

# Discover Portlethen Moss



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### What is Portlethen Moss?

Portlethen Moss consists of a mosaic of habitats including remnants of raised bog, dry heath, gorse, wet scrub, grassland and areas of planted trees.

### Raised bogs

Raised bogs are formed in wet conditions which are too nutrient poor, waterlogged or acidic for rotting organisms to work properly. Hence the plant material does not decompose properly but forms peat. Sphagnum mosses are a major component of raised bogs as they can survive on very little nourishment. They also absorb rain, thus keeping the conditions waterlogged. Sphagnum mosses grow from the tip and die down below but as they do not decompose properly the layers of peat forming below gradually raise up the surface of the bog.

Portlethen Moss has been modified over the years by peat cutting which is the cutting of blocks of peat from below the living plant layer and drying it for fuel. You can still see the lower lying rectangular areas on the Moss where the peat was cut. The Moss has also been drained for housing. Since 1970 the Moss area has reduced in size by more than half. All of this has changed its character but fortunately we are still left with a landscape rich in wildlife.

### What you can see on the Moss

Different areas of the Moss have different specialities, plants and animals adapted to survive in sometimes inhospitable habitats.

Sundews (1) are insect eating plants found in the boggy acidic areas. The leaves are covered in sticky hairs which trap insects to add nutrients to the plant's diet. Common cotton-grass, also found in the wetter areas, relies on large air filled cells in its roots and leaf bases to survive in the oxygen poor environment, while the single fluffy headed hare's tail cotton-grass (3) is found on drier tussocks.

In summer, throughout the grassy areas on the Moss you may see the distinctive heath spotted orchids (4) followed by the pale violet and sometimes white pincushion shaped flowers of devil's-bit scabious (5).

The wetter areas are ideal for newts and frogs which are often seen as tadpoles in the spring. Occasionally you may get a glimpse of a dipper characteristically bobbing up and down on the stones in the burn.

The dry heath is home to heather, grasses and the dainty climbing corydalis and is surrounded by gorse which provides song posts and nest sites for many of the birds you may see on the Moss including dunnock, tits and the less common yellowhammer.

Other birds you may see or hear include bullfinches with their distinctive red and black colouring, reed buntings, meadow pipits and our summer migrants willow warblers, and chiff chaffs.

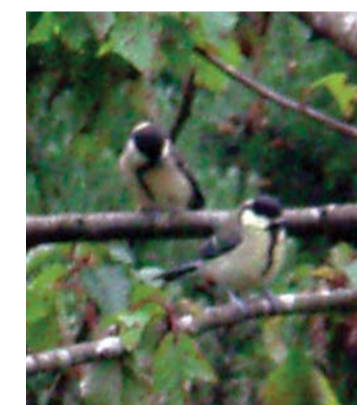
Roe deer are a common sight in the early morning or evening if you are quiet. All over the Moss you may see some of our varied invertebrate life including the butterfly and caterpillars pictured here.

Throughout the year there is always something to discover on the moss. Bog asphodel (2), a pretty yellow flower found in the wetter areas, turns completely orange and even in the winter there are greens, oranges and wine reds of the sphagnum mosses.

The lichens on the trees, a sure sign of clean air, can now be clearly seen.

There is also a chance of seeing snipe, a winter visitor, flying up as you walk along the path.

The Moss is a unique amenity. It is a sensitive area which is easily damaged, especially by dumping garden waste. This is your Moss, please enjoy it and look after it.



With support from Aberdeenshire Council, Scottish Natural Heritage and Forestry Commission Scotland we have been able to make improvements to some of the paths on the Moss. A loop has been created providing access so everyone can come in and enjoy the site, young or old, able or less able and especially those in wheelchairs. A longer loop does exist but in some areas it gets very boggy, so footwear should be chosen with care. Areas of gorse have been removed in some places, to encourage heather to grow and, in others, to allow the planting of more native trees.

Our aim is to preserve the Moss and look after this piece of wilderness in Portlethen for posterity.

For those people who are interested in further information, or want to help at future events such as clean ups and litter removal, there is a local group dedicated to maintaining the Moss. Contact details can be found at our website

[www.portlethen-moss.org.uk](http://www.portlethen-moss.org.uk)

Thank you for visiting. We hope you have enjoyed it and seen lots of interesting things, although please leave them for future visitors! If you do see something remarkable, take a photo and e-mail it to us. We may add it to the website, complete with your name (if you wish)! Please help to keep the Moss litter free by taking your rubbish away with you and using the dog waste bins if required.



**Key**  
 Rough path  
 Constructed path  
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