COED LLETYWALTER SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST

SSSI Area: 38.6 ha

Photograph by Doug Oliver CCW

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 this Site Management Statement (SMS), we explain what is special about the wildlife on your site, and what care is needed to look after it into the future.

All SSSI 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.

What is 'special' about the wildlife at Coed Lletywalter SSSI?
The recorded feature of interest is:

Oak woodland. The sessile oak woodlands of southern Snowdonia, including Coed Lletywalter, 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 Lletywalter is of European importance and as such forms part of the Meirionnydd Oakwoods and Bat sites Special Area of Conservation (SAC).

Coed Lletywalter is an attractive woodland, intersected by streams and covering a rugged landscape of rocky knolls with numerous small cliffs and boulder-strewn slopes. The woodland is mainly dominated by sessile oak with downy birch and beech. The ground flora varies from, boulder-strewn areas with little vegetation other than mosses, to heather and bilberry dominated areas with wavy hair-grass and common cow-wheat. Richer soils support an attractive mix of honeysuckle, wood sorrel, dog's mercury, violets and primroses with small areas of bluebells. There is a patchy ground layer of mosses and liverworts which in humid places adorn boulders, crag faces and trees, with some species forming large distinctive cushions and others intimate mosaics or delicate wefts. The nationally scarce liverworts, *Adelanthus decipiens* and *Jamesoniella autumnalis*, and the uncommon Tunbridge filmy-fern, all indicative of high humidity, are recorded here. Alder and willow grow in the wetter areas and ash, holly, and hazel are scattered through the wood. Where drainage is impeded, bog woodland dominated by downy birch and willow, has developed, with a ground storey of bog mosses and purple moor grass and a few plants of royal fern. Small areas of ash woodland on lime-rich soils add further diversity, as does the swamp and willow scrub, which has developed within the artificially dammed lake to the southeast.

Most of the site is young broadleaved woodland and there is a lack of old mature trees. A recent survey indicated that, excluding beech, there are currently only 46 mature trees of which only 8 are old enough to be called veteran. Beech, a planted species not native to this area, is still frequent despite a concerted effort to control it over recent years. The moss, liverwort and lichen flora (collectively called lower plants) is currently disappointing given the close proximity of the lower plant-rich woodlands to the west. That said there is a notable population of tree lungwort on 20 or so trees and 7 more trees with uncommon lichens such as *Sticta limbata* and *Sticta sylvatica*. The 'good' lichen trees are concentrated within a relatively small area close to the old ruin at Cwrt.

As well as the woodland described above, Coed Lletywalter has other habitats and species that contribute to the special wildlife interest. These include areas of wetland, pools, streams, grassland, scrub, heath, bracken, and rocky outcrops. Birds typical of western oak woods, such as pied flycatcher, redstart and wood warbler breed here and the drumming of greater and lesser spotted woodpecker, on dead standing trees and boughs, echoes through the wood in spring. Lesser horseshoe bats may use the mine adits as hibernation roosts and the woodland as a feeding area together with other bat species such as brown long-eared, Natterers, whiskered/Brandts and pipistrelles.

Noctule bats may roost in old woodpeckers' holes in suitable trees. Otter make sorties into the wood from the nearby Afon Artro and may use the mine adits as lying up and breeding holts.

Photograph by Doug Oliver CCW

What do we want Coed Lletywalter to look like?

The woodland should continue to cover the entire site and be allowed to mature so that veteran trees are scattered throughout and the increasingly humid conditions allow further colonisation of lower plants. A luxuriant lichen flora may then develop with several trees supporting large leafy lungwort and other species typical of a high rainfall loving community, right across the site. Common and rare mosses and liverworts, typical of humid places, should increase in abundance. Tunbridge filmy-fern should at least maintain its current distribution and hopefully may increase. The ground flora should redevelop as the densely shading beech is managed but bramble and ivy should form only local patches and not extensive stands as they do at present. Bracken may continue to be dominant within the former grassland fields and glades until a scrub and tree canopy develops.

The trees and shrubs should be of locally native broadleaved species: oak, downy birch, ash, rowan, holly, and hazel, together with occasional non-native tree species such as beech and sycamore. In the longer term there should be no beech. There should be a good under storey of shrubs with only local dominance of holly, which does not threaten the establishment of moss, liverwort and lichen communities. Rhododendron should be absent from the site and preferably from the surrounding countryside. Bog woodland should continue to be present in its current locations and have the same or greater extent.

Naturally regenerating tree seedlings and saplings, should form a landscape of shifting light and shade, where as much as a third of the woodland may be open glades or developing young woodland, slowly filling a changing patchwork of temporary glades formed by natural tree fall. Fallen and standing dead trees, as well as live trees with holes, hollows and rotten branches, will provide special habitats for various mosses,

liverworts, fungi, insects, birds and bats. Throughout the woodland there should be ample dead wood.

