



REPUBLIC OF ESTONIA  
ENVIRONMENTAL BOARD



# Karula National Park



# **Karula National Park**

**Võru and Valga County**



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# WELCOME TO KARULA NATIONAL PARK!

The smallest (surface area: 123 km<sup>2</sup>) and hilliest national park in Estonia, Karula National Park is located in the Karula Uplands, on the borders of Valga and Võru counties. The varied terrain of Karula was placed under national protection, with the original landscape protection area being designated a national park in 1993.

**The park was established to preserve the natural environment found in the hilly landscapes characteristic of Southern Estonia, where forests and lakes abound, as well as species under protection and the cultural heritage of the area.** Karula National Park belongs to the Natura 2000 network of protected areas in the European Union.

The unique, beautiful terrain of the Karula Uplands formed more than 10,000 years ago as a result of the action of glacial ice. With the continental glacier retreating, the **northern section of Karula came to feature predominantly dome-shaped kames**, or hills covered with fields, grassland or forests. Kames are separated from one another by small, wet meadows, forest stands, patches of marshy ground and lakes. The hilly section of the national park is its most densely populated area. The **southern part of Karula features groups of eskers and kames with mires and forests**, where human settlements are quite rare. The highest point in the uplands is **Tornimägi Hill** (137.8 m) in the village of Rebasemõisa. The uplands between the Valga Depression and the Võru-Hargla Valley zone also function as a watershed area between Lake Peipus and the Gulf of Riga. The brooks and rivers which originate from the uplands are small and carry little water in their upper reaches. The best known river here is the Mustjõgi, which flows from Lake Suur Saarljärv.

Karula is the name of a former parish, thought to come from the word *karune*, or rough. This word perfectly describes the region, which abounds in wooded hills difficult to access or cultivate.



Karula National Park, Margus Muts

# NATURAL VALUES

## Landscapes

Karula is considered to have high conservation value due to its natural and heritage landscapes. The **natural landscapes** typical of the region – large forests alternating with small lakes and mires – can be found in the southern part of the national park and near Lakes Ödri and Kaugjärv. Karula has the highest density of the black stork population in Estonia. **Heritage landscapes**, the result of thousands of years of continuous human activity, are predominantly located in hilly areas, from the villages of Jõeperä and Rebasemõisa to the villages of Mähkli and Kolski, respectively.



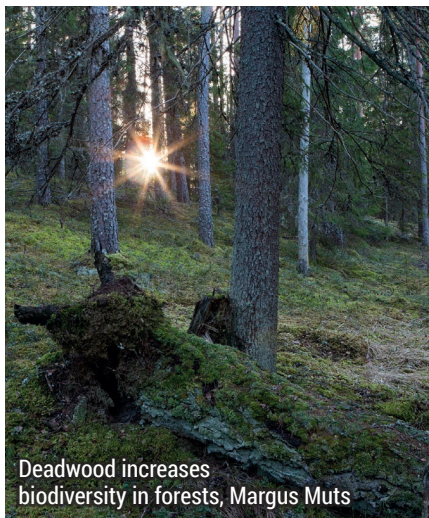
Black stork, webcam photo

In the national park there are **more than a hundred farmsteads**, the history of more than half of which can be traced back several hundred years. Karula is an area of **dispersed settlement**, which means that farmsteads or small groups thereof are scattered between the hills. The farm buildings are generally log structures, typical of the early 20th century. The distribution of heritage landscapes is predetermined by the location of arable land: hill tops and their steep slopes tend to be wooded, encircled by fields or meadows. Depressions between hills contain small lakes, wooded mires or wet meadows. Over the course of the last hundred years, the extent of heritage landscapes has more than halved due to industrialisation (rendering obsolete steep hill slopes and hayfields where nature has gradually taken over) and the deportations of the 1940s.

