

SOUTH DOWNS NEWS

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NATIONAL PARK

WORK AND PLAY IN YOUR NATIONAL PARK

This month:

- **Together Now for Nature, Climate and People** We've launched our five-year Partnership Management Plan outlining priorities, including more woodland and cleaner waterways.
- **Dazzling dark skies** Find out the winners of the hotly-contested astrophotography competition.
- **Power of ponds** Learn about work to improve wetlands across the South Downs region.
- **WIN a free boat tour!** Experience the Seven Sisters cliffs like never before 😊

As always, please send your comments and ideas to us at newsletter@southdowns.gov.uk

Big ambitions for future of South Downs National Park

A five-year masterplan has been unveiled to build the critical natural infrastructure we need to tackle the challenges of nature loss, pollution in our rivers, flooding, water shortages, and the ever-increasing risk of wildfires.

The ambitious plan for the South Downs National Park includes helping more young people take action for nature, being a more welcoming and accessible space for all, and protecting and improving our precious dark skies.

It comes as a government assessment on national security, released last month, concluded that continued biodiversity loss and ecosystem collapse pose serious risks for food security, energy, water supplies, and geopolitical stability.

Working alongside a range of fantastic partners, including farmers, environmental organisations, communities and businesses, the National Park Authority has adopted its Partnership Management Plan – the most important document for any National Park. The strategy lays out what the Authority and its partners want to deliver over the next five years.

The plan is the next step towards the National Park's vision for 2060 – a thriving, buzzing nature-rich South Downs. It has been developed over 18 months and comes after several rounds of consultation and engagement across the region.



A range of ambitious targets have been agreed, including increasing tree canopy and woodland cover by 4,200 football pitches (2,625 hectares) by 2031 to help store carbon, soak up water and create vital new havens for wildlife.

A goal of restoring or creating more than 3,300 hectares of wildlife-rich habitats by 2031 has been agreed – an area the size of Worthing or Hayling Island. These new havens are outside current protected nature sites and will help significantly boost regional biodiversity in the long-term and increase resilience to higher temperatures and flooding.

Together with the extra woodland cover, new wildlife havens and other measures, the National Park will be able to absorb more greenhouse gases from the atmosphere and help to tackle climate change.

Meanwhile, a key goal is that all waterbodies in the National Park achieve “high” or “good” status by the end of 2027. It comes after a major study last year showed

that most bodies of water are failing to meet good ecological standards.

The Plan also commits to engaging with 2,500 schools, inside and outside the National Park, and delivering 500 nature-based activity sessions for young people. It comes as the Government's recent [climate change and mental health report](#) highlights that young people are especially vulnerable to the mental health impacts of climate change and NHS statistics show record rates of anxiety in children.

The plan is for the whole National Park and can only be delivered in partnership with farmers, landowners, local authorities, the health sector, water companies, businesses, schools, charities and communities.



Siôn McGeever, Chief Executive of the National Park Authority, said: "This new partnership plan is hugely ambitious – and rightly so because our wonderful National Park deserves nothing less.

"National Parks have the answers to so many of the challenges facing our society today, including biodiversity loss, flooding, wildfires, water shortages, and rising mental health issues. We can build this natural, green infrastructure by planting more trees, improving our soils, transforming waterways, increasing food security and providing that access to nature that so many people need for their wellbeing.

"This plan asks us all to come to together and step up what we can collectively achieve to bring about real and lasting change across the South East so that we can create a better future.

"The South Downs National Park was designated for us all and it will take us all to achieve the aims in this plan. This is an outward-looking plan, so it's very much about what we can achieve together at a regional and national level.

"As a human race we're facing the biggest challenges of our time and National Parks have a key role to play – as hubs for nature recovery and climate action and, perhaps most importantly, places of hope."

Vanessa Rowlands, Chair of the South Downs National Park Authority, said: "I'd like to thank each and every person who has contributed to this Plan, including members of the public and the many partners who have got behind it.



"It's a collective effort and we must build on what is working, acknowledge what isn't, innovate, try new things, create new partnerships, and challenge ourselves. This

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plan is a powerful call to action, and everyone can play their part in creating a brighter future.

"Young people are the future custodians of this amazing place, so I'm really pleased that we're putting a big emphasis on engagement with them."

The Partnership Management Plan sets out seven collective priorities between 2026 and 2031 – nature recovery, climate action, clean water, young people, welcome and access, arts and heritage and a thriving, greener place.



