



FOR BIRD WATCHERS BIRDS AT THE ĶEMERI

Welcome to Ķemeri!



The Ķemeri National Park, apart from its nature reserve zone is open to hikers, plant, animal and landscape watchers, berry and mushroom hunters, swimmers, sunbathers, bicyclists and boaters. Mechanised motor vehicles are allowed only on general use roads. Please let's make sure to nurture the values which led us to visit the park in the first place!



BIRDS: A KEY ELEMENT OF THE ĶEMERI NATIONAL PARK

Nearly 260 of the 342 species of birds that have ever been spotted in Latvia have been seen at the ĶNP. There are both nesting and migratory birds in the park's forests, meadows and waterways. Many species are uncommon and protected. In the autumn and spring, thousands of migrating geese and cranes use the park to rest and spend the night.

Popular bird-watching locations at the ĶNP (marked on the map as 1-7)

1 Lake Ķaņieris – A shallow an overgrown lagoon-type lake, with more than 200 species of birds spotted there (mostly nesting birds). The most likely time to see lots of birds is in the spring and early summer, when you can visit the lake at night to hear the voices of the Eurasian bittern, various species of reed warblers, the little crane, and the water rail. Toward the latter half of the summer, there will be migratory birds such as different kinds of ducks, wading birds such as sandpipers and plovers, and different types of gulls. Early in the autumn, shortly before nightfall, geese will arrive at the lake in large numbers of to spend the night. If the lake is not frozen in winter, you can see grey herons, ducks, swans and ospreys. There's a bird-watching tower on Riekstu Island. If you want to use a boat, you must rent one from the local facilities. Please note that there are seasonal restrictions in certain parts of the lake.

2 Lake Sloka - A shallow lagoon-type lake near the sea, with birds present throughout the year. Water birds are in the lake during the winter if it is not frozen over. Thousands of birds (mostly coots and ducks) are here in the spring and autumn during migration season. During the spring, there are mute swans, ducks, crested grebes, coots and different egrets. There's a bird-watching tower, a car park, spots of picnics, and the Lake Sloka trail, which is around 3 km in length.

3 The Dumbrāji Trail runs through the forest in the wetlands of the Vēršupīte River. It has not been affected much by people, but thanks to the vast amount of deadwood in the area, woodpeckers and other birds that nest in holes in the trees. Mid-March to early July is the best time to visit, particularly in the morning, when the woodpeckers will be most active. Other birds that can be seen here include titmice, wrens and robins.

4 The Dunduri Meadows are encircled by forest and are rather peripheral, which is why birds love them. The best time to visit is from the spring until the latter half of the summer. There's a bird-watching tower. This is a good place to watch predatory birds, because small rodents are common in the area. The restored and natural flow of the Slampe River is good for herons, storks and several types of ducks. Migrating water birds are attracted to the meadows during spring floods. In some places along the river shore there might be the nests of common kingfishers. The cement bridges across the river are enjoyed by the common house martin, and on summer evenings the song of the corncrake.

5 The Lapmežciems seashore where the tributary of the Starpiņupe River flows into the sea – this is a wonderful place to see wading birds, gulls and different kinds of ducks, particularly during migration season. Birds are attracted by the sandbanks and mud that are here. The best time to watch birds is July and August. The Starpiņupe River does not freeze, and water birds spend the winter between its sluices and the sea.

6 The fields of Slampe are between Vīksele, the Kalnāji farm and Lancenieki. This is an open rural landscape near the borders of the ĶNP. It is popular among migrating geese and cranes. During the autumn and spring, large groups of birds can be seen here resting and feeding.

7 The Raganas Swamp along the Ķemeri-Antiņciems road is a high swamp with its corresponding landscape and the possibility of spotting cranes or heath-cocks.

More about birds: www.putni.lv, www.lob.lv, www.ornitofaunistika.lv

BEST PRACTICE WHEN BIRD-WATCHING

- Leave the birds alone
- Remember that all species of bird are equally important
- Protect the nesting places of birds
- Respect the rights of others and yourself
- Write down your observations
- Thoughtfully share your knowledge
- Try to learn more

Bird-related events in the ĶNP. You can monitor events at: www.daba.gov.lv

- Bird watching days in the spring (each April)
- Autumn bird watching trips, "The Feathers of Ķemeri," which are part of an international bird-watching process on the first weekend of October each year)

Equipment: The best binoculars for bird-watching will be 8x30 to 10x50 binoculars with an attached telescope (32-60x). The binoculars will allow you to look at flocks of birds that are of interest to you, while the telescope will allow you to determine the species and other nuances about the birds. Bring a bird guidebook to help you if you spot an uncommon bird or one with which you're just not familiar. Choose clothing and footwear appropriate to the weather conditions and planned activities when going out in the nature. Think about protection against insects and mosquitoes which are especially many during the summer season in wetlands of Ķemeri National Park.

