

ACADEMY OF SCIENCES OF THE ESTONIAN
SSR



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NATURE
CONSERVATION
IN THE
ESTONIAN S.S.R.

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The Soviet Socialist Republic of Estonia is a territory where the work of nature protection has an unbroken tradition of over fifty years. At a yet earlier date — during the second half of the nineteenth century and at the beginning of the present century — the problem of protecting certain areas and rare natural objects had been taken in hand. But these first steps represent rather the tentative efforts of a few private enthusiasts than the introduction of a systematic and comprehensive scheme of nature conservation.

On August 14, 1910, the Riga Naturalists' Society set up a bird sanctuary on the tiny islands of Vaika off the west coast of Saaremaa (Oesel). This was the first protected area of its kind in the Baltic countries. The sanctuary continued to exist right up to the outbreak of the first World War, and the date of its foundation may be regarded as the beginning of official nature conservation in Estonia.

Persistent work in this field was done under the regime of the bourgeois republic, when the idea of nature protection was disseminated through the medium of the press, a number of reserves were created and a nature conservancy law was carried into effect.

With the establishment of Soviet power in Estonia both the tasks and the prospects of nature conservation were immeasurably broadened. At the present moment it would be unthinkable to undertake any far-reaching scheme of research into the natural resources of the country, or to launch any project for their practical utilisation, without taking into consideration the interests of nature protection. We shall now submit a brief survey

of the manner in which conservation is organised in Soviet Estonia.

The basic principles of nature conservation in Estonia are laid down in the Act of June 7, 1957, on "the protection of nature in the Estonian SSR" (see appendix). The enforcement of the law is secured by a number of decrees of the Council of Ministers of the Estonian SSR, of which the first, and most important, was promulgated on July 11, 1957.

The central organ of administration is the Nature Conservancy Board, attached to the Council of Ministers. Among the manifold functions and responsibilities of the Board may be listed the following: verification of the practical measures taken to ensure the conservation of all protected objects and natural resources; surveillance of the rightful operation and enforcement of the law; the registration of objects declared under protection; the drafting of new legislation; the representation and defence of the interests of nature conservation in every case where plans are drawn up for the exploitation of natural resources; the exercise of control over the introduction of alien plant and animal species; the issue of permits for the scientific use and investigation of protected objects; the formulation and submission of incriminating evidence against offenders under the Act to the appropriate organs of justice.

Research work in the field of nature protection is directed by the Commission for Nature Conservation of the Estonian Academy of Sciences. This organisation is partly scientific, partly public in character, and its members include representatives of a wide range of institutions. Its main tasks are: to subject to scientific analysis all projects for the conservation, rational exploitation and renovation of the natural resources of the republic, and to formulate the general principles involved; to assist the Nature Conservancy Board of the Council of Ministers in its work of determining the basic aims and methods of nature protection; to consider and submit proposals for the extension of the entire network of protected objects; to organise research dealing with protected objects; to study and select

new objects standing in need of protection; to give consultation on questions of nature conservation; to draw up programmes of study for teaching nature conservation in educational establishments; to compile and publish literature, and to organise public lectures on the subject of nature conservation; to convene meetings and conferences where problems of nature conservation are discussed; to maintain contact with similar institutions and organisations both at home and abroad.

Thus the work of nature conservation in Estonia is conducted jointly by the Nature Conservancy Board and the Commission for Nature Conservation, acting in close collaboration. Much has been done, and is still being done, to popularise the idea of nature protection among the masses of the people by the Section of Nature Conservation (founded 1920) of the Naturalists' Society (founded 1853) affiliated to the Academy of Sciences. The Section has grown steadily of recent years and has now assumed the dimensions of a broad public organisation, defending the interests and propagating the aims of nature conservation in every corner of Estonian territory.

There are, at present, 4 national parks and 26 permanent nature reserves in Estonia.

The national parks are areas in which the whole territory, in its entirety, is preserved as far as possible in its original, primeval state, down to the least details of the landscape and all its component parts. They are fields of continuous scientific investigation. Each park has its own management, including both the scientific personnel and maintenance staff. The most extensive protected area of this type in Estonia is the Matsalu national park (60,000 hectares), which is the largest haunt of waterfowl and marsh fauna in the Baltic countries. The chief nesting-place for sea birds is the sanctuary at Vaika, mentioned at the beginning of the present article. Though small in extent (35 hectares), the sanctuary is of great interest on account of the exceptional features of its landscape. Of the two remaining national parks, Viidumäe (593 hectares) is notable for its unusual flora and

rare plant associations, and Nigula (2730 hectares) for its typical peat bogs and woodlands.

