

## National Parks

National parks are territories, which have the status of nature protection and scientific research institutions used for education, science, culture and other purposes. National parks are the territories where special ecological, historical, aesthetic and other significant natural complexes are located.

Most of the territories of Azerbaijan are occupied by nature protection areas. In Azerbaijan, there are nine National Parks, as well as fifteen Nature Reserves and eighteen Nature Game Reserves located across the country, known for their rich natural diversity. These parks are home to many rare species of plants and animals that are listed in the Red Book. Unlike nature reserves, where tourists are typically not allowed, national parks are accessible to the public. The ecological diversity of Azerbaijan's national parks is impressive: wide steppes and semi-deserts, dense relict forests, mountain lakes and deep rivers. In addition to conserving nature, these parks also aim to educate the population about the environment and promote ecotourism.

### Hirkan National Park



Hirkan National Park with an area of 40358 hectares was established by the Order of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan dated 9 February 2004 on the administrative territory of Lankaran and Astara districts. Ancient relict and endemic plant species of the Tertiary period are protected here. The purpose of creation of the National Park is to ensure preservation of relict and endemic species of plants of the Tertiary period, protection of typical representatives of flora and fauna of this area, listed in the Red Book of the Azerbaijan Republic and implementation of environmental monitoring. The Park provides conditions for public environmental education, research, tourism and recreation. Most of the territory of Hirkan National Park is covered with forests. The average temperature of the hottest month is 27°C. The type of forests changes distinctly as it moves from east to west towards the mountain peak. The lower part of the forest is dominated by chestnut oak, ironwood, hornbeam (Albizia Lankaran, Hirkan fig, Gleditsia Caspica, Caucasian persimmon, etc.) At higher altitudes these species are replaced by beech forests.

The Lankaran natural region has rich fauna and flora including many rare and endemic species. Flora of the park consists of 1, 900 species including 162 endemics, 95 rare, and 38 endangered species. A number of these plants have been included in the Red Book of Azerbaijan.

There are many endemic and rare animals, particularly, among the representatives of ground mollusks and non-flying insects. Birds' endemism is well represented, up to subspecies level, while the species level has a relatively poor representation. Ornithofauna of Hirkan National Park, including black

stork, osprey, goshawk, Imperial Eagle, Talish Caucasian pheasant, turach, were also included in the Red Book of Azerbaijan. The animal world of the park is also very diverse. Here one can meet the Persian leopard, lynx, wild cat, badger, wild boar, roe deer, spotted deer, raccoon. The main protected objects are the natural complexes of lowland and low mountainous forest areas of the Lankaran natural region, including the unique well-preserved plot of lower forest, the ecosystem of the rare forest of the Hirkan type.

### **Shirvan National Park**

Shirvan National Park was established in 2003 on the territory of Salyan, Garadagh and Neftchala districts. The total area of the park is 54373.5 hectares. This national park was established to preserve the most important components of the semi-desert landscape, to protect the gazelles listed in the Red Book of Azerbaijan and other fauna species characteristic of the area. Its functions also include ecological monitoring, public environmental education, as well as creation of conditions for tourism and recreation



development. The diversity of terrain, vegetation and soil cover on the territory of the national park allows to distinguish a number of natural landscapes. Most of the park is occupied by solonchak (saline) semi-desert small hills and solonchak semi-desert plains. Four species of amphibians can be found in the park: Syrian garlic frog, green toad, common quack frog and lake frog. As the Syrian garlic frog is a rare and endangered species, it is listed in the International Union for Conservation of Nature and the Red Book of the Republic of Azerbaijan and is protected by law.

