

Eastern Valleys Uplands Project - Local Wildlife Sites

The following information outlines the best practice guidelines for managing the habitat type listed below in a manner that is sympathetic to wildlife. It is part of a series relating to various habitat types and management issues that have been produced by your local Wildlife Trusts.

No.15 Ffridd (Coedcae)

What is Ffridd?

Ffridd is the mosaic of habitats that occurs on the valley sides above the enclosed agricultural land of the valley bottoms and below the upland farms and unenclosed common land. It is essentially the transitional zone between these two areas. In North Wales 'Ffridd' refers to unenclosed land, whereas in South Wales 'Ffridd' is generally enclosed with 'Coedcae' being used to describe unenclosed Ffridd. The Ffridd is a complex mosaic of heath, bracken, woodland, scattered scrub, acid grassland and wet flushes.



High Brown Fritillary



Ffridd



Whinchat

What wildlife does it support?

Ffridd, with its mosaic of different habitats, supports a wide range of species including many of Wales' distinctive wildlife. It provides a refuge for birds such as Yellowhammer and Whinchat which are now struggling in the lowlands. The Bracken provides cover for swathes of Bluebells and Violets which in turn support rare butterfly species such as the High Brown Fritillary. The acid grassland component can be flower rich and also support nationally important assemblages of Waxcap fungi.



Harebell



Yellowhammer



Waxcap fungi

Why preserve/enhance it?

Ffridd, which you can justifiably feel proud to own, is a superb resource for wildlife. It provides a refuge for many species which are now struggling in the developed and agriculturally improved lowlands. The linear nature of the Ffridd along valleys also offers great connectivity through the landscape both along the valleys and between lowland and upland. Also in time it will offer a refuge for species to move into in response to land use and climate change.

Threats

The following can all lead to the loss/degradation of this habitat:

- Agricultural improvement - drainage, ploughing, reseeded, fertiliser or herbicide treatment, slurry application, conversion to arable.
- Inappropriate levels of grazing - typically too intensive and with sheep which prevents flower growth and regeneration of woody species.
- Lack of appreciation of habitat value, particularly the Bracken element.
- The dying out of the practice of cutting Bracken for animal bedding.
- Abandonment and neglect - encroachment by Bracken/scrubbing over.
- Development.
- Burning - both intentional and vandalism.
- Tree planting.

Management Recommendations

The following is recommended to ensure the valuable Ffridd habitat is managed sympathetically for wildlife and is thus preserved and enhanced:

Preservation/Enhancement of Ffridd

- As Ffridd is essentially a mosaic of different habitats, reference should be made to the specific Toolkits that refer to the individual habitat requiring management. Those likely to be of particular relevance are No.3 Acid Grassland and No.7 Heath. Those for No.17 Upland Broad-leaved Woodland and No.18 Upland Flushes may also be of importance, together with No.13 & 14 Invasive Weed Control. Additionally No.11 Scrub Control and No.12 Bracken Control may also be relevant, particularly if they are invading species rich grassland areas. However it should be borne in mind that the presence of Scrub and Bracken is very ecologically important within the Ffridd mosaic so may not need control and perhaps actually could be actively encouraged.
- As with so many habitats the control of **grazing** is of vital importance to maintaining the habitats in good condition. Grazing at a low intensity, particularly with cattle is likely to be beneficial. Without grazing, hillsides would become dominated by dense Bracken and gorse and eventually become wooded to the detriment of the ideal mosaic of habitats. Conversely, too much grazing is likely to result in the lack of regeneration of any Scrub or Heather and loss of species diversity in grassland.
- Wholesale and uncontrolled **burning** is not advised as it can damage the Scrub component and encourage dense Bracken growth and thick unpalatable grasses in its aftermath. However controlled, targeted burning, particularly in Heather dominated areas can encourage new Heather regeneration.
- Tree planting should not be undertaken but the scattered regeneration of native tree and scrub species within the habitat mosaic adds to the wildlife value of the Ffridd.
- The land should not be ploughed to convert to arable.
- No fertilisers should be used as they will increase soil fertility and encourage the out competition of wildflowers by vigorous coarse grasses and weedy species.

