





# **Yorkshire Peat Partnership**

## 2009 to 2017 Summary Report

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## 1. The Yorkshire Peat Partnership



The Yorkshire Peat Partnership (YPP) began in 2009 as an umbrella organisation to try to coordinate the restoration of the badly degraded peatlands in the uplands of northern Yorkshire. Since 2009 YPP has developed into the primary organisation coordinating the delivery of upland peatland restoration across the Yorkshire Dales National Park, Nidderdale AONB, North York Moors National Park and northern parts of the South Pennines.

Yorkshire Peat Partnership's mission is to substantially increase the amount of peatland restoration activity in northern Yorkshire's uplands through a combination of practical restoration work, monitoring and research.

- Through its restoration work YPP preserves the peat that remains and helps to reinstate functioning, peat-forming ecosystems that will restore hydrological processes, increase biodiversity, reduce flooding impacts and decrease the amount of carbon loss.
- Through its monitoring and research YPP is contributing to the development of peatland restoration science and guiding future restoration techniques.



#### **Blanket Bog in North Yorkshire**

• **14% of the UK's blanket bog is in England (3553 km<sup>2</sup>) (JNCC, 2011).** The majority of this occurs in the hills of the Pennines stretching from the Peak District in the south to the English/Scottish border the north with other significant areas in Dartmoor and Exmoor in the southwest.

## 2. Aims & Objectives

To restore 50% (35000ha) of Yorkshire's blanket bog through a programme of grip blocking,			
gully restoration and bare peat re-vegetation by March 2017.			
Object	ives	Target Date	
1. > > >	Restore 21,262ha of degraded peatland using existing HLS committed funds. This will include: Blocking 2085km of grips Reducing erosion from at least 616km of eroding gullies & hags Revegetating at least 139ha of eroding bare peat	March 2017	
2.	Complete a programme of desk based surveys of 45 individual peatland sites to provide restoration plan estimates and costs for sites on a long-list for restoration.	March 2012	
3. > > >	Secure funding and implement a works programme to restore at least an additional 13,738ha of degraded peatland from the long list to bring the total restored to 50% of the blanket bog in the Yorkshire Region. This should include: Blocking at least 500km of grips Reducing erosion from approximately 200km of eroding gullies & peat hags Revegetating approximately 30ha of eroding bare peat	March 2017	
4.	Establish long-term research & monitoring at a minimum of 2 sites to assess the benefits of peatland restoration to a range of ecosystem services including flood reduction, water supply, water quality, biodiversity, grouse populations and carbon budgets	March 2013	
5.	Complete a research programme to model the benefits of grip blocking in reducing the flood hydrograph	March 2013	
6.	Produce an estimate of the carbon storage and sequestration potential of the Yorkshire region's upland peat.	August 2011	
7.	Develop and secure funding for a communications and raising awareness programme to promote the importance of Yorkshire peatlands.	March 2012	
8.	Seek and secure funding to enable the continuation of the Yorkshire Peat Partnership core team beyond March 2013 enabling the restoration of the remaining peatland sites and continuation of research programmes.	March 2013	
9.	Develop a plan for restoring a significant proportion of the remaining 50% of degraded blanket bog and other peatlands within the Yorkshire Peat Partnership area	March 2015	

## 3. Funding



YPP has become expert at securing and managing funds from a range of sources and finding ways to overcome bureaucratic and administrative arrangements in order to maximise the impact of these funds in delivering peat restoration.

Since 2009 funding for the YPP's **£1,888,856 of core costs** (e.g. staff, vehicles, equipment and office costs) has come from a wide range of partners with the main funders as follows:

Golden Plover (Margaret Holland)

Organisation	Amount £
Environment Agency	271,190
Higher Level Scheme (administered by Natural	242,125
England through individual land manager	
agreements)	
Natural England	534,533
North York Moors National Park Authority	93,146
Peter de Haan Conservation Trust	100,000
Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority	300,100
Yorkshire Water contracts	182,557
Yorkshire Wildlife Trust	138,484

YPP has secured a total of **£13,294,949** of capital restoration funding since it began in 2008/09. This has come from the following sources:

