

Author's response

In the text below, the authors respond to the comments given by both referees. The comments of the referee are given as plain text, while the authors response is given in *italic*. Line numbers are added between brackets to indicate where in the revised manuscript changes were made in comparison to the original version.

Referee 1: anonymous

Comments

Although the manuscript could be published in its present form, I recommend a minor revision to make reported results reproducible and to clarify the concept of the work. Below are my reflections that authors might find useful as a source of ideas for improving the manuscript. Are this data available from authors? Or is there any plan to make these data open for re-use? I recommend to add a brief section about data availability if authors are planning to make data open or available under some conditions.

It is the intention of the authors to make the soil coring dataset (i.e. coordinates of soil corings and stratigraphy) available by adding the data to the article as supplementary material. A section "Data availability" was added at the end of the manuscript to direct the reader to the repository of the datasets. In total, two datasets are added, namely a list of all soil corings, including their location, elevation and measured peat thickness. A second dataset gives the detailed description of each soil coring.

Which numerical method did authors use for solving the Eq (1)? I recommend to add a phrase directing a reader to the article where the numerical method used for solving the Eq (1) is described.

The numeric scheme used to discretize the Boussinesq equation consists of a first-order upwind finite difference scheme for the advection component and a forward in time – centred in space finite difference scheme for the diffusion component. This numerical method is, for instance, well described in Campforts & Govers 2015 (Campforts, B. & Govers, G., Keeping the edge: A numerical method that avoids knickpoint smearing when solving the stream power law., Journal of Geophysical Research: Earth Surface, 2015). The manuscript was updated to add this reference (lines 154 – 156).

It seems to me that the changes in hillslope topography resulted from peat accumulation do not affect the water storage ($S(x)$) given by Eq (1), because this equation takes into account only the bedrock slope

($i(x)$) which is not affected by peat accumulation. If my understanding is correct, then $S(x)$ is the maximum water storage that could be achieved under given climatic conditions and the bedrock slope ($i(x)$).

The model used by authors is based on the concept of impeded drainage [1-3] suggesting that geomorphological conditions (i.e. bedrock slope) determine the maximum peat depth under given climatic conditions. Therefore, it would be interesting to see if there is a significant correlation between the measured peat depth (averaged over the transect) and the bedrock slope (averaged over the transect). The lack of significant correlation may suggest that the observed range of variations in the bedrock slope does not lead to a dramatic difference in the S (averaged over the transect).

There is indeed a relationship between the bedrock slope and the peat thickness measurements both for the individual coring locations as for the mean values per transect (see figures below). There is a clear decrease in the maximum observed peat thickness with increasing bedrock slope, or, thick peat layers cannot be found on steeper slopes. However, the large scatter indicates that thin peat layers or even the absence of a peat cover can be found for all slope values. A section was added to the manuscript (lines 303 – 311) to elaborate on this issue.

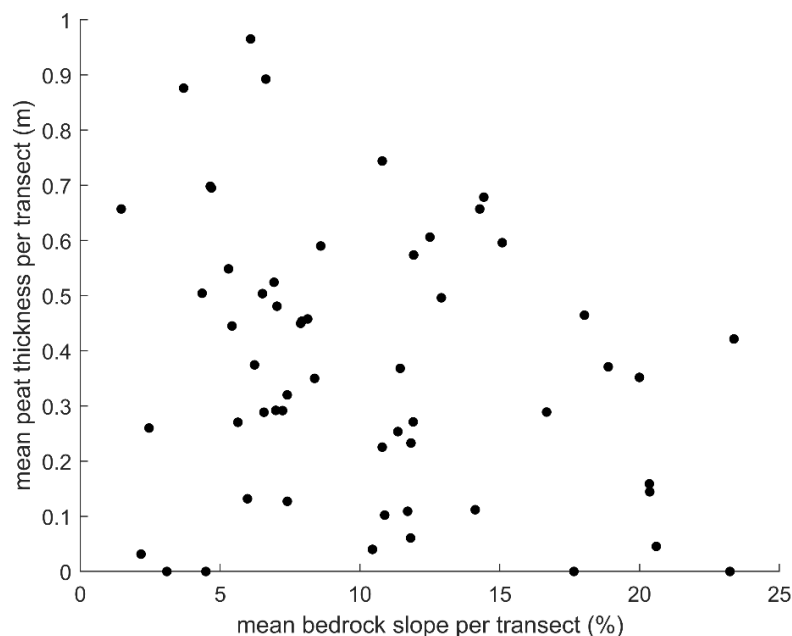


Figure 1: Scatterplot of the mean peat thickness per hillslope transect as a function of the mean bedrock slope per hillslope transect.

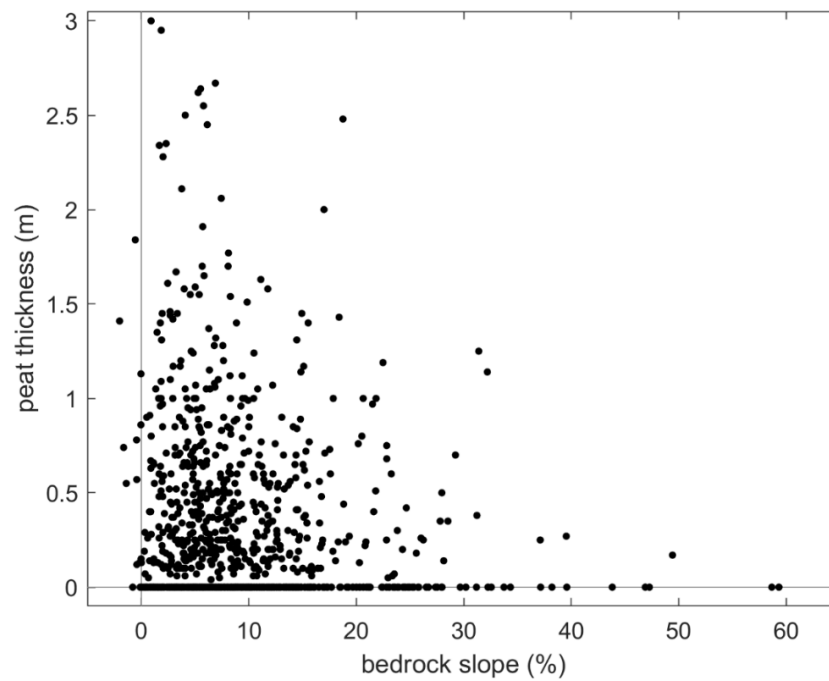


Figure 2: Scatterplot of the measured peat thickness per coring location as a function of the bedrock slope.

Suggested references by the referee

[1] Ingram, H.A.P.: Size and shape in raised mire ecosystems: a geophysical model. *Nature* 297, 300–303, 1982.

[2] Clymo, R. S.: The Limits to Peat Bog Growth, *Philos. Trans. R. Soc. B Biol. Sci.*, 303(1117), 605–654, doi:10.1098/rstb.1984.0002, 1984.

[3] Alexandrov, G. A., Brovkin, V. A. and Kleinen, T.: The influence of climate on peatland extent in Western Siberia since the Last Glacial Maximum, *Sci. Rep.*, 6, doi:10.1038/srep24784, 2016.

The authors thank the reviewer for suggesting additional literature. These references provide useful information and were included in the manuscript.

Referee 2: Andreas Heinemeyer.

Comments

This study is an interesting one. It tackles an important issue, our ability to model and predict how blanket bog peatlands evolved and (based on their current C balance) could behave under future climate change. It also highlights the limitation of peatlands to sequester carbon in the long-term: as the C balance of input vs decomposition decreases over time, the ability for net sequestration is limited. This issue is often overlooked and needs to be highlighted.

The authors could have added a few more modelling studies which already highlighted this issue (i.e. Heinemeyer et al., 2010; Froking et al., 2010) – plenty of peatland development models show an asymptotic C accumulation over time, leveling off during the past few thousand years. However, this depends on the peatland conditions (climate and topography). A bit more context in the introduction and discussion would be beneficial.

It was not the intention of the authors to give a full overview of the existing long-term peatland models and their advantages and disadvantages. Therefore, we referred to articles where this overview is given. However, we agree that this results in a short and maybe incomplete introduction to the literature on peatland modelling which might leave the reader with some unanswered questions.

As a result, some changes were made to the manuscript to elaborate on the available studies dealing with the long-term modelling of (blanket) peatlands and give a short overview of the existing models (lines 48 – 62). For a detailed description of the models however, we refer to other articles to avoid a long and heavy manuscript (lines 49 – 50).

The asymptotic behaviour of the carbon accumulation curve at millennial timescales is indeed an important result of this article. A paragraph was added to the discussion to elaborate on the long-term carbon storage potential of peatlands and compare it to other studies as mentioned by the referee (lines 488 – 492).

Although the model is interesting there are a few points I raise (also see below). One important, related aspect is the recreated past climate. I do not think that the anomalies for temperature or rainfall are capturing past changes. Just think about the little ice age/medieval warm period etc. Maybe consider Heinemeyer et al., 2010 and Morris et al., 2015 for some UK specific reconstructions. 8 mm difference in monthly rainfall seem somewhat meaningless. Also, the initial warming impact and wetting at the onset of the warming about 12k ya should be more pronounced. I suggest you consider some specific literature (although I acknowledge that actually data on this is not that easy to come by). I think the issue is mainly in using a large scale model output – actually differences are lost (same as when averaging current climate

over large grid scales). I suggest you discuss this limitation in the light of the above concerns and publications.

The authors agree that the climate reconstructions used in this article have their disadvantages, but quantitative climate data spanning the entire Holocene period are difficult to come by. In this study we use a pollen-based climate reconstruction which provides mean annual temperature and mean monthly precipitation anomalies for the past 12 000 years at a 1° x 1° spatial resolution and a 500-year temporal resolution (Mauri et al., 2015). Note that the UK specific reconstructions by Morris et al 2015 are also largely based on continental-scale gridded climate reconstructions such as those by Mauri et al 2015 which we used. UK specific reconstructions used by Heinemeyer et al 2010 are based on palaeoclimate records from the US and China and updated with present-day UK climate data. Hence, the UK specific reconstructions the referee is referring to are also not relying on UK-based palaeoclimate data. Furthermore, the Mauri dataset was rescaled to a 50m resolution gridded dataset by taking into account local orographic effects using meteorological data from 7 stations in the vicinity of the study area. Local information on climate is thus also used to finetune the palaeoclimate records and to increase the spatial variability that is not present in the continental-scale datasets. At present, we have no indications that one climate reconstruction is better than the other.

In the revised manuscript, a few lines were added on the possible limitations and drawbacks of using these continental-scale climate reconstructions and to compare the used climate reconstruction method with other long-term peatland modelling studies (lines 187 – 207).

Moreover, the lack of a link between runoff and erosion within a hill slope context seems very odd to me. I suggest you consider this but maybe I have missed something in the methods. I just cannot find a link – which is crucial to allow slope C accumulation (which is not only decomposition [water table x temperature] driven). But your calibration will lead to overcompensation because of an important C flux process missing in your overall C budget.

The erosion of peat is indeed not included in the model. This does not mean that the phenomenon of peatland erosion is not present in the study area. At multiple locations, erosion features can be detected on the hillslopes. However, we decided not to include this process for a couple of reasons. Firstly, the erosional features observed within the study area cover a range of processes including sheet erosion, gullies, shallow mass movements, etc. This would complicate the model in correctly representing these different processes in a correct way. Secondly, the erosion of peatlands is a complex process with an entire body of literature dealing with this issue. The erosion equation as used by Heinemeyer et al 2010 predicts erosion of TOC in function of runoff depth and water table depth. This is a simple approach that neglects the variety in erosion processes observed. As we know from wealth of studies on erosion of mineral soils, erosion equations differ widely for sheet and rill erosion compared to gully erosion and various types of mass movement. At present, and to the authors knowledge, no comprehensive peat erosion model exists that can cover all peat erosion processes and that is easy to implement in a long-term peatland growth

model. As a result, we chose not to implement this process in the model since it would increase model complexity, increase the calculation time and a proper calibration would be nearly impossible due to the large number of parameters that need to be calibrated (in case all types of erosion processes would be simulated). Several erosion and hydrological modelling studies have shown that reducing model complexity is needed to reduce model uncertainties (e.g. Rompaey, A. J. V., & Govers, G. (2002). Data quality and model complexity for regional scale soil erosion prediction. International Journal of Geographical Information Science, 16(7), 663-680 or Jetten, V., Govers, G., & Hessel, R. (2003). Erosion models: quality of spatial predictions. Hydrological processes, 17(5), 887-900.).

We are aware that as a consequence, the calibrated decomposition rate as found during the model calibration procedure will be higher because it will encompass other processes (such as erosion) which remove peat mass from a certain location. A paragraph was added to the manuscript to clarify this issue and the resulting effect on the calibration process and model output (lines 59 – 62 and 421 – 432).

This previous point also relates to the possible issue that underlying bedrock slope might not relate directly to peat surface slope (depressions) – another reviewer already made a comment on this. Would be nice to see a comparison in this respect.

This comment was discussed in the answer to reviewer 1. The field data indicate a clear relationship between the bedrock slope and the peat thickness. Additionally, the relationship between the surface slope and the bedrock slope shows to be consistent with most gridpoints clustering close to the 1:1 line (see figure below). This scatterplot indicates that the observed range in slope values strongly exceeds the possible differences between the bedrock slope and the surface slope at a certain location. Hence, it demonstrates that the use of bedrock slope in the model (and thus, not adjusting the topographic slope when peat accumulates) is not likely to lead to a bias in modelled peat thicknesses. A paragraph was added to the results section to elaborate on this issue (lines 303 – 311).

