

# Launch habitat restoration work in Ķemeri National Park, Jūrmala and Mērsrags

Published: 11.01.2022.

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The Nature Conservation Agency (Agency) is starting field work in Ķemeri National Park, Lielupe estuary meadows and Mērsrags meadows of Lake Engure Nature Park to restore meadows, bogs and improve natural conditions in coastal forests.

In total, habitat restoration is planned in 40 specially protected nature territories throughout Latvia. The works are mainly planned in those habitats whose existence depends on human activity or management. Many specially protected areas serve as migration corridors for species, they are the core areas of green infrastructure. It is therefore important to ensure that the natural values they contain are preserved and that the conditions are suitable for the various species.

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☞ "Conservation of nature requires the systematic and deliberate involvement of man in order to preserve specific habitats and species whose habitats have for centuries depended on human activities or natural processes, such as natural disturbances, such as fire and floods, which are deliberately limited today." says Andrejs Svīlāns, Director General of the Agency.

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In the next two years, a total of 240 ha of specially protected habitats are planned to be restored and managed in Ķemeri National Park (ĶNP), including improving the living conditions of rare and specially protected plant species, such as the swallowtail, sand carnation, woodcock and many others. disappear as their habitats are overgrown with shrubs and trees and the humidity regime and lighting conditions of the environment change rapidly.

Raganu mire has become drier in the last 50 years due to changes in the moisture regime and some places are becoming a sparse forest, losing its mire landscape, as grown pines with a well-developed root system and a bushy crown contribute to water evaporation, depriving the high mire of water. In order to slow down the overgrowth of the bog, the densest tree overgrowth in the area of 134 ha will be removed in Raganu bog - by cutting down and removing as soon as possible the fast-growing pines, but

preserving the “bog pines”, which are even 100-150 years old. Reducing the overgrowth of the bog with trees will stop the degradation of this bog and restore the bog landscape, which could be seen in previous centuries.

In the list of renewable habitats, ĶNP also includes calcareous grass bogs. When grazing ceases, forest meadows and swamps are slowly overgrown with shrubs and trees, squeezing out other plant species from this habitat, such as the rusty blackbird, the stand, the yellow and Rusov's thistle, the swamp's single-leafed, the swallow-eyed, the common crested grebe. As a result, they disappear and become rare and vulnerable. As they are still found in the Kaņieris-Dūņieris-Sloka district of the KNP, restoration measures for these habitats are planned there.

In the ancient dunes of ĶNP, which are covered with pine forests, living conditions are suitable for a rare plant species - forest beetle. According to the special requirements of this plant, the spruce and dense undergrowth of the second floor will be cut down and openings will be created in the growing areas. Once the felled material has dried, all the branches will be picked up, stacked and burned, creating exposed areas of soil that will be suitable for germinating seeds in the coming years.

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☞ "In order for the forest weevil to multiply, it is imperative to have exposed soil where the seeds will fall and germinate next year. In forests where natural disturbances have not occurred for a long time (fires, windbreaks, etc.), a thick layer of moss and a layer of litter usually develops. In such conditions, the plant itself lives and blooms for some time, but the ripe seeds do not reach the soil when they fall into a thick moss cover," explains project manager Inga Hoņavko.

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Habitat restoration events will also be visible in Jaunķemeri - a place very popular and popular with people. Considering that fires in Latvia are not allowed in places important for human recreation, coastal forests are aging - accumulating an increasing layer of organic matter, overgrown and overgrown with deciduous trees and shrubs, thus displacing specially protected species such as sand carnations and meadow marshes, and creating conditions that are no longer suitable for sun lovers - plants and insects living in wooded dunes. Another sun lover is also a small beetle - a resinous woodpecker, which can live only in the sun-covered, thick bark of a pine at least 150 years old and cannot move elsewhere.

In the next two years, visitors to Jaunķemeri forest and beach will be able to see with their own eyes the measures taken during the project, as thick undergrowth will be cut near Jaunķemeri road, old and large pine canopy trees and shrubs and forests, the control of the invasive species, the curly rose, will continue.

Outside ĶNP - in Jūrmala and Mērsrags - restoration and management of meadows is mostly planned. For example, on the banks of the Vecslocene River, an area of 15 ha will be cleared of overgrowth, as well as bush and tree roots and large groves will be milled, the ground cover will be prepared for regular mowing, thus restoring not only a protected habitat but also improving the landscape near the city.

Similar meadow restoration works are planned in the territory of Lielupe estuary meadows in Jūrmala, on the bank of Lielupe, near the railway bridge, where small gardens have once been established in the territory of valuable meadows. The restoration of the former coastal grasslands in Mērsrags on the seashore will be especially challenging for the managers. At present, these grasslands are overgrown with dense reedbeds, and only regular mowing of reeds several times a season can allow the reforestation and flowering of coastal grassland plants.

Most of the wet grasslands in Latvia are currently in poor condition, as they are difficult to manage with modern methods, when they are not grazed as in ancient times. The maintenance of these values requires regular and annual maintenance, which will be continued by the Authority in all habitats that will be restored during the project.

*The total budget of the project "Implementation of Management Measures in Specially Protected Nature Areas and Micro-Reserves to Improve the Conservation of Habitats and Species" (No. 5.4.3.0 / 20 / 1 / 001) is planned to be EUR 3.52 million and 85% of them is financed by the European Union Cohesion Fund. Project implementation period: from 2021 to 2023.*

<https://www.daba.gov.lv/en/article/launch-habitat-restoration-work-kemeri-national-park-jurmala-and-mersrags>