The woodland should continue to support a typical breeding bird assemblage of western oak woods, good feeding area for bats and tree roost sites.

What management is needed on Coed Lletywalter SSSI and why?

Although Coed Lletywalter is an good place for wildlife it will only remain so and be further enhanced and restored if the necessary management continues. CCW's priority is to continue to work with you to ensure that this management is carried out successfully. 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?
Coed Lletywalter is owned by the Woodland Trust but has been managed by CCW up until March 2006. There is one additional private owner of the site.

Some management is essential to conserve the special features, while other management actions could damage the special interest within a very short time. Below is a list of those we regard as most important.

Woodland management, which may include tree felling and scrub clearance, can be beneficial if carried out appropriately. It could however cause damage if for example important trees are felled or if mosses, other plants and/or wildlife are damaged or disturbed as a result. As Coed Lletywalter has such a high cover of non-native trees, especially beech, it is expected that tree felling will be restricted to those species and essential health and safety works.

Beech and other non-native trees such as sycamore, horse chestnut, sweet chestnut and conifer species are of concern as they replace native trees and are generally not as good for wildlife in themselves (though sycamore can be good for lichens) and result in an impoverished ground flora. Beech was planted here for landscape and commercial reasons in the early 1800s with subsequent planting at the turn of the century. Beech is of particular concern on this site for its presence at plantation density and for its ability to regenerate vigorously under the dense shade of the beech and oak canopy, which is too shady for the locally native tree species to become established. Mature, sapling and seedling beech trees now dominate large areas of the woodland. This is undesirable as the beech here is planted and is not considered a locally native species and its deep shade suppresses field and ground layers and prevents the restoration of native oak woodland of European importance. The spread of Douglas fir and Scots pine is also of potential concern given the presence of mature specimens on site. Whilst the occasional non-native tree may be tolerated in the woodland, they should not be allowed to increase above manageable levels. Mature beech trees, saplings and seedlings should be removed to reduce cover and prevent further establishment by felling, manual removal or chemical treatment. Ring-barking or injecting beech with herbicide would increase the amount of standing dead wood mentioned below.

Rhododendron can be one of the most damaging factors affecting western sessile oak woodlands. The plant often grows to the exclusion of all else, forming a dense canopy, which casts a dense shade. Each mature bush can produce millions of tiny wind dispersed seeds, which germinate readily in the moist moss carpets present throughout the woodlands. Clearance or control is extremely costly. To achieve satisfactory control all plants on the site as well as those adjacent to the site have to be removed. Rhododendron has been cleared from the southern part of the site where it occurred, but constant vigilance and a program of continued management is required to ensure that this alien invasive species does not re-colonise.

Grazing woodland is a balance between ensuring tree regeneration for its long-term survival and age diversity whilst not allowing the ground layer to become too overgrown. Tree regeneration is best achieved by periods of no grazing or very low levels and/or in some situations individual tree protection from grazing stock. On the other hand light grazing can be beneficial or essential for plants such as mosses and liverworts as well as breeding birds. Coed Lletywalter has not been grazed for the last 30 years or so and currently is regenerating well. Assessment of the results from a recent survey of the under storey and ground flora, including the impact of the increasing cover of holly, bramble and ivy, indicates that it would be a good idea to reintroduce light grazing.

Dead wood (including standing dead trees where safe) should be retained in all areas of the site and dead and decaying wood should be left in situ. Tree surgery and timber movement should only take place for public or stock safety reasons. Away from public access, standing dead trees should be allowed to decay and fall naturally. Dead wood is important for its associated plants and animals supporting specialised mosses, liverworts, lichens and invertebrates. Ring barking or injecting selected trees with herbicide helps increase the amount of standing dead wood.

Power line clearance or way leave tree surgery and coppicing is undertaken for health and safety reasons at one location. Cut brash should be piled up in neat piles and left on site.

Archaeological features including buildings, enclosures, hut circles, tracks and walls of prehistoric to post-Medieval origin are present. There is a requirement to keep some of these features clear and they can be vulnerable to tree-fall, tree felling and tree growth.

Feral Goats can cause significant damage to young trees and saplings. A large established goat population exists on the nearby Rhinogydd, with Coed Lletywalter forming the lowland boundary of one of the larger hefts. Feral goats browse the leaves of smaller sapling trees and strip the bark from larger trees during the winter months. A small number of goats have been seen within the site in recent years. Control of the goat population should continue in the area and on the site to ensure continued survival of sapling trees and woodland regeneration.

Finally

Our knowledge of wildlife 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. Any information you can provide on the wildlife of your site, it 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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