



Georgia

## Task report on Development of community-based ecotourism/wildlife watching



UNDP/GEF project "Catalyzing Financial Sustainability of Georgia's Protected Areas System" (00070382)

Testing site-level revenue generation mechanisms in Tusheti PAs

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*The views expressed in this report are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations or UNDP.*

## Abbreviations used

APA	Agency of Protected Areas
FFI	Fauna and Flora International, UK
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
NACRES	Centre for Biodiversity Conservation and Research
NP	National Park
PA	Protected Area
SNR	Strict Nature Reserve
TPA	Tusheti Protected Areas
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
WWI	Wildlife Watching Itinerary

## Contents

1	Introduction.....	5
2	The WWI developmnet process.....	5
3	Goals and objectives of wildlife watching development.....	6
4	Action plan.....	6
4.1	Time table of activities: 2011 .....	9
	Annex 1: Description of WW itineraries.....	10
	Annex 2: Maps of WW itineraries .....	15

## 1 Introduction

Tusheti is one of Georgia's most popular tourist destination among domestic as well as international travelers. In recent years visitor numbers to Tusheti has increased significantly and according to the forecast this trend is likely to continue in the future<sup>1</sup>. Recent improvements in the visitor service sector and in the infrastructure should also be noted. Despite certain problems<sup>2</sup>, on the whole the tourist sector is developed in Tusheti. With the many current and planned activities conducted by the TPA administration, APA and local NGOs as well as with the support of various organizations and projects Tusheti is expected to be better prepared for the 2011 tourist season. At the same time the surveys conducted within the same contract have clearly demonstrated that Tusheti's tourist potential is by far not fully utilized yet. At present the local tourism sector is mainly focused on local culture (architecture, folklore, cuisine, etc.) and also on cultural and semi-natural landscapes. While the opportunities presented by the wilderness and unique biodiversity are not adequately utilized. It is important to promote these natural elements for the overall development of the national tourist sector and also for the promotion of the Tusheti NP and NR as a tool for the conservation of the elements important for nature-based tourism.

The present document explores and proposes the opportunities for the development of wildlife watching as one of the forms of nature-based tourism.

## 2 The WWI development process

Within the same contract NACRES has conducted a number of assessments that have direct or indirect relevance to the development of wildlife watching potential in Tusheti. Among them is the assessment of biodiversity during which special emphasis was made on the evaluation of bird watching opportunities and large mammal watching potential in Tusheti. Based on the findings of this and other surveys we critically assessed the preliminary plan proposed in the NACRES application prepared in January 2010. While developing the presented plan we also carefully reviewed and considered all other on-going and planned activities that have relevance to the wildlife watching capacity development in Tusheti. This was considered an important prerequisite for developing a feasible plan.

Based on the findings of our surveys and considering the overall current situation on the ground, at this point (and at least over the next few years) it is considered most appropriate for the Tusheti wildlife watching to mainly focus on the wild goat, a star species of TPA. Tusheti is the only place in Georgia where this species survives. The wild goat as a symbol of TPA will be the main element. All other important components of biodiversity including large birds, butterflies and flora in combination with the stunning landscapes present a unique opportunity for the development of a

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<sup>1</sup> Tusheti PA Tourism and Marketing sub-plan, NACRES, 2010 (prepared under the same contract)

<sup>2</sup> Task Report on Workshops and Meetings for Facilitating Establishment of Partnerships between the Small Companies and Locals, NACRES, 2010 (prepared under the same contract)

potentially successful tourist product. In combination with beautiful landscapes and other elements of biodiversity the opportunity of watching the endemic Caucasian snowcocks may also be attractive to many visitors. Currently the Tur (*Capra cylindricornis*) presents less ecotourism opportunities in Tusheti since chances of observing these animals in Tusheti are not so high during the main tours season<sup>3</sup>.

Based on the above the Project Team in close cooperation with the TPA administration and association "Tusheti Guide" developed specific wildlife watching itineraries (WWI).