As for the nature reserves, their main object is to secure the preservation of a certain given element of the environment (e.g. of the landscape, or of the local fauna or flora, etc.). As a rule, they have no permanent staff, and their maintenance and upkeep are arranged on a voluntary basis. As objects of scientific research they are open to all. They vary greatly in size, from 4.8 hectares (the meteorite craters at Kaali) to 8200 hectares (the Muraka bog). Eleven such reserves have been set up for the protection of the landscape (the largest being the primeval valley of the River Ahja — 1040 hectares, the Rõuge lake country — 1210 hectares, and Aegviidu-Nelijärve — 1555 hectares). Of the remainder, one is geological in character, four are botanical, one ornithological, and nine botanico-zoological (including the vast Virtsu-Laelatu-Puhtu reserve — 4900 hectares, the Nätsi bog — 1650 hectares, and the Muraka bog, mentioned above). Apart from all these, four new reserves are to be set up for the preservation of extensive tracts of forest land.

The total area of the national parks already in existence is 63,358 hectares. That of the permanent reserves is 25,455 hectares. Taken together, they constitute ca 2% of the entire surface area of the republic.

In addition protection has been extended to 34 separate elements of the landscape (waterfalls, geological surface formations and exposures, karst areas, etc.), 46 parks, 4 dendraria and experimental plantations, 11 orchards and valuable fruit-trees, 335 ancient trees, 222 glacial boulders and deposits of rocks, 55 plant species and 186 animal species.

Game and fish are protected by the special hunting and fishing regulations authorised by the Council of Ministers in 1958.

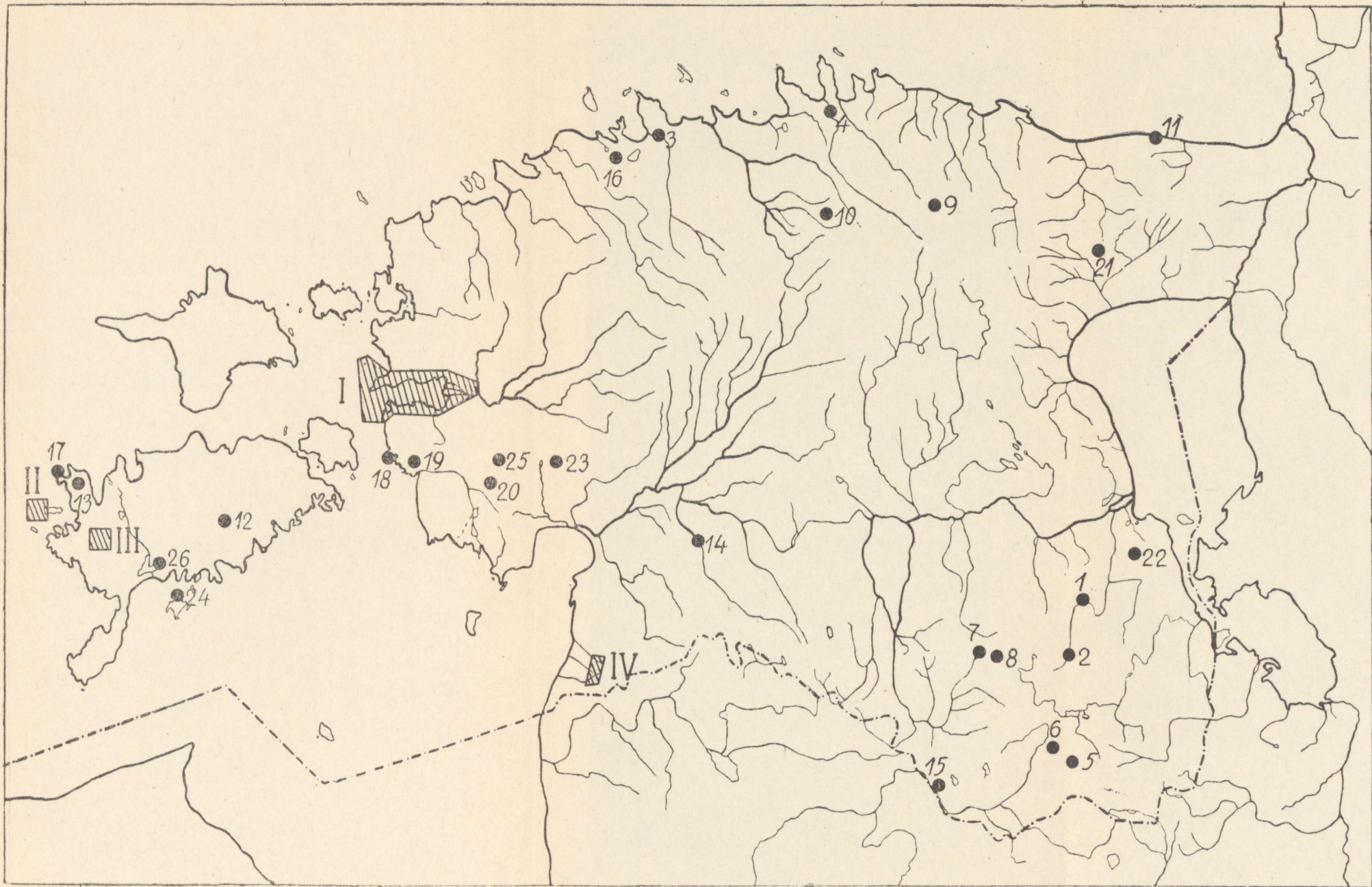
The conservation of protected territories and objects is operated along two channels. In the case of the national parks protective measures are carried into effect by the permanent staffs of keepers and guardians; in the case of the reserves and individual objects protection is ensured by the state organs or public

