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Report for the pilot project

FFI/NACRES: Georgia Carnivore Conservation Project

An aerial photograph of a town at dusk or dawn. The town is illuminated with warm lights, and the sky is a mix of blue and orange. In the background, there are several mountain ranges under a clear sky.

**WILDLIFE/CARNIVORE TRACKING TOURS, AS ONE
OF THE COMPONENT FOR THE ECOTOURISM
DEVELOPMENT IN DEDOPLISTSKARO REGION.**

Consultant for Ecotourism development in Dedoplistskaro region;
Giorgi Rajebashvili

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Introduction

Nowadays, travel and tourism is considered one of the largest industries in the world. By 2010, tourism and travel business is expected to produce approximately 330 million jobs across the globe. The gross economic benefits this industry brings are evident, for example, international tourism generated €642 billion in 2008, from which wildlife-related tourism appears to account for some 20-40 percent. Every year the quantity of tourists and travelers is increasing and 1.6 billion international tourists are forecasted to exist by 2020 (WTO).

At the same time tourism, especially mass tourism is often criticized for disrupting local economies, creating seasonal unemployment and degradation of the natural and cultural environment. Over the last few decades, however, more sustainable forms of tourism have been emerging. For instance, new types of tourism are sometimes referred to as eco, sustainable, community based, ethical or pro poor tourism. In these approaches, there should be a shared concern for development that takes into account environmental, economic and socio-cultural impacts of tourism. Another goal of new types of tourism is a greater understanding of the natural and human environment, and this understanding should involve both the education of tourists and the host community.

Undoubtedly the key foundation for wildlife watching is conservation of the wildlife. Without this wildlife tourism is simply short-term mining of the resource and has no role in a modern sustainable society. For this reason was introduced 'Georgia Carnivore Conservation' pilot project in Vashlovani Protected Areas, to ensure wildlife conservation and support ecotourism development.

Inspiration of this report is to stress the ideas and attitudes of various stakeholders regarding the ecotourism development in Dedoplistskaro region. Furthermore, to illustrate infrastructure and potential of 'wildlife/carnivore tracking' tour development in Dedoplistskaro region, in addition to provide comprehensive recommendations for the project development.

Brief overview of Dedoplistskaro region

The Dedoplistskaro region is located south-eastern part of Georgia and holds 2532 square km. Landscapes varies from valleys (of Shiraki, Ole, Taribana, Iori, Eldari and etc) to hills, separated by ravines and canyons. Furthermore, Dedoplistskaro region contains badlands, marshes and saline lands which is about (12%) of the territory. Most part of territory is occupied by steppes and semi-desert landscapes, only northern part are occupied by forest.

Nowadays, Dedoplistskaro region contains Vashlovani national park (25,114 ha), from which (10,142 ha) is Vashlovani strict natural reserve and three natural monuments, also contains Chachuna managed nature entities (30,552 ha) which in total makes 12% of the Dedoplistskaro region's territory. Vashlovani national park is only park in Georgia with such a variety of flora and fauna. Here the steppes turn to shrubbery, deserts transfer into light forests and Alazani riparian forests give way to steep ravines. Each habitat hosts their unique inhabitant, that's why Vashlovani national park areas are valuable of conservation efforts.

According to Georgian department of statistics (2002 census), population of Dedoplistskaro region is about 31 thousand settled in one town and 14 villages. It appears that since 1989 six thousand people have left the region due to rise of unemployment and worsening the socio-economic conditions.

Overall situation for the ecotourism development in Dedoplistskaro region

Notably, local population didn't have significant economic gain from the tourism development in region. Some of them didn't even know that foreigners who are visiting Dedoplistskaro region are coming mainly to visit protected areas of Vashlovani. There is a lack of the information and cooperation between local people and Department of Protected Areas.

Other local people who more or less have connections with tourists think that it will be great to have more visitors which will bring additional income. So far in Dedoplistskaro are nine guest houses, from which six guest houses were started through the World Bank project. Small grants were provided for the local people who wanted to renovate their facilities to host the visitors in future.

Most of the guest house owners are complaining that there is a lack of visitors since the official visitor center was built in Dedolpistskaro, in addition most of the visitors who used to stay in Dedolpistskaro few years ago nowadays stay in bungalows of Vashlovani national park.

Basically, local people depend on agriculture and cattle-breeding, so far they do not know about tourism development or do not have any income, so do not see as one of the alternative way of cash flow. Local people seem open for novelties and have positive attitudes toward tourism development, most of them mentioned town Signagi as a good example of tourism development which brings to locals from Signagi economic benefits.

Local infrastructure; transportation, accommodation, roads

In last few years in Dedoplistskaro region have been done quite a few changes in terms of improving infrastructure: changing the water irrigation system, water supply system for the town, paved main roads in town and supply of electricity. Water supply and electricity improved local people's livelihoods and it will play also great role for the Ecotourism development. But still infrastructure is in poor condition, only in downtown are paved roads, as far you go from downtown, roads are becoming worst.

