

Blanket Bog



Description

Blanket Bog is a special habitat that has developed where cool, wet climatic conditions have favoured waterlogging of the ground and accumulation of plant remains as deep peat.

The quality of the habitat has suffered significantly, with a decline in species diversity as a result of air pollution, over-grazing, inappropriate or accidental burning, peat extraction and past drainage. Wildfires and air pollution in particular have contributed to the poor condition. Haretail Cottongrass is often overwhelmingly dominant but the bog-building *Sphagnum* mosses are scarce. At their worst, these impacts have led to substantial areas of eroding moor and this can be seen for example on the Langsett Moors. It is worth noting, however, that in part some erosion may be a natural process, reflecting the great age (9,000 years) of the Peak District peats.

Scarce plants of the bogs include Cloudberry and Labrador Tea, and the flushes on the margins of the bogs can be botanically richer, supporting Bog Asphodel, Sundew and a variety of Sedges. Invertebrate interest is less well understood but includes a large population of Craneflies, at least locally, which are an important food source for moorland birds. Together with the lower and intimately linked heather moorland, the Blanket Bogs support a breeding bird community of international importance. The habitat is of great importance for breeding Golden Plover, whilst Merlin and Short-eared Owl can also very rarely be found. Other characteristic birds include Red Grouse, Curlew, Snipe and Dunlin, with the latter breeding around the bog pools. Mountain Hare also frequent Blanket Bog vegetation.

National Status

Blanket Bogs are part of a UK resource which is globally restricted and hence of international importance for nature conservation. It is one of the most extensive semi-natural habitats in the UK, supporting around 10–15% of the global resource. There is no comprehensive national data set on trends in the extent of Blanket Bog across the UK. However, serious declines, perhaps 27% between the 1940s and 1980s, have occurred in Scotland, principally due to afforestation.

Local Status

Blanket Bogs or mires in the Barnsley district are mostly (but not entirely) located within the Peak District National Park to the west of the borough.

Legal Status

All of the Blanket Bog in the Peak District is protected within the Dark Peak SSSI, which also forms part of the South Pennine Moors SPA, designated in recognition of its populations of upland breeding birds – Golden Plover, Merlin and Short-eared Owl. All the areas of Blanket Bog and transition mire are also included within the South Pennine Moors proposed SAC. All the Blanket Bog within and outside the Peak District National Park is recognised as a Natural Heritage Site.

Current Factors Causing Loss or Decline

- Inappropriate grazing management locally, eg. overgrazing and a decline in hefting as a result of off-wintering.
- Locally inappropriate burning regimes.
- Drainage leading to drying out of Blanket Bog.
- Peat-cutting (possibly beneficial on a small scale).
- Atmospheric pollution depleting the lower plant flora (sulphur dioxide levels have decreased, but nitrous oxides have increased).
- Climate change.
- Fire.
- Natural erosion.
- Recreational disturbance leading to localised vegetation damage and possible disturbance to breeding birds.

Current Local Action

- Work is being undertaken by the Peak District National Park and Natural England, working with farmers and landowners to restore the designated sites into favourable condition using agri-environment schemes (Environmentally Sensitive Area, Countryside Stewardship Scheme, High Level Stewardship). Some of this is in partnership with Yorkshire Water, who are a major landowner.
- A Local Access Forum has been established for the Peak District. This will seek to encourage opportunities for responsible enjoyment of the countryside (including open country) whilst reducing conflict.
- The Blanket Bog has been surveyed for the *South Yorkshire Plant Atlas* project, and for the *Barnsley Breeding Bird Survey*. Bird monitoring also continues annually.

Proposed Local Action

- Maintain the current extent of the resource. Define favourable condition, locate any examples and ensure all zones are in a management regime that will maintain favourable status. Lead partner: Natural England
- Introduce/maintain management regimes to improve condition to ensure it is in or approaching favourable condition. Lead partner: Natural England
- Introduce/maintain management regimes to improve, and if possible subsequently maintain in favourable condition. Lead partner: Natural England
- Gather information on Blanket Bog habitats not covered by statutory designations outside the Peak District National Park and develop conservation plans in conjunction with owners if appropriate.
- Extract information from the *Barnsley Bird Study Group Breeding Bird Survey* to provide populations and mapping of breeding Curlew, Dunlin and Golden Plover.
- Extract past records, survey and monitor Mountain Hare.
- Extract any past records, survey and monitor for Common Lizard.