

**CYNGOR CEFN GWLAD CYMRU
COUNTRYSIDE COUNCIL FOR WALES**

SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST CITATION

POWYS

GLASCWM AND GLADESTRY HILLS

Date of Notification: 1991

National Grid Reference: SO 175535

O.S. Maps: 1:50,000 Sheet number: 148
1:25,000 Sheet number: SO 14, 15 and 25

Site Area: 2426.1 ha

Description:

This upland is an excellent example of heather moorland of a predominantly dry heathland type, but with interesting ecological transitions into a range of other upland vegetation types. It has one of the largest red grouse populations in Wales and is actively managed for grouse. The other upland bird populations are also of high conservation interest.

The site comprises Red Hill, Cefn Wylfre, Glascwm Hill, Little Hill (East), Gwaunceste Hill, Llanfihangel Hill, Colva Hill and Caety Traylow. All these hills are characterised by relatively level summit plateaux at heights ranging from Little Hill 464 metres to Gwaunceste Hill 542 metres. The hills are steep-sided, but virtually all the site is higher than 305 metres.

Much of the heather-dominated vegetation corresponds to the heather sub-community of heather/bilberry *Calluna vulgaris/Vaccinium myrtillus* heath. This occurs to varying degrees on all the hill summit plateaux, but on some of the high parts of Glascwm Hill, Gwaunceste, Llanfihangel and especially on Colva and Caety Traylow, cowberry *Vaccinium vitis-idaea* is a frequent and significant component of the vegetation. On the latter two areas the vegetation is remarkably uniform over very extensive areas, with frequent heather, cowberry and bilberry, and variable quantities of crowberry *Empetrum nigrum* and a range of lichen species *Cladonia spp.* Cross-leaved heath *Erica tetralix* is only sparsely represented. At lower levels there is an edge effect, probably accentuated by grazing pressure where heather-dominated vegetation is replaced by domination by bilberry, with only a sparse representation of heather. Crowberry is often well represented and locally, as on western parts of Glascwm Hill, may be dominant. Some of this bilberry heath may be transitional to a heavily grazed modified version of a heather-western gorse *Calluna vulgaris/Ulex gallii* heath, but gorse is rare in this site except on the lower southern slopes of Colva Hill. Vegetation corresponding to bilberry/wavy hair-grass *Vaccinium myrtillus/Deschampsia flexuosa* heath also occurs on this hill.

Mire vegetation is very sparsely represented, being confined to a few 'mawn' pools, notably at Glascwm, Baily Bedw, Blaen heath and the valley mire south of Caety Traylow. These correspond to types derived from heather/hare's-tail cottongrass *Calluna vulgaris/Eriophorum vaginatum* mire, but with varied quantities of purple moor-grass *Molinia caerulea*, bog-mosses *Sphagnum spp.* and cranberry *Vaccinium oxycoccos*. An intermediate vegetation between heathland and blanket mire occurs on the summit ridge of Little Hill, and this is better developed on ridges above the Ceste valley where cowberry occurs as a component of mire vegetation.

The lower edges of the hill slopes are characteristically dominated by bracken *Pteridium aquilinum*, but in many areas this occurs over a dwarf-shrub understorey.

The site is of high ornithological interest for moorland birds. Red grouse are at a good population density for southern Wales and raptors include breeding merlin. The occurrence of rock outcrops, scrub and bracken provides valuable habitat for several pairs of ring ouzel and also supports outstanding populations of small passerines such as whinchat and redstart. Raven occur at low density. The 'mawn' pools are used by waders and wildfowl, notably curlew and teal. A large colony of black-headed gulls occurs within the site.

Remarks:

Most of the site is registered as common land.

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