

West Pennine Moors becomes Largest Protected Wildlife Site in a Decade

One of the country's most precious landscapes has been given special legal protection for its nationally important wildlife and habitats. The West Pennine Moors is the largest new site of special scientific interest (SSSI) notified by Natural England since 2004, covering a total of 76 square kilometres between Chorley, Blackburn, Bolton and Haslingden in Lancashire and Greater Manchester.

This move reflects the national significance of the area and its combination of upland habitats, moorland fringe grasslands and woodland, which support an impressive array of breeding birds. Merlin, curlew, snipe, lapwing and redshank nest in the area and there are large breeding colonies of both black-headed and Mediterranean Gulls.

Natural England's Chief Executive, James Cross, said:

"This is a significant moment for the protection of wildlife across a wild and beautiful expanse of north-west England.

"Our upland landscapes provide vital wildlife habitats and clean water, reduce flood risk and bring enjoyment and a sense of well-being to millions of people."

The West Pennine Moors provide a dramatic backdrop to the surrounding towns and the wild, open spaces have been enjoyed by generations of locals and visitors alike. The hills also provide clean drinking water for thousands of households and their ability to store water plays a vital role in reducing flood risk in urban areas downstream.

Natural England will work with owners and land managers to continue to protect and enhance the wildlife importance of the area, whilst maximising the other benefits from the moors. This includes sensitive management of blanket bogs through careful grazing by cattle or sheep, and maintaining water levels at or around the surface of the peat to make sure the habitat is at its healthiest. Chorley Council owns a small area of land around Rivington Pike.