To visit Vashlovani protected areas essential to have four wheel drive vehicle, because of the muddy and bumpy roads. Visitor center do not provide transportation for the visitors, visitors have to bring own cars or hire in Dedoplistskaro. In Dedoplistskaro one can find taxi drivers but most of the cars are not in suitable for this roads or driver do not knows roads toward Vashlovani Protected



Areas. The Vashlovani Protected Areas had contract with two local drivers who had four wheel drive cars but it didn't work out, because drivers were not always available.

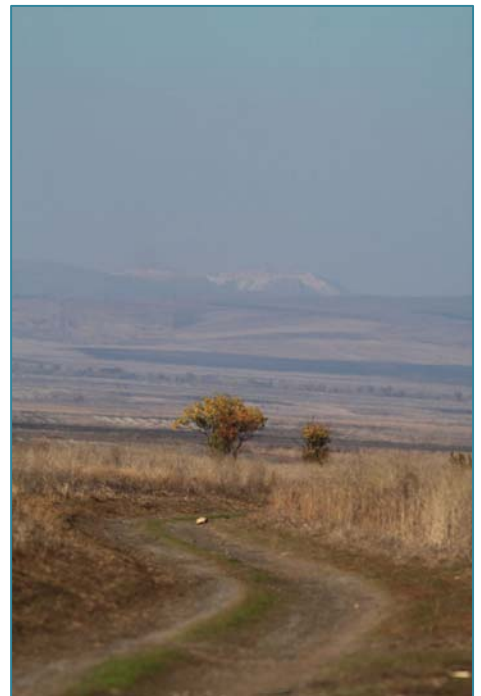
To drive from Dedoplistskaro to Vashlovani Protected Areas takes almost two hours (70km) and road goes in the agricultural field which is changing after every rain. Furthermore, there is a lack of the sign posts, firstly it is hard to find visitor center in Dedoplistskaro, and secondly on the road toward Vashlovani Protected Areas in some places sign posts are missing. It might cause discomfort and may be even problems for the visitors who want to go there on their own.

In Dedoplistskaro doesn't exist any hotel, mainly visitors are using local guesthouses and visitor center. Each local guest house can host around 10-12 people at once, although most of them have one bathroom for the visitors which might cause discomfort for visitors.

In visitor center (Dedoplistskaro) there are four rooms but only one has own bathroom, other three are sharing two bathrooms to each other. In total all the guest houses plus visitor center can host 70-80 person at once.

Regarding the prices of local accommodation and service; local guest houses are quite expensive (45 Euros per person per day) when in other parts of Georgia for example in Stepantsminda guesthouses are charging (25-30 Euros per person per day). However, during the interviews with local guesthouse owners it appeared that they can host the visitors for the 25 Euros as well. In addition, some of them were complaining that they are spending lots of money for the food, it seems that some time they buy much more food than it is necessary for the guests.

There is a lack of the cafes and restaurants in Dedoplistskaro region, for now in November there was open only two small (Soviet type of "Sasadilo" restaurants), although even in Summer there might be two more. In general it is possible to have quite nice Georgian cuisine in these restaurants but it might be inadequate for some foreign groups or visitors.



In Vashlovani national park available accommodation in the newly built bungalows on two different spots, one is in visitor center and another is in Mijnskure, both of them can host 30 persons at once.



All the bungalows are similar and have capacity of two people; also each has a nice balcony, a kitchen and a bathroom. It is quite comfortable and suitable for the small groups who want to see nature and stay on the beautiful spot in the middle of the park. It has also electricity (12 volts) but do not have hitting system and hot water. In summer it is fine (because water is getting hot anyway) but during other seasons it will cause discomfort between the visitors.

Furthermore, water is problematic in this area, bungalows have water supply from the reservoir which has to be filled once in a while. For this reason park administration is utilizing vehicle which brings water from the village Keda. I got some information from the companies and from the tourists who have used these facilities, it seems that water supply is problematic and some time visitors depend on how accurately was used water by the previous customer.

There is no technical staff in the park that will be responsible for the water pipes, bulbs or other small details which might cause issues during the trip. Rangers are responsible for technical side too which seems too much for the one person who has other duties as well.

Furthermore there is no food supply in bungalows, so visitor or companies has to bring own food with them, but there is a lack of the kitchen tools as well which causes more problems. In warm weather group can have a food in the shelter next to the bungalows but in cold or rainy weather there is no special room or place where people can gather together for the food or just for the coffee. It seems that companies which are using the facilities of national park usually bring some food and kitchen tools with them and for the dining are using one of the bungalows, (mainly one where stays guide).