## Forests

Forests cover some **70% of Karula's surface area**, growing as old, unfragmented areas in the park's sparsely populated southern section and as smaller patches in the park's northern, hilly part. More than 60% of these forests are in conservation zones. The **unfragmented block of forest** which takes up almost half of the national park and is **the largest of its kind under protection in south-eastern Estonia** is considered to be of exceptionally high value. This ancient wooded area includes the strict nature reserve of Pautsjärv. This massive forested area is home to large wild game, such as elk, roe deer, wild boar, lynxes, wolves and bears.

Hilly terrain gives rise to different light and moisture conditions, which is why the forests in the national park are varied in type. The most common are mesotrophic and meso-eutrophic, accompanied by various types of mire forests (transition mire, bog, fen and alder fen), fully-drained mire forests and boreo-nemoral forests, as well as meso-eutrophic boreo-nemoral hillock forests growing on calcareous moraine.



Deadwood increases biodiversity in forests, Margus Muts

**Mesotrophic forests** take up more than a third of all forests, growing in the poor, sandy and gravelly soils found in the southern and northern parts of the national park. The biota in these forests is not very rich in species. The tree layer is dominated by pines; the shrub and field layer by lingonberries, blueberries and heather; while the moss layer is continuous and thick. Natural values associated largely with mesotrophic forests are the **Western capercaillie, osprey and slow worm**. On the edges of these forests, where vegetation is sparse, you might spot the **Eastern pasqueflower** and **sand lizard**.

**Meso-eutrophic forests**, predominantly found in former slash-and-burn fields, grow in the fertile soil of the northern and eastern parts of the national park. Here, the tree layer is dominated by spruce, while the field layer is characterised by such plant species as the common wood sorrel, false lily of the valley and Arctic starflower. These forests are home to the **three-toed woodpecker** and **northern goshawk**, which are becoming increasingly rare elsewhere in Europe.

The most common tree species in Karula are the Scotch pine, followed by birch, Norway spruce and grey alder, while aspen, alder and others are less common.

## Lakes

The retreating continental glacier caused depressions to form which later developed into lakes. The Karula Uplands boast 60 lakes, of which **40 are located in the national park**. Typically, the lakes have marshy shores; sandy shores are a rare find. Various lake types found in Estonia are represented in the national park: there are eutrophic and oligotrophic lakes as well as brown-water and clear-water lakes, and most of them are in good ecological condition. The largest among them is the picturesque **Lake Ähijärv** (176 ha) with its winding shoreline, while the deepest is **Lake Savijärv** (18 metres). **Lake Ubajärv** stands out for its biodiversity.

The majority of freshwater fish species registered in Estonia can be found in the lakes in Karula National Park. The most common are the perch, roach, pike, crucian carp and tench. As for protected species, the **spined loach** and **European weatherfish** can be found in here.

In many places, visitors will spot traces of beaver activity – lakes with a higher-than-usual water level, and flooded forests. As for mammal species under protection, you might spot the **otter** in the region's lakes. Those with abundant fish populations are also an important feeding site for the osprey.



Lake Ubajärv – a favourite among fishermen, Tiit Leito



## Small bodies of water

In Karula, the landscape is dotted with small bodies of water between hills, locally known as *lontsik*, *land* or *lump*. These shallow pools, where no fish live, are invaluable habitats and spawning grounds for amphibians and insects. The **European spadefoot toad** prefers shallow bodies of water for spawning and for its tadpoles to mature in. The **great crested newt** looks for fishless waters that get at least a measure of sunshine, where its spawn can be attached to low-lying aquatic plants. Small bodies of water are also an ideal habitat for the larvae of the protected species of the **large white-faced darter**.



European spadefoot toad, Siim Veski

## Mires

Mires cover some **10% of the national park's surface area**. The largest is the 219-hectare **Äestamise mire**, located in a depression on the edge of the uplands. Other significant mires include Apja, Pikäsilla, Kuusistsaarõ and Aruküla, situated on outwash plains in the southern part of the national park. Due to the region's hilly terrain, the majority of mires in Karula have a **small surface area**. In comparison with the rest of Estonia, Karula has an exceptionally large number of **quaking bogs** which have formed as a result of lakes becoming overgrown.

