

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

SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST CITATION

POWYS

LLANDEILO, RHULEN AND LLANBEDR HILLS

Date of Notification: 1991

National Grid Reference: SO 120475

O.S. Maps: 1:50,000 Sheet number: 147,148
1:25,000 Sheet number: SO 04 & SO 14

Site Area: 1436.9 ha

Description:

This area of sub-montane upland is of great ecological interest in that it supports an unusual range of moorland vegetation types that show affinities with lowland heathlands of south-western Britain. However, more northerly upland species are also present. Several nationally rare species of plant occur, and the area is also of high ornithological interest.

The site comprises an area of moorland plateau about 8 kilometres long lying on a south-west/north-east axis. The land falls sharply from this plateau to the north and west, but generally slopes more gently to the south. The site is dominated by (i) bilberry *Vaccinium myrtillus* or heather *Calluna vulgaris* moorland on the plateau; (ii) extensive areas of bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* hill slopes in which the bracken may be dominant as a canopy to heathland species or most commonly as a canopy to a grassy sward and (iii) areas of neutral grassland often associated with relatively base-rich rock outcrops, pools and points of access from surrounding agricultural land. Variable quantities of scrub (largely hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*) occur around the hill edges.

The heathland communities occur as either a heather-dominated heath in which older stands are characteristically rich in lichens *Cladonia spp.*, or as a form of the typical south British bilberry heath. The latter may be variable in composition, heather is often present in low quantities and on damper ground cross-leaved heath *Erica tetralix* is a constant species. Grasses are a minor constituent, but commonly include wavy hair-grass *Deschampsia flexuosa*, sheep's fescue *Festuca ovina*, mat-grass *Nardus stricta* and purple moor-grass *Molinia caerulea*. This heathland mosaic is intermediate in character between the heather/western gorse (*Calluna/Ulex gallii*) vegetation type and a wet heathland corresponding to the national type of deergrass/cross-leaved heath (*Trichophorum cespitosum-Erica tetralix*). It shows clear affinities with vegetation types of south-western lowland Britain, but is intermediate in lacking such species as bell heather *Erica cinerea* and deergrass. Additionally, western gorse is patchy in

representation, being heavily suppressed by grazing pressure. The moorland, however, supports characteristic upland bird species and includes the hunting territories of peregrine and merlin. Red grouse occur at a fairly low density. A relatively small area of wet heath dominated by purple moor-grass has been included within the site because its atypical occurrence within the surrounding moors highlights the full spectrum of varying ecological conditions and resultant vegetation.

The most extensive grasslands within the site are fescue/bent/bedstraw (*Festuca/Agrostis/Galium saxatile*) and bracken/bedstraw (*Pteridium/Galium saxatile*) communities. Bracken, particularly in association with scrub and rock outcrops, is a valuable ornithological habitat and here supports remarkably high breeding densities of whinchat, in addition to such species as redstart, tree pipit, reed bunting, stonechat and ring ouzel. Locally the grassland may be botanically diverse and may support such species as adder's-tongue *Ophioglossum vulgatum*. Additionally, free-draining areas may be subject to summer drought and support common whitlowgrass *Erophila verna*, English stone-crop *Sedum anglicum* and navelwort *Umbilicus rupestris*. These latter species also occur on rock outcrops, many of which are botanically rich and often include, at different localities, such diverse species as the locally uncommon meadow saxifrage *Saxifraga granulata*, mossy saxifrage *S. hypnoides*, carline thistle *Carlina vulgaris* and, in one area, the nationally rare whitebeam *Sorbus porrigentiformis*. The lightly wooded rock outcrops on the south-west facing slopes situated on the southern boundary of the site are additionally important for the occurrence of unusual moss and lichen assemblages. This area is believed to be one of the most important cryptogamic sites in mid-Wales. Nationally uncommon invertebrate species have also been recorded from the Aberedw rocks area.

The 'mawn' pools scattered across the moorland are a valuable refuge for the nationally rare pillwort *Pilularia globulifera*, lesser bladderwort *Utricularia minor* and lesser marshwort *Alpium inundatum*, as well as more widespread species such as shoreweed *Littorella uniflora*. Great-crested newts, nationally uncommon water beetles and other uncommon invertebrates have also been recorded. Many of the pools are also of ornithological interest, but the outlying part of the site comprising a mixture of grass, heath and scrub around the area of the Raddle Pool has been included largely because of its significance for wading bird species, particularly breeding populations of lapwing.

Remarks:

The site is registered as common land.

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