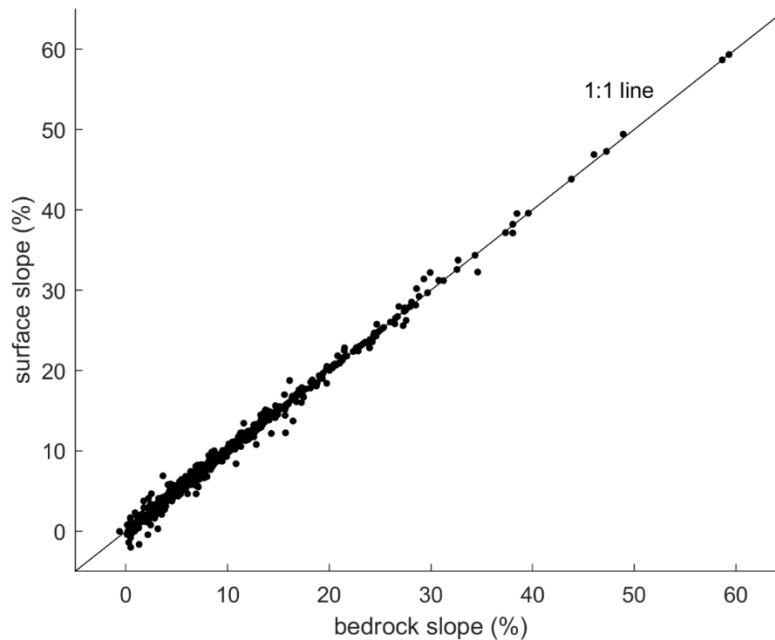


Figure 1: Scatterplot of the surface slope and bedrock slope (in percent) for all coring locations.

Very interesting to see such a high level of heather domination over time. Also the hill slope data are of general interest. Are those data to be made available? I suggest a section and/or doi for the data.

The authors plan to make the hillslope data available by adding the data to the manuscript as supplementary material (see also our response to referee 1).

The raw data of some of the pollen cores used in the REVEALS analysis can be found in the open-source European Pollen Database (EPD) (Birks, 1969 & Huntley, 1994). The authors are planning to add the pollen data from Hunter, 2016 to the EPD as well. For the three remaining pollen cores used in the analysis, permission was granted by the original author (Paterson, 2011). The use of the EPD is also mentioned in the acknowledgements.

The underlying bedrock is impermeable (drainage). In most cases it is, and that will likely affect water tables during dry periods. They do have hydraulic conductivity and porosity... but in line 147 you mention that the mineral layer has been assigned a hydraulic conductivity. Explain and be consistent throughout the manuscript.

All simulations start with a situation where there is an impermeable bedrock covered by a layer of mineral material, representing the glacial till deposits, which does have a porosity and hydraulic conductivity value.

Over time, when organic matter keeps accumulating in the mineral layer and a threshold is exceeded, peat starts to form on top of this mineral layer. This means that at the start of the simulation, all gridpoints have two layers (bedrock and a mineral layer) and that throughout the simulation, some gridpoints can develop a third layer (peat) if the right conditions are available.

The authors made sure that the paragraphs dealing with the model domain and the subsurface representation in the model are consistent in terminology to avoid confusion and possible misinterpretations. Some changes were made to this section (lines 134 – 137).

The hydrology model just assumes that the water table depth is 'always' near the surface. This is not true. I bet in 2018 the water tables even in deeper and normally wet Scottish blanket bog went down to 30 cm or even more.

This is not entirely the case. Indeed, the difference in saturated hydraulic conductivity between the acrotelm and catotelm within the peat profile will affect the water table behaviour but does not necessarily mean that the water table is located at this boundary. Some locations will be almost fully water saturated for most of the time while others will have a water table which is located much lower in the peat profile. For example, for the year 2010, which is the end date for the simulations, the calibrated thickness of the acrotelm is 10 centimetres while the mean water table depth is 22.3 centimetres below the surface. The water table dynamics are influenced by the difference in hydraulic conductivity, but also by the hillslope topography, which indicates the importance of 2D-simulations of blanket peatlands. This was clarified in the discussion section (lines 398 – 400).

Litter input and quality (NPP) are affected by both, temperature and precipitation (Lieth's equation). It is a bit odd to use the Moor House equation, which is purely temperature based. Maybe provide a critical assessment of doing so. Particularly the role of trees in peat depend on the water table depth (trees evaporate a lot and can cause shrinkage and decomposition of peat – but the understanding about this is still somewhat limited). Maybe consider recent publications on Scottish afforested bog by Sloan et al (with the late Richard Payne as his supervisor).

The model does indeed calculate NPP based on an empirical relationship between NPP and the mean annual temperature using the Moor House dataset. There are a couple of reasons for this. Firstly, the equation of Lieth/Miami model uses both precipitation and temperature to calculate the NPP separately, using the minimum value of both for a given situation. Under the climatic conditions of the study area however, precipitation is not the limiting factor for the NPP, which will result in a NPP calculation which is determined by the mean annual temperature when using Lieth's equation. Secondly, the data from Moor House indicate that for a given temperature, the NPP is lower than would be predicted based on Lieth's

equation given a temperature range similar to the range observed within the study area. Since the data from Moor House come from a relatively similar environment to the study area, in contrast with the Miami model which was designed for a wide range of environments, we decided to work with an empirical equation based on the field data of Moor House. Indeed a similar result can be obtained using the approach in the MILLENNIA model with a conversion factor for the NPP calculation.

We agree that calculating a good NPP value based on the limited data available is difficult and that different approaches or equations can be used. A few lines were added to the manuscript discussing in more detail why we chose this approach and to indicate the possible advantages and disadvantages of such an approach in comparison with the methods used in other peatland models (lines 216 – 226).

Snow evaporation during frosty and dry periods can be important (see Carroll et al., 2015 model description).

This process is indeed not included in the model. The authors are aware that some processes are not represented in detail in the model (such as snow sublimation, but also erosion - see above). This is done to keep the model relatively simple and to reduce the calculation time necessary for model runs. The authors are of the opinion that the process of snow sublimation has a relatively limited impact on the total hillslope hydrology and as a result, the process is not explicitly represented in the model. This is clarified in the article (lines 161 – 162).

AET is also dependent on rooting depth in relation to the water table depth (see Carroll et al., 2015 model description).

The representation of the AET within the model is indeed relatively simple. In contrast to more detailed models such as MILLENNIA or the HPM, we do not use plant functional types in our vegetation calculations. As a result, we used a more simplified representation of the water table dependence of the AET as described by Hilbert et al. 2000. There is no doubt that other existing peatland model better represent certain peatland processes. However, it is the intention of this study to come up with a relatively simple model which allows to be applied at a larger spatial scale. As a result, some processes are excluded from the model or have a simple representation. See also our discussion regarding the erosion processes not included in the model. We included a comparison regarding AET between more detailed models such as MILLENNIA and the model presented here (lines 182 – 185).

It seems a bit odd to have a 2 phase Q10 which will cause a jumping up and down in steps (why not have a continuous change in Q10 – simple function?). Also, the Q10 question is very questionable indeed – apparent vs intrinsic & short-term vs long-term & with roots vs without roots - but that is a complex issue. It would be good to also provide references as to those two Q10 values.

The use of a double q10-value is based on the review article of Chapman and Thurlow (1998) on peat respiration at low temperatures, which indicates that at lower temperatures (below 5°C), the q10-value is higher due to the fact that a temperature increase within this range expands the range of soil taxa, actively decomposing organic matter. The choice of q10-value is indeed not straightforward and a range of values is available. A paragraph was added to the manuscript to explain the choice for two q10-values and to provide more background information (lines 239 – 245).

Please add a bit more information on what kind of model you developed/tested (empirical/process) “spatially-explicit hill slope model”.

The process-based nature of the model, in combination with the 2D spatial representation were clarified in the article (line 9).

Please add more information to what this means “peatland architecture was reconstructed”. Currently this is unclear (did you take core samples/use a pollen and/or peat depth database?). Also, is ‘assessed’ a better word?

The reconstruction consists of soil corings along hillslope transect, peat samples and seven pollen cores. This was changed in the manuscript (lines 102 – 103).

Please also add more information on what kind of climate data you used “climate reconstructions” e.g. mean annual precipitation/temperature The above points will help the reader grasp the complexity of what you did and put it into context for specific interests.

In this article, we use the reconstructed mean annual temperature and mean monthly precipitation. Some changes were made to the paragraph on the climate reconstruction to discuss in more detail the climate reconstructions used in this article (line 12 and lines 187 – 208).

There are a lot of Gallego-Sala references when talking about basics of blanket bog. Is this the first time those explanations are made? I would have thought that Lindsay would have done this earlier and others before him. It is always good to go back to the original people.

The references were checked to make sure we refer to the original article. One reference was changed to Lindsay, 1995 (line 27).

I think it would be nice to mention the MILLENNIA (Heinemeyer et al., 2010) peatland model – coming out at the same time as HPM but for a UK context (so I suggest it is important in this context). This is also relevant when considering hill slope (see topography effects on temperature and hydrology, especially runoff and erosion - as in your study also using Garnett peat depth data for a validation at Moor House) and root C inputs. However, a valid point of criticism would be that it is a 2D model – so you are trying to do something better, which is great. However, you might also want to discuss what the disadvantages are of your simpler 2 depth model (root C input vs water table depth and porosity over depth affecting oxygen availability and thus decomposition – see Carroll et al. 2015 using the MILLENNIA model).

There is no doubt that more detailed peatland models exist, such as the MILLENNIA model, Digibog, the Holocene Peatland Model, etc., which are better designed to capture specific processes such as the difference between above and below ground biomass or more gradual changes in peat properties throughout the peat profile. However, the idea behind this paper is to demonstrate that when a model is constructed with a simplified representation of the processes at play in a peat profile but incorporating an additional spatial dimension to study hillslope hydrology, we are able to reconstruct long-term peatland dynamics at the landscape-scale, while point-by-point comparison is more difficult. This is discussed throughout the manuscript, and this message is strengthened in the introduction and discussion to indicate more clearly the difference between the existing detailed models such as MILLENNIA, Digibog, HPM, ... and the model presented in this paper, highlighting possible advantages and disadvantages of this relatively simple peatland model in studying blanket peatlands (lines 48 – 66, 449 - 455).

Finally, the empirical C input relationship with only temperature seems questionable when NPP is clearly dependent on both, temperature and precipitation – potential evapotranspiration functions are commonly used as in the MILLENNIA model, Durham Carbon Model by Worrall et al. etc.).

This is discussed in detail in a comment above.

Maybe better to use 'assessed' instead of reconstructed. L100 Soil cores were 'taken' along ... L104 give details of the sections (what depth ranges were assessed – BD changes with depth).

These comments were changed in the manuscript (lines 10, 102, 104 – 109).

Please add more information regarding “Boussinesq equation for the simulation of the hillslope hydrology”.

A few lines were added to elaborate on the Boussinesq-equation since the water table behaviour is an important part of the peatland model (lines 148 – 153).

Peat Initiation I like that there is a threshold for 'peat' based on C accumulation in the top mineral layer! Nice work. However, I suggest that a bit more information is needed again for the definition of the threshold (%Corg?).

This is indeed based on a threshold value. The mineral layer accumulates organic matter until the upper horizon of the mineral substrate contains the amount equivalent to the organic carbon mass in a peat layer of 10 centimetres (which is also the threshold we used in the field for the definition of peat). This was clarified in the manuscript (lines 252 – 259).

Model Calibration I think it would be nice to see how all the parameters changed from default to calibrated. Possibly also how they compare to other publications (if applicable; e.g. HPD).

This is indeed an interesting comparison and a paragraph was added to the discussion to locate the calibrated parameters within the range of values mentioned in the literature (lines 415 – 421).

Results I think reporting dry bulk density values is best in g/cm³ – most models and field measurements in peatlands will show those units (unless I am mistaken).

This unit is indeed more in line with other studies and was changed in the manuscript (line 300).

Modelling long-term blanket peatland development in eastern Scotland.

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Abstract. Blanket peatlands constitute a rare ecosystem on a global scale but is the most important peatland type on the British Isles. Most long-term peatland development models have focussed on peat bogs and high-latitude regions. Here, we present a spatially explicit process-based 2D hillslope model to simulate long-term blanket peatland development along complex hillslope topographies. To calibrate the model, the peatland architecture was ~~reconstructed~~ assessed along 56 hillslope transects in the headwaters of the river Dee (633 km²) in eastern Scotland, resulting in a dataset of 866 soil profile descriptions. The application of the calibrated model using local pollen-based land cover and regional climate reconstructions (mean annual temperature and mean monthly precipitation) over the last 12,000 years shows that the early-Holocene peatland development is largely driven by a temperature increase. An increase in woodland cover only has a slight positive effect on the peat growth potential contradicting the hypothesis that blanket peatland developed as a response to deforestation. Both the hillslope measurements and the model simulations demonstrate that the blanket peatland cover in the study area is highly variable both in extent and peat thickness stressing the need for spatially distributed peatland modelling. At the landscape scale, blanket peatlands were an important atmospheric carbon sink during the period 9.5 ka – 6 ka BP. However, during the last six thousand years, the blanket peatlands are in a state of dynamic equilibrium with minor changes in the carbon balance.

20 1 Introduction

Peatlands occur across the globe and contain up to one third of the global soil carbon stock, despite covering approximately less than three percent of the Earth's surface (Gorham, 1991; Xu et al., 2018). Especially at higher latitudes, peatlands are an important ecosystem type and their dynamics have profoundly influenced the terrestrial carbon cycle throughout the Holocene (Yu et al., 2011). Unfortunately, little is known about long-term peatland dynamics and their response to climatic and land cover changes (Wu, 2012).

Blanket peatlands are spreads of peat of varying thickness, covering the underlying topography, thus “blanketing” the landscape (Lindsay, 1995) (~~Gallego-Sala et al., 2016~~). This peatland type occurs in hyperoceanic climates with cool and moist conditions throughout the year, and is mostly confined to the maritime edges of the continents (Gallego-sala and Prentice, 2013). Due to their location in the landscape, blanket peatland formation is more controlled by topography, compared to other

30 peatland types (Parry et al., 2012). Although rare on a global scale, up to 6 percent of the area of the United Kingdom is covered by blanket peatland (Jones et al., 2003). The large extent of the Scottish blanket peatlands, covering 23 percent of the land area, compared to the international rarity of these environments, make the Scottish peatlands of high conservation value (Fyfe et al., 2013; Tipping, 2008).