On the steep slopes of large hills, spring mires can be found.

In addition to regular mire plants, such as the marsh Labrador tea, leatherleaf, cranberry and others, various **orchid species** grow here, such as the white adder's mouth, bog adder's mouth orchid, marsh helleborine and fen orchid.



Äestamise mire in autumn, Jaanus Tanilsoo



Chamomile grapefern, Arne Ader

## Meadows

The majority of meadows in Karula (approximately 75%) are dry **grasslands** growing on mineral soil; the rest can be found in excessively wet areas. Historically, the meadows in Karula have been wet, paludified meadows and marshy meadows, which are currently disappearing from modern landscapes. Present-day grasslands evolved from old, long-standing fields which were left uncultivated for decades. In these places, vegetation characteristic of dry meadows is taking over. Only fragments of the former dry **mesotrophic meadows** have survived, and these serve as invaluable habitats for some rare species, such as the **chamomile grapefern** and **leathery grapefern**. Moonworts (*Botrychium*) of the *Pteridophyta* division reproduce by spores and are threatened by their habitats becoming overgrown and turning into scrubland.

Meadows serve as ideal habitats for biota associated with heritage landscapes: butterflies, bumblebees, bees, beetles and others. As for birds, such species as the Eurasian skylark and **corn crane** depend on open landscapes for their survival. Meadows are also important feeding sites for the **lesser spotted eagle**.

## CULTURAL HERITAGE

Karula National Park is mostly located in the former **Karula parish**, spanning the greater part of its eastern section. In addition to its unique nature, other key values protected in the national park include human settlements which evolved over a long period of time, village architecture, the traditional way of life and the Võru dialect.



Traces of the past on a landscape, Martin Suuroja



## Architecture

For the most part, the built structures in the national park are farm buildings from the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Of these, the **saunas** – more specifically smoke saunas, which are typical of the region – have survived remarkably well and are still widely used. Also, a number of **granaries** and **free-standing threshing barns** have survived. The latter date back to a relatively short period of time when dwelling quarters were built as independent structures instead of merging them with the barns. The most valuable examples of **free-standing threshing barns** are those in **Karkküla and Mundi**. In the 1870s, the building of barn dwellings was abandoned in favour of a more modern type of dwelling: **mansions**. In Karula, several impressive mansions from the earlier period, unharmed by later reconstruction efforts, survive to this day. The walls of **cowsheds** from this period were typically made of logs, clay or boulders. It was very common to build **cellars with sheds on top** of them, the latter being low-lying structures with wooden shingle roofs, reaching up to the height of a couple of logs.

## Traditional way of life

Here, people are brought together by the Võru dialect, everyday practices and customs dating back to old times, family connections spanning several centuries and a way of life shaped by the region's unique landscapes. In Karula, agriculture has traditionally played an important role in the lives of local people, who have **mainly engaged in growing cereal crops and livestock farming as well as forestry, beekeeping and fishing**.

Today, the hilly terrain is predominantly maintained by the local cows and sheep. Horses, rabbits and other farm animals as well as domestic fowl are raised on farms. Generally, **traditional skills** (mowing with a scythe and making haystacks) have survived and are used on a daily basis in small households. **Traditional crafts** – spinning yarn and dyeing it with plants; weaving cloths; making brooms, sauna whisks and wood chip baskets – are highly valued and kept alive. Traditional building techniques are quite common and widely used. Also, the custom of making *sõir*, a type of cheese characteristic of the historical Võru County, continues to this day. Local people actively participate in working bees, value the wisdom handed down through the generations and celebrate traditional festivals.





Smoke sauna in Mundi Farm, Toomas Kalve

**Smoke saunas** still hold an important place in the daily lives of people living in the national park. Saturday is popularly called *puulpäiv*, meaning a half-day, because people work only until midday; the rest of the day is dedicated to heating and later enjoying the sauna. For many, a sauna is still a sacred place, and it is believed that a smoke sauna does not only cleanse the body, but also the soul. Among other old customs, smoking meat in such saunas survives to this day.