Organisation	Amount £
Environment Agency Water Framework Directive	633,810
Higher Level Scheme (administered by Natural England through individual land manager agreements)	10,940,663
Natural England Water Framework Directive	70,021
Yorkshire Water contracts	1,554,237



Yorkshire Peatland landscapes, YPP

#### **Unlocking funding**

A major stumbling block in the early stages of the project related to the system of paying for works and claiming back from Natural England under the Higher Level Scheme. Under the scheme, 100% grant funded works such as peatland restoration required agreement holders to pay up front and then obtain a "receipted invoice" in order to submit a claim to Natural England. Given the high cost of peatland restoration and the size of invoices most landowners were reluctant to pay out such large amounts and then have to wait for an unspecified period of time while their claim was processed.

YPP was able to act as an "Authorised Payment Agent" to the agreement holder, pay contractors and claim back directly from Natural England without the agreement holder having to finance anything.

A further step was needed before this system could be implemented. As a small charity YWT would have suffered significant cash-flow problems if it paid a number of contractors on a number of different restoration sites and then had to wait for at least 2-4 weeks for claims to be processed. A system was needed to bridge the cash flow gap between paying contractors and being reimbursed by Natural England. This was solved with the generous help of The Royal Society for Wildlife Trusts and the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority who provided interestfree "bridging" loans to cover this gap.

The combination of the Authorised Agent approach and the bridging loans enabled the unlocking of substantial amounts of HLS grant funding to deliver a massive programme of peatland restoration across the region. Without this administrative fix it is unlikely that YPP would have been so successful.



Cottongrass, YPP



Bog Asphodel, YPP

## 4. Achievements

## 4.1 Assessing the state of North Yorkshire's blanket bogs

Prior to restoration works taking place YPP carries out a comprehensive 4 stage survey of the restoration sites as follows:



• Pre-survey mapping using GIS and aerial photography

• Field surveys - YPP staff have completed surveys of 40,281ha of peatland units (67 sites covering 37,022ha of actual peat)

• Archaeological assessment - A total of 48 archaeological assessments have been completed to date

• Drone surveys - A total area of 7876ha of Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) Surveys. As far as we are aware this if the biggest dataset of its type in the UK

YPP now holds a dataset of over 20,000 individual survey point records together with GIS maps of classified grips, gullies, bare peat and other erosion features

#### Peat area, depth & mass & Carbon store

Total estimated Peat area = 70,169ha

**Overall the mean depth of peat across the North Yorkshire sites surveyed is 1.01m.** The largest mean depths are in the Yorkshire Dales (1.02m) followed by Nidderdale (0.98m) and the North York Moors (0.94m).

The mean depth for deep peat (>0.4m) across the North Yorkshire sites surveyed is 1.25m. Nidderdale has the deepest peats (mean of 1.41m), followed by the North York Moors (1.31m) and the Yorkshire Dales (1.21m).

The **maximum site mean depth was 2.91m** at May Moss in the North York Moors although this site is more typical of a raised bog than a blanket bog.

Only 3 of the Units surveyed by YPP covering just 815ha (2.1%) of the peatland in the surveyed area had mean peat depths less than the 40cm deep peat definition.

**Estimated total stored carbon mass = 38,101,767 tonnes**. YPP used a method using Thiessen (or Voronoi) polygons to estimate peat volume and mass for restoration sites. YPP has carried out a preliminary analysis of 22 units (11,563ha of voronoi polygons) using this method which gives an overall estimated carbon mass of 543 tonnesha<sup>-1</sup> (assuming peat mass is 50% carbon)

## 4.1.1 <u>Physical state</u>

YPP's survey results in detailed GIS layers that map the physical erosion features present within the surveyed area. Making the assumption that the remainder of un-surveyed sites will have similar levels of erosion YPP have used these figures to estimate the quantities of these erosion features across the full upland peatland in North Yorkshire.

