

## **First nature reserve for rare bog butterfly**

Wester Moss near the village of Fallin, Stirling has been declared the first reserve in the UK for the rare Large Heath Butterfly.

The Large Heath Butterfly is a bog specialist that lives on peatlands that support its food plant, Hare's-tail Cottongrass. The butterfly is still widespread on the blanket bogs of north and west Scotland, but in the rest of the UK is confined to lowland raised bogs (or 'mosses'), which have been cut over in the past for fuel, but are now extracted for horticultural peat.

The reserve is a partnership project between Butterfly Conservation Scotland, Stirling Council and the local community. The 30 hectare site is already designated as nationally important (a Site of Special Scientific Interest) due to it being a Lowland Raised Bog, a very scarce and declining habitat, nearly 90% of its former area having been lost in Scotland.

Wester Moss is suffering from past drainage and the encroachment of scrub, both of which act to dry out the site. This is bad news for the plants that live on the bog that depend on the damp conditions. For several years the Stirling Council Countryside Ranger Service has been undertaking work on the Moss, but now that Butterfly Conservation is involved, extra funding opportunities are available. Stirling Council Ranger Jennifer Davidson said; "It is fantastic that we have managed to work together to get Wester Moss adopted as a Butterfly Conservation reserve, which will not only benefit the butterflies and the bog, but also visitors from near and far".

Butterfly Conservation and Stirling Council recently held their first joint workparty on the site when local volunteers came along to help remove seedlings. Work later in the year will include the blocking of ditches with plastic sheeting and the removal of more self-seeded Birch, Pine and Rhododendron.

Alex Hogg Butterfly Conservation's Community Participation Officer says: "This reserve is an exciting opportunity to get more local people involved in conservation work and enjoy the benefits of having such a unique reserve on their doorstep. Get in touch with us if you would like to help".

The Moss is also a very valuable and tranquil 'green space', enjoyed by local people, and is adjacent to Polmaise Colliery bing, an area of coal waste that has now been colonised by a wide variety of plants and insects, which is very popular with families and dog-walkers. Wester Moss is also home to rare plant species such as Bog Rosemary and Cranberry, rare moths and other animals such as Brown Hare, Treecreeper and Barn Owl.

Local Fallin resident Bob Dawson said; "The Moss is a very special place and right on our doorstep. Stepping onto the Moss you feel you are stepping further back in time from the rich mining history of the area. On a sunny summer day the Moss is buzzing with activity - you can discover lots of stuff, from carnivorous plants to wonderful butterflies and moths."

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### Contacts

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### Images

Large Heath butterfly on Wester Moss (credit Paul Kirkland).

More images are available from [ahogg@butterfly-conservation.org](mailto:ahogg@butterfly-conservation.org) or [pkirkland@butterfly-conservation.org](mailto:pkirkland@butterfly-conservation.org)

### Notes for Editors

- The **Large Heath** (*Coenonympha tullia*) is our only bog specialist butterfly. The caterpillars can even survive short periods underwater. The best time to visit to see the Large Heath Butterflies is late June/early July.
- The Large Heath is a **UK Biodiversity Action Plan species**, and is disappearing throughout the UK. The latest data we have is that the decline is continuing with a 20% loss of range in Scotland (and the UK) over the last 10 years.
- Butterfly Conservation is the largest insect conservation charity in Europe with 15,000 members in the UK, and over 1,000 in Scotland. Its aim is the conservation of butterflies, moths and their habitats. It runs conservation programmes on over 60 threatened species of butterfly and moth and manages over 30 nature reserves. Further information [www.butterfly-conservation.org](http://www.butterfly-conservation.org)
- In Scotland Butterfly Conservation receives grant-aid from Scottish Natural Heritage to support volunteers who collect data, provide advice to landowners and others, and promote the conservation of butterflies, moths and their habitats. [www.butterflyconservation.org/scotland](http://www.butterflyconservation.org/scotland)

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