**Forestry work** used to be the main source of livelihood in some areas where the poor, sandy soil was not suitable for agriculture. Small farms of former forestry workers

(*roomakesed*) and forest guards employed by manors located in the large forest block in the southern section of Karula are examples of this.

Over the centuries, **tree beekeeping** has been popular among local people. Old pines once used as hive trees have perished but Karula could be considered the last stronghold of that kind of traditional beekeeping in Estonia. In earlier times, a large pine was selected and a cavity was hollowed out in its trunk using a gutter axe and large bowl gouge. The opening was closed off with a board, and holes for the bees to get in and out of the hive were then made in the board. To keep the tree from being brought down in a storm, its top was cut off. To demonstrate how tree beekeeping works, the owner of Värtemäe Farm made a hive pine on his farm in 2005. It is the last existing hive tree in Karula National Park.

Due to the area being exceptionally rich in lakes, **fishing and catching crayfish** used to be very popular. Dragnets, hand-held spears, tip-ups or seines were used for fishing. A lake guard once lived by Lake Ähijärv to make sure that the peasants did not catch too many fish from the manor's lake.



Two-chamber storage shed on Saarjärve Farm, Karole Kutsar





Making a haystack, Jaak Nilson

## Folklore

Local folklore is closely associated with the landscape, and there are many legends explaining the origins of place names. In Karula, tales about old settlement and burial sites, farmsteads and musicians, popular jokes and stories about wild animals and legends about spirits living in the lakes circulated among the people. Also, practitioners of traditional medicine and witchcraft were common here. According to popular folklore, “Witchcraft is everywhere near Lake Ähijärv. Around Karula not as much as around Antsla”. Other tales speak about places where ghosts and spirits were seen, brooks and springs with a healing effect, and animals on which spells were cast.

## Võru dialect

Karula parish belongs to the **western group of Võru dialects**, exhibiting common features with the regional languages of Tartu and Mulgi. Local place names have a beautiful ring to them – take for example Lajassaarõ, Peräkonnun, Värtemäe, Tsigasmäe, Taropedäjä or Pirrupuusaarõ. The Võru language is typically a domestic and informal language rather than one used in formal conversations.

## Historical figures

**Peeter Koemets** (1868-1950) – Head of the rural municipality and an MP, born on Kaika Farm. In 1918 he took a stand against the creation of the United Baltic Duchy at a feudal council held in Rīga and presented a letter from the Estonian peasantry demanding the independence of Estonia.

**August Kerem** (1889-1942) – Minister of Agriculture, Defence and Roads in the pre-war Republic of Estonia, from the sprawling Mähkli Farm (190 ha).

**Jaan Lattik** (1878-1967) – Author, politician and clerical figure, born in Mägiste. Later, his parents moved to Vana-Mendo Farm in the national park.

**Karl Leinus** (1889-1968) – Famous choirmaster and a prominent figure in the musical life of the time, from Sibula Farm. His mother Mari was a well-known singer of traditional songs who helped to record the lyrics and melodies of many folk songs.



## SIGHTS

① **Lake Ähijärv**, with a meandering shoreline that measures some 3 kilometres, is a typical eutrophic lake. There are a number of campfire sites and swimming spots on its shores. Its average depth is 3.8 m, with a maximum depth of 5.5 m. The biota of Ähijärv is very diverse, and more than a hundred algae species have been recorded here. It is known as a good fishing spot – in addition to other freshwater fish, eels and pike perches inhabit the lake. Once, crayfish were also abundant in the lake.

Ähijärv has been considered a sacred lake, and a number of legends and myths are associated with it. There are hills on the bottom of the lake which reach up to the surface in the middle of the lake and form islands when the water level is low.

