

CORNDON HILL 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 Corndon Hill SSSI?

The site consists of a variety of upland habitats. Those that are considered to be of particular interest include dry heath, acid grassland, acid rocks and scree and tall herb and fern vegetation. These habitats support plant species typical of both north-western and south-eastern Britain, including parsley fern and the nationally scarce rock stonecrop. The lichen communities growing on the rocks and scree may also be of some interest.

As well as the features listed above, Corndon Hill has other habitats that may contribute to the special wildlife interest. These include marshy grassland, wet heath, acidic springs and flushes and dense bracken. This mixture of habitats is important for much of the wildlife. Unless it is specified below, management of the site should aim to look after these habitats as well as the listed features of interest.

What do we want Corndon Hill SSSI to look like?

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

Most of the northern, eastern and southern slopes of the hill are covered with dry heath dominated by heather, with other plants such as bilberry, wavy hair-grass and various mosses. The vegetation of the southern slopes grades into acid grassland around old quarry workings on the western slopes, which is dominated by wavy hair-grass and sheep’s-fescue, with heath bedstraw and various mosses and lichens.

Along the eastern and southern slopes are areas of rock outcrop and scree, which provide habitat for plants such as rock stonecrop, oak, beech, scaly male, mountain male and parsley ferns and a variety of mosses and lichens.

Near the summit of the hill is an old field supporting bent and fescue grassland with a variety of plant species, including the now rather uncommon mountain pansy.

The low-lying land forming the eastern part of the site consists of wet heath and marshy grassland, with purple moor-grass intermixed with drier grassland, bracken and scattered scrub and trees that extend up the slope and around the southern part of the site to grade into the scree, rock outcrops and heath.

For each habitat of particular interest, the area is stable, or increasing, its quality is maintained, typical plants are thriving (see below) and the factors that may affect the habitat are under control.

For each plant that is of interest, the population is stable, or increasing and is sustainable in the long term, the range is not contracting, sufficient habitat exists to support the plant and the factors that may affect the plant or its habitat are under control.

What management is needed on Corndon Hill SSSI, and why?

Although the Corndon Hill is an excellent place for wildlife, it will only remain so if the necessary management is established and continued. In this context appropriate grazing, and heathland management are particularly important. 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:

- **Soil Fertility**

Soil fertility is naturally low to moderate. The application of any agricultural fertilizers, lime or manure will have an adverse effect on the natural development of the habitats and will promote a few grass species at the expense of the variety of wildflowers which we are seeking to encourage. No fertilizers should therefore be applied, and care should be taken to avoid any drift from adjoining land.

Stock feeding could also lead to damage from localised nutrient enrichment, disturbance and poaching, enabling the possible introduction/spread of weeds and agricultural grass species. Feeding should therefore be avoided on the SSSI, and should be confined to the summit grassland outside the notified area.

- **Drainage**

The marshy grassland and wet heath in the low-lying eastern part of the SSSI is dependent on the maintenance of a fairly high water table. Consequently, it is important that the natural drainage pattern here is preserved by avoiding any new drainage work and by taking care when cleaning out any existing drainage channels.

- **Burning and Mowing**

Parts of the site have been burned in the past. However, burning is not an appropriate management practice at Corndon Hill due to the small size of the heathland and the risk of fire spreading to nearby woodland and bracken litter. It would also encourage the further spread of gorse, including western gorse.

The terrain and presence of large rocks renders mowing impractical on the slopes, but it may be an option on the summit areas as a means of promoting a mosaic of different ages of heath and for managing any gorse, provided that grazing levels are appropriate.

- **Bracken Encroachment**

The spread of bracken needs to be periodically controlled, by mechanical or chemical means, in order to prevent it from overwhelming the heath and grassland habitats. Control measures should be carefully planned in consultation with CCW and other interested bodies, with care taken to avoid watercourses and areas supporting scarce ferns and other sensitive plants.

- **Acidification/Pollution**

Several widespread ongoing human-induced processes are changing the environmental and ecological conditions and are causing concern at Corndon Hill and in other upland/heathland areas in Britain. These include acidification of rain and soils, due to atmospheric pollution, and nutrient enrichment (especially increased nitrogen and phosphorus), through a combination of atmospheric pollution, excessive sheep-dunging/urination and other inputs from diffuse sources. Mosses and lichens are particularly vulnerable to pollution from atmospheric sources.

Although it is very important for wider measures to be taken, at Government and international levels, to reduce air pollution, some actions can be taken locally to alleviate these problems. Conifer forests can aggravate acidification problems on sensitive upland soils and fertiliser drift

and run-off can also be a problem. However, sensitive forestry and agricultural management in the immediate vicinity of Corndon Hill may help to alleviate these problems.

In addition, some active management is essential to conserve the special features and maintain them in their current condition. This includes:

- **Grazing**

Over much of Wales, heavy intensive sheep grazing during the past thirty years or so has resulted in the loss of large areas of heath to species-poor acid grassland of little wildlife interest. This has happened to a limited extent at Corndon Hill, and there is a risk of continued deterioration unless an appropriate long-term grazing regime is established. Finding the correct grazing levels may involve some experimentation over a period of years.

Ideally, the heath and grassland habitats at Corndon Hill should be maintained by a fairly light grazing regime. Excessive grazing will suppress the vegetation and result in the loss of further heath and grassland plant species. The ideal aim is to have a mosaic of different ages of heath to include young, mature and old growth.

The slopes and summit areas of the hill should be grazed by an appropriate number of sheep, with the stock being removed during the winter months. The lower eastern area should be grazed by cattle during the summer to control the coarse vegetation and prevent the spread of bracken, but at the same time allowing the development of scattered scrub and trees uphill to grade into the scree and rock outcrops.

Finally

Our knowledge and understanding of wildlife/geology 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, in particular, of the possible/probable impact of climate change. 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.

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