

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

SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST CITATION

RHONDDA CYNON TAFF

CORS BRYN-Y-GAER

Date of Notification: 2002

National Grid Reference: SN 945065

O.S. Maps: 1:50,000 Sheet number: 160
1:10,000 Sheet number: SN 90NE and NW

Site Area: 52.1 ha

Description:

Cors Bryn-y-gaer is of special interest for its lowland bog and for areas of soligenous flush, marshy grassland, dry neutral grassland and lowland acid grassland. These habitats occur in a complex with wet heath, swamp and semi-improved grassland. The site is also of special interest for the marsh fritillary butterfly *Eurodryas aurinia*.

The site is located immediately north-west of Hirwaun and south of the Brecon Beacons National Park. Cors Bryn-y-gaer is situated at the northern edge of the South Wales Coalfield, on glacial boulder clay, with areas of deep peat on lower ground. Several small water courses and springs are associated with the site, which is in the catchment of the Afon Cynon. The altitude varies from 205 to 220m. The main part of the site comprises several drumlins (smooth oval hills of glacial drift) interspersed with lower lying flat ground. A series of enclosed fields form the northern margin. Also included within the site are two small level fields situated 500 m to the south of the main block of land; these fields are bisected by the A4059 Hirwaun-Penderyn road.

The lowland bog at Cors Bryn-y-gaer is actively peat forming. The vegetation is characterised by a carpet of bog moss *Sphagnum cuspidatum*, together with species such as deergrass *Trichophorum cespitosum*, hare's tail cottongrass *Eriophorum vaginatum* and round-leaved sundew *Drosera rotundifolia*. In slightly drier areas cross-leaved heath *Erica tetralix* becomes more abundant and there is a greater range of bog moss species *Sphagnum spp.*, whilst in the wettest areas common cottongrass *Eriophorum angustifolium* is frequent.

Areas of acidic soligenous flush (under the influence of slow flowing mineral-rich ground or surface waters) cover most of the remaining deep peat between the drumlins. Here the vegetation is dominated by sharp-flowered rush *Juncus acutiflorus* over a carpet of bog moss. Associated species include purple moor-grass *Molinia caerulea*, heath wood-rush *Luzula multiflora* and tormentil *Potentilla erecta*. More sedge-rich flushes, with abundant carnation sedge *Carex panicea*, frequent bog asphodel *Narthecium ossifragum* and common cottongrass occur locally.

Marshy grassland is common on sloping ground on drumlins throughout Cors Bryn-y-gaer. Much of this grassland is dominated by purple moor-grass together with species such as sheep's fescue *Festuca ovina* and tormentil. In places, this grassland is slightly heathy with frequent heath rush *Juncus squarrosus* and occasional cross-leaved heath. Elsewhere grasses are more prominent,

including sweet vernal-grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum* and heath grass *Danthonia decumbens*. Small patches where the soil is slightly less acidic are distinguished by the presence of meadow thistle *Cirsium dissectum*.

Areas of marshy grassland dominated by rushes such as soft rush *Juncus effusus* and sharp-flowered rush are also present throughout Cors Bryn-y-gaer. Associated species include frequent marsh bedstraw *Galium palustre*, devil's-bit scabious *Succisa pratensis* and greater bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus pedunculatus*.

Other habitats found at Cors Bryn-y-gaer include dry acid and neutral grassland. The neutral grassland is characterised by a range of grasses including common bent *Agrostis capillaris*, red fescue *Festuca rubra* and crested dog's tail *Cynosurus cristatus*, together with common knapweed *Centaurea nigra* and common bird's-foot trefoil *Lotus corniculatus*. On the lower slopes of the drumlins this community often grades into the more extensive acid grassland community, containing frequent sheep's fescue *Festuca ovina* and bird's-foot trefoil. Several small areas of wet heath also occur in association with marshy grassland and acid flush. These typically include frequent purple moor-grass, along with deergrass, cross-leaved heath and a range of mosses.

Many of the plant communities are closely juxtaposed, with well displayed transitions between them. Other habitats present on the site include small patches of swamp, inundation vegetation and scrub which add to the ecological and structural diversity of the site.

The nationally scarce marsh fritillary butterfly is associated with the marshy grassland, in which its larval food plant, devil's bit scabious, is frequent and widespread.

Cors Bryn-y-gaer also supports a population of cruet collar moss *Splachnum ampullaceum*, a nationally declining species, scarce in south Wales. This moss occurs mainly in lowland wet pastures, where it grows on decaying cattle and sheep dung.

Remarks:

Cors Bryn-y-gaer SSSI and the nearby Woodland Park/Pontpren SSSI support one of the largest metapopulations of marsh fritillary in South Wales. These two sites comprise the Blaen Cynon candidate Special Area of Conservation (cSAC).

Cors Bryn-y-gaer supports the following UK Biodiversity Action Plan priority habitats: lowland raised bog, purple moor-grass and rush pasture, fen, lowland acid grassland and lowland meadow.

The marsh fritillary is included on Annex IIa of the EC Habitats and Species Directive (Directive 92/43/EEC on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora) and Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and is a Biodiversity Action Plan species.

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