During the Holocene period, large areas of blanket peatland have developed throughout the Scottish Highlands and this shift
35 from mineral to waterlogged and nutrient-poor organic soils is one of the most important Holocene landscape changes in Scotland. Different hypotheses have been raised regarding the cause of this peatland development (Tipping, 2008). The original hypothesis, as proposed by Moore, linked the blanket peatland initiation to human impact, where anthropogenic land use change and increased grazing during the Neolithic period led to a shift in the hillslope hydrology resulting in the paludification of the upland soils (Moore, 1973). While this hypothesis has been supported by local studies throughout the British Isles, other
40 authors have suggested that, at least for Scotland, the initiation of blanket peatlands resulted from climatic changes during the Atlantic period (Ellis and Tallis, 2000; Huang, 2002; Simmons and Innes, 1988; Tipping, 2008). A recent study based on a database of basal radiocarbon dates shows regional differences in the timing of the blanket peatland development with an earlier timing for Central and Southern Scotland, compared to the other regions of the British Isles (Gallego-Sala et al., 2016). Most of the case studies studying the blanket peatland initiation are based on field data such as pollen cores and radiocarbon
45 dating, but studying causalities based on timing alone is difficult (Gallego-Sala et al., 2016). Process-based modelling of this landscape transformation could prove to be a useful technique, complementary to the field data, to provide insight in the underlying processes and mechanisms.

In recent decades, several peatland models have been developed, varying in spatial and temporal scale and in model complexity (Frolking et al., 2010). A good overview of the models developed for simulating long-term peatland behaviour is given by
50 Baird et al. (2012). Currently, several long-term peatland models such as Digibog and the Holocene Peatland Model (HPM) allow to simulate peatland processes and the feedbacks between ecology, hydrology and peat properties over Holocene timescales (Baird et al., 2012; Frolking et al., 2010). These models have been applied successfully within the context of peat bogs, but are difficult to transfer to blanket peatlands for two reasons. Firstly, these models are developed as cohort models, where each year, a new peat layer is added to the soil profile and included in the calculations for the remaining part of the
55 simulations. As a result, these allow to simulate temporal changes in peat properties such as hydraulic conductivity within the peat profile, but as the simulated time period increases, these models become computationally expensive, especially when a spatial dimension is added. ~~As a result, they are difficult to apply to a landscape scale.~~ Secondly, these models have been developed for peat bogs, which have a different peatland architecture compared to blanket peatlands and are therefore not always adapted to simulating peatland processes along complex hillslope topographies. These issues have been partially resolved by the MILLENNIA model, which has been designed specifically for blanket peatlands (Heinemeyer et al., 2010). This model is also a cohort model but incorporates additional processes which are specific to blanket peat such as runoff-driven peat erosion. However, the high degree of detail in the model domain and the representation of the processes make it difficult to apply cohort models at the landscape scale.

In this study, a ~~long-term~~process-based peatland model is presented which is able to simulate the hillslope hydrology and peatland dynamics along topographically complex hillslopes on Holocene timescales. Additionally, the representation of the model domain is relatively simple using a diplotelmic peat profile, making it computationally feasible to study peatland development on a landscape scale by simulating a large number of hillslope cross-sections. The model is applied to the Upper Dee catchment in the Cairngorms National Park, eastern Scotland. The goal of this study is twofold. Firstly to apply a relatively simple process-based peatland model to study the long-term blanket peatland development in the Scottish Highlands on a landscape scale. Secondly, to identify the relative importance of climatic and land cover changes in the long-term blanket peatland development.

2 Materials and methods

2.1 Study area

The study area consists of the headwaters of the river Dee in eastern Scotland, with an elevation ranging from 322 to 1309 metres a.s.l. The area lies in the centre of the Cairngorms National Park and is managed by the Mar Lodge, Invercauld and Mar estates (fig.1). The geology of the Dee catchment is characterised by metamorphic and igneous rocks, with schists and granulites in the southern part of the study area and granite batholith intrusions in the north (Maizels, 1985). The entire area was glaciated by the Scottish ice sheet during the last ice age, which retreated between approximately 16 ka and 13.6 ka BP. In contrast to the Western Highlands, the Cairngorms massif was not subjected to widespread glacial expansion during the Younger Dryas (Loch Lomond Stadial). During this period, the glacial activity remained largely restricted to the cirques (Everest and Kubik, 2006). The development of the current landscape and soils in the upper Dee area has been influenced by the deglaciation, forming a wide variety of glacial and fluvioglacial landforms (Ballantyne, 2008). In many parts of the study area, the bedrock is covered by glacial till of varying thickness (Maizels, 1985). The summits and ridges mostly carry skeletal soils and bedrock outcrops, while the slopes are covered by blanket peat and alpine podzols (Smith, 1985). The peat deposits are found both lying directly on bedrock and overlying a layer of mineral sediment. This mineral substrate consists of gravel-rich silt loam and sandy loam in the southern part of the study area and sandy loam to loamy sand in the northern part. Currently, the area is dominated by semi-natural land cover, including alpine and montane heath vegetation on the highest summits, heather moorland and small pockets of natural forest (Tetzlaff and Soulsby, 2008). The total annual precipitation ranges from 800 mm in the eastern part of the study area to almost 2000 mm on the mountain tops, with a significant proportion of the precipitation falling as snow during the winter months (Dunn et al., 2001). The temperature regimes can vary considerably within the study area. The town of Braemar (339 m a.s.l.), has a mean annual temperature of 6.8 °C, ranging from 1.6 °C as a mean winter temperature (DJF) to 12.8 °C as a mean summer temperature (JJA). In contrast, the summit of Cairn Gorm (1245 m a.s.l.) has a mean annual temperature of 0.6 °C, and ranges from a mean winter temperature (DJF) of -2.6 °C to a mean summer temperature (JJA) of 5.3 °C.

95 Early Holocene traces of human presence have been found within the study area, with archaeological evidence indicating the presence of Mesolithic hunter-gatherer structures as early as 8.2 ka cal BP in the western part of the study area (Warren et al., 2018). The first traces of permanent settlement in the Upper Dee are from the village of Braemar around 1000 AD (Paterson, 2011). In contrast to the western part of Scotland, the study area shows no traces of large scale peat extraction, which is probably due to the relatively thin peat profiles and difficult access to the area (Maurer, 2015).

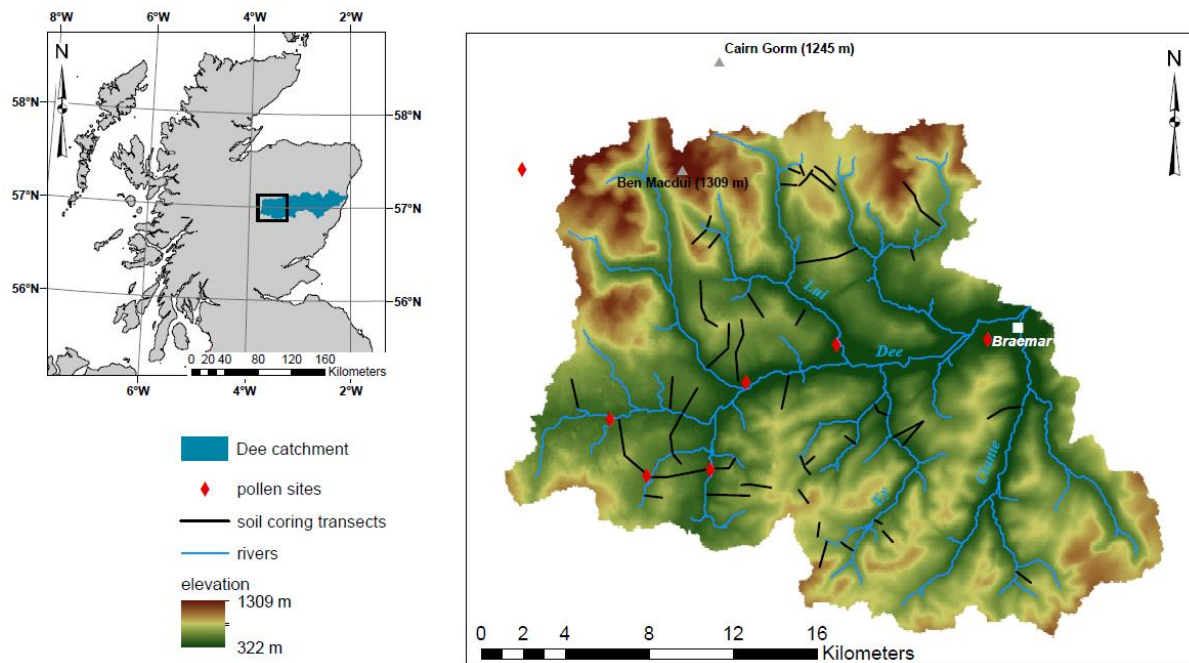


Figure 1: Location of the Upper Dee catchment, with indication of the hillslope transects and the pollen sites used for the land cover reconstruction.

2.2 Field data

For the study area, the blanket peatland architecture was ~~reconstructed~~ assessed along 56 hillslope transects across the study area during field campaigns in 2015 and 2017 using soil corings, laboratory analysis of peat samples and pollen cores (fig. 1). The sSoil corings were ~~made~~ taken along the hillslope transects with a spacing of approximately 50 metres using a gauge auger. The hillslope topography was measured using Post-Processing RTK GPS measurements. The transect locations were selected in order to include a wide variety of lithologies, elevation zones and topographic parameters such as aspect, slope and curvature. Additionally, the carbon content, dry bulk density and water content of the peat deposits were derived from 35 field samples, collected as core sections with a length of 5 centimetres. These samples were collected at random coring locations and at depths ranging from 5 centimetres to 165 centimetres below the surface. The regional vegetation evolution over the past 12,000 years was reconstructed based on seven pollen cores located within the study area (fig. 1). These cores provide vegetation information from different elevation zones and with a varying distance to the low-lying valleys of the Dee and the Spey (Birks, 1969; Hunter, 2016; Huntley, 1994; Paterson, 2011). Using the REVEALS model (Regional Estimates of

115 Vegetation Abundance from Large Sites (Sugita, 2007)), the pollen percentages were converted to regional vegetation fractions. REVEALS was developed to reconstruct regional vegetation composition using pollen data from large lakes, but previous studies has shown that a group of sites can also be used to estimate regional vegetation ~~using REVEALS~~ Score (Fyfe et al., 2013; Mazier et al., 2012; Trondman et al., 2016). Pollen type parameters (pollen productivity and fall speed) were based on the standardized set of Mazier et al., (2012). The regional vegetation fractions were grouped in five classes (coniferous
120 trees, deciduous trees, shrubs, heather, grasses & herbs) and used as land cover input in the hillslope model. As the land cover reconstruction for Scotland based on REVEALS by Fyfe et al. does not include pollen data from high-elevation sites, a new land cover reconstruction was made by Hunter (2016) for this study using local pollen data (Fyfe et al., 2013; Hunter, 2016). At all coring locations, the soil profiles were described based on visual inspection, analysing the colour, texture and possible presence of macroscopic remains (charcoal, wood, ...). Based on the coring descriptions, the peat thickness could be derived.
125 In this study, peat is defined as a dark organic-rich layer of minimal 10 centimetres thick without or with minimal presence of mineral material based on visual inspection. Organic-rich horizons with a clear presence of mineral material were not classified as peat.

In total, 34 peat samples were radiocarbon dated at 17 locations throughout the study area, encompassing a range of topographic situations and peat thicknesses (see appendix A2 for dating details). All radiocarbon dates were performed by the Belgian
130 Royal Institute for Cultural Heritage and calibrated using the Oxcal 4.3 software and the IntCal13 calibration curve (Bronk Ramsey, 2009; Reimer et al., 2013).

2.3 Model outline

The model presented here is based on the concept of impeded drainage, where environmental conditions such as bedrock topography can cause waterlogging and peat formation (Alexandrov et al., 2016; Clymo, 1984; Ingram, 1982). The basic
135 structure of the hillslope peatland model consists of a hydrology module simulating the water table behaviour along the hillslope, which is coupled to a peat growth module simulating biomass production and ~~peat~~ decomposition (fig. 2). The model domain consists of a two-dimensional hillslope cross-section, which is discretised in a series of model gridpoints. The stratigraphy consists of an impermeable bedrock, overlain by a layer of glacial till, which is assumed to be porous. Over time, a peat profile can develop on top of this ~~mineral-till~~ substrate when the right environmental conditions are met ~~locally~~. ~~To~~
140 ~~enable the use of the Boussinesq equation for the simulation of the hillslope hydrology, local topographic depressions are filtered out.~~ The hillslope topography is based on the detailed GPS-measurements for each coring location.

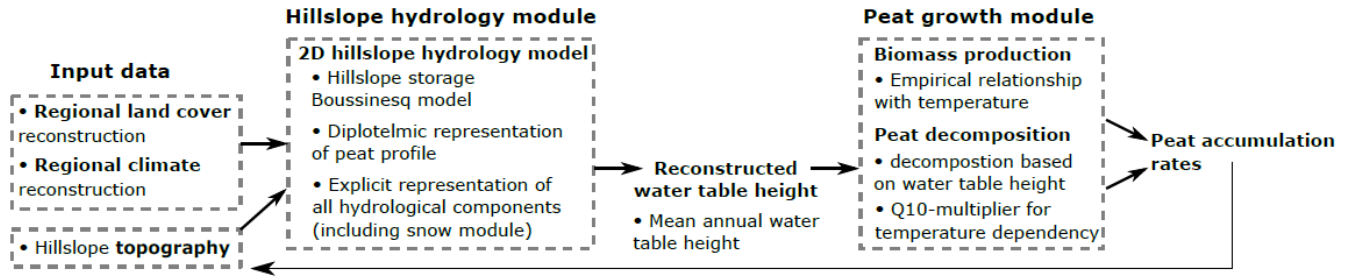


Figure 2: General model workflow. For a more detailed description of the model structure, the reader is referred to the text.

