

# **CRAIG ADWY- WYNT A CHOED EYARTH HOUSE A CHÎL-Y-GROESLWYD SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST**



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## **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 wildlife at Craig Adwy-wynt a Choed Eyarth House a Chîl-y-groeslwyd SSSI?**

This site has 5 special features.

- Semi-natural woodland
- Limestone (calcareous/calccolous) grassland
- Limestone woundwort
- Pearl-bordered fritillary
- Grizzled skipper

As well as the features listed above, Craig Adwy-wynt a Choed Eyarth House a Chîl-y-groeslwyd has other habitats that are essential to the maintenance of the special wildlife interest. These include acid (calcifugous) grassland, bracken, scrub and limestone pavement, cliffs, rock outcrops and scree. This diversity of habitats similarly supports a wide range of species including vascular plants such as stinking hellebore, bird’s-nest orchid and greater butterfly orchid and butterflies such as white-letter hairstreak, dingy skipper and small pearl-bordered fritillary and small numbers of hibernating lesser horseshoe bat. Unless it is specified below, management of this site should aim to look after these habitats and species as well as the listed features of interest.

## **What do we want Craig Adwy-wynt a Choed Eyarth House a Chîl-y-groeslwyd SSSI to look like?**

The following is a description of how we would like to see the features at this site.

### **Semi-natural woodland**

It is our aim to maintain the existing 30.7 ha woodland as follows:

- With a canopy dominated by ash and oak
- With local dominance by yew
- With a naturally diverse understorey and age structure
- With sufficient amounts of natural regeneration to perpetuate the woodland

At least 48% of the site will be covered by sustainable, semi-natural woodland. The canopy will be locally native species, with an overall dominance by ash and oak and local dominance by yew. Natural regeneration will contribute to maintaining the woodland in the long term. Non-native species such as beech and sycamore will be tolerated where they currently dominate the canopy but replacement by ash and oak will be encouraged when gaps appear in the beech/sycamore canopy. In the long term, the canopy will include trees within the full range of age classes, and particular attention will be paid to maintaining old, veteran trees, regardless of species, for the lower plants that thrive on their bark. The understorey shrub and ground layers will

contain canopy species as seedlings and saplings, as well as locally native woodland shrub and other plant species suited to a site where the bedrock is Carboniferous limestone. Dead wood will be represented as components of living trees, standing trees, fallen trees and branches. Consideration will be given to restoring semi-natural woodland of broadleaves and/or yew where small stands of planted conifers surrounded by the site are felled for timber harvesting.

### **Limestone grassland**

It is our aim to maintain the existing 0.9 ha of limestone (calcareous) grassland as follows:

- With a sward of lime-loving (calicolous) native grasses and herbs

Open ground on terraces and slopes above limestone cliffs and amongst rock outcrops and limestone pavements will be covered by limestone grassland. The sward will comprise of locally native species, typical of unimproved, dry, tightly-grazed limestone environments. Native tree and scrub species, such as ash, oak, yew, wych elm, sycamore, gorse and thorn, and bracken will be retained only in so far as they do not cast excessive shade onto the grassland and continue to provide warm sunlit glades for butterflies.

### **Limestone woundwort**

It is our aim to maintain the population of limestone woundwort as follows:

- The population size will be allowed to fluctuate
- In any one year there should be one or more plants flowering and setting seed
- By providing woodland glade and edge habitat
- By appropriate woodland management that includes some ground disturbance

A succession of well-lit woodland clearings and edges will be maintained to promote growth and flowering of this short-lived perennial species. It is not necessary or desirable that woodland clearings are created every year. Nonetheless, it remains important that some appropriate small-scale woodland clearing and associated ground disturbance occurs at periodic intervals to compensate for the inability of this species to compete with bramble and other tall woodland herbs. As the woodland canopy closes the limestone woundwort becomes weakened and eventually disappears. Seeds of this species are believed to survive in the ground for many decades so even prolonged periods of inactive woodland management may not threaten its long-term survival.

### **Pearl-bordered fritillary**

It is our aim to maintain the population of pearl-bordered fritillary as follows:

- The number of adult butterflies recorded during a timed count should be at least within the range for the previous ten years (2001-2009).

- By providing a patchwork of habitats suitable for breeding and feeding. These will include: short grassland containing the larval food-plant violets, spring-flowering herbs as nectar sources for adults, bracken with a litter layer for hibernation and pupation and gorse and thorn scrub for shelter.

Pearl-bordered fritillary requires areas of grassland maintained as a short sward containing an abundance of dog violet (the food plant of the caterpillars) with a light scattering of bracken. Bracken stands of diverse size and age structure also need to be present nearby, with a proportion of these with a closed canopy with deep litter and a higher proportion with an open canopy with shallow litter (for pupation). Nectar sources provided by spring flowers such as bluebell, bugle, dandelion, ground ivy, primrose, tormentil, lesser celandine and germander speedwell are required for the adults to feed on.

### **Grizzled skipper**

It is our aim to maintain the population of grizzled skipper as follows:

- The number of adult butterflies recorded during a timed count should be at least within the range for the previous best year (2000).
- By providing a patchwork of habitats suitable for breeding and feeding. These will include: short grassland and bare ground containing spring flowering herbs as both larval food plants and nectar sources for adults. Taller vegetation such as bramble at scrub or woodland edges for pupation and over-wintering.

### **What management is needed on Craig Adwy-wynt a Choed Eyarth House a Chîl-y-groeslwyd SSSI and why?**

Although this site 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 this site if they are not properly managed. These are the ones we regard as most important:

#### **Semi-natural woodland**

##### **Silvicultural operations**

Forestry operations, including timber extraction, may damage the ground flora or woodland interest if carried out insensitively (this includes damage from windthrow after harvest and from access routes used for transport of felled timber). Felling coupes should therefore be as small as practicable, with damage to standing trees and ground flora kept to a minimum. Replanting of felling coupes will favour ash, oak and wild cherry. Forestry operations shall be compatible with conservation aims.

