Moorland gripping is the practice of digging ditches to drain wet areas of heath and blanket bog. Gripping was a practice particularly widespread in the northern uplands in the 1960s to the mid 1980s, often encouraged by grant aid. The use of drainage ditches on Exmoor and Dartmoor was also common. Changes to the hydrological management of upland habitats can be detrimental to the characteristic vegetation and species of the uplands, as well as increasing the risk of soil erosion and flash flooding. Grip blocking can help to restore natural drainage patterns, encourage re-vegetation, reduce erosion, and minimise the knock-on effect of hydrological change downstream.

**BENEFITS FOR WILDLIFE**

**Grip blocking helps restore a characteristic community of plants**

Blocking grips will raise the water level to at, or near, the soil surface, encouraging the colonisation of sphagnum and other specialist plant species, for example bog asphodel, cloudberry, bog orchid and sundew. Blanket bogs and other mire vegetation communities are of significant conservation value.

**Grip blocking can provide important feeding habitat for birds**

The wet flushes created by blocking grips can increase invertebrate numbers, which provide a valuable food source for grouse chicks as well as wading birds, such as curlews, snipe, lapwings and golden plovers. Cranefly (leatherjackets) and chironomid larvae are particularly important for foraging chicks.
HOW CAN I BENEFIT WILDLIFE WITH GRIP BLOCKING?

OBJECTIVES OF GRIP BLOCKING

- Restoring natural drainage patterns.
- Encouraging re-vegetation of the bog surface.
- Blocking eroding grips.
- Blocking active grips that are maintaining themselves.
- Blocking grips adjacent to in-bye pasture can provide damp pasture beneficial for breeding wading birds. Water run-off from gripped moors can lead to flash flooding on the in-bye, which can be detrimental to ground-nesting birds and also lead to a temporary loss of grazing.
- Agri-environment schemes can fund this type of management. You can get further information on this and other ways of managing your farm for wildlife from: Agricultural Adviser, The RSPB, UK Headquarters, The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire SG19 2DL. Tel: 01767 680551

These objectives are achieved by:

- Non-structural change to ground.