

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

SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST: CITATION

POWYS

BRITHDIR A CHWM MAWR

Date of Notification: 10 December 2009

National Grid Reference: SO 301 946

OS Maps: 1:50,000 Sheet number: 137
1:10,000 Sheet number: SO39 NW

Site Area: 7.9 ha

Description

Brithdir and Cwm Mawr fields are of special interest primarily for their species-rich unimproved neutral grassland, now a rare habitat due to widespread agricultural improvement. This is the largest known area remaining in Montgomeryshire and is a good example of a type that supports plants more typical of acidic grassland. Additionally, the site supports important populations of the scarce and declining green-winged orchid *Orchis morio* and pepper saxifrage *Silaum silaus*. The site comprises several fields situated close to the border with Shropshire, just east of Roundton Hill, near the villages of Churchstoke and Hyssington. The fields lie from around 200 to 290 metres above sea level.

The species-rich stands of neutral grassland are the core of the botanical interest. The most frequent grasses are common bent *Agrostis capillaris*, red fescue *Festuca rubra*, crested dog's-tail *Cynosurus cristatus* and sweet vernal-grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum*, with other less common species including quaking grass *Briza media*, yellow oat grass *Trisetum flavescens* and heath grass *Danthonia decumbens*. Alongside these grasses is a variety of prominent forbs, including common knapweed *Centaurea nigra*, common bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus corniculatus*, devil's-bit scabious *Succisa pratensis* and tormentil *Potentilla erecta*, with great burnet *Sanguisorba officinalis*, meadow vetchling *Lathyrus pratensis* and lady's bedstraw *Galium verum* also present. More uncommon species have also been recorded within these neutral grassland stands, with pepper saxifrage scattered infrequently at one of its very few stations in Montgomeryshire, as well as several plants of dyer's greenweed *Genista tinctoria*. A large population of adder's-tongue *Ophioglossum vulgatum*, is also present.

In the more low-lying parts of the site, the drier neutral grassland grades into rush-pasture, dominated by sharp-flowered rush *Juncus acutiflorus* and accompanied by marsh bedstraw *Galium palustre*, greater bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus uliginosus*, lesser spearwort *Ranunculus flammula* and ragged robin *Lychnis flos-cuculi*. Short sedges are prominent in places and, locally, the rush canopy gives way to short sedge and bryophyte-rich flushes characterised by base-loving species, notably tawny sedge *Carex hostiana* and the mosses *Campyllum stellatum* and *Ctenidium molluscum*. Other more notable species found in this community include smooth brome grass *Bromus racemosus*, marsh St. John's-wort *Hypericum elodes*, marsh valerian *Valeriana dioica*, and a colony of giant horsetail *Equisetum telmateia*, a scarce localised species in Montgomeryshire, occurs around field boundaries. Some of the fields are separated by

woodland, scrub and hedgerows and, within these areas, the uncommon epiphyte toothwort *Lathraea squamaria* grows on the hedgerow hazel *Corylus avellana*.

An interesting orchid community exists at the site, including most notably the uncommon green-winged orchid, which is now restricted to three known locations in the district, fragrant orchid *Gymnadenia conopsea* ssp. *densiflora*, early-purple orchid *Orchis mascula*, as well as heath spotted orchid *Dactylorhiza maculata* and common spotted orchid *Dactylorhiza fuchsii*.

Remarks

The site is also of note for spreading bellflower *Campanula patula*, a species whose population in Britain has declined significantly in recent decades and is now listed as endangered in the United Kingdom and critically endangered in Wales. It has been recorded in the north-eastern field of the site and occurs on hedge banks and along a green lane outside the site boundary to the north-east, where it is at its strongest. This makes the area one of the best remaining outposts for the species in Wales. The added significance of this population is that it is at the northerly extent of its now limited distribution in Britain.

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