

Mossland

Mosslands, where extensive, support a distinctive flora. In Wigan this includes *Sphagnum papillosum* and cranberry. Due to the preserving qualities of peat, mosslands have an immense value as an archive of the past. It takes thousands of years to form a fully functioning mossland community.



Current status

Mossland, also known as lowland raised bog, is a UK Priority Habitat and is internationally threatened. Mosslands once covered large areas of our region, but as elsewhere across Europe there has been a dramatic loss of this habitat. Raised bog still capable of restoration is of European Importance under the European Habitats Directive.

Since 1850, the area of mossland in the UK has fallen from 95,000 hectares to 6,000 hectares. Regionally, 99% of mossland habitat within Lancashire, including Wigan has been destroyed. What remains is fragmented, and mostly damaged by unsympathetic management. Wigan has less than 100 hectares of mossland spread over five sites. These remaining sites are still under threat. Characteristic and important mossland species are still being lost due to a variety of factors.

Characteristic wildlife

Wigan's mosslands are notable for the characteristic plants that have adapted to this low fertility, high moisture, acidic habitat. These include sphagnum moss species, cotton grasses, cross-leaved heath and cranberry. Drying out of the mossland has led to some areas becoming dominated by purple moor grass.

High quality wet mosslands contain a range of other species which include sundews, bog asphodel bog rosemary, bog myrtle and further species of sphagnum, including many of the hummock forming species, which are all found in the northwest but not currently in Wigan

Key Species

The following rare or threatened species are associated with mosslands in Wigan. Species were selected on the basis that they are UK BAP Priority Species (P), Species of Conservation Concern (C) or notable species recorded in Wigan.

Water vole	<i>Arvicola terrestris</i>	P
Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus europeaus</i>	P
Barn owl	<i>Tyto alba</i>	P
Long-eared owl	<i>Asio otus</i>	P
Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	P
Tree pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>	C
Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	C
Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	C
Common lizard	<i>Lacerta vivipara</i>	
Black darter	<i>Sympetrum danae</i>	
Large heath butterfly	<i>Coenonympha tullai</i>	P

Current Issues

- Development pressures including peat extraction.
- Surface and groundwater abstraction causing lowering of water levels.
- Water quality – pollution, pesticide and nutrient enrichment.
- Habitat isolation as a result of fragmentation.
- Absence of management for existing mossland habitat.
- Recreational pressures.
- Agricultural expansion and intensification.
- Scrub encroachment.

Best Management Practice

Pristine mossland needs little management. The majority of mossland in the North West needs to reverse past damage which usually involves raising the water table.

The key objectives of mossland management are to achieve:

- A diverse range of mossland communities
- Optimal conditions for mossland vegetation, especially sphagnum mosses.
- Prevention of scrub succession.
- Development of monitoring systems for associated flora and fauna.
- a range of small pools for aquatic species diversity
- Management of non-native weed species.
- Control of disturbance and damage by human activity.

Current Action

Recent schemes in Wigan have allowed a total of 50 ha of mossland to be brought into active management.

A working group will oversee the development and implementation of the Mossland BAP. This partnership includes: Natural England, Greater Manchester Ecology Unit,

Lancashire Wildlife Trust, RSPB, Wigan Council and Wigan Leisure and Culture Trust

Related Action Plans

UKBAPs:

Reedbed
Wet woodland

GMBAPs:

Wet woodlands
Ponds
Lowland heath
Acid grassland
Marshy grassland
Water vole

Wigan BAPs:

Wet Woodland
Water Vole

Objectives, actions and targets

Strategic Objective: Protect, develop and monitor mosslands in Wigan		
Operational objective	Action Required	Timescale
1. Determine the current distribution and quality of mossland in Wigan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collect and collate records of mossland and produce distribution map to establish accurate baseline 	2008
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assess all mossland using standardised and repeatable methodology 	2008
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish a database accessible by all relevant partners 	Ongoing
2. Protect existing mossland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognise and protect mossland through policies in plans and strategies e.g. UDP, LDF, SPD, Mossland strategy, Biodiversity Strategy Nature Conservation Strategy 	Ongoing
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assess all relevant planning applications for their impact on mossland 	Ongoing
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage sustainable water abstraction policies 	Ongoing
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Safeguard all mossland sites through designation as SAC, SSSI, LNR, SBI. 	2008
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Produce management plans for all SSSI and SBI Mossland 	2009
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Land acquisition policy to include purchase of existing mossland and buffer zones suitable for improvement. 	Ongoing
3. Investigate opportunities for restoration of mossland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify areas for potential restoration of quality mossland habitat, and associated wetlands 	2009
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage landowners/managers to participate in appropriate management and habitat creation schemes. 	Ongoing
4. Monitor mossland resource	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop monitoring procedure 	2008
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitor mossland quality and quantity 	Ongoing
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitor water quality 	Ongoing
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop links with universities and encourage research on mossland and associated habitats 	Ongoing

Management Objective: Create and maintain mosslands in Wigan		
Operational objective	Action Required	Timescale
1. Protect existing mossland	• Implement management plans for SSSI and SBI mosslands	2009
	• Protect mossland from disturbance through management	Ongoing
	• Protect adjacent land from developments which may affect mossland habitat	Ongoing
	• Control invasive species to maintain high quality mossland	Ongoing
	• Comply with the peatlands charter	Ongoing
2. Develop mossland on extraction sites	• Investigate opportunities for mossland restoration initiatives	2009
	• Investigate opportunities to increase area of mossland where depth of peat allows	2008
3. Manage existing Mossland	• Investigate opportunities for mossland management/maintenance	Ongoing
	• Identify funding for development and management/maintenance of mossland	Ongoing
	• Develop good practice examples in current mossland management	Ongoing
	• Investigate translocation of species to improve mossland diversity.	2009
4. Promote conservation value of Mossland	• Raise the profile of mossland and improve community awareness of its wildlife value	Ongoing
	• Encourage community involvement in conservation of and access to mossland sites	Ongoing
	• Promote examples of good practice in mossland management	Ongoing
	• Flood alleviation	Ongoing