

KONG MINI MOUNTAIN MARATHON EVENTS 2017 KINDER EVENT – ECOLOGICAL BRIEFING NOTE

Kong Mini Mountain Marathon Events are located in northern England's most striking upland areas that often contain features of outstanding nature conservation 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 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 2017 Kinder 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 localized ecological disturbance.

The 2017 Kinder event area is located within an upland area of the Peak District National Park that has a wild heather moorland character. The event area is at the southern end of the Dark Peak Millstone Grit upland plateau, where south and west facing slopes grade from heather moorland at altitudes of 400 to 600 metres across enclosed hill pasture to more productive farmland of the lower Pennine edge.

The majority of the 2017 Kinder event area consists of land that is designated for its national and international nature conservation importance. Of particular ecological interest is the presence of extensive heather moorland vegetation on deep blanket peat that extends across the upland plateau landscape of the area. This combines with other upland vegetation types that include dry and wet heath, acid grassland and groundwater flush plant communities to create an area of outstanding upland nature conservation interest.

At higher altitudes, the event area includes relatively intact moorland vegetation. These areas also include extensive tracts of vegetation that have been adversely affected by atmospheric pollution from the towns and cities that enclose the Dark Peak uplands. The death of moorland vegetation within these areas has failed to prevent surface and gully erosion of the underlying deep peat substrates. As peat erosion threatens to significantly degrade the international nature conservation interest of the Dark Peak upland plateau the event area includes a number of locations where ecological restoration projects have been undertaken to rehabilitate moorland vegetation and help to stabilise the eroding peat surface.

The extent and variety of upland vegetation types within the event area contributes to the maintenance of internationally important breeding upland bird populations. These include Golden Plover, Curlew and Dunlin. Additional ornithological interest is provided by many of the rock outcrops that form part of the Dark Peak landscape that are used in particular as nesting habitat by Peregrine and Raven.

- **Dry acid grassland** is a widespread vegetation type on moorland plateau edges 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 fell running.
- Extensive areas of dry acid grassland within the event area can include **local patches of other upland vegetation** types such as blanket bog, wet heath and wet acid grassland. These can create areas of potential vulnerability to disturbance by a concentration of trampling by competitors on the Kinder event.
- **Patches of intact blanket bog** are important habitat features at several locations within the event area. Race controls have been carefully located to prevent the need for competitors to cross the most highly valued areas of blanket bog habitat within the event area. Where runners encounter smaller patches of intact blanket bog vegetation they should be avoided wherever possible. In situations where crossing **blanket bog** patches is unavoidable, route choices should try to follow strips and patches of better-drained moorland vegetation between areas of saturated peat. These typically provide areas of relatively robust vegetation that are more resistant to the trampling effects of running.

- Extensive **degraded blanket bog** areas are present at higher altitudes within the event area, where bog vegetation has been lost and deep peat erosion gulleys (peat hags) have formed. Disturbance of **degraded blanket bog** by runners churning through peat hags has the potential to trigger further peat erosion by destabilising the peat surface. **It is extremely important** that competitors refrain from crossing these areas and risk contributing to further degradation of peatland vegetation and destabilisation of underlying peat substrates.
- Many areas of degraded blanket bog within the event area are undergoing **peatland rehabilitation and ecological restoration**. In these areas peat erosion gulleys are being blocked with board dams to prevent further loss of peat by erosion from the moorland plateau. Kong event competitors should avoid areas with peat hags that contain board dams. The peat sediment that has been retained by the dams is being slowly colonised by moorland vegetation and the plants that are becoming established in these areas are highly vulnerable to disturbance from trampling.
- Within other **peatland rehabilitation and ecological restoration** heather seed, Sphagnum moss and moorland grasses have been applied to bare peat areas to encourage vegetation recovery. The parts of the event area are also vulnerable to trampling disturbance and should be avoided by Kong event competitors.
- Areas of **wet acid grassland** will be encountered at locations where groundwater emerges at the surface as seepages across more steeply sloping ground. Wet acid grassland and seepages can be 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.
- **Groundwater seepage vegetation** patches on steep ground can be difficult to avoid where they cross valuable contouring lines. These vegetation types are often located within shallow gulleys, re-entrant features or associated with ground level rock outcrops on steep slopes. Avoidance of these areas could involve a significant deviation from the desired contour level. Despite this, it would be ideal if damage to seepage zone vegetation could be minimised.
- On hillsides, soil movements within **dry and wet acid grassland** areas can develop well-defined micro-terrace systems, often referred to as sheep walks. 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 terraces to minimise grassland damage.
- Specialised **rock ledge plant communities** are present at a number of locations within the event area. If competitors need to negotiate low rock outcrops great care should be taken to minimise disturbance of ledge vegetation.
- The event area includes a number of **streams and rivers**, some of which are potentially vulnerable to ecological disturbance from repeated crossing by runners. Some of the watercourses within the event area could support wildlife species of nature conservation importance. 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, minimising bank disturbance when entering and climbing out of stream channels.
- The nature conservation value of **streams and rivers** within the event area can extend to include wetland habitat and vegetation types that have developed along the margins of these watercourses. To ensure that damage to these habitat and vegetation strips is minimised, runners handrailing streams and rivers should avoid following watercourse margin flood plain areas.