During the wildlife tracking tours off course visitors prefer to stay in bungalows which are on the right spot for the wildlife tracking tours. Furthermore, guesthouses in Dedoplistskaro cannot be competitor of bungalows; rather it will be to better to cooperate to each other, which can be succeeded through local tour company. Package for the wildlife tracking tours can include first and last day which will be spend in Dedoplistskaro, that time local guesthouses can host the visitors. For example first day can be visited Artsivi “Eagle” Canyon for the hiking and nature watching, also Khornabuji castle. On the last night of the tour visitors can stay in Dedoplistskaro and enjoy wine taste tour, or just have a chance to experience the local cuisine and lifestyle.

Accommodation for wildlife/tracking tours in Dedoplistskaro and in visitor centers of Vashlovani Protected Areas are suitable. There must be done few changes in some facilities and more attention on the required food for the visitors, which finally will satisfy visitors. Roads are in bed conditions but through four wheels drive vehicles visitor comfort can be guaranteed. At the same time such kind of trip supposed to be foreseen for the mainly European market, for the people who have special knowledge or interest toward carnivores and wildlife, consequently they will be ready in advance for the trip. Furthermore, terrible roads in some cases make tours adventurous and unforgettable for tourists.

Wildlife tourism, potential of Vashlovani Protected Areas for the wildlife/carnivore tracking tour development

Wildlife tourism is a specialized and extremely important aspect of the tourism phenomenon. Most of the people would love to go places where animals live, which might be explained with the fact that even few generations ago most of our ancestors saw wild animals every day. Nowadays, when most of the people live in big cities watching the beautiful nature mostly on television, electronics enable people to ‘experience’ wildlife from their cozy rooms but at the same time people maybe are more connected mentally to nature than ever before to at least some aspects of wildlife.

Visiting places where animals live and can be seen behaving as they always have may offer an important opportunity for bringing virtual reality closer to the reality as our ancestors experienced it (Higginbottom, 2004).

Furthermore, wildlife tourism can improve the depressed economies in rural areas, because wildlife is often most rich far from major urban development (McCool 1996; Fennell and Weaver 1997, Goodwin et

al.1998). In a few cases, wildlife tourism is a major component of the economy of nonmetropolitan areas or towns.

There are quite a few examples that illustrate economical importance of Wildlife tourism in some parts of the world;

- Mountain gorillas alone provide annual revenue of US\$4 million to Rwanda (Higginbottom, 2004).
- Each individual lion in Amboseli National Park worth US\$515,000 as a tourist resource over its lifetime (Higginbottom, 2004).
- Economic value of wildlife to international tourism in Australia in the range AUD\$1.8 to AUD\$3.5 billion per year, and koalas alone worth about AUD\$1.1 billion ((Higginbottom, 2004).

Regarding the wildlife/carnivore tracking tours in Vashlovani Protected Areas; based on my own knowledge and experience, based on information provided by Vashlovani Protected Areas, based on information from the interviews of local tour company Ekoturi and off course information provided by Bejan Lortkiphanidze (NACRES) can be concluded:

Fauna of Vashlovani is quite diverse and attractive. Around 46 species of mammals inhabit Vashlovani. There are quite few; jackals (*Canis aureus*), Red foxes (*Vulpes vulpes*), hares (*Lepus europiacus*), wolves (*Canis lupus*), lynxes (*Lynx lynx*), Jungle cats (*Felis chaus*) and Indian porcupine (*Hystrix indicus*) and even Brown bears (*Ursus arctos*) in Vashlovani, (Agency of Protected Areas).

At the end of 2003 leopard (*Panthera pardus ciscaucasica*) was discovered in Vashlovani, the (NACRES) scientists managed to shoot the photos of this animal, (before this fact scientists thought that it was extinct from Georgia). The male leopard still inhabits the territory of Vashlovani and is a symbol and visit card of the National Park.

Although it should be mentioned that animals are shy in Georgia and it is hard to see carnivores in Vashlovani national park, one reason can be the deep canyons, high grass and bushes almost everywhere. Another reason which makes animals shy can be the poaching almost everywhere in Georgia. However, Vashlovani Protected Areas is one of the best places in Georgia where carnivores can be tracked.

For the visitors who want to see wildlife, Vashlovani Protected Areas can offer remarkable 5-7 day tour but can't guarantee to see carnivores (especially bears) on the good distance. Additional attraction for the visitors during the wildlife tracking tours can be involvement in scientific research which takes a place in Vashlovani national park through the (NACRES). Visitors with guide can use the GPS coordinates of the wolf (few of them) which were caught and have collar GPS/radio attachments on the neck for the further monitoring. It is possible to make evening and even night trips by car on the territories which show GPS coordinates. Then on the closed distance (1.5-2 kilometers) can be utilized headphones to follow radio signals and track the exact location of the mammal. In some cases, especially in evening it will be still possible to use binoculars and scan the territory, at night group might see tracked wolf through the spotlights. Usually these carnivores aren't that scared of cars and such kind of trips (which will be bounded in time, following each mammal not longer than two hours) should not disturb them.