The Ķemeri National Park was established in 1997, primarily for the purpose of protecting wetlands – the shallow western shore of the Bay of Rīga, overgrown seaside lakes, extensive swamps, damp forests, and lowland meadows as important locations for plants (fully one-quarter of the endangered plants which are listed in the Latvian Red Book are found in the park) and animals (particularly nesting and migrating birds). The park territory also includes one of the largest swamps in Latvia – the Great Ķemeri Heath, as well as other fairly large swamps such as Raganu Swamp, Zāļais Swamp, Čaukcīems Swamp and Sloka Swamp. Some of these were once used for peat extraction. The area around Ķemeri has long since been known as a source of sulphurous streams, and it remains an important location for obtaining sulphurous water and medicinal mud which at one time served as the foundation of the widely known Ķemeri Spa. Interesting historical objects in the park are completely linked to the seashore as a place where people could relax and recover their health. Today the territory of the national park includes educational nature trails (the Melnalkšņi Marsh trail, the Lake Sloka trail), bike routes, three bird-watching towers, etc. The administrative and informational centre for the park is found in the "Forest House" in Ķemeri.

The Ķemeri National Park has several bike, water and automobile routes. Look for a list of routes on www.countryholidays.lv and for markings out in nature!

BIRD SPECIES THAT CAN BE SEEN

1 The great bittern is a protected bird which lives in reeds. It is mottled brown and chubby, and very seldom does anyone see it. The bird's voice, however, can be heard at a distance of five km if the conditions are right. You won't confuse the great bittern's voice with any other – it is deep and unique, similar to the sound that you get when you blow air into an empty bottle. There are 20 known pairs of great bitterns at the KNP.

2 The black stork is threatened throughout the world, and the fact is that it was the black stork that led to the idea of the Kemeru National Park. The black stork nests in large, natural and undisturbed areas of forest – areas which are becoming less and less common in Latvia. In the Kemeru National Park, the bird is most often spotted in small rivers or streams, looking for the fish that are its diet. Fewer than 10 pairs of black storks are known to be living in the KNP.

3 The Eurasian pygmy owl is the smallest owl in Latvia, and it is tiny, indeed. The bird is seen quite often in the KNP, and, unusually for owls, it is active during the daytime, too. The owl's voice is a simple whistle, and if you learn to reproduce it, you can get the wee owl to come up to for a closer look. Woodpeckers help to ensure the presence of the Eurasian pygmy owl in the forest – the birds live in woodpecker holes. Some 100 pairs of Eurasian pygmy owls are thought to be living in the KNP.

4 The lesser spotted eagle is another species of bird which requires forests for survival – the birds build their nests and raise their young there. Latvia is home to fully 13% of the world's population of lesser spotted eagles, and several pairs of the birds live in the Kemeru National Park, where conditions are appropriate for them. The lesser spotted eagle mostly eats rodents, and it is often seen in the air above fields and meadows. There are around five pairs of lesser spotted eagles in the KNP.

5 The water rail. Should you ever be walking down a road alongside water that is full of water plants, and it is dusk late in the spring or early in the summer, you may hear a noise similar to the squealing of a piglet. It's probably not a piglet. You've probably come across a proud male water rail who is singing to attract the favours of a lady water rail and do better than his competitor. This is a small bird which keeps itself hidden, and the voice is usually the only thing to indicate its presence. Between 50 and 100 pairs of water rails nest in the KNP.

6 The little crane is like the great bittern in that it is very seldom seen, but has a loud and easily recognised voice. The little crane is found in places which are thickly overgrown – the reeds of Lake Kaņjeris or the part of the Melnragi meadows that has been flooded by beavers. There are 25 to 30 pairs of little cranes in the KNP.

7 The crane is a beautiful bird and has probably been seen and heard by just about everyone – toward the autumn, up in the air, flying in formation with hundreds of other cranes and heading South for the winter. The bird is often seen on the ground at the Kemeru National Park, mostly in the autumn, when the birds gather together on fields to gain strength for the long flight ahead. There are 40-60 pairs of nesting cranes in the KNP.

8 Geese are seen in absolutely huge numbers at the Kemeru National Park during migration season – tens of thousands of birds overhead and, often, spending the night at the park. The arrival of a flock of geese shortly before dark is an impressive natural performance which everyone should experience at least once.

9 The osprey is a smallish and light predatory bird, eating only fish which it spots from high, high above before throwing itself into the water to catch its prey. There are three or four pairs of ospreys at the KNP.

10 The white-tailed eagle is the largest predatory bird in Latvia, and several pairs of white-tailed eagles live in the Kemeru National Park. Older birds just stay there, while younger ones like to wander a bit. The white-tailed eagle loves to eat water birds, so if you ever spot a bit of panic among birds in a body of water, it is likely that you will find the cause of the fuss if you just look up in the air. There are between three and five pairs of white-tailed eagles in the KNP.

11 The corncrake – it's said that the harsh "crex, crex" sound that the corncrake makes cuts the summer into two parts. During the first part of the summer, this endangered bird offers an inviolable component of the rural landscape in Latvia. There are between 200 and 240 pairs of corn crakes in the KNP.