### 3 Goals and objectives of wildlife watching development

The overall goal of wildlife watching development in Tusheti is:

To diversify the tourist product offered in Tusheti and to include wildlife watching component, which would provide additional income to both TPA administration and local people, and in turn create new incentives among the local communities to maintain biodiversity and also increase the reputation of the PAs as the main instrument for conserving Tusheti's biodiversity.

The objectives are as follows:

1. To develop WWI (Wildlife Watching Itinerary) for visitors
2. To encourage cooperation between the TPA administration and the relevant local groups in relation to the implementation of WWIs in order to ensure maximum involvement and participation of communities groups (local guesthouses, horse/vehicle renting people, etc. ).
3. To ensure maximum possible protection of the wildlife watching sites and the effective monitoring of key species.
4. To increase the capacity of the local groups involved in the implementation of the WWIs.
5. Provision of basic infrastructure and equipment necessary for the launching of the WWIs.
6. To market the Tusheti wildlife watching tourist product.
7. To test and pilot the WWIs and evaluate them.

### 4 Action plan

Some of the above objectives are covered by other components of the same contract. These include Objectives 2, 4 and partially also 3.

Activity 1.1: Development of WWIs.

We propose two separate wildlife watching itineraries (Annex 1 and 2). Both are short (0.5 and 1.5 days) and in our opinion would significantly enrich any visitor's experience in Tusheti. They are likely to be an attractive tourist activity to both short- and long-term visitors to Tusheti. In the future the

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<sup>3</sup>Report of the Assessment of Biodiversity, Tusheti PA complex, NACRES, 2010 (prepared under the same contract)

two itineraries may be combined to form a third 2-day option. It is notable that one of the itineraries (*Itinerary #1*) is suitable for almost all visitors irrespective of age and physical capabilities.

**Activity 2.1:** To discuss and agree on details of cooperation between the TPA administration and relevant local groups.

The cooperation between the TPA administration and relevant local groups has been encouraged through other components<sup>4</sup> dedicated to local partnership development with the primary aim to maximize local communities' benefits from tourism in Tusheti.

**Activity 3.1:** To increase patrolling in relevant key sites and to conduct wild goat monitoring.

This activity will be conducted under other components<sup>5</sup> dedicated to improving law enforcement and biodiversity monitoring. The TPA Law Enforcement (patrolling) Strategy makes special emphasis on the protection of key species and their habitats. Priority patrol routes and monitoring sites among other sections of TPA also fully cover proposed wildlife watching sites.

**Activity 4.1:** Deliver training to the local groups involved in the implementation of WWIs.

Another component<sup>6</sup> of the same contract envisages the capacity raising of associations "Tusheti Guide" and "Friends of Tusheti PAs".

**Activity 5.1** Creation of basic infrastructure

Some basic infrastructure would be needed to ensure effective implementation of the wild goat watching itinerary (*Itinerary #1*). This involves setting up a special watching platform. At the proposed Kue watching point a safe and comfortable watching platform should be constructed. It is also advisable to improve the nearby picnic site. The project implementation team has conducted relevant negotiations and Georgia Carnivore Conservation project (a joint FFI/NACRES project funded by EU) will support the provision of the watching platform. In summer 2011 such a platform will be designed and constructed in close cooperation with the TPA administration.

**Activity 5.2:** Capacity building of TPA administration: provision of equipment

TPA administration needs additional equipment for the effective implementation of WWIs. In this respect of highest priority are quality binoculars and GPS units. Provision of these equipment is also envisaged within the above mentioned EU funded project (Georgia Carnivore Conservation project, FFI/NACRES)

**Activities 6.1-6.3:** Marketing of WWIs.

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<sup>4</sup> „Task Report on Workshops and Meetings for Facilitating Establishment of Partnerships between the Small Companies and Locals“; „Development of local partnerships and capacity raising trainings“

<sup>5</sup> „Biodiversity monitoring“ and „Law Enforcement Strategy“

<sup>6</sup> Development of local partnerships and capacity raising trainings

In addition to the marketing activities already planned as part of the Tourism and Marketing sub-plan, it is also recommended to conduct marketing specifically focusing on the wildlife watching opportunities in Tusheti. All possible means of information dissemination should be utilized. The strategy should consider the following two directions: (1) local marketing of WWIs in which case the target group is national and international visitors that have already arrived in Tusheti and may be interested in short wildlife watching trips and (2) offering Tusheti WWIs as part of a wider package or separately.

