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**FLORA AND VEGETATION OF KASHIRTY PEATBOG (CENTRAL CAUCASUS)**

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The Caucasian alpine sphagnum peatbogs contain remnants of the flora of the glacial epochs. Kashirty peatbog is among them. It is located in the Ushtulu tract (Agashtan) in the lower reaches of the Karasu River – the main tributary of the Cherek Balkarsky River in the Kabardino-Balkar Republic. It occupies a glacial basin at an altitude of about 2000 m above sea level, where the waters of the Ushtulu mineral springs drain.

A comprehensive study of the vegetation cover of the peatbog was carried out. During two field seasons (2020 and 2021), vascular plants and mosses were collected and determined. Geobotanical releves cover the entire spectrum of communities formed by the main dominants of the peatbog.

Floral lists of vascular plants and mosses, as well as geobotanical releves are in the article. Taxonomic, florocenotic and arealogical analyses were carried out for vascular plants. *Utricularia minor* was found for the first time in the republic. It is shown that the flora of the Kashirty peatbog is boreal-Holarctic and is related by its origin to the northern regions of Eurasia. The changes in the floral composition of the peatbog compared to the previous study carried out by N.A. Bush (1931) more than 90 years ago were analyzed. Plant communities are compared with formations identified by other authors using an ecological-phytocenotic approach.

Based on the obtained materials, a conclusion was made about the relatively early stage of the development of the peatbog by overgrowing the lake. The change in species composition compared to the list given by N.A. Bush (1931) suggests that the general trend of the development of the peatbog is directed towards mesotrophy, but the process of evolution is rather slow – after 90 years, the peatbog is still at an early stage of development.

The vegetation of the peatbog includes species and communities that are relatively rare in the Caucasus. Since the peatbogs here are at the stage of extinction, many of them are particularly vulnerable and deserve protection. We recommend including the Kashirty peatbog in the Kabardino-Balkarian Highland Reserve located nearby.

*Keywords:* Vegetation, flora of the Caucasus, mountain peatbogs, sphagnum mosses, alpine vegetation.

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