

Phytophthora pseudosyringae, Roaches fell race and the Leek Moors SSSI, SAC, SPA



The Leek Moors SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest), Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and Special Protection Area (SPA) are nationally and internationally important for wildlife. They represent an extensive tract of semi-natural upland and upland fringe vegetation typical of this part of the Southern Pennines and support several plants and animals at the southern limit of their English distribution. Associated with this vegetation and the prevailing traditional livestock farming is an outstanding assemblage of upland breeding birds. At the Roaches this vegetation is dry and wet heath and blanket bog.

The land is currently at risk from Phytophthora, soil or water-borne fungus-like pathogens which can cause widespread damage and death in a variety of trees and shrubs. *Phytophthora pseudosyringae* has been identified on the Roaches particularly on parts of Roaches moor, Nicker Pits and Back Forest wood. Here the disease is affecting bilberry *Vaccinium myrtillus* which is an important component of each of the habitats for which the SSSI is so important.

Phytophthora pseudosyringae is spread by two main methods 1. By transmission through the roots of infected plants into adjacent healthy plants. 2. by water droplets that can be transferred between plants by either people or animals brushing against infected plants.

Natural England is trying to discover more about the disease through research and monitoring and it is hoped that this will inform future management and consenting future events on sites affected by the disease.

Natural England regulates activities on protected sites such as the Leek Moors on a precautionary basis. Where activities are not essential for a sites management these are permitted where it is known that there will not be a significant effect on the protected sites as a result of the activity. The Roaches fell race will include up to 150 and the normal route covers some of the most intensively infected parts of the site. Whilst Natural England and the National Park Authority has not closed these routes to members of the public, we cannot be certain that large numbers of people moving quickly through the site will not exacerbate the situation. Large numbers of people are less likely to stick to the paths and therefore more likely to pick up and spread the disease. We hope that by making a small change to the route of the course Mow Cop Runners and the competitors in the Roaches fell race are able to enjoy the race whilst minimising the likelihood of damaging the site through increasing the spread of the disease.

As fell runners are likely to go from the Roaches to run in other parts of the country which may not be infected with this disease we are asking that you disinfect your footwear today and wash your running kit at 60 degrees when you get home. This is the only way of killing the spores on clothing and preventing the spread of the disease across other important habitats. I have washed my running club vest at 60 degrees and can report that there were no detrimental effects.

Thank you for your cooperation.