

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

SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST CITATION

RHONDDA CYNON TAF

WAUN GOCH, PENRHIW CARADOG

Date of Notification: 2 February 2012

National Grid Reference: ST 047970

O.S. Maps: 1:50,000 Sheet number: 170
1:10,000 Sheet number: ST 09NW

Site Area: 5.54ha

Description:

Waun Goch, Penrhiw Caradog is of special interest for its species-rich neutral grassland, its marshy grassland, most of which is species-rich 'fen-meadow', and for its large population of soft-leaved sedge *Carex montana*, a scarce plant with a restricted distribution in Wales.

Waun Goch, Penrhiw Caradog is located in Cwm Clydach, to the north of Ynysybwl and approximately 2km south of Mountain Ash in the adjacent Cynon valley. It consists of one large field with a southwesterly aspect, ranging in altitude from 240 to 270 metres. It straddles the break in slope between upland plateau and the steep, glacially-sculpted valley side. The bedrock geology is Pennant Sandstone Formation, a sandstone sequence punctuated by thin mudstone and coal layers of Westphalian (Upper Carboniferous) age. In the lower part of the site, this bedrock is covered by glacial till of Devensian age. This till was deposited by ice spilling over into Cwm Clydach from the Cynon valley, through the cols in the ridgeline just above the site. Soils of both the Withnell 1 Association and the Wilcocks 1 Association are represented. The former occur over the sandstone in the upper part of the site and are free draining, loamy, typical brown podzols. The latter occur over the rest of the site and are strongly gleyed, loamy and seasonally waterlogged, with humose topsoils.

Species-rich neutral grassland occurs mainly in the northern half of the field on higher, free-draining ground. Here, common knapweed *Centaurea nigra* and common birds-foot-trefoil *Lotus corniculatus* occur, together with grasses such as common bent *Agrostis capillaris*, sweet vernal-grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum*, crested dog's-tail *Cynosurus cristatus* and red fescue *Festuca rubra*. A significant area of this grassland type contains plants that are tolerant of nutrient poor, slightly acidic conditions, such as devil's-bit scabious *Succisa pratensis*, heath grass *Danthonia decumbens* and tormentil *Potentilla erecta*. Other species commonly found in this grassland include greater burnet *Sanguisorba officinalis* and pale sedge *Carex pallescens*. In places where there is some flushing of base-rich water, quaking grass *Briza media* and glaucous sedge *Carex flacca* are also frequent.

There are also small areas of species-rich acid grassland, which grade into species-rich neutral grassland. The nationally scarce soft-leaved sedge occurs in both the acid grassland and the adjacent neutral grassland. Betony *Betonica officinalis* is also frequent in these areas and wood bitter-vetch *Vicia orobus* occurs rarely.

Where the drainage is impeded and the soils are mildly base-rich, areas of fen-meadow occur, adjacent to, and often in a close mosaic with, the neutral grassland. Here, purple moor-grass *Molinia caerulea* is prominent with an abundance of meadow thistle *Cirsium dissectum* and devil's-bit scabious. Some areas also show signs of more acidic conditions and here saw-wort *Serratula tinctoria*, bog asphodel *Narthecium ossifragum* and bog-mosses *Sphagnum* spp. occur.

Other areas of wet ground, where the conditions are less base-rich, support rush-pasture dominated by sharp-flowered rush *Juncus acutiflorus*, associated with greater bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus uliginosus*, devil's-bit scabious and Yorkshire fog *Holcus lanatus*. Some areas of purple moor-grass pasture lack any base-enrichment and here the common associated herbs are tormentil and devil's-bit scabious.

Small brooks, rows of mature trees and areas of scrub and woodland around the margins of the grassland provide additional wildlife habitat.

Remarks:

The site supports the following UK biodiversity action plan (BAP) priority habitats: purple moor-grass and rush pastures; lowland fen; lowland meadows.

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