

## FAST FACTS

August 2019

- Around 1 million visitors to Hengistbury Head annually
- Hengistbury Head is nationally and internationally important for its wildlife and archaeology
- The headland is situated on the southern shore of Christchurch Harbour
- Humans have been using the site for over 12 000 years
- Hengistbury Head has a wide range of habitats which support a fantastic variety of flora and fauna
- In 1910, spectators at a nearby air pageant watched in shock as Charles Rolls (of Rolls Royce fame) plunged to the ground in the aircraft he was flying and was killed.
- In 1919, Harry Gordon Selfridge (of 'Selfridges' fame) purchased the headland and planned to build a castle with 250 luxury bedroom suites. In the end, all that materialised was a nursery garden, which is now a haven for wildlife
- The Bournemouth Corporation of the time first started to purchase land at Hengistbury Head in 1930
- Between 1939 and 1945, the entire headland was requisitioned as a Second World War military base. Installations included a Chain Home Radar Station to track enemy fighter planes, pill boxes, gun emplacements and beach mines
- The area known as Wick Fields is land that was tipped on between 1952 and 1957
- Hengistbury Head is managed by the Ranger team, based at the Visitor Centre. They look after over 160 hectares of land.
- As of 2011, the beach volume at Hengistbury Head had been artificially increased by around 3, 700, 000 cubic metres by several Beach Improvement Schemes (BIS)
- The Visitor Centre opened in December, 2013

### An Important Site

- Hengistbury Head is an extremely important site, for its flora and fauna, its geology and its archaeology, which is of international significance. This is reflected in the site's various designations and protections continued...

- SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest) - Hengistbury Head is a component of the Christchurch Harbour SSSI because of its geology and its ecology - estuarine marshes, heathland and other habitats support flora and fauna rich in rare and unusual species
- SAM (Scheduled Ancient Monument) - Hengistbury Head Scheduled Ancient Monument includes the Double Dykes (a protective barrier built to defend the Iron Age port) and two barrows (burial mounds) on the golf course
- LNR (Local Nature Reserve) - Hengistbury Head, Wick Fields and some adjacent land make up the Hengistbury Head Local Nature Reserve
- SAC (Special Area of Conservation) and SPA (Special Protection Area) - this designation is specifically for the heathland of Hengistbury Head
- ESA (Environmentally Sensitive Area) - Wick Fields and its meadows form part of the Avon Valley ESA
- SNCI (Site of Nature Conservation Interest) - two areas outside of the boundaries of the Site of Special Scientific Interest are designated as Sites of Nature Conservation Interest under a scheme administered by Dorset Wildlife Trust
- Hengistbury Head is part of the Green Belt
- Hengistbury Head is a Green Flag Site at the time of writing (July 2019)
- Hengistbury Head is a Public Open Space

### **Thousands of Years of History**

- Early Hunter's Camp Site - the first humans to leave evidence of visits to, and use of, Hengistbury Head came here from mainland Europe around 12 000 years. They were following the ice as it retreated after the Ice Age to find new hunting grounds. This was the Old Stone Age.
- Around 10 000 years ago, the coastline was actually somewhere to the south of what is now the Isle of Wight
- During the Middle Stone Age, around 9000 years ago, Hengistbury Head had an Archers' Camp - hunters were using bows and arrows to hunt rather than spears, as these were more effective in the then heavily forested landscape.
- The first settlers at Hengistbury Head would have made their home here in the New Stone Age (Late Neolithic) around 5000 to 4000 years ago
- At the beginning of the Bronze Age, around 4000 years ago, human use of the Headland changed significantly. It became a very important burial site where people came to bury their dead.

