the burbot, *Lota lota*. Fishermen have planted in the lake the carp, *Cyprinus carpio*, the rudd, *Scardinius erythrophthalmus* and, in recent years, the perch, *Perca fluviatilis*.

Cerknisko jezero is also rich in malacofauna. So far, 136 snail species and 6 shell species have been identified in the area. Of special interest are species that live in the water sources and the subterranean species, of which 10 are endemic to the Ljubljana catchment area.

At Lake Cerknica and its environs, 36 species of dragonflies have been recorded, 428 beetle species and 125 species of diurnal butterflies. This means that at Cerknisko jezero 70 % of all butterfly species living in Slovenia or one quarter of all European butterfly species may be seen. Here are found the threatened species of the alcon blue, *Maculinea alcon*, the scarce large blue, *Maculinea teleius*, the large copper, *Lycaena dispar* and the *Euphidryas aurinia*.

Among mammals, the common otter, *Lutra lutra* and the water shrew, *Neomys anomalus*, living on the banks of the tributaries, are the most dependant on the lake's water body. Sightings of the brown bear, *Ursus arctos*, on the lake's shore, scavenging dead fish when the lake dries up, are not uncommon. The high abundance of roe deer and red deer often attract the wolf, *Canis lupus*. Traces found in muddy holes full of dead fish bear witness to the fact that the red fox, *Vulpes vulpes*, the European badger, *Meles meles*, and even the European lynx, *Lynx lynx* and the wild cat, *Felis sylvestris*, feed on the fish, too. Among martens, the *Martes foina* is very frequent, whereas the European polecat, *Mustela putorius*, has become rare. The ermine, *Mustela erminea*, and the least weasel, *Mustela nivalis* are also found there. Cerknisko polje, including the zone of the lake in the dry season, provide habitat for numerous field voles, *Microtus agrestis*. In the night, the eastern European hedgehog, *Erinaceus concolor*, can be often seen. Also nocturnal are the edible dormouse, *Glis glis*, and the forest dormouse, *Dryomys nitedula*.

An important characteristic of the larger area and the karst caves in particular is the underground fauna.

### Physical features of the site

In the north, the bottom of the lake is built of impermeable dolomite while in the southeast it is of cretaceous limestone which is more soluble in water and allows development of karst phenomena. In addition, there are many fractures in the bottom, with the largest of them located at the junction of the dolomite and limestone formations (the fault named Idrijska prelomnica) where the biggest systems of sinkholes have been formed (Rešeto, Vodonos, Retje, Ponikve). A bit further away from the fault there are the sinkholes of Zadnji kraj, the largest among them being: Kotli, Velika Bobnarica, Mala Bobnarica, Gebnu and Zajcovke. The water which drains and disappears underground through the above sinkholes resurges again in the sources at Bistra and its environs at the edge of Ljubljansko barje.

The bottom of the lake is covered with quaternary and holocenic alluvial deposits. Across the dolomite bedrock on the NW flows the Cerkniščica, which has deposited a large amount of material so the area is slightly elevated above the rest of the lake. The thickness of the deposits that form the nowadays Cerkniško jezero varies across the area, ranging between four to ten metres. Locally, thickness may reach up to sixteen metres. Lake deposits consist mainly of loam (often carbonate), clay and sand.

The largest sinkholes are the karst caves on the west side of Cerkniško jezero of which Velika Karlovica, Mala Karlovica, Narti, Svinjska jama and Kamni are particularly noteworthy for their size and the length of 7307 m of the explored underground. The water from the caves flows into in the Rak in Rakov Škocjan through the sources at Mali naravni most, Kotel and Kotliči; these sources receive also an abundant underground supply of water from the Javorniki mountain range, known among experts as the Javorniki subterranean stream. The max. outflow of water through the underground channels of the Velika Karlovica and Mala Karlovica sinkholes ranges between 40 and 55 m<sup>3</sup>/s. Rakov Škocjan is a karst valley, approx. 1.5 km long and 200 m wide. It is situated in the northern foothills of Javorniki at the altitude of 500 – 510 m asl. The River Rak flows through it.

The main source of the Rak is in the east of Rakov Škocjan. The Rak's waters, which take rise in Zelške jame, are a discharge from Cerkniško jezero through the underground channels of Velika Karlovica and Mala Karlovica. At many points, the ceilings of the Zelške jame caves have already collapsed. The Rak takes rise in a cavity and then flows across a narrow seasonally flooded flat. From the west it receives water from several smaller tributaries resurging at the edge of the valley. The main water contributor of the Rak are the Kotliči and Kotel sources, contributing at times of high water level the largest share of water to the Rak's watercourse. In the area of Rakov Škocjan, there are seven more karst sources that bring water from Cerkniško polje and Javorniki mountain range.

The surface watercourse of the Rak ends after 800 m at Veliki naravni most. After this natural bridge, the Rak sinks in the Tkalca jama cave, which has been explored in the length of approx. 2 km. The distance between this cave and the sources in the Planinska jama at the edge of Planinsko polje amounts to some 4 km.