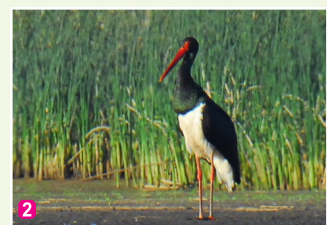
12 The white-backed woodpecker is the symbol of the Kemeru National Park, and it just loves the local forests with trees of various ages, fallen trees, etc. It is precisely for this reason that the KNP is also home to all other kinds of woodpecker-type birds in Latvia. There are 20 to 30 pairs of white-backed woodpeckers at the park.

13 The Eurasian three-toed woodpecker is usually found in old and shadowy forests of fir, particularly if there are lots of dead trees there. There are places in the KNP where you can hear the drumming of several of these woodpeckers at once during mating season. There are an estimated 20 to 40 pairs of three-toed woodpeckers in the KNP.

14 The red-breasted flycatcher returns from its winter locations late – only in late May. During the summer, its song can often be heard from the yard of the KNP administrative centre, as well as near the Dumbrāji trail. There are between 150 and 300 pairs of red-breasted flycatchers at the KNP.



Great bittern *Botaurus stellaris*



Black stork *Ciconia nigra*



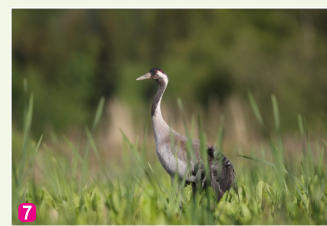
Lesser spotted eagle *Aquila pomarina*



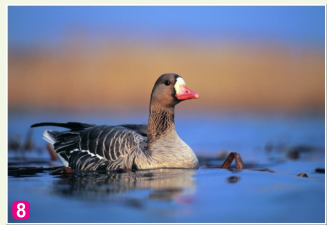
Eurasian pygmy owl *Glaucidium passerinum*



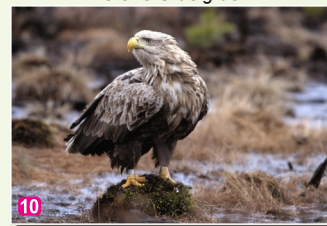
Little crane *Porzana parva*



Crane *Grus grus*



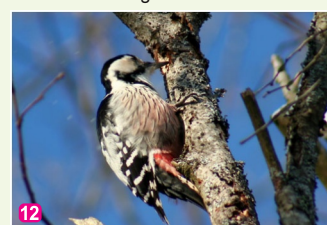
Goose *Anser albifrons*



White-tailed eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla*



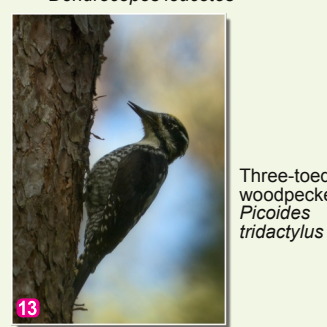
Osprey *Pandion haliaeetus*



White-backed woodpecker *Dendrocopos leucotos*



Corn *Crex crex*



Three-toed woodpecker *Picoides tridactylus*



Red-breasted flycatcher *Ficedula parva*

■ - bird can be seen regularly, ■■■ - bird can be seen occasionally, * - bird voices can be heard

Species	Where	When												
		Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	
1 Great bittern *	Lake Kaņjeris				■	■	■	■	■	■	■			
2 Black stork	Slampe river and the Dunduri meadows				■	■	■	■	■	■	■			
3 European pygmy owl	Forests around Kemeru	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
4 Lesser spotted eagle	Dunduri and Melnragi meadows, Odiņi polder				■	■	■	■	■	■	■			
5 Water rail *	Lake Kaņjeris, Melnragi meadows				■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
6 Little crane	Lake Kaņjeris, Melnragi meadows				■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
7 Crane	Melnragi meadows, Slampe fields				■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
8 Geese	Lake Kaņjeris				■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
9 Osprey	Lake Kaņjeris, Lake Sloka				■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
10 White-tailed eagle	Lake Kaņjeris, Lake Sloka, Dunduri meadows	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
11 Corn crane *	Dunduru meadows					■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
12 White-backed woodpecker	Dumbrāji trail, Lake Sloka hiking trail	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
13 Three-toed woodpecker	Dumbrāji trail, Lake Sloka hiking trail				■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
14 Red-breasted flycatcher	Dumbrāji trail, Lake Sloka hiking trail					■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■



Lauku ceļotājs
 12-21, Vilīpa str., Rīga, LV-1083, Latvia
 Ph:+371 67617600, F: +371 67830041
 lauku@celotajs.lv, www.countryholidays.lv

www.countryholidays.lv

Text: Kemeru nacionālā parka administrācija
 Photo: Jānis Kuze, Andris Poišs,
 Māris Strazds, Aivars Petriņš, Andris Klepers,
www.ornitofaunistika.lv (Jānis Stomers,
 Arnis Dimperāns),
 Jānis Jansons (www.putni.info)