

Georgia founded the first strict nature reserve in the Caucasus Ecoregion, Lagodekhi Strict Nature Reserve, in 1912 to conserve pristine Caucasus broad-leaved forests and associated wildlife. At the end of the 1990s (Soviet era) the Protected Area system in Georgia included 15 Strict Nature Reserves only, which covered 2.4 % of country's territory – mostly forests of different types. After the collapse of Soviet Union the system, with support of donors, such as GEF/World Bank, German Government, Government of Norway, and with technical assistance of WWF and some other international and national organizations, has been developing rapidly in both directions: extension and transformation-diversification. Today Georgia has 14 State (Strict) Nature Reserves (IUCN Category I), 9 National Parks (IUCN II), 14 Natural Monuments (IUCN III), 16 Sanctuaries (IUCN IV), 2 Protected Landscapes (IUCN V) and 5 Multiple Use Areas (IUCN VI) covering a total area of around 520,000 ha or 7.5 % of the country's territory (three times more than in the 1990s) (Fig. 12.1). The system protects around 10 % of the country's forest area, among them: pristine forests Colchic humid broad-leaved, mixed and swamp forests (e.g. Kintrishi Strict Nature Reserve, Mtirala and Kolkheti National Parks), East Caucasus temperate broad-leaved forests (e.g. Lagodekhi and Tbilisi Strict Nature Reserves), high mountain birch and pine forests (e.g. Kazbegi and Tusheti National Parks), dry open pistachio-juniper woodlands (Vashlovani National Park), East Caucasus flood-plain forests (e.g. Gardabani and Chachuna Sanctuaries), etc. High mountain grasslands are main object for protection of newly established Javakheti National Park. However, Georgia's protected areas system still needs improvement and development. Some new protected areas, effectively functional buffer zones, as well as corridors between protected areas need to be established to allow animal migrations and certain threatened ecosystems need to be set aside. Principal fauna species are globally threatened: West Caucasus Tur (wild goat, endemic for the Greater Caucasus – *Capra caucasica*), Bezoar goat (*C. aegagrus*), Caucasian salamander (relict and endemic species for the West

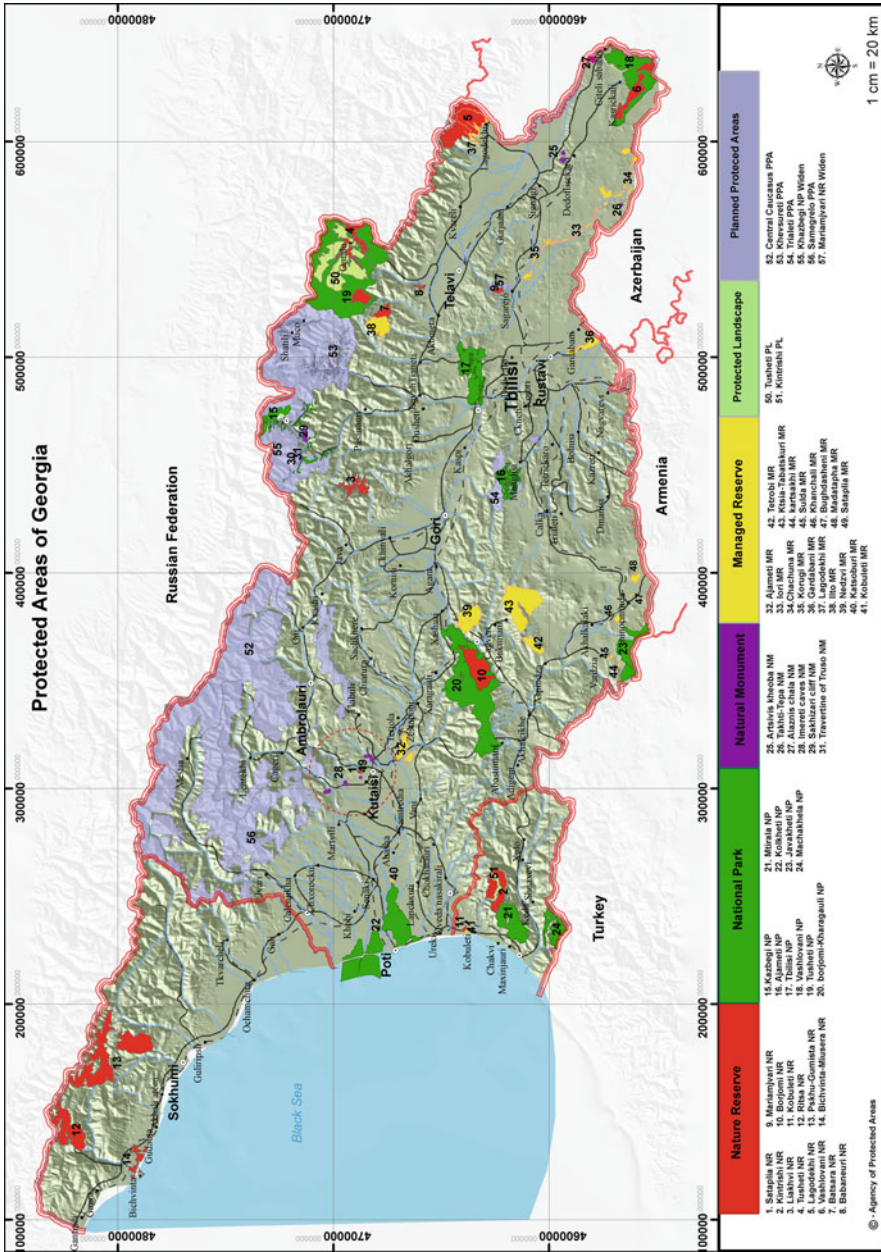


Fig. 12.1 Protected areas of Georgia (from the Agency of Protected Areas of Georgia)

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Lesser Caucasus), as well as brown bear (*Ursus arctos*), European lynx (*Lynx lynx*), East Caucasus Tur (endemic – *Capra cylindricornis*), C. Caucasian red deer (*Cervus elaphus maral*), etc. Few individuals of globally endangered Caucasian leopard (*Panthera pardus ciscaucasica* = *P.p. saxicolor*) occur in Tusheti and Vashlovani National Parks (Williams et al. 2006; IUCN 2009; Zazanashvili et al. 2009).