



## DOS AND DON'TS FOR VISITORS

- Keep the forest and bog clean.
- Put up your tent and make a fire only at the prepared places.
- You can pick berries, mushrooms and other forest goods in the nature reserve.
- A visit by or event with more than 50 participants should be co-ordinated with the administrative authority of the protected area.
- Do not cycle outside the trails and paths.
- Try not to step on the ants' trails.
- Drive your motor vehicle only on the provided roads and park it only in the car park.

When you see damage done to the nature or visiting objects, inform the Environmental Inspectorate by phone 1313.



### ADMINISTRATIVE AUTHORITY

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ENVIRONMENTAL BOARD

### ARRANGEMENT OF VISITS

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# VALGESOO Nature Reserve



Photo: Ants in Valgesoo, A. Saarist

## FLORA

Typical bog plants – leatherleaf, bog-rosemary, crowberry, marsh Labrador tea, hare’s-tail cottongrass – grow in the Valgesoo bog. The latter with its white tussocks has probably given name to the bog. Hare’s-tail cottongrass is the only cottongrass with one tussock at the stem’s end. The plant is most remarkable in June when the bog is covered with the carpet of white tufts. The plant is less known in April and May when it blooms. Then greyish leaves and yellow stamens of small blossoms instead of white bobs can be noticed. Hare’s-tail cottongrass is, by its coverage and frequency of occurrence, the most important plant in the bog and together with Sphagnum moss creates most of the peat.



Photo: View from Observation Tower, M. Kala

## VALGESOO NATURE RESERVE

The Valgesoo Nature Reserve with its area of 345.5 hectares is located in Vastse-Kuuste and Põlva Rural Municipalities, Põlva County. The nature reserve was founded in 1981 as a protected wetland with the aim to protect the Valgesoo bog and its adjacent landscape.

In 1981, 30 regions in Estonia were allotted for protected wetlands. By that time it was understood that bogs play an essential role in the global hydrological cycle: the peat in bogs filtrates polluted rain water, cleans contaminated soil water and regulates the global carbon cycle, absorbing carbon dioxide and releasing oxygen more than it consumes. Bogs, especially its pools and other bodies of water, are reservoirs of clean water. Bogs are exceptionally stable and self-regulating, offering, in this respect, scientific interest.

## BOG

The bog of Valgesoo (*White Bog*) is located in the sandy flat valley of a bend of the River Ahja. Most of the bog is covered with scattered trees with only two patches of bare land, covered with heather. The bog is flat with eight low islands covered with pines. The transition from bog to mineral land is, in general, abrupt and that is why only a narrow strip of woods surrounds the bog.

The average depth of the peat layer is 1.3 metres, with the maximum being 1.8 metres. The bog peat lies directly on the sand, which indicates that the Valgesoo bog has arisen as a result of the swamping of a sandy hollow. The bog has never been affected by drainage, which raises its value.



Photo: Hiking Trail in Valgesoo, M. Kala

Sphagnum moss, as well as the other mosses, decomposes and grows at the same time. As it has no roots, it grows from the top and decomposes at the lower part. As there is less and less air in the thick decayed layer, the parts of the plants do not decompose in full and form peat rather than soil. In our bogs, the peat layer thickens for about 1 mm a year.

## ‘BARON’S PINEWOOD’

The bog is from almost each side surrounded by forests. In the north eastern part of the area, near the observation tower, a spectacular pinewood grows which was founded in the 1860s-1870s by the landlord Conrad von Brasch and is now called the ‘Baron’s Pinewood’ by the local people.

## FOR HIKERS

A stunning view of the bog opens from the 24-metre-high observation tower. There starts the 1.8-kilometre-long hiking trail, which heads along the boardwalk across the bog and back through the forest on the other edge of the bog, where in a small old spruce wood large nests of red wood ants can be admired.

## RED WOOD ANTS

Ants and other insects living in communities are regarded to be the most developed species of insects. Red wood ants are the largest ants in Estonia. They live on the sweet honeydew produced by plant lice, seeds and nectar of plants, and fungi grown in their own nests. They also eat up pest insects and that is why they are considered efficient forest protectors. So an average ant family protect the woods from pests in the area of 1/4 of hectares but the ants living in a 2-metre-high nest even in the area of one hectare. The red wood ant belongs to category III of protected species.