Estimated quantities of erosion features across North Yorkshire's upland peatlands (excluding the Forest of Bowland for which we have no data)

Feature	Administrative Area	Total
Bare Peat	North York Moors	21ha
	Nidderdale	45ha
	Yorkshire Dales	417ha
	South Pennines (in North Yorkshire)	7ha
	All areas	490ha
Length of eroding gullies	North York Moors	62km
	Nidderdale	377km
	Yorkshire Dales	2317km
	South Pennines (in North Yorkshire)	2km
	All areas	2758km
Length of eroding hag sides	North York Moors	5km
	Nidderdale	151km
	Yorkshire Dales	2317km
	South Pennines (in North Yorkshire)	0km
	All areas	2473km
Length of grip	North York Moors	109km
	Nidderdale	905km
	Yorkshire Dales	6487km
	South Pennines (in North Yorkshire)	5km
	All areas	7506km
Length of eroding grip	North York Moors	88km
	Nidderdale	558km
	Yorkshire Dales	4263km
	South Pennines (in North Yorkshire)	2km
	All areas	4911km
Area of micro-erosion	North York Moors	1ha
	Nidderdale	11ha
	Yorkshire Dales	3ha
	South Pennines (in North Yorkshire)	7ha
	All areas	22ha
Area of dendritic erosion	North York Moors	Oha
	Nidderdale	Oha
	Yorkshire Dales	58ha
	South Pennines (in North Yorkshire)	7ha
	All areas	65ha

#### 4.1.2 Habitats & species



While not a fully comprehensive habitat assessment the YPP survey method provides a lot of useful data on the vegetation characteristics of upland peatlands in the project area.

These results are initially encouraging in that there are only small amounts of non-bog vegetation communities present. However, much of the blanket bog is in categories with *Calluna vulgaris* at greater than 25% cover even on the deep peat areas.

Bare peat, Grimwith, YPP

Summary of the percentage of survey points with each vegetation community present at the two peat depths for the peatland so far surveyed by YPP.

Vegetation type	Percentage of survey points (%)	
	>15cm peat depth (n = 14,953)	>40cm peat depth (n = 11,185)
Blanket Bog (Sphagnum dominated)	1	1
Blanket Bog (25% Calluna cover)	11	13
Blanket Bog (50% Calluna cover)	23	28
Blanket Bog (75% Calluna cover)	25	31
Blanket Bog (Cottongrass dominated)	4	4
Wet heath	4	2
Dry heath	13	7
Acid grassland dominated by Heath rush	5	4
Acid grassland dominated by Mat grass	3	2
Acid grassland mosaic with Heath rush and Mat grass	4	3
Acid grassland dominated by Purple moor grass	<1	<1
Neutral/calcareous grassland	1	0
Acidic fen	2	2
Basic fen	1	1
Bare peat	<1	<1
Bare mineral	<1	<1
Other habitat	2	2

#### **Blanket bog vegetation**

YPP's survey results demonstrate the dominance of Heather across the surveyed bogs and there are some indicators of "drier" communities (Bilberry, *Polytrichum* spp.) at higher than expected levels while specialist bog species (Cross-leaved heath, Crowberry, Cranberry, Cloudberry, Bog Rosemary, Bog Asphodel, Sundews) are at very low levels. *Sphagnum* spp. presence is reasonably high although, unfortunately, without comprehensive species information we have no way of knowing if these are more specialist blanket bog species.

Sphagnum fallax was the most frequently recorded Sphagnum species. S. fallax is tolerant of a wide range of conditions so is not the best indicator of bog condition but S. capillifolium and S. papillosum are also present at reasonable levels and we know that S. magellanicum and S. subnitens also occur on the bogs and these and other species may have been under-recorded.





Sphagnum mosses, YPP

### 4.1.3 Land management



The overwhelming majority (>96%) of YPP's work is conducted on private land largely owned and managed for the purposes of grouse shooting and sheep farming

As it is currently the primary land management tool on blanket bog, the YPP survey also records the amount of burning on each site; this is largely managed burning.

#### Burning

YPP's surveys show that the majority of peatland in the project area show evidence of burning and the lack of tall old heather (just 5% or 6% of survey points) suggests that this may be on a relatively short cycle.

Only 16% or 17% of the survey points were categorised as unburnt.

