

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

SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST CITATION

NEWPORT

GWENT LEVELS – WHITSON

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| <u>Date of notification:</u> | 1988 |
| <u>National Grid Reference:</u> | ST 390840 |
| <u>O.S. Maps:</u> | 1:50,000 Sheet number: 171 1:25,000 Sheet number: ST 38 |
| <u>Site area:</u> | 937.4 ha |

Description:

The Gwent Levels constitute the lowlands between Cardiff and Chepstow and are drained by an ordered network of drainage ditches. They are an example of one of the most extensive areas of reclaimed wet pasture in Great Britain which includes the Somerset Levels, Romney Marsh and the Pavensey Levels, and is the largest area of its kind in Wales. Together these Levels systems constitute a national series of sites each with its own special features.

The Gwent Levels reens are rich in plant species and communities, many of which are rare or absent in other Levels systems. This is due to the variety of reen types and their management regimes and the timing of the management which results in a staggered programme across the Levels. The regular maintenance of some reens provides conditions for submerged species such as hairlike pondweed *Potamogeton trichoides* and openwater emergents such as arrowhead *Sagittaria sagittifolia* an opportunity to flourish. Others are less intensively managed and some have become completely overgrown by weeds and hedges.

The aquatic invertebrate fauna is very diverse and the Gwent Levels compares well with similar areas in Britain. Many nationally rare or notable species are present such as *Haliphus mucronatus* and *Hydrophilus piceus*. The area is important in the Welsh context for its snails and dragonflies and includes the species *Physa heterostropha* and *Brachytron pratense* respectively. The large number of hedgerows add to the diversity of the area and together with the main reen banks provide a habitat for nationally important assemblages of terrestrial invertebrates such as *Pipunculus fonscai* and *Tomosvaryella minima*.

The Whitson area is of particular importance for its large number of nationally rare and notable invertebrate species. A total of 65 of these rare invertebrates have been recorded in this area including *Anthomyza bifasciata*, *Coptophlebia volucris* and *Hydrophilus piceus*.

This area is also important for its botanical interest as it contains the nationally rare hairlike pondweed *Potamogeton trichoides* and is the only location in Gwent for the

tussock sedge *Carex elata*. Arrowhead *Sagittaria sagittifolia* also grows in abundance in several main reens in this area.

Remarks

The Gwent Levels – Whitson SSSI is one of a series of SSSIs within the area between Chepstow and Cardiff known as the Gwent Levels.

The Severn Estuary SSSI is contiguous with the southern boundary of this area.

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