

Ramsar Information Sheet

Transcript of the original document.

- 1. Date this sheet was completed:** 01.06.1997
- 2. Country:** Estonia
- 3. Name of wetland:** **Vilsandi National Park**
(in Estonian: *Vilsandi Rahvuspark*)
- 4. Geographical co-ordinates:** 58°23'N 21°54'E
- 5. Altitude:** 0-17 m above sea level
- 6. Area:** 24,100 ha

7. Overview

Vilsandi National Park covers a large wilderness area: varied coastal landscape together with an archipelago. Extensive coastal area with many islands and islets (altogether 160), shallow bays and sand dunes. Along the shore are many relict lakes. Coastal meadows for grazing are the predominant coastal biotopes.

- 8. Wetland type:** A B D E H J K M O Tp Y
- 9. Ramsar Criteria:** 1c, 2a, 2b, 3a, 3b, 3c, 4b
- 10. Map of site included:** Yes

11. Name and address of compiler:

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12. Justification of criteria selected under point 9:

1c - it is a particularly good representative example of a wetland which plays a substantial hydrological, biological or ecological role in the natural functioning of a major river basin.

2a - it supports an appreciable assemblage of rare, vulnerable or endangered species or subspecies of plant or animal, or an appreciable number of individuals of any one or more of these species.

2b - it is of special value for maintaining the genetic and ecological diversity of a region because of the quality and peculiarities of its flora and fauna.

3a - it regularly supports 20,000 waterfowl.

3b - it regularly supports substantial numbers of individuals from particular groups of waterfowl, indicative of wetland values, productivity or diversity.

3c - it regularly supports > 1% of the individuals in a population of *Cygnus olor*, *Anser anser*, *Branta leucopsis*, *Grus grus*, *Aythya marila*, *Bucephala clangula*, *Mergus merganser* and *Polysticta stelleri*.

4b - it is an important spawning ground for *Coregonus lavaretus* and *Leuciscus idus*.

13. General location:

Saare County; Saaremaa Island, 35 km west-northwest of Kuressaare town (16,300 inhabitants).

14. Physical features:

Natural origin Silurian dolomite bedrock, covered by moraine. Main soil types are gravelly soils, limestone rendzina, various podzols.

The base rock is biherm, the particularly firm limestone originated from the warm Silurian sea and composed by the medium of algae, moss animals, corals, etc. Offshore islands consist of dolomite banks thus belonging to the skerry type of islands which are rare for Estonia. The Western coast of Vilsandi and the isles of Vaika are well known for their Karrenfelds.

The climate is maritime, with prolonged autumn, mild winter, late cool spring, strong winds, long periods of sunshine. Mean annual precipitation of 540 mm, the lowest average temperature in February -3.5, the highest in July +16.3.

When the rest of Estonia is covered with snow on average for 120 days a year, the corresponding figure here is only 63. The average wind speed is 6.5 meters per second, it storms for nearly 60 days every year.

The sea is shallow (max 20 m) with the salt content remaining between 6 and 8 ‰.

15. Hydrological values:

Important role in shoreline stabilisation.

16. Ecological features:

Shallow water sea with many islands and islets, shallow bays and sand dunes; coastal habitats: coastal meadows and reed beds, brackish and freshwater relict coastal lakes; other inland habitats: forests (coniferous, sparse coniferous, mixed and deciduous forests), bushland, alvar-like lands, crops, bare fields, grasslands, pastures.

17. Noteworthy flora:

With the maritime climate and ample grounds for vegetation and various modes of dissemination the plantlife is rich indeed. Despite the low fertility of the soil 520 plant species of the higher order are found on the islands of the park. One third of these species are rare for Estonia:

Artemisia maritima (3)¹, *Asplenium ruta-muraria* (4), *Bupleurum tenuissimum* (3), *Cephalanthera longifolia* (3), *Cephalanthera rubra* (3), *Cochlearia danica* (3), *Cladium mariscus* (3), *Callorhiza trifida*, *Cypripedium calceolus* (3), *Dactylorhiza baltica* (3), *Eryngium maritimum* (2), *Geranium lucidum* (3), *Hedera helix* (2), *Herminium monorchis* (2), *Hydrocotyle vulgaris*, *Lathyrus maritimus* (4), *Litorea uniflora* (1), *Malus sylvestris*, *Orchis mascula* (2), *Orchis militaris* (4), *Orchis morio* (2), *Pyrus pyraster* (3), *Rhinanthus osilensis* (1), *Sagina maritima* (3), *Scoenus nigricans* (3), *Trifolium alpestre* (2).