② **Church site in Lõo** – from the Iron Age (50-450 CE), a burial site in the form of a stone-cist grave. According to legend, a small, church-like chapel stood here in the Middle Ages. The church collapsed, and its tower (together with its bell) fell into Vilimiku Brook and was never found.

### ③ **Group of hills, village, former school and church in Kaika**

The group of hills in Kaika is spectacular: more than 20 dome-shaped hills, all clustered together, have been recorded in 1 square kilometre. In 1900, a Russian Orthodox Church with two onion-shaped domes was built on Kaikamäe Hill, financed by a businessman from St Petersburg. Currently, the church is in a dilapidated state. A school was established at the same time, initially as a Russian-language parish school which was later turned into an Estonian-language one. The school was closed in 1999. Today the building is used as a community centre. The cemetery behind the church is still in use. On Kaikamäe Hill there is a bench dedicated to Kaika Laine, a renowned local healer. A beautiful view over the group of hills in Kaika opens up from here.

### ④ **Village, ancient burial mound and settlement site in Mähkli**

The village of Mähkli is a dispersed settlement typical of Southern Estonia, where farmsteads or small groups thereof are scattered between the hills. The area is a great example of a traditional heritage landscape. In the forest here is an ancient burial and settlement site. According to ancient customs, the deceased were cremated, and charred bone fragments together with other objects were sprinkled between the tomb walls. It is believed that burial sites were exclusively built and used by a specific group of the population, probably those with a higher-than-average economic status. In the area, similar stone burial mounds from the Roman Iron Age (50-450 CE) have also been discovered in Karkküla and Alakonnu. There is an ancient settlement site dating back to the 1st or 2nd millennium BC as well. Nearby is a group of burial mounds consisting of a number of small sand mounds. Archaeologists have not yet been able to provide a full explanation as to their purpose.

**⑤ Ruins of a threshing barn and punishment stone on the livestock farm of Rebäse belonging to Karula Manor** – a threshing barn built from boulders with a bench-shaped punishment stone built into one of its walls. The stone was used to mete out corporal punishment (beating) to peasants for not performing their labour or for other offences.

**⑥ Stronghold hill and settlement site in Rebäse** – once there was a stronghold on this oval hill with its steep slopes, built to function as a local centre for the authorities. The people of Karula lived on the hill well before the Common Era. During the Viking Age (800-1050 CE) the hill was probably associated with the beaver trade – hunting beavers and selling their pelts to Arabs was a lucrative business at the time. During the Ancient Estonian Fight for Freedom (1208-1227) Germans besieged the stronghold and likely destroyed it. To the west of the stronghold hill is an ancient settlement site.

#### **Picturesque views, burial mound and threshing barn in Karkküla**

When walking along the winding gravel road from Lüllemäe or Rebasemõisa to Kolski, picturesque views of heritage landscapes with farmsteads open up.

**⑦ Burial mound in Karkküla** – hidden by a grove is an oval stone mound: a burial site in the form of a stone-cist grave from the Roman Iron Age (50-450 CE).

**⑧ Karkküla barn** is a free-standing threshing barn typical of Karula, once used to dry cereal crops and process flax. With the introduction of threshing machines the barn fell out of use.

**⑨ Farm buildings of Kivi forest guard station** – a barn dwelling typical of Southern Estonia and built in the mid-19th century, this was among the largest of its kind in Karula parish. The living quarters and sauna have since perished, but the barn and cowshed survive to this day. There was once a watermill on Apja Brook.

**⑩ Forestry workers' (*roomakesed*) house in Lauksilla** – a log house for two families in the middle of a small clearing in a large forest. Here, forestry work was the main source of livelihood because the soil was very sandy and thus unsuited to farming activity.

**⑪ Lossimägi Hill** – this hill was named after a hunting castle, which once belonged to the baron of Vana-Antsla. Back in the day, Vana-Antsla Manor was one of the largest of its kind in the region and its hunting castle was located on the borders of the manor, surrounded by virgin forests. The castle was destroyed in a fire in 1921. The former site of the two-storey balconied structure is now marked by large thuja and larch trees, the ruins of a furnace and a cellar built from boulders.

