

CARMARTHENSHIRE LOCAL BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN

HEATHLAND



Conservation objectives

- * Maintain the current extent of heathland in Carmarthenshire and enhance its condition through appropriate management.
- * Encourage restoration of heathland, particularly where it links fragmented areas.

What you can do to help:

- * If you own this habitat seek advice on its management.

Further information:

www.ccw.org.uk
www.carmarthenshire.gov.uk



What is heathland?

Heathland is vegetation made up of at least 25% heather. The habitat is classified as upland or lowland, wet or dry and often occurs as part of a mosaic with other habitats.

Upland heathland occurs on poorer soils in upland areas (above the limit of agricultural enclosure). It often forms a mosaic with other habitats such as blanket bog, grassland, bracken, scree and woodland. Dry heath has more heather, bell heather, bilberry, crowberry and western gorse whilst wet heath is dominated by mixtures of heather, cross-leaved heath, purple moor-grass and deer grass, and carpets of moss. Upland heathland in Wales can support a range of uncommon birds including merlin, hen harrier and red and black grouse; the habitat may also be important for invertebrates and mosses and lichens.

Lowland heathland occurs below the upper limit of agricultural enclosure, and generally found below 300 m. Characterised by heather, bell heather, cross-leaved heath and western gorse, on nutrient-poor soils it is often associated with acid or damp grassland. Nightjars, skylarks and linnets all use this habitat and it can be important for reptiles and invertebrates.

The best heathland habitat has patches of heather of different ages and a variety of associated plants and animals. In the past management maintained this diverse structure. Unfortunately the extent of heather moorland has declined significantly in Wales.

Distribution in Carmarthenshire

Much of the upland heathland is concentrated on Mynydd Mallaen in north Carmarthenshire (this site is part of a Special Area of Conservation for its dry heath vegetation). Mynydd Llanllwni, north of Brechfa, is another important area.

Lowland heathland is less common and is mostly wet heath associated with marshy grassland. Good examples occur at Cernydd Carmel, Mynydd Llangyndeyrn and Mynydd Ystyffalau-carn. Lowland dry heath occurs around the upland fringes with small scattered stands also occurring along the millstone grit ridge in the south of the county. Twelve SSSIs contain lowland heathland.

What are the threats?

- * Overgrazing, particularly by sheep.
- * Inappropriate burning of upland heaths.
- * Agricultural improvement – ploughing/reseeding/fertilisers/drainage.
- * Afforestation, although no longer a threat is a reason for loss.
- * Loss to development.
- * Deposition of atmospheric nitrogen leading to changes in vegetation.

What is being done locally?

- * Management schemes and agri-environment agreements are in place at many heathland sites.
- * Upland heathland restoration is underway within forestry sites.
- * Survey of the county's heathland has taken place.