



MEADOWS OF DUNDURI AND RIVER SLAMPE



Location

Džūkste parish, Tukums county

Description

Remote, forest surrounded meadows have now become a 120 ha large pasture ground for semi-wild horses (Konik Polski) and cows (Heck cattle). They are also home or feeding ground for several European protected species of birds – Lesser Spotted Eagle, Corncrake, White-tailed Eagle and Black Stork. This is the place where the first river restoration project in Latvia took place, turning the small River Slampe from a melioration ditch into a natural river again.

To get the best view just climb up the hillock on the roadside, formed during restoration works, or go to the 5,5 m high viewing tower which also has a parking lot.

Restoration of River Slampe

In the first half of the past century River Slampe was a natural river meandering mostly through wet floodplain meadows. In 1974, it became the main part of melioration system of surrounding areas and was straightened into a long ditch.

In 2005, during restoration works implemented by the Administration of Kemeru National Park the lower 2.1 long section of the ditch regained a more natural riverbed again, with the total length of meanders reaching 4,6 km. Re-naturalization processes have started, and in the long run the river will attract even more animal species characteristic for natural water courses. Spring floods have become an annual natural phenomenon here again, providing suitable living conditions for many rare and protected species of animals and plants.



Heck Cattle and Konik Polski horses

Regular management activities are essential to keep the meadows open and prevent overgrowing, and this important task has mostly been assigned to the wild cows (Heck Cattle) and Konik Polski which live here all year round.

The first Heck Cattle arrived in October 2004 from Belgium, whilst the first Konik horses were brought in August 2005 from Pape (Latvia). Heck Cattle and Konik horses are typical herbivorous animals. They need open landscape and pastures rich in grass. Wild cows skim off the highest growth of the grass, while horses nibble it to the ground. As a result, the surface of the meadows is suitable for species preferring longer grass as well as for those in favor of balder patches, thus providing best possible conditions for expanding natural diversity.

In winter these animals feed on the grass left over from summer, Bramble-bush and shoots. If necessary, they are fed additionally.



Wild boar

Regulations for visiting

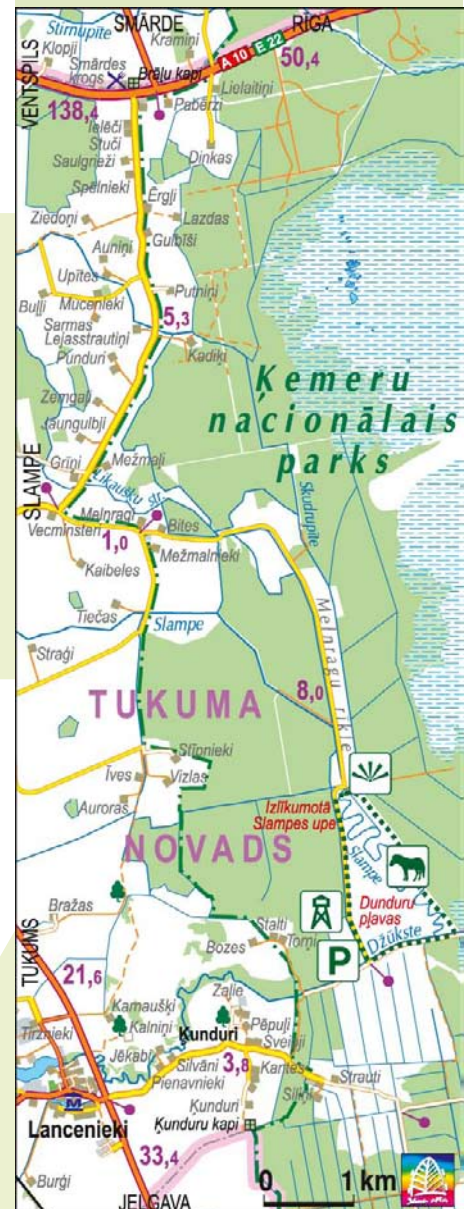
Please, do not:

- enter the enclosed territory;
- touch the electrified fences;
- feed and disturb wild horses and cows!

Getting there

• By car – drive along the Ventspils motorway (A10) until the turn to Slampe. Follow the road sign, continuing along the gravel road for 5.3 km up to the T junction, where you have to turn left. Then after 1 km, keep straight, passing directly through the farm of Melnragi. For the next 7 km the road leads through Dunduri meadows.

• By public transport – go by train from Riga to Jelgava or Tukums; then take a Jelgava-Tukums or Tukums – Jelgava bus until the bus stop “Lancenieki”. It is 4 km from the bus stop to the tower.





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The history of formation of species of the Heck cattle and Konik horses

Historically natural meadows have been maintained by large herbivorous animals – Aurochs and Tarpan. These species became extinct; however they are ancestors of the modern types of cows and horses which began to form several thousand years ago. In 1920s to 30s, German Heck brothers started breeding back European cattle with the intention to obtain animals which would be like the extinct Aurochs and could be capable of surviving in the wild. The species created are not identical to the perished Aurochs, however they are externally alike and possessing many qualities essential for living in the wild – they can use food poor in nutrients, they are tough against unfavorable weather conditions and they have well organized herd structure in order to defend themselves against predators (wolves). The semi-wild Konik Polski horses have the same qualities and like the Heck cattle have been bred back to resemble

their ancestors as much as possible. Both species are widely used for grazing grasslands in the protected nature territories across Europe.

Bird watching

The vast and quiet meadows offer great chances for birdwatching at different seasons. As meadow management activities provide perfect access to small rodents, the main specialty of this place is considered to be birds of prey, with Lesser Spotted Eagle and White-tailed Eagle on the top of the list. Spring floods, usually in March, attract thousands of migrating waterfowl and waders. At this time, it is a good idea to check puddles in surrounding fields as well – they might be full of surprises. Meanders of the re-naturalized River Slampe are attractive for heron, black stork and several duck species. Nights in May and early June are filled with squeaking of Water Rail, taken over by several dozens of breeding Corncrakes. Some outcrops of river banks are suitable for nesting of Kingfisher, whilst concrete bridges across River Slampe are

home for House Martins. To get a full picture, several places of observation should be used, including the “hillock” on the roadside and the viewing tower, as well as just stopping on the road from time to time. As the meadows are surrounded by forest, its species will usually make enjoyable addition to your list species observed here. Listening to drumming of woodpeckers in the middle of a vast meadow can really bring new colors to your birdwatching experiences.



Common crane



Marsh warbler



White stork



White-tailed eagle



Common snipe



Common kingfisher