## 4.2 Producing a restoration plan

The ultimate end point of all of this survey and assessment work is to produce a Restoration Plan. Yorkshire Peat Partnership has developed a restoration plan template that acts as (i) a summary of the survey information, mainly in the form of maps and (ii) a specification for subsequent capital works, mainly in the form of tables of quantities.



#### A total of 62 YPP surveyed sites now have Restoration Plans

#### **Restoration planning**

- 38,602ha (35,673ha blanket bog) out of the 43,398ha (40,139ha blanket bog) area surveyed by YPP, Ribble Rivers Trust & National Trust up to the end of March 2017 has so far been taken forward to the restoration planning and implementation stage.
- In total YPP, RRT and NT completed restoration works (including initial capital works) on 27,223ha of blanket bog by the end of March 2017 which is 39% of the estimated total area of YPP blanket bog.
- No capital works were proposed on 3,797ha of blanket bog (5% of total area) although with advances in *Sphagnum* spp. introduction techniques it may be appropriate to revisit some of these sites in future.
- Detailed restoration plans were produced for 4,653ha of blanket bog (7% of total area) but were not implemented due to lack of landowner support.

#### 4.3 <u>Restoring bogs</u>



Timber sediment trap, Cray Moss

The majority of the capital restoration works have been carried out by private contractors working under the supervision of YPP staff (or RRT or NT). These contractors are a vital component of the effective delivery of peatland restoration across Yorkshire. The contractors used are specialists in peatland restoration and provide YPP and its partners with innovation and skills that would be very expensive for YPP to employ directly.

So far YPP has:

**Begun restoring hydrological integrity by blocking 1844km (38%) of eroding grips and begun blocking** of 181km (7%) of eroding gullies

Prevented further erosion by:

- *Re-profiling and re-vegetating 1682km of grips and 1497km of gully edges and hags.*
- *Re-vegetating 108ha of bare peat & micro-erosion.*
- Commenced restoration in 58ha of dendritic gullying.

Begun restoring functioning blanket bog on badly eroded areas of bare peat by:

- Sowing heather seed across 124ha of bare peat, hags, dendritic areas and microerosion.
- Planting 124,775 cotton grass plugs
- Inoculating 404ha with 93,850 harvested Sphagnum clumps, 332ha of harvested Sphagnum fragments, 7ha of BeadaMoss beads<sup>®</sup> and 25ha of BeadaGel<sup>™</sup>
   Begun re-establishing Sphagnum in 58ha of degraded blanket bog vegetation by:

• Spreading 20ha of BeadaMoss beads<sup>®</sup> and planting 50,018 BeadaHumok™ plugs.





#### **Restoring hydrological integrity**

#### YPP has:

Blocked 993km of grip and 81km of gully with peat dams which at an average spacing of about 8m is over 130,000 peat dams.

YPP have installed over 3000 timber sediment traps in 7km of grips and, in conjunction with heather bale dams and stone sediment traps, 100km of gullies.

YPP have installed heather bale dams in 16km of grip and have installed over 7000 bales in 100km of gullies in conjunction with timber and stone sediment traps.

Blocked 74km of larger grips with stone sediment traps and installed over 200 stone traps in 100km of gully in conjunction with timber and heather bale dams.







Restoration, YPP style

## Landscape-scale Action

We completed a remarkable 27,223ha of blanket bog restoration work by the end of March 2017 which is 39% of the estimated total area of YPP blanket bog.

## 5. Monitoring Restoration works

In 2017 YPP completed a works monitoring assessment where a series of transects were set up across the areas of each site that had undergone different types of restoration intervention. A number of different measurements were recorded using GPS units at 30-40 sample points along thetransect to assess the status of the specific type of restoration intervention.

Grip blocking • •	Overall results very positive Grip blocking with peat dams had been particularly successful with the majority of dams remaining intact (94%) with a high average percentage vegetation cover (72%). Grips with reprofiled edges appeared to be more successful than non-reprofiled, with less erosion around the dam and a higher percentage of vegetation cover (82% versus 65%).
Reprofiling had	as and gullies
•	The success of reprofiling hags and gullies and revegetating using turves or seed and brash was less apparent
•	Revegetation was relatively low (55%) in both techniques and 73% of the slopes
	Clause fusion is a couth waster direction was might on slopes revegetated with tarves.
•	Sopes facing in a south-westerly direction were notably poorly revegetated. This could be due to a number of factors including aspect, exposure, slope angle and quantity of brash and seed used.
Bare peat	
•	The story on bare peat areas revegetated with brash and seed is very variable with success ranging from 0% to 100% cover.