Birdwatching

In Georgia there occur around 360 bird species, of which over 250 different species are breeders. It's obvious that the ornitho-fauna is exceptionally diverse for such a small country (69 500 sq.km.). Georgia along with the other Caucasian countries lies across a migration corridor, so called "funnel" or "bottle neck" between the Black and Caspian Seas, and it's due to this funnel that the diversity and numbers of birds in Georgia astoundingly increases during spring and fall migrations. Many of the migrant species that does not breed in Georgia can be found here either throughout the year or for most of the year.

Vashlovani protected Area is known for supporting a large community of breeding birds. Raptor and scavenger breeders are special attraction of the site, among them Egyptian, cinereous, Eurasian griffon vultures, imperial eagle, lesser kestrel, lanner falcon. Other nesting raptors are long-legged buzzard, northern goshawk, short-toed snake eagle, and some other birds of prey.

The most typical bird of the region is chukar. Large aggregations of rose-coloured starlings, European bee-eaters, European rollers, and Eurasian hoopoes can also be found. A few pairs of black storks are nesting in the area. The songbird community includes calandra lark, colonies of crag martin, rufous-tailed scrub robin, several species of wheatears (special attraction, Finch's wheatear), shrikes, buntings, and warblers, blue rock thrush, rock nuthatch, rock sparrow, and many others. The site is a wintering ground for birds, including thousands of little bustards.

That's why Vashlovani Protected Areas and Chachuna reserve are one of the favorite places in Georgia for the birdwatchers. Furthermore, few years ago birdwatchers visited Vashlovani Protected Areas only for one day tours or had to go in Chachuna, when nowadays comfortable bungalows increase potential

on Vashlovani Protected Areas for the birdwatching tours. Besides, creating wildlife/carnivore tracking tours enable tour companies to create diverse itineraries, when birdwatchers can spend few more days and spot the carnivores.

Local and national stakeholders

Usually in all countries there are many stakeholders in wildlife watching, ensuring the development and sustainability of such tourism is a difficult task. While Governments have special, often central, roles in ensuring proper legislative protection and resources for conservation, other partners are also crucial. The habitat managers (protected area managers, private landowners, conservation NGOs) have high responsibility for the day to day outcomes. Community groups may offer political, financial and intellectual support for wildlife-watching ventures. Tour operators need to be part of planning and management. Finally tourists are critical for the financial and political success and may become valuable advocates for more resources and better conservation outcomes (Higginbottom, 2004).

In our case, for Vashlovani Protected Areas wildlife tourism development is a new task, it is new for the local population of Dedoplistskaro region as well. Furthermore, it seems that so far there is no cooperation between the various stakeholders and even Agency of Protected Areas and Vashlovani Protected Areas do not work in synchrony.

I had chance to interview Khatuna Kokuashvili who is working for the Vashlovani Protected Areas as a visitor service manager. She was open and very friendly; she helped me to manage my trip in Vashlovani national park and gave me some information regarding the park administration and facilities.

Nowadays, Vashlovani Protected Area is offering to visitor's six different routes, duration of the trips varies from one to three days and covers different parts of the park. Furthermore there are some of the routes only for the car and some of them for the hiking or mixed. Vashlovani national park employs (local people) 33 persons in administration and around 25 rangers. Based on statistics of Vashlovani Protected Areas, 80% of the visitors are domestic (Georgian) visitors and 20% from foreign countries. There is good connection between Vashlovani Protected Areas, and Signagi tourism information center, and sometimes especially one day visitors are coming from Signagi.

Moreover, there are only two guides in Vashlovani Protected Areas, both of them speak some English and know area well, but their experience seems not enough to guide wildlife tracking tours. In addition

Vashlovani NP do not provides transportation for the visitors, so visitors have to bring own cars or find in Dedoplistskaro which is not easy. Except the local company Ekoturi there are two other people who sometime drive visitors in park and who knows the surroundings but they aren't always available. In past administration of park use to employ those two drivers but after some issues such as; getting late, complaining about the roads or not answering the phone their contract was canceled.

Regarding the 'wildlife tracking 'tours; In Vashlovani administration they think that it will be hard to make such tour work. As Khatuna stated, firstly they do not have guides who can guide this kind of specific tours, secondly it will be hard to show to visitors some mammals such as wolf or bear. She was pointing out that Amiran Kodiashvili can guide this kind of trips, furthermore she stated that there are some rangers in Vashlovani national park who knows mammals well but they do not speak any English.

