

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

SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST CITATION

CARMARTHENSHIRE

ABER TAF/TAF ESTUARY

Date of Notification: 2002

National Grid Reference: SN 310 110

O.S. Maps: 1:50,000 Sheet number: 159
1:10,000 Sheet number: SN 21 NE
SN 21 SE
SN 30 NW
SN 30 SW
SN31 SW

Site Area: 1494.3 ha

Description:

The Taf Estuary is of special interest for its saltmarsh vegetation, which is associated with extensive areas of intertidal mud, sand and the river channel. The site is also of special interest for two species of migratory fish.

The Taf Estuary is situated on the south Carmarthenshire coast and forms part of the 'Three Rivers' complex of the Taf, Tywi and Gwendraeth estuaries. Discharging into Carmarthen Bay, this estuarine complex is closely associated with the Burry Inlet a few miles to the east. Along with the rest of Carmarthen Bay, the whole area is of international importance for its marine and intertidal habitats, which in turn support important populations of wintering wildfowl and various species of fish.

The Taf Estuary contains some extensive stands of saltmarsh vegetation. This habitat is highly restricted in a European context and the south Wales coast supports some of the best and largest examples. A range of saltmarsh communities are represented within the Taf, with the zonation generally related to the degree of tidal inundation and also, in some cases, to grazing intensity. Common cord-grass *Spartina anglica* dominates much of the seaward fringe, alongside scattered patches of common saltmarsh-grass *Puccinellia maritima*, common glasswort *Salicornia europaea*, sea aster *Aster tripolium* and annual sea-blite *Suaeda maritima*.

This vegetation then grades into a range of mid to upper marsh communities, dominated by various mixtures of sea aster, common saltmarsh-grass, sea rush *Juncus maritimus* and red fescue *Festuca rubra*. Characteristic associates throughout these communities include sea plantain *Plantago maritima*, sea arrowgrass *Triglochin maritimum*, sea-milkwort *Glaux maritima* and English scurvygrass *Cochlearia anglica*.

Dense stands of sea-purslane *Atriplex portulacoides* also occur extensively in less grazed situations, notably along the western banks of the estuary between Laugharne and Ginst Point,

where some impressive stands are present. Other associated vegetation includes various swamp communities, mostly dominated by either sea club-rush *Bolboschoenus maritimus* or common reed *Phragmites australis*. Two nationally scarce plant species also occur, namely the rock sea-lavender *Limonium procerum* ssp. *procerum* and bulbous foxtail *Alopecurus bulbosus*.

Extensive areas of intertidal mud and sand also occur within the Taf Estuary. The general sequence runs from fine muds in the upper reaches of the estuary, through to muddy sands in the middle reaches and clean sands towards the mouth of the estuary. These sediments support an abundant macroinvertebrate fauna and provide feeding grounds for a range of wintering and migratory wildfowl and waders which inhabit the Three Rivers complex.

The Taf estuary is also of importance for various species of fish, including allis shad *Alosa alosa* and twaite shad *A. fallax*. Both of these species gather in the Three Rivers estuary in spring, before moving upstream to spawn. Most spawning occurs in the Afon Tywi, but there are reports of twaite shad spawning in the freshwater part of the Afon Taf. Both species are also known to spawn in the upper reaches of estuaries. Later in the year, juvenile shad feed in the Three Rivers estuary before migrating out to sea.

The otter *Lutra lutra* is also known to frequent the Taf Estuary, together with the rest of the Taf catchment.

Remarks:

Part of the site is owned by the National Trust.

The site is a component part of the Carmarthen Bay and Estuaries/Bae Caerfyrddin ac Aberoedd candidate Special Area of Conservation.

The otter and allis shad are listed on Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and Annex II of the EC Habitats Directive (Directive 92/43/EEC on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora). The twaite shad is also listed on Annex II of the Directive.

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