A scenic view of a hillside village with numerous wooden houses, some with corrugated metal roofs, scattered across a green slope. The houses are built on a hillside, and the foreground is a lush green field with yellow wildflowers. In the background, there are rolling green hills under a grey, overcast sky. The overall atmosphere is rural and peaceful.

Farmer's Handbook

For Eco and Agro Tourism Start-ups

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Batumi 2017

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Introduction

Tourism is one of the most significant sectors contributing to the economic development of Georgia. According to the National Tourism Administration statistics up to 6.4 million tourists visited Georgia in 2016 and the amount of money generated by the Georgian economy exceeded 2.2 billion USD.¹

The Autonomous Republic of Ajara occupies an important place among the tourism destinations in Georgia. Its unique climate and landscape, as well as its biological diversity, creates favourable conditions for tourism development. The number of tourists, who spend a part of the summer in Ajara, grows every year. According to statistics provided by the Department of Tourism and Resorts of Ajara, in 2016 the Autonomous Republic was visited by 871,455² tourists, 84% of them visited or explored the natural environment, and the remaining 16% visited the protected territories of Ajara.³

The aim of this handbook is to support rural residents and farmers of the Autonomous Republic of Ajara in the development of tourism, based on the opportunities of local biodiversity and agriculture. The handbook describes the main steps to be considered and followed by families interested in starting a business to attract tourists.

¹<http://stats.gnta.ge/Default.aspx>

²<http://Ajara.gov.ge/uploads/Docs/d0db178922454392abb527885eb8.pdf>

³<http://gobatumi.com/files/media-and-press/News-2016/2016%20statistics%20info-graphic%20full%20report-final.pdf>

Definition of Terms

Rural Tourism – type of tourism developed in rural areas with its socio-economic characteristics covering 3 main aspects: low density of population and small size of settlement, land use dominated by agricultural fields and forestry, traditional social structure, where there is a feeling of community identity and heritage.⁴

Ecotourism – responsible travelling in the countryside in order to have pleasure and to appreciate nature (and its component modern and traditional cultural characteristics), which facilitates conservation. It has a low impact from visitors and provides socio-economic benefits to the local population.

Agro Tourism – commercial activities on the working farms, which is created for visitors' entertainment and provides additional income for the farm owner.⁵

Farmer – a person mainly occupied in the field of agriculture. The farmer conducts all the necessary activities in order to increase/cultivate and produce agricultural products, which will be sold to consumers.⁶

Farm – land area, considered for agricultural use and the main purpose of which is to produce food and is regarded as the primary form of food production.⁷

Household Farm – the way to organize agricultural activities handled by a family; mainly family members are involved.⁸

Evaluation of market opportunities – to study market attractiveness and dynamics of a certain industry. Its aim is to support companies and private entrepreneurs to generate strategies for business development.

⁴<https://www.oecd.org/cfe/tourism/2755218.pdf>

⁵<http://sfp.ucdavis.edu/agritourism/factsheets/what/>

⁶<http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/farmer.html>

⁷Gregor, 209; Adams, 454.

⁸<http://www.fao.org/3/a-i4306e.pdf>

Tourism Marketing – a business field. Its aim is to attract tourists to a particular service and location.⁹

Financial Plan for Small and Medium Size Businesses – prediction of the future development of a business, which is calculated for a year or a several year period.¹⁰

⁹http://www.ehow.com/about_6683884_definition-tourism-marketing.html

¹⁰<http://smallbusiness.chron.com/developing-financial-plan-small-business-4714.html>

Area and Directions of Eco and Agro Tourism

Eco Tourism develops near protected territories or natural monuments having significant value and depends on the attractiveness of the local natural environment, which can be established as the main or an additional source of income for the local population.

Agro Tourism is related to a certain farm, where service delivery is conducted by the farmer, it is an additional source of income together with the main agricultural activity.

Eco and Agro Tourism may cover the following areas:

- ✓ Activities in the countryside (study and observe wild nature, visit high value cultural and natural monuments, riding, fishing and hunting);
- ✓ Entertainment/festivals (harvest festivals, local agriculture/community festivals);
- ✓ Hosting service (staying on the farm and getting acquainted with farm life, organising thematic tours on the farm);
- ✓ Selling farm products.