2.3.1 Hillslope hydrology module

The water table dynamics are modelled using a variant on the Boussinesq equation for a non-constant slope (Hilberts et al., 2004):

$$\text{Eq. (1)} \quad \varepsilon \frac{\partial S}{\partial t} = \frac{k}{\varepsilon} \cos i(x) \left[B \frac{\partial S}{\partial x} + S \frac{\partial B}{\partial x} + \varepsilon S \frac{\partial i(x)}{\partial x} \right] + \frac{k}{\varepsilon} \sin i(x) \left[\varepsilon \frac{\partial S}{\partial x} - SB \frac{\partial i(x)}{\partial x} \right] + \varepsilon N$$

$$\text{With} \quad B = \frac{\partial}{\partial x} S$$

With x the distance to the hillslope bottom (m), ε the soil porosity (m m^{-1}), S the actual water storage (m), k the hydraulic conductivity (m s^{-1}), i the bedrock slope (m m^{-1}) and N the rainfall recharge or infiltration (m) (Hilberts et al., 2004). The Boussinesq equation is a simplified form of the full Richards's equation for unsaturated soils by excluding a representation of the unsaturated zone. This simplification can be justified for peat soils. Given the often shallow position of the water table in blanket peatlands (Ballard et al., 2011; Paniconi et al., 2003), the unsaturated zone is excluded from the hydrological calculations, assuming an instantaneous exchange. As a result, the Boussinesq equation assumes an instantaneous exchange of water (e.g. infiltration and evapotranspiration) between the surface and the saturated zone of the soil profile. As a result, this simplified representation leads to a significant reduction of the computational time is significantly reduced (Ballard et al., 2011). To enable the use of the Boussinesq-equation for the simulation of the hillslope hydrology, local topographic depressions are filtered out. In this study, the Boussinesq equation is discretised using a forward in time – centred in space finite difference scheme for the diffusion component and a first-order upwind finite difference scheme for the advection component (Campforts and Govers, 2015).

The diplotelmic nature of the model is represented by the depth-integrated saturated hydraulic conductivity. Each stratigraphic unit (mineral substrate, catotelm and acrotelm) has a specific saturated hydraulic conductivity value. The bedrock is excluded from the water table depth calculations as it is assumed to be impermeable.

A simple snow module is included in the hydrological model, with precipitation falling as snow during periods with sub-zero temperatures. The amount of melt is based on a degree day factor model. Snow sublimation is not explicitly represented in the model. For each timestep, infiltration- and saturation excess overland flow is calculated. The produced runoff is assumed to leave the hillslope before the next timestep. For open peatland vegetation types, all rainfall is assumed to be able to infiltrate for intensities below 2 mm h^{-1} . For higher intensities, the infiltration rate increases with higher precipitation rates:

170 Eq. (2) $ir = 0.626 * p + 0.0002$

With ir the infiltration rate (mm h^{-1}), p the precipitation rate (mm h^{-1}) (Holden and Burt, 2002). For woodland peatlands, infiltration rates of up to 30 mm h^{-1} are reported (Cairns et al., 1978). In the model, this maximal infiltration rate of 30 mm h^{-1} is used for a fully forested peatland. The final infiltration rate at a certain location is determined based on linear interpolation between the infiltration rates of open and forested peatland based on the percentage woodland cover at each model gridpoint.

175 The potential plant transpiration and soil evaporation (mm day^{-1}) are calculated separately based on the Leaf Area Index (LAI), which enables differentiation based on the vegetation cover (eq. (3)) (Williams et al., 1983).

Eq. (3) $E_{soil} = E_{pot}e^{(-0.4LAI)}$

$$E_{plant} = \frac{E_{pot} LAI}{3}, 0 \leq LAI \leq 3$$

$$E_{plant} = E_{pot} - E_{soil}, LAI > 3$$

180 With E_{soil} the soil evaporation rate (mm day^{-1}), E_{plant} the plant transpiration rate (mm day^{-1}) and E_{pot} the potential evapotranspiration rate (mm day^{-1}), which is calculated using the Thornthwaite equation based on the mean monthly temperature.

The actual evapotranspiration rate (AET) (mm day^{-1}) is calculated as a function of the water table depth (eq. (4)). If a gridpoint consists of glacial till without a peat cover, the AET is at the potential rate when the water table is at the surface ($z_1 = 0$) and decreases linear until depth z_2 . If peat is present, the actual evapotranspiration is assumed to be at the potential rate if the water table is located in the upper horizon ($z_1 = \text{acrotelm thickness}$) and decreases linearly until a depth z_2 (m) (Frolking et al., 2010; Lafleur et al., 2005). In this study, z_2 is set to 1 meter for both the glacial till and peat soils. In contrast to more detailed peatland models such as the MILLENNIA model, the AET – water table depth relationship is not influenced by changes in vegetation groups and their root properties, resulting in constant values for z_1 and z_2 throughout the simulations (Carroll et al., 2015).

Eq. (4) $AET_t = (E_{soil} + E_{plant}) \frac{z_2 - wt}{z_2 - z_1}, \text{ for } z_1 \leq wt \leq z_2$

Since detailed local climate reconstructions are scarce, several peatland modelling studies have used continental or at best regional climate reconstructions (mostly pollen-based) which were fine-tuned using local climate information (Frolking et al., 2010; Heinemeyer et al., 2010; Morris et al., 2015). Here, a similar approach is used. Input data for temperature and precipitation values are based on a European gridded dataset of mean annual temperature and mean monthly precipitation anomalies for the last 12,000 years derived from pollen data with a spatial resolution of $1^\circ \times 1^\circ$ and a temporal resolution of 500 years (fig. 3) (Mauri et al., 2015). As total annual precipitation amounts and mean annual temperatures vary considerably throughout the study area, the precipitation and temperature data were corrected for orographic effects. Data from eight meteorological stations in the vicinity of the study area were used to construct linear regression models, correcting the mean daily precipitation amount and mean annual temperature for each location based on the elevation (eq. (5) – eq. (6)) (see appendix A1 for the weather station details):

Eq. (5) $P = (0.003776 * E) + 1.669$

Eq. (6) $MAT = (-0.0083 * E) + 13.2839$

With P the mean daily precipitation amount (mm), E the elevation (m a.s.l.) and MAT the mean annual temperature (°C).

Additional local climate information was added to the climate reconstruction data by incorporating random variability to the reconstructed temperature and precipitation data, based on the variability as observed in the weather station of Braemar for the period 1853 – 2010. The relatively low spatial and temporal resolution of the continental-scale climate reconstruction will probably lead to the underrepresentation of short-lived events and local climate variability. However, by incorporating the orographic corrections and random variability, local climate information is used to fine-tune the records and increase both the spatial and temporal variability. The time series used as model input are based on daily temperature and hourly precipitation data from the weather station of Braemar, which are rescaled using both the regression equations for elevation effects and the long-term anomalies for temperature and precipitation (fig. 3). As a result, precipitation and temperature series with a high temporal resolution are used throughout the entire studied period. The model is run with a spatial resolution of 50 metres, similar to the average coring distance. The time resolution is set to 400 seconds for the hillslope hydrology module and 1 year for the peat growth module to ensure model stability.

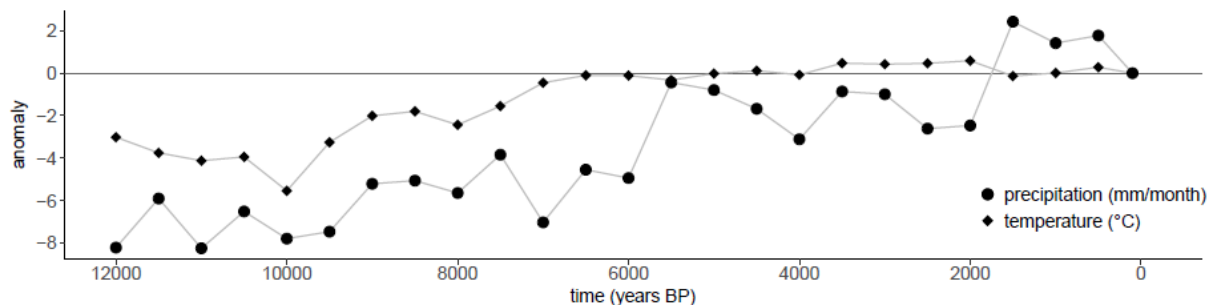


Figure 3: Reconstructed mean annual temperature (°C) and mean monthly precipitation (mm month⁻¹) anomalies for the period 12 ka – 100 BP with a 500-year interval for the location of Braemar. Values extracted from a gridded European dataset with a spatial resolution of 1x1 degree (Mauri et al., 2015).

2.3.2 Peat growth module

The peat accumulation at each gridpoint is calculated as the balance between biomass production and decomposition. In the literature, several relatively simple equations can be found to calculate the Net Primary Production (NPP) based on climatic data (mean annual temperature, total annual rainfall or potential evapotranspiration) such as the Miami model or the Thornthwaite Memorial Model of which some have been implemented in peatland models (Heinemeyer et al., 2010; Lieth, 1973; Lieth and Box, 1972). In some cases, such as the Miami model, the NPP is calculated based on multiple climatic variables (rainfall and temperature), using the minimum value of both equations as the final NPP-value. However, given the climatic conditions of the Scottish Highlands, precipitation is not a limiting factor for biomass production. As a consequence, the biomass production is simulated as a function of the mean annual temperature using a power function regression equation based on field data for the Moor House Reserve in northern England (Garnett, 1998), corrected for the woodland cover. A

230 possible disadvantage of this simple approach is the dependence of the biomass production calculations on the quality of the climate and land cover reconstructions.

$$\text{Eq. (7)} \quad NPP = 60.06 (MAT^{1.134}) * (1 + (\frac{wc}{wc_{max}} * wi))$$

With NPP the Net Primary Production ($\text{g m}^{-2} \text{a}^{-1}$), MAT the mean annual temperature at the gridpoint location ($^{\circ}\text{C}$), wc_t the woodland fraction, wc_{max} the woodland percentage of a fully forested peatland and wi the percentage increase in NPP between an open and wooded peatland. In general, the NPP is higher for wooded peatland compared to open peatland vegetation, with reported values of a 12 percent increase for bogs and 17 percent for fens (Beilman and Yu, 2001; Szumigalski and Bayley, 1997). In this study, wi is set to 15 percent and wc_{max} to 40 percent.

The peat column at each gridpoint is divided in an oxic and anoxic zone based on the calculated mean annual water table height. The total decomposition can thus be written as:

$$\text{Eq. (8)} \quad D = k_1 * wt + k_2 * (h - wt)$$

With D the total decomposition (m a^{-1}), k_1 and k_2 the rates of decomposition under anoxic and oxic conditions (yr^{-1}), h the thickness of the soil profile above the bedrock (m) and wt the height of the water table above the bedrock (m) (Hilbert et al., 2000). The decomposition rates are dependent on the mean annual air temperature using a Q_{10} -temperature multiplier, which is the ratio by which the biomass respiration rate increases under a 10°C temperature increase. The range in Q_{10} -values mentioned in the literature is large, but Chapman and Thurlow demonstrated that Q_{10} -values are generally higher for temperatures between 0°C and 5°C (Chapman and Thurlow, 1998). This effect can be attributed to the fact that as temperatures rise above the freezing point, more microbial groups will become active, leading to relatively large changes in respiration rates for small changes in temperature. As the Q_{10} -value itself is assumed to be temperature dependentAs a result, two Q_{10} -values are used in this study. A Q_{10} -value of 2.2 is used for temperatures above 5°C , and 3.7 for temperatures between -4 and 5°C . Below -4°C , the decomposition is assumed to cease completely (Chapman and Thurlow, 1998; Rosswall, 1973 as cited by Clymo, 1984; Wieder and Yavitt, 1994; Wu, 2012). The biological module runs at an annual timescale. Based on the calculated peat accumulation rate, the hillslope topography is updated annually.

2.3.3 Peatland initiation

Simulations start with a hillslope consisting of an impermeable bedrock covered by glacial till. As the thickness of the till is not known at each location, it is assumed to have a constant thickness of 50 centimetres. Over time, the organic matter accumulates within the upper 30 centimetres of the mineral soil forming an organic-rich horizon based on the balance between biomass production and decomposition. When a threshold is exceeded ~~(in this case the amount of organic matter equivalent to a peat layer of 10 centimetres)~~, additional organic matter which is produced, starts to accumulate as peat at that location, with the properties of an acrotelm. In this study, the threshold is set at an amount of organic matter, equivalent to a peat layer with a thickness of 10 centimetres using the median dry bulk density and organic carbon percentage of the 35 peat samples, collected in the field. This ensures that a similar definition for peat is used both for the hillslope corings as for the model simulations.

Once the peat thickness exceeds the thickness of the acrotelm layer, the peat layer becomes diplotelmic, with the peat below the acrotelm having the properties of the catotelm. Once the biomass within the simulated peat profile decreases below the biomass threshold, the gridpoint is no longer considered to be covered by a peat layer and only mineral soil properties are taken into account.

2.3.4 Boundary conditions

The impermeable bedrock below the glacial till is used as a zero-flux boundary condition at the bottom of the model domain. At several locations throughout the study area, rivers have eroded the stream bank, exposing the peat. At the lower end of the hillslope, the water storage is thus set to a fixed value, representing the depth of the river. For the gridpoint at the top of the hillslope transect, a lateral zero-flux boundary is assumed.

2.4 Model calibration and validation

Model calibration is based on the measured mean peat thickness per topographic class. In total, nine topographic classes were defined by dividing both the measured slope and curvature at each coring location in three classes, resulting in nine possible combinations. The calibration procedure resulted in topographic class limits of 0.098 and 0.135 m m⁻¹ for slope and -0.184*10⁻³ m⁻¹ and 0.184*10⁻³ m⁻¹ for curvature. For all 56 hillslope transects, the modelled mean peat thickness per topographic class after 12,000 years of simulation is compared to the mean peat thickness measured in the field. In total, three model parameters were calibrated: the decomposition rates under oxic and anoxic conditions and the acrotelm thickness. The goodness-of-fit of each parameter combination was evaluated based on minimization of the Root Mean Squared Error (RMSE) between the mean modelled and measured peat thickness per topographic class. Out of the 866 hillslope corings, 433 were selected randomly to be used as calibration points and the others as validation points. Since the spacing between the soil corings is slightly variable, the model results were resampled to the locations of the soil corings using linear interpolation.

