

GWEUNYDD GLAN-Y-GLASNANT SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST



YOUR SPECIAL SITE AND ITS FUTURE

‘Your Special Site and its Future’ is part of our commitment to improve the way we work with Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) owners and occupiers. In it, we explain what is special about the wildlife on your site, and what care is needed to look after its wildlife into the future.

All SSSIs are considered to be of national importance and we recognise the crucial role that owners and occupiers play in their management and protection. We need you to share your views and knowledge of this site with us, to help safeguard it.

We hope that you will find ‘Your Special Site and its Future’ interesting and helpful. Please contact us if there is anything about the site and its management that you would like to discuss.

What is ‘special’ about the wildlife at Gweunydd Glan-y-glasnant SSSI?

Gweunydd Glan-y-glasnant has two special features.

Species-rich neutral grassland is now very rare. In the past, much of the grassland in Britain on free draining soils would have been like this. However, between the 1930s and 1980s, 97% of this habitat was lost, mainly to intensive agricultural improvement. Gweunydd Glan-y-glasnant SSSI has some of the remaining fragments in Carmarthenshire.

Species rich neutral grassland is very rich in plant life, and can support as many as 30 species of plant per square metre. These in turn provide food for large numbers of insects, birds and mammals. By comparison, modern agricultural grassland may have as few as one or two species of plant and supports few insects and birds.

Marshy Grassland is also a rare habitat, found on more waterlogged ground. Much of the remaining marshy grassland in Britain is found in Wales and we have a special responsibility for its conservation. Like species rich neutral grassland, most has been lost in the 20th century.

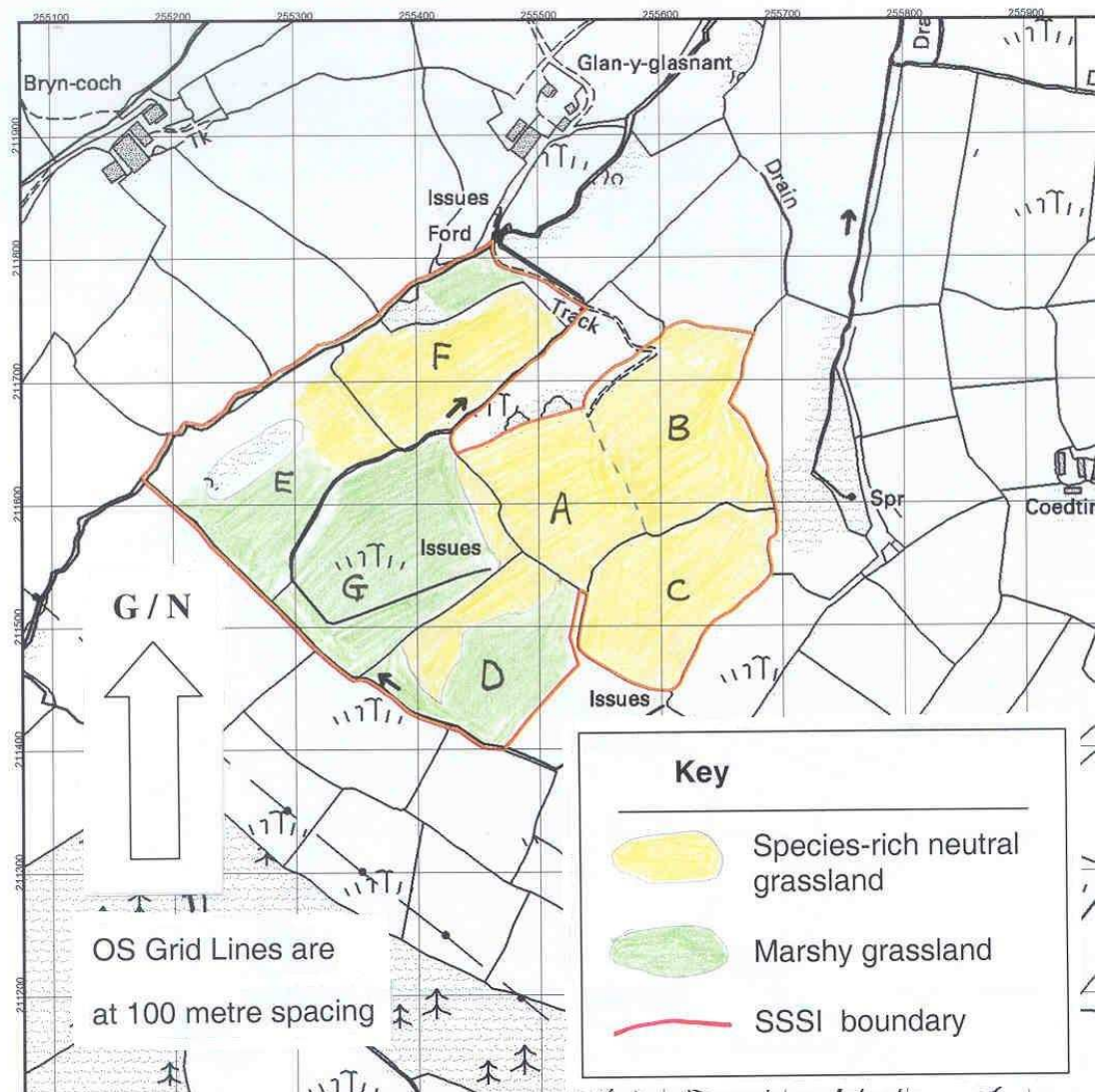
As well as the features listed above, Gweunydd Glan-y-glasnant has other habitats that contribute to the special wildlife interest. These include acid grassland, scrub, semi-natural broadleaved woodland, hedgerows with individual trees, earthbank field boundaries, streams, ditches and rock outcrops. This diversity of habitats is important for a wide range of species. Unless it is specified below, management of this site should aim to look after these habitats and species as well as the features of interest described above.

