

## KONG MINI MOUNTAIN MARATHON 2018 HELVELLYN 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 Helvellyn 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 Helvellyn event area extends across one of the best-known and most striking areas of upland landscape in the Lake District. The area comprises a great variety of upland landforms that creates outstanding scenic beauty and an area of great importance for upland biodiversity. The rugged character of the event area results from glaciation of hard, acidic rocks that were formed during a period of intense volcanic activity between 440 million and 480 million years ago. The high fells of the area support extensive tracts of montane grassland and montane heath vegetation with frequent rock outcrops and tall mountain crags.

The event area contains four designated nature conservation sites, recognising the national and international importance of one high fell area and one section of old oak woodland habitat. In addition, the high fells within the event area include examples of notable upland vegetation and habitat types that lie outside designated nature conservation site boundaries. These mainly comprise upland acid grassland that is relatively robust in terms of resisting potential disturbance from localised trampling effects of passage by Kong Mini Mountain Marathon competitors. Localised features that are more sensitive to the risk of trampling disturbance are also present. These include patches of blanket bog and wet heath vegetation, tarn margins, rock outcrop ledges, boulder-field and scree habitats of upland ridges and plateau.

Steeper ground and tall, north-facing mountain crags within the event area include locations known to support a number of extremely rare montane plant species. They include locations where specific ecological management and research has been underway for many years to ensure the survival of these plant species and of the unique high altitude vegetation and habitat of which they form an important component. An extensive programme of ecological restoration is underway within the Helvellyn massif and adjacent upland areas, largely under the direction of the John Muir Trust. This work is striving to reinstate a number of lost and depleted upland habitats, aiming to rehabilitate an area of great upland biodiversity potential. This work is also being undertaken to achieve wider benefits that include the management of flood risk in Glenridding village.

Many of the controls within the 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 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 Helvellyn 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 heather-dominated heath vegetation, wet acid grassland and patches of blanket bog, creating areas of local vulnerability to a concentration of trampling by Kong Mini Mountain Marathon competitors.

- Some of the less frequently visited parts of the event area are of importance for a number of upland wildlife species. In particular, these include both **ground nesting birds** and **cliff nesting birds**. As the Kong Mini Mountain Marathon event takes place towards the beginning of the upland breeding bird season it is extremely important that competitors take great care when passing through parts of the event area that lack existing paths and tracks to ensure that the risk of disturbance to nesting birds is avoided.
- **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.
- 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. The varied geology of the event area includes locations at high levels where base-rich bedrock is present. In these areas very distinctive, species-rich communities of arctic-alpine plant species comprise the montane grassland and heath vegetation. 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. Competitors crossing 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. Wherever possible, the need to access these features should be avoided. If competitors have no alternative but to negotiate low rock outcrops great care should be taken to minimise disturbance of ledge vegetation.
- The event area includes several **mountain tarns** that contribute to the upland biodiversity interest of the locality. This interest includes locations at tarn edges that provide important lake margin habitat assemblages. King Mini Mountain Marathon competitors should take care to avoid mountain tarn margins to avoid the risk of disturbing their biodiversity interest.
- 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 competitors at stream crossings, preferring the use of bridges and stepping stones to minimise bank disturbance when entering and climbing out of stream channels.