

Wales Grassland and Heathland Ecosystem Group Priority Action

Llŷn Peninsula Coastal Heathlands and Grasslands

Coastal grasslands and heathlands are a defining element of the Llŷn landscape. The Llŷn AONB Management Plan states that “the Llŷn’s characteristic elements include the green pastures of countryside, the heather and gorse of the heathlands and the rough pasture of the uplands”. The Llŷn heathland sites are important for a number of Section 42 species including chough, three-lobed water crowfoot, and pillwort. The international botanical significance of the Llŷn coastal heaths is illustrated through their identification as an Important Plant Area (the Llŷn Sea Cliffs and Heaths IPA). As such they represent the top 5% of the remaining heathland resource in the UK.

Nevertheless evidence shows that semi-natural vegetation underwent a severe decline across Llŷn during the 20th century with a loss of 50% of dry heath and 95% of wet heath between 1920’s and 1980’s¹

Much of the remaining lowland heathland is found along the coast particularly on the western tip of the peninsula with scattered inland sites. Although the coastal belt represents a near continuous fringe of semi-natural vegetation, in places this belt is very narrow and heathland vegetation is confined to a number of key sites. The condition of much of the heathland and associated maritime grassland is unfavourable as a result of inappropriate grazing management (past and present) and poor burning practices. Consequently there are areas of dense western gorse-dominated heath often with little ericoid cover, rank maritime grassland and invasive scrub and bracken. Unfavourable habitat condition has a knock-on impact on associated species, for example rank and close-sward vegetation provides unsuitable feeding habitat for chough. Changes to grazing management can also impact on plant species such as pillwort and three-lobed water crowfoot which require heavy grazing stock to maintain seasonally wet muddy niches such as pond margins and ruts on tracks and paths.

In the last 10 years work on a number of key sites has improved their condition through better grazing management including the use of ponies and cattle and increased management of rank vegetation such as bracken spraying and gorse/heather cutting. Although some sites are progressing towards favourable condition others are not and grazing and burning remain key issues. There are also stretches of coast between and beyond the key heathland sites where there has been less effort recently with a resultant decline in habitat quality. Inland most of the heathland sites are still either un-grazed or have insufficient grazing.

Action required includes:

1. Mechanical management of vegetation
2. Improved burning management through use of Burning Management Plans
3. Improved infrastructure to allow better management of stock
4. Establishment of grazing appropriate to the requirements of both the habitats and associated species
5. Restoration of highly degraded heathland (e.g. heather reseeded where required)
6. Pond restoration, management and creation, including control of invasive non-native species.
7. Marketing of heathland meat products to ensure long-term grazing commitment
8. Prevention of improvement and upgrading to track surfaces with aggregate.
9. 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

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¹ Blackstock T. H et al. 1995. Changes in the extent and fragmentation of heathland and other semi-natural habitats between 1920-22 and 1987-88 in the Llŷn peninsula Wales, UK. Biological Conservation 72 (33-44)

on habitats and species. It is particular importance to address concerns regarding stock management and access to avoid coastal abandonment.

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.

Priority Sites for Action

Mynydd Cilan
Mynydd Tir-y-cwmwd
Mynydd Anelog
Mynydd Bychestyn

Other Key Sites

Braich y Pwll
Ynys Enlli
Pen y Cil
Mynydd Riw
Mynytho
Capel Horeb
Porth Ceiriad to Borth Fawr Coast
Aberdaron to Porth Neigwl Coast

Species Interest

Key Section 42 species

Chough	<i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i>
Three-lobed water crowfoot	<i>Ranunculus tripartitus</i>
Pillwort	<i>Pilularia globulifera</i>
Pale dog-violet	<i>Viola lactea</i>
Chamomile	<i>Chamaemelum nobile</i>
Ciliate strap-lichen	<i>Heterodermia leucomela</i>
Orange hair-lichen	<i>Teloschistes flavicans</i>

Other Section 42

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