Agency of Protected Areas

I had chance also to meet Kristina Asatiani from the Agency of Protected Areas, in Tbilisi. Kristina stated that guides who are working in Vashlovani Protected Areas can easily guide also wildlife tracking tours. Furthermore stated that so far Agency of Protected Areas does not have such kind of tours and it will be nice for the diversification of the tours to protected areas. In general she seems enthusiastic toward eco-tourism development in Dedoplistskaro region, and behalf of Agency of Protected Areas stated that will be happy to take part in wildlife trekking tour promotion and development.

National tour companies

There are some national tour companies (Explore Georgia, Georgica travel, Concord Travel and etc.) which are offering eco "exploration" tours to their customers. Although, their itineraries demonstrates that they are doing cultural tours mixed with some hiking, (one can find eco based tours on their web pages, such as birdwatching but they can't do this trips alone, have to cooperate with other tour companies which can provide expert guiding). Usually this tour companies have ambitions to offer diverse tours to their customers but due to lack of the experienced guides and comprehensive information which requires wildlife tours makes them to negotiate with other companies who can manage such kind of tours.

Past experience shows that it is possible to make official agreements with national tour companies where will be clearly define the roles of the national and local tour company and how the income from the tours will be divided between them. Most of the Georgian national tour companies are checking the facilities which can be offered to their customers and professionalism of the guides, if it fulfils their requirement then cooperation becoming winning for the both sides.

Furthermore, in Tbilisi I met officials from the one of the biggest Georgian tour companies, Caucasus travel and Visit Georgia. Both of these companies are offering their clients diverse tours and are ready to cooperate with local company from Dedoplistskaro to offer their clients new type of tour such as wildlife/carnivore tracking tour. In addition, if there will be detailed itinerary for the wildlife/carnivore tracking tours other national tour companies will be interested for cooperation with local tour company.

Local Tour Company

Nowadays, there is only one company 'Ekoturi' in Dedoplistskaro region which is engaged in tourism business. It is a small company, two persons (Amiran Kodiashvili, Temur Popiashvili) run this business and during the tourist season hiring two other persons (as a driver) who know surroundings well. Both of them Amiran Kodiashvili and Temur Popiashvili used to work for the Vashlovani National park so are quite familiar and know this area well. Amiran Kodiashvili, was involved in almost every project which Vashlovani national park had, consequently gained his experience and knowledge regarding the wildlife conservation and ecotourism in national park. He also knows well birds and mammals so easily can be involve in wildlife tracking tours Furthermore speaks some English and knows lots of interesting stories which makes unforgettable trips for the visitors.

Temur Popiashvili was working for Vashlovani National park as a resource management specialist during the years. He is also quite good in birds and mammals and speaks some English too. He is young and experienced guide who also knows Dedoplistskaro region well.

Both of them through their company "Ekoturi" are engaged in nature watching tours in Dedoplistskaro region and in whole Georgia. Their idea is to develop ecotourism in Georgia and involve local people in tourism. Both of them seem enthusiastic toward creating the wildlife/carnivore tracking tours and hold comprehensive knowledge and information. In addition, company Ekoturi owns two four wheel drive mini buses for their tours and small office in center of Dedoplistskaro.

Concessions and Visitor Management

Usually national parks service has several concession contracts with private businesses in attempt to enlarge visitation and allow for a larger audience to enjoy national park land. In case of Vashlovani national park, Agency of Protected Areas is encouraging Georgian tour companies to bring their clients in national parks and in Vashlovan Protected Areas as well. Recently APA started excursions in Vashlovani national park for the schools to rise up eco consciousness from the youth age, also started actively advertising Vashlovani NP through media. Figure (1) clearly illustrates growing number of visitor numbers in Georgian national parks

