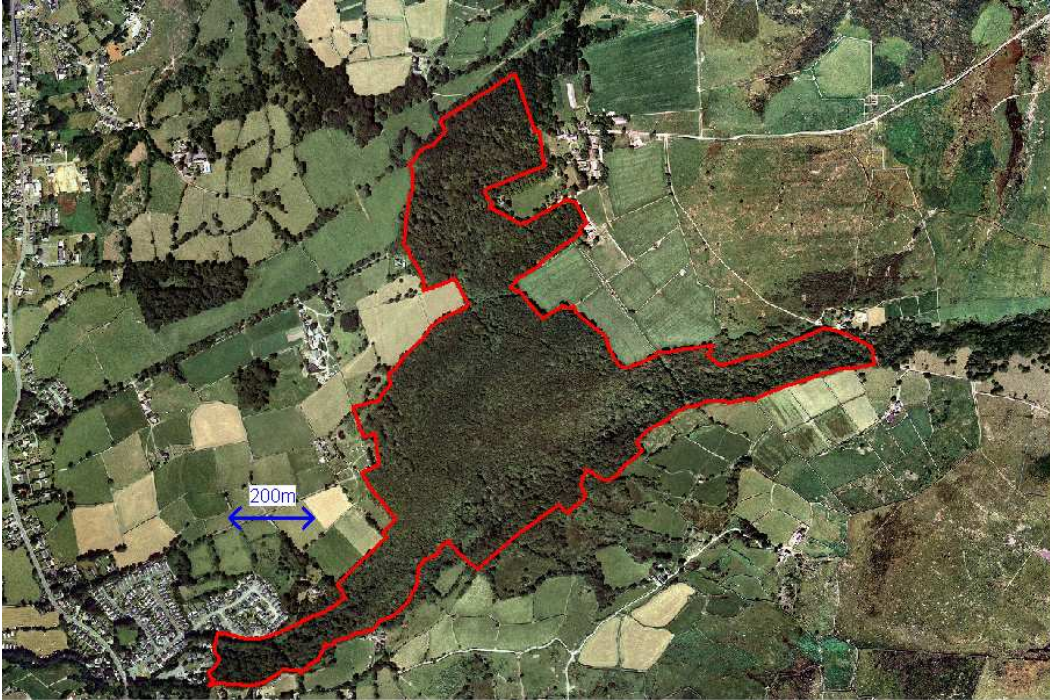


COED CORS Y GEDOL SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST

Site area: 56.3 ha



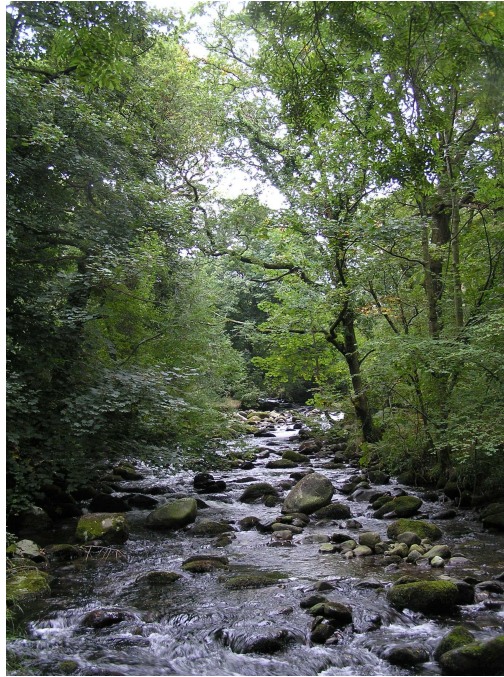
*Aerial photograph of Coed Cors y Gedol (SSSI boundary shown in red)
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YOUR SPECIAL SITE AND ITS FUTURE

‘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 it 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 us 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.



Photograph by CCW

What is ‘special’ about the wildlife at Coed Cors y Gedol SSSI?

The recorded features of interest are:

Oak woodland

Most oak woodlands in Meirionnydd have an acid ground flora due to the nature of the soils. Coed Cors y Gedol is an exception as it is a good example of oak woodland on less acid, neutral soils. As a consequence, the flora is richer with wood anemone, ramsons, bluebells, enchanter’s nightshade and dog’s mercury as well as bramble and bracken. Unusual plants include hay-scented buckler fern, great horsetail, wood millet and globeflower.

The sessile oak woodlands of southern Snowdonia, including Coed Cors y Gedol, form one of the most important areas for woodland conservation in Europe. This type of Atlantic woodland is often described as “temperate rain forest” due to the prevailing damp humid climate and associated abundance of ferns, lichens and luxuriant growth of mosses and liverworts. Coed Cors y Gedol is of European importance and as such forms part of the Meirionnydd Oakwoods and Bat sites Special Area of Conservation (SAC).

Mosses and liverworts

The woodland is rich in mosses and liverworts (bryophytes) with over 90 different species recorded growing on the trees, rocks and also on the ground and on earth banks. Many of these are restricted to western parts of Britain and Europe where the climate is wet but mild. They thrive in the humid conditions of the woodland, especially by the river and streams. One species of liverwort *Porella pinnata* is nationally scarce.

Lichens

Coed Cors y Gedol supports an impressive array of lichens, ranging from the crusty patch-forming lichens on rocks and trees to quite large leaf like and beard like species on tree trunks and branches. The quality of the lichen flora indicates clean air conditions and that this woodland is truly ancient and must have contained large, veteran trees throughout its history. Most of these lichens require fairly open conditions where they are not too shaded by dense tree cover. There are several nationally scarce species present and, as with the mosses and liverworts, some of the unusual lichens are “riparian” species associated with the Afon Ysgethin. The presence of these species reflects the unacidified, unpolluted quality of the river.

