Karula National Park

The smallest national park in Estonia at just 123 km² in size, Karula National Park is situated in the north-eastern part of the country, on the border of Valga and Võru counties. The varied terrain of Karula was placed under protection as a nature reserve in 1974 and became a national park in 2000. The natural environment found in the hilly landscapes characteristic of central eastern Estonia is represented in the national park. There are national park. Typically, the lakes have marshy shores; forests, where human settlement remains quite sparse; and areas of bog and fen, which cover some 10% of the national park's surface.

The unique terrain of the Karula Uplands formed more than 10,000 years ago in an area with raised glaciers and moraines, which are the result of thousands of years of continuous human activity. The distribution of heritage landscapes is predetermined by the location of arable land; hill tops and their steep slopes tend to be wooded and enriched by fields of meadows. Depressions between hills contain small lakes, wooded forests, or wet meadows. In Karula, the landscape is dotted with small bodies of water between hills, locally known as lõikud, land or lumpy meadows, which are currently disappearing from modern landscapes. Present-day grasslands evolved from long-standing fields which were left uncultivated for decades. In these places, vegetation characteristic of dry meadows is taking over. Only fragments of the former dry meadow landscapes have survived and these serve as invaluable habitats for some rare species.

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