Activity 6.1: Distribution of information leaflets at (i) local guesthouses and visitor center in Tusheti and (ii) at any place where potential visitors may find it (tourist Information Centers, various places frequented by tourist). The leaflet will give short information on the WWIs and contact details of the tour operators.

Activity 6.2: Placement of the information on WWIs at various relevant web-sites (TPA web-site, other relevant web-sites). Also dissemination of information through *FaceBook* or CENN (Caucasus Environmental NGO Network).

Activity 6.3: Informing partner tour operators about the proposed WWIs in Tusheti so that they may choose to include them into their package tours.

#### Activity 7.1: Piloting the WWIs.

The implementation of the WWIs will begin in summer 2011 jointly by the Project team, Association "Tusheti Guide" and TPA administration, and also with the support of "the Friends of TPA". Concrete schedule and tariffs will be agreed through joint discussions. Representatives of national tour operators, other relevant organizations, as well as media representatives should be invited to participate in the first pilot wildlife watching tours. At the end of each pilot tour open discussions should be organized at which the participants will have an opportunity to provide their comment and suggestions as to how the visitors' experience and service can be improved.

#### Activity 7.2. Review and evaluation of WWIs.

At the end of the tourist season a workshop will be reorganized with all key stakeholders to discuss and summarize the accomplished work and plan future activities.



#### 4.1 Time table of activities: 2011

Objective/Activity	Responsible entities	May	June	July	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.
Activity 1.1: Development of the WWIs. WWIs	NACRES, UNDP/GEF Project, APA, TPA administration, associations "Tusheti Guide" and "Friends of Tusheti PAs".						
Activity 2.1: To discuss and agree on details of cooperation between the TPA administration and the relevant local groups.	APA, TPA administration, associations "Tusheti Guide" and "Friends of Tusheti PAs".						
Activity 3.1: To increase patrolling in relevant key sites and to conduct wild goat monitoring.	NACRES, UNDP/GEF Project, APA, TPA administration						
Activity 4.1: Deliver training to the local groups involved in the implementation of WWIs.	NACRES, UNDP/GEF Project						
Activity 5.1 Creation of basic infrastructure	NACRES, FFI/NACRES, TPA administration,						
Activity 5.2: Capacity building of TPA administration: provision of equipment	NACRES, Georgia carnivore Conservation project(FFI/NACRES)						
Activity 6.1: Distribution of information leaflets	NACRES, UNDP/GEF Project, APA, TPA administration, associations "Tusheti Guide" and "Friends of Tusheti PAs".						
Activity 6.2: Placement of the information on WWIs on the internet.	NACRES, UNDP/GEF Project, APA, TPA administration						
Activity 6.3: Informing partner tour operators	NACRES, UNDP/GEF Project, APA, TPA administration						
Activity 7.1: Piloting the WWIs.	NACRES, UNDP/GEF Project, APA, TPA administration, associations "Tusheti Guide" and "Friends of Tusheti PAs".						
Activity 7.2. Review and evaluation of WWIs.	NACRES, UNDP/GEF Project, APA, TPA administration, associations "Tusheti Guide" and "Friends of Tusheti PAs".						

## Annex 1: Description of WW itineraries

### (a) Itinerary #1: Wild goat watching

Duration: Half day

Location: Village Omalo and its surroundings, the Kue watching point, Keseloebi castle.

Tour highlights: Wild goat, rare birds of prey and vultures, endemic and special interest passerine birds, pine forest, and typical Tusheti landscapes.

