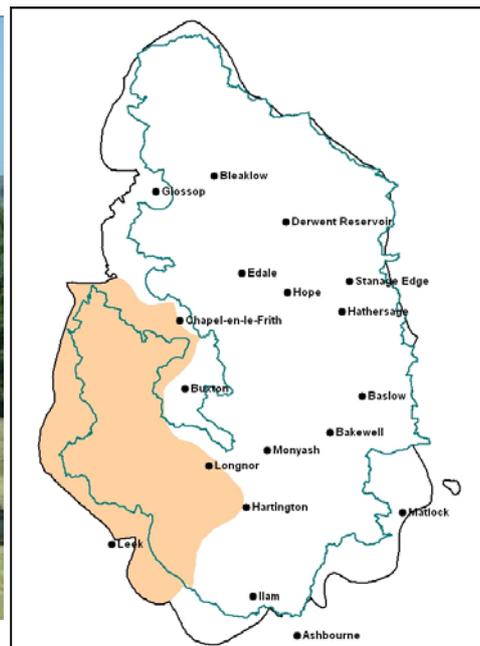


# THE SOUTH WEST PEAK



The South West Peak supports a similar range of habitats to the Dark Peak, but generally in a much more intimate mosaic. The largest expanses of blanket bog and upland heathland occur around the Goyt Valley and Axe Edge. To the south of Axe Edge the landscape comprises moorland on the hilltops and upper slopes in a mosaic with rush-pasture, hay meadows and more improved grasslands on the lower hillsides and valley bottoms. This pattern can be seen, for example, along the main ridges which dominate the area such as the [Roaches](#), Morridge, Lum Edge and the Ipstones Ridge. In some areas, particularly in Cheshire, continuous grazing over many years has led to replacement of the hilltop moorland by rough acid grassland.



Towards the eastern and western edges of the area the land is more intensively farmed. It is the intimate mosaic of habitats in particular which contribute to the character and wildlife interest of the area. Moorland edge species like [curlew](#), dependent on both moorland and adjacent farmland, are particularly characteristic.

The moorlands are generally lower lying than most of the Dark Peak moors, comprising smaller blocks of blanket bog and heathland. Bilberry is abundant on some moors, as at Back Forest, and provides an important nectar source for the [bilberry bumblebee](#)

which is dependent on a mosaic of moorland and flower-rich grasslands. The moorlands also provide some of the most southerly sites in Britain for arctic or northern species such as cloudberry and the rare rove beetle *Atheta arctica*. Rock outcrops include the dramatic crags of the Roaches and Ramshaw Rocks; and the Killarney fern, a species of global conservation concern, occurs at one site. Areas of wet heath can be found locally, particularly in lower-lying moorland basins. Such habitat, which is rare outside the UK, is the only remaining site in the Peak District for the delicate lesser butterfly orchid. A wide range of moorland flushes (spring-fed wetlands) occur, supporting plants like marsh valerian, greater tussock sedge, marsh hawksbeard, bottle sedge and [bog asphodel](#). Small areas of willow scrub are a particular feature of some moorlands and these can be rich in wetland plants.

The rivers and streams of the area generally comprise fast-flowing upland streams with the largest of these being the rivers Goyt and Dane. These provide an important habitat for aquatic and bankside invertebrates, whilst some of the reservoirs support nationally scarce mosses and local plants such as shoreweed on the drawdown zones.





The largest blocks of woodland in the area are the extensive [plantations](#) (mainly coniferous) around the Macclesfield Forest and Goyt Valley reservoirs. The former include fragments of clough woodland with relic populations of bay willow, aspen and bird cherry. Elsewhere semi-natural woodland is generally scarce, but with important concentrations along the Dane Valley near Danebridge and the Shell Brook near Wincle. Buzzards have recolonised several of these woodlands in the South West Peak and both pied flycatchers and wood warblers occur.

The enclosed grasslands of the South West Peak tend to be rather more varied than those of the Dark Peak, with a greater concentration of rush-pasture and hay meadows in particular. The wetter and more botanically rich [rush-pastures](#) are another example of a habitat which is rare outside the UK. The large expanses of this habitat in the South West Peak are of particular importance for breeding birds such as snipe, curlew, [lapwing](#) and reed bunting. In addition to the breeding birds, the plantlife can be diverse, with local species including bogbean and marsh cinquefoil. Some of the hay meadows in the area are intermediate between those typical of lowland Britain and the very rare upland type of meadow found in the Yorkshire Dales.



Great burnet and lady's mantle are characteristic of these meadows, whilst the uncommon [melancholy thistle](#) and [marsh orchids](#) can be found locally. Up until the late 1970s this was the habitat of the corncrake, a globally threatened bird which declined substantially in Britain during the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The richest pastures support flower-rich swards with plants such as mountain pansy, adders tongue fern and the extraordinary miniature fern [moonwort](#). The importance of acid grasslands for fungi is also increasingly being recognised.



## THE SOUTH WEST PEAK