

Peatland Restoration

Landowners Rising to the Challenge

Introduction

The Moorland Association and the Heather Trust believe that achieving long-term conservation success requires the involvement of the people who are most connected to the land and who are responsible for its management. 'Bottom-up' conservation, with landowners and managers at the heart of decision making, as opposed to conservation imposed by 'top-down' policy, has the multiple benefits of:

- Giving landowners and managers a much better understanding of the conservation objectives,
- Engendering a willingness to change management practices and attitudes,
- Harnessing the existing pride and motivation of landowners and managers,
- Finding workable, self-sustaining and cost effective solutions using practical know-how, and
- Ensuring that potential unintended consequences and risks are properly assessed.

Using the scientific evidence about the importance of deep peat function and hydrology, the impacts of historic and current land management can be addressed with the agreed aim of 'fixing the peat'.

Peatland Restoration – where are we?

Landowners and grouse moor managers appreciate that raising the water table builds resilience into their land to provide protection from the impacts of climate change and the increasing risk of damage from wildfire - 'wetter is better'. They appreciate that sphagnum moss is the king of deep peat habitats; it improves water quality, water retention and carbon capture and storage. Moorland Association members are actively engaged in trialling techniques for the recovery of sphagnum mosses on the 400,000 acres of deep peat in their custodianship. Land managers are rising to the challenge.

A vast amount of work has already been completed on grouse moors over the last decade. In the North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty alone, 120 Ha of bare peat have been re-vegetated and 4,370 km of drainage ditches have been blocked. The figures across the whole Moorland Association membership are much higher; these are currently being collated by Natural England, along with mapping of restoration work that still needs to be done.

New "Outcomes" Approach

Since 2014, the Moorland Association and the Heather Trust have helped spearhead a new approach to upland management that has been adopted by Natural England. At the centre of this approach is a recognition of the local knowledge, skills and experience of land managers and a wish to work more closely with them. On areas of deep peat, this approach will help to deliver the following outcomes, which will be of benefit to us all:

- Carbon capture and storage,
- Improved biodiversity,
- Improved water quality,
- Enhanced water retention,
- Wildfire mitigation,
- Driven grouse shooting, and
- Economic stock grazing

Good grouse moor management does not 'dry the peat to increase the grouse population' or 'burn the peat' or create 'wall to wall heather'. Peat is the basic building block supporting a varied habitat for Red grouse and other key moorland birds. Careful burning and/or mowing, which has little or no impact on the existing moss layer, helps protect against damage from wildfires. This management creates a mosaic of different plants with a range of heights, which is important for all ground nesting birds.

Bogathon and Sphagathon

Through a series of site visits, key stakeholders, including the Moorland Association, Heather Trust, National Gamekeepers Organisation, Yorkshire Water, RSPB, Natural England, National Farmers Union and Defra, have agreed that 'fixing the peat' will deliver a raft of the above benefits on deep peat soils, which have a depth greater than 40cm. The best ways to do this are:

- Raise the water table by blocking historical drainage ditches to re-wet the moors.
- Re-vegetate bare peat caused primarily by historical atmospheric pollution, wildfires and erosion.
- Where the cover of peat forming Sphagnum mosses has been lost, re-introduce the mosses using innovative techniques.

The consensus reached with other stakeholders has driven the Blanket Bog Restoration Strategy led by Defra's Upland Stakeholder Forum and work continues with the Uplands Management Group to turn this strategy into further tangible action on the ground.



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THE HEATHER TRUST

Promoting Integrated Moorland Management

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