On this route (namely from the Kue observation point) there is high probability to observe wild goat (*Capra aegagrus*) groups. In all Georgia wild goats remain only in Tusheti. During the last census (Biodiversity Assessment of Tusheti Protected Areas Complex, 2010) the total Tusheti population was estimated at 130 individuals. The species is included in IUCN as well as in Georgian Red lists.

Omalo is situated on a plateau and is bordered by several gorges. There is a mosaic of forest and meadows that creates perfect habitat for birds including birds of prey. Therefore the village itself as well as its surroundings has a very diverse bird community. This should attract visitors with general interests in observing birds. More than 50 bird species may be observed in the Omalo area. Among them are Georgian Red Listed species: Griffon vulture (VU), Black vulture (EN), Bearded vulture (VU), Golden eagle (VU) as well as Caucasian Chiffchaff (*Phylloscopus lorenzii*) and Green Warbler (*Phylloscopus nitidus*) both of which are among the primary target species for birdwatchers visiting the Caucasus. Another such species, the Red-fronted Serin (*Serinus pusillus*) that breeds only in the mountains of the Caucasus, Turkey and Iran is also one of the most common birds in Tusheti. In the pine forest at Omalo, nesting hobby (*Falco subbuteo*) may also be seen. Sparrowhawk (*Accipiter nisus*) and Goshawks (*Accipiter gentilis*) are also often observed there. Below is the list of birds species that may be observed on the route (Table 1).

Table 1. List of birds recorded in Omalo and its surroundings

#	Scientific name	Common name
1.	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	Grey Heron
2.	<i>Gypaetus barbatus</i>	Bearded vulture
3.	<i>Aegypius monachus</i>	Eurasian Black Vulture
4.	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>	Griffon Vulture
5.	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>	Golden Eagle
6.	<i>Hieraetus pennatus</i>	Booted Eagle
7.	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	Common Buzzard
8.	<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>	Goshawk
9.	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	Sparrowhawk
10.	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	Kestrel
11.	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>	Hobby
12.	<i>Alectoris chukar</i>	Chukar

13.	<i>Coturnix coturnix</i>	Quail
14.	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	Lapwing
15.	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>	Turtle Dove
16.	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>	Cuckoo
17.	<i>Apus apus</i>	Swift
18.	<i>Upupa epops</i>	Hoopoe
19.	<i>Merops apiaster</i>	Bee-eater
20.	<i>Coracias garrulus</i>	Roler
21.	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	Great Spotted Woodpecker
22.	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	Barn Swallow
23.	<i>Delichon urbica</i>	House Martin
24.	<i>Anthus spinoletta</i>	Water Pipit
25.	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	Meadow Pipit
26.	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	White Wagtail
27.	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	Wren
28.	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	Dunnock
29.	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>	Black Redstart
30.	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>	Northern Wheatear
31.	<i>Turdus merula</i>	Blackbird
32.	<i>Turdus torquatus</i>	Ring Ouzel
33.	<i>Sylvia curruca</i>	Lesser Whitethroat
34.	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>	Willow Warbler
35.	<i>Phylloscopus nitidus</i>	Green Warbler
36.	<i>Phylloscopus lorenzii</i>	Caucasian Chiffchaff
37.	<i>Parus major</i>	Great Tit
38.	<i>Parus ater</i>	Coal Tit
39.	<i>Parus caeruleus</i>	Blue Tit
40.	<i>Aegythalos caudatus</i>	Long-tailed Tit
41.	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>	Treecreeper
42.	<i>Lanius minor</i>	Lesser Gray Shrike
43.	<i>Lanius collurio</i>	Red-backed Shrike
44.	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	Jay
45.	<i>Corvus corone</i>	Hooded Crow
46.	<i>Corvus corax</i>	Raven
47.	<i>Oriolus oriolus</i>	Golden Oriol
48.	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	Chaffinch
49.	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	Goldfinch
50.	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>	Linnet
51.	<i>Serinus pusillus</i>	Red-fronted Serin
52.	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>	Bullfinch
53.	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>	Common Crossbill
54.	<i>Emberiza hortulana</i>	Ortolan Bunting

Trail level: This is a walking route and its total length is about 5 km. The trail is relatively easy and does not require any special physical abilities.

