



MEDIA RELEASE

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CLIMATE CHANGE THREATENS RARE MOUNTAIN HABITAT

Research by the conservation charity, the National Trust for Scotland, at Ben Lawers National Nature Reserve (NNR) has shown that one of the most extreme habitats in Scotland is under threat from climate change.

Snow beds, areas where snow lies late and deep far into the spring, typically occur above 600m asl on the sloping headwalls of shaded corries. Few plants can tolerate such prolonged periods of snow cover but specialised plants including bryophytes, mosses and liverworts, have adapted to survive in these conditions.

Thanks to the range of unusual habitats which occur on Ben Lawers NNR, an exceptional variety of these rare species are found in this location. Over 300 species have been recorded, almost one third of the British total - including many rarities which makes the reserve of national importance.

Dr Oliver Moore, an expert bryologist, recently revisited high altitude study areas, set up in 2008 and 2010. He recorded a decline in several species of liverworts which grow together to form a black mat characteristic of these patches. There were increases in some commoner mosses, such as *Racomitrium*, and of grasses - suggesting shorter periods of snow cover. With longer growing seasons, these more robust plants may out-compete the specialised bryophytes.

Helen Cole, Senior Ranger Naturalist for the National Trust for Scotland at Ben Lawers NNR, said:

“This habitat could well be one of the most vulnerable at Ben Lawers, as a changing climate leads to shorter and more erratic periods of snow cover. Whilst continued monitoring will track changes in vegetation, the Trust must consider whether there are management techniques which could conserve these rare plants communities.”

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Images: <https://www.flickr.com/gp/133918740@N04/G4r95Z>

Editor's Notes:

About National Trust for Scotland

The National Trust for Scotland is the conservation charity that over 90 years has saved, maintained and shared many of the country's most loved places, rich with history, heritage, nature and culture. The charity celebrates Scotland's heritage and with more than 100 places in its care, there's a place for everyone to love.

The National Trust for Scotland relies on the support of its members and donors to carry out its important work of caring for the natural and built heritage that people from Scotland and across the world all love, ensuring its future for everyone to enjoy.

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