

Tundra

A sensitive habitat

Long-distance pollution

Although remote and far away, the tundra is not spared the negative impact of some of man's activities. Its most important problems have to do with the pollution which is caused by mining. The flowrate of the main Siberian rivers, the Lena and the Yenisey, has dramatically increased lately, despite the reduced rainfall. According to researchers, the water that swells up the rivers comes from the tundra. Recent studies actually showed the permafrost is getting thinner, probably because of the earth's general overheating. In addition, the increased quantity of freshwater flowing into the Arctic Ocean could alter the salinity of the sea and endanger the life of the water ecosystems.

Natural parks of the tundra

The flora of the tundra is damaged by the passage of vehicles or even footfalls. Plants grow slowly, so they take long to recover. In addition, the destruction of bushes leaves the soil underneath more exposed to the sun, which makes it drier. A number of natural reserves, where man's activities are controlled and restrained by law, have been established to preserve the biome of the tundra. One of the most important ones is the National Pallas Ounastunturi reserve, in the north of Finland. This reserve covers a surface of 500 square kilometres and includes two rocky plateaux of glacial origin: the Pallastunturi and the Ounastunturi. The word "tundra" comes from "tunturi", which means "barren land". The reserve is home to elks, wolverines, grizzlies, wolves and lynxes; there are many variable or Arctic or white hares, weasels, lemmings and ermines. One of the oldest reserves in Finland is the Petkeljärvi sanctuary. Established in 1956, it covers approximately 6 square kilometres and since the antiquity this area has been considered one of the most beautiful ones in Finland. It is the ice that, during the latest ice age, has shaped and created such beautiful sights, producing isles, lakes, sandy beaches and isthmuses (strips of land). Water from molten ice left sand and pebbles, that built up into mounds, called eskers. It is a wild landscape of unique beauty, with open moors, small peat-bogs, swampy meadows and lakes covering approximately two thirds of the overall surface of the sanctuary. If, on one hand, its location at the border with Russia allowed it to remain in a wild state, on the other hand the Second World War brought battles here that damaged it. When walking through it, some small trenches and fortifications are still visible and have now been restored and turned into tourist attractions. The sanctuary is the domain of elks, although it is also home to a good number of pine martens, lynxes, beavers and many species of birds.