

# **COED Y GOPA 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 ecology at Coed Y Gopa SSSI?

This site has 2 special features.

**Feature 1** The winter population of lesser horseshoe bats Rhinolophus hipposideros.



Lesser horseshoe bat in hibernation (Photo © Mike Castle)

It is currently thought that there are approximately 17,000 lesser horseshoe bats in Britain. Though now confined to Wales, the West Midlands and southwest England, 100 years ago their numbers are thought to have been much greater and their distribution was more widespread. They were found as far north as Yorkshire and as far east as Kent. In North East Wales, disused mines and caves are used hibernation sites by lesser horseshoe bats.

**Feature 2** An assemblage of hibernating bats

As well as the features listed above, this site has other habitats that contribute to the special wildlife interest. These include secondary broadleaved woodland, grassland, and scrub together with linear or point structures such as hedgerows or individual trees. This diversity of habitats supports a wide range of species and these too are a key component of the special interest of the site. Unless it is specified below, management of this site should aim to look after these habitats as well as the listed features of interest.

## **What do we want Coed Y Gopa Wood to look like?**

The following is a description of how we would like to see the features at Coed Y Gopa.

*The caves continue to support at least 75 lesser horseshoe bats and at least three other species. All roosting sites are free from disturbance and the entrance points clear of obstructions. Internal temperatures and humidity of these roosts should be constant throughout the winter.*

*Woodland, scrub, and grassland communities continue to provide conditions suitable for foraging bats. Landscape features such as hedgerows and large individual trees provide flight-lines for bats to feed and disperse and are important elements of bat habitat. Such features should be retained and not reduced in size in order to preserve the bats ability to navigate by these landmarks.*

## **What management is needed on Coed Y Gopa SSSI and why?**

Although Coed Y Gopa is an excellent place for wildlife it will only remain so if the necessary management continues. 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 Coed Y Gopa if they are not properly managed. These are the ones we regard as most important:

- **Disturbance**

Bats are very susceptible to disturbance whilst hibernating. Winter monitoring visits should therefore be restricted to two per winter. If bats are disturbed repeatedly during the winter, arousal from hibernation will result in increased use of stored body fat, which may increase the risk of mortality before spring.

It is therefore important that essential management operations are undertaken at a time of year when disturbance to bats is considered to be unlikely, ie between April and September. Management works within 100m of the roost entrances should therefore only be carried out after consultation with CCW. No works, including excavations undertaken for scientific purposes, should be undertaken whilst the bats are hibernating.

- **Alterations to Airflow**

Caves and mines must be protected from alterations to airflow. Airflow regimes within caves and mines should maintain constant humidity and temperatures between 8-12°C. It is therefore important to ensure that entrances are kept unobstructed. Similarly it is important to avoid any unplanned new entrances, which may cause changes to ventilation.

- **Integrity and Accessibility of Cave and Mine Entrances**

It is important to maintain the accessibility and integrity of the entrances to each cave. Vegetation growth close to each cave is desirable for the purposes of providing cover for dispersing bats. However, management undertaken to remove excessive vegetation growth around cave entrances may periodically be required. Management works may also be required to maintain the structural integrity and condition of each cave entrance.

- **Foraging Habitat**

Bats principally feed on insects such as flies (mainly midges), small moths, caddis flies, lacewings, beetles, and small wasps. Suitable foraging habitat includes dense broadleaved woodland, scrub, and pasture. The size of the bat population suggests that sufficient foraging habitats exist within the vicinity of Coed y Gopa. It is therefore important that surrounding habitats are left intact, and in particular, within the area immediately surrounding roost entrances.

Although limited foraging habitat is included within the site, the nightly radius for foraging lesser horseshoe bats is known to exceed 1.5 kilometres. CCW may consider entering into discussions with land managers in order to secure appropriate habitat management regimes within foraging areas.

- **Dispersal Routes**

The preferred habitats that bats use as cover for dispersal include woodlands, hedgerows, scrub and along linear man made features such as walls. The landscape around the roost site includes woodland (including some conifer plantations), hedgerows, scrub and calcareous grassland. If linking habitats between roosts are lost, bat flight patterns could be disturbed which could lead to alterations to the size of this bat colony. The management of these areas should therefore aim to maintain tree cover whenever possible. Existing woodland should be carefully managed to ensure continuity of habitat, and whenever gaps exist, hedges planted to ensure continuity of corridors. Hedges should not be cut or layered except in exceptional circumstances.

### **Finally**

Our knowledge and understanding of wildlife 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. Any information you can provide on 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.**

**Your local office is;**

Countryside Council for Wales  
Glan y Nant  
Unit 19  
Mold Business Park  
Mold  
Flintshire CH7 1XP

**Telephone: 01352 706600**

**Fax : 01352 752346**

**Email: [mold@ccw.gov.uk](mailto:mold@ccw.gov.uk)**

**Web site: <http://www.ccw.gov.uk>**