

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

SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST CITATION

POWYS

HEN-ALLT COMMON

Date of Notification: 1991

National Grid Reference: SO 233399

O.S. Maps: 1:50,000 Sheet number: 161
1:25,000 Sheet number: SO 23

Site Area: 11.8 ha

Description:

Hen-Allt Common is situated on a steep, north-west facing sandstone scarp above the Wye valley, near Hay-on-Wye. It supports outstanding areas of botanically rich damp grassland, base-rich flush and spring-head mire, as well as good populations of plant species that are rare and declining in Wales. Locally important lower plant communities are also present.

Much of the common is dominated by bracken *Pteridium aquilinum*, under which survives what is probably the largest population of meadow saffron *Colchicum autumnale* known in Wales. This species has declined both in range and abundance in recent times as a result of agricultural intensification. Glades within the bracken support a type of grassland dominated by common bent *Agrostis capillaris*, crested dog's-tail *Cynosurus cristatus* and a mixture of other grasses, including quaking-grass *Briza media*, heath-grass *Danthonia decumbens*, meadow fescue *Festuca pratensis*, mat-grass *Nardus stricta* and yellow oat-grass *Trisetum flavescens*. Other common associates include glaucous sedge *Carex flacca*, sneezewort *Achillea ptarmica*, lady's bedstraw *Galium verum*, autumn hawkbit *Leontodon autumnalis*, common bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus corniculatus* and tormentil *Potentilla erecta*.

The slopes are dissected in several places by small gullies supporting spring-fed mire communities which are characterised by species such as quaking-grass, glaucous sedge, tawny sedge *Carex hostiana*, carnation sedge *C. panicea*, fairy flax *Linum catharticum*, common butterwort *Pinguicula vulgaris*, selfheal *Prunella vulgaris*, devil's-bit scabious *Succisa pratensis* and the mosses and the mosses *Bryum pseudotriquetrum*, *Campylium stellatum* and *Ctenidium molluscum*. Other common associates include creeping bent *Agrostis stolonifera*, common yellow-sedge *Carex demissa*, square-stalked St. John's-wort *Hypericum tetrapterum*, bulbous rush *Juncus bulbosus*, water mint *Mentha aquatica* and flat sedge *Blysmus compressus*, which is not known to grow anywhere else in Wales. One of the spring-heads is notable on account of the extensive deposits of tufa that have formed around it. The main tufa-forming species are the mosses *Cratoneuron commutatum* var *commutatum* and *Eucladium verticillatum*. Other characteristic plants include red fescue *Festuca rubra*, glaucous sedge, cuckooflower *Cardamine pratensis* and the mosses *Bryum pseudotriquetrum* and *Philonotis calcarea*. Calcareous

sandstone outcrops are present along the south-western fringe of the common supporting, in places, a typical limestone lower plant flora, which includes the moss *Anomodon viticulosus* and the lichen *Placynthium nigrum*. Where shallow caves have formed below a harder sandstone capping a notable lichen community characterised by *Dirina repanda* has developed. Additional habitat diversity is provided by the widespread occurrence of patches of scrub and woodland in which field maple *Acer campestre*, alder *Alnus glutinosa*, silver birch *Betula pendula*, hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*, ash *Fraxinus excelsior*, holly *Ilex aquifolium*, oak *Quercus* spp., goat willow *Salix caprea*, grey willow *S. cinerea* and bramble *Rubus fruticosus* are all locally prominent.

Remarks:

The common is vested in the care of Powys County Council. It lies within the Brecon Beacons National Park.

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