Local and foreign tourists are interested in getting acquainted with the countryside and the culture of their host countries as well as with the life and traditions of the local population. All this is possible through Eco and Agro Tourism, as one of the commercial activities, which in most cases develops as a small and medium size business and is based on current farming and creates additional income for farmers.¹¹

¹¹Center for Responsible Travel, 2016, The Case for Responsible Travel: Trends & Statistics 2016

How to Start Eco and Agro Tourism

1. Evaluate your opportunities

In order to understand an opportunity to start an Eco and Agro Tourism business, it is necessary to evaluate your resources such as:

- ✓ Human resources (what knowledge and skills should people have to work in your business, is it affordable to hire such people);
- ✓ Technical resources (what possibilities does the farm on your property have to offer tourism services to future consumers; in what condition is the farm's infrastructure and what kind of renovation is needed in order to receive potential consumers; does the farm have anything specific or unique, which will be of interest to consumers);
- ✓ Financial resources (Do you have access to financial resources; if a loan is required, how will it be possible to repay the loan and make a profit from the income received from the new business activities).

(in the Annex 1 you can see preliminary self-evaluation table for a farmer interested in starting a business in tourism sector, which will help you define the readiness for the first steps).

2. Be informed

- ✓ Take part in training, conferences and workshops, which will contribute to increasing your knowledge and capacity to start a new business *(in the Annex 2 you can see the list of organizations offering thematic knowledge to interested people and companies for starting a tourism related business);*
- ✓ Buy thematic books, journals, films and subscribe to electronic bulletins *(in the Annex 3 you can see the list of literature considered useful for people interested in Eco and Agro Tourism);*
- ✓ Get acquainted with the activities and innovative approaches of farmers working in your field of interests;
- ✓ Study the market well and survey current demand. Introduce your ideas to potential consumers before developing new services and get advice from them;

- ✓ Develop networking contacts, for example, become a member of different organisations, which are working in your field of interest (*see Annex 4*); invite other farmers and establish associations with neighbouring farmers;
- ✓ Be open to forming partnerships with various state, private and public organisations;
- ✓ Create business, marketing and financial plans. There are a lot of resources on the internet to make the above-mentioned plans and different consulting organizations are ready to assist start-ups;
- ✓ Start with a small initiative and develop into a large one based on the experience gained.

Prerequisites for Starting Eco and Agro Tourism Business

If you live in a village, have a house, cultivate land, have domestic animals and are involved in traditional farming, i.e. you are a farmer, and your village is located in a diverse and interesting ecological zone, this is already a good precondition for starting an Eco and Agro Tourism business, which has 3 main requirements for farmers:

1. Hosting and providing accommodation for interested tourists

Hosting and providing accommodation for tourists are related to both the technical possibilities of the farm (does the farm have the necessary infrastructure?) and knowledge of the host (communication skills, knowledge of foreign languages).

Primary technical requirements are:

Location – the farm should be located in a place that is easily accessible for tourists, its location should be secure and peaceful;

Farm infrastructure should include:

- ✓ Visitors' reception area (room), where they can access information about the activities and services offered by the farm;
- ✓ A parking area, for both small and medium size vehicles, should be close to the visitors' reception room;
- ✓ Dining room/area, which can be used by farm visitors, as well as for recreational tourists arriving near the area;
- ✓ Farm guide¹² - farm personnel with a good knowledge of farming activities and good communication skills;
- ✓ Farm shop, where farm produce and local souvenirs are sold;
- ✓ Supporting infrastructure, which should include internal roads or paths, pedestrian areas, external lighting system, power sockets, clean potable water

¹² Mahaliyanaarachchi, R., 2015. Agri Tourism Farm & Farm Stay

points, restrooms and bathrooms, washing and drying equipment, kitchen equipment, which can be used by tourists;

2. Offering educational and intellectual activities on the farm

The farmer, who intends to develop tourism on his farm, should share his knowledge with the tourists. To this end, he should create a course or tour which transfers knowledge to people of different ages and abilities and involves the tourists in the farm's activities. The noted activity should be educational and include certain specifics, which makes the time spent on the farm interesting for tourists so that they recommend visiting the farm to others.