bodies on whose territory they are situated. Quite apart from the state-protected objects of national significance, there are large numbers of local protected objects, the conservation of which is provided for by the urban or rural executive committees under whose jurisdiction they fall.

Scientific research is an intrinsic component of nature conservation in the Estonian SSR. In the national parks this is partly organised by the specially appointed, permanent scientific personnel. But in all protected areas and objects research is mainly conducted by other institutions, in particular by various bodies affiliated to the Academy of Sciences of the Estonian SSR.

Every possible means is employed to inculcate the idea of nature conservation in the general public. The elements of nature conservation are taught at the schools. A special course in nature protection is read to students of natural history, geography and agriculture at Tartu University and at the Estonian Academy of Agriculture. "Bird Day," which falls in March, and "Nature Conservation Day," in May, are widely celebrated in the schools. The frequent articles which appear in newspapers and magazines, popular lectures for both children and adults, special exhibitions, regular radio and TV broadcasts — all these serve to keep the principles of nature conservation alive in the public conscience. During recent years literature on the subject has begun to appear more and more frequently, including such important publications as the "Looduskaitse põhimaterjale" ("Basic Materials of Nature Conservation"), issued by the Nature Conservancy Board, and the "Looduskaitse teatmik" ("Nature Conservation Handbook"), published by the Commission for Nature Conservation. A large photograph album, "The Beauty of the Estonian Countryside," has already appeared, and several similar albums and other works of a popular nature are being prepared for the press. A series of scientific papers presenting the results of researches in the national parks and other protected objects is also nearing completion.

Following the promulgation of the Nature Conservancy Bill of the Estonian SSR in 1957, nature conservation in the republic has been placed on a firm footing. Since then it has developed into a wide and growing movement which has become accustomed to rely with confidence not only on the contributions of specialists and professional nature protection workers, but also on the intelligent support and co-operation of the broad masses of the people.



Map showing the sites of the national parks and permanent nature reserves of the Estonian SSR.

The national parks and permanent nature reserves of the Estonian S.S.R.

(Note: The numbers given correspond to those shown on the map)

- I. The Matsalu National Park (60,000 hecets.)
- II. The Vaika National Park (35 hecets.)
- III. The Viidumäe National Park (593 hecets.)
- IV. The Nigula National Park (2730 hecets.)