However, many of the sites that were monitored had been completed prior to current improvements in techniques. Applications of brash, dwarf seed and 'nurse' grasses have been increased and less suitable lowland grass species have been replaced by upland varieties better adapted to local conditions. Cotton grass plugs were also introduced last winter, targeting wetter areas. Although it is not possible to predict the success of the revegetation from recent work using these updated techniques, the first signs are promising with, for example, Cragdale after just a year post-restoration showing one of the highest average percentages of revegetation (56%).

Analysis of longer term data shows encouraging changes in cover of key species. Common Heather *Calluna vulgaris* appears to be decreasing along with Hare's Tail Cotton Grass *Eriophorum vaginatum* increasing and more base tolerant species such as *S. palustre* and *S. fallax* decreasing. Conversely, on the increase are more acid tolerant *Sphagnum* species. The positive indicators are that on these sites water is being retained by the grip blocking, creating conditions better suited to blanket bog community species.

## 6. Research



Wherever possible and subject to funding being available YPP has tried to support relevant peat-based research. The vagaries of funding has meant that this has had to be a reactive approach but YPP have managed to support some key research.

At the beginning of the programme YPP supported research through Moors for the Future's Small Research Project Fund and then began to work with other partners and commission its own research projects. All of the research projects are summarized below with more detail available from specific websites or the quoted references.

#### 6.1 Small Research Projects Fund

In 2010 YPP provided £16,645 into the Moors for the Future Small Research Projects Fund and supported the following seven projects. Full reports are available from the Moors for the Future website (<u>http://www.moorsforthefuture.org.uk/moorland-research-fund</u>):

#### 6.2 <u>Peat Cores</u>

In 2011 YPP and the University of Gloucestershire supported a PhD student (Julia McCarroll) to extract peat cores from Mossdale, West Arkengarthdale and Oxenhope Moors to determine historic changes in vegetation and how this might inform conservation today. The results of this work have been written up in Julia's thesis and several published journals as follows:

**McCarroll, J. (2014)** *Application of Palaecological Techniques to Inform Blanket Mire Conservation in Yorkshire, UK.* PhD thesis University of Gloucestershire, England.

J. Mccarroll, J., Chambers, F.M., Webb, J.C. & Thom, T. J. (2016) Informing innovative peatland conservation in light of palaeoecological evidence for the demise of *Sphagnum imbricatum*: the case of Oxenhope Moor, Yorkshire UK. *Mires & Peat* **18(8)** pp. 1-24.

**Mccarroll, J., Chambers, F.M., Webb, J.C. & Thom, T.J. (2016)** Using palaeoecology to advise peatland conservation: An example from West Arkengarthdale, Yorkshire, UK. *Journal for Nature Conservation* **30** pp. 90-102.

**Mccarroll, J., Chambers, F.M., Webb, J.C. & Thom, T.J. (2017)** Application of palaeoecology for peatland conservation at Mossdale Moor, UK. *Quarternary International* **432** pp. 39-47.

#### 6.3 DEFRA burning versus cutting

YPP also provided support to Andreas Heinemeyer and his team at the Stockholm Environment Institute, University of York in a 5 year long research project funded by DEFRA to investigate differences between cutting and burning on blanket bogs on a range of ecosystem services including greenhouse gas emissions and water quality (predominantly dissolved organic carbon). The report of this study is imminent but details of the project can be found at <u>http://peatland-es-</u><u>uk.york.ac.uk</u>.



## 7. <u>Conclusions & Next steps</u>

## 7.1 <u>How did we do?</u>

The following table sets out our original objectives against the outcomes we actually achieved. It is clear that the Yorkshire Peat Partnership has been a hugely successful project getting very close to its original very challenging targets during a period of global austerity.

