

**CYNGOR CEFN GWLAD CYMRU
COUNTRYSIDE COUNCIL FOR WALES**

SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST CITATION

CARMARTHENSHIRE/SWANSEA BURRY INLET AND LOUGHOR ESTUARY

Date of Notification: 1972, 1979, 1984, 1989

National Grid Reference: SS435985, SN584024

O.S. Maps: 1:50,000 Sheet number: 159
1:25,000 Sheet number: SS 49, SS 59, SS 50

Site Area: 5897.7 ha

Description:

The largest estuarine complex within the old West Glamorgan county and Borough of Llanelli. Comprising extensive areas of grazed saltmarsh, sand and mud flats, the area is internationally significant for its wader and wildfowl populations with overwintering totals averaging in excess of 46,000 birds.

The Burry Inlet exhibits a particularly wide tidal range (circa 8m) with its estuarine form deriving from the effects of glacial overdeepening followed in turn by sediment deposition as the sea level rose subsequent to the melting of the ice sheets. Whilst fine sands comprise the bulk of the sediments within the estuary, smaller particle sizes predominate in more sheltered areas where tidal velocities are reduced. The saltmarshes formed in areas where plants have subsequently been able to colonise are the most extensive in Wales and cover an area in excess of 1600 ha. The marshes on the southern side of the estuary between Whiteford Point and Loughor are of national significance in respect of a variety of geomorphological features including creeks, saltpans, erosion cliffs and a range of sediment types. Landimore, Llanrhidian and Berthlwyd marshes have developed in sequence from east to west. The mature marshes at Berthlwyd display well developed terraces and an eroding marsh cliff while at Llanrhidian both pans and creeks are present and the marsh is heavily dissected. At Landimore an intricate and deep creek network is present. This sequence of marshes forms a key area for the understanding of saltmarsh dynamics, sediment transport and sea level changes.

The vegetation of the Inlet is similarly significant and ranges from pioneer communities dominated by glasswort *Salicornia* spp., annual sea-blite *Suaeda maritima* together with substantial areas of the introduced common cord-grass *Spartina anglica* through to low-midmarsh communities dominated by the common saltmarsh-grass *Puccinellia maritima* with sea-purslane *Halimione portulacoides* frequent along the creeksides wherever grazing pressure is reduced. The mid - upper zones of the marsh support extensive swards of *Puccinellia* mixed with red fescue *Festuca rubra* both of which are associated with other species such as thrift *Armeria maritima*, sea-milkwort *Glaux maritima* and sea plantain *Plantago maritima*. The upper limit of the marsh below Loughor Bridge is marked by a belt of sea rush *Juncus maritimus* in association with less common species such as marsh-mallow *Althaea officinalis* and sea wormwood *Artemisia maritima*. Above Loughor Bridge, however, the final limit of saltwater penetration is characterised by extensive areas of brackish swamp dominated by common reed *Phragmites australis* and sea club-rush *Scirpus maritimus*. At Llangennech this merges into reed marsh with abundant common club-rush *Schoenoplectus lacustris* and invading willow scrub. A small species-rich transition mire at Ffos Fach is

notable for the presence of saltmarsh flat-sedge *Blysmus rufus* in its only known location within the Carmarthenshire.

The international importance of the estuary is marked by the regular overwintering of wader populations in excess of 20,000 birds among which the average totals for oystercatcher (17,300), wigeon (5,351), knot (5,288), pintail (1,885) and turnstone (622) all exceeded 1% of the total European population over the winters of 1982/83 to 1986/87 inclusive. The site is also nationally important in respect of golden plover (2,148), teal (1,920), curlew (1,285), shelduck (1,175), grey plover (687) and shoveler (143).

Populations of sanderling, ringed plover, dunlin, bar-tailed godwit and redshank are all substantial in the local context. In addition, nationally important numbers of whimbrel, greenshank, sandwich tern, common tern, arctic tern, little tern and black tern all occur on passage.

The whole range of coastal habitats from the shoreline at the seaward end of the Inlet to the brackish swamps above Loughor are important for the maintenance of the present ornithological diversity exhibited by the site. Brent geese are particularly associated with the grazed saltmarshes and are occasionally joined by white-fronted, bean and barnacle geese. A small number of resident eider duck, primarily feeding close to Whiteford Point, move widely within the estuary as do many of the more numerous species of waders and wildfowl. The upper Loughor saltmarshes while valuable as a roost for species such as snipe and curlew also provide suitable breeding habitat for both lapwing and redshank. In addition the extensive reed beds at Llangennech support breeding reed and sedge warblers as well as reed buntings.

Remarks:

Most of the southern shore is within the Gower AONB.

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