

# Zorkul Nature Reserve



## General features

<b>Country:</b>	Tajikistan
<b>Date of establishment:</b>	1972
<b>Area:</b>	1,610 km <sup>2</sup>
<b>Geographic location:</b>	Latitude: 37°30'N; Longitude: 73°45'E
<b>IUCN category:</b>	I

## Overview

Zorkul Nature Reserve (ZNR) is located in south-eastern Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Province, bordering Afghanistan's Wakhan District. The reserve occupies a 320 km wide valley between the southern Alichur and Vahan ridges of the eastern Pamir Mountains. It lies east of the provincial capital of Khorog at an altitude of 4,000–5,460 masl. The landscape consists of gentle slopes of sparsely vegetated alpine steppe. A core feature of the reserve is the 3,900 ha freshwater Zorkul Lake (4,125 masl). The area was initially managed as a protected area for the conservation of bar-headed geese and was upgraded to a full nature reserve in 2000.

## People

Pamiri and Kyrgyz

## Flora

Vegetation is sparse, primarily consisting of high-mountain desert cryophytic meadow and wetland species. The floristic composition does not exceed 250–300 species.

## Fauna

The reserve has important populations of mammals including long-tailed marmot (*Marmota caudata*), juniper vole (*Microtus juldaschi*), Marco Polo sheep (*Ovis ammon polii*), Siberian ibex (*Capra sibirica*), snow leopard (*Panthera uncia*), grey wolf (*Canis lupus*), red fox (*Vulpes vulpes*), weasel (*Mustela altaica*), and brown bear (*Ursus arctos*).

BirdLife International has declared the reserve an Important Bird Area (IBA) because it supports significant populations of several bird species – either as residents or as overwintering, breeding, or passage migrants – including Tibetan snowcock (*Tetraogallus tibetanus*), Himalayan snowcock (*Tetraogallus himalayensis*), and bar-headed goose (*Anser indicus*).

## Threats

- Habitat degradation and biodiversity loss due to illegal logging, fuelwood harvesting, and the timber trade.
- Reduction in species diversity, habitat degradation, and erosion as a result of overgrazing.



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*Photos: Srijana Joshi, Zhang Lixun*