3. Organizing outdoor activities

It is important for Eco and Agro tourists to participate in outdoor activities on the farm, for example, walking in the forest, going to the river for bathing or fishing, visiting cultural monuments, observing local plant and wildlife. The farmer should predetermine the natural and cultural resources existing around the farm, which would be of potential interest to tourists and plan outdoor activities accordingly.

Criteria for Evaluating the Eco and Agro Tourism Market

While initiating a tourism business, it is necessary to conduct a preliminary study of the tourism market in the country and define your place/niche. The development of the tourism market is impacted by both external (security in nearby countries; tourism development in other competitive countries; global economic crisis causing decrease in the number of tourists) and internal factors related to the development of the local infrastructure, competitive prices, quality of services offered and biodiversity.

5 main criteria for **evaluating Eco and Agro Tourism market**:

1. Attraction

Try to make your tourist offer more attractive by offering a range of entertainment activities along with opportunities to relax, distance the tourist needs to travel to reach your family farm in addition to communication with other tourist places;

2. Activities to be offered to tourists

Plan beforehand and describe the entertainment and relaxation activities to be offered to tourists in your proposal. It would be better if they are connected to other tourist attractions in your area, as a result, the tourists will perceive your offer as a part of common tourist package (in order to achieve the above noted goal, a good way is to create a tourism association, where hotel owners and other suppliers of tourism services will agree on roles and cooperation mechanisms);

3. Accessibility

Tourists pay special attention to the accessibility of the territory, where they plan to relax and be entertained. It is important for them as it is related to security, comfort and time management. Transport infrastructure is essential (good roads, public or private transport network) and if necessary, cooperation with the authorities regarding these issues is relevant;

4. Providing tourists with accommodation

Tourists are divided into different groups as per possibilities and desires. Each group has its own requirement regarding living conditions, thus, you should define the tourist segment you want to attract, in advance (for example, relatively expensive, but high-quality service, where guesthouse rooms are well furnished, food service and additional services for guests are included; or relatively cheap, where several guests can stay in one guesthouse room, can share a bathroom, food service is not included in the accommodation price);

5. Other favourable conditions

Foreign and local tourists should have access to good internet and mobile networks. A shop should be located in the guesthouse or nearby areas, where they will be able to buy necessary products, auxiliary items or souvenirs.

Eco and Agro Tourism Marketing

In parallel to the study of the tourism market and the development of tourist services, it is essential to develop a marketing plan, which should be directly linked to the market requirements and your capabilities. A one-year marketing plan (as a minimum) should describe all the activities, which you will conduct to attract tourists, it should also include the necessary financial resources. Implementation of marketing activities requires significant investment. Aimed at optimising financial and human resources, it is possible to unite with other farmers involved in a tourism business and create a common marketing plan. It is important to develop your marketing plan monitoring mechanism, for example, you can ask visitors: how they were informed about your service; which communication method they prefer; do they have any advice with regard to improving marketing activities, etc.;

State bodies can greatly support tourist service providers in the implementation of marketing activities (for example, Georgian National Tourism Administration, Department of Tourism and Resorts of Ajara Autonomous Republic); they may finance commercials, short films, make and distribute information brochures, connect you with potential partners and clients.

Secure and Protected Farm for Tourists

Georgia has several laws¹³ related to the tourism field. They do not regulate the issues related to Eco and Agro Tourism, however in the near future, together with the increase of interested tourists and the increased demand for compliance with international requirements, legislation will be improved. One of the goals of our handbook is to prepare farmers interested in the tourism field, for the new regulations and envisage internationally recognized requirements when providing Eco and Agro Tourism services, of which security is one of the core issues.

Internal security of the farm

The farm building or buildings should comply with technical requirements of the Law of Georgia on Construction; in addition, it should envisage state regulations on natural and technogenic threats and food safety and hygiene standards. In order to minimize risks, it is recommended to contact insurance companies and study their requirements about business and infrastructure insurance. To this end, it is possible to deliver risks to the insurance company and in addition, receive complete information on state technical regulations.