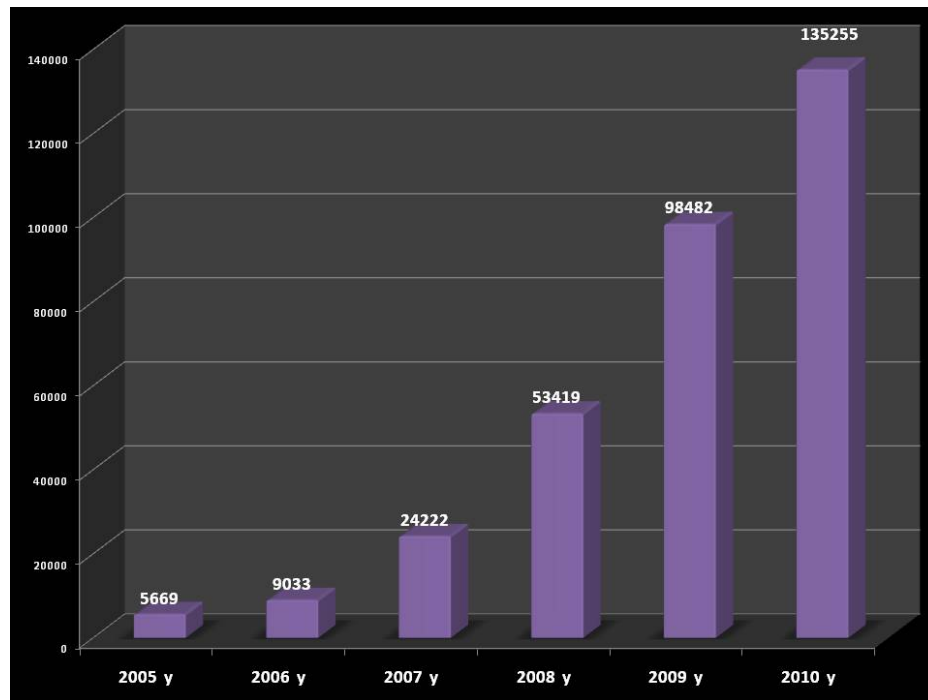


Figure 1 Statistic of visitors in protected areas according to years.

Although, based on the statistics provided by Agency of the Protected Areas (figure 2), so far Vashlovani National park has lowest quantity of visitors to compare other Georgian national parks.

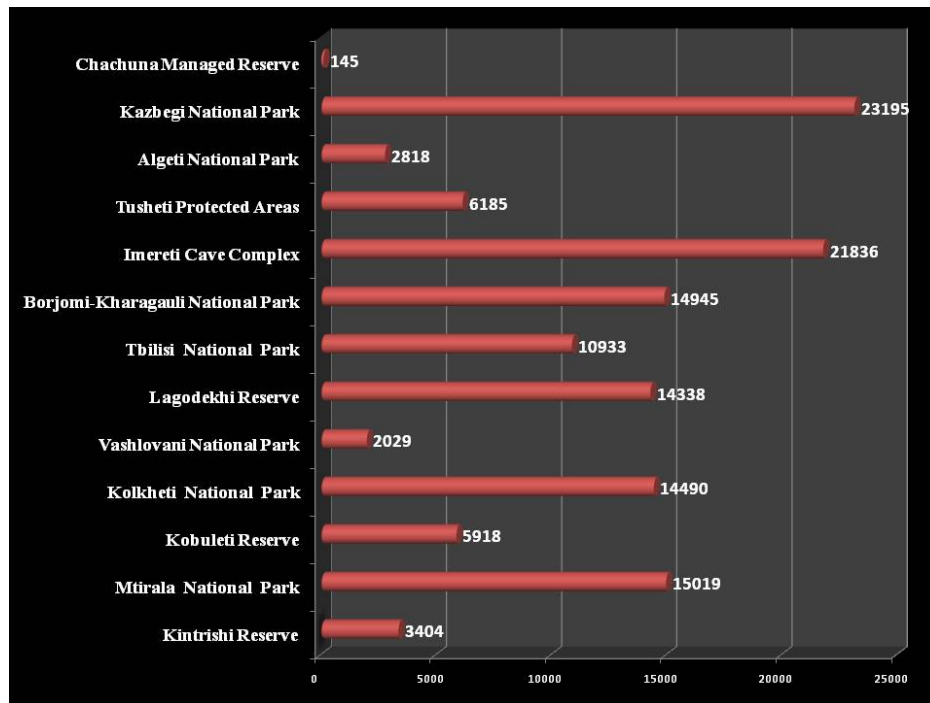


Figure 2 Statistic of visitors in the protected areas of Georgia

One of the reasons of this might be distance from Tbilisi and bad roads, also the fact that Vashlovani national park is not closed to the cities or villages as it appears in other cases. Figure (3) demonstrates quantity of visitors in Vashlovani National park according to the months. Based on the figure the most common month to visit Vashlovani national park is October.

