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COUNTRYSIDE COUNCIL FOR WALES**

SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST CITATION

NEWPORT

GWENT LEVELS – ST BRIDES

Date of notification: 1991

National Grid Reference: ST 290825

O.S. Maps: 1:50,000 Sheet number: 171
1:25,000 Sheet number: ST 28/38

Site area: 1312 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 Pevensy 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 reens in the St Brides area support a number of interesting plant species most notably thread-leaved water-crowfoot *Ranunculus trichophyllus* and small pondweed *Potamogeton berchtoldii*. Reen bank and green lane habitats in this area are also

important for relict meadow plant species such as the regionally notable grass vetchling *Lathyrus nissolia* and common meadow-rue *Thalictrum flavum*. The St Brides area also supports rich invertebrate communities with a number of nationally notable and notable marshland species, e.g. the true fly *Chrysogaster macquarti* and the beetle *Hydaticus transversalis*. It is the only area on the Gwent Levels where the rare fly *Stenomicra cogani* has been recorded.

Remarks

The Gwent Levels – St Brides 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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