- Thirteen burial mounds, known as round barrows, are located on and near the headland
- Iron Industry - in the Early Iron Age (2800 to 2600 years ago) iron replaced bronze as the preferred metal for tools and weapons. Iron was abundant, cheap and made better tools. With a ready supply of iron ore, Hengistbury Head was an attractive place for people to settle
- Hengistbury Head became a flourishing port in the Late Iron Age (2100 to 1900 years ago). Large settlements grew up along the northern shoreline. Exotic goods such as wine and glass arrived by boat from the Roman Empire, and British metals, slaves, corn, cattle, hides and dogs were traded in exchange.
- Archaeological excavations in 1957, 1968 and the early 1980s at the Late Upper Palaeolithic hunters' camp site recovered around 25 000 artefacts! These included more than 600 stone or flint tools.
- Many more artefacts are likely to have been lost to the sea over the years as cliffs have crumbled away
- The Bronze Age burial barrow (situated beyond the fence of the Visitor Centre wildlife garden) was excavated in 1911, revealing a high status burial. It contained the cremated remains of a young woman who must have been of great local importance. Buried with her were precious items for her afterlife.
- Victorian Industry - between 1848 and 1870, human activity had a devastating impact on the landscape of Hengistbury Head. Tons of ironstone doggers were removed from the shoreline, sea bed and Warren Hill, and shipped off to iron smelting works in south Wales.
- For thousands of years, these extremely hard rocks had formed a natural defence, protecting the headland from the erosive forces of the sea.
- Within just a few decades of their removal, around one third of the headland was lost

### **A Haven For Wildlife**

- Thanks to its coastal location, and a fantastic variety of habitats, Hengistbury Head supports a huge variety of flora and fauna
- Over 40 habitat categories have been identified - the main ones are heathland, grassland, scrub, woodland, flood meadows, reedbeds, freshwater ponds, saltmarsh, mudflats, sand dunes, beaches, estuary and cliffs
- Over 500 species of plants have been identified and recorded at Hengistbury Head - that's around a quarter of all the plant species to be found in Britain

- More than 320 bird species have been recorded. These include birds that breed here in the spring and summer, birds that overwinter here, and birds that use Hengistbury Head as part of their migration route. Many rare birds have been recorded over the years, including birds from as far afield as North America and Asia.
- More than 800 species of moths have been recorded - this tremendous total represents around one third of all the moth species to be found in Britain
- 16 species of dragonflies and damselflies have been recorded on Hengistbury Head
- The nationally rare Natterjack Toad has a very healthy population here at Hengistbury Head, thanks to specially created ponds and careful management by the Ranger service.
- Shetland Sheep, and Shetland and Galloway cattle graze different parts of the nature reserve - this is a way of managing the land for nature conservation. The sheep graze the Double Dykes and have done a brilliant job of removing all the scrub that was spreading on this ancient monument and preventing it from being seen as the amazing feature that it is.

### **65 Million Years in the Making**

- Hengistbury Head as we know it today is said to have taken 65 million years to create
- Geologists can read its cliffs, with their many different layers, like the pages of some epic history book
- The creation of the layers of sands, gravels and clays that make up Hengistbury Head began when Hengistbury Head was a warm tropical sea. The different layers represent different periods in geological history
- In more recent history, Hengistbury Head was inland. A chalk ridge extended from the chalk cliffs where the Needles of the Isle of Wight now are, across to the white cliffs of Ballard Down, by Old Harry Rocks
- When the sea broke through and reached Hengistbury Head, it was the very strong ironstone which formed a coastal defence and led to the formation of Hengistbury as a headland

### **The Visitor Centre**

- The Visitor Centre opened in December of 2013 for the Christmas period. It then closed in the January and opened full time in February 2014.
- There was an official event in April, 2014 and Chris Packham came to 'open' the Visitor Centre
- The Centre is open seven days a week, every day except Christmas Day

- The Centre relies heavily on the fantastic support of volunteers. Since the Centre opened, we have benefitted from an incredible 40,000 volunteer hours at the time of writing! (July 2019)
- The Visitor Centre has exhibitions about the archaeology, geology and natural history of Hengistbury Head, as well as live cameras that provide fantastic views of nesting and feeding birds
- There is a beautiful wildlife garden which is looked after by a dedicated band of garden volunteers
- Our gift shop sells a wide range of gifts to suit all pockets, from pocket-money toys for children through to scarves and jewellery
- Many of the items in the gift shop have a local theme, or are sourced locally
- The shop's best-selling item in terms of quantity sold is our tubs of Purbeck Ice Cream - 139 tubs were sold on Good Friday, 2019
- Hot drinks are the next best-seller in terms of quantity, followed by our popular range of fossils