A wide range of partners have given their backing to the plan.

Among the other key targets include:

- A total of 300 new affordable homes are completed by 2031 – with planning permission for a further 500.
- Expand the current dark sky core (the very darkest areas) of the International Dark Sky Reserve by 10 per cent by 2031 by working with lighting authorities and local communities.
- Ensuring at least 65 to 80 per cent of land managers adopt nature-friendly farming on at least 10% to 15% of their land. Also in agriculture, the aim is to implement regenerative farming practices across 8,000 hectares of the National Park by 2031. This is a form of agriculture that focuses on improving soil health, biodiversity and the water cycle.
- Bring 80 per cent of Sites of Scientific Interest (SSSIs) in the National Park into favourable condition by 2042 – with a goal of 50 per cent by 2031.
- Improve sustainable access across the South Downs National Park by expanding public transport services to key visitor hubs and gateway towns.
- Some 200 Scheduled Monuments in the National Park to have enhanced or updated condition records on the National Heritage List for England.

[Read the full Partnership Management Plan \(2026-2031\) here.](#)

Dazzling shots of night sky



A galactic “jellyfish” formed from a massive star that exploded 35,000 years ago and a stunning shot of the Milky Way over a South Downs valley are among the winners of this year’s astrophotography competition.

More than 130 breathtaking images were submitted by members of the public for this year’s competition, which was marking the South Downs National Park’s 10th anniversary as an International Dark Sky Reserve.

The astrophotography winners are being announced as the National Park’s Dark Skies Festival gets underway, with an action-packed line-up of space-related fun over the half-term holidays. See the programme [here](#).

Taking the top spot as overall competition winner was “Ancient Light”, by Michael Steven Harris.

The shot shows the expansive Milky Way and all its wonderful detail above an abandoned barn in the Balsdean Valley, near Brighton. Judges agreed it was a photo that encapsulated the true beauty of the dark skies in the South Downs National Park.



The judging panel for this year’s competition included “Dark Skies” Dan Oakley, a Dark Skies expert and astrophotographer, Vicki Wells, a Member of the National Park Authority a former producer of the BBC’s *Sky At Night* programme and Elinor Newman, who organises the festival and has a specialism in astrophysics.

About the winning photograph, Dan said: “I think this is an incredible and realistic photo of what the South Downs Dark Skies experience is. It’s beautifully framed.”

Vicki added: “For me, this image shows the stunning dark skies with the working South Downs landscape and its heritage, which is many thousands of years old. We had

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the first farmers 6,000 years ago so it has a lovely story behind it.”

Michael lives in Brighton and wins £250. He said: “The site has had a long history with roman occupation, as a medieval hamlet, use as accommodation during the Second World War and for farming. All of which have long since come and gone in the time it has taken for the light from the Milky Way above to reach us, which is approximately 26,000 years!”

Winning the “Life at Night” category was Richard Murray’s shot, “Snail Trail to the Stars”, capturing a snail beneath The Plough asterism.



Elinor said: “This really does encapsulate life at night, with the snail, flora and lichen. The image has incredible detail, captures a moment and takes me to another place. A very inspiring image.”

Richard, from Waterlooville, wins £100 for his amazing photograph.

Taking the runner-up spot in the category was “Four Horses of the Apocalypse”, by Ian Brierley, who managed to capture a golden moment at Cissbury Ring with four horses in silhouette by a full moon.

The South Downs Dark Skyscapes category was hotly contested with many breathtaking shots of the landscape.

Winning the category was “A Window to our Galaxy” by Lorcan Taylor-Hood, who managed to capture The Milky Way filling up the window and stretching up and over an old ruin near Eastbourne.

Vicki said: “The image has a real honesty about it about what you can see with the naked eye on a clear night, so it’s a very accomplished photograph.”

Lorcan, from Eastbourne, wins £100.

Meanwhile, the runner-up spot went to Carl Gough for his photograph “Eclipsed”, stunningly depicting a partial lunar eclipse next to Arundel Castle. Carl, from Littlehampton, wins £50.

Taking the top spot in the meteoric mobile phone category was Mandy Turner’s “Moon Halo”, which is caused by the refraction of moonlight from ice crystals in the upper atmosphere, creating a ring effect.



Dan said: “It looks like the dark sky staring back at you.”