¹ 1 - endangered, 2 - vulnerable, 3 - rare, 4 - care demanding

18. Noteworthy fauna:

Birds: 249 species. Breeding: *Cygnus olor* (>150 pairs), *Anser anser* (150 pairs), *Branta leucopsis* (33 pairs in 1996), *Grus grus* (>50 pairs), *Aythya marila* (30 pairs), *Somateria mollissima* (3500-4000 pairs), *Larus canus* (400 pairs), *Larus fuscus* (30-50 pairs), *Larus marinus* (200-350 pairs), *Sterna caspia*, *Botaurus stellaris*, *Recurvirostra avosetta*; stop-over migration: *Cygnus olor* (>3500), *Anser anser* (2000), *Branta leucopsis* (10000), *Grus grus* (900), *Cygnus cygnus* (100), *Aythya marila* (>3100), *Mergus merganser* (>1800); wintering: *Cygnus olor* (1000), *Polysticta stelleri* (3500), *Bucephala clangula* (3000), *Mergus albellus* (80-100).

Mammals: 23 species of mammals have been counted, including *Halichoerus grypus* (2000 ind.).

19. Social and cultural values:

Education and scientific research, historic and folk-cultural heritages. Important area for small-scale recreation and tourism.

20. Land tenure/ownership of:

a) site: State and private land.

b) surrounding area: State, private and municipal land.

21. Current land use/principal human activities:

a) site: Less than 1000 inhabitants. Small-scale farming, forestry and fishing.

b) Surroundings/catchment: Extensive agriculture, forestry.

22. Factors adversely affecting the site's ecological character, including changes in land use and development projects:

a) site: The main threat would be oil-spill from the passing ships. Human disturbance of birds during breeding time.

b) Surroundings/catchment: Increase of pollution at a greater distance than 200 km.

23. Conservation measures taken:

Vilsandi National Park was established on 10 December 1993 (18 500 ha). The predecessor of the Vilsandi National Park was the Vaika Bird Sanctuary established on 14 August 1910 (14.5 ha). Since 1958 it was named Vaika State Nature Reserve (35 ha) and Vilsandi State Nature Reserve in 1971 (10 689 ha). The new protection rules were approved by the Estonian Governmental Regulation no. 144 of 22 May 1996 (published in *Riiga Teataja* I, 1996, 37, 745). Vilsandi archipelago is designated IBA (in 1989), proposed categories in 1996: A1, A4, B1, B3. Vilsandi National Park overlaps also with proposed IBA - Tagamõisa peninsula - with categories A1, A4, B1, B2.

24. Conservation measures proposed but not yet implemented:

According to Estonian Governmental Regulation No. 48 of 04 March 1997 the management plan for the area has to be completed by 1999.

25. Current scientific and research facilities:

The main international projects are: International co-operative programme on integrated monitoring on air pollution effects - with a station since 1994, EMEP station; project group for moth monitoring in the Nordic countries since 1994. Local projects: long-term monitoring of the breeding, migrating and wintering waterfowl since 1910; monitoring of seals.

26. Current conservation education:

The national park has its visitors centre on Vilsandi island, facilities for school visits, for students and for scientific workers, etc. Several informational booklets exist.

27. Current recreation and tourism:

There are possibilities for limited tourism (ecotourism), with up to 12,000 visitors per year.

28. Jurisdiction:

Kihelkonna Commune, Kihelkonna, Saaremaa County, EE3335

Lümanda Commune, Lümanda, Saaremaa County, EE3335

Ministry of Environment, Department of Nature Conservation, Tompuiestee 24, EE0100, Tallinn, Estonia

29. Management authority:

Vilsandi National Park, Kihelkonna EE3334, Saaremaa County, Estonia

30. Bibliographical references:

Kullapere, A. (ed.) 1983. Vilsandi - nature reserve in the western coast of Estonia. Tallinn, "Valgus", 100 p. (in Estonian, with English summaries).

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Flora and vegetation of Saaremaa Island. Estonian Academy of Science, Tartu, 1990.

Leito, A. 1996. Bird watching localities in Estonia. Tartu, 36 p.

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