There may be further issues that are reducing/threatening the ecological value of your Ffridd such as:

- **Bracken** - BRACKEN IS AN IMPORTANT COMPONENT OF FFRIDD BUT CAN BE PROBLEMATIC IF INVADING VALUABLE OPEN GRASSLAND/HEATHLAND AREAS. For best results, roll/flail/cut Bracken twice a year in May/June and again in July/August. Leave Bracken on steep slopes or gullies. Consideration needs to be given to potential for breeding birds that may limit/preclude work in May/June, if this is the case then control Bracken by cutting or spraying after the bird-breeding season in late July/early August. A noticeable reduction will be achieved in 5 years. *Refer to separate Toolkit – No. 12 Bracken Control for more detail.*

- **Invading Scrub** – SCRUB IS AN IMPORTANT COMPONENT OF FFRIDD BUT CAN IN THE ABSENCE OF GRAZING INVADE VALUABLE OPEN GRASSLAND/HEATHLAND AREAS. If this is the case remove any invading Scrub between October to March (avoiding the bird-breeding season also) by either hand pulling or cutting, otherwise this will shade out and out compete traditional grassland/heathland species. Stumps should be spot treated with a suitable herbicide to prevent regrowth. *Refer to separate Toolkit – No. 11 Scrub Control for more detail. Refer to separate Toolkit No.20 Rhododendron Control if this species is involved*

- **Invasive weeds** - Control the spread of highly invasive weeds such as ragwort, thistles, nettles and docks, as well as alien species such as Himalayan Balsam, and Japanese Knotweed. These can be controlled with minimum harm to wildlife.
 - ❖ **Ragwort** can be hand pulled (wear suitable gloves) in May before it sets seed.
 - ❖ **Thistles, nettles, and docks** can be controlled by mowing them to a height of about 15cms before they flower and set seed.
 - ❖ **Himalayan Balsam** can also be controlled by hand-pulling before it sets seed.
 - ❖ **Japanese Knotweed** will require spot treatment with a suitable herbicide.

Refer to separate Toolkits – No. 13 & 14 Invasive Weed Control for more detail.

- **Dry-stone Walling** – By definition much of the Ffridd is unenclosed so that features such as hedgerows, fence-lines and walling are largely absent. Old, dilapidated dry-stone walling can still be an important feature of this landscape even if it is no longer functional. The dry-stone walling adds to the ecological value of the area through the provision of a substrate for lichens, mosses and ferns. It also provides shelter for many invertebrates and species such as Common Lizard, as well as nesting opportunities for birds such as the Wheatear. The dry-stone walling should be retained and if restored can provide valuable shelter for livestock and be utilised to control grazing levels if so required.

Restoration of Ffridd

There may also be areas of habitat within your land that are not currently of particularly high ecological value but measures can be taken to restore these if desired.

This can be achieved by converting species poor “semi-improved” grassland (species poor, probably formerly quite intensively farmed with applications of chemicals and heavy grazing) to more species-rich “semi-improved” grassland with mosaics of other habitats by ceasing applications of fertilisers and controlling grazing to allow vegetation a chance to flourish.

Creation of Ffridd

Additionally there may be some areas within your land that do not have any discernible wildlife value but measures can be taken to create habitat of higher ecological value if desired. The detail of this work is beyond the scope of this document but your Local Wildlife Trust would be delighted to advise you further.

Should you require any further advice regarding the management of your Local Wildlife Site please do not hesitate to contact your local Wildlife Trust:

Gwent Wildlife Trust

Tel: 01600 740600

e-mail: info@gwentwildlife.org

Wildlife Trust of South & West Wales

Tel: 01656 724100

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Other toolkits available are:

No.1 Neutral Grassland (Hay Meadows)

No.2 Neutral Grassland (Pasture)

No.3 Acid Grassland

No.4 Calcareous Grassland

No.5 Marshy Grassland

No.6 Marsh Grassland (with Marsh Fritillary)

No.7 Heath

No.8 Hedgerows

No.9 Salt Marsh & Coastal Grazing Marsh

No.10 Ponds & Lakes

No.11 Scrub control

No.12 Bracken control

No.13 Invasive weed control (natives – thistle, dock etc.)

No.14 Invasive weed control (aliens – Japanese Knotweed, Himalayan Balsam etc.)

No.16 Blanket Bog

No.17 Upland Broad-leaved Woodland

No.18 Upland Flushes

No.19 Post Industrial

No.20 Rhododendron & Cherry Laurel Control

Further useful documents include:

Ffridd – a habitat on the edge (RSPB & NRW)

http://www.rspb.org.uk/Images/ffridd_tcm9-384432.pdf

Management of Moorland Edge for Priority Species:

sciencesearch.defra.gov.uk/Document.aspx?Document=BD1234...doc

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