Mandy, from Seaford, takes home £100 for her image. Mandy said: “I was brought up in London and didn’t see much with all the light pollution. It’s a joy to me to now live in Seaford and enjoy the open skies across the South Downs. I have plenty of opportunities now to photograph the night sky. This image is a moon halo which appears when ice crystals form in the stratosphere, which

Turn that light out! ☺

normally is followed in the next day or two with rain or snow."

This year the National Park introduced a "South Downs to Deep Space" category for the first time and was inundated with some spellbinding shots taken on telescopes from across the National Park.

Winning the category was Jellyfish Nebula, by Nigel Stanbury, showing the remains of a supernova located 5,000 light years away.

Dan said: "It looks like a jellyfish, but it's not – it's the remains of an exploding star. It looks straight out of Star Trek!"

Nigel, from Haslemere, wins £100. He said: "The image is of the so called Jellyfish Nebula located in the constellation of Gemini, the Twins. It is the remains of a star larger than our Sun, that exploded as a supernova many thousands of years ago, blowing off a cloud of gas that has been expanding ever since and glows as it collides with

surrounding gas and dust. It has taken light 5,000 years to reach us so the image shows the object as it appeared 5,000 years ago!"

Taking the runner-up spot was "Winter's View Orion" by Tom Elphick.

Tom, from Brighton, wins £50.

The judges highly commended a number of images:

- A Galaxy Far Far Away by Ivana Peranic
- Aurora Above Seven Sisters by Maxine Monaghan
- Belle Tout Lunar Eclipse by Lee Rouse
- Flemings Triangular Wisp by Stephen Martin
- Heart Nebula by Kayal Bodle
- Milky Way over Cuckmere by Daniel Richards
- Moonlit Silver Studded Blue by Anthony Whitbourn
- Shared Sky by Maxine Monaghan
- St Hubert's Milky Way by Nathan Hill
- Stargazer by Jennie Fellows
- Tail of a Comet by Ivana Peranic
- The Living Night by Tom Elphick
- Trees of Life by Michael Steven Harris

Following the festival a range of winning and shortlisted images will be put forward for the People's Choice vote, with the victor winning £100.



Vicki Wells is a former producer on BBC Sky At Night and is passionate about the dark skies of the South Downs. Now cabinet member for environment at Worthing Borough Council and a National Park Authority Member, she writes about how simple steps can help protect the dark skies and benefit nature.

During daylight hours, the South Downs National Park is a great place to explore nature with its mosaic of habitats including chalk grassland, lowland heath, ancient woodlands, river valleys and coastal chalk cliffs.

At night, our fantastic National Park serves a dual function. Not only is it home to a variety of nocturnal wildlife including mammals and bats, amphibians including toads, insects, moths and owls – it is also a fantastic place to spot planets, enjoy meteor showers and join the dot to dot of stars that reveal our northern hemisphere constellations.

International Dark Sky Reserves like the South Downs work to maintain pristine night skies and the UK boasts six IDSRs as part of a network of 25 across the planet.



A truly dark sky allows you to see far-off stars and galaxies in the same way our ancestors did. Unimpeded by the glow of street lights or bright artificial lighting, you can see amazing celestial objects with your naked eye. The arms of the Milky Way, the Andromeda galaxy and the plethora of stars that infill the gaps, helping complete the ancient outlines of the constellations are revealed when it's properly dark.

Orion, the Hunter, is one of the most recognisable northern hemisphere constellations. In Greek mythology, Orion was a mighty hunter and the son of the god of the sea, Poseidon. Not so mighty as it turned out, dying from a scorpion sting, having boasted that he could hunt and kill every animal on Earth. Nevertheless, Zeus placed him, not unlike a hunting trophy - among the stars forever.

Restoring precious ponds



Portsmouth Water is supporting nature initiatives in the National Park, including creating new ponds for insects, birds and amphibians.

The Havant-based water company is helping with the restoration of six ponds in the National Park via its biodiversity grants. Ecological surveys to improve waterways are also being funded, including work on the River Lavant and River Ems near Chichester.

Meanwhile, grants are supporting the removal and management of invasive non-native species, including Himalayan balsam, Japanese knotweed and mink.

Water troughs for livestock are being introduced at multiple RSPB sites to reintroduce conservation grazing.

While not in the National Park, enhancements at Farlington Marshes will help improve habitats so wildlife such as wetland birds can move across the landscape more easily.