Recommended equipment: Binocular and/or telescope

Optimal group size: 10 persons

Detailed description: The trip begins in Omalo. Registered visitors gather at a preliminarily announced place at 6 a.m. which could be at one of the guesthouses or the village centre. The guide gives the participants a short overview of the itinerary. Visitors walk 1,5 km to reach the Kue observation point. During the walk the guide speaks about Tusheti, Tusheti Protected Areas and its biodiversity while the visitors have an opportunity to see small birds such as passerines and enjoy some breathtaking views of Tusheti.

The group arrives at the Kue observation point around 7 a.m. From Kue it is possible to observe parts of the Tsitel Mta and the rocky slopes below village Shenako. The guide tries to locate wild goat groups using binocular. Visitors are also encouraged to assist in locating the animals. The guide also provides interesting information about the wild goat range, its ecology and behavior. As wild goats are spotted, the guide talks about the physical differences between the sexes and also between adults and young. The visitors should also be informed that the Kue observation point is an important monitoring site and that visitors are welcome to participate in the counting of individuals hence in the monitoring process.

The observation lasts until around 9:00 a.m. i.e. until it gets hot and the animals start moving down toward the river bed.

If wild goats can not be spotted for 30 minutes the guide suggests another place (e.g. Tsitel mta trail) from which the animals can be observed at a closer distance. However visitors must be prepared to do a more difficult walk to reach the place. This other place should be considered as an alternative only if the main site fails to be successful because there is higher potential disturbance to the animals. Part of the visitors willing to do the alternative trail follows the guide. It is advisable to limit the number of people going to the Tsitel Mta trail to 5 or 6. If the number of visitors willing to go down to the Tsitel Mta trail is higher they may be divided into two groups. Those who choose/are unable to go to the Tsitel Mta trail remain at the Kue observation place and continue searching for the wild goats from there. The rest proceed to the alternative observation site led by the guide about 300-400 meters. They will not be allowed to go beyond that point. They will also be warned that they must move slowly and quietly to minimise disturbance to the wild goats as well as to other wildlife. Observation will continue until about 9:30 a.m. after which time the group will begin their walk back to Kue observation point and have some time to share their impressions with each other. In the meantime large birds may also appear. Visitors have a chance to observe bearded and griffon vultures perching on one of the resting sites on the Samekhe (Sonekhe) hillside just opposite the Kue observation point. Preferred perching rocks can be easily distinguished by white spots created by birds' droppings.

As the smaller group gets back to the Kue observation point to reunite with the rest of the group the guide phones his/her colleague and the latter brings breakfast and water for the visitors to the picnic site in about 20 minutes time. The group moves to the picnic site to have breakfast there. They all remain there until 11 am. After breakfast the visitors start walking to the Keseloebi castle. This is

only a short walk, 1.2 km. From Keseloebi castle visitors enjoy some of the most beautiful scenery of Tusheti. There is also some chance to see wild goats there. Interested visitors can also visit the Tusheti museum. The guide will provide interesting information on the museum and the specimens on display. After visiting the museum, visitors and guide proceed back to village Omalo.

Recommended total price per person: 35 GEL

\* Price includes: services of the guide, breakfast, and a free gift: copy of the bilingual (English-Georgian) "Field Guide to the Birds of East Georgia" published by NACRES.

\* Minimum number of participants: 5

### (b) Itinerary #2: Lake Oreti

Duration: 1,5 day

Location: Village Omalo and its surroundings, lake Oreti.

Tour highlights: Caucasian Snowcock, other rare bird species, breathtaking views.

Omalo-lake Oreti is one of the most popular visitor trails in Tusheti due to the spectacular scenery and views which are so wide that almost all of Tusheti can be seen. The site includes typical habitats of two endemic birds Caucasian Black Grouse (*Tetrao mlkosiewiczi*) and Caucasian Snowcocks (*Tetraogallus caucasicus*).