**⑫ The village of Saera and a battlefield from and memorial stone dedicated to the Estonian War of Independence** – In the village of Saera, on the borders of the national park, a battle was fought in the Estonian War of Independence. The Estonians prevailed in the confrontation, which was between Armoured Train No. 3 on the Estonian side and the Latvian Red Riflemen. In 2015, a memorial stone was erected in the battlefield.



Karula scenery during twilight, Sven Začek

# HIKING IN KARULA NATIONAL PARK

There are several hiking trails in the protected area, accessible on foot or by bicycle. Those hiking on foot can choose between four study trails and one hiking trail. There are information boards and signposts along the way. Those travelling by bicycle can pick a bicycle route that matches their level of fitness. For the littlest visitors, there is a nature trail and playground by Lake Ähijärv.

In addition to trails passing through the national park, Ähijärve is also the starting point – or alternatively the ending point – of the **RMK Peraküla-Aegviidu-Ähijärve hiking route**, running from one side of the country to the other. The route is marked with signposts and green-white-green paint markings.

## Karula National Park visitor centre

To make the most of their time in Karula, visitors are encouraged to start their trip at the visitor centre in the village of Ähijärve. The RMK information centre provides up-to-date information on hiking trails, campfire sites and sights in the national park as well as in other protected and recreational areas. Visitors can also watch a movie about the national park, enjoy permanent and seasonal exhibitions and use the Internet.

A permanent exhibition in the granary gives an overview of the folk culture and way of life characteristic of Karula parish in the first half of the 20th century. The visitor centre organises environmental education programmes and nature camps.

**A nature trail (0.5 km) and playground for children** can be found next to the visitor centre in Ähijärve. This attraction for the littlest visitors includes a slide chute with an observation tower, a swing set, a sandbox and a rope carousel. Information boards along the way help children learn about erratic boulders and rocks, tell the difference between coniferous and deciduous trees, recognise the bird species and tracks of mammals active in the area and discover what soil is like.

**Ähijärve track (4 km)** leads visitors around the natural and historical sights in the Ähijärve area and helps them explore local folklore. The path starts at the Karula National Park visitor centre, on the shores of Lake Ähijärv. The track, as its name suggests, runs mostly along a variety of former and present-day tracks and roads, including a hay road, a shore path, a footpath, winter roads, horse roads and a number of forest paths. Visitors can explore the terrain, forests and farm landscapes around Lake Ähijärv and in the Karula Uplands. Beautiful views over the lake open up from its northern shore.



Exhibition in a former granary (the visitor centre of Karula National Park), Tiit Leito

The track winds its way past swimming spots and camping sites. It takes approximately one-and-a-half hours to complete. There are signposts and 13 information boards along the way and the track is marked with white-red-white paint markings.

**Peräjärve forest trail (4 km)** takes hikers through a variety of forest types (including meso-eutrophic, mesotrophic, heath, bog and alder fen) before passing Lake Peräjärv (a small, overgrown lake in the middle of a forest), Hundiauk (Wolf's hole), Säitsmepõrguorg (Valley of seven hells) and Barons' spring and ending on Lossimägi Hill. The trail provides a





Landscape with traces of beaver activity on Rebäse hiking trail, Martin Suuroja

thorough overview of how forests have been used in different times. A living example of this is the pine trees growing nearby, which have been tapped for their resin.

There are signposts and 15 information boards about key sights along the way and the trail is marked with white-red-white paint markings. The trail, which runs through hilly terrain, takes approximately two hours to complete.

**Rebäse landscape trail (7 km)** helps visitors explore various landscapes characteristic of the region and learn about their development. It starts in the car park at Tornimäe. Hikers can climb the highest hill in the area (103.1 m above sea level); admire Lake Raudjärv, which is known for its ice-cold waters; take a tour around Taitse, the oldest farmstead in the area, first mentioned in 1586; and visit Linnamägi Hill, which was inhabited in the Late Iron Age. From the slopes of Tornimägi Hill, views over one of the largest gullies in the Karula Uplands opens up. The observation tower of Rebasemõisa, located on top of Tornimägi Hill, offers great views over the uplands of Otepää, Haanja and Alüksne as well as the group of hills clustered together in Kaika.

