

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

SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST CITATION

POWYS

**MARCHEINI UPLANDS,
GILFACH FARM AND GAMALLT**

Date of Notification: 1988

National Grid Reference: SN 957733

O.S. Maps: 1:50,000 Sheet number: 147
1:25,000 Sheet number: SN 97

Site Area: 810 ha

Description:

This site is of outstanding ornithological interest because of the range of breeding bird species occurring on the upland plateau sheepwalks and craggy hill slopes, and in woodlands varying from scattered scrub to well developed sessile oak wood. The area is of additional importance because of its representation of blanket mire, heather moorland, western gorse heathlands, lichen-rich rock outcrops and the occurrence of rare species.

The site supports such a remarkable assemblage of breeding bird species because of the variety, extent and juxtaposition of scrub, woodland and upland habitat. Species breeding in woody habitat include birds of prey such as buzzard and sparrowhawk, tawny owl, three species of woodpecker, pied flycatcher, spotted flycatcher, redstart, wood warbler, garden warbler and blackcap. The surrounding upland and wetland habitats provide breeding habitat for birds such as curlew, ring ouzel, dipper and grey wagtail. Red grouse breed on the high moorland and rare raptors, including peregrine falcon and red kite, hunt over the land.

Wyloer Hill and Gamallt support extensive areas of western gorse *Ulex gallii* on their south and west facing slopes. Heather *Calluna vulgaris* is extensive and dominant on Gamallt, but though represented on Wyloer this latter hill is predominantly a mosaic of acid grassland and bracken *Pteridium aquilinum*. The western (fridd) slopes of Gareglwyd are a similar grassland type, but with scattered hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* bushes forming a generally sparse shrub component, particularly in association with the crags. This upland edge fridd is a very characteristic habitat mosaic of great value for species such as redstart, whinchat and wheatear. The Wyloer cliffs and rock outcrops comprise Tarannon and Llandovery Shales mud-stones and grits, which support one of the richest assemblages of lichens for this rock type recorded in mid-Wales. A number of locally and nationally uncommon species occur, forming good examples of sunloving lichen communities, but with a more montane element also represented. Although

modified by current agricultural usage, moorland on Drysgol is an important component of the ornithological habitat. It grades into an outstanding example of watershed mire at Waun Goch, in which the nationally uncommon species, bog rosemary, *Andromeda polifolia*, occurs. There are valley mires at the headwaters of the Marcheini Fawr and blanket bog and dwarf-shrub heath on Pyllau Clais.

Running through the southern part of the site is the River Marteg, a major tributary of the Wye. It falls steeply in a series of pools, riffles and occasional waterfalls. The banks are tree-lined, and species-rich alder carr is well developed. The deep rock gorge provides ledges free from grazing by stock, and the high humidity favours atlantic or sub-atlantic moss and liverwort species. With over one hundred moss and liverwort species and a good range of flowering plants, ferns and lichens, the river and gorge is a particularly valuable wildlife habitat. The river is noted for its otters. The steep valleys of the Marcheini Fawr and Marcheini Fach are also important with good dwarf-shrub vegetation, rock outcrops and their variety of upland bird species.

Allt-goch Wood is included as a good example of grazed sessile oakwood with a typical spectrum of bird species associated with woodland and the adjacent uplands. The abundance of natural holes has resulted in good populations of pied flycatchers and redstarts. The mixture of woodland types on Gilfach Farm and the small fields among the bands of woodland containing varied hedgerows, isolated trees and patches of scrub, all greatly contribute to the ornithological interest. The inclusion of the adjacent conifer plantation adds to the variety of species interest.

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