Bob Taylor, Chief Executive Officer for Portsmouth Water, said: "Improvements to chalk grassland, pond restoration and new hedgerow planting are just a few examples of the projects we've been fortunate to contribute to through our Biodiversity Grant Scheme.

"Many of our sites are home to diverse and sensitive habitats, and we have a responsibility to help safeguard them. Biodiversity relies on connectivity, so we're committed to supporting local groups whose projects enhance habitats around our land and strengthen that natural network."



Jan Knowlson, the National Park's Biodiversity Officer (*pictured above*), said: "None of this inspiring work to restore dew ponds would be possible without donations from businesses and organisations such as Portsmouth Water, so I'd like to say a big thank you. We think a century ago there may have been more than 1,000

ponds across the South Downs, but this number has drastically reduced, so you can only imagine the impact this has had on wildlife."

Orion is best known and identified by its diagonal, 'belt' of stars, but one of the 'three' stars is actually five stars in a complex star system. The constellation also contains two of the night sky's brightest stars, Betelgeuse and Rigel.

Betelgeuse, Orion's right shoulder is a giant, red star, about 10 million years old (our Sun is nearly 5 billion-years-old). Rigel - the brightest in the constellation, is Orion's left knee.

In a very dark location, you can also spot the Orion Nebula with the naked eye. A nebula is an intense star-forming region of gas and dust. It looks like a smudge of fuzzy light but in reality, the Orion Nebula is 24-light-years-wide and 1,350 light-years away from Earth. Find it in Orion's sword, directly below the belt!

Dark sky reserves are vital for wildlife. The word "nocturnal" comes from the Latin word *nox*, which means night, and the conservation of darkness is more important than ever for nocturnal animals which depend on it.



Artificial light is fatal for insects, drawn into harm's way and impacting populations. Anything reducing insects at this time of biodiversity crisis, contributes to fewer pollinators for plants and less food for humans, birds and bats.

Migratory birds navigate by moonlight and starlight. Towns or cities with brightly lit towers and buildings disrupt seasonal cues, forcing birds to migrate too early or too late, throwing off nesting and foraging activity which is vital for their survival.

The good news is that light pollution is instantly reversible and we can all do our bit in a very small but helpful way to safeguard dark skies. Every time a light is shielded, pointed downwards, or switched off when it's not needed, we support wildlife by helping provide and maintain the darkness they depend on to thrive and survive. By protecting 'darkness' we help protect and conserve the biodiversity of our nocturnal ecosystems.

With so much to see and hear in a truly dark outside space, time spent looking up at the night sky is a fantastic way to slow down and reconnect with nature. Wrap up warm and head to any of the ten Dark Sky Discovery Sites within the South Downs National Park, and soak up the stunning star-filled skies!

Help dark skies, save energy and support nature

- Outside lights/fairy lights - shield lights, use timers or sensors so they aren't on all night.
- Close your curtains at night - this stops light escaping and keeps your home warm too!
- Choose softer, warmer light bulbs - they are better for nature and still keep your home bright.

Charity marks 50th birthday



A charity that helps connect people with the outdoors in West Sussex is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year.

The Goodwood Education Trust is an independent environmental education charity operating on the beautiful Goodwood Estate, near Chichester.

It all started in the early 1970s when an informal centre for environmental studies was established with the co-operation of West Sussex County Council.

Then in 1972 a nature trail for partially-sighted people was created and the original Braille maps and trail notes are still on site.

In 1976, the charity was formally established by the 10th Duke of Richmond and Gordon. The Trust worked closely with local education providers and activities included farming and forestry workshops.

The Estate kindly made available 20 acres of semi-ancient woodland plantation, known as Seeley Copse for educational activities, and a wooden hut provided shelter and storage. A purpose-built, accessible and sustainable Education Centre replaced the wooden hut and formally opened in 2021, with additional funding support from the National Park Authority's Community Infrastructure Levy. Links with the National Park are strong, including receiving a grant from the South Downs National Park Trust.



Catherine Cannon, Trust Manager, said "The Trust has evolved to be responsive to local educational and community needs and we offer three programmes, which are farm visits for schools, woodland learning and Children in the Community."

The 11th Duke of Richmond said: "As the Trust celebrates 50 years of environmental education, the focus remains very firmly on connecting children and young people with nature, particularly the under-served and more vulnerable. My father's vision was very forward thinking, and it's fitting to recognise his legacy, as we meet the needs of the next generation."