### **Non-native species**

Beech and sycamore assume local dominance in the woodland and patches of snowberry and other exotic trees and shrubs have been planted for game cover or ornamental purposes. Regeneration of these tree species that are not native to the site should be discouraged in favour of native species such as ash, oak, elm and yew and the shrubs either contained or, over the long term, removed. However, as sycamore is widespread across the site, it will be removed where it is of scattered distribution, and tolerated, at least in the short term, where it comprises >50% of the canopy. Other non-native species such as conifers should be allowed to die out or removed as opportunities arise.

Small blocks of non-native conifers surrounded by semi-natural broadleaved woodland should be felled and allowed to regenerate with native woodland species.

### **Pheasant shooting**

Pheasants are released into these woodlands for shooting. There is a scattering of feeders and release pens. Around feeders and within release pens there is poor regeneration of the woodland vegetation compared to that in the surrounding woodland. This means that feeders and pens must be in carefully chosen positions where damage or destruction of the woodland ground flora is minimal.

### **Recreation**

Parts of the site are non-statutory nature reserves where public footpaths pass through these and other sections of the site. Current usage is not heavy and path erosion is not evident. If necessary the maintenance of paths through woodland, grassland and bracken will be confined to the clearing of obstructing branches or fallen timber and strimming once a year.

### **Grazing**

In general livestock grazing in the woodland is unacceptable, as this would prove detrimental to both the herb layer/ground flora and the natural regeneration of tree and shrub species. Thus boundary fences should be erected and maintained in order to exclude livestock. However, in some circumstances woodland management for the limestone woundwort could be assisted by rotating short periods of browsing and trampling by large herbivores such as horses in compartments where this species has previously been recorded.

### **Limestone grassland**

#### **Grazing**

At present, the areas of limestone grassland remain open largely due to the attentions of rabbits and this should continue. Rabbits maintain the diversity and structure of the sward and prevent invasion by scrub and tree seedlings. If their population crashes because of infection with a viral haemorrhagic disease or myxomatosis an increase in such species as gorse, blackthorn and hawthorn may result with consequent loss of grassland. High rabbit numbers produce a tightly nibbled turf with bare patches and an increase in lower plants as is found on the summit of Craig Adwy-wynt. With the cessation of sheep grazing several decades ago those parts of the site less attractive to rabbits have already advanced far towards dense scrub, secondary woodland or dense bracken. In some instances such as the limestone terraces and screes of Craig Adwy-

wynt these are now beyond easy recovery to grassland. Some sheep grazing for a limited period during the summer now occurs where a compartment has been fenced and access provided to a supply of water. It would be desirable to reintroduce similar sheep grazing to other compartments. Heavier livestock might need to be used to break up dense bracken where mechanical or chemical methods of bracken management are unsuitable.

### **Public access**

Trampling by visitors using footpaths across the grassland may help maintain an open sward but if too intensive can result in the dominance of only tolerant species. If sensitive areas of the site become heavily eroded redirecting this trampling foot traffic may be necessary.

### **Invasive native species**

Significant areas of limestone grassland, and heath, on Craig Adwy-wynt have been lost over recent decades to tall dense stands of gorse and thorn. Trees such as ash, birch, sycamore and yew are in turn now replacing the invading scrub with the potential succession to secondary woodland. Management is required to control scrub and tree invasion so as to halt this succession and expand or re-establish the areas of grassland.

### **Limestone woundwort**

#### **Silvicultural operations**

Forestry operations that can include small felling coupes and coppice resulting in sufficient light reaching the woodland floor for a number of years will provide suitable habitat for limestone woundwort within the site. Associated ground disturbance providing that it does not compact soils will favour exposure of buried seeds and production of a new generation of plants.

#### **Livestock**

Ground disturbance by livestock trampling can create conditions for seed germination. Some browsing by animals can also be useful in maintaining woodland clearings in an open condition. In those compartments of the site that once were suitable but are now unsuitable because of competing overgrowth or a closed canopy controlled grazing for short periods could be beneficial for limestone woundwort.

#### **Cultivation and Collecting**

Within a few years of its first discovery at the site the population of limestone woundwort consisted of a mixture of plants that have either arisen spontaneously from the buried seed bank or plants cultivated off site and transplanted into the site once they were of sufficient size to survive in the wild. The last transplants were in 2006 since when no further transplanting into the site should occur until doubts concerning its native status have been resolved.

The site is well known in the botanical community as one of the only two localities in Great Britain. If discovered, unauthorised picking or uprooting of plants should be reported to the police. Offenders may be subject to legal proceedings resulting in a substantial fine. Licenses to collect will only be given for research projects that can

make significant contributions to establishing the native status of the species in Great Britain.

### **Pearl-bordered Fritillary**

#### **Habitat**

Loss of open habitats supporting larval food plants and nectar plants for adults should be avoided. Bracken should be managed so as to prevent the build up of extensive stands of this species with associated accumulations of deep layers of bracken litter. Nonetheless, it is essential that some bracken is retained to provide shelter for pupation and over-wintering. Gorse and thorn scrub should be managed so that small patches of cleared ground are available at least every other year. Some scrub and trees should be retained to provide shelter from cold winds.

### **Grizzled Skipper**

#### **Habitat**

Loss of open habitats supporting larval food plants and nectar plants for adults should be avoided. Tall vegetation such as brambles next to scrub or woodland edges should be retained for pupation and over-wintering. Gorse and thorn scrub should be managed to provide as much edge as possible while providing shelter from cold winds.

### **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 the wildlife of 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.**

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