

County: Lancashire **Site Name:** Winmarleigh Moss
District: Lancaster, Wyre
Status: Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) notified under Section 28 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981.
Local Planning Authority: Lancaster City Council
Wyre Borough Council

National Grid Reference: SD 447480 **Area:** 89.96 (ha) 222.29 (ac)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50 000 102 **1:10 000** SD 44 NW, NE

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1979 **Date of Last Revision:** -

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1984 **Date of Last Revision:** 1991

Other Information:

The site boundary has been amended by an extension at the 1991 revision.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

Winmarleigh Moss is situated 5 km north-west of Garstang, at an altitude of 9 m AOD and is important as the largest area of lowland raised mire remaining in Lancashire. This habitat was formerly extensive on the coastal plains of Lancashire but is now rare, both within the county and nationally, due to peat extraction, agricultural reclamation and afforestation. The main vegetation types are heather and purple moor-grass dominated mire over deep peat, birch scrub and birch woodland. The site also supports a number of rare insect species.

Signs of former peat extraction exist in the form of outlines of peat cutting hollows and the system of grips (drains) but 2-3m depth of peat remains, the top layer of which is poorly humified. This has favoured regeneration and the survival of the characteristic mossland plants and animals, and although the effects of both internal and peripheral drains can be seen there is good potential for restoration of an actively growing raised mire.

The main body of the moss is dominated either by purple moor-grass *Molinia caerulea* or heather *Calluna vulgaris*, sometimes intermixed. In the wetter areas heather is commonly co-dominant with cross-leaved heath *Erica tetralix* and haretail cottongrass *Eriophorum vaginatum* with common cottongrass *Eriophorum angustifolium* occurring locally. Sphagnum (bogmoss) is widespread, particularly in the base of the grips, with the commonest species being *S. papillosum*, *S. subnitens*, *S. recurvum* and *S. tenellum*. Cranberry *Vaccinium oxycoccus* grows on the Sphagnum hummocks and lawns and is also widespread.

Winmarleigh Moss (cont...)

Another plant associated with Sphagnum, round-leaved sundew *Drosera rotundifolia*, is scattered throughout the site, as is bog myrtle *Myrica gale*. Bog rosemary *Andromeda polifolia*, a nationally scarce species, occurs throughout the site but is more common in the southern part of the SSSI, where it sometimes forms large patches.

Drainage associated with peat cutting and the surrounding agricultural ditches has led to the drying out of the edges of the moss and subsequent encroachment of birch scrub. In places this has developed into mature birch woodland with an understorey of bramble *Rubus fruticosus* and broad buckler-fern *Dryopteris dilatata*.

Crawley's Dyke, an ancient boundary ditch, crosses the centre of the site. In places the growth of vegetation within it has blocked the flow of water allowing pools to develop and providing a breeding place for dragonflies and other insects including the local black darter dragonfly.

Winmarleigh Moss is also important for the range of invertebrates it supports. These include over 90 species of butterflies and moths, several of which are nationally rare, and 40 species of Diptera (flies). This is the only Lancashire site for the rare bog bush cricket and the moss holds the best populations in the county of the uncommon large heath butterfly.

Some of the adjacent agricultural grassland has been included within the site for hydrological reasons.