Technical recommendations to provide visitors' security:

- ✓ At least one person/family member should be assigned to be responsible for visitors' security. He/she should have information on technical equipment (medical and fire fighting equipment, telephone, transport and other communication methods), which can be used in emergency situations;
- ✓ There should be warning signs on the farm for visitors, since a great number of tourists may not know how to behave around domestic animals or use the farm's equipment while living on the farm;

¹³March 6, 1997 –Law of Georgia on “Tourism and Health Resorts”. This “frame” law is a fundamental act in the legislation of tourism and resorts.

March, 1998 – Law of Georgia on “Protective Sanitary Zones of Health Resorts and Resort Localities”.

March 20, 1998 – Law of Georgia on “Recording the Tourists Entering and Leaving Georgia”.

March 20, 1998 – Law of Georgia on “Registration of Visitors to Georgia and Settlement of Tourists from Georgia”.

- ✓ Special signs with limited access should be placed in the parts of the farm, where movement of tourists/visitors is limited;
- ✓ Fire fighting equipment (for example, fire extinguisher, spade, a small water reservoir) should be placed in all farm buildings. It would be better to have a fire emergency response plan where farm personnel are given specific duties to perform during emergency situations;
- ✓ Internal communication system should be provided on the farm (for example, hand voice transmitter) enabling visitors to connect easily with farm employees;
- ✓ First aid kit should be available in all farm buildings, moreover, farm guides should be equipped with first aid training;
- ✓ Farm animals should be placed far from tourists; visitors should not be able to approach them without guides working on the farm;
- ✓ Special sanitary means should be available for tourists on various territories of the farm;
- ✓ It is necessary to arrange internal and external resting places for tourists. Potable water and rest rooms should be available in these places;
- ✓ Recycle bins should be provided on the farm territory. It is desirable that tourists have the possibility of a waste separation. Separated waste can be used for producing compost; the sale of metal and glass waste will be an additional income for farmers.

Security of farm external activities

The main target group of the proposed handbook is represented by farmers living in mountainous Ajara. This region is distinguished with hard relief and rich biodiversity. If the farm is located near a forest or other populated areas are significantly far from it, there is a high probability of coming across wild animals during outdoor activities (see the Annex 5 - Map), which on the one hand, is of great interest to tourists, and on the other, could be dangerous (see the Annex 5, Diagram 4); farm guides should be prepared for this and tourists should have information beforehand, on how to behave in such situations (see the Annex 6, Diagram 1, 2, 3).

We offer several recommendations to be considered by guides and tourists in case of coming across wild animals:

- **Wolf/jackal** –use as loud a voice as possible, throw a stone close to animal, demonstrate your physical size as much as possible, at each motion try to show your physical strength to the animals;
- **Bear** – keep calm, do not run. Even the fastest runner cannot escape from a bear over a short distance. Try not to look like potential prey. Demonstrate your physical size as much as possible, frighten the animal with hand motions and a loud voice. Try to climb a tree, if there is one nearby and climb to a height of 10-15 m. Do not lie down on the ground, since such behaviour raises the interest of the animal and creates additional danger for you;
- **Snake** – keep calm, try to carefully move away from the reptile without turning, turn only when you are 1.5-2 m far from the reptile;
- **Deer** – keep calm and try to move away carefully. A deer attacks a human very rarely, and only happens if the deer is repelling an attack from the human.

Farm protected from wild animals

The following methods based on local and international practice can be used in order to protect the farm from wild animals:

Artificial and natural barriers:

Barriers are widely used to protect domestic animals or crops from wild animals. Barriers have been used by humans since ancient times in order to fence around cereal crops or orchards, pastures or places to spend the night. There are many ways to set up barriers: tree branches, stones, wire nets among others.

Fladry barriers or more modern turbo fladry barriers are used in Eastern Europe to protect domestic animals from wolves. Fladry is easy to construct: it consists of swaying flags hanging on a rope and the space between flags is 0.5 m. An electric wire component is included in the turbo fladry instead of

the rope. Studies have shown that wolves are afraid of flags swaying fastened to the rope/electric wiring and they do not cross such barriers. Similar barriers are used even today to protect domestic animals. It is easy to set up these barriers in the area, where domestic animals spend the night, though it is difficult to use them on pastures. It is worth noting that a bear is not afraid of this type of barrier. Domestic animals are also not afraid of it. As a rule, fladry is used in combination with other types of barriers.

