

**KONG MINI MOUNTAIN MARATHON  
2019 DARK PEAK EVENT – ECOLOGICAL BRIEFING NOTE**

Kong Mini Mountain Marathon events are located in Britain's greatest upland areas that often contain features of outstanding biodiversity value and importance. Occasionally, the features that provide this interest can be vulnerable to the wear and tear that may result from the passage of event competitors. The risk of ecological damage is carefully assessed during early stages in the planning process for each event, when every effort is made to avoid sensitive ecological interest areas that could be disturbed by the event.

We are keen to encourage personal route selection choices by competitors on our events to further avoid the risk of local ecological disturbance. This Ecological Briefing Note has been prepared for the 2019 Dark Peak event to identify key ecological interest features that contribute to the special character of the event area, with route selection comments to help minimise the risk of localised ecological disturbance.

The 2019 Dark Peak event area is located within the distinctive dark peak landscape, comprising a high moorland plateau, dissected by steep sided valleys at its margins. The vegetation and habitats within this area have developed on the nutrient poor acidic soils and blanket peat deposits that overlie the grits, shales, sandstones and mudstones of the Millstone Grit series of geological strata.

Blanket peat is a significant feature of the 2019 Dark Peak event area, having developed over a period likely to have exceeded 6000 years. Vegetation and habitats that have developed on blanket peat within the central and eastern parts of the event area are designated as of both national and international nature conservation importance. These include blanket mires on saturated peat, wet and dry heaths and acidic grasslands, flushes and mires on moorland slopes, semi-natural woodland and habitats associated with rock outcrops. Several vegetation types, habitats, plants and animals within the event area are at either the southern or northern limits of their British distribution, contributing to the special nature conservation interest of the area. Most habitats within the event area are known to be of outstanding ornithological importance, in particular for their breeding bird populations.

Deep peat deposits within the event area have probably undergone erosion at times throughout their formation, accelerated during recent centuries by man-induced factors that include pollution, moorland burning and over-grazing. Vegetation that forms on blanket peat is especially susceptible to atmospheric pollution from cities that surround the Dark Peak area. Despite the widespread degradation of vegetation and habitat that has developed on blanket peat the event area retains some important tracts of moorland habitat. This includes areas of vegetation and habitat that benefit from recent ecological restoration interventions that strive to reduce the rate of peat erosion and accelerate vegetation recovery in degraded blanket peat areas.

Locations within the event area that are sensitive to the risk of trampling disturbance by Kong Mini Mountain Marathon competitors include accumulating and degraded blanket peat, wet heath, fragile plant communities that develop around groundwater springs and flushes, rock outcrop habitats and patches of woodland at the margins of the moorland plateau. Notable breeding bird species are also vulnerable to disturbance while nesting.

Better drained parts of the event area comprise upland grassland and dry heath that are relatively robust in terms of resisting potential disturbance from localised trampling effects of passage by Kong Mini Mountain Marathon competitors.

The distinctive wildlife habitats and vegetation types within the 2019 Dark Peak event area are contained within two extensive designated areas of International nature conservation importance, and one area of National nature conservation importance. Existing hill paths will enable Kong Mini Mountain Marathon competitors to access many event controls without having to cross extensive areas of undisturbed vegetation and habitat, helping to avoid the risk of disturbance to features of special nature conservation interest. For situations where competitors might need to access areas of land not crossed by hill paths this ecological briefing note should support personal route choices that will avoid the risk of significant ecological disturbance. This ecological briefing note has also been produced to communicate the special upland environmental interest of the event area to enrich the experience of participating in the 2019 Dark Peak event.

- **Dry acid grassland** is present on better drained land at the margins of the event area, where livestock grazing has converted heather moorland to open grassland. These areas provide a relatively robust vegetation type that can generally withstand the trampling effects of hill running.
- **Blanket bog** is an important habitat type throughout much of the event area. In some places degraded blanket bog where bog vegetation has been lost and peat erosion gulleys (peat hags) have formed. In these places the underlying peat is being eroded into streams and rivers that drain the moorland plateau.
- Disturbance of **blanket bog** by runners churning through peat hags has the potential to trigger further peat erosion by de-stabilising the peat surface. Wherever possible, route choices in these areas should try to link strips and patches of surviving moorland vegetation between the peat hags. These are often quite well-drained, providing areas of relatively robust vegetation and resistant to the trampling effects of running. Friable moorland vegetation often overhangs the edge of peat hags and should be avoided as they are easily damaged.
- In contrast to areas of degraded **blanket bog**, some locations within the event area contain high quality blanket bog with an intact vegetation surface that lack eroding peat hags. These are typified by areas of wet heath vegetation interspersed with shallow pools, sometimes associated with *Sphagnum* mosses. These areas often comprise a mosaic of vegetation types that will include slightly **raised areas of better drained peat with drier heather moorland vegetation**. These will be far less vulnerable to disturbance through vegetation damage by trampling and should ideally be selected when making route choices for running through these intact blanket bog areas.
- Areas of **wet acid grassland** will be encountered where impeded drainage occurs within relatively level hill grassland areas or where groundwater emerges at the surface as seepages across more steeply sloping ground. Wet acid grassland can be of special nature conservation interest within the Dark Peak, in particular where **groundwater seepages** provide conditions for communities of uncommon mosses, liverworts and other specialised plants. These vegetation types can be vulnerable to persistent disturbance effects of trampling and should ideally be avoided wherever possible by selecting routes that keep to dry acid grassland to by-pass wet grassland patches.
- **Wet acid grassland** at groundwater seepages on steep ground can be difficult to avoid where they cross valuable contouring lines. Avoidance of these areas could involve a significant route change and deviation from the desired contour level. Despite this, damage to seepage zone vegetation should be minimised, often located within shallow gulleys, re-entrant features or associated with ground level rock outcrops that cross steep slopes.
- On hillsides, soil movements within **dry and wet acid grassland** areas can develop well-defined micro-terrace systems, often referred to as sheep walks or trods. These typically follow contours and can provide extremely useful running lines. Grassland vegetation at the edge of these micro-terraces is often friable and easily broken off. Care should be taken when using these features for contouring to avoid running on the edge of these terraces to minimise grassland damage.
- Distinctive **semi-natural woodland** of nature conservation interest is present within the event area, including patches of broadleaved woodland on steeper sloping ground. The Kong Mini Mountain Marathon Dark Peak event generally avoids the need to pass through or in close proximity to key areas of upland semi-natural woodland interest. Where competitors might need to pass woodland areas, it is important that existing paths are used wherever possible.
- **Rock ledge plant communities** of nature conservation interest are present within the event area. If Kong Mini Mountain Marathon competitors need to negotiate low rock outcrops great care should be taken to minimise disturbance of ledge vegetation. Where possible, routes through rock outcrops that utilise existing paths should be used.

- A complex network of **streams and rivers** drain the moorland plateau that comprises the majority of the event area. Some of the streams and rivers are potentially vulnerable to ecological disturbance from repeated crossing by runners. Some of the watercourses could provide habitat for notable wildlife species where the nature conservation interest of these rivers and streams concerns use of the banksides by these animals. As a consequence, great care should be taken by Kong Mini Mountain Marathon competitors at stream crossings, minimising bank disturbance when entering and climbing out of stream channels.
- Moorland habitats within the event area are of very high interest to **nesting birds**. The Dark Peak event takes place towards the end of the bird nesting season when the risk of nesting disturbance is low. However, care should be taken in the event that late nesting birds are present. Use of existing paths where possible will help to minimise the risk of nest disturbance.