As an additional validation of the model behaviour, the simulated peat growth initiation dates for all model gridpoints can be evaluated against a dataset of basal radiocarbon dates for blanket peat deposits in the upland regions of Scotland, with an elevation above 300 metres a.s.l. (n = 30) (Gallego-Sala et al., 2016). The dataset was expanded by incorporating 17 additional basal radiocarbon dates on peat deposits from within the study area (see appendix A2 for dating details). For each of the 17 locations within the study area for which radiocarbon dates were available, the basal age was estimated using the clam 2.2 software package to construct age-depth models and extrapolate to the bottom of the peat layer (Blaauw, 2010). As the available initiation dates based on radiocarbon dating were not necessarily taken at the modelled transect locations, the comparison between modelled and observed peat growth initiation is based on the probability density curves using a bin width of 500 years. Depending on the amount of available radiocarbon dates at each location, some estimates of the peat growth initiation date were based on the extrapolation of the age-depth model over large sections of the peat profile. To analyse the effect of the age-depth model extrapolation on the resultant probability density curve, an additional probability density curve was

constructed containing only those radiocarbon dated samples which were directly measured at the bottom of a peat layer (n = 20).

295 **3 Results**

3.1 Field measurements

In total, soil coring descriptions were made at 866 locations throughout the study area (detailed descriptions and location data can be found in the supplementary material). Based on the definition of peat used in this study, 57 percent of the coring locations contained a surface peat layer, with a mean measured peat thickness over all coring locations of 36 centimetres, with a maximal value of 3 metres. The mean measured peat thickness per hillslope transect varies between 0 and 96 centimetres (fig. 4). Overall, the transects with a high mean peat thickness can be found in the upstream parts of tributaries of the river Dee. Strong spatial variability occurs, even at small distances, making the peat cover throughout the area highly variable in both occurrence and mean thickness. The mean measured peat thickness per topographic class ranges from 23.6 ± 31.9 cm for the class with a moderate slope and a convex curvature to 54.1 ± 65.3 cm for the topographic class with a low slope and a straight curvature. Based on 35 randomly selected soil samples, which were identified in the field as peat, the median organic carbon percentage was calculated at 51.9 ± 7.3 percent and the dry bulk density at $0.128 \pm 0.063 \text{ g cm}^{-3}$.

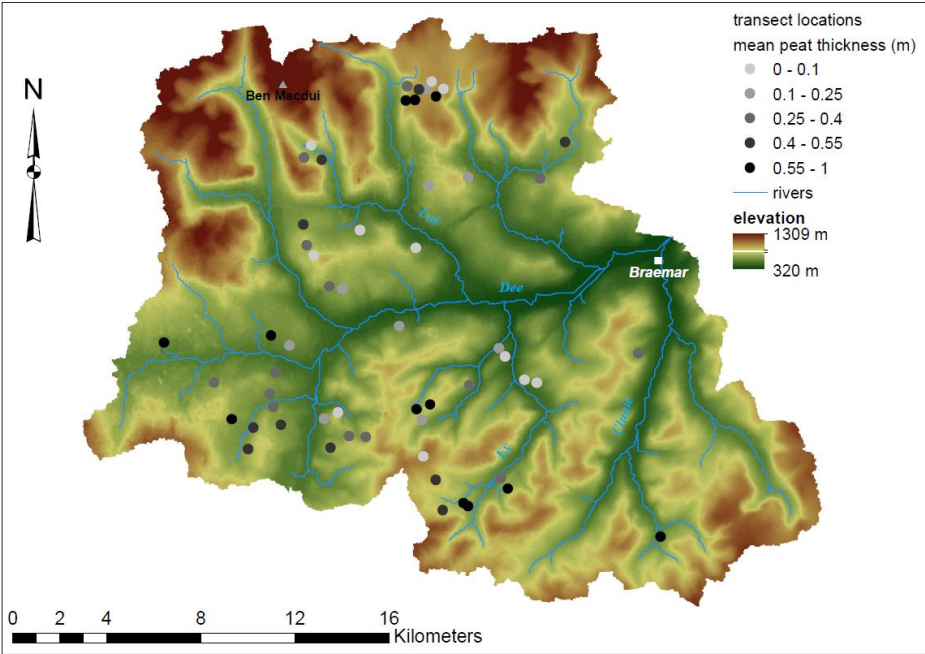


Figure 4: Mean measured peat thickness per hillslope transects (n = 56).

As the model is based on the principle of impeded drainage, there is an assumed relationship between the bedrock slope and the peat thickness at a certain location. The peat thickness data indicate that this relationship is present, showing a clear

decrease in the maximum thickness with increasing bedrock slope. However, the variability, especially at lower slope angles indicates that shallow peat layers or even the absence of peat is observed for every slope value (fig. 5a). In the Boussinesq equation, the bedrock slope is used instead of the surface slope. One could argue that the bedrock slope might not relate directly to the surface slope in for example local depressions filled with peat. However, the comparison of the bedrock slope and surface slope for all coring locations indicate a clear and strong relationship between both, with the observed range in slope values strongly exceeding the differences between bedrock and surface slope at a single location (fig. 5b). As a result, the use of the bedrock slope is thus unlikely to introduce a bias in the modelled peat thickness values.

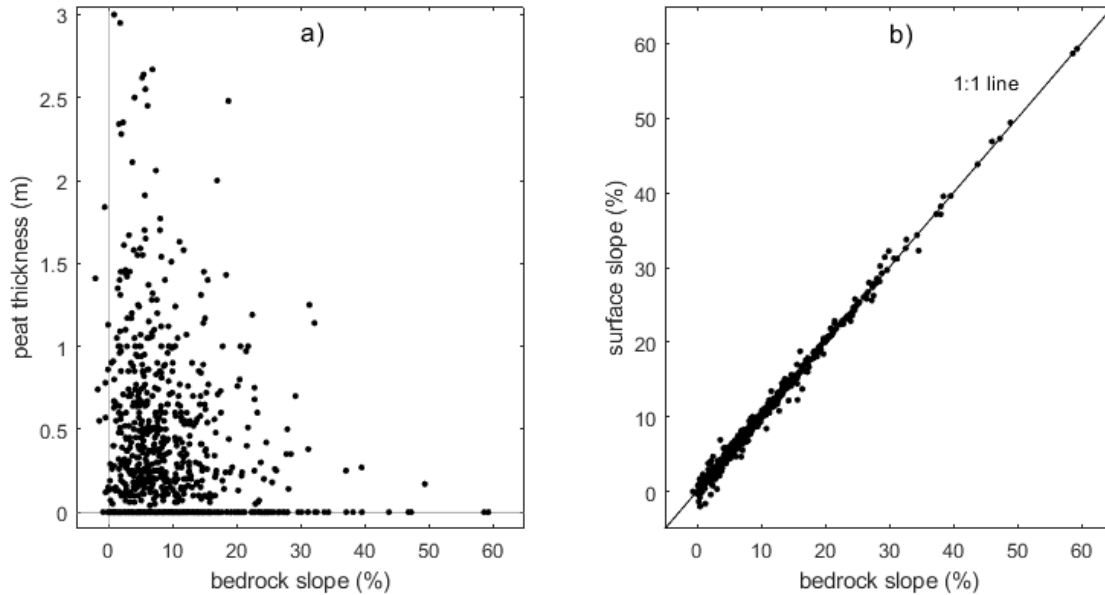


Figure 5: a) Scatterplot of the measured peat thickness (m) as a function of the bedrock slope (%) and b) scatterplot of the surface slope (%) as a function of the bedrock slope (%) for all coring locations (n = 866). The slope calculations are based on the measured coordinates of the coring locations.

The pollen-based reconstructed land cover shows an early-Holocene woodland increase until the period 8.4 ka - 7.2 ka cal BP (fig. 56). This period is followed by a general woodland decline, with the woodland cover dropping below 5 percent from 3.6 ka cal BP onwards. The reconstructions for the individual pollen cores show an important east-west gradient in terms of maximal forest cover, with higher woodland percentages for the eastern and lower-lying part of the study area (Paterson, 2011). The woodland is of a mixed type containing both coniferous species (Scots pine) and deciduous species (birch, rowan and aspen). A study by Fyfe et al., reconstructed the Holocene vegetation over Scotland using the REVEALS model for seven sites across the Scottish mainland, resulting in a maximal forest extent by 6.7 ka cal BP (Fyfe et al., 2013). The data presented here show an earlier woodland cover decline around 7.2 ka cal BP and a larger proportion of coniferous species in the forest composition. In comparison to the sites of Fyfe et al., the woodland cover shows to be relatively low, with an open heather landscape prevailing during the period under study, which can be attributed to the relatively high elevation of the study area.

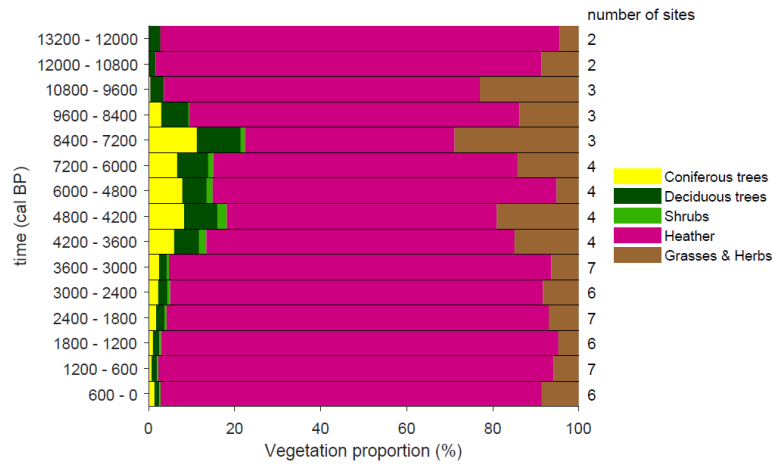


Figure 65: Reconstructed vegetation proportions for the study area using the REVEALS model, based on seven pollen cores.

3.2 Model calibration

Point-by-point calibration resulted in poor correspondence between the modelled and observed peat thickness. As a consequence, the model parameters were calibrated based on the mean peat thickness per topographic class. In total, nine topographic classes were constructed by classifying all coring locations based on the slope and the hillslope curvature. The best fitting parameter combination results in an acrotelm thickness of 10 centimetres, an oxic decomposition rate at 10°C of 2.15 percent year⁻¹ and an anoxic decomposition rate at 10°C of 0.24 percent year⁻¹, which corresponds to an oxic/anoxic decomposition ratio of 9. These values correspond largely to those reported in the literature (Ballard et al., 2011; Clymo, 1984; Wu, 2012; Yu et al., 2001). The RMSE on the mean peat thickness for the best fitting parameter combination is 9.53 centimetres (fig. 67).

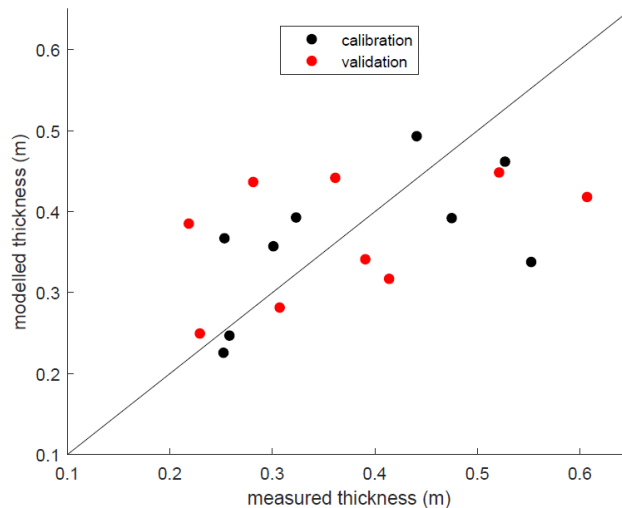


Figure 76: Modelled and measured mean peat thickness per topographic class for both the calibration and validation transects.

345 **3.3 blanket peatland development**

The calibrated model was run to simulate the long-term blanket peatland development since 12 ka BP for the 56 hillslope transects using the calibrated parameter values. The reconstructed land cover history (fig. 56) is used as vegetation evolution throughout the simulations. Overall, the model simulations indicate that mean peat accumulation rates were low until 9.5 ka BP, with small variations between the different gridpoints (fig. 78). Later, the accumulation rates increased and were high during two phases in the early Holocene, 9.5 – 8.5 ka BP and 8 – 6.5 ka BP. From 6 ka BP to 2 ka BP, the rates were relatively stable and slightly positive on average. A long-term decrease in accumulation rates occurred between 2 ka BP and 1 ka BP, which increased again to positive values around 0.5 ka BP. The mean peat and carbon accumulation rate over all gridpoints and for the entire studied period is $0.03 \cdot 10^{-3} \text{ m year}^{-1}$ and $1.79 \text{ g C m}^{-2} \text{ year}^{-1}$. The maximal mean peat and carbon accumulation rate over the entire studied period is $0.18 \cdot 10^{-3} \text{ m year}^{-1}$ and $11.95 \text{ g C m}^{-2} \text{ year}^{-1}$ and occurs at 7050 years BP.

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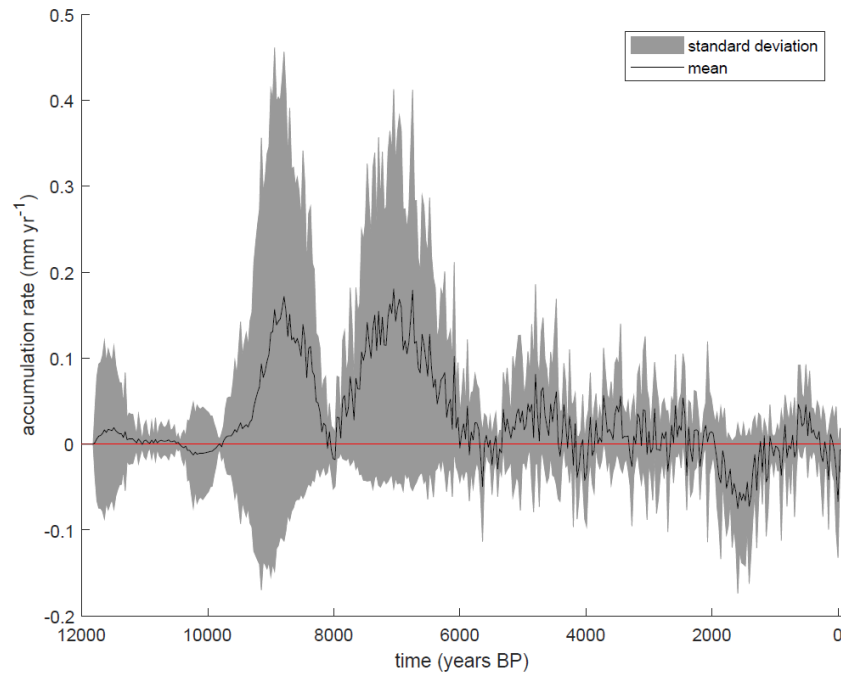


Figure 87: Simulated mean peat accumulation rate and standard deviation for all studied hillslope transects (n = 56).

