

FFRIDD (COEDCAE) HABITAT STATEMENT

1. INTRODUCTION

"Coedcae" or "ffridd" is part of the classic Welsh landscape arising from hill farming practice. Although there is no UK BAP for this habitat, it is important in both a Welsh and a Caerphilly county borough context. It is characteristic of valley sides and comprises a mosaic of different habitat types supporting a wide range of animals, in particular important bird and butterfly species. Due to its linear and often continuous nature it can form significant wildlife corridors for its associated species, especially birds.

2. HABITAT DEFINITION

Ffridd refers to the vegetation of the, often uncultivated, valley sides; the middle slopes between the upland farms, extensive conifer plantations or unenclosed common land and the valley bottoms. The ffridd is a complex mosaic of heath, bracken, woodland, acid grassland, old workings and wet flushes. These habitats can include numerous NVC communities and are traditionally grazed by sheep or cattle. In north Wales "ffridd" usually refers to unenclosed land, whereas in south Wales it is generally enclosed. The term "Coedcae" is normally used in south Wales specifically to denote unenclosed ffridd.

Ffridd is particularly important for high brown fritillary and pearl-bordered fritillary butterflies, which are UK priority species. The bracken fronds act like a woodland canopy for the violets on which fritillary butterfly caterpillars feed and the bracken litter provides a warm microclimate for the early life stages. Fritillary butterflies thrive better where cattle or ponies are the main grazing stock. These animals, being heavier, break up the bracken litter so that the female butterfly can fly to the violet beneath but there is still enough small dead bracken 'debris' to capture warmth and raise temperatures for caterpillar development in the spring. Also cattle and ponies unlike sheep do not selectively graze violets.

3. CURRENT STATUS

3.1 Caerphilly County Borough

Within Caerphilly county borough coedcae/ffridd occurs in the following areas: (see **Map 7.1**)

- Sides of the Aber valley between Mynydd Meio & Mynydd Eglwysilan;
- Eastern fringe of Cefn Gelli Gaer;
- Fringe of Cefn y Brithdir;
- Between south-eastern edge of Mynydd Bedwellty & Mynydd Manmoel/Mynydd Pen-y-fan;
- Between Mynydd y Grug & Mynydd Machen;
- Between I slyn & Mynydd y Lan;
- Western fringes of Mynydd Maen
- From Caerphilly Common to Mynydd Machen/Rudry Common.

The following SIN C sites have examples of coedcae/ffridd⁴:

5 **Cefn y Brithdir**; 7 **Coed Cefn-Rychdir**; 8 **Mynydd Manmoel**; 10 **Craig Ysgwydd-Gwyn**; 15 **Coed Deri-Newydd**; 31 **Coed y Moeth**; 46 **Cwm Afon Railway Line**; 116 **Mynydd Eglwysilan**; 159 **Craig y Fedw**; 163 **Mynydd Meio**; 168 **Caerphilly Common**; 171 **Mynydd Rudry**; 178 **Graig y Rhacca Grasslands**

3.2 Associated Species

The presence of bracken in this mosaic of habitat ranging from open grassland to woodland is important for many forms of wildlife:

- **Birds:** *nightjar**, *linnet**, *yellowhammer*, *curlew*, *skylark**, whinchat, tree pipit and stonechat
- **Invertebrates:** *high brown fritillary**, *pearl-bordered fritillary**, small pearl-bordered fritillary
- **Plants:** *bluebell*, violets

3.3 Links with Habitats

- *Deciduous Woodlands*
- *Wildlife Corridors*
- *Species-rich Grasslands* (rhos pasture)
- *Common Land*
- *Heathland* (upland and lowland heath)

4. CURRENT FACTORS AFFECTING THE HABITAT

- Overgrazing, particularly sheep, preventing regeneration especially of heath and deciduous woodland elements
- Lack of grazing or other appropriate management (beneficial cattle less common than sheep)
- Gradual overall decline of bracken cutting for bedding
- Past coniferisation and current new planting schemes
- Economic development
- Agricultural improvement
- Poor image of ecological value of bracken slopes
- Burning of bracken by vandals
- Burning ("muirburn") as agricultural practice

5. CURRENT ACTION

- 5.1 Possible grants for the management of this habitat as part of the whole farm agri-environment scheme, Tir Gofal.
- 5.2 Some SI NCs contain species-rich ffridd and bracken as part of the site⁴.
- 5.3 Some bracken is once again being harvested for animal bedding from commons and ffridd. Care is needed that this currently sustainable level does not increase so as to threaten eradication.

5.4 CCBC liaison with Coed Cymru for appropriate management of certain sites.

6. CONSERVATION DIRECTION

6.1 **The Main Objectives** are to:

- **Halt** the loss of coedcae/ffridd.
- **Ensure** favourable management of ffridd, in particular methods of grazing and prevent further agricultural improvements.
- **Prevent** development on ffridd which removes the landscape's natural diversity.
- **Raise the awareness** of landowners and managers, and the general public of the importance of these habitats and the need for beneficial management and land use regimes, particularly aiming to alter the negative public perception of bracken habitat.

6.2 **Possible actions** to consider are:

- Raise awareness of importance of ffridd, for example by producing a Biodiversity Briefing Note promoting the importance and wildlife value of bracken slopes & "ffridd".
- Survey/assess quality and condition of ffridd habitats.
- Require ecological surveys to support all planning applications.
- Encourage use of traditional cattle breeds e.g. Welsh Blacks over sheep.
- Create areas of new habitat where appropriate e.g. to restore lost continuity.
- Improve Council liaison with farming community and commoners associations, via the SIN C and LBAP processes.
- Encourage owners of ffridd slopes to apply for Tir Gofal.
- Encourage the investigation of bracken cutting and composting as a peat substitute.