

Sary Zhadzien Nature Reserve



Location:

Polesia, Belarus



Area:

17,048.4 ha



National protection
status:

National Nature Reserve



International
protection status:

Ramsar site (2140) – Sary Zhaden (17,048.4 ha);
Emerald Network*
(BY0000051) – Sary
Zhadzien (23,560.6 ha);
IBA (BY039) – Sary
Zhadzien (16,285.0 ha).

* After denunciation of accession to the Bern Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats, de jure there are no Emerald Network sites in Belarus.



General information

This area is a vast and tapestry of forests and wetlands. At its heart lie the Sary Zhadzien and Vialikaje mires, two great peatlands separated by ancient sand dunes. The landscape is dominated by two key ecosystems: oligotrophic and mesotrophic bogs, and expansive pine and deciduous forests. The area's hydrology is a unique blend of natural and historical features. An old network of canals, dug in the late 19th century, crisscrosses the land. Most of these have since been reclaimed by nature – overgrown with vegetation and dammed by beavers, with the water eventually finding its way into the Scviga River. A near-total absence of roads and the seasonal waterlogging make this area virtually impenetrable to people. This very inaccessibility, however, is what makes it a critically important sanctuary for species that are highly sensitive to human activity and disturbance, such as the rare Greater Spotted Eagle.

Biodiversity and natural values

The site is a large complex of forest and wetland habitats. About 10 endangered habitats requiring specific protection under the Bern Convention (Resolution No 4 of the Standing Committee to the Bern Convention) have been identified here, and this area is of particular importance for their conservation in Belarus. This applies, in particular, to Inland sand dunes (2330), Transitional mires and quaking bogs (7140), Beds of large sedges, usually without free-standing water, Riverine ash-alder woods, wet at high water but not at low water (91E0), Sphagnum birch woods (91D0), Boreal coniferous bog woods and Nemoral coniferous bog woods (91D0), Raised bog complexes (7110), etc.

The site is a critical breeding area for globally threatened species, such as the Greater Spotted Eagle (*Aquila clanga*) (more than 3% of the national population). It is the breeding area for 2% of the national population of the Crane (*Grus grus*), the Great Grey Owl (*Strix nebulosa*), the White-tailed Eagle (*Haliaeetus albicilla*). The Black-tailed Godwit (*Limosa limosa*), the Eurasian Curlew (*Numenius arquata*), the Black Stork (*Ciconia nigra*) and the Short-toed Snake Eagle (*Circaetus gallicus*) have also been recorded breeding here.

The site is an important habitat for rare plant species, such as the Yellow Azalea (*Rhododendron luteum*) and the Sand Jurinea (*Jurinea cyanoides*). More than 30 species listed in the Resolution No. 6 of the Standing Committee to the Bern Convention have their habitat here.

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The most important impacts and threats

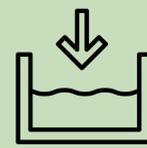
The forest habitats and species are threatened by intensification of forestry (various types of logging), deadwood withdrawal, and forest plantation. The wetland ecosystems suffer from the current drainage system in adjacent areas and ditches within the area, as well as road construction. Hunting and fires also have negative impact on habitats and biodiversity.



Illegal hunting



Dead wood removal,
sanitation felling



Old drainage systems



Conservation measures

About 72% of the area is protected within the National Wetland Reserve, where drainage, construction, logging and some other land uses are restricted. Special protected areas have been established for some natural habitats and species. Existing conservation measures cover approx. 75% of the area.

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Mikhail Kapychka