Original Objectives	Outcome
To restore 50% (35,000ha) of Yorkshire's blanket bog by March 2017, including:	
Restore 21,262ha of degraded peatland using existing HLS. Secure funding and implement a works programme to restore at least an additional 13,738ha to bring the total restored to 50%.	<ul> <li>27,223ha worked on (39%). No capital works needed on 3,797ha (5%). This is a total of 31,020 (44%) so we got pretty close!</li> <li>X Could not secure landowner support for works on a further 4,653ha (7%)</li> </ul>
Complete a programme of desk based surveys of 45 individual peatland sites to provide restoration plans	$\checkmark$ Surveyed and produced restoration plans for 62 peatland sites.
Establish long-term research & monitoring at a minimum of 2 sites	✓ Working with the Stockholm Environment Institute supported a 5 year study into the relative merits of burning versus cutting.
Complete a research programme to model the benefits of grip blocking in reducing the flood hydrograph	X but other organisations (e.g. Water@Leeds) have done this
Produce an estimate of the carbon storage and sequestration potential of the Yorkshire region's upland peat.	Estimated that our peatlands currently store 38,101,767 tonnes of carbon but we have not yet worked out the sequestration potential.
Develop and secure funding for a communications and raising awareness programme to promote the importance of Yorkshire peatlands.	X but supported the IUCN-UK Peat Programe to do awareness-raising on behalf of all of the restoration partnerships.
Seek and secure funding to enable the continuation of the Yorkshire Peat Partnership core team beyond March 2013	✓ ✓ We kept going and have funds to continue. We also developed innovative approaches to unlock substantial funds.
Develop a plan for restoring a significant proportion of the remaining 50% of degraded blanket bog and other peatlands	X This will form the basis of the next business plan.

### 7.2 <u>Next steps</u>

The table on page 16 also shows that there is much left to do and we now need to draw up the plans for the next phase of our work from 2018 onwards.

This will concentrate on several key activities:

Consolidate the restoration work already begun by re-visiting those sites with new restoration techniques where the monitoring has highlighted the need for additional restoration work.

Continue to work on new sites with the ultimate goal of restoring all 70,000ha of Yorkshire's upland peatland where it is needed.

Expand the research and monitoring aspects of our work to try to tackle some of the big questions we have yet to answer (e.g. what is the carbon sequestration potential of Yorkshire's peatlands; what are the impacts of restored peatlands on flood reduction and how far downstream?).

Develop new ways to engage with a wide range of audiences to promote the importance of fully functioning blanket bogs for biodiversity, for carbon storage and sequestration, for flood risk reduction and for high quality drinking water.

### 8. Acknowledgements

The success of the Yorkshire Peat Partnership is the result of the hard work of by a huge range of partners and could not have happened without them.

Landowners, their agents, gamekeepers, farmers and tenants have helped YPP deliver the restoration work on their land often helping practically but also providing advocacy support and helping to unlock funding.

None of the work could have taken place without our major funders supporting both the capital work but also the hugely important core funds that enable YPP to function. We are hugely grateful to Natural England, the Environment Agency, Yorkshire Water, the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority, the North York Moors National Park Authority, Peter de Haan Conservation Trust & Yorkshire Wildlife Trust. Huge thanks also go to the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority and The Wildlife Trusts who provided the bridging loaned to enable us to unlock HLS funds.

We would also like to thank our other Steering Group members (Moorland Association, National Farmers Union, National Trust and Nidderdale AONB Partnership for supporting and guiding our work.

A special mention goes to Yorkshire Wildlife Trust for hosting the Yorkshire Peat Partnership and providing all the essential back-up services (especially Peter Batchelor and his finance team and

Tracey Davison-Franks in HR) we couldn't have done without. The impact and cost of hosting YPP should not be under-estimated.

Last but not least none of this could have happened without the support of hugely dedicated, hardworking staff team (Astrid Hanlon, Pete Christopherson, Tessa Levens, Jackie Smith, Ceri Katz, Mark Brown, Les Hughes, Matt Cross, Kay Waites, Laura Watson, Rosie Snowden & Jenny Sharman) who have come and gone over the years but remain the heart, soul and spirit of the Yorkshire Peat Partnership.



YPP Snow dancing!