Shirvan National Park is also home to 17 species of reptiles. The Mediterranean turtle (*Testudo graeca*) is a rare and endangered species, it is listed in the list of the International Union for Conservation of Nature and the Red Book of the Republic of Azerbaijan and is protected by law. *Vipera transcaucasiana* is one of the most widespread species of reptiles on the territory of the national park. Vipers are very valuable species of snakes due to their venom, which is widely used in medicine. During wintering and migration, mallards (*Anas platyrhynchos*), Eurasian wigeon (*Anas crecca*), grey duck (*Anas strepera*), wigeon (*Anas penelope*), pintail (*Anas acuta*), teal (*Anas querquedula*), broad-billed teal (*Anas clypeata*), flamingo (*Phoenicopterus ruber*) gather in shallow waters, in deep water, red-nosed duck (*Netta rufina*), red-headed duck (*Aythya ferina*), tufted duck (*Aythya fuligula*), sea blackbird (*Aythya marila*), common eagle (*Bucephala clangula*) and other duck species. In these biotopes there are puffins (*Podicipedidae*), pelicans (*Pelecanus*), cormorants (*Phalacrocoracidae*) and gulls (*Laridae*). Plovers (*Charadriidae*), Pintail (*Recurvirostridae*) and Snipe (*Scolopacidae*) congregate around the lakes and in the coastal zone. In the territory of the National Park there are 34 species of birds, which are threatened with extinction in Azerbaijan and all over the world. 14 of them are included only in the Red Book of Azerbaijan, 10 in the

list of the International Union for Conservation of Nature, and 10 in both the Red Book of Azerbaijan (1989) and the list of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (2002). Gazelle, ferret-dressing and forest cat are included in the Red Book of our Republic. Caspian seal, gazelle and ferret-dressing and forest cat are declared as protected species of different status by the International Union for Conservation of Nature. All bat populations are protected by the EUROBATS agreement.

### **Agh-Gol National Park**

Agh-Gol National Park was created in 2003 on the territory of Aghjabedi and Beylagan districts. The total area of the park is 17,924 hectares.



Lake Agh-Gol is situated in the Mill steppe of the Kur-Araz Lowlands. The Mill Steppe surrounding the lake is a slightly hilly accumulative plain, where mostly semi-desert and arid steppe type: summer is warm and dry, winter is cool. Lake Agh-Gol is the most famous steppe ecosystem in Azerbaijan, an oasis for thousands of birds that breed and rest during migration, or come to winter from the north. The main reason for protecting the lake system is its international importance as a refuge for endangered bird species included in the Red List of the International Union for Conservation of Nature and the Red Book of Azerbaijan.

On 25 May 2001, Agh-Gol was listed in the Ramsar Convention on “Wetlands of International Importance Mainly as Waterfowl Habitats”. The purpose of the national park is to ensure the conservation of landscapes, ecosystems and endangered species, as well as environmental monitoring and the development of ecotourism. The lake is mainly surrounded by thickets of reeds. A moderately warm climate of semi-deserts and dry steppes with dry summers prevails on the territory of the National Park. This climate (except for periodic freezing of the lake in winter) creates favourable conditions for birds and mammals. Among birds there are such species as marbled teal, turach, little bustard (*Tetrax tetrax*), black stork, great and small cormorant, whooper swan, mute swan, Egyptian heron, goatherd, sultan hen, spoonbill, dalmatian pelican, white-tailed eagle, white-eyed diver, common flamingo, mallard, geese and others. It is also a habitat for wolf, jackal, fox, hare, bats, reed cats and other mammals.

### **Zangazur National Park named after Academician Hasan Aliyev**

According to the order of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Zangazur National Park was created on 25 November 2009 in an area of 42797,4 hectares on the base of Ordubad National Park named after Academician Hasan Aliyev and Shahbuz State Nature Reserve in the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic. It was named after Academician Hasan Aliyev who is considered as a founder of ecology in Azerbaijan.



The Ordubad State Nature Sanctuary covers an area of 27870 hectares and is located next to Zangazur National Park. The main purpose of establishing the Zangazur National Park was to safeguard the diverse elements of the region, such as its unique climate, terrain, and physical features, along with its endemic animal species and typical fauna. Additionally, the park has responsibilities for environmental monitoring, as well as promoting education and tourism within the area.

