

KONG MINI MOUNTAIN MARATHON 2018 TROUTBECK EVENT – ECOLOGICAL BRIEFING NOTE

Kong 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 Kong Mini Mountain Marathon event, when every effort is made to avoid sensitive ecological interest areas that could be disturbed.

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 2018 Troutbeck 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 2018 Troutbeck event area extends across a distinctive part of the Central Fells region of the English Lake District. The landscape of the event area is characterised by the glacially dissected lava-plateau landscape of Upper Borrowdale. Volcanic rocks that extend across the entire event area. The glaciated landforms that characterise the area have produced a range of nature conservation interest features that are located both on lower lying land and at locations on the high tops and ridges.

A variety of distinctive upland wildlife habitats and vegetation types are present within the 2018 Troutbeck event area. These include one area of International nature conservation importance, and three areas of National nature conservation importance. Many of the controls within the Troutbeck event area can be accessed using existing hill paths, helping to avoid the risk of disturbance to sites and features of special nature conservation interest. For situations where event competitors might be required to pass through areas of land that are 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 some of the special upland environmental interest features of the event area to enrich the experience of participating in the Troutbeck event.

- **Dry acid grassland** is a widespread vegetation type within the event area, where centuries of 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.
- Extensive areas of dry acid grassland can include **mosaics of other upland vegetation** types such as blanket bog, heather-dominated heath vegetation and wet acid grassland creating areas of local vulnerability to a concentration of trampling by Troutbeck competitors.
- Upland vegetation mosaics can be of interest to **ground-nesting birds**. The 2018 Troutbeck event will take place at the end of the main bird nesting season, and this should minimise the risk of disturbance to ground nesting birds and birds nesting on crags and within scree fields. However, care should be taken to avoid the risk of disturbance to late nesting birds when crossing these areas. Use of existing paths where possible will help to minimise the risk of nest disturbance.
- **Blanket bog** is an important but relatively localised habitat feature within the event area. Disturbance of these areas by runners churning through wet peat has the potential to trigger peat erosion by destabilising the peat surface. Wherever possible, route choices in blanket peat areas should try to link strips and patches of better drained moorland vegetation. These often provide areas of relatively robust vegetation and resistant to the trampling effects of running.
- 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. Some patches of wet acid grassland on lower level ground within the event area include locations

of special nature conservation interest, in particular where groundwater seepages provide conditions for communities of specialised 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, it would be ideal if damage to seepage zone vegetation could 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 **fen vegetation** of very high conservation interest is present within the event area, typically on level and gently sloping sites adjacent to streams and rivers where groundwater irrigation from more base-rich bedrock supports a distinctive and uncommon vegetation type. These locations often support a high diversity of plant species including many with a localised distribution that is confined to the specialised conditions of fen habitats. Fen sites can also be of great invertebrate nature conservation importance. Fen vegetation is often characterised by an abundance of Common Reed and tall herb flowering plants such as Meadowsweet and Hemp Agrimony and should be avoided by competitors on the Troutbeck event.
- A variety of **boulder field and scree habitats** are present at higher levels within the event area that are potentially vulnerable to disturbance. Ice-shattered boulder fields on the highest tops can support fragile montane grass-heath plant communities of extremely high nature conservation value. Existing paths through these areas should be used wherever possible to avoid disturbance of these communities. Blocky scree often supports specialised plant communities that utilise the microclimate of sheltered spaces within the scree. Sections of the Troutbeck route that cross these features should use existing paths wherever possible and should always minimise disturbance of scree blocks.
- Specialised **rock ledge plant communities** are present at a number of locations within the event area. If Troutbeck competitors need to negotiate low rock outcrops great care should be taken to minimise disturbance of ledge vegetation.
- The event area contains a complex network of **streams and rivers**, some of which are potentially vulnerable to ecological disturbance from repeated crossing by runners. Some of the rivers within and surrounding the event area could support internationally and nationally threatened animal species such as **otter** and **water vole**. In many cases, 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 Troutbeck competitors at stream crossings, preferring the use of bridges and stepping stones to minimise bank disturbance when entering and climbing out of stream channels.