

Improving the Bog Standard

LIFE Active Blanket Bog in Wales Project

The European funded LIFE Active Blanket Bog in Wales Project is a 5 year partnership that will restore and conserve significant areas of the internationally important blanket bog found within two Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) in North Wales, UK.

Blanket bog is an important habitat due to its assemblage of plant, insect and bird species. When in good condition, it is also an important sink for carbon as the key bog mosses, *Sphagnum* spp. pull in carbon dioxide. Blanket bog in poor condition, however, produces a large amount of carbon dioxide and methane, which has a significant effect on climate change.

United Kingdom

It is estimated that 10-15% of the worlds blanket bog occurs in the United Kingdom. Of the 70,000 ha of



Vyrnwy Blanket Bog in North Wales



Bollihope grip

blanket bog occurring in Wales, in excess of 10% is no longer believed to support blanket bog vegetation, and a significant proportion of the remaining area is not likely to support active blanket bog. The Berwyn and South Clwyd Mountains SAC (c. 27,200 ha) supports the most extensive tract of near-natural blanket bog in Wales, whilst the Migneint-Arenig-Dduallt SAC (c. 20,000 ha) supports the second largest area, after the Berwyn. It is within these two internationally important areas that the LIFE Project is focusing its work.

Lake Vyrnwy

The majority of the work within the Berwyn SAC will consist of the blocking of moorland drains on the RSPB reserve at Lake Vyrnwy. During the last century, over 100 km of drain were dug on the site to dry out the land to improve grazing. These drains are having a significant impact on the blanket bog by drying out the land and lowering the water table.

The drains will mainly be blocked using a combination of peat dams and heather bale dams depending on the individual drain. The drains currently account for a significant loss in stock numbers as the sheep can become

stuck within the drain. The dams provide a "bridge" which the sheep can use to navigate their way through the bog without becoming trapped within the drains. There is also a third technique to remove the drains, which involves complete blocking using heather bales. This technique removes all trace of the drain and allows easier passage by stock and quad bike alike.

The Project will also be carrying out other work at Lake Vyrnwy. This includes reseeding degraded moorland with heather, removing non-native self-seeding rhododendron and Sitka spruce from the blanket bog and mowing large areas of dry heath for protection against fires.

Alongside this work, the Project will be carrying out work on Forestry Commission (Wales) land on the Migneint SAC. This work will focus on restoring afforested blanket bog by removing an area of Sitka plantation, removing Sitka regrowth, blocking ditches and fencing & grazing the newly cleared blanket bog.

Learn more

To encourage other landowners to view this project and to learn more about the techniques involved, staff will be visiting relevant landowners

Prince of Wales Helps Farmers

Bishops give thanks on behalf of Farming Help Charities

The Prince of Wales has raised over half a million pounds for British Farmers directly affected by the latest outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease.

Leading supermarkets such as ASDA, Marks & Spencer have made substantial contributions, as have the Co-op, Musgrave, Booths, Unilever, Cadbury Schweppes and the national food service distributor 3663.

The Prince himself has donated £100,000, which has been matched by The Duke of Westminster, in a move which echoes the donations both made at the time of the last Foot and Mouth outbreak in March 2001.

The Reverend Dr. Gordon Gatward, from the Arthur Rank Centre at the Royal Agricultural Society of England said: "We are delighted by this donation. The Prince, The Duke and all the companies which have contributed deserve our deepest thanks and praise for realising the depth of the problems which some farmers are now facing".

In England and Wales the fund will be administered by the Farming Help Partnership which is made up from three charitable organisations: The Royal Agricultural Benevolent Institution, The ARC-Addington Fund and the Farm Crisis Network. In Scotland the fund will be administered by The Royal Scottish Agricultural Benevolent Institution.

Bishops' thanks

The Bishops of Exeter and Hereford wrote to The Prince of Wales thanking him for his efforts in raising the money for the Farming Help Charities who are currently supporting farmers affected not only by Foot and Mouth but also Bluetongue Disease and flooding.

"In the light of the continued severe situation in agriculture, we are grateful to learn of your generous and timely initiative to make a significant contribution to the Farming Help Charities. It is an important achieve-

ment to have been able to draw in most of the major supermarkets and we hope that their donations will raise awareness of the issues within the wider public.

"We know from Farm Crisis Network of the increase in calls for help that they have received over these past few weeks from farmers in our own areas, and of the number of families they have referred on to RABI and the ARC-Addington fund for financial assistance. The combination of events that have hit farmers across the country have engendered a very real fear for the future and initiatives such as yours provide encouragement and hope." □

*Farming Help can be contacted via their website: www.farminghelp.org.uk
ARC-Addington Fund 02476 690587
Farm Crisis Network 07002 326 326
Royal Agricultural Benevolent Institution 01865 727888. RSABI 0131 472 4166
Samaritans 08457 90 90 90*

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and tenants within the two SACs to discuss the work. This advisory work will be enhanced by talking to local community groups and schools, and inviting them to visit the reserve.

To be able to provide the best advice and practical information the Project will be carrying out extensive monitoring to determine the impacts and outcomes of the work. This involves vegetation, hydrological and parasite monitoring.

The vegetation monitoring will determine whether the removal of the drains and invasive species increases the natural blanket bog vegetation.

The hydrological monitoring is extremely important as much of our drinking water is stored within the

uplands. The artificial drains cause this natural "sponge" to lose its ability to hold water within the uplands and with large storm events the rain water rapidly heads to the lowlands. If the blanket bogs were in good condition, this water would be stored within the uplands and would steadily seep out. This has major implications for lowland flooding and erosion of lowland fields.

Parasite populations

Many upland farmers have significant problems with parasites such as ticks. The project will study the changes in parasite populations resulting from the drain blocking as it is carried out. Tick and liver fluke will be studied to

determine what impact this work will have on stock within the blanket bog area.

This project will improve the condition of a large area of blanket bog within Wales and through the advisory work we hope to provide best practice for managing blanket bog. This expansion of the Project to other landholdings will benefit farmer, wildlife and climate alike. □

The LIFE project is a partnership between the RSPB, Countryside Council for Wales, Environment Agency (Midlands and Wales) and Forestry Commission Wales. For more information email: gorgorscymru@rspb.org.uk or visit www.blanketbogswales.org