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Celebrating Lynne Houlston – championing conservation at Castlemartin for over 20 years

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Castlemartin Ranges lies on the south coast of Pembrokeshire Coast National Park. As well as being one of the UK's most vital training areas, its renowned coastal scenery, geology and history has much to offer humans and wildlife alike.

Uniquely, Castlemartin has a dedicated ranger. This role was created in 2003 following Castlemartin's designation as a Special Protection Area for its rich birdlife and the emerging requirement for a new integrated land management plan at Castlemartin Ranges.

The ranger role was seen as essential to support long-term conservation management, develop stronger links with local and recreational communities, and provide expert support and advice to Defence Estates, now the Defence Infrastructure Organisation (DIO), on behalf of Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority and the Countryside Council for Wales, now Natural Resources Wales.

Lynne Houlston took up the joint-funded role on 9 June 2003 and is now one of the longest-standing team members at Castlemartin Camp. Her dedicated and experienced understanding of the natural, historical and recreational nuances are relied upon to keep the complex machine running.

The natural environment

Due to its natural landscape and rare wildlife, Castlemartin Ranges is subject to numerous environmental designations, including as a Site of Special Scientific Interest. As part of DIO's environmental stewardship, Lynne is directly involved in monitoring the designated conservation features. Her enthusiasm and unwavering dedication mean Castlemartin has received over two decades of high-quality environmental recording.

To supplement her recording, Lynne has worked hard to establish collaborative partnerships



Lynne Houlston, Castlemartin Ranger
© Pembrokeshire Coast National Park



with a wide range of specialists, all drawn to Castlemartin because of its noted features and species. Amphibian and Reptile Conservation, Bumblebee Conservation Trust and Pembrokeshire County Wildlife Recorders are a small handful of specialists Lynne works with, all contributing to DIO's wealth of ecological data.

Detailed records collected on special features, notably chough and grey seals, provide datasets that raise national awareness and enable informed judgements regarding these species within the context of the range requirements. This work has been crucial in enabling Castlemartin to deliver world-class training exercises. Lynne has also spent many hours passing on her passion, knowledge and recording skills to countless seasonal wardens, volunteers and visitors.

A visitor attraction

Castlemartin holds some of Wales's most distinguished natural and historical features, such as the Green Bridge of Wales and St. Govan's Chapel. As well as opportunities for coastal walks and wildlife watching, the cliffs also offer internationally renowned cliff climbing. This and more draws thousands of year-round visitors.



Lynne working with the Cambrian Caving Council and DIO © Crown

Along with her commitment to Castlemartin's natural environment, Lynne has been instrumental in facilitating a wider range of manageable and sustainable public access that would ordinarily not be achieved. This has been aided by the numerous long-standing partnerships Lynne has developed and nurtured, including the Access and Recreation Stakeholder Group and the Cambrian Caving Council.

Historic reflections

Lynne's vision and commitment are perfectly demonstrated in her Reflections from Castlemartin project. In 2019, Castlemartin celebrated its 80th anniversary. Lynne recognised that this represented a significant milestone for those residents who had lived and worked in and around Castlemartin all their lives.

Lynne spent many hours carrying out research, uncovering photographs and articles, and teasing out interviews from former residents to retell Castlemartin's history. With the aid of a videographer, Lynne's project, funded by the DIO Conservation Stewardship Fund, produced a short, poignant film telling the story of those who lived and worked in the area around 1939.

Going further, Lynne organised a commemorative day celebrating 80 years of Castlemartin for staff, former residents and their descendants. This also provided the ideal launch for the film, allowing contributors to enjoy the fruits of their labour and reminisce about the area's history during a guided tour. Post-event, news of the film spread throughout Pembrokeshire, prompting Lynne to tour local communities in her own time, giving well-received talks alongside a film screening.

After all this hard work, Lynne followed up her remarkable achievement by bringing the story up

to the present day with a second DIO Conservation Stewardship Fund financed film entitled 'Castlemartin – A Story of Wildlife, Weapons and Welsh Mountain Sheep'. The film further reflects countless hours of work and Lynne's passion and dedication to a place she loves.

Above and beyond

Lynne's commitment has raised Castlemartin Range's profile as a training area, a designated natural environment, a historic landscape, a place of recreation and a community in a way that would never have happened without her vision and enthusiasm. Lynne has been a keystone for positive working relations between the three funding partners. Throughout her tenure, she has played an instrumental part in supporting the balance of Defence requirements alongside Castlemartin's designated special features and recreational opportunities. MOD has an awful lot to thank Lynne for.



Lynne giving HRH King Charles III a special tour of St. Govan's Chapel on His Majesty's 2022 visit © Pembrokeshire Coast National Park