Coed Cors y Gedol has river, scrub and wet flush habitats that contribute to the special wildlife interest. This mixture of habitats including dead wood supports a diverse flora and fauna including bats, flowering plants, ferns and fungi. Otters are likely to use the Afon Ysgethin and there is a badgers’ sett in the wood. The woodland supports bird species typical of western oakwoods such as wood warbler, redstart and pied flycatcher. Unless specified below, management of this site should aim to look after these habitats and species as well as the listed features of interest that contribute to the special wildlife interest.

What do we want Coed Cors y Gedol to look like?

Most of Coed Cors y Gedol is broadleaved woodland, dominated by oak, birch, rowan and hazel. There are also areas with mainly ash and some non-native trees such as beech and sycamore and there is an impressive avenue of mature hybrid lime trees. Much of the central part of the wood was clear-felled during World War II, and this area has since regrown into a dense, even-aged oak woodland, with a dense shrub layer of hazel and rowan. This has resulted in a rather unnatural woodland structure. Other parts of the wood, for instance to the north of the road leading to Cors y Gedol Hall and near the Afon Ysgethin, have a more natural age structure with older trees and an understorey of hazel or, in wetter areas, willow.

The following is a description of how we would like Coed Cors y Gedol to develop:

Trees vary in age, size and density. A changing patchwork of temporary glades formed by fall or death of trees is slowly filled by naturally regenerating tree seedlings and saplings, forming a landscape of shifting light and shade, where as much as a quarter of the woodland may be open glades or developing young woodland.

Most of the trees and shrubs are of locally native broadleaved species. Sessile or hybrid oak, downy or pendulous birch, ash, rowan, holly, and hazel, together with occasional non-native tree species such as beech, sycamore, and hybrid lime create patterns of dappled green as their abundance changes throughout the woodland. Dead and dying trees, as well as live veteran trees with holes, hollows and rotten branches, provide special habitats for various mosses, liverworts and fungi, and also for specialised insect species.

The tree trunks, boulders and rocks are adorned with mosses, liverworts and lichens. In spring, parts of the woodland floor turn blue with abundant bluebells, with patches of white wood anemones. More difficult to find are the delicate grass wood millet, and the showy yellow globeflower.

During the breeding season, birds such as pied flycatchers, redstart and wood warblers are to be seen flitting among the branches and the woodland is filled with varied bird sounds, including the drumming of woodpeckers. At dusk, bats may also be seen, hunting insects as they fly in the woodland glades and rides. Badgers emerge from their setts at dusk in mid-summer, a good time to see them as they set off along their well-worn paths through the wood.

What management is needed on Coed Cors y Gedol SSSI and why?

Although Coed Cors y Gedol is an excellent place for wildlife it will only remain so if the necessary woodland management continues. CCW's priority is to continue to work with you to ensure that this management is carried out. We place a great importance on our relationships with owners and occupiers, because without your help it will be impossible to safeguard the special interest on your land.

What does this mean in practice?

Some management is essential to conserve the special features, while other management actions could damage the special interest within a very short time. Most of Coed Cors y Gedol is currently managed under the terms of a Tir Gofal agreement.

Woodland structure management in the central, even-aged part of the wood could be considered. Here, some glade creation by tree-felling may be undertaken in order to diversify the woodland structure, as it will take many years for a more natural woodland structure to develop in the absence of management intervention. Such intervention must also ensure that selected trees are retained within glades to provide future veteran trees.

Sheep or cattle-grazing at low levels will help to prevent the woodland ground layer becoming rank and overgrown with tussocks of grass and by vigorous species such as bramble. Light grazing benefits the mosses, liverworts and lichens, as it prevents their being smothered and shaded out, and helps them to colonise new areas. A level of 1 sheep per two hectares in late summer may be appropriate, but would need to be monitored. Too many sheep prevent tree regeneration, and in spring/summer they would suppress the ground flora. Cattle can also damage soil and plants by heavy poaching, but a short period of cattle-grazing, followed by little or no grazing, can be beneficial in providing suitable conditions for tree seeds to germinate. The level and pattern of grazing must therefore be carefully controlled so that stock have beneficial impacts on the wood, while allowing young trees to regenerate successfully in the long term.

Humidity, particularly the maintenance of a high humidity, is an important factor affecting the biodiversity of the woodland. A reduction in the humidity within the woodlands could result in gradual loss of rare moss, liverwort or lichen species if ambient humidity levels frequently fall below the level required by individual species. The cause of this could be either local loss of tree canopy in humid areas, or a reduction in the flow of the Afon Ysgethin from, for example, a hydroelectric scheme or major water abstraction upstream from the SSSI.

Rhododendron can grow to the exclusion of all else, forming a dense canopy and casting a dense shade. Currently there is only a small amount of Rhododendron in Goed Cors y Gedol. This should be eradicated as soon as possible as each mature bush can produce millions of tiny wind dispersed seeds, which will germinate readily. To ensure that the woodland then stays free of Rhododendron a program of continued vigilance is required to prevent establishment of bushes from distant seed sources and nearby gardens.

Dead wood should ideally be left where it falls and standing dead trees should be allowed to decay naturally. The removal of dead and decaying wood will lead to a reduction of the diverse wood decay conditions that many specialised plants and animals of woodland habitats depend upon. Without a continuous supply of dead wood of various sizes at various stages of decay, many of these species may not be present. Movement, cutting and tidying of dead wood should be avoided unless essential for public and livestock safety.

Finally

Our knowledge of the wildlife present at Coed Cors y Gedol is far from complete. 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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