

## Eastern Valleys Uplands Project - Local Wildlife Sites

The following information outlines the best practice guidelines for managing the habitat type listed below in a manner that is sympathetic to wildlife. It is part of a series relating to various habitat types and management issues that have been produced by your local Wildlife Trusts.

### No.16 Blanket Bog

#### What is Blanket Bog?

Blanket Bog is an area of habitat formed over peat where the ground is periodically or permanently waterlogged by high rainfall, poor drainage and a high water table. It can form both in wet hollows and over large expanses of undulating land. Rainfall is the sole supply of water and the dominant supply of nutrients to the vegetation. Blanket Bog often occurs in a mosaic with other habitats such as rock outcrops, acid grassland and drier heath.



Common Butterwort



Sphagnum Moss



Round-leaved Sundew

#### What wildlife does it support?

Blanket Bog is relatively species poor but the species it does support are often specialised and scarce. Typical species are blankets of Sphagnum moss, Cross-leaved Heather, Purple Moor-grass and stunning swathes of Cotton Grass. Interspersed amongst these are a number of specialised plants such as the insectivorous Sundew and Butterwort. Various dragonfly species can be present in abundance over the bog pools. The bog can also support scarce upland breeding birds such as Golden Plover and provide good hunting grounds for species such as Short-eared Owl.



Black Darter



Cranberry



Bog Asphodel

#### Why preserve/enhance it?

Blanket Bog, which you can justifiably feel proud to own, is a great resource for wildlife and supports many scarce and specialised species. Additionally it acts as a great store of both water and carbon thus reducing flooding and Climate Change issues. Sadly, significant areas of this habitat have been lost over the last century to factors such as afforestation, drainage and peat extraction and many remaining examples are degraded. It is therefore of great importance that this decline is halted and we would very much like to assist you in achieving this goal by both highlighting the threats to this habitat and providing management recommendations.

## Threats

The following can all lead to the loss/degradation of this habitat:

- Tree planting (particularly coniferous plantations).
- Drainage.
- Peat extraction.
- Development i.e. building of roads, housing etc.
- Agricultural improvement - drainage, fertiliser or herbicide treatment.
- Burning.
- Over-grazing.
- Atmospheric pollution in rainwater resulting in over acidification.
- Lack of management allowing natural succession over time.

## Management Recommendations

The following is recommended to ensure the valuable Blanket Bog habitat is managed sympathetically for wildlife and is thus preserved and enhanced:

### Preservation/Enhancement of Blanket Bog

If your Blanket Bog is already in good condition there may be no need to alter the current regime. Indicators that Blanket Bog is in a degraded condition may be it drying out, which is likely to manifest itself in a dominance of Heather and Purple Moor-grass and tree species as opposed to a dominance of Sphagnum. Drying out and overgrazing may mean floral diversity will be reduced and areas of bare peat present. If these features are present, then expert assessment and advice is likely to be required to preserve/enhance the Blanket Bog. In general, best-practice guidelines for managing Blanket Bog are:

- If there is evidence of drying out then restore natural hydrological regimes through drain and gully blocking and re-profiling, using best practice techniques.
- If Scrub has become widespread then some control measures may be required. Remove any invading Scrub between October to March (avoiding the bird-breeding season) by either hand pulling or cutting otherwise this will shade out and out compete species typical of Blanket Bog as well as up-taking water thus drying out the bog. Stumps should be spot treated with a suitable herbicide to prevent regrowth. **Refer to separate Toolkit – No. 11 Scrub Control for more detail.** However the long-term solution to this is addressing the low water levels that allow the Scrub to develop.
- Alien invasive species such as Sitka Spruce and Rhododendron can be a particular problem and should be controlled. **Refer to separate Toolkit – No. 20 Rhododendron and Cherry Laurel Control for more detail.**
- Peat extraction should ideally be ceased or managed at sustainable levels.
- Grazing levels should be kept to a relatively low level. A range of species, breeds, ages and sizes of animal will help to create structural diversity. Cattle and Horses are the preferred animals with Sheep ideally being avoided.
- Burning should ideally not be used as a management technique and if vandalistic burning is a problem then firebreaks may need to be installed.
- If necessary to restore the habitat and prevent peat loss on localised areas then consideration should be given to re-vegetating areas of bare peat, using best practice restoration techniques and appropriate, native, local provenance plant species mixes.
- No fertilisers or herbicides should be used apart from any necessary to control the re-sprouting of any Scrub removed.

### Restoration of Blanket Bog

If the Blanket Bog is degraded then measures can be taken to restore it. Whether this is achievable or economically worthwhile will depend on the level of degradation and the underlying reasons for its poor quality. The measures outlined previously for the preservation/enhancement of Blanket Bog are all likely to be potentially applicable to the restoration of the Blanket Bog but may need to be undertaken on a more extensive and intensive scale. Expert advice is likely to be needed but reference to “Restoration of Degraded Blanket Bog (NEER003)” by Natural England is of particular use.

Should you require any further advice regarding the management of your Local Wildlife Site please do not hesitate to contact your local Wildlife Trust:

**Gwent Wildlife Trust**

Tel: 01600 740600

e-mail: [info@gwentwildlife.org](mailto:info@gwentwildlife.org)

**Wildlife Trust of South & West Wales**

Tel: 01656 724100

e-mail: [info@welshwildlife.org](mailto:info@welshwildlife.org)

**Other toolkits available are:**

No.1 Neutral Grassland (Hay Meadows)

No.2 Neutral Grassland (Pasture)

No.3 Acid Grassland

No.4 Calcareous Grassland

No.5 Marshy Grassland

No.6 Marsh Grassland (with Marsh Fritillary)

No.7 Heath

No.8 Hedgerows

No.9 Salt Marsh & Coastal Grazing Marsh

No.10 Ponds & Lakes

No.11 Scrub control

No.12 Bracken control

No.13 Invasive weed control (natives – thistle, dock etc.)

No.14 Invasive weed control (aliens – Japanese Knotweed, Himalayan Balsam etc.)

No.15 Ffridd (Coedcae)

No.17 Upland Broad-leaved Woodland

No.18 Upland Flushes

No.19 Post Industrial

No.20 Rhododendron & Cherry Laurel Control

*Further useful documents include:*

*Information on Active Blanket Bog in Wales*

[http://ec.europa.eu/environment/life/project/Projects/index.cfm?fuseaction=home.showFile&rep=file&fil=Blanket\\_bogs\\_Brochure.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/life/project/Projects/index.cfm?fuseaction=home.showFile&rep=file&fil=Blanket_bogs_Brochure.pdf)

*Restoration of Degraded Blanket Bog (NEER003) (Natural England, May 2013)*

<http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/5724822>

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