Zangazur's mountain range, with an average height of 3200 meters, is the tallest range in the Lesser Caucasus. The highest peak in the range, standing at 3906 meters, is situated within the National Park. The final third of the Zangazur range is called Soyug Dagh (Cold Mountain) and is also part of the National Park. The elevation of Soyug Dagh ranges from 2000 to 3000 meters. This section of the mountain slopes down towards the south and west for 12 kilometers, featuring steep cliffs, narrow valleys, and eroded rocks. The ancient glacial landscape in Soyug Dagh gradually disappears as it descends. Zangazur National Park is a mountainous region with a cold, dry climate, experiencing average temperatures of -30 °C to -10 °C in January and 10 °C to 25 °C in July. The area receives an annual precipitation of 300-800 mm. The region is home to several rivers such as Gilanchay, Vanadchay, Duylunchay, Aylishchay, Ganzachay, Kotamchay, Kilitchay, and Ordubadchay, which are fed by rain and snowmelt. The Araz River forms the border with Iran. The landscape in the region includes grasslands, alluvial grasslands, mountain forests, and mountainous grasslands. Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic stands out in Azerbaijan due to its diverse bird species, with 217 species and subspecies identified, including 15 listed in the Red Data Book. The area also hosts six species of amphibians and 38 species of reptiles, including turtles and snakes. Nakhchivan is home to 62 mammal species, including carnivores like leopards, wolves, foxes, and striped hyenas. The region is also rich in rare plants, with 77 species found in the National Park, including *Iris elegantissima*, *Himantoglossum formosum*, and *Dorema glabrum*. Additionally, the area is dotted with natural and historical landmarks.

## **Absheron National Park**

Absheron National Park was established on the basis of the Absheron State Nature Sanctuary in the area of 783 hectares of administrative territory of Baku city Khazar district with the decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan dated February 8, 2005.



This Park is located in the southern part of the Absheron peninsula in the Shah Dili area. The area experiences a mild, warm climate characteristic of semi-desert and dry heaths. The main goal of creating the Absheron National Park is to protect the wildlife, preserve

rare and endangered plant and animal species, and explore the natural resources for ecotourism opportunities. Absheron National Park is home to over 50 species of birds and animals, as well as around 25 plant species.

The territory of the park is mostly covered with sea sand. Semi-desert and moderately warm climate of dry steppes are prevalent in the national park. Coastal sandy plants, reed meadows, and annual salt marshes can be found frequently. Ephemeral plants start to appear in early spring. The National Park is home to various animals such as a gazelle, wolf, jackal, wildcat, raccoon, fox, badger, hare, mute swan, great white heron, coot, marsh harrier, green toad, lake frog, Caspian tortoise, Transcaucasian agama, golden skink, eyrenis (snake), and more. There are numerous Caspian seals in the Caspian Sea within the boundaries of Absheron National Park. According to the Guinness Book of Records, this species is recognized as the smallest seal in the world's oceans.

### **Altiaghaj National Park**

Altiaghaj National Park was established in August 2004 in the territories of Khizi and Siyazan regions. It was created in an area of 11 035 hectares on the base of Altiaghaj State Natural Reserve and adjacent state-owned forest lands.

The main purpose of establishing this National Park is to protect the key elements of the natural landscape on the southeastern slopes of the Greater Caucasus, restore the flora and fauna species, promote environmental education, and develop tourism and recreation opportunities. Different types of terrains such as brown forest mountainous, humic carbon forest mountainous, and steppe grassland mountainous are present within the boundaries of Altiaghaj National Park. The climate in this area is moderately warm and dry throughout the winter and summer months. The largest river in the region is the Atachay, which originates at an altitude of 1870 meters in Dubrar Mountain and flows into the Caspian Sea. The majority of the park is covered with forests,



with the main tree species being Caucasian oak, Caucasian hornbeam, oriental beech, ash, and birch. Shrub species like hawthorn, dog-rose, and blackberry can also be found in the area. A variety of mammals such as roe deer, brown bear, wild boar, lynx, raccoon, hare, fox, squirrel, and wolf, as well as birds like pheasant, partridge, eagle, thrush, goatsucker, and ring-dove inhabit the National Park.

