



The first mention of the merchant settlement of Björkö (Swedish for Birch island) or Koivisto (Finnish for birch, birch forest), situated on the shore of the Björkööund Strait, dates back to the early 13th century, the time of the Vikings. Interestingly, the modern Russian name for the islands is also derived from the word meaning "birch" – *beresa*. The archipelago had belonged to Sweden since 1323, but was ceded to the Russian Empire in 1721, after the Northern War. In 1811 it became part of the newly established Grand Duchy of Finland. The life of the local people has always been tightly bound to the sea: shipbuilding, sailing and fishing were the main income sources and sealing was a traditional occupation. Until 1918, there was a campus of the Kronstadt School of Marine Engineers, a shipyard and a small airfield in the village of Eistilä. Koivistoonsaari (Bolshoy Berezovy Island) was a large shipbuilding and commercial centre of the Koivisto region. In the beginning of the 20th century agriculture began to play a more important part in the islands' economy. By the end of the 1930s, there were 16 villages on the islands, with the total population of over 3000 people. The local infrastructure comprised road network, piers, small fish-processing factories, agricultural and forest enterprises, cooperative shops etc. There were schools and branches of different public organizations (unions of farmers, fishermen and housewives, youth and sport clubs etc.). During the Russian-Finnish battles of 1939-1944, the Finnish population had to leave the archipelago. The area was ceded to the Soviet Union and was declared a border zone. Fishermen cooperatives were formed and later turned into collective farms (*kolkhozy*); a fish-smoking unit was built. Altogether, however, the population of the islands gradually declined and some villages were abandoned. The border zone regime, limiting the access to the islands and the economic activities there, contributed to the conservation of the archipelago's nature. At present, there are only three inhabited villages on the islands: Petrovskoe, Krasny Ostrov (Krasnoostrovsky) and Severnaya.

History

The granite base of the archipelago's islands was formed more than two billion years ago. The landscape of the area has changed repeatedly ever since. Nowadays there are no rocky outcrops there, the bedrock being completely covered by sand and boulder deposits. The climate has also been mutating, with warm periods interspersed with periods of glaciation. The archipelago's ecosystems have preserved living proofs of the ancient past. Marine crustaceans – isopod *Saduria*, amphipod *Monoporeia* and mysids – are now living representatives of relict fauna, inhabited periglacial lakes ca. 1000 years before present. The fourhorn sculpin (*Triglopsis quadricornis*), a fish feeding on these invertebrates, also lives in the Baltic Sea since that time. The relicts of subsequent warmer periods are broad-leaved forests of oak, lime, maple, elm and ash, preserved owing to the mild marine climate and rich soil. At present broad-leaved forests are rare in the Leningrad Region, and need protection. Most islands are covered with coniferous forests, with pine forests predominating on Bolshoy Berezovy and Zapadny Berezovy Islands and spruce forests being more common on Severny Berezovy. Birch forests can be found everywhere in the area, while black alder forests grow only along the coast and on abandoned agricultural lands. There are mires as well as small meadows on the larger islands. And yet the most remarkable feature of the reserve, making it the "pearl" of the protected areas network of the Leningrad Region, is the diversity of its coastal and marine ecosystems.



Nature

Rules for visitors of the reserve

Prohibited activities:

- unauthorized cutting of trees and bushes, tapping trees for gum
- driving or parking motor vehicles off the roads and outside specially designated areas
- visiting water areas of the Gulf of Finland serving as stopover sites of migratory waterbirds (including shallow waters along shores of the islands) and areas of mass nesting of waterbirds (islands Tsepnoy, Zvenjevoy, Bolshaya Otmel, Rondo, Klinok, Kamenisty, Bolshoy Reef, Vostochny Bliznets, Zapadny Bliznets, Ravitsa with adjacent islets, Maly Berezovy with adjacent islets) from April 1 to August 1
- visiting pupping areas of ringed seals (Gulf of Finland water areas to the south-west of archipelago) and destroying ice cover in this area from February 15 to natural ice break-up
- camping and making fires outside specially designated areas, burning grass and reeds
- organization of mass sport and recreational activities
- organization of landfills, dump household or industrial waste
- landing outside specially designated areas
- hunting, collecting birds' eggs
- collecting reeds, other shore plants and flotsam
- collecting/killing protected species of plants, fungi and animals

You may:

Walk in the nature reserve, pick mushrooms and berries for personal use, fish in accordance with current fishing regulations*, use personal transport in compliance with the above mentioned rules and restrictions.

