

Moorland HAP



Objectives

1. To retain or restore the full diversity and extent of habitats within the moorland, particularly blanket bog, wet and dry heath and the transitions between them, through the maintenance or introduction of sustainable management
2. Where appropriate, to look to develop limited areas representative of the transition between open moorland and native woodland
3. To maintain and enhance populations of characteristic moorland species, in conjunction with Species Action Plans such as the Moorland Birds SAP
4. To encourage public understanding and appreciation of the importance of the moorland resource to wildlife and local businesses

Introduction

The North York Moors National Park contains the largest patch of continuous heather moorland in England, representing over 10% of the country's resource. As well as valuable vegetation communities, moorland supports important vertebrate and invertebrate assemblages. Birds such as red grouse, golden plover and merlin are dependent on this type of habitat in the UK. The moorland in the North York Moors National Park is vitally important from a socio-economic point of view. Most of the moors are privately owned with management being carried out for sheep grazing and grouse shooting. The moorland resource is also important for recreation and the income from visitors supports many local businesses.

Moorland generally consists of a mix of wet and dry heath, blanket bog, flushes, bracken and acid grassland. This Moorland Habitat Action Plan considered these as one habitat type and covers all non-woodland vegetation above the limits of enclosed farmland.

The UK Biodiversity Action Plan priority habitats included in this plan are Upland Heath, Blanket Bog and Lowland Heath.

Progress (2008-2012)

- At the end of 2012 there were 55 live Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) agreements addressing moorland management, covering approximately 38,375.33ha.
- Works have been undertaken to increase heathland habitat within current conifer blocks to create a more natural fringe;
 - 34ha of conifer removed at moor edge in Baysdale.
 - 14ha conifer plantation removed at Commondale.
 - 5ha of conifer removed at Sutton Bank.

- 20ha of conifer removal planned for Trennet Bank.
- Further areas of moor edge forestry work have been included in a number of forestry proposals but areas have not been confirmed.
- Expert advice was given to landowners and land managers by NYMNP and Natural England (NE) staff through HLS negotiations. NPA staff actively engaged with approximately 30 landowners (total engaged exceeds 100 including graziers, landowners, shooting interests and anyone else/third party actively involved in managing the moorland).
- Best Practice Day on Tracks organised by NPA in Oct 2011 with 22 land managers/contractors attending, advice given by FC, NE and NPA.
- 37.8ha of gill woodland and moor edge woodland was planted, including 15.5 ha on Levisham Estate as part of the Slowing the Flow project, and at Hob Hole Beck, Low Cow Helm (Bilsdale), Scar End Wood (Wheeldale) and Grain Beck (Baysdale).
- Restoration has taken place on seven moors and survey work for another two has occurred through the Yorkshire Peat Partnership, works largely funded by NE through ESS agreements with NPA facilitation, (NPA, NE WFD and FC also contributed.) £7,000 spent by the NPA on Levisham Estate blocking naturally occurring moorland gullies with heather bales as part of the Slowing the Flow Project.
- 15 HLS agreements were given advice by NPA and/or NE staff regarding sensitive burning on blanket bog.
- Three annual NP Moorland Events and three annual guided walks on Levisham Moor were led by senior ranger David Smith to promote the nature conservation interest and accessibility of moorland habitat to local communities. 13 radio/TV broadcasts were carried out on moorland issues. Additional promotion has been carried out by the two Education officers based at the Moors Centre, Danby, through the Danby Moor ESS and Fylingdales Moor ESS.
- NYMNP have assisted 15 students with relevant projects.
- Landowners in the North York Moors appointed a consultant to carry out a feasibility study into black grouse re-introduction. A study was carried out, but the results were not shared with the NPA.
- 70ha of blanket bog at May Moss has been restored – see **May Moss case study below**.

Case Study

May Moss

May Moss is located on the watershed between Eller Beck and the River Derwent. It draws water solely from rainfall making it an ombrotrophic peatland. It is one of the largest and certainly the best area of blanket bog on the North York Moors and supports a rich bog community – uncommon plants recorded here include cloudberry and bog rosemary. A population of water voles is also present.

The story of May Moss is an excellent example of partnership working and an area of high level scientific research; Dr. Margaret Atherden examined peat depth and carried out pollen analysis in the 1970s. Her research showed that the site had been largely unwooded for most of the time of peat accumulation and the depth of peat was up to 6.4 metres. Dr Richard Chiverrell, currently at Liverpool University, has carried out detailed analysis of peat cores on the Moss, revealing how changes in the climate over the last 2000 years are reflected in the composition of plant species, testate amoebae and amounts of humification in the peat layers. Botanical monitoring is also been carried out; the longest running quantitative recording of plant species on the North York Moors is the transect monitoring

here, which has been undertaken on a reasonably regular basis since the middle of the 1970's following work by Dr Atherden. This volunteer survey is still carried out annually.

The Forestry Commission (FC) established Langdale Forest south and east of May Moss and in the 1970s they drained and planted the eastern and southern sides.

Due to the increasing awareness of the true value of peat as a carbon store and special ecosystem FC policy changed to reflect a more holistic land management approach. Changes in vegetation composition also suggested that the site was drying out, thought to be influenced by the draining and planting of surrounding areas.

The FC,began restoration works in 2009 on the land surrounding the Moss, supported by a grant from SITA Trust and NYMNPA. 70 hectares of naturally regenerating conifer plantation has been felled (some removed), with approximately five hectares of mulching. . Many ditches have been blocked and natural watercourses slowed down with timber interventions.

In 2012 this was supplemented by grip and gully-blocking on the Moss itself, funded by Natural England, NYMNPA and FC and organised by the Yorkshire Peat Partnership.

Hydrological monitoring is currently carried out by Dr.Chiverrell to monitor outputs from the site. May Moss is also a popular destination for field trips by York University. May Moss, the restored heath around it and Worm Sike immediately to its north provide the ideal locations for long term monitoring of trends in vegetation change.