

HEATHLANDS : North York Moors, UK (50,000 Ha of Moorland)

FACTORS / CONDITIONS

- Over 300m in height (Upland)
- Free draining sandy soil
- Rapid and easy leaching of minerals
- Acid soils (pH 3-5)
- No shade
- Very cold in winter, but snow cover protects the plants
- Can be Wet Heathland or Dry Heathland depending on the drainage conditions

OTHER PLANTS

- Some vertical structure is seen
- Herb layer beneath the heather of Bilbury, Crowberry and Gorse
- Ground layer of mosses and lichens
- Bog areas have Sedge, Rush and Peat formation

MAIN PLANT

HEATHER

- Old wood remains to prevent light getting in and reduce competition
- Small leaves with sunken stomata to help prevent water loss
- Roots have a mycorrhizal relationship fungi to aid nutrient uptake from the poor / infertile soil

HEATHER LIFE CYCLE

- PIONEERS - 0-7 years, young plants from seed or burnt stem of older plants
- BUILDING PHASE - 7-15 years, vigorously growing, dense plant cover
- MATURE PHASE – 15-25 years, plants become woody and plant cover reduces
- Degeneration phase - >25 years, cover only 50%
- Then through a full succession to BRACKEN and eventually to Oak woodland
- But, controlled burning before the mature phase encourages new heather growth
- This is therefore a PLAGIO-CLIMAX COMMUNITY where humans control the succession for grouse or sheep farming