Table 2. List of birds recorded on the Omalo – lake Oreti route

#	Scientific name	Common name
1.	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>	Griffon Vulture
2.	<i>Gypaetus barbatus</i>	Bearded vulture
3.	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>	Golden Eagle
4.	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	Common Buzzard
5.	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	Kestrel
6.	<i>Tetraogallus caucasicus</i>	Caucasian Snowcock
7.	<i>Alectoris chukar</i>	Chukar
8.	<i>Coturnix coturnix</i>	Quail
9.	<i>Merops apiaster</i>	Bee-eater
10.	<i>Upupa epops</i>	Hoopoe
11.	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	Grey Wagtail
12.	<i>Anthus spinoletta</i>	Water Pipit
13.	<i>Phylloscopus nitidus</i>	Green Warbler
14.	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>	Northern Wheatear
15.	<i>Parus ater</i>	Coal Tit
16.	<i>Carduelis flavirostris</i>	Twite
17.	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	Chaffinch
18.	<i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i>	Chough

The Oreti lake area is particularly attractive due to large birds of prey and vultures as well as the presence of two endemic Caucasian species (Caucasian Black Grouse , *Tetrao mlokosiewiczii*, and Caucasian Snowcocks, *Tetraogallus caucasicus*). It is very difficult to observe black grouse during the main tourist season in Tusheti, the summer<sup>7</sup>. The snowcocks on the other hand can easily be observed in the scree just above lake Oreti.

The meadows around the lake are intensely used for livestock movement and grazing. Both sheep and sheep dogs disturb the birds. Sheep dogs are also a potential threat to the visitors. If this disturbance could be removed or at least reduced chances of observing the snowcocks would increase significantly and visitors would be able to move around safely.

Level: The overall length of the trail is about 10 km and visitors will cover it on a horseback.

Recommended equipment: Binocular or scope, sleeping bag.

Group size: 5-6 persons

Detailed description: The trip begins in village Omalo at 12 a.m. As the participants gather in a predefined spot the guide briefs them about the itinerary and tour highlights. The guide then reminds them about some basics of horse riding and safety rules. The group heads toward the river, crosses over the bridge and continues uphill toward lake Oreti. They reach the camp site near the lake at about 5 p.m. Here visitors can enjoy some of the most stunning views of Tusheti. In the meantime the guide chooses a specific site and with the help of visitors begins to set up camp. Until it gets dark the visitors are free to walk around, visit the small lake Oreti and enjoy the views. At the end of Day 1 the guide will remind the visitors of the schedule of the next day.

On Day 2 visitors get up at dawn (e.g. at 5 am) and set off to quietly stealth as close to the birds as possible. Snowcocks are found in the scree above the lake. They are usually active during the early hours of the day as well as in the evening, during which time they can be observed as well as heard. One of the advantages of this site is that visitors may go close to the birds without actually disturbing them. There are also chances of observing golden eagles hunting the snowcocks. By 10 a.m. visitors get back to camp and have breakfast. Then they take camp down and head back to Omalo. On the way back they stop to have lunch and also take several breaks at various spots as needed.

During the tour visitors may see roe deer, wild goats, brown bears and other large mammals or their signs (e.g. footprints).