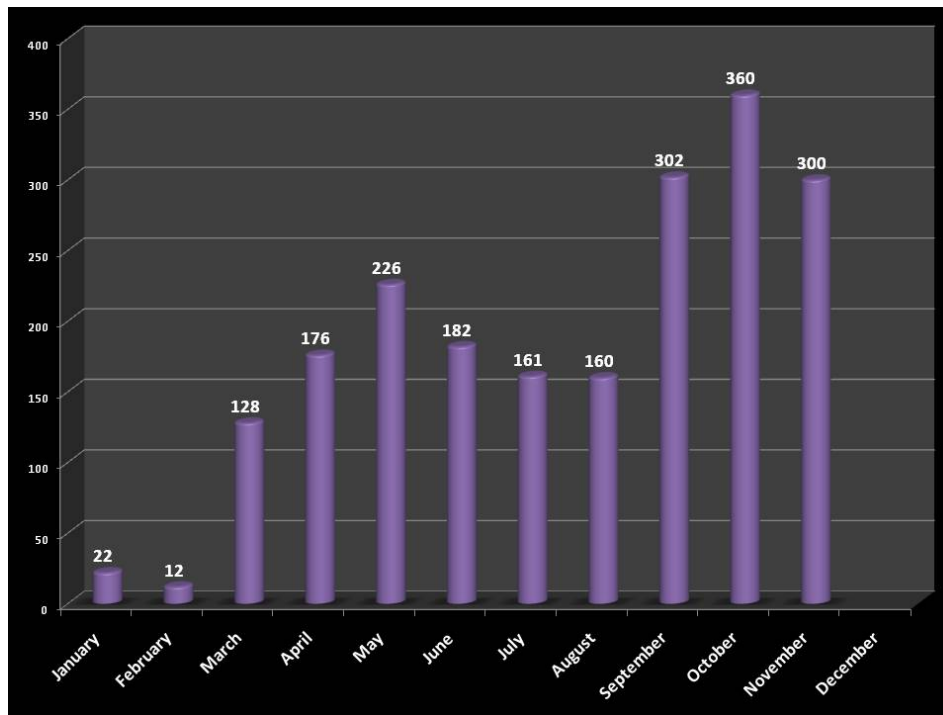


Figure 3 Visitors quantity in Vashlovani National Park according to the months

Furthermore, so far there is no need for the visitor management, although there must be plan for future in case of the growing numbers of the visitors, for avoid any negative impacts on wildlife. Especially for the wildlife tracking tours, there must be strict plan for visitor management and group schedule to avoid any impacts on the carnivores. Furthermore, it is important to find out how often groups can go at the same spot, some carnivores are more vulnerable than others and permanent visitors might have a negative impact on them. After the first few groups should be done small research about the carnivore behavior and check if they (some of them with collar attachments) started changing their living habitat.

Nowadays, throughout the World is widely used for the visitor management so called 'soft tools' which can be adopted by Vashlovani Protected Areas as well. Visitor management is basically based on the techniques such as:

- 1) **Codes of conduct**, i.e. not allowed walking on grass, not allowed to swim here etc.
- 2) **Redirection**, i.e. certain footpaths redirected to allow plants to grow again.
- 3) **Advertising**, i.e. advertisements promoting to throw rubbish in bins, keeping area clean etc.

- 4) **Environmental Management Systems**, i.e. solar panels to heat own water. Using wind for electricity, and etc.
- 5) **Guiding**, i.e. guiding people in park, so guide will choose the place where to go and which part to leave for some time.
- 6) **Fencing and signposting**, i.e. Channeling visitors flows through artificial means. i.e. in forest different routes (red/green/yellow etc), manmade obstacles.
- 7) **Reservation**, i.e. on first come first serve basis. You have to make reservations for bungalows and guides in advance.
- 8) **Participation**, i.e. people participation in decision making.
- 9) **Regulation**, i.e. certain areas you aren't allowed to enter.

Strengths and Weaknesses of the project

Strengths

- ◆ Vashlovani national park has unique flora and fauna which can attract visitors from different countries.
- ◆ In Dedoplistskaro region already exists some infrastructure which can be used for the wildlife tracking tours.
- ◆ Wildlife tracking tours can bring additional income to local population through using local services such as; guiding, transportation, lodging, food, handicrafts and etc.
- ◆ Local people's participation in wildlife tracking tours might play positive role for conservation of important ecosystem and improve conservation status for carnivores as well.
- ◆ Some of the hunters who have good knowledge and sense of wildlife can be used for guiding wildlife tours. It might encourage them to abandon poaching through getting some economic gain and benefit for nature conservation too.

Weaknesses

- ◆ It is hard to find mammals in Vashlovani Protected Areas, so during the wildlife trekking tour finding any mammals especially carnivores can't be guaranteed.
- ◆ Capacity of the Vashlovani national park for the wildlife trekking tours is not big; consequently on short term planning it will be hard to involve lots of local people who can have some benefits from such kind of tour.
- ◆ On territory of Vashlovani national park are three different border control posts, before starting the tour they must be informed about the trip in advance and during the tour every time group of visitors have to stop and provide documents which is time consume and not comfortable for the visitors.
- ◆ It seems that this border controls are hunting sometime or host some hunters too, firstly this action is not suitable for the protected areas, secondly, during the wildlife tracking tours while following the carnivore if visitor will find even one accident of hunting on national park territory might cause the problems, not to talk about the black image of the wildlife tracking tour and whole national park.
- ◆ There are unprotected sanitary norms in local restaurants and lack of public toilets and garbage collection areas in Dedoplistskaro. Often guesthouses are inadequate for foreign groups or visitors, minor upgrades can bring up to the international standard (one of the problem is shower-toilet combination in almost every guesthouse).