Figure 8-9 indicates the evolution of the mean peat thickness and corresponding organic carbon mass over all hillslope transects. The mean peat thickness reaches a maximal value of 0.36 metres around 2 ka BP and declines slightly afterwards to a current value of 0.33 metres or $22.04 \text{ kg C m}^{-2}$. Overall, the peatland development occurs mostly before 6 ka BP and shows limited variations afterwards, with a slight decline in mean peat thickness between 2 ka BP and 1 ka BP. When only the model gridpoints with a peat cover are considered, the maximal value for the modelled mean thickness is 0.66 metres, declining to

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0.61 metres nowadays or 40.25 kg C m⁻². In total, the model simulates a peat cover at 61 percent of the coring locations, which is comparable to the coring data, which result in 57 percent peat cover.

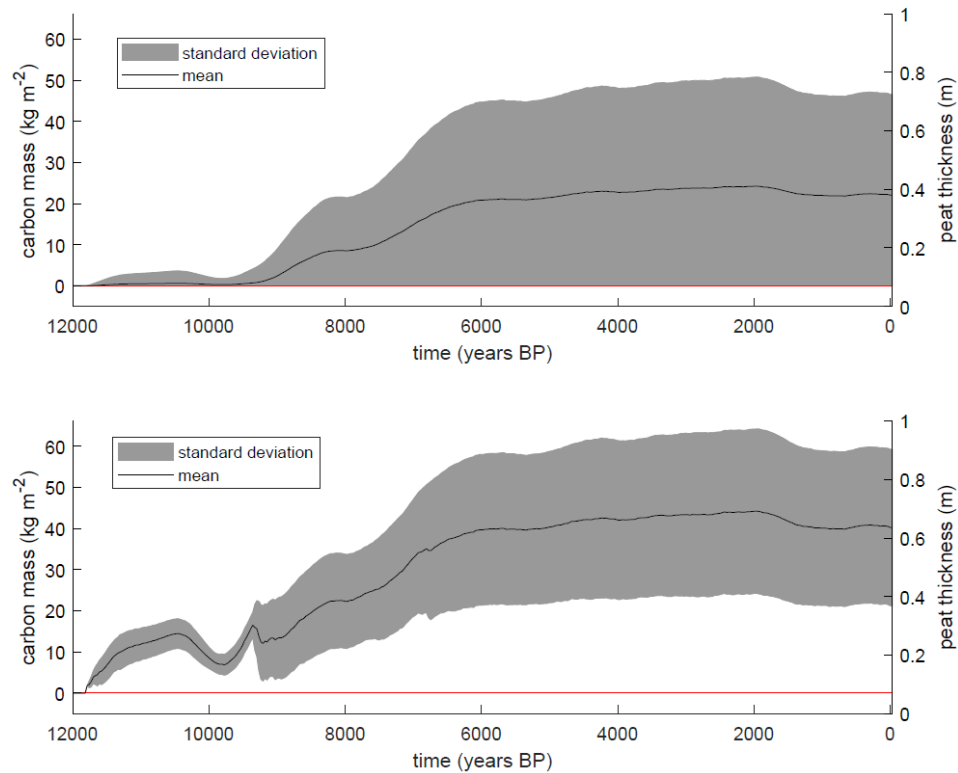


Figure 98: Simulated mean peat thickness/carbon mass and standard deviation for all gridpoints (top) and for the gridpoints with a peat cover (bottom).

Although the model calibration is solely based on the current peat thickness, the timing of peatland development can be evaluated based on radiocarbon dating of peat profiles. Overall, the model simulations indicate that peat growth initiated at most locations between 9.75 ka BP and 6.75 ka BP. The basal radiocarbon dates (n = 47) show a more diffuse pattern for the Scottish upland areas (fig. 9a10a). When only considering those dates for which the radiocarbon sample was taken at the bottom of the peat column (n = 20), excluding the sites for which the initiation date was estimated by the extrapolation of an age-depth model to the bottom of the peat core, the probability density function shifts to older initiation ages and corresponds much better with the simulated dates (fig. 9b10b).

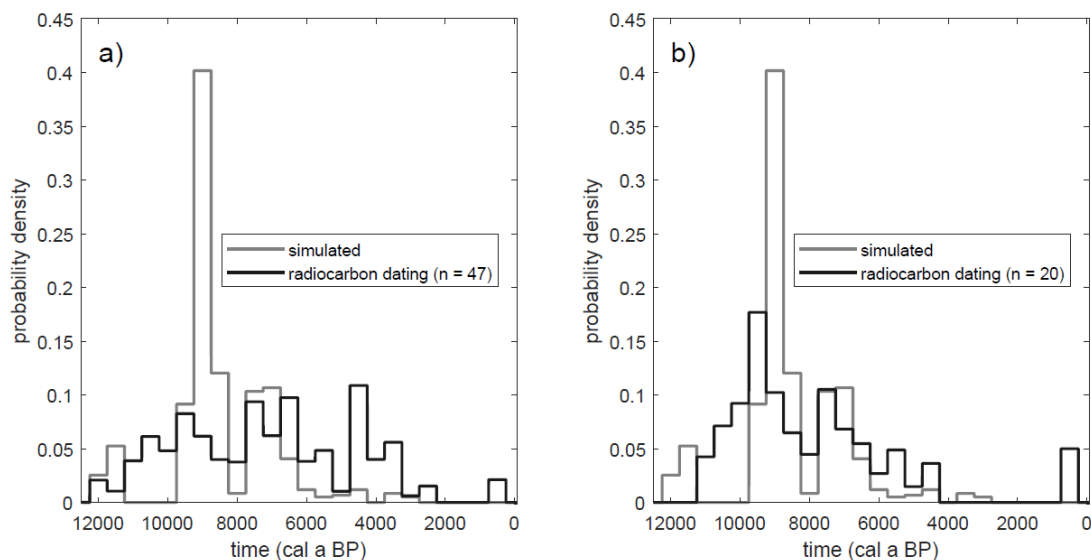


Figure 109: Probability density function of the peat growth initiation dates based on the model simulation and the radiocarbon dating database for Scottish upland areas (above 300 metres a.s.l., see appendix A2) using a bin width of 500 years. a) all dates. b) All dates, excluding those for which a date was obtained by extrapolating an age-depth model to the bottom of the peat column.

3.4 Sensitivity analysis

To study the model sensitivity to variations in parameter values a sensitivity analysis is carried out. In total, seven parameters are varied over the range as mentioned in the literature. The parameters broadly cluster in two groups, peat properties and environmental parameters (Table 1). Each parameter is varied stepwise, while all other parameters are kept at the standard value. The sensitivity is evaluated as the current mean peat thickness over all gridpoints after a simulation over a 12,000 year-period using the pollen-based climate and land cover variations as environmental boundary conditions (fig. 1011). Overall, the model shows to be most sensitive to the peat decomposition rate, mean annual temperature and woodland cover. The peat thickness shows no sensitivity towards changes in catotelm conductivity, probably, because the low conductivity values of the catotelm anyhow result in slow drainage compared to other components of the hillslope hydrology and thus in quasi permanent water saturation of the catotelm. The acrotelm conductivity shows the same behaviour except for the lowest value. The acrotelm is under oxic conditions for most of the simulated values. Only for the lowest conductivity value, the water table rises above the catotelm-acrotelm boundary, resulting in lower decomposition rates and a higher mean peat thickness.

Table 1: Overview of the parameters used in the parameter sensitivity test, listing the standard value and the range over which the parameter is changed.

Parameter	Standard value	Minimum value	Maximum value	References
Peat properties				

Acrotelm saturated hydraulic conductivity (m s^{-1})	$1 \cdot 10^{-3}$	$1 \cdot 10^{-5}$	$1 \cdot 10^{-2}$	(Cunliffe et al., 2013; Holden et al., 2011; Ingram, 1983)
Catotelm saturated hydraulic conductivity (m s^{-1})	$1 \cdot 10^{-6}$	$1 \cdot 10^{-9}$	$3 \cdot 10^{-6}$	(Cunliffe et al., 2013; Dai and Sparling, 1973; Holden and Burt, 2003; Ingram, 1983; Rosa and Larocque, 2008)
Acrotelm thickness (m)	0.1	0.05	0.5	(Ballard et al., 2011; Belyea and Malmer, 2004; Clymo, 1984)
Oxic decomposition rate at 10°C ($\% \text{ yr}^{-1}$)	2.15	1	5	(Kleinen et al., 2012; Lucchese et al., 2010; Malmer and Wallen, 2004; Wu, 2012; Yu et al., 2001)
Environmental parameters				
woodland cover (%)	REVEALS-based land cover reconstruction (fig. 56)	0	100	(Hunter, 2016)
Mean annual temperature ($^\circ\text{C}$)	6.2	-50%	+50%	Standard value based on the mean annual temperature for Braemar for the period 1890 – 1919 (earliest data available) (MetOffice, 2012)
Mean annual precipitation (mm yr^{-1})	900	-75%	+75%	Standard value based on the mean annual precipitation for Braemar for the period 1890 – 1919 (earliest data available) (MetOffice, 2012)

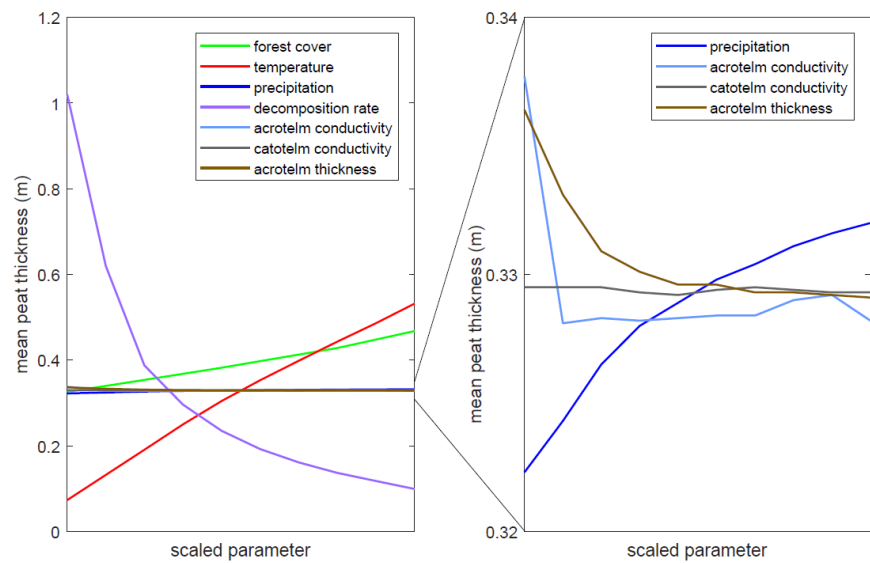


Figure 1149: Mean simulated peat thickness for all variables used in the parameter sensitivity test.

The climate sensitivity of a model gridpoint appears to be dependent on the presence of a peat layer. Overall, the percentage of model gridpoints covered by peat shows to be more sensitive to precipitation changes than the mean peat thickness (fig. 4412, fig. 4213). This might be a result of the diplotelmic representation of the peat profile. The strong difference in saturated hydraulic conductivity for the two peat horizons results in minimal water table changes when the precipitation amount is varied. In other words, the use of a diplotelmic model results in a water table which fluctuates only slightly around the acrotelm-catotelm boundary. As a result, the peat accumulation rates and resulting peat thickness are not very sensitive to precipitation changes. However, this does not mean that the water table is located at the same depth for all gridpoints. Depending on the local hillslope topography, some locations will be fully saturated for most of the time while at other locations, the water table will be located much lower in the peat profile. For the substrate, only a single saturated hydraulic conductivity value is used, which results in a more sensitive response to precipitation changes for the gridpoints which do not have a peat cover. Overall, the highest peat thickness and percentage peat cover can be found for the scenarios with a high temperature and precipitation amount.

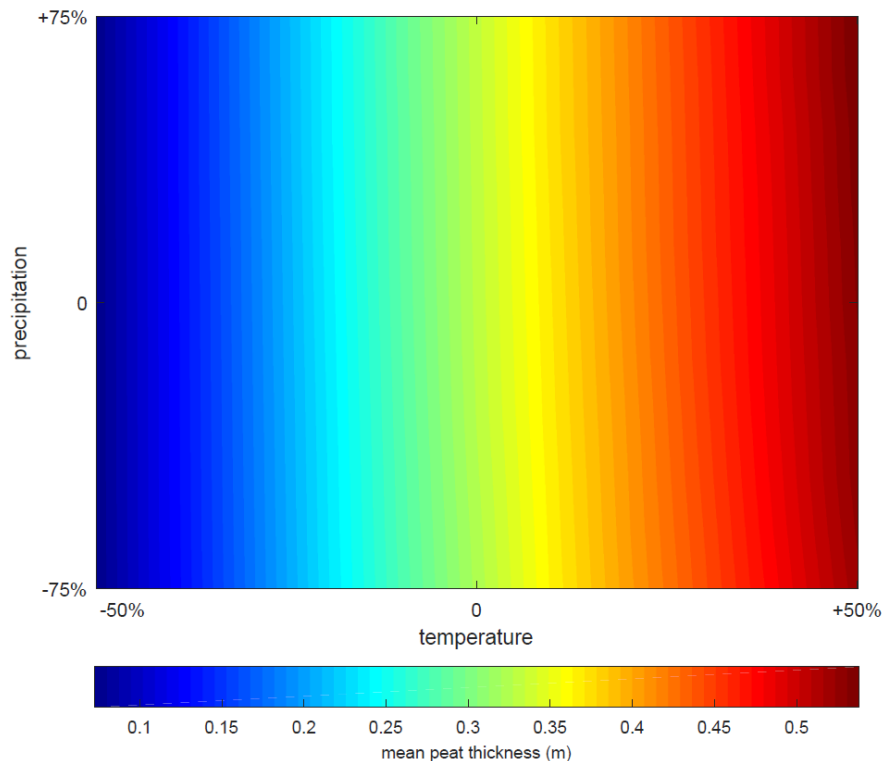


Figure 1244: Mean peat thickness for all combinations of temperature and precipitation changes.

