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Ministry of
Ecology and Natural Resources
of the Republic of Azerbaijan



Empowered lives.
Resilient nations.

Azerbaijan creates its
**First Marine National
Park in the Caspian Sea**

AZERBAIJAN'S

Specialty Protected Areas

FACTS & FIGURES

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National Parks

11

State Nature
Reserves

24

State Nature
Sanctuaries



175,575

hectars of this area cover a coastal zone, with:

- 4 National Parks,
- 2 State Nature Reserves, and
- 2 State Nature Sanctuaries





As the largest enclosed inland body of water on the Earth, the Caspian Sea is a precious, but fragile place for approximately 400 endemic species.



The biodiversity of the Caspian Sea and the coastal areas has come face-to-face with the danger of depletion in recent years. It is in large part due to the land degradation caused by overfishing and unsustainable farming. Another major threat and a pressing concern for the Caspian Sea is pollution. Furthermore, the spread of invasive species and climate change has had an even greater negative impact on the overall balance of the ecosystem.



Over the past years, the Government of Azerbaijan has implemented a number of measures within the coastal zone of the Caspian Sea to address these threats. Prominent steps forward in this regard were the decision to create the Network of Specially Protected Areas and the September 2018 Presidential decree on the establishment of the Gizilagaj National Park, as part of the Network. Azerbaijan's landmark wetland, Gizilagaj is the first marine national park in the entire Caspian Sea region.





Gizilagaj is the largest national park in Azerbaijan. Located on the south-western coast of the Caspian Sea, the Gizilagaj National Park is one of the most critical wetlands for wintering and breeding of aquatic birds of the Western Palearctic zone. This national park was included in the “Ramsar List” of the Ramsar Convention “On Wetlands of International Importance” in 1975.

Managing and maintaining specially protected areas requires careful planning, significant institutional capacity and investment.



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Aiming to substantially upgrade the infrastructure of the Gizilagaj State Nature Reserve and the Gizilagaj State Nature Sanctuary, which are both part of the recently proclaimed Gizilagaj National Park, the Government of Azerbaijan and international organisations joined efforts to protect the authentic heritage of this coastal wetland. In 2014, the Global Environment Facility and the United Nations Development Programme in Azerbaijan launched a joint project implemented in close collaboration with the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources. The project seeks to increase the representation of effectively managed marine ecosystems in the Specially Protected Areas. The result of this joint

initiative was that these conservation areas in Gizilagaj now have significantly increased their capacity and technical bases through the newly appointed equipment and a series of capacity-building trainings for employees.

Employees of the Gizilagaj National Park received substantial training in the framework of the project, and the national park was provided with monitoring, security and other specialised equipment. Boats and cars were purchased to supervise and patrol the territory of Gizilagaj. A new management plan was developed, and the previous infrastructure was rebuilt and considerably renovated.

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Aftandil Abbasov, the director of the Gizilagaj National Park notes that “the project has been indispensable in that it helped significantly eliminate the dire lack of resources and physical infrastructure”.

Speaking of a notable difference that the project has made within a short period of time, Aftandil says: “The facilities where we operated in the past have been remarkably transformed as the infrastructure has undergone substantial upgrading, expansion and rehabilitation. We

obtained new transport vehicles and overall received crucial support as to how to protect and examine the needs of the Gizilagaj National Park in a more sufficient and efficient manner.”

Looking ahead, Aftandil pointed out that in the past visitors were not allowed to enter the Gizilagaj State Nature Reserve, but with the new Gizilagaj National Park becoming fully operational, this prominent conservation area has opened its doors to welcome a growing number of incoming tourists.”



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All in all, the Gizilagaj National Park entails close to 100,000 hectares of land, altogether embracing the premises of the Gizilagaj State Nature Reserve, Gizilagaj State Nature Sanctuary and a portion of the state land reserve fund, which is part of the Neftchala administrative division.

One of the last milestones of the project was the launch of a new state-of-the-art Tourist Information Centre at the Gizilagaj National Park. Today, the newly established national park operates at full capacity. Gizilagaj will now become a popular attraction both for domestic and international tourists, which in turn will help boost the country's unprecedented potential for tourism development. The brand new Tourist Information Centre offers a unique opportunity for a wide range of visitors to gain invaluable insights about the history, culture and wildlife of this precious wetland.



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UNDP partners with people at all levels of society to help build nations that can withstand crisis, and drive and sustain the kind of growth that improves the quality of life for everyone. On the ground in nearly 170 countries and territories, we offer global perspective and local insight to help empower lives and build resilient nations.

The Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of the Republic of Azerbaijan was established on 23 May 2001. In Azerbaijan, it is the primary governing body, whose mission is to ensure the enforcement of environmental protection, conservation of biodiversity and preservation and improvement of forests in the Azerbaijan sector of the Caspian Sea (lake). The Ministry is the central executive authority, which executes and oversees the implementation of the Government policy actions aimed at sustainable use of natural resources, groundwater, mineral raw materials and their restoration. The Ministry is also closely involved in the monitoring and forecasting of hydro-meteorological processes.

The Global Environment Facility was established on the eve of the 1992 Rio Earth Summit to help tackle our planet's most pressing environmental problems. Since then, the GEF has provided over \$17.9 billion in grants and mobilised an additional \$93.2 billion in co-financing for more than 4500 projects in 170 countries. Today, the GEF is an international partnership of 183 countries, international institutions, civil society organisations and the private sector that addresses global environmental issues. www.thegef.org

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