Recommendations

- 1) Required trainings for the Guest house owners in hospitality management. For drivers defensive driving course. For guides in animal tracking and safety issues for wildlife/carnivore tours.
- 2) Active involvement of media local and national TV channels, newspapers and radio to provide information for the local population regarding ecotourism development. Working on awareness rising projects for local population toward nature conservation and ecotourism.
- 3) Agency of Protected Areas should improve the technical details in bungalows and start thinking about providing food for visitors.
- 4) Putting signposts on the roads to find firstly visitor center in Dedoplistskaro and later Vashlovani NP.

- 5) Visitor center supposed to have own transportation for tourists who do not have own cars, or at least, record of local drivers who have proper car for such kind of tour. Encouraging locals to engage in Eco- tours as a driver, or guide and etc..
- 6) Encouraging local people to participate in wildlife tracking tours, to make them think about the nature conservation and at the same time show them some benefits which such kind of trips can bring to them. Providing and updating local people about the ongoing and future projects, cooperation with them. Some of the poachers can be used for guiding, their knowledge will be useful to find carnivores and at the same time they will have additional income, with this way they might abandon hunting.
- 7) Somehow active involvement of border control department in wildlife tracking tours, to show them that this tour is important for the Vashlovani Protected Areas and for the region as well. Updating them in terms of an up going scientific research or Ecotourism projects, to proof that wildlife preservation is important. At the same time if they will know that some mammals wear collar equipment they might be scared to shoot them, because sooner or later their pray will be found through radio signals.

Technical recommendations for the wildlife tracking tours

Duration of the trip can be around 5-7 days in total and maximum size of the group must be 5 -6 persons to avoid disturbance of the mammals. Furthermore, during the carnivore tracking or birdwatching tours large groups can create problems among the participants too, for example conflict of interests, (when some people want to see different species then others, or want to visit different places then others). It is necessary to bear in mind that wildlife tracking or safari tours are quite specific and required special knowledge as for the guide and for the visitors too. Furthermore wildlife tracking tours will take place in Vashlovani Protected Areas, consequently must be taken in consideration all kind of negative impacts which might have tracking the carnivores. It should be clear also for the visitors that there will be fixed hours (may be 2-3 hours a day) for the tracking carnivores such as wolf and bear, to avoid chasing and disturbing them.

Visitors should be informed in advance that with their guide will follow the spoor of wolves and bears. Furthermore spoor may include; tracks, feathers, kills, scat, scratching posts, trails, sounds, marking posts and etc. Plus utilizing radio telemetry and headphones to find some mammals which have collar/GPS attachments on the neck for scientific reasons, so visitors can be informed also about the study and they can feel that are part of it. Through the binoculars visitors will be able to see wolf and bear, but if after following them few hours without the luck to see them, they have to return back.

During the opening the wildlife/carnivore tracking tours should be announced specially planned event with participants from every stakeholder group; local and national officials, Ministry of Interior, Department of Protected Area, Department of Nature Preservation, Agency of Nature Preservation, Department of Tourism and Resorts of Georgia, national tour companies, Embassies and of course local stakeholders. There can be made first tour for the governmental officials or for other special guests. Event might also host the wildlife picture exhibition, traditional dances, music and etc.

During the wildlife/carnivore tracking tours groups should visit the shepherds around the Vashlovani Protected Areas, visitors will see the traditional shepherds life style, might hear some stories from them regarding the human wildlife conflict and etc. For the future bungalows in Vashlovani Protected Areas should offer to visitor's food as well. Food should be natural products from the region which will bring additional income to the locals. For the one of the nearest village to park Eldari (Kasristskali) will be option to make small market where tourists can buy not only the natural products but some traditional handicrafts too, such as rugs, traditional style carpets, socks and various accessories made by fleece.

Since February 2006, the Project "Development of Traditional Handicraft" under financing by the World Bank and WWF has been accomplishing. Nowadays, in Dedoplistskaro handicraft school 'Pesvebi' serves for the restoration and development of traditional handicrafts and everyday goes process of working and training. School is also open for the international visitors who can attend the process of work on the 9 Brothers ST.18 in Dedoplistskaro.

Conclusion

International experience shows that protected areas while preserve well wildlife can have great role for the local peoples social and economic benefits. Some parts of the protected areas which can be open for visitors can increase the proportion of employment in the service and retail sectors while significantly reducing the exploitation of natural resources for consumptive uses. Such economic changes do not always go smoothly, but past experience demonstrates in many parts of the world that recreation-related employment can be more than five times greater than employment in resource exploitation in the same territory, and gross economic benefits are often more than ten times greater (Higginbottom, 2004).

Finally, can be stated that even wildlife/carnivore tracking tours might have small market in Vashlovani Protected Area, it is quite important segment for Ecotourism development in region and

on long term planning will reach the success as for the wildlife conservation as for the local population in terms of economic Benefits.

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