

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

SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST CITATION

PEMBROKESHIRE

GWEUNYDD BLAENCLEDDAU

Date of Notification: 2000

National Grid Reference: SN 156316

O.S. Maps: 1: 50,000 Sheet number: 145
1: 25,000 Sheet number: SN13

Site Area: 149.6 ha

Description:

Gweunydd Blaencleddau is of special interest for its complex of marshy grassland, wet-heath, blanket bog, fen and flush communities, and the significant populations of the southern damselfly *Coenagrion mercuriale* and marsh fritillary butterfly *Eurodryas aurinia* which these support. The site is located around the headwaters of the Eastern Cleddau, to the east of Mynachlog-ddu in north Pembrokeshire. It occupies a shallow south-west trending valley between 190 and 275m in altitude. A series of springs and seepages arise along the flanks of the valley, draining into swamp and mire areas alongside the Eastern Cleddau. The underlying geology comprises glacially deposited clays and loams, overlain in places by a mantle of peat.

Wet-heath has developed over shallow peat or mineral soils. Deergrass *Trichophorum cespitosum* is frequent amongst a mix of sub-shrubs such as heather *Calluna vulgaris* and cross-leaved heath *Erica tetralix*. Deeper peat deposits over gently sloping land on the east side of the river support blanket bog vegetation at an unusually low altitude. Bog mosses, principally *Sphagnum papillosum* and *S. recurvum*, are abundant amongst hummocks of purple moor-grass *Molinia caerulea*, hare's-tail cottongrass *Eriophorum vaginatum* and heather.

Springs emerging on the valley sides give rise to a complex patterning of flushes, runnels and seepages. Lawns of bog mosses *Sphagna*, together with species such as star sedge *Carex echinata*, common cottongrass *Eriophorum angustifolium* and bog asphodel *Narthecium ossifragum*, are characteristic of the more acidic areas. Where the spring water is less acidic, a more diverse flora has developed. Dioecious sedge *Carex dioica*, marsh St John's-wort *Hypericum elodes*, marsh arrow-grass *Triglochin palustris* and mosses such as *Campylium stellatum* are typical of these base-rich flushes.

Fen is found in the wetter areas along the valley bottom. In one place this occupies a circular 'pingo' hollow, formed towards the end of the last ice age. The vegetation generally comprises a diverse mix of sedges, mosses and wetland herbs. Bottle sedge *Carex rostrata*, bogbean *Menyanthes trifoliata*, marsh cinquefoil *Potentilla palustris* and the bog moss *Sphagnum teres* are typically abundant in these communities.

Extensive areas of marshy grassland are present on the valley flanks. This takes various forms according to management practices and soil conditions. Purple moor-grass is often dominant in a

tussocky sward. Heathy examples of this vegetation support species such as cross-leaved heath and heath rush *Juncus squarrosus*. Tall-herb variants are characterised by species such as wild angelica *Angelica sylvestris* and marsh thistle *Cirsium palustre*. Other areas are influenced by lime-rich groundwater, with flea sedge *Carex pulicaris* particularly characteristic here. Purple moor-grass is replaced by rushes in wetter or more nutrient-rich areas, with sharp-flowered rush *Juncus acutiflorus* and soft rush *J. effusus* forming a tall canopy. A wide variety of herbs such as lesser spearwort *Ranunculus flammula*, marsh bedstraw *Galium palustre* and greater bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus pedunculatus* are interspersed with the rushes.

Other habitats present include small areas of swamp, dry heath, acid grassland, neutral hay meadow, bracken and scrub. These associated habitats contribute to the ecological diversity of the site.

Notable flowering plant species include few-flowered spike-rush *Eleocharis quinqueflora*, whorled caraway *Carum verticillatum* and ivy-leaved bellflower *Wahlenbergia hederacea*. Amongst the lower plants *Kurzia sylvatica*, hornwort *Anthoceros punctatus* and *Splachnum ampullaceum* are of particular interest.

A large population of the nationally scarce marsh fritillary butterfly is present. The larval foodplant, devil's bit scabious *Succisa pratensis*, is locally prominent in grazed purple moor-grass vegetation around the site. The nationally rare southern damselfly is found in a few base-rich flushes, favouring the slow flowing channels and seepages choked with plants such as marsh St John's-wort. Other invertebrates noted include a number of uncommon species such as the scarlet tiger moth *Callimorpha dominula* and scarce blue-tailed damselfly *Ischnura pumilio*. Birds recorded include reed bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus*, grasshopper warbler *Locustella naevia* and willow tit *Parus montanus*.

Remarks:

The marsh fritillary butterfly and southern damselfly are listed in Annex IIa of the EC Directive on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and Wild Flora and Fauna, and in Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). The southern damselfly is also listed in Appendix II of the Bern Convention.

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