

**CYNGOR CEFN GWLAD CYMRU
COUNTRYSIDE COUNCIL FOR WALES**

SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST CITATION

CARMARTHEN

COED GWEMPA

Date of Notification: 1992

National Grid Reference: SN 435116

O.S. Maps: 1: 50,000 Sheet number: 159
1: 25,000 Sheet number: SN 41

Site Area: 19 ha

Description:

Coed Gwempa is a semi-natural woodland lying on fairly level ground, some of which slopes very gently northwards towards the Gwendraeth Fach river, south-west of Pontantwyn village. The underlying rock is Old Red Sandstone, overlain by boulder-clay, giving rise to generally waterlogged conditions, particularly in the north-west of the site, where a small area of alder carr and open herbaceous vegetation has developed. The wood is an interesting mix of three main vegetation types, and is most unusual in south-west Wales, where sizeable lowland woodlands lying predominantly on base-rich soils are scarce. In many ways the wood is more typical of those found in the English lowlands, in particular in parts of the south and west Midlands.

The main vegetation types are pedunculate oak *Quercus robur* - bracken *Pteridium Aquilinum* woodland on the poorer, less base-rich ground, especially near the outer edges of the wood; ash *Fraxinus excelsior* - rowan *Sorbus aucuparia* woodland on the marginally higher and less waterlogged level ground, towards the centre of two eastern enclosures in particular; and small areas of alder *Alnus glutinosa* woodland. The oak and ash dominants within these communities exist as large standards in places, sometimes as tall old coppice, and often as rather spindly and quite dense maiden growth. Alder is frequent throughout the wood. There is a well developed shrub layer dominated by mature hazel *Corylus avellana* coppice, dense in places, along with frequent hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*, elder *Sambucus nigra*, guelder-rose *Viburnum opulus*, goat willow *Salix caprea* and grey willow *Salix cinerea*.

Over large areas the ground flora comprises dog's mercury *Mercurialis perennis*, which is sometimes very abundant, along with enchanter's-nightshade *Circaea lutetiana*, honeysuckle *Lonicera periclymenum*, wood-sorrel *Oxalis acetosella*, wood speedwell *Veronica montana*, common nettle *Urtica dioica*, red campion *Silene dioica*, bramble *Rubus fruticosus* agg. and ferns, in particular male-fern *Dryopteris filix-mas* and soft shield-fern *Polystichum setiferum*. In damper flushed areas there are growths of opposite-leaved golden-saxifrage *Chrysosplenium oppositifolium*, moschatel *Adoxa moschatellina*, sanicle *Sanicula europaea* and, at one point in the west of the wood, rough horsetail *Equisetum hyemale*, a scarce and declining plant which

requires permanently moist and silica-rich substrates in which to grow. In the western-most part of the site the waterlogged ground has frequent alder, which forms a mosaic with other drier areas supporting rowan and ash. Here the ground flora is characterised by an abundance of tufted hair-grass *Deschampsia cespitosa*, meadowsweet *Filipendula Ulmaria*, wood sorrel, enchanter's-nightshade and a sparser covering of dog's mercury, creeping soft-grass *Holcus mollis*, water avens *Geum rivale*, common bent *Agrostis capillaris* and sedges *Carex spp.*

In the more open conditions to the north-west of the wood, the ground vegetation (possibly representing a formerly grazed area) is more varied, and includes much wavy hair-grass, common valerian *Valeriana officinalis*, devil's-bit scabious *Succisa pratensis*, heath spotted-orchid *Dactylorhiza maculata spp. ericetorum*, marsh and meadow thistle *Cirsium palustre* and *C. dissectum*, betony *Stachys officinalis*, wild angelica *Angelica sylvestris* and tormentil *Potentilla erecta*. There is invasive bramble, hazel, oak and eared willow *Salix aurita*, whilst down-slope there is a small area of mire vegetation with yellow iris *Iris pseudacorus*, marsh-marigold *Caltha palustris*, hemlock water-dropwort *Oenanthe croccata*, meadowsweet, and a strong population of wood club-rush *Scirpus sylvaticus*, a plant of local occurrence in Carmarthen. The red-tipped clearwing moth *Synanthedon formicaeformis* occurs in this open area, here at its only known extant Welsh site, breeding on willow *Salix spp.*. The dense herbaceous vegetation hereabout also supports a thriving colony of dark bush-crickets *Pholidoptera griseoptera*, a rare species away from the coast in Wales.

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