The hydrological regime of the Rak is closely connected with the outflow from Cerkniško jezero. When the lake dries out, the Rak's river bed dries out, too. This connection has been proved by water tracing; a subterranean connection between the caves of Tklaca jama and Planinska jama (i.e. the Unica) has been proved, too. Cerkniško jezero and Rakov Škocjan intercommunicate through the systems of caves of Velika Karlovica and Mala Karlovica (7307 m) at the Cerkniško jezero side and the caves of Zelške jame (4749 m) at the Rakov Škocjan side. Only some 50 m of the intercommunication between the two systems remain to be explored.

Križna jama is situated in the SE of Cerknica polje. It is 8,273 meters long and up to 32 meters deep. The cave is best known for its 22 underground lakes divided by gours (barriers formed by calcium carbonate). The water flowing through the cave comes from the Bloke plateau through its underground paths.

Currently, there are two caves, the old cave, first described in 1832, and the new cave discovered in 1991. The caves are separated by a siphon. The water level in the cave varies and depends on the water quantity and the precipitation regime.

### Physical features of the catchment area

Cerkniško jezero is the largest and the most typical intermittent karst lake in Slovenia. Its

hydrographic catchment area amounts to approx. 475 km<sup>2</sup>.

The entire catchment area is formed in calcareous rock, ie Triassic and Jurassic dolomite and Jurassic and Cretaceous limestone. Triassic dolomite forms the surface of Cerknisko polje and the southwest foothills of Slivnica Mt. It reappears at Gorenje jezero and from there it continues towards Loško polje. The same bedrock can be found at the northeast part of Cerknisko polje, except near Grahovo, Žerovnica and Lipsenje, where there is Jurassic (Liassic) limestone. The eastern edge of Cerknisko polje up to Križna gora and Loško polje is underlain by Jurassic bedrocks: stratified Liassic limestone and dolomites, crumbly Malm limestone and unstratified grained dolomite.

Edges of karst poljes are mostly overgrown with different types of forests. In the western parts prevail large and well preserved forests of the type *Abieti-Fagetum dinaricum*, while the *Hacquetio Fagetum* type is predominant in the eastern parts. The floor of poljes is mainly used for agricultural purposes. Thus, agriculture and forestry are the most prevalent land-use in the area.

The climate is markedly continental with a relatively high precipitation level (1600-1800 mm/year). Thermal inversions often occur

### Social and cultural values

Many archaeological sites provide evidence for early settlement of the environs of Cerknisko jezero, dating from Palaeolithic, Mesolithic, Bronze Age and Iron Age through Roman and Middle Age periods.

Among the largest archaeological sites are the Palaeolithic, Mesolithic and Iron Age settlement at Gorica, an island in the middle of the lake. Prehistoric settlements have been discovered at the elevations and hills bordering Cerknisko jezero. They are dated between 12th and 4th centuries BC.

At Cerknica, a Roman necropolis has been discovered; in 13th century, a castle was located at the edge of the precipice over Svinjska jama. Another and much bigger mediaeval castle, Šteberk, was located on the hill at the source of the Šteberščica, one of the tributaries of Cerknisko jezero. The first mention of the name Cerknica in the remaining written evidence is from 1040, when 50 rural households at Cerknica and its environs were transferred to the ownership of the Aquileia patriarch.

From 16th century onwards, the karst hydrological features of Cerknisko jezero have attracted many scientists and travelers. Through the history, there have been many different descriptions of Cerknisko jezero and its seasonal floods, vrtačas, dolines, ponors and numerous caves. In 1689, J. V. Valvasor described into detail his understanding of the system of the lake's filling up and discharging, as well as fishing and hunting and the life and customs at villages in the environs of Cerknisko jezero. The emptying of the lake was followed closely the entire population of the villages around Cerknisko jezero and from the neighbouring Loška dolina. The news on the lake's discharging was promptly delivered to those nearby lords of manors who had the right of fishing in the lake's sinkholes and watercourse beds.

In 19th century, the fishing right was granted to the best bidder; the inhabitants of the neighbouring villages were entitled to fishing to a certain extent, too. After 1955, the locals lost their right to fish in the watercourses and lower part of the lake as the fishing right was granted to the fishermen's society Ribiška družina Cerknica. The upper part of the lake is currently managed by the Public Fisheries Institute of Slovenia.

Over the past two centuries, a wide variety of plans involving reshaping of karst poljes

have been developed. Two most opposing ideas from the two extreme poles are, first, that poljes should be converted into permanent lakes so as to exploit water for power plants and other ends, and, second, that floods should be done away with permanently and flat surfaces used for agriculture. Even though the plans have not been implemented they have provided an additional impetus for the examination and research into the characteristics of the karst catchment area of the Ljubljana River.

### Current recreation and tourism

Cerkniško jezero is a popular destination for cyclists and hikers, for wind-surfers and skaters, for hunters and fishermen and, last but not least, for nature-lovers and bird-watchers from entire Europe. Even though some projects have been already elaborated, the area has not been developed as a tourist site as yet. The area of Cerkniško jezero still needs to be organized for tourism development.

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