There are signposts and 15 information boards along the way and the trail is marked with white-red-white paint markings. The trail goes through areas used for livestock grazing and takes about three hours to complete.

**The long foot trail of Karula (36 km)** goes in a circle, winding its way through the picturesque landscapes of Karula. The trail does not have a fixed starting or ending point, and it is possible to walk in both directions, following signposts along the way. It is easier to complete the trail counter-clockwise, with the bonus of spectacular views. The trail is marked with white-yellow-white paint markings, plastic signs bearing the hiker symbol and tin signposts near major roads. The trail passes through the campfire sites of Veski, Mäekonnu, Õdri, Rebasemõisa and Plaagi, and the Suuremäe camp site.



View opening up from Mäekonnu tower, Janek Joab

**Karula's cycling routes (15 km or 38 km)** wind their way through the pleasantly hilly terrain of the national park, including its small roads and forests. The routes do not have a fixed starting or ending point. The most convenient place to access the routes is by the national park's visitor centre. Visitors can leave their cars in the car park and get a map of the national park from the information centre. The routes are marked with tin and plastic signs bearing the bicycle symbol. Camping is allowed at the Rebasemõisa camp site.

## INSTRUCTIONS FOR VISITORS

- Please do your best to not leave any trace of your presence, and to maintain silence.
- When moving around in nature, follow everyman's right.
- To move around on private land designated as such or enclosed by a fence, obtain the permission of the owner.
- Camping and making fires is allowed in specially arranged and designated places only (see the map). Before leaving a campfire site, put out the fire.
- It is permitted to pick berries, mushrooms and other wild produce in the national park except in strict nature reserves or in conservation zones when restrictions on movement apply (see the map).
- The strict nature reserves of Pautsjärv and Kaadsijärv were established to ensure that the ecosystems in these areas evolve exclusively as a result of natural processes, which is why all human activity – even visiting the reserves – is prohibited.
- When driving a motor vehicle or bicycle, use the designated roads or routes only. If possible, leave your car in a car park.
- It is only permitted to use non-powered floating vessels on lakes in the protected area.
- When fishing or using a floating vessel, follow the restrictions in force in the national park (see the map).
- When moving around in nature, dogs must be kept on a leash at all times.

Hiking trails go through areas used for livestock grazing, which may be **fenced off with electric fencing**.

- Use the specially arranged places or crossings to pass grazing enclosures.
- Do not touch electric fencing or any of its metal parts, as these may be live.
- Use the plastic handle to open the crossing gate.
- Make sure you close all gates.
- Do not disturb the livestock.



Hikers in the Kivi  
campfire site, Helen Kivisild

**If you become aware of activities that are potentially harmful to the environment or visitor facilities, call the Environmental Inspectorate hotline on 1313**

**For emergency services, call 112**



### Did you know?

- The national park was established in 1993 within the boundaries of a landscape protection area created in 1979.
- Karula National Park is the smallest national park (surface area: 123 km<sup>2</sup>) in Estonia and also the one with the hilliest terrain.
- The national park was established to preserve the natural environment found in the hilly landscapes characteristic of Southern Estonia, where forests and lakes abound, as well as species under protection and the cultural heritage of the area.
- 563 species of vascular plants (including 19 species of orchids), 157 species of birds, seven species of amphibians, five species of reptiles and 42 species of mammals have been recorded here.
- Important protected species include the black stork, osprey, lesser spotted eagle, sand lizard, European spadefoot toad and chamomile grapefern.
- The smoke sauna tradition is kept alive in the national park and the local Võru dialect is spoken here on a daily basis.
- Karula National Park belongs to the Natura 2000 network of protected areas in the European Union.



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