Permission for collection of botanical, zoological and mineralogical collections, as well as development of nature trails is to be obtained from the Committee for Natural Resources of the Leningrad Region.

Detailed rules and regulations concerning the protected area can be found in the Statute (*polozhenie*) of "Berezovye Islands" state nature reserve (adopted by the Government of the Leningrad Region).

* Fishing Regulation for the Western fishery basin is adopted by the Federal Agency for Fisheries (Order no. 393 of 10.12.2008).

Persons found guilty of infringing the protection regime of the reserve will be subject to administrative penalty.

The visitors' respect both to the nature and to the efforts at its conservation is essential for the welfare of the protected area. Remember that in certain seasons animals are extremely sensitive to any disturbance and that coastal and bog plant communities suffer a lot from trampling. Please take this into account when planning your visit to Berezovye Islands.

There are no rubbish collection points on Berezovye Islands outside the villages. You certainly can take away everything that you have brought with you.

Let's keep Berezovye Islands tidy!

Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar sites) in the Leningrad Region



Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention develop and maintain an international network of Ramsar sites ensuring their protection and wise use.

The management authority of "Berezovye Islands" state nature reserve is the Committee for Natural Resources of the Leningrad Region



You can learn more about this and other protected areas of the Leningrad Region at: www.nature.lenobl.ru

Attention!

The protected area is situated in the border zone.

Booklet design: Baltic Fund for Nature of St. Petersburg Naturalists Society, Committee for Natural Resources of the Leningrad Region, Metsähallitus (Finland)

References: Environment and biological diversity of Berezovye Islands archipelago (the Gulf of Finland). St. Petersburg, 2007. Protected nature of the Karelian Isthmus. St. Petersburg, 2004.

Photographs: Andrey Frenkel, Mikhail Verevkin, Nadezhda Alekseeva, Anna Doronina, Yulia Danilova, Metsähallitus.



The booklet was prepared in 2008 with support from the European Union. The information and views set out in this publication are those of its authors and do not necessarily reflect the official opinion of the European Union.

The second (modified) edition of the booklet was prepared by the Committee for Natural Resources of the Leningrad Region and the Forest Management Board of the Leningrad Region (Lenoblles) in 2012.

Twenty-nine species from the above groups are listed in the Red Data Book of the Russian Federation, 143 species are listed in the Red Data Book of the Leningrad Region. Many species are also included in the IUCN Red List, the Red Data Book of the Baltic Region and the Red Data Book of East Fennoscandia.

- numerous invertebrates, whose fauna is still unstudied
- 25 species of mammals
- 193 species of birds
- 4 species of reptiles
- 3 species of amphibians
- 42 species of fish
- 2 species of cyclostomes
- 28 species of marine macroalgae
- more than 70 species of slime molds
- more than 750 species of fungi
- more than 270 species of lichens
- more than 200 species of mosses and liverworts
- more than 640 species of vascular plants

The protected area provides habitats for

- threatened species of animals, plants and fungi
- unique plant communities of the islands
- fish spawning grounds
- pupping grounds of the Baltic ringed seal

The nature reserve also protects

- biological diversity of wetland ecosystems
- Gulf of Finland
- Islands archipelago and the north-eastern part of the
- rich and diverse natural complexes of the Berezovye
- nesting colonies of waterbirds
- spring migration
- large stopover sites of waterbirds, especially during

The Wetland of International Importance (Ramsar site) is established in order to preserve

Total area: 536 km², including 453 km² of the Gulf of Finland water area.

Berezovye Islands are an archipelago consisting of three large and more than fifty small islands. The borders of the Wetland of International Importance (Ramsar site) coincide with those of "Berezovye Islands" regional state nature reserve (zakaznik in Russian).

