

Monument unique in all of Europe

Nesvizh Castle's reconstruction to be completed in 2011

Reconstruction is soon to be completed on the 16th-18th century palace-and-park ensemble in Nesvizh — the unique architectural site included on UNESCO's Cultural Heritage List. The Castle will open its doors to visitors, boasting a new museum exhibition. Major renovation works will end this year but minor renovation is to continue (of frescos and fireplaces). "We'd like to have everything of the highest quality in the Castle and restoration of frescos requires expertise, so cannot be placed within the confines of the construction schedule. This architectural monument is unique for both Belarus and Europe, containing numerous original elements from the 16th-18th century; our primary task is to conserve them," asserts Sergey Drushchits, helping manage the project. He adds that tourists have been welcomed for several years, with popularity evident. Heating, lighting and air conditioning are in place, while the interior decoration is almost finished.

Treasures find worthy place

Major exhibition at Belarus' only Museum of Religion History opens in Grodno

By Lilia Novitskaya

The exhibition is dedicated to pre-Christian beliefs, the appearance of Christianity, the history of the Orthodox faith, Catholicism, Islam and Judaism in Belarus, as well as the age of atheism and the various confessions found in contemporary Belarus. The event marks the complete revival of the unique museum, which has endured difficulties in recent decades. After the building was returned to an Orthodox monastery in 1992, it spent most of its time 'on wheels' organising travelling exhibitions to schools, colleges, universities and houses of culture. It also held charity events in orphanages and boarding schools. The restoration of Khreptovich Palace — a 17th century architectural monument donated to the museum — has been underway in Grodno's historical centre during this time.



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The first exhibition — entitled *Epoch. Time. Building* — opened a year ago, describing the history of the palace and its owners, as well as the way of life and culture of 19th century Grodno residents. This time, visitors are being welcomed by the central exposition of the museum — *Religion and Culture of Belarus* — housed by six halls.

True treasures, which have only recently been placed on display from the museum's archive, are on show, such as the Holy Family icon, created in the 1530s in Grodno by Dominican monk Gilyary Khoetsky. 18th century clerical garments, containing the elements of Slutsk sashes in their decoration, are no less precious. One even depicts a

True 'pearls' unveiled to public from museum archives

legendary cornflower, praised by Belarusian poet Maxim Bogdanovich. The Orthodox Gospel and other rarities are priceless, as is a Venetian missal from 1586 (an order of service book used by the Catholic Church); it was published by the Vilnya brotherhood printing house in 1644.

"Today, this is the most

contemporary museum in the Grodno Region, boasting the latest equipment," notes Alexander Loiko, the Head of the Grodno Regional Executive Committee's Cultural Department. "This guarantees the integrity of priceless exhibits, many of which are over 500 years old. Further work to expand the exhibition lies ahead."

Flowers bloom in succession

By Oksana Petrovskaya

Japanese camellia blooms at National Academy of Sciences' Central Botanical Garden greenhouse

Camellias grow primarily in damp evergreen and deciduous forests throughout Japan and China, and blossom for 3-4 months at a time, with buds opening in succession. The plant is a major attraction in greenhouses around the world, since it blooms when most plants are dormant.

Japanese camellias are accompanied by orchids and Bird of Paradise plants at the Central Botanical Garden, alongside pomegranates and lemons. You can even find the rare



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Lemons grow at the garden citrus plant Buddha's Hand Citron, the leaves of which resemble fingers; its fruit is like an orange. The garden's lemon greenhouse boasts over 20 varieties of lemon, mandarin and orange, bringing true delight to those wishing to experience the tropical, exotic beauty of remote climes.

The Central Botanical Garden in Minsk is one of the largest in Europe, occupying 153 hectares, with over 9,000 varieties of plants in its collection, from various climatic zones.

Which birds aren't afraid of winter cold and frost?

By Olga Veremeyeva

Belarusian ornithologists conduct national winter bird register

In January, specialists determined which birds are spending winter in our country, with the latest data showing the territorial distribution of birds in Belarus while revealing new facts relating to the

over-wintering of rare species.

In 2010, over 500 people took part in the campaign, logging 96 wintering bird species. In total, over 60,000 birds were recorded, with large new wintering sites located for aquatic birds: in Mozyr, Soligorsk and Slutsk. Great tits and house and tree sparrows were the most frequent visitors at winter bird tables.

Berezinsky Reserve gains status of Ramsar wetlands

By Darya Kurilova

Berezinsky Biosphere Reserve added to List of Wetlands of International Importance — following decision of Ramsar Convention Secretariat

The reserve has been preparing the necessary documents for filing with the Ramsar Bureau for several years, jointly with Belarus' Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection and the National Academy of Sciences. Status is granted according to a complex system of criteria.

Berezinsky Reserve has become the ninth site in Belarus boasting this status, joining Sporovsky, Srednyaya (Mid) Pripyat, Zvanets, Omalnskie Bolota (Marshes), Osveysky, Yelnya, Kotra and Prostyr. Information on these and other sites included on the List of Wetlands of International Importance can be found on the database of the Wetlands International — continuously updated.

The main purpose of the Ramsar Convention is to conserve and sustain wetlands. Berezinsky Reserve is a unique natural environment combining exceptional diversity: upland, transitional and low-lying wetlands. These account for 60 percent of the reserve, while an extensive network of large and small rivers also exist, creating the floodplain of the Berezina River, and lakes varying in



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Auroch is largest animal in Berezinsky Reserve

size and origin. The total area of the wetlands is about 70 percent, while the number and composition of its plants and animals meet international criteria for inclusion on the list of Ramsar sites. Berezinsky Reserve is home to many species threatened with extinction on a global scale. It is among the most important places for nesting and migration of waterbirds in Belarus.

The reserve already has the status of State Reserve, Biosphere Reserve, a key ornithological area, and a monitoring site of the National Environment Monitoring System (NEMS). The Ramsar Convention (The Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, especially as Waterfowl Habitat), was adopted in the Iranian city of Ramsar in Feb-

ruary 1971. It is the first global international treaty devoted entirely to one type of ecosystem. The Ramsar Convention has 160 country signatories, with Belarus joining in 1990.

At present, Berezinsky Biosphere Reserve is negotiating with foreign partners regarding the acquisition of thoroughbred aurochs. At the moment, their population in the reserve is about 35. The first of these large mammals — the heaviest among those living on the European continent — appeared in the reserve in 1974, giving birth to the current herd. Outside animals are required to diversify their gene pool and talks are underway with the Polish centre involved in study of aurochs, regarding receiving animals for this purpose free of charge.