Electric fencing is another of the type of barrier. It works well on both small and big wild animals, such as the brown bear and wolf. Domestic animals avoid it too, which is also a significant factor. Electric fencing is used for protecting areas, where cattle spend the night (cattle gathering area), as well as on pastures for enclosing a large area, for securing bee hives and agricultural lands. Long-term exploitation period is an advantage of electric fencing, though its primary installation price may be perceived as a disadvantage, it can, however, be considered as cost effective due to its long-term and easy exploitation conditions.

It is important to implement a farm management system, which will reduce the contact of wild animals with cattle and agricultural lands (nightlights, electric fences operating on helio system, noise systems for frightening animals, etc.).

Your Potential Partners in the Tourism Sector

The Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia and its Legal Entity of Public Law - Georgian National Tourism Administration is responsible for the development of the tourism sector in Georgia. The Department of Tourism and Resorts of Ajara under the Ajara government governs the tourism sector in the region. Apart from the state entities mentioned above, which are directly involved in the development of the tourism sector, local tourism development service departments or responsible persons are assigned in the local municipality administrations, working in the sphere of local economic development including tourism.

The department of Protected Areas under the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources Protection of Georgia actively works on the development of nature based tourism. The agency as well as developing the network of protected areas, implements local social-economic development projects through close cooperation with international organizations. The projects are mainly focused on tourism.

The Ministry of Agriculture plays a relatively small role in the development of Agro Tourism. Today, the development of Agro Tourism is one of the challenges within the country even though the sector is showing an annual increase in the international tourism sector.

Local non-governmental organizations and private companies actively work for tourism development throughout the Ajara Autonomous Republic and Georgia (see Annex 4) providing necessary consultations to interested people. Cooperation with similar organizations will significantly increase the involvement of farmers in the tourism business and support the sharing of successful local and international practices and lead to the implementation of these practices in the country.

Annexes:

Annex 1. Preliminary Self-Assessment Table for Eco and Agro Tourism Business Start uppers

	Self-Assessment Questionnaire	Yes	No
1.	Assessment of human resources		
1.1	Do you have the necessary people (for example, family members, friends, neighbours), who will help you to commence the business?		
1.2	Do they have the relevant education/experience (for example, in tourism, managing a small and medium business enterprise, customer service?)		
1.3	Do they have a desire to receive additional knowledge and improve their skills (for example, taking part in training, workshops and conferences?)		
2.	Assessment of technical resources		
2.1	Is the farm easily accessible from the tourist centre/settlement, from where you can attract tourists?		
2.2	Is your house well organised to receive guests (are there guests' and auxiliary rooms, sanitary points, yard?)		
2.3	Is your farm's infrastructure adequately set up and do you have an interesting offer prepared for tourists?		
3.	Assessment of financial resources		
3.1	Do you have or can you find financial and technical resources to prepare your house and farm to receive visitors?		
3.2	Do you have or can you find financial resources to pay salaries for a minimum of 6 months to any employed personnel?		
3.3	Do you have or can provide financial resources to purchase the inventory needed for hosting tourists?		

**Annex 2. Educational Institutions
Offering Learning Courses in Tourism Field**

Educational Institutions	Web Page	Courses
Vocational Educational Institutions (State Educational Institutions) - http://vet.ge/		
Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University	www.bsu.edu.ge	Restaurant filing clerk
Vocational College “Black Sea”	www.batumiprof.ge	Guide (ecotourism, etc.); Hotel filing clerk; Restaurant filing clerk
Educational Institute - Batumi State Maritime Academy	www.bsma.edu.ge	
All training on one web page - http://www.trainings.ge		
Educational Centre BDC Academy	http://bdc-center.ge/	Tourism Management; Hotel Management Courses including Internship; Business Administration
Intellect Centre	www.intelc.ge	Complete Course of Modern Management and Business Administration

