

Wales Grassland and Heathland Ecosystem Group Priority Action

Ceredigion Coastal Heath and Grassland

Along the coast of Cardigan Bay, from Borth in the north to Cardigan in the south there is a rich and varied resource of grassland, heath and scrub. Much of the coastal belt is within the Aberarth - Carreg Wylan SSSI, designated for its geological, geomorphological and biological features. The cliffs and coastal belt vary considerably in geology, landform and exposure, supporting a wide range of marine and coastal wildlife. Of special interest are the cliff crevice and ledge vegetation, maritime grassland and the coastal heathlands. Wooded valleys, scrub, sand dune and steep bracken covered slopes contribute to an overall natural and diverse area of coastal habitats, supporting a rich associated flora and fauna. The varied substrate and maritime influence is reflected in the cliff top vegetation and the landward transitional communities.

A large number of nationally scarce and regionally rare plant species are found along the coast with eight nationally scarce species, including dune fescue, Portland spurge, rock stonecrop, rock sea lavender, common gromwell and smooth cat's ear. This stretch of coastline supports an important assemblage of rare and notable invertebrate species, many of which depend on the associated maritime habitats for their survival. A rare species of crane fly *Gonomyia (Idiocera) bradleyi* occurs on sparsely vegetated seepages on boulder clay cliff and the nationally scarce thrift clearwing moth that favours coastal areas with an abundance of the larval foodplant thrift. Twenty-eight species of butterfly have been recorded in the Cwm Soden valley, north of Cwmtudu including the nationally scarce pearl-bordered fritillary and the small blue.

The Ceredigion coast is notable for its bird assemblage. It supports over 3% of the national population of both breeding and non-breeding chough. Choughs nest in crevices on cliffs between south Ceredigion and north Pembrokeshire. A rocky stretch of coastline at Craig yr Adar near New Quay supports an important seabird population including the only known breeding colony of kittiwakes in Ceredigion.

On much of the exposed coastal slopes maritime grassland is dominated by red fescue and supports species such as thrift, sea campion, English stonecrop and spring squill. The richest examples are found in the exposed areas such as Mwnt, whilst under-grazed less exposed areas support more rank vegetation. Small areas of species rich calcareous grassland are also found, particularly in the stretch of coastal slope to the south-west of Aberaeron and just to the north of Cwm Soden. Here a rich mix of fairy flax, birds foot trefoil, glaucous sedge, wild thyme and locally kidney vetch are found. Acidic grasslands are also an important part of the rich mix on this coast with small areas of lichen rich turf at Mwnt and species-rich bent-fescue grassland with betony, devils bit scabious and saw-wort. Examples of the latter are found at Coybal, where the acid grassland species are in an intimate mix with heathers, as well as at RAE Aberporth, Morfa Mawr and Mynchdy'r Graig.

Scattered along the coast belt are areas of coastal and lowland heath, often dominated by western gorse. Smaller remnants of true maritime heath are found on the cliff edges as a thin fringe of western gorse, heathers, spring squill and burnet. Inland there are more some larger areas of lowland heath, with the most notable example being found at Mynachdy'r graig where mire is also present.

Bracken is a component of most sites, where ever the soils are deep enough. Though this is an issue where it has spread into other important habitats it's also a key part of the ecology of this coastline. Bracken with an under storey of violets is vital for the pearl bordered fritillary

and there are significant stands of bracken underlain by a rich flora of bluebells and wood sorrel, for example at Lochtyn and Cwm Tydu.

Rich and diverse areas of scrub are found throughout ranging from wind cropped blackthorn to old stands of European gorse and mixed areas of bramble and hawthorn. Though in places scrub has increased at a detriment to the key coastal grasslands and heathland, like bracken it also plays its part in both the ecology and the aesthetics of this stunning stretch of coastline.

Traditionally the coastal grasslands have been grazed by sheep, cattle or ponies and where successful has maintained a mosaic of relatively open heath, grassland, scrub and bracken. With changes in farming practice there are several sites where grazing is limited or at some grazing has ceased.

It is essential that in the development of projects the hinterland of the core sites is considered as part the need to expand and enhance the wider network of habitats.

Action required includes:

1. Improved infrastructure to allow better stock management
2. Establishment or enhancement of mixed grazing needed, targeted at each sites individual needs.
3. Mechanical cutting of scrub, particularly European gorse. Bracken is also an issue on some of the coastal slopes.
4. Small, controlled patch burning of the heathland
5. 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

- Lochtyn
- Coybal
- Mwnt
- Mynachdy'r graig
- Castell –
- Penbryn
- Cwm Soden and other PBF sites

Species Interest

Key Section 42 Species

| | |
|---------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Chough | <i>Pyrrhonorax pyrrhonorax</i> |
| Pearl-bordered fritillary | <i>Boloria euphrosyne</i> |
| Yellowhammer | <i>Emberiza citronella</i> |

Other Section 42 Species

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|-------------|----------------------------|
| Skylark | <i>Alauda arvensis</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> |