

ROUND-UP



Mike Morris

Blanket bog comes to LIFE

Now in its third year, the LIFE Active Blanket Bog in Wales Project is in full swing. This five-year project to restore the valuable habitat of Wales's uplands is well on schedule to achieve its targets set for 2011.

So far, the work has mainly focused on the RSPB reserve at Lake Vyrnwy, but this winter the spotlight will be split between here and Penaran on the Migneint-Arenig-Dduallt Special Area of Conservation.

Over the past two years, 43,000 m of drainage ditches (grips) have been blocked on Lake Vyrnwy's blanket bog, resulting in an increase in the height of the water table. The bog has been further protected by mowing over 100 hectares of heath to reduce the risk of fire.

The project has also been busy in the local community with more than 500 people attending events at Lake Vyrnwy or illustrated talks on the project. Eighteen local schools have had visits by the RSPB Lake Vyrnwy field teachers and more than 350 children visited the project over the autumn.

The work at Lake Vyrnwy this winter will involve blocking a further 25,000 m of grips and mowing around 35 hectares of heather to protect the bog from fire risk. The project will also welcome four new members of staff, who will spend the winter on the moors removing all self-seeding invasive plants.

At Penaran, a conifer plantation and invading Sitka spruces will be eradicated. Around 10,000 m of grips will also be blocked. Eight Welsh Black cattle have been grazing the bog all summer. They will continue to do so to improve the diversity of plants.

The project is continuing to improve the blanket bog directly and by increasing understanding of this rare, vital habitat. If you wish to visit one of the project's events or see the project DVD, hosted by Iolo Williams, please visit the website at www.blanketbogswales.org

The RSPB is working with the Countryside Council for Wales, the Environment Agency (Midlands region and Wales) and the Forestry Commission Wales to restore active blanket bog in the Berwyn and Migneint Special Areas of Conservation. Funding for the project is from the EU LIFE-Nature programme.