

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

SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST CITATION

CARMARTHSHIRE

CEFN BLAENAU

Date of Notification: 1989

National Grid reference: SN580414

O.S. Maps 1: 50,000 Sheet number: 146
1: 25,000 Sheet number: SN 54

Site Area: 23.4 ha

Description:

A small upland valley which supports a diverse mosaic of unimproved pasture, 'ffridd' land, wet flushes and small valley mires. These habitats, which are so well represented in this one site, have been greatly reduced in north Carmarthen due to land improvement and afforestation. The headwaters of the River Marlais (a tributary of the Cothi) run through the valley.

The valley bottom has a series of valley mires merging into areas of wet heathy pasture dominated by purple moor-grass *Molinia caerulea* and rich in sedges. In the very wet, flushed mire areas there is an abundance of bog-mosses *Sphagnum* spp. with other localised plants such as marsh St. John's-wort *Hypericum elodes*, round-leaved sundew *Drosera rotundifolia*, common butterwort *Pinguicula vulgaris* and bog pondweed *Potamogeton polygonifolius*. At the base of the valley slopes in particular, there are boggy areas with common cottongrass *Eriophorum angustifolium*, cross-leaved heath *Erica tetralix* and locally, many-stalked spike-rush *Eleocharis multicaulis*. The wet pasture supports uncommon species such as whorled caraway *Carum verticillatum*, bog asphodel *Narthecium ossifragum* and heath spotted-orchid *Dactylorhiza maculata* subsp. *ericetorum*.

Along streamsides, linear areas of a poor-fen vegetation occur, with various rushes *Juncus* spp, ragged-robin *Lychnis flos-cuculi*, marsh thistle *Cirsium palustre*, greater bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus uliginosus*, marsh bedstraw *Galium palustre*, sneezewort *Achillea ptarmica*, marsh-marigold *Caltha palustris* and lady-fern *Athyrium filix-femina*. More open areas along these streamsides have the uncommon ivy-leaved bellflower *Wahlenbergia hederacea*.

The drier valley slopes have grazed acidic grassland characterized by tormentil *Potentilla erecta*, wavy hair-grass *Deschampsia flexuosa* and the moss *Polytrichum* sp. Distinctive wet flushes descend these dry slopes and, where there is a deeper accumulation of soil, bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* is dominant, interspersed with grass-heath areas and hawthorn scrub. These 'ffridd' areas are of importance for birds, particularly nesting whinchat, tree pipit, yellowhammer and linnet.

Three species of fritillary butterfly - marsh *Eurodryas aurinia*, small pearl-bordered *Boloria selene* and dark green *Argynnis aglaia* occur at Cefn Blaenau. The marsh and small pearl-bordered fritillaries occur in the wet pastures whilst the dark green is found on the drier bracken slopes. All have declined nationally and are local species, now principally of south-western Britain. Another species of particular note found in the wet flushed areas is the nationally uncommon keeled skimmer dragonfly *Orthetrum coerulescens*. This is a species of southern wet heathland whose larvae develop in wet mud of base-enriched flushes or bog pools.

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