Win an amazing boat tour!



The Seven Sisters coastline is one of the most magical in the UK – and also one of the most fragile.

It's a haven for all manner of birds, insects, and plants, which make a home on this ever-changing coastline that is under constant pressure from the awesome power of the sea.

The cliffs are a remnant of a huge chalk dome that rose up from the sea through powerful tectonic forces 50m years ago. The chalk is the remains of billions of microscopic marine organisms called coccoliths, which lived in an ancient sea which covered this stretch of England when T-rex and Triceratops still roamed the planet!

When these coccoliths died, their skeletons sank down to the bottom of the ocean floor, forming a soft ooze. Over millions of years, this mush compacted and hardened – transforming living bones into a white, crumbly rock. This explains why the cliffs are so unstable and you need to stay well back from the edge!

How would like to see these famous cliffs from the sea?

We've teamed up with **Maverick Boat Adventures** to offer a Seven Sisters boat trip for two.

Maverick Boat Adventures is a family-run business based in Newhaven Marina, running a range of coastal boat trips along the stunning Sussex coastline.

The Seven Sisters boat tour is a 1.5 hour guided adventure taking guests from Newhaven along the coast to the iconic Seven Sisters and back.

Along the way, the local skipper shares stories of the area's smuggling past, history and lookout for local wildlife such as seals, porpoise and bird colonies. The tour is on a luxury Mediterranean rib boat, seating a maximum of 11 people. The business also offers private charters, bike and ebike hires.

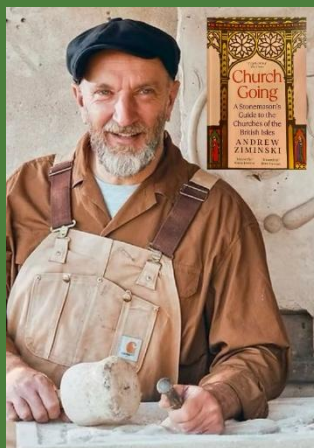
People signing up to the newsletter during February will be automatically entered into the draw to win the family pass. Those who are already signed up can email "Maverick" to newsletter@southdowns.gov.uk before midnight on 28 February. Sign up to the newsletter [here](#) and see competition T&Cs [here](#).


Things to do in the South Downs this February

Please follow the links as booking may be necessary. Find these and more events across the National Park and submit your own events at southdowns.gov.uk/events/



Stargazing at Seven Sisters by Emily Birtwisle



Come & listen to revered stonemason & conservator
Andrew Ziminski
talk about his career & book
Church Going
Book of the Year - The Times, Telegraph & BBC History Magazine
Weds 4 March, 7.30pm
St Peter's Church Petersfield
Tickets £5 - to fund local church conservation


- Grab your wellies and dive into the muddy magic of wetlands this February half term at Arundel Wetland Centre. From February 14 to 21, head to the centre for a week of hands on fun where mud isn't just messy — it's marvellous. Cook up creations in the mud kitchen, sculpt wetland creatures from clay and natural materials, splash through puddles of every size, mix seed bombs to take home, and test your aim in a mudslinging contest.
- Are you aged between 16 and 25 and wanted to get involved with nature conservation? We're holding a free **Youth Action day** at Seven Sisters on 28 February with some hands-on landscape management with our ranger team. Find out more and book a [place here](#).
- Coming up next month, on 4 March, is an **inspiring talk in Petersfield** from one of the UK's most respected stonemasons, Andrew Ziminski. Come and see churches through the eyes, and hands, of a master stonemason and learn more about his acclaimed book, Church Going.
- Also coming up next month, on 14 March, is the Petersfield Seed Swap, taking place this year from 10am to 12.30pm at Winton House on Petersfield High Street. Now in its 4th year, the Petersfield Seed Swap encourages all to grow and try something new in their gardening space. Along with seeds to swap from a selection of vegetables, flowers and herbs, there will be the opportunity to meet local gardening and nature organisations, gain advice from experts and find inspiration for the growing year ahead. The seed sowing corner encourages younger visitors to grow - complete with peat-free seed sowing compost, eco-friendly pots and trowels, they can sow a sunflower or pea seed to take home and grow.

Pic credits:

P1 Petersfield pond by Ben Evans; P2 Anne Purkiss; P4 right Snow in Springtime by Neil Jones; P5 Greater horseshoe bat by Daniel Hargreaves