MoorLIFE learning

Bringing life back to the moors

What are Blanket Bogs?

A rich and diverse habitat, Blanket Bogs started forming 5000-6000 years ago after early man cleared woodland in the upland areas of the UK.

It is a rich and diverse habitat, found where ground is waterlogged and temperatures are cool. In these conditions when wetland plants die they are not able to fully rot down (decompose) and so instead they accumulate forming peat. It is a slow process and only forms about 1mm every year. The term Blanket Bog comes from the way the peat layer blankets the ground. Active Blanket Bogs are those that contain areas within them that still support peat formation.

Active Blanket Bog is an EU priority habitat…Why?

Peat bogs support a wide range of wildlife, plants including heather, sundew and peat forming Sphagnum moss. Birds such as the Curlew, Merlin and Golden Plover, (some of which are on the amber or red list for conservation status), live and nest on the bogs. Animals such as the Mountain Hare and Common Lizard live amongst the bog communities and are listed as EU priority species. The moors also offer stunning landscapes for us all to enjoy.

70% of our water supplies come from the uplands. Usually this water is unpolluted but the water companies do have a problem; as the water flows through peat it picks up brown colouration. This is expensive to remove and the problem is exacerbated when peat is damaged, allowing it to wash into the run-off water more easily. Intact peat bogs therefore ensure a high quality water supply.

Globally Blanket Bogs are a rare but important habitat because as peat forms, it locks up and stores carbon dioxide. More carbon is stored in the peat moors of the UK than in all the forests of the UK and France combined! By storing the carbon dioxide, there is less in the atmosphere to contribute to the climate change problem.

Why are we worried about our Blanket Bogs?

Much of the Blanket Bog in England has been degraded to some degree through our activities.

Large areas of vegetation have been destroyed leaving precious peat exposed to erosion.

The Sphagnum which actively forms the peat has nearly totally disappeared so that now, new peat cannot form.

www.moorsforthefuture.org.uk/moorlife

The MoorLIFE project is co-funded by the European Union's Life+ programme and delivered by Moors for the Future Partnership.

Partners include: Environment Agency, Natural England, National Trust, Peak District National Park Authority, United Utilities and Yorkshire Water.

What has caused this erosion?

Industry in the areas around the peaks (Manchester, Sheffield, Nottingham, Stoke etc.) has polluted the air and killed off most of the Sphagnum plants that keep the moors healthy.

Over-grazing and wildfires kills off the vegetation layer leaving the peat exposed, which leads to drying out and decomposing or becoming susceptible to erosion by wind and rain.

MoorLIFE

MoorLIFE is a 5 year project funded by the EU LIFE+ programme. With a budget of £5.5 million it is one of the biggest moorland conservation programmes in Europe.

The project aims to protect active Blanket Bog by restoring bare and eroding peat in the South Pennines. The aim is that by 2012, 2000 acres will have been restored, which is the same area as 1300 football pitches or 8000 Olympic size swimming pools!

How is MoorLIFE achieving this?

The project works on stabilising the peat to stop it being lost and to re-introduce vegetation to create a sustainable active Blanket Bog.

To achieve this, a number of techniques are used:

1. Lime, seed and fertiliser are applied to the ground to establish a nurse crop of grass which protects the ground long enough for the heather to re-establish.
2. Gully-blocking. As peat is washed away by rain, it creates gullies which in turn make it easier for water to drain off the moors. This process lowers the water table allowing peat to dry out and decompose. By blocking gullies the bogs retain the water and peat and the water table rises creating the peat forming conditions once more.
3. Seeds are spread to increase the diversity (range) of plants thereby increasing the number of food types and habitats for animals. Sphagnum moss will also be re-established.

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How successful has the project been so far?

As part of the MoorLIFE project, the work is being monitored to measure its success.

The vegetation, hydrology and peat accumulation/erosion rates are being monitored to see how the bogs change following the restoration.

What we have now is a massive data-set. And this is where you come in!

The data has been put together with worksheets for you to look at, analyse and make your own conclusions as to the effectiveness of the project to date.

What Next?

What else can you do?

1. Find out more about some of the important species that live on the bogs. Why they are important to us and what threatens them.
2. Research your local area of Blanket Bog. Find out what makes it special and what activities are threatening its future.
3. Design a poster or pamphlet to educate others about Blanket Bogs and why you think they are important.
4. Discover for yourselves what makes Blanket Bogs special…go and visit one your self. They are not that far away!

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