Annex 3. List of Literature for People Interested in Eco and Agro Tourism

Reading Materials about Tourism	Additional Information
Modelling of Touristic Routes (learning-methodical book) – (2013) - N. Biritskaya, N. Kvaratskhelia, N. Alkhanishvili	
Introduction to Hosting Management. The 10 th edition - (2012) – Berovsky, V. Kleiton, T. Pavers, D. Reinolds	
Tourism (basics, practice, theory) – the 12 th edition - (2013) – Geldner Charles R, Ritchie Brent J. R.	
Georgia – Country of Tourism and Resorts: handbook – (2011) – Nikoloz Saakashvili, Tamar Chilingarashvili	
Environment and Ecotourism Management – (2012) – Marina Metreveli	
Tourism and Hosting Management: handbook – (2012) – T. Koblianidze, M. Meladze	
Tourism Business - (2010) – Larisa Korghanashvili	http://lkorgan.narod.ru/turizmisbiznesi.pdf
Geography of Tourist-Recreation Resources (lecture course for bachelors translated by Nino Pavliashvili)	https://www.tsu.ge/data/file_db/faculty_societal_political/Turizmis%20geografia-nino%20pavliashvili.pdf
Tour Guide Business	http://tsu-tdi.blogspot.com/p/blog-page_6.html
Hotel Management	http://tsu-tdi.blogspot.com/p/blog-page.html
Introduction in Tourism and Hosting Management I	http://tsu-tdi.blogspot.com/p/i.html
"NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC Georgia"	http://www.nationalgeographic.ge/

Annex 4. Eco and Agro Tourism Organizations in Georgia

Agro Tourism

- Biological Farming Association Elkana - www.elkana.org.ge
- Wine Club - <http://www.wineclub.ge/>

Ecotourism

- Ecotourism Development Centre - <http://ecotourism.ge/>

Annex 6. Diagrams¹⁴

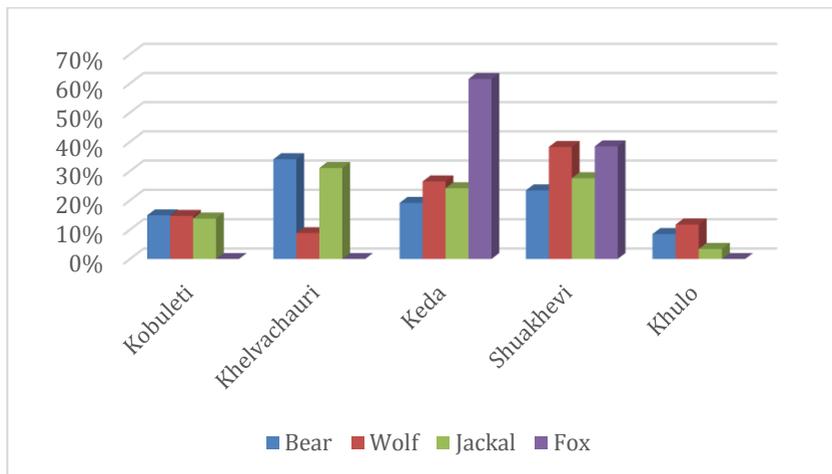


Diagram 1: Main wild animals and the frequency of their nomination according to municipalities

¹⁴ Basic survey „Interdependence of Humans and Wild Animals“, Ajara Autonomous Republic, November, 2015, Alliances Lesser Caucasus Programme (ALCP).

