



The Wildlife Trust for
Lancashire
Manchester &
North Merseyside



Forest of
Bowland
National
Landscape

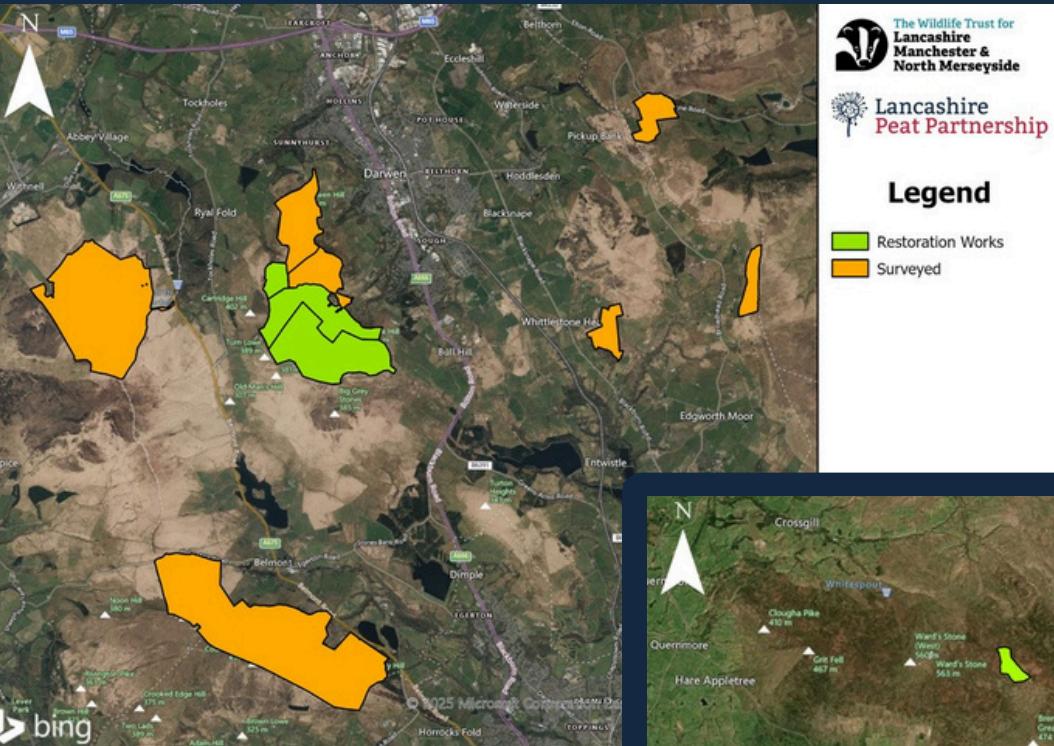


Credit A.J.Critch Wildlife



Lancashire
Peat Partnership

Annual Report 
April 2024 - March 2025



Headline Stats:

We have put **424 hectares** of the uplands of Lancashire on the long path towards restoration, protecting the peat soils from further erosion, making the land more resilient to wildfires, drought and flooding, securing the carbon in the soils and improving the biodiversity of the land.

Across the West Pennine Moors area, the team have installed over **4,000** different ditch blocks, created **5.5 km** of surface bunding, reprofiled **1.5 km** of eroding edges and planted **182,000** sphagnum moss plug plants, **60,000** of which were planted with the help of volunteers.

In the Forest of Bowland National Landscape, the team have installed over **2,000** different ditch blocks, covered more than **8 ha** of bare peat, reprofiled more than **40 km** of eroding edges and planted **12,000** sphagnum moss plug plants.

In addition to the restoration works, the team have surveyed approximately **1,500 ha** of blanket bog habitats in preparation for future restoration works.

Season Highlights

Lords Hall Estate | Bunding Trial

In March 2024 work completed on a large area of bunding on the Lords Hall Estate on Darwen Moor. A requirement of this was that we had to closely monitor the impact on the land, as requested by the regulator, Natural England.

The Lancashire Peat Partnership is happy to report that this trial has been a success. While it was considered a possibility that the surface bunds would not fill with water, all bunds now have pools of standing water behind them – most of them filling within less than 24 hours of being created. This is not only providing a swathe of new habitat for numerous species, but also making the land more resilient to wildfire by creating a natural, wet fire break, and reducing the dominance of purple moor grass (*Molinia caerulea*) which is increasing the fire risk.

Does the wildlife approve? Yes!

Staff have seen a large flock (~30) of **golden plover** (*Pluvialis apricaria*) using the site as a pit-stop, foraging in the pools mid-migration back to Scandinavia. A survey of **Odonata** species (dragonflies and damselflies) done in the August, just 5-months after the bunding zone was completed saw a 150% increase in these flying insects.



Species seen included:

- Black darter (*Sympetrum danae*)
- Common darter (*Sympetrum striolatum*)
- Four-spotted chaser (*Libellula quadrimaculata*)
- Emerald damselfly (*Lestes sponsa*)
- Migrant hawker (*Aeshna mixta*)
- Common hawker (*Aeshna juncea*)



Staff have also seen **red grouse** (*Lagopus lagopus scotia*) using the slightly raised land to keep an eye on the surroundings, and **curlew** (*Numenius arquata*) wandering through and foraging in the pools.



Credit Alex Hubberstey



Forest of Bowland | Bring on the Drones

In the Forest of Bowland, the team have undertaken some post-restoration surveys with drones on some of their sites.