What do we want Gweunydd Glan-y-glasnant to look like?

The following is a description of how we would like to see the features at this site:

Species-rich neutral grassland will occupy about two-thirds of the total site area, and marshy grassland will occupy about a quarter. Woodland and scrub will be limited to no more than 10% of total site area.

Species-rich neutral grassland covers the land shaded yellow on the map, apart from small areas such as around gateways. During the summer the fields marked A, B and C are managed as hay meadows (A and B used to be separated by a hedge, now removed). Before haymaking they will be an attractive mix of different flowers typical of this kind of grassland – black knapweed, bird’s-foot trefoil and great burnet will be common, and the grasses crested dogtail and sweet vernal grass will also be found in the sward. The remainder of the species-rich neutral grassland that is not being managed for hay will be grazed during summer and may not look as colourful as the hayfields at first sight, because flowering heads are often eaten by stock. However, the sward, which varies in height from about five centimetres up to tussocks of 15cm, still contains most of the species present in the hayfields. The abundance of flowers in the hayfields and grazed land contrasts with the monotone green of the agriculturally improved fields in the surrounding countryside.



Marshy grassland covers the land shaded green on the map. From a distance, it looks slightly browner green than other drier grassland. In summer, this grassland is a mix of grasses and sedges such as purple moor-grass and glaucous sedge, dotted with flowers such as tormentil, meadow thistle, cross-leaved heath, whorled caraway and devil's-bit scabious. The sward height is slightly higher than the species-rich neutral grassland – perhaps 20 to 30 cm high – but it is still fairly easy to walk through and has no large tussocks of purple moor grass. You may see some cattle grazing here at this time of the year.

What management is needed on Gweunydd Glan-y-glasnant SSSI and why?

Although this site is an excellent place for wildlife it will only remain so if the necessary management continues. CCW's priority is to work with you to ensure that this management is carried out.

What does this mean in practice?

There are a number of different factors that could damage the special features at this site if they are not properly managed. These are the ones we regard as most important:

Nutrient enrichment

The most significant source of nutrient enrichment is through the application of fertilisers. Such treatments result in an 'improvement' of the sward and undesirable changes in species composition, namely a decrease in species richness and an increase in agricultural and weed species.

Therefore, no fertiliser, including farmyard manure, should be applied to any part of the site. Routine supplementary feeding of livestock should also be avoided.

Both inorganic fertilizer and farmyard manures have been routinely applied to fields at Gweunydd Glan-y-glasnant SSSI over a number of years, and the grassland has become agriculturally improved. In order to reverse the damage to the wildlife interest that has been caused, the restoration measures detailed below should be followed.

Drainage

The development of this marshy grassland over many centuries has been due in part to poor drainage in the soil (the other influential factors being climate and treatment of the vegetation). To preserve the value of this important feature, it is essential that no new drainage systems should be put in place, and any maintenance of the existing drainage system should be done carefully with guidance from CCW.

Grazing and mowing

These treatments of the grassland are very important. They allow lots of different plants to grow together, and prevents one or two species of plant from taking over the grassland, or even the grassland turning into scrub and woodland. Light summer grazing, preferably by cattle alone, or by a combination of horses and cattle is necessary to maintain this grassland (see below).

Scrub control

Scrub should be kept from encroaching into the grassland. If scrub control by grazing is not adequate, active control may become necessary. Topping of the marshy grassland is a current management practice, which may continue. It is best done in late summer (e.g. late August, after the bird breeding season has finished).

Some management is essential to restore the special features. This includes:

Restoration of the species-rich neutral grassland managed as haymeadows

This can only be achieved if all applications of fertiliser cease, including farmyard manure and calcified seaweed. Over a period of years, grass production would fall relative to current amounts. A single cut of grass for hay or silage should be made after mid-July each year. The aftermath should be grazed with cattle intermittently from August to October, with livestock being excluded from these fields from November to the following summer.

It is hoped that this treatment of the sward would produce a gradual increase in species diversity, with much of the sward eventually reverting to species-rich neutral grassland. However, the results of this new management regime will need to be closely monitored by CCW field officers, and it is possible that changes in the above restoration prescriptions may be called for.

Restoration of the marshy grassland and remaining areas of species-rich neutral grassland

As with the haymeadows, restoration of these other areas of grassland requires that there be no further applications of fertiliser, including farmyard manure and calcified seaweed. These areas should be lightly grazed with cattle on an intermittent basis during the period April to October inclusive. By the end of this grazing period, ideally there should be an uneven patchwork of short and long vegetation, with the sward in the wetter areas being rather taller than it is in the drier areas (see above, in the section 'What do we want Gweunydd Glan-y-glasnant to look like?'). These areas should be left ungrazed between November and March inclusive.

Finally

Our knowledge and understanding of wildlife is continually improving. It is possible that new issues may arise in the future, whilst other issues may disappear. This statement is written with the best information we have now, but may have to change in the future as our understanding improves. Any information you can provide on the wildlife of your site, its management and its conservation would be much appreciated.

If you would like to discuss any aspect of your SSSI, or have any concerns about your SSSI, please contact your local CCW office.

Your local office is:

**Countryside Council for Wales
Beechwood Building
Talley Road
Llandeilo
SA19 7HR
Tel.: 01558 825800
Fax: 01558 823467**