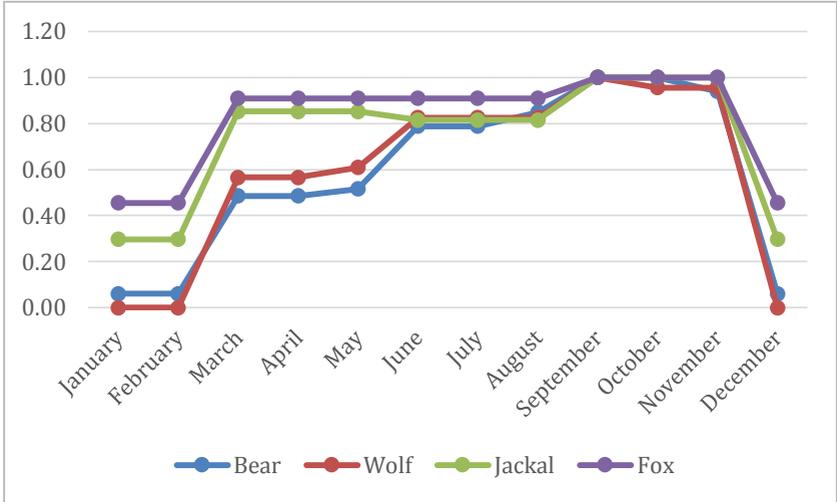


Diagram 2: Seasonality of wild animal attacks

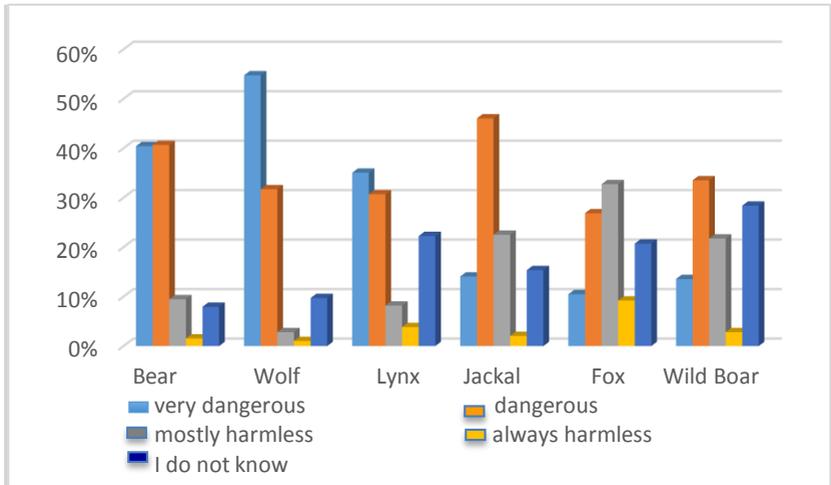


Diagram 3: Dangerous animals for humans according to locals

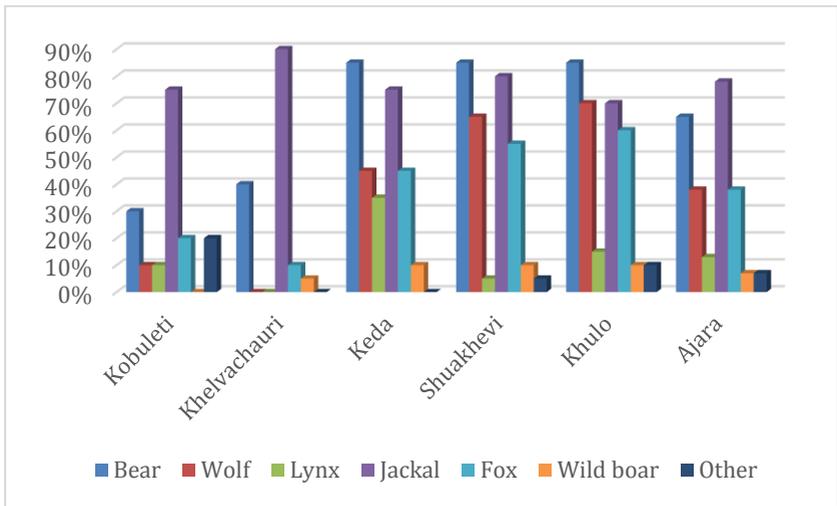
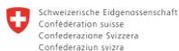


Diagram 4: The Most Problematic Wild Animals

The handbook was prepared by experts in the "Black Sea Eco Academy" and is based on "Human-Wildlife Interface Baseline survey" conducted by them in Ajara in 2015. The research and handbook were prepared by the "Black Sea Eco Academy" ordered by the "Alliances Lesser Caucasus Program" (ALCP) implemented by Mercy Corps and funded by the Swiss Development and Cooperation Agency (SDC).



ALCP | Alliances Lesser
Caucasus Programme



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