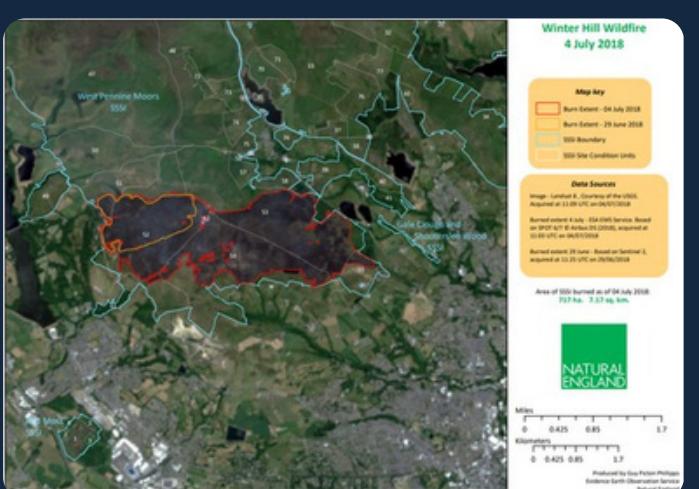
This birds-eye view of the moor is a really useful tool for peat practitioners. The drone footage has shown the extent of works in extremely high detail, and from the images taken you are able to see small details such as the individual coir logs being used to slow-the-flow and trap sediment.

This detail helps to show landscape scale change over time, shows areas where things may not be working as expected, or are working better than anticipated. It also provides good imagery to use for other purposes such as engagement with local communities and landowners/managers.



Winter Hill | The Surveys Begin

Many people who live in and around the West Pennine Moors will remember the Winter Hill fire of 2018; the fires burned for 41 continuous days and devastated 7 square kilometres/700 hectares (980 football pitches) of the sensitive blanket bog habitat. Seven years later and the land is still suffering. The fire scar is still visible on the land, and while some small-scale restoration works were undertaken after the fire, large-scale restoration is needed to get the bog back on track. That is where the Peat Partnership comes in.



A satellite map of the West Pennine Moors including Winter Hill. The red area shows the extent of the 2018 fire.

Staff have spent the winter months surveying the eastern side of the hill, which is roughly 400 hectares in size, working out what restoration works can be done. Thankfully for the hill, the answer is quite a lot.

But where do we go from here?

The Peat Partnership will now work with the landowner to seek funding for this restoration work in the next season (August 2025 – March 2026). We will also work with local stakeholders and experts to ensure that our plan is as effective as possible and puts Winter Hill at the start of its long recovery to ecological health.

This will provide a large amount of benefits, not just to the hill, but to the surrounding communities and the people that live, work and enjoy the moor. From reducing the risk of future wildfires and flooding downstream, sequestering carbon, and providing habitat for a lot of rare and threatened species.

The Sphag Shack Baby!!

The Peat Partnership has been working with another branch of Lancashire Wildlife Trust; The Greenhouse Project. Together, we have been setting up one of the unused greenhouses as a bog plant growing facility.



With teachings from Calderdale Council who undertook a similar project, we have installed a new misting irrigation system and have identified and harvested seven different sphagnum moss species from a site on Darwen Moor to grow on in the greenhouse. These mosses will eventually be replanted back on the sites they were harvested from.

The species harvested are:

- Sphagnum capillifolium
- S. rubellum
- S. palustre
- S. papillosum
- S. fallax
- S. fimbriatum
- S. subnitens



[Watch our video](#)



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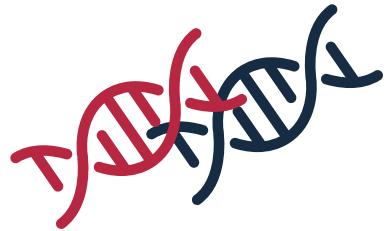


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North Merseyside

Annual Report
April 2024 - March 2025

Page 5

Science & Monitoring



Prioritisation Tool

The Peat Partnership has been working with an independent researcher and the Environment Agency to create a Peatland Prioritisation Tool for the whole of the uplands of Lancashire.

This tool allows us to assess different climate scenarios in the future and prioritise areas which will be the least resilient in their current state. These then become a focus area for engagement with local stakeholders and landowners to build relationships and enable surveys/restoration work in the area.

E-DNA Surveys – The Bowland Bug Hunt

Working with a Lancashire-based Ecological Consultancy and University of Applied Sciences in the Netherlands, a pioneering project regarding invertebrate eDNA (Environmental DNA) on peatlands in the Forest of Bowland was undertaken in the spring and summer of 2024. Pitfall traps collected invertebrates which were catalogued by entomologists and then sent off for metabarcoding. This study aims to add to the growing area of research, with the hope of one day metabarcoding becoming a reliable technique that can be rolled out across the industry more widely for the monitoring of invertebrates.

EDNA detects the traces of species left behind in waterbodies or soil. All species, including humans, leave small traces of DNA wherever they go, and this scientific field can identify species from those traces. If DNA is detected, you know that a certain species has passed through or lives in that area. This is a much less invasive survey method than using pitfall traps which result in the invertebrates which fall into them being killed, the species collected are then identified and counted.



Looking to the Future

The Peat Partnership currently have a number of "shovel-ready" sites which will undergo restoration works in the coming working season. This includes another large site on Darwen Moor, around Jubilee Tower, another smaller site on the edge of Holcombe Moor, and the second phase of works on Aushaw Moss will begin.

In the Forest of Bowland it is expected that restoration works on at least four sites totalling 420ha will begin. Delivered through the Nature for Climate Peatland Grant Scheme in partnership with the National Trust, local landowners and NGOs.

If funding can be secured, Winter Hill East will also begin restoration works. This will be the largest project the Peat Partnership has delivered to date.

We will continue to survey sites across Lancashire to build a pipeline of "shovel-ready" projects for delivery when funding becomes available.



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Page 7