"Berezovye Islands" Protected Area

Regional state nature reserve



BEREZOVYE ISLANDS



Wetland of International Importance "Berezovye Islands, Gulf of Finland"
(Ramsar site no. 691)



This wetland area has been designated by the Government of the Russian Federation for inclusion in the List of Wetlands of International Importance established under the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands (signed in Iran in 1971)



The Baltic sea is home to the Baltic subspecies of the ringed seal (*Pusa hispida botnica*), registered in different Red Data Books. Fewer than 300 individuals are left in the Gulf of Finland. The Baltic ringed seal is considered as one of the most vulnerable animal species in the Leningrad Region as well as in the Baltic.

The area around Berezovye Islands is a major ringed seal pupping ground in the eastern part of the Gulf of Finland. The pups are born in ice shelters from February to March. Lack of disturbance during this time is essential for the welfare of the seals.



Sandy dunes, a characteristic feature of coastal landscapes in general, are uncommon on Berezovye Islands, and are something of a special landmark there. A typical dune plant, lyme grass (*Leymus arenarius*), is resistant to shifting sands.



Common tern (*Sterna hirundo*)



Brent goose (*Branta bernicla*)



Colonies of the lesser black-backed gull (*Larus fuscus*) have survived in the reserve. This gull, whose numbers are decreasing everywhere in the Baltic, is included into various Red Data Books.



Numerous bird species nest in reeds growing along the islands' coastline. The reed warbler (*Acrocephalus scirpaceus*), for instance, skilfully hangs its nests on vertical reed stems.

Bladder wrack (*Fucus vesiculosus*) is a typical marine brown alga. This seaweed plays the same role in marine communities as trees do in the forest, creating habitats for other organisms.

Bladder wrack, threatened by water eutrophication (increased concentration of nitrates and phosphates), is included in the Red Data Book of the Leningrad Region.



Sometimes the sea casts ashore deep-water bottom dwellers, such as the isopod *Saduria entomon*. This a good chance to have a glimpse of these relic crustaceans, living at the sea bottom.



Coastal plant communities (coastal meadows and marshes, reed and rush beds, communities of sandy dunes and beaches) are the pride of the reserve, as well as the focus of special care. They comprise numerous species of vascular plants, mosses, lichens, fungi and insects that are rare for the North-West Russia.

Here and there stony and sandy shores are overgrown with ramanas rose (*Rosa rugosa*), beach pea (*Lathyrus maritimus*) (2), sea sandwort (*Honkenya peploides*) (3) and purple loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*) (4). A rare flower of the Baltic sandy shores, the dyer's woad (*Isatis tinctoria*) (5), can also be found there.



Coastal meadows usually stretch as narrow strips along the water edge. They mostly consist of halophilic ("salt-loving") plants, adapted to frequent brackish-water flooding. Among them there are many rare protected species, such as chives (*Allium schoenoprasum*) (1), spear-leaved skullcap (*Scutellaria hastifolia*) and sea century (*Centaurium littorale*).



Large, brightly coloured oystercatcher (*Haematopus ostralegus*) is a typical representative of the marine bird fauna. It is included in the Red Data Book of the Leningrad Region.

Large colonies of different gull species (herring gull – *Larus argentatus*, common gull – *Larus canus*, lesser black-backed gull – *Larus fuscus* and great black-backed gull – *Larus marinus*) and terns (common tern – *Sterna hirundo* and Arctic tern – *Sterna paradisaea*) can be found on the smaller islands of the archipelago. Their colonies also provide a nesting place for sea ducks and dabbling ducks.



Pine forests, common on Berezovye Islands, are an endless source of delight for the visitors. Besides enjoying the uplifting pine odour, one may pick berries there, such as lingonberry, blueberry and crowberry.



Berezovye Islands lie on the White Sea-Baltic Flyway of migratory birds, connecting their wintering areas in Western Europe and Africa with the breeding areas in Northern Eurasia. Shores, shallow water areas, bays and channels between the islands serve as feeding grounds for dozens of thousands of migrating waterbirds, especially in spring. Swans, geese, ducks and waders are numerous there. Berezovye Islands are one of the most important stopover sites in the region.