

Wales Grassland and Heathland Ecosystem Group Priority Action

Anglesey Coastal Heathland and Grasslands

The Anglesey Heathland Strategy (2003) states that; “heathland forms an important component of the Anglesey landscape. The designation of most of Anglesey’s coastline as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) affords national recognition of its coastal heathland, which contribute greatly to the scenic character of the best landscape on Anglesey. Since the AONB is a key resource underpinning the tourist industry, it follows that heathland should be recognised as a feature of that resource to be valued, protected and managed”. The international botanical significance of the Anglesey coastal heaths is illustrated through their identification as an Important Plant Area (the North West Anglesey Heaths and Sea Cliffs IPA). As such they represent the top 5% of the remaining heathland resource in the UK.

Much of Anglesey’s heathland is fragmented, isolated and interspersed with other semi-natural habitats and improved farmland. However on the exposed west and north coasts a series of sites supports some of the finest heathland and maritime grassland on the island. This band of coastal vegetation is not continuous but substantial stretches of heathland and maritime grassland occur on Holy Island, between Church Bay and Cemlyn Bay, near Porth Wen and between Amlwch and Pont Lynas.

A particularly unusual example of lichen-rich wave-form maritime heath is found at Breakwater Country Park and Penrhyn Mawr near South Stack shows one of the best examples of coastal zonation in maritime heath in Wales.

The key issues which needs to be addressed on Anglesey, as in many coastal areas of Wales, is the decline of the agricultural use of coastal land which is both difficult to manage and offers little economic reward. As a result low grazing levels have led to the development of a closed-canopy rank heathland particularly in areas where heathland is dominated by western gorse. Scrub and gorse encroachment are also an issue on some sites. Low grazing levels are less of a problem in very exposed situations where maritime heath is a climax community although some areas of maritime grassland have become rank with a thatch of dead material. Heavy grazing in a few locations has reduced the structural diversity of the vegetation and there is potential to restore these to more diverse communities.

Many of the species associated with heathland habitats prefer structurally diverse heathland with bare ground, short turf, seasonally inundated pools and ditches, and heather at various stages of maturity from pioneer to mature. Silver-studded blue, for example, requires warm open ground found in areas of pioneer heather or short grassy turf.

Whilst action may be focused on key heathland sites it is important to maintain the full range of semi-natural habitats at a landscape level. For example on heathland sites it may be necessary to control some encroaching scrub and bracken however as these are important habitats in their own right they should be maintained at the landscape scale. There is therefore a need to have a vision for the coastal landscape as a whole hence the mapped priority action area includes the key heathland sites, stretches of coastal cliff between and beyond these plus areas of adjacent chough feeding habitat and corridors linking the coast to the inland sites or linking inland sites.

Action required includes:

1. Support to help existing grazing scheme (AGAP) continue and expand
2. Improved infrastructure to allow better management of stock
3. Scrub and bracken management

4. Establishment of grazing appropriate to the requirements of both the habitats and associated species
5. Pond restoration, management and creation, and control of invasive non-native species.
6. Heathland management by burning and/or mowing (where appropriate to habitat, situation and species)
7. Expanding marketing of heathland meat products to ensure long-term grazing commitment (AGAP)
8. Continued integration of coastal access and habitat management to ensure that people's enjoyment of the "wild" nature of this stretch of coast is enhanced without impacting the habitats and species.

Priority Sites for Action

South Stack, Penrhyn Mawr
 South Stack
 Amlwch to Point Lynas Coast
 Holy Island wet heaths
 Porth Wen to Porth Gynfor NT Coast

Other Key Sites

Rhoscolyn Coast
 North east Coast NT Sites

Species Interest

Key Section 42 species

Chough	<i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i>
Silver-studded blue	<i>Plebejus argus</i>
Pillwort	<i>Pilularia globulifera</i>
Pale dog-violet	<i>Viola lactea</i>
Three-lobed Water-crowfoot	<i>Ranunculus tripartitus</i>
Chamomile	<i>Chamaemelum nobile</i>
Ciliate strap-lichen	<i>Heterodermia leucomela</i>
Golden hair-lichen	<i>Teloschistes flavicans</i>

Other Section 42

Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>
Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citronella</i>
Linnet	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>
Adder	<i>Vipera berus</i>
Slow worm	<i>Anguis fragilis</i>
Grass snake	<i>Natrix natrix</i>
Brown hare	<i>Lepus europaeus</i>
Grayling	<i>Hipparchia semele</i>