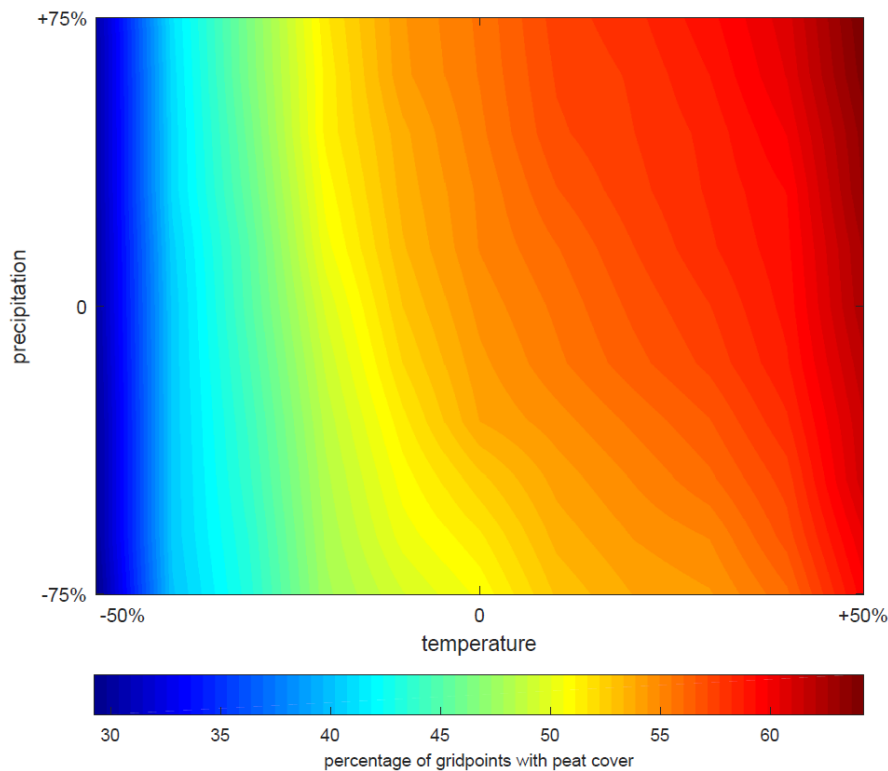


Figure 1342: Percentage of all model gridpoints with a peat cover of at least 10 centimetres for all combinations of precipitation and temperature variations.

4 Discussion

Point-by-point calibration of the hillslope model resulted in a poor correspondence between modelled and observed peat thickness. Using the mean peat thickness per topographic class however allowed to calibrate the model with a RMSE below 10 centimetres (fig. 67). This indicates that a spatial peatland model with a simplified representation of the peat profile is unable to capture the local variability, but can replicate the general peatland evolution on the landscape scale. Similar model behaviour has been found in sediment erosion modelling, where point-by-point comparison yields poor correspondence but where the mean value per topographic class performs sufficiently well (Peeters et al., 2006). The calibrated acrotelm thickness of 10 centimetres fits well within the range of 5-50 centimetres mentioned in the literature (Ballard et al., 2011; Belyea and Clymo, 2001; Clymo, 1984). The same holds true for the calibrated oxic decomposition rate at 10°C of 2.15 percent per year, where values between 0.25 and 7 percent per year can be found in the literature (Kleinen et al., 2012; Lucchese et al., 2010; Malmer and Wallen, 2004; Wu, 2012; Yu et al., 2001). In contrast, the calibrated anoxic decomposition rate at 10°C of 0.239 percent per year is relatively high and exceeds values from other studies which find rates between $1.6 \cdot 10^{-3}$ and $2.6 \cdot 10^{-2}$ percent per year. The high calibrated decomposition rates can be attributed to the fact that these rates within the model do not only encompass peat decomposition within the soil profile, but also other processes which lead to decrease in peat thickness in the

430 field such as particulate organic carbon export through gully development and shallow mass movements. These processes are
not represented in the model but affect the peat thickness as it is measured in the field, leading to higher decomposition rates
in the model calibration. The MILLENNIA peatland model contains a peat erosion module, calculating the total organic carbon
(TOC) export based on the local water table depth and hillslope runoff depth (Heinemeyer et al., 2010). However, this approach
435 is not able to discriminate between the different erosion processes observed in the field and would require a high amount of
additional data. As studies on soil erosion have demonstrated that a model complexity reduction is necessary to reduce the
model uncertainty when applied at the landscape scale, peat erosion is not included in the model (Jetten et al., 2003; Van
Rompae and Govers, 2002). As a consequence, the calibrated decomposition rates must be regarded as a model parameter
encompassing a range of processes removing peat mass from a certain location rather than simply the decomposition of organic
matter within the peat profile itself.

440 Overall, the peatland model is not able to simulate the high peat thickness values (larger than 1.5 metres), observed at some
locations in the landscape. ~~This can be partially attributed to, due to~~ the relatively high calibrated decomposition rates (fig.
1314). ~~This high rate can be attributed to two processes. Secondly,~~ A second reason might be the fact that local depressions
within the hillslope topography were filtered out to enable the use of the Boussinesq-equation for the simulation of the
subsurface flow. Since local depressions showed to contain thick peat deposits in the field, the filtering procedure on the
445 hillslope topography reduces the potential of modelling high peat thickness values at these locations. ~~Firstly the fact that the~~
~~decomposition rate within the model does not only encompass peat decomposition within the soil profile, but also other~~
~~processes which lead to decrease in peat thickness in the field such as particulate organic carbon export through gully~~
~~development and shallow mass movements. These processes are not represented in the model but affect the peat thickness as~~
~~it is measured in the field, leading to higher decomposition rates in the model calibration. Secondly, local depressions within~~
450 ~~the hillslope topography were filtered out to enable the use of the Boussinesq equation for the simulation of the subsurface~~
~~flow. Since local depressions showed to contain thick peat deposits in the field, the filtering procedure on the hillslope~~
~~topography reduces the potential of modelling high peat thickness values at these locations.~~

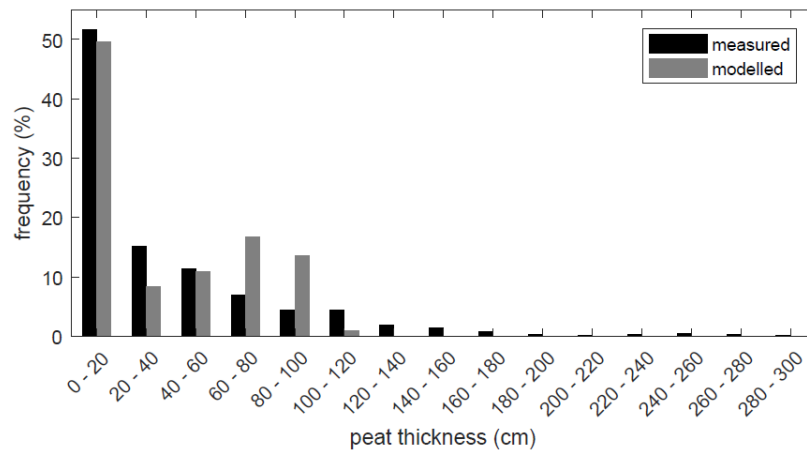


Figure 1413: Frequency distribution of the measured and modelled peat thickness for all studied hillslope transects (n = 56).

The range of simulated peat accumulation rates shows to be realistic, with periods of high mean accumulation rates coinciding with periods of temperature increase (fig. 3, fig. 78). More specific, the mean peat accumulation rates were high during the periods 10 ka – 8.5 ka BP where the mean annual temperature increased with 3.74°C, resulting in a mean peat accumulation rate over all modelled locations for the entire period of $0.064 \cdot 10^{-3} \text{ m yr}^{-1}$ or $4.24 \text{ g C m}^{-2} \text{ yr}^{-1}$ and 8 ka – 6.5 ka BP, with a temperature increase of 2.34°C and a mean peat accumulation rate of $0.104 \cdot 10^{-3} \text{ m yr}^{-1}$ or $6.88 \text{ g C m}^{-2} \text{ yr}^{-1}$. It appears to be the temperature increase, rather than the temperature itself, which drives peat growth. The increased biomass production due to the temperature increase outweighs the lowering in water table height caused by higher evapotranspiration rates and creates an imbalance between production and decomposition, leading to positive accumulation rates and a peat thickness increase.

In contrast to existing cohort models, which have shown to be capable of capturing local variations in dynamics within the peat profile, the relatively simple diplotelmic model presented here cannot reproduce the local dynamics with the same degree of detail (Frolking et al., 2010; Heinemeyer et al., 2010; Morris et al., 2012). However, the simple representation of the model domain leads to a decrease in computation time which allows the application of the model over large spatial and temporal domains. In combination with the pollen-based climate and land cover reconstructions, it allows to study peatland development on the landscape scale, rather than at the scale of a single peat bog or peat profile as is often the case for the cohort models, allowing to answer different research questions.

4.1 Peat growth initiation

Based on the model simulations, the peat growth initiation dates cluster mostly within the period 9.75 ka – 6.25 ka BP (fig. 910), which corresponds largely to the Atlantic period, which is mentioned by other studies based on field data (Ellis and Tallis, 2000; Tipping, 2008). The database of basal radiocarbon dates shows a wider spread of initiation dates for upland Scotland between 12.25 ka BP and 3.25 ka BP. However, a majority of the available basal dates within the dataset is based on a radiocarbon dating higher in the peat profile, which is extrapolated to the bottom of the core using an age-depth model. One

could question whether this extrapolation is justified. The deeper parts of the peat profile are older and as a result, a smaller fraction of the originally deposited biomass will remain. This leads to lower reconstructed accumulation rates further back in time. The reconstructed rates based on the available radiocarbon dates for the study area show a clear decreasing trend when going further back in time (fig. 4415, see appendix A2 for dating details). When extrapolating to the bottom of a peat profile in order to obtain an initiation age, the accumulation rate of the above-lying part of the peat profile is used to extrapolate over the lowest part of the profile, which is older and has a lower fraction of remaining peat mass. As a result, these extrapolated ages will be biased towards younger basal ages. This effect increases with increasing distance between the bottom of the peat profile and the deepest radiocarbon date. When excluding the extrapolated basal ages from the analysis, the probability density function shifts towards older ages, clustering between 11.25 ka BP and 4.25 ka BP and corresponding much better with the probability density function of the model simulations (fig. 910). Here, both the radiocarbon dates as well as the model simulations show peaks in peat growth initiation in the periods 10.25 – 8.25 ka BP and 7.75 – 6.25 ka BP, which coincide with the periods of temperature increase. Overall, the simulations show broadly the same pattern as the radiocarbon dates, but with a more pronounced difference between periods. The spikes in the simulated initiation dates might be attributed to the use of a single set of parameter values for the entire study area resulting in a relatively similar response of many model gridpoints to the changing environmental conditions during the early-Holocene. The more diffuse probability density function for the radiocarbon dates might thus, at least partially, be ascribed to local heterogeneity. Additionally, as the available basal radiocarbon dates come from areas all over Scotland, the probability density curve is likely to include regional differences in peatland initiation ages as well.

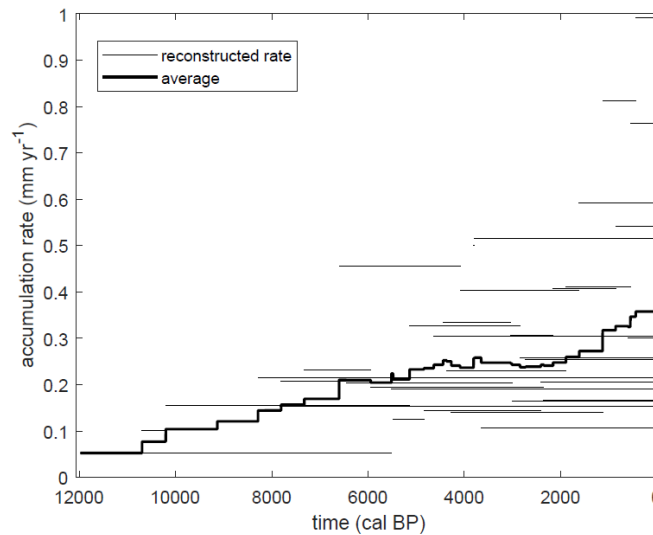


Figure 1514: Reconstructed peat accumulation rates based on all available radiocarbon dates within the study area and mean peat accumulation rate .

A study for the British Isles based on an envelope climate model for blanket peatlands finds a contraction in the area suitable for blanket peatland development in eastern Scotland since 6 ka BP and other studies find post-6 ka accumulation rates to be

relatively low (Gallego-Sala et al., 2016; Simmons and Innes, 1988). In this study, accumulation rates decrease from 8 ka to 6 ka BP onwards (fig. 7). Overall, the mean accumulation rate remains positive until approximately 2 ka BP, but never reaches the high values which occurred during the early Holocene. This results in a slowdown in the peatland development and carbon storage after 6 ka BP (fig. 89). The asymptotic behaviour of the peat thickness evolution at the landscape scale, stabilising after 6 ka BP, is also found in other studies modelling long-term peatland development at the local scale. While the modelled peat thickness trajectory is dependent on the specific conditions (climate, land cover, topography, ...), it is clear that the carbon-sequestering potential of a peatland has its limits at millennial timescales, as the balance between biomass production and decomposition comes in equilibrium with the environmental conditions (Frolking et al., 2010; Heinemeyer et al., 2010).

