

**CWM BACH, SYCHPANT
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 SSSI owners and occupiers. In it, we try to explain what is special about the wildlife on your site, and what care is needed to look after this 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 will look to your views and knowledge to help safeguard this important site.

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 of Cwm Bach, Sychpant SSSI?

The site is covered by a rich **mosaic** of different habitat types:-

- Native **woodland** and parkland have an abundance of mature trees festooned with lichens, and decaying wood is rich in insects and other invertebrates.
- **Acidic grassland** is host to an abundance of flowering plants, such as bell heather, heath bedstraw and tormentil.
- **Scrub** provides cover for nesting birds and shelter for insects.

This mosaic of habitats is home to a range of rare plants and animals:-

- The woodland areas are particularly important for **lichens typical of ancient woodland**, of which an exceptional number are found at Cwm Bach, Sychpant.

An unusually high number of different **butterfly** species are found around the areas of bracken.

What do we want Cwm Bach, Sychpant to look like?

The following is a summary of our vision for the special features:

*The site will consist of a mosaic of **woodland** (around one quarter of the site), scrub (15%), open bracken (35%) and grassland (25%), all of which will consist of locally native species. Trees of all ages will be found here, with oak and ash common across the site. Veteran trees (old trees that are starting to decay) are particularly important for the species they support, as is standing and fallen dead wood. On closer inspection of the trees, you will see the colourful and varied shapes of different lichens and fungi, with insects and other invertebrates flourishing under the bark. The numbers of these mature veteran trees will be maintained or increase. When walking through the wood, abundant saplings and seedlings present in the understorey will show you that natural regeneration of native trees and shrubs is plentiful on the site. The only clues that the secretive dormouse is here are the discarded hazelnut shells with perfectly smooth holes bitten into them.*

*The area of open **bracken** will be maintained or increase from 25-35% of the site at the expense of dense scrub, and will have a diverse structure with a ground flora of violets. These violets attract many butterflies, which you will see fluttering on a warm, sunny day.*

*The height of the **grassland** will range from very short (ankle height or less) to taller areas (around knee height). Typical species found will include bell heather, red fescue, heath bedstraw, tormentil and wood sage. Patches of scrub will remain scattered throughout the site.*

*Cwm Bach will continue to support the unusually rich variety of **lichens** typical of such ancient woodlands in areas with exceptionally clean air.*

Older trees, especially oak and ash, are particularly suitable for lichens to grow on, so these will be present throughout the site. The more mature veteran trees along old boundaries and the Cwm Bach stream are particularly important for lichens.

Healthy populations of silver-washed fritillary, small pearl-bordered fritillary, brown hairstreak, green hairstreak and holly blue butterflies will be found at Cwm Bach, Sychpant. Ideally, the high brown and pearl bordered fritillaries will also return to breed at the site, but they are limited by a lack of suitable habitat elsewhere in the area.



What management is needed on Cwm Bach, Sychpant, and why?

Although Cwm Bach, Sychpant is an excellent place for wildlife, it will only remain so if the necessary management continues. The vegetation cover we see today is not entirely 'natural', being the product of many centuries of management. CCW's priority is to work with you to ensure that this management continues. We place a great importance on our relationships with owners and occupiers, because without your help, it will be impossible for us to safeguard the special features on your land.

What does this mean in practice?

Some management is essential to conserve the special features. Other management actions could damage the features within a very short time. These are the ones we regard as the most important:

- **Grazing**

This site was historically managed as an open field system and, apart from a period during the 1990s, has been extensively grazed by ponies or cattle for many years. Cattle used to lie up in the

bracken and trample it, maintaining an open structure. Grazing is essential to maintain the open nature of the site, which benefits both the lichens and butterflies. Currently, a few ponies graze the site during the autumn/winter months. Grazing pressure should be just high enough to break up the scrub and bracken communities without damaging the lichens. Small areas of wood pasture may be fenced off from stock on a rotational basis to allow tree regeneration, or individual saplings can be protected by guards.

- **Grazing for butterflies**

High brown and pearl-bordered fritillary butterflies depend on 2-5ha of suitable bracken to support a viable colony. Trampling by heavy-footed animals (ponies or cattle) is required to break up the bracken to between 30 and 70% cover, with violets covering around 70% of the ground beneath. The broken-down leaf litter is also essential for many species as it provides the right conditions for the larvae and eggs to keep warm, and should be around 5-10cm deep.

- **Non native species**

It would benefit wildlife if non-native tree species, such as conifers, beech and sycamore, were gradually removed from the site, or at least prevented from spreading further. These species create dense shade, making conditions unfavourable for many lichens, and produce a very persistent leaf litter that reduces the diversity of plants growing on the woodland floor. However, veteran sycamore or beech trees should be retained, especially in areas with few mature trees.

- **Air quality**

The lichens will only continue to thrive if there is no decline in the air quality of the Gwaun Valley. Some types of pollution can only be tackled on a county or national basis, but steps can be taken locally to reduce the effects of agricultural spray drift and car pollution. Hedgerows should be maintained and additional buffer strips of trees or shrubs could be planted along the most sensitive boundaries, but care must be taken to avoid shading the lichens. Reduction in use of fertilisers and pesticides on adjacent land would benefit the lichen communities.

- **Woodland structure**

Lichens need fairly light conditions to grow, so both scattered trees (found across the site, especially along old boundaries) and gladed woodland (found along the two river valleys) are valuable and will be maintained. Shrubs around the trees should not be too dense, so light can reach lichens growing on the tree trunks. Areas that are already rich in lichens should be maintained with a fairly open canopy and a light shrub layer. This can be achieved using light, controlled grazing, as long as lichens are not damaged by stock rubbing against trees. Some woodland thinning might be necessary to increase the amount of light reaching the trees. Older trees, especially oak and ash, should be retained for lichens to grow on, whilst allowing enough natural regeneration to provide suitable trees to sustain lichens in the future. Open and sunny woodlands are favoured by several of the butterfly species found at this site. South facing, sheltered clearings are particularly important for these and a variety of other invertebrates. Such clearings should be maintained or even created if necessary.

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. Information from owners and occupiers can be very helpful in helping us to improve our knowledge of wildlife conservation.

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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