



Photographs: Jarek Jõepera, Raimo Pajula, Aivar Ruukel and Jaanika Savi

Did You know that
about one-fifth of all land in Estonia
is covered by mires?

In terms of the abundance of natural swamps, we rank third in the world, after Finland and Canada.

Tiesitkö, että Virossa suot peittävät noin viidenneksen koko maa-alueesta?

Luonnon soiden runsauden perusteella olemme maailman kolmantena Suomen ja Kanadan jälkeen.

Знаете ли вы, что болота покрывают примерно пятую часть материковой Эстонии?

Вслед за Финляндией и Канадой мы занимаем третье место в мире по обилию природных болот.

Kas teadsid, et Eestis katavad sood umbes viiendiku kogu maismaast?

Looduslike soode rohkuse poolest oleme Soome ja Kanada järel maailmas kolmandad.



Two to three peat moss plants can fit on one square centimetre, twenty thousand or so on one square metre, and two hundred million or so specimens on one hectare.



Pictured in the photograph: Seto Farmer Museum

Peat mosses produce acidic compounds, which prevent bacteria (germs) and fungi. As a result, it has been used for bandaging wounds. Furthermore, peat moss has been harvested in bog and used for insulating log houses.



There are 9 species of so-called 'carnivorous plants' growing in Estonia and all may be specifically encountered in bog. Mainly, they feed on various insects, and a person will not lose his or her finger!



The cranberry is called the 'grape of the Nordic countries'. Cranberries contain lots of vitamins, sugars and acids, which help the berry to last the winter on the cushion of moss. They have been a supplement to the human diet for centuries.



Isolated bog islands, cut off from the rest of the world by wet and spongy peat are favourite breeding places for wolves and golden eagles, which build their nests atop tall lone trees.



In the older days, footwear – *padinad* or räätsad (marsh shoes) – would be made for both horses and people to move about the mires. Today, these are only used by people. When wearing räätsad (marsh shoes), you can go exploring mires with experienced guides during all four seasons.



The fifth season or high water happens in low-lying wetland areas in spring, mostly in April, when large quantities of water from melting snow pour into the Valleys and lowlands. Then you can only get around without getting your feet wet if you use small watercraft of *haabjad* (dugouts).



In Estonia, an ancient skiff is called 'haabjas' (dugout). Soomaa is the only place in the world to experience moving around by skiff and participating in a skiff-making workshop.



Boardwalks provide Access to Estonian bogs without having to get your feet wet. In Estonia you can enjoy the bogs on foot, wheelchair or with a buggy on 60+ kilometres of boardwalks all over the country.



By being inaccessible and dangerous, bogs have generated many fairy tales and legends about fairies, witches, ghost lights and bogs bogeys. Bogs generate bog gas, and when this ignites spontaneously upon contact with air, sometimes “will-o’-the-wisps” (ghost lights) may be seen in bogs. In the older days, folk used to associate them with the locations of buried treasures, or a small light would cause people to stray from their path.



Estonians have traditionally picked berries and medicinal herbs in bogs. In ancient times, the Estonians often built their refuges and fortresses on bog islands that were accessible only by complicated secret paths. Mires even provided shelter during and after World War II.