

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

SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST CITATION

**ANGLESEY**

**GLANNAU YNYS GYBI/HOLY ISLAND COAST**

**Date of Notification:** 2000

**National Grid Reference:** SH 210845

**O.S. Maps:** 1:50,000 Sheet number: 114  
1:10,000 Sheet number: SH27 NW, SH28 SW

**Site Area:** 399.4 ha

**Description:**

This site is of special interest for its geological and biological features, including heathland and maritime grassland communities, coastal cliffs and ledges, its assemblages of vascular plants and birds, invertebrates and its solid geology. The site lies on the north west corner of Holy Island and includes the most westerly point on Anglesey. Holyhead lies immediately to the east.

The cliffs around South Stack lighthouse display some of the most magnificent exposures of folded sedimentary rocks in Great Britain, described by Greenly (1919) as an amazing revelation. The section is the type locality for the Monian South Stack Group, and includes the only known record of burrowing organisms *Skolithos* in the Mona Complex. The existence of these trace fossils has been cited in the support of a Cambrian, rather than a Precambrian, age for the exposures. The presence of clear sedimentary 'way-up' evidence in these cliffs provided critical evidence to Shackleton in his famous inversion of Greenly's stratigraphic sequence. More recently, the complex minor structures at South Stack have provided further evidence of great significance.

The coastal cliffs and the associated grassland and heaths are of major botanical interest. The South Stack fleawort *Tephrosia integrifolia subsp. maritima* isn't found anywhere else in the world and the nationally rare spotted rock-rose *Tuberaria guttata* occurs within the mosaic of heath and grassland communities above the cliffs, together with pale heath violet, *Viola lactea*. Other nationally scarce plant species on the cliffs include golden samphire, *Inula crithmoides* and the endemic rock sea-lavender *Limonium britannicum subsp. celticum* and *L. procerum subsp. procerum*. Juniper *Juniperus communis*, a locally uncommon plant, occurs on the cliffs and there are Atlantic bryophytes and ferns such as hay scented buckler fern *Dryopteris aemula*, Wilsons filmy fern *Hymenophyllum wilsonii* and Tunbridge filmy fern *H. tunbrigense*.

An extensive area of dry lowland heath of heather *Calluna vulgaris* - western gorse *Ulex gallii* covers the flanks of Holyhead Mountain. Scree along the western edge of the mountain supports a more diverse bilberry *Vaccinium myrtillus* sub-community of this heather and western gorse heath. Around the coastal margins heather - western gorse heath of the spring squill *Scilla verna*

sub-community grades into heather *Calluna vulgaris* - spring squill *Scilla verna* maritime heath. In wetter areas cross-leaved heath *Erica tetralix* - bog-moss *Sphagnum compactum* and deergrass *Scirpus cespitosus* - cross-leaved heath *Erica tetralix* wet heath communities are found.

On rocky ledges and at the top of the cliffs the vegetation comprises the thrift *Armeria maritima* - common mouse-ear *Cerastium diffusum* maritime therophyte community. This generally forms rather sparse open turf with much bare ground; associated species include buckshorn plantain *Plantago coronopus* and kidney vetch *Anthyllis vulneraria*. On deeper soils above the cliffs is the cocksfoot *Dactylis glomerata* sub-community of the red fescue *Festuca rubra* - Yorkshire fog *Holcus lanatus* grassland. These areas are characterised by a very thick sward with associated Spring squill, wild carrot *Daucus carota* and sorrel *Rumex acetosella*.

The cliffs support important seabird colonies; guillemots, razorbills and puffins combine to create one of the largest colonies of breeding auks in North Wales. Fulmar and kittiwake also nest on these cliffs together with peregrine and chough, the latter using the heathland and adjacent areas extensively for feeding. Within the heathland stonechat, skylark, linnets and whitethroat all breed regularly.

The site supports a good range of invertebrates including the silver studded blue *Plebejus argus* and marsh fritillary *Eurodryas aurinia* has been recorded here in the past.

### **Remarks:**

A voluntary ban agreed between CCW, RSPB and the British Mountaineering Council asks climbers to avoid specified cliffs where seabirds, chough and peregrine, nest from February to July inclusive.

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