Landscape reserves

1. The primeval valley of the R. Ahja (1040 hecets.)
2. Tilleorg (190 hecets.)
3. The valley of the R. Pirita (550 hecets.)
4. The valley of the R. Valgejõgi (665 hecets.)
5. The Suur-Munamägi and Vällamägi hills (475 hecets.)
6. The Rõuge lake country (1210 hecets.)
7. Lake Pühajärv (870 hecets.)
8. The Väike-Munamägi and Tedremägi hills (335 hecets.)
9. The Neeruti hills (885 hecets.)
10. Aegviidu-Nelijärve (1555 hecets.)
11. The Saka - Ontika - Toila Glint (890 hecets.)

Geological reserve

12. The Kaali meteorite craters (4.8 hecets.)

Botanical reserves

13. The wooded meadows at Tagamõisa (130 hecets.)
14. The wooded meadows at Halliste (270 hecets.)
15. The wooded meadows at Koiva (170 hecets.)
16. The Harku dendropark (45 hecets.)

Botanico-zoological reserves

17. Harilaid (400 hecets.)
18. Virtsu - Laelatu - Puhtu (4900 hecets.)
19. Nehatu swamp (410 hecets.)
20. Nätsi bog (1650 hecets.)
21. Muraka bog (8200 hecets.)
22. The Nature Conservation Area at Järvselja (19 hecets.)
23. The hump in the Virusaare bog (42 hecets.)
24. The deciduous woods on Abruksa Is. (103 hecets.)
25. The oak forest at Mihkli (91 hecets.)

Ornithological reserve

26. Linnulaht ("The Bay of Birds") (335 hecets.)

THE SOVIET SOCIALIST REPUBLIC OF ESTONIA
ACT OF JUNE 7, 1957

On the Protection of Nature in the
Estonian S.S.R.

The Supreme Soviet of the Estonian S.S.R. notes that the exercise of care to ensure the rational utilisation of natural resources and the preservation of beautiful and distinctive features of the Estonian landscape, together with the protection of noteworthy areas and monuments of nature, are the indispensable prerequisites of scientific research and of satisfying the growing material, cultural and aesthetic needs of the people. The conservation of nature is an important duty of the Socialist state and of the whole body of the Soviet public.

The Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Estonia

resolves:

§ 1. That areas inhabited by plant and animal species of particular scientific interest, likewise areas which are of interest by reason of their geological structure or distinctive surface formations, and which require protection in their entirety, together with all the component elements of which they are formed, shall be taken under state protection and declared National Parks.

Areas in which a certain given element of the landscape regarded as a natural unit (the fauna, flora, geological denudations, individual features of the scenery, etc.) stands in need

of protection, shall be declared either permanent or temporary Nature Reserves.

State protection shall be similarly accorded to separate monuments of nature and natural objects (animal and plant species, ancient trees, waterfalls, geological denudations, glacial boulders, etc.), which are both rare and threatened by extinction or destruction; also to natural objects (parks, woods, rivers, lakes, etc.), which cannot be directly qualified as nature monuments, but which nevertheless need to be preserved for scientific, cultural or aesthetic considerations.

§ 2. To set up a Nature Conservancy Board, to be attached to the Council of Ministers, with the object of furthering the development of nature protection in the Estonian S.S.R.; to lay on the Nature Conservancy Board thus constituted the duty of acting in close collaboration with scientific and public bodies to this effect, and of organising a nation-wide network of officers and agents of nature conservation.

§ 3. To assign to the Council of Ministers of the Estonian S.S.R. the task:

a) of formulating and authorising the statutes of the Nature Conservancy Board;

b) in conformity with the present Act and on the basis of proposals submitted by the said Nature Conservancy Board, of confirming the status of the National Parks and the permanent and temporary Nature Reserves to be established, together with the list of nature monuments and individual features of the landscape declared under state protection;

c) of reinforcing the measures taken to ensure the effective protection and to increase the numbers of fish, wildfowl and game;

d) of devising and applying means for the preservation and maintenance of parks throughout the territory of the Republic.

§ 4. That the wilful damage or destruction of natural objects in the National Parks or Nature Reserves, and the wilful damage or destruction of individual objects placed under state protection, shall be punishable by a term of imprisonment up to two years or by

enforced correctional labour from one month to a year, provided always that these offences, by their nature, do not incur still heavier penalties.

§ 5. That the infliction of wilful injury in urban districts to trees, beds of standing plants, etc., to which state protection has not been accorded, is a misdemeanour which may be summarily dealt with and which renders the offender liable for damages.

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