The conclusion that the blanket peatland development in the Upper Dee area can be attributed to a climate warming, independent of an increase in precipitation, as demonstrated by the sensitivity analysis, is in line with a study by Morris et al., who compared a large dataset of peatland initiation dates across the globe with GCM paleoclimate simulations, concluding that peatland initiation in formerly glaciated areas can be attributed to rising growing season temperatures (Morris et al., 2018). Additionally, a recent study on buried peat layers indicates that in northern latitudes (>40°N) peat growth is extensive during warm periods such as the last interglacial and the MIS 3 interstadial (57 - 29 ka) (Treat et al., 2019). It is clear that anaerobic conditions are required for the development of peat soils. However, regional climatic changes towards wetter conditions do not seem to be necessary for blanket peatland initiation. Apparently, local factors driving the hydrology such as hillslope topography, soil properties, etc. will determine where anoxic conditions will establish to enable blanket peatlands to develop (Morris et al., 2018).

The model simulations do not support the original hypothesis on the origin of the blanket peatlands, linking the peatland development to a deforestation-driven change in hillslope hydrology (Moore, 1973). Firstly, both the available basal radiocarbon dates and the simulated initiation dates indicate a shift towards peat soils during a period of increasing or stable woodland cover (fig. 56, fig. 910). Secondly, the parameter sensitivity analysis indicates that a decrease in tree cover, either by natural or anthropogenic causes, decreases the peat growth potential because the decrease in evapotranspiration due to a loss of tree cover is outweighed by the reduction in biomass production under the environmental conditions present in the study area. Tipping (2008) studied the Holocene blanket peatland development in five upland and northern sites in Scotland using a combination of geomorphic, archaeological and radiocarbon data, resulting in the hypothesis that blanket peatlands were common over large parts of the Scottish Highlands within the first few millennia of the Holocene either due to rapid soil development or by climatic changes (Tipping, 2008). This study supports the hypothesis of Tipping, as shown by the model simulations and peatland initiation dates and provides evidence that a changing climate (increasing mean annual temperature) was the main driver of blanket peatland development.

Although the simulated mean peat accumulation rates remain at low levels after 6 ka BP, this does not mean peat profiles are unable to develop but rather that the peatlands at landscape scale are in dynamic equilibrium with the stabilising Holocene climate. This can be demonstrated using a forced model simulation where all peat soils are removed at 6 ka BP. The resultant simulated peat thickness evolution indicates that peat starts to develop immediately after the peat removal (fig. 4516). After

approximately 1500 years, the mean peat thickness over the study area reaches again the values of the standard model run. This indicates that the model can simulate peatland regeneration at locations which are impacted by a removal of the peat cover either by natural processes (e.g. by shallow mass movements, gullies) or following anthropogenic peat cutting.

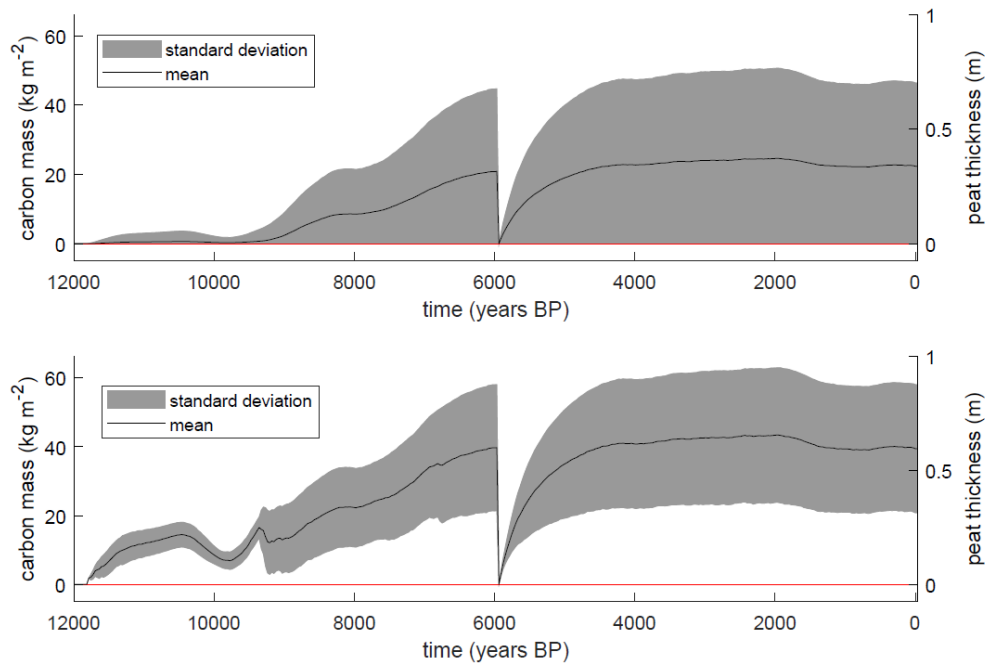


Figure 1645: Simulated mean peat thickness/carbon mass and standard deviation for all gridpoints (top) and for the gridpoints with a peat cover (bottom), with a removal of all peat cover within the study area at 6 ka BP.

5 Conclusion

A new process-based model was presented to study long-term blanket peatland development along hillslopes. The simulations for the past 12,000 years indicate that a relatively simple diplotelmic model is able to capture long-term peatland dynamics on the landscape scale. However, point-by-point comparison still holds poor results, which can be attributed to the use of a single set of calibrated parameters and the idealised representation of the model domain. Overall, both the field data and model simulations indicate that the blanket peatlands in the Upper Dee area developed mostly during the Atlantic period, with a peak in peat growth initiation dates around 9 ka BP. The timing of peatland initiation together with the results of the sensitivity analysis support the hypothesis of a climate-driven origin of the blanket peatlands in the Scottish highlands, where the peatland development shows to be driven by a long-term regional warming trend during the early-Holocene. A higher woodland cover leads to an increase in peat growth potential, contradicting the original hypothesis of Moore (1973), which identified deforestation as a potential driver of blanket peatland development. In more recent periods, the relatively stable climate and land cover within the study area since 6 ka BP result in a stabilisation of the peatland development, indicating that the study area served as a terrestrial carbon sink mainly during the Atlantic period and has stabilised during the late-Holocene.

Appendices

A1: MIDAS (Met office Integrated Data Archive System) weather stations used for the construction of the regression equations for orographic temperature and precipitation corrections.

Station name	MIDAS station code	Elevation (metres a.s.l.)	Latitude (degrees North)	Longitude (degrees West)
Braemar (irrigation farm)	14938	323	57.012	2.745
Dalwhinnie	14769	361	56.928	3.403
Corgarff	144	400	57.165	2.733
Forest Lodge No. 2	15190	305	56.847	3.001
Trinafour	15183	268	56.751	2.856
Glenshee Lodge	225	335	56.799	3.111
Pitcarmick	15251	198	56.694	2.627
Inschriach	14783	213	57.144	1.954

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A2: Radiocarbon dating results. Calibrated ages were calculated using the Oxcal 4.3 software and the IntCal13 calibration curve (Bronk Ramsey, 2009; Reimer et al., 2013).

Sample ID	Lab-code	Conventional age (BP)	Calibrated age (cal a BP $\pm 1\sigma$)	Longitude (degrees)	Latitude (degrees)	Dated material	Sample depth (m)	Total peat depth (m)	Reference
DEEH1P3	RICH-26352	594 \pm 23 BP	599 \pm 26 cal a BP	-3.5117	56.9711	bulk peat	0.20	0.20	This study
Allt Connie H4P5-1	RICH-25414	941 \pm 27 BP	855 \pm 39 BP	-3.5667	56.9468	Plant remain	0.5	1.77	This study
Allt Connie H4P5-2	RICH-25429	2145 \pm 29 BP	2155 \pm 79 BP	-3.5667	56.9468	Bulk peat	1.03	1.77	This study
Allt Connie H4P5-3	RICH-25435	2899 \pm 30 BP	3036 \pm 52 BP	-3.5667	56.9468	Bulk peat	1.3	1.77	This study
Allt Connie H4P5-4	RICH-25415	3827 \pm 31 BP	4440 \pm 69 cal a BP	-3.5667	56.9468	bulk peat	1.70	1.77	This study
DEEH8P7	RICH-26330	2430 \pm 25 BP	2724 \pm 87 cal a BP	-3.6235	57.0005	bulk peat	0.65	0.71	This study
DEEH8P12-1	RICH-26327	2383 \pm 25 BP	2408 \pm 55 BP	-3.6258	56.9979	Bulk peat	0.51	0.94	This study
DEEH8P12-2	RICH-26349	4265 \pm 27 BP	5480 \pm 42 cal a BP	-3.6258	56.9979	bulk peat	0.86	0.94	This study
DEEH8P13-1	RICH-26350	4764 \pm 27 BP	5514 \pm 52 BP	-3.6265	56.9973	Bulk peat	1.06	1.40	This study
DEEH8P13-2	RICH-26329	7543 \pm 31 BP	11979 \pm 94 cal a BP	-3.6265	56.9973	bulk peat	1.21	1.40	This study
DEEH8P16	RICH-26334	6994 \pm 31 BP	9132 \pm 55 cal a BP	-3.6278	56.9958	wood	1.22	1.42	This study
DEEH9P7	RICH-26351	3241 \pm 25 BP	3649 \pm 40 cal a BP	-3.4847	57.0352	bulk peat	0.38	0.4	This study
DEEH10P8-1	RICH-26331	2333 \pm 25 BP	2347 \pm 20 BP	-3.4682	57.0499	Bulk peat	0.4	1.42	This study
DEEH10P8-2	RICH-26333	5184 \pm 28 BP	7324 \pm 51 cal a BP	-3.4682	57.0499	bulk peat	1.10	1.42	This study
DEEH13P7	RICH-26324	7350 \pm 30 BP	8287 \pm 60 cal a BP	-3.5606	56.9251	bulk peat	1.77	1.80	This study
DEEH15P1	RICH-26326	3865 \pm 24 BP	4633 \pm 60 cal a BP	-3.5305	56.9106	wood	1.33	1.43	This study
DEEH23P13-1	RICH-26328	2756 \pm 25 BP	2842 \pm 36 BP	-3.5656	57.0686	Bulk peat	0.75	2.34	This study
DEEH23P13-2	RICH-26332	4461 \pm 27 BP	5137 \pm 97 BP	-3.5656	57.0686	Bulk peat	1.5	2.34	This study
DEEH23P13-3	RICH-26335	9029 \pm 39 BP	10697 \pm 33 cal a BP	-3.5656	57.0686	bulk peat	2.29	2.34	This study
DEEH42P2	RICH-26325	3519 \pm 28 BP	3806 \pm 42 cal a BP	-3.3981	56.9023	bulk peat	1.99	2.00	This study
Allt Connie AC200-1	RICH-25434	528 \pm 28 BP	549 \pm 33 BP	-3.5648	56.9451	Bulk peat	0.47	1.59	This study
Allt Connie AC200-2	RICH-25430	1939 \pm 29 BP	1888 \pm 35 BP	-3.5648	56.9451	Bulk peat	1.02	1.59	This study
Allt Connie AC200-3	RICH-25433	3882 \pm 31 BP	4455 \pm 114 cal a BP	-3.5648	56.9451	wood	1.58	1.59	This study
Bynack Burn pollen core-1	RICH-22684	1570 \pm 31 BP	1466 \pm 40 BP	-3.6689	56.9497	Bulk peat	1.08	2.77	(Hunter, 2016)
Bynack Burn pollen core-2	RICH-22690	2008 \pm 28 BP	1956 \pm 35 BP	-3.6689	56.9497	Bulk peat	2.16	2.77	(Hunter, 2016)
Bynack Burn pollen core-3	RICH-22687	3006 \pm 34 BP	3409 \pm 76 cal a BP	-3.6689	56.9497	bulk peat	2.68	2.77	(Hunter, 2016)
Geldie Burn pollen core-1	RICH-22689	1688 \pm 28 BP	1598 \pm 40 BP	-3.6667	56.9789	Bulk peat	1.00	3.14	(Hunter, 2016)
Geldie Burn pollen core-2	RICH-22685	3729 \pm 33 BP	4073 \pm 59 BP	-3.6667	56.9789	Bulk peat	2.00	3.14	(Hunter, 2016)
Geldie Burn pollen core-3	RICH-22686	5510 \pm 38 BP	5580 \pm 48 cal a BP	-3.6667	56.9789	bulk peat	3.02	3.14	(Hunter, 2016)
Geldie Lodge pollen core-1	GU-17252	2880 \pm 35 BP	3010 \pm 58 BP	-3.7181	56.9625	Bulk peat	0.51	1.48	(Paterson, 2011)
Geldie Lodge pollen core-2	GU-17254	5540 \pm 35 BP	7745 \pm 64 cal a BP	-3.7181	56.9625	bulk peat	1.43	1.48	(Paterson, 2011)
Luibeg H200-1	RICH-25412	386 \pm 26 BP	437 \pm 59 BP	-3.6457	57.0444	Plant remain	0.5	1.50	This study
Luibeg H200-2	RICH-25427	1200 \pm 28 BP	1127 \pm 45 BP	-3.6457	57.0444	Plant remain	1.06	1.50	This study
Luibeg H200-3	RICH-25436	3603 \pm 32 BP	4411 \pm 113 cal a BP	-3.6456	57.0444	bulk peat	1.45	1.50	This study

Data availability

The supplementary data to this article consist of two datasets. A list of all soil corings, including the coring location, elevation and measured peat depth is available online at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17632/pxszz2wzny.1>. The detailed stratigraphic descriptions of each soil coring is available online at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17632/ms484mrjj5.1>.

Author contribution

The conceptualisation and methodology development of this project was carried out by WS, NB and GV. The field work was performed by WS, NB and GV. WS carried out the lab work, developed the model code and performed the model simulations. GV and NB supervised the research. The writing of the manuscript was carried out by WS, NB and GV.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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