

Discover Portlethen Moss



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 and acidic for decomposing organisms to work properly. Hence the plant material doesn't 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. They grow from the tip and die down below but as they don't 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 – cutting the 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) it has also been drained for housing and reduced in size (since the 1970's the Moss area has been reduced by more than half) all of which have changed its character but, fortunately, we are left with a landscape rich in wildlife.



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

Over the years, Portlethen Moss has considerably declined in size. This is mainly due to pressures from housebuilders who require more and more area to build yet more homes. While it may be desirable to increase the number of homes in Portlethen, it has become more and more worrying to lose so much of the Moss to this. The Moss is a unique local amenity! Looking back to maps of the region from the early 1970's it can be seen that the area was more than double what it is now.



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 (top left) are insectivorous 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 **Hares' tail cotton grass**, (shown above) is found on dryer tussocks.

Throughout the grassy areas on the moss, in summer, you may see the distinctive **Heath spotted orchids**, top right, followed by the pale violet and sometimes white pincushion shaped flowers of **Devil's bit scabious**, (see above.)

The wetter areas are ideal for **newts** and **frogs**, often seen as **tadpoles** in the spring, and occasionally you may get a glimpse of a **dipper** characteristically bobbing up and down on 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 the many birds you may see on the moss including **dunnocks**, **tits** and the less common **yellowhammers**.

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

Roe deer are a common sight in the early morning or evening if you are quiet and all over you may see some of our varied invertebrate life including some shown in the pictures here.

Throughout the year the moss is never quiet; in autumn **Bog asphodel**, a pretty yellow flower, (top left,) found in the wetter areas turns completely orange and even in the winter there are the greens, oranges and wine reds of the **sphagnum mosses**. The **lichens** on the trees are easier to see (a sure sign of clean air) and there is even the chance of a **snipe**, a winter visitor, flying up as you walk along the path.



Historically, Portlethen Moss was used for Peat Cutting – a valuable resource for centuries!



Most years there are **Aberdeenshire Council Ranger Service** led events, such as Bug Hunts or Moths on the Moss – check the council website for details.

For those people who are interested in further information, or want to help at future events (such as clean-ups / 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

Thank you for visiting – we hope you have enjoyed it and seen lots of interesting items – although please leave them for future visitors! If you do see something remarkable, take a photo and email it to us; we will probably add it to the website, complete with your name!. Please help keep the Moss litter free by taking your rubbish away with you and using the dog waste bins if required.

In the latter half of 2007, with the help of WIAT (Woodlands In and About Towns) funding, improvements were made to some of the path system; what were previously unofficial grassy paths were made far more substantial and "weatherproof" – a loop was 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 does get very boggy – so footwear should be chosen with care.

Ultimately, our aim is to make the moss a local nature reserve and thus look after this piece of wilderness in Portlethen for posterity.