### **Goygol National Park**

Goygol National Park was founded on April 1, 2008, due to a decree issued by the President of



Azerbaijan Republic, expanding the Goygol State Nature Reserve which was previously located in Goygol, Dashkasan, and Goranboy districts. The area of the reserve increased from 6739 hectares to 12,755 hectares upon becoming a National Park. Situated in the North-Eastern part of the Lesser Caucasus, Goygol National Park spans the North Slope of Kapaz Mountain, ranging from 1000 to 3060 meters above sea level, encompassing various mountainous

terrains. Named after the Goygol Lake, the park features crystal clear water that perfectly mirrors the lush green forests and the clear blue sky. The primary objective of establishing Goygol National Park is to preserve endemic and endangered plant and animal species, maintain the balance of natural ecosystems, facilitate scientific research, promote environmental awareness among the public, and develop ecotourism. The region experiences a cold climate with dry winters, with average temperatures ranging from 4 to 10 degrees. Annual rainfall in Goygol National Park ranges from 600 to 900 mm. The Aghsuchay River, a right tributary of the Kurakchay, is the longest river in the park. Goygol is one of Azerbaijan's most stunning lakes, and at the same time the largest lake in the region. Following an earthquake in Ganca in 1939, the Kapaz mountain collapsed, blocking the Aghsuchay River and forming the beautiful Goygol Lake. The area also features smaller lakes like Maralgol, Garagol, Zeligol, Aghgol, Shamligol, and others.

Goygol National Park is predominantly covered with rich vegetation, including mountain-forest, mountain-steppe, subalpine, and alpine mountain-meadow ecosystems. The mountain forests, found at elevations of 1100-2200 m, are teeming with 80 tree and bush species, such as oriental beech, oriental oak, Caucasian hornbeam, birch, ash tree, sharp-leaved maple, lime-tree, and Kokh pine. Shrubs like cornel, barberry, dog rose, medlar, spindle-tree, and blackberry, as well as herbs like Caucasian violet, dandelion, bellflower, noble chamomille, fescue, mat-grass, and meadow-grass are prevalent, especially in subalpine meadows. The Park boasts a diverse fauna, including Caucasian red deer, roe deer, brown bear, billy goat, badger, forest cat, sable, lynx, hare, squirrel, fox, hedgehog, and Caucasian mole among mammals, and birds like quail, stock dove, woodcock, bearded vulture, black vulture, Egyptian vulture, eagle owl, owl, swan, black woodpecker, golden oriole, woodlark, and mistle thrush. Endangered species such as the

Caucasian red deer and forel fish in Goygol Lake are protected within the park. The breathtaking natural landscapes, abundant flora and fauna in Goygol National Park offer great potential for the development of ecotourism in the area by attracting tourists and visitors.

### **Shahdagh National Park**

Shahdag National Park was established in accordance with the decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, dated December 8, 2006. Its total territory is primarily 115895 hectares.

The Ismayilli and Pirgulu State Nature Reserves cover an area of 21014 hectares, while state forest foundation lands in Guba, Gusar, Ismayilli, Gabala, Oghuz, and Shamakhi regions make up 81797 hectares. Additionally, useless summer pastures in the mountains across these regions account for 13084 hectares within the National Park. Following a decree by the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan № 193/S on July 8, 2010, the territory of the National Park was expanded by 14613 hectares, bringing its total size to 130508 hectares. The main goal of establishing the Shahdag National Park is to restore, preserve, and manage mountain forests and pasture ecosystems, which are home to various endemic and endangered species, as well as transboundary migratory animals. The Park also aims to protect the fertile soil layer, conserve and enrich the local fauna and flora species, maintain the natural stability of the ecosystem, provide necessary facilities for scientific research, environmental monitoring, and education, and promote the development of ecotourism in the area, which has great tourism potential. The diverse height of the National Park's territory contributes to its varied climatic conditions, fertile soil for flora, and abundant wildlife. The forests within the park offer stunning and diverse landscapes, thanks to the vertical fluctuations, complex climate, and soil conditions that support a wide range of flora species.



### **Samur-Yalama National Park**

Samur-Yalama National Park was founded in the administrative region of Khachmaz by the decree of the President of Azerbaijan on November 5, 2012. The Park includes 11772.45 hectares of land outlined in the public forest fund lands in Khachmaz. This National Park boasts a variety of plant species including dog rose, garlic, St John's wort, blooming sally, and melissa. The soil in the park consists of meadow-forest, chestnut, and light chestnut types. Meadows, shrubberies, and flat forests are common throughout the park. Wildlife in Khachmaz includes feral pigs, raccoons, pheasants, and partridges. The coastal waters are abundant with fish and



---

there are thermal and mineral springs within the park. Khachmaz is known for its excellent hunting and fishing opportunities. The Association of Hunters is active in the area and manages the Reserve of the Gul-Alan Lake.