



Financing blanket bog restoration and research in Wales



Project introduction

This extremely successful project was a partnership between the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, Countryside Council for Wales, Environment Agency and Forestry Commission Wales with the aim of restoring active blanket bog in the Berwyn and Migneint Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) in Wales.

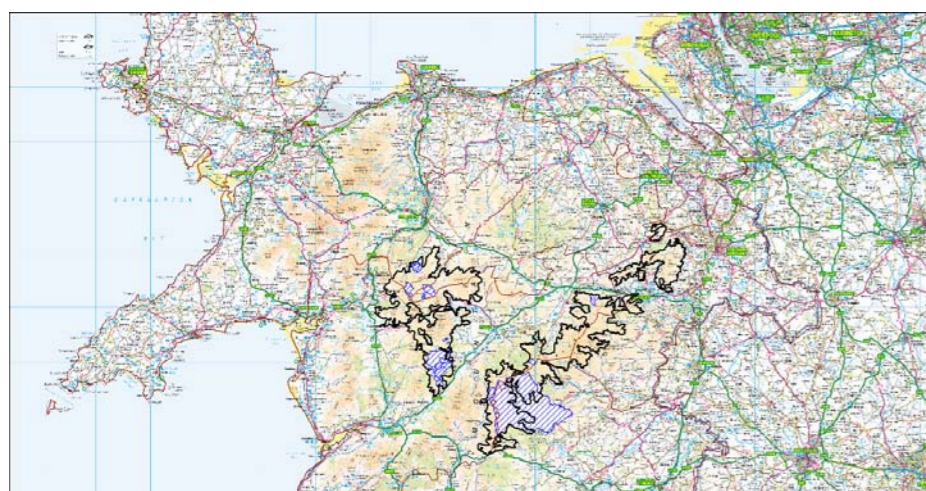
The 56 month project ended on March 31st 2011, with the majority of £3m project funding (75%) secured from the EU LIFE-Nature programme.

Although large areas of blanket bog still occur in Wales, the majority have been seriously degraded through afforestation, encroachment by alien species (such as *Rhododendron ponticum* & Sitka spruce *Picea sitchensis*), over grazing, drainage, and either deliberate or accidental burning.

During the 5 years of the LIFE Blanket Bog in Wales project, significant and sustained improvement in the condition of blanket bogs in key areas of two SACs in North Wales was achieved. The Natura 2000 sites concerned were the Migneint-Arenig-Dduallt and the Berwyn and South Clwyd Mountains SACs. The project also promoted awareness and best practice in the surrounding communities and beyond.

The project carried out the following work:

- Blocked 485 km of artificial drains over an area of 8,500 ha (181 km on 13 private farms).
- Removed *Rhododendron* & Sitka spruce from more than 5,700 ha of open moorland.
- Re-wetted 250 ha of previously afforested blanket bog.
- Carried out extensive demonstration and advocacy work with 260 farmers and land managers across the region
- Extensive outreach work within local communities talking to more than 3,500 local people including 1,200 local school children
- Monitored the impacts of the ditch blocking work upon vegetation, peat hydrology, and water quality and run-off.



Financing restoration

In 2005 the available budget to staff at RSPB Lake Vyrnwy was sufficient to re-wet the 4,500 hectares of uplands on the reserve over 100 years.

In order to carry out the necessary restoration work to meet the 2010 targets, the RSPB began talking to local stakeholders and went into a partnership with the Countryside Council for Wales and the Environment Agency. In order to achieve greater results across both SACs, the project partners also included Forestry Commission Wales to allow work on afforested blanket bog within the Migneint SAC. The project partners provided the match funding to allow the bid to the EU LIFE Nature fund to be successful.

One of the key outcomes from the project has been the hydrological, vegetation and parasite monitoring that has been undertaken. This has largely been possible by additional funding from the Environment Agency at an early stage of the project. Ongoing hydrological monitoring (2011/12) has also been secured through the Environment Agency.

Close collaboration with the National Trust and Snowdonia National Park throughout the project provided an additional opportunity to secure extra funds. In the final year of the project both organisations secured match funding to work with the project to carry out drain blocking within their areas on the Migneint SAC. This gave an additional opportunity for the project to work with local landowners.

In total the partners and other stakeholders have contributed €945k to protect some of the most important areas of blanket peat bog in Wales.

Working together



Limitations placed on many funding streams may result in projects being limited in the scope of work they may carry out. For example, LIFE-Nature funds conservation projects that focus upon Natura 2000 sites, with no funding available for research. However, collaborations between different organisations or projects with access to different funding streams but overlapping interests can result in very beneficial partnerships developing. Early discussions between the LIFE project, the RSPB, and the NERC funded UKPopNet resulted in a range of research projects being carried out by UKPopNet at Lake Vyrnwy that would not have been possible by a single organisation acting independently.

Collaborations such as this have a huge scope for increasing the amount, scale and quality of research that can be carried out. If discussions occur early enough, small adjustments to practical work programmes or methods may have significant benefits for no cost.

The work carried out by UKPopNet at Lake Vyrnwy included:

- Does land use change influence abundance, diversity and activity of soil bacterial populations producing and utilising greenhouse gases?
- Does plant productivity drive soil processes involved in global warming?
- Scaling in interdisciplinary upland research: from plots to catchments to regions
- The relative importance of microclimate and land use to biodiversity
- Impacts of large scale management on ecological quality using ES based measures

This platform provided over £1 million of research to be undertaken on the RSPB Lake Vyrnwy reserve. Partnerships between conservation and science bodies in particular within landscape scale projects must be prioritised.



Partnership



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