Recommended total price per person: 120 GEL

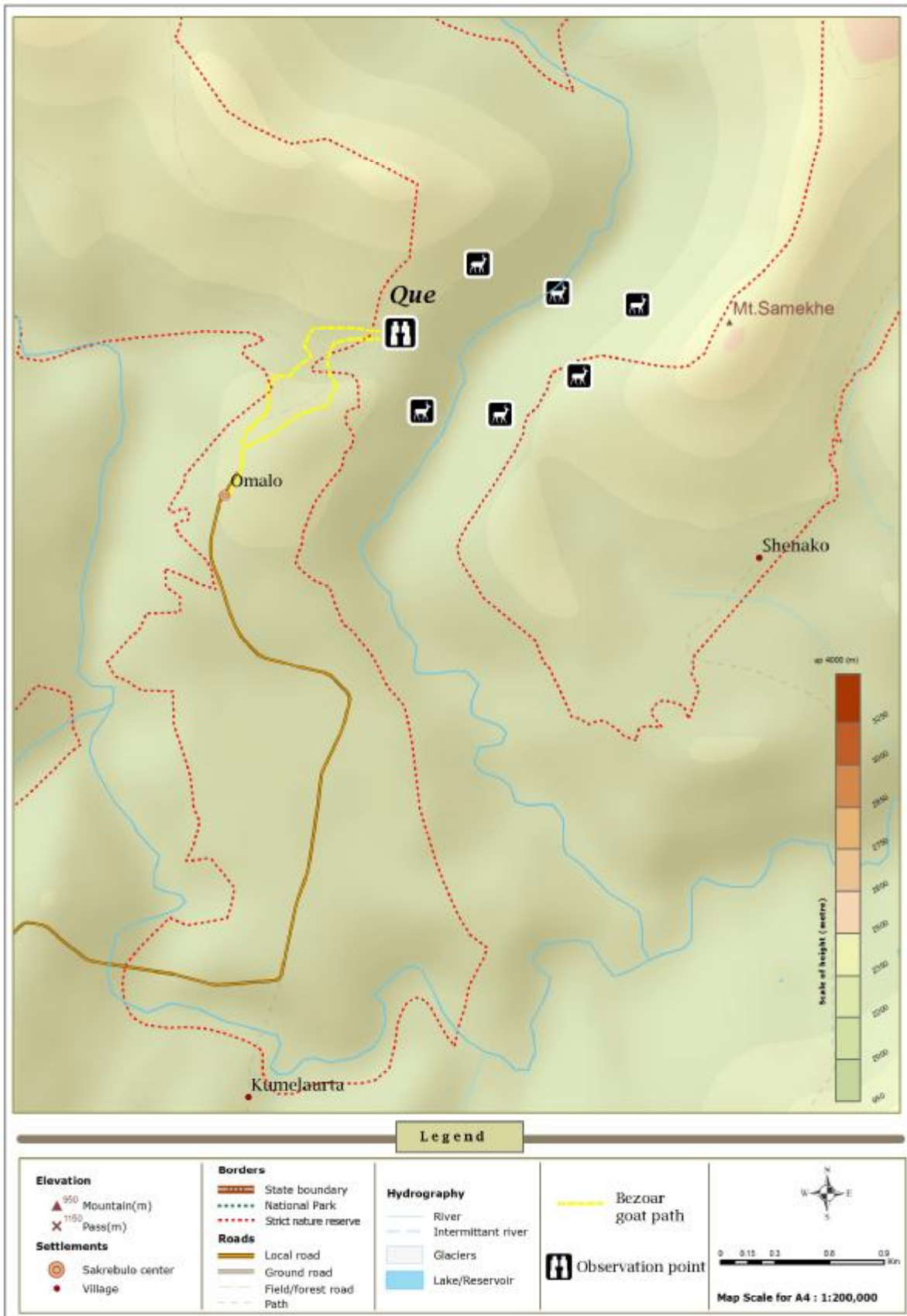
\* Price includes: services of the guide, horse rent, all meals (2 dinners, 1 supper, 1 breakfast), rent of tent, and a free gift: copy of the bilingual (English-Georgian) "Field Guide to the Birds of East Georgia" published by NACRES. \* Minimum number of participants: 5

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<sup>7</sup> The best time to observe black grouse in the Caucasus is when they have lek that is in April to May. In summer these birds are largely invisible most of the time confined to the Caucasian rhododendron (*Rhododendron caucasicum*) shrubbery.

## Annex 2: Maps of WW itineraries

### (a) Itinerary #1: Wild goat watching



(b) Itinerary #2: Lake Oreti

