

EC Directive 79/409/EEC on the Conservation of Wild Birds:
Special Protection Areas

CITATION FOR CASTLEMARTIN COAST, SOUTH PEMBROKESHIRE DISTRICT, DYFED

The Castlemartin Coast is a 20 kilometre linear strip of outstanding maritime habitats containing exposed limestone sea-cliffs, bare headlands, short-sward grasslands, maritime heaths and dune systems. The cliffs are important geologically for their Carboniferous Limestone succession and Variscan structures. The site is also outstanding for its coastal geomorphology, exhibiting some of the best coastal rock cliff forms in Britain. The vegetation zonation inland from the cliff-tops reflects the different levels of exposure and salt in the soil, ranging from bare ground, through species-rich maritime grassland to maritime heath and scrub. The cliffs consequently support an important range of maritime plant communities, including three flowering plant Red Data Book species. The long tradition of rough grazing on the cliff "Downs" and winter grazing of sheep and cattle continues. The dune systems support a diversity of plant communities ranging from vestigial strand-line vegetation, marram Ammophila arenaria, species-rich grazed grasslands and in the dune-slacks, wetter areas grading into rich-fen vegetation in places. Much of the coast has remained free of forest cover since the last Ice Age and the lichen communities are especially rich and important on the dunes and sandy cliffs.

The boundary of the Castlemartin Coast largely follows the boundaries of Castlemartin Cliffs & Dunes and Broomhill Burrows SSSIs and also includes the more open coastal habitats at Stackpole SSSI.

The site qualifies under Article 4.1 of the Directive by supporting between 12-14 pairs of breeding chough Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax (about 4% of the British population). The exceptionally high breeding density indicates that the limestone cliffs support an abundance of safe nest sites and that the cliff-top habitats and their management are well suited to producing high densities of accessible invertebrates. The sand-dune systems are important as winter-feeding habitats, especially in hard weather. Notable also are up to 2 pairs of peregrine Falco peregrinus.

The site also holds regionally important cliff-nesting seabird populations, principally at Egegug Stacks, including guillemot Uria aalge (7,200 individuals), razorbill Alca torda (690 individuals) and over 350 pairs of kittiwake Rissa tridactyla and several pairs of puffin Fratercula arctica. Small numbers of swift Apus apus and several small colonies of house martin Delichon urbica nest in the sea-cliffs.

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