

SOUTH DOWNS NEWS

HELP US TO #RENATURE
SOUTH DOWNS
NATIONAL PARK

WORK AND PLAY IN YOUR NATIONAL PARK

This month:

- **Together Now for nature, climate and people** Tell us what you think about the National Park's priorities and goals for the next five years.
- **ReNature Festival is back!** Connect with wildlife and find out about the line-up of events.
- **Calling all local history buffs!** Learn about an amazing new hub about the South Downs.
- **Win a hotel stay!** Enjoy a getaway to the incredible Tottington Manor.

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

Have your say on new exciting partnership plan

Increasing tree cover in the National Park by over 1,400 football pitches, cleaning up rivers and delivering 25km of new accessible paths are among the goals of an ambitious plan going out to public consultation.

The National Park Authority is launching a major consultation on the draft Partnership Management Plan (PMP) – the most important document for any National Park which lays out key priorities and targets. By law, National Parks must review their PMP every five years.

People from inside and outside the National Park are now being invited to have their say on the draft plan. The consultation went live on 9 June and is running until 1 August.

The final plan is being developed and will be delivered in partnership with scores of other organisations and

individuals, including farmers, landowners, local authorities, the health sector, water companies, businesses, schools, charities and community groups.

The draft 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.

Within the draft plan are some new targets including:

- Increasing tree canopy and woodland cover across the National Park by 888 hectares by 2031.
- Delivering 25 kilometres of accessible path, ensuring 50 gates/stiles have been made more accessible by 2031 and delivering five new easy access routes.
- Ensuring that the Authority is on track to reach 60% of the National Park being managed for nature by 2060.
- Ensuring that 300 affordable homes are built and completed by 2031 and there is extant permission granted for 500 affordable homes by 2031.
- Achieving a 10% improvement in Water Framework Directive status (aimed at reducing pollution and

improving water quality) for watercourses, including rivers and streams, across the National Park by 2031.

- Ensuring that 115 scheduled monuments have improved records around monitoring by 2031.
- By 2031, community groups from each parish in the National Park have signed up to a nature and climate pledge.
- Reduce net greenhouse gas emissions in South Downs National Park to net zero by 2040 relative to 1990 levels.
- By 2031, 100 farms in the National Park have carbon literacy and climate resilience plans, covering soil health and flood management.
- Bringing 80% of Sites of Scientific Interest within the National Park into “favourable condition” by 2042.
- Ensuring that more people have a chance to enjoy and engage with dark night skies, with 1m people reached online and 10,000 reached through in-person events by 2031.
- Supporting tourism activity that helps reduce carbon emissions and increases nature recovery.

Siôn McGeever, Chief Executive of the South Downs National Park Authority, said: “At a time when the world is facing unprecedented climate, nature, and economic crises, we need to be innovative and forward-thinking and that’s exactly what the draft Partnership Management Plan is.



“So, there’s one word that sums up this shared plan – ambition. We’re not shying away from aiming high in our shared vision for this amazing place.

“Like Sir David Attenborough recently said, the natural world is changing and we’re totally dependent on it for our food, water and air. It’s the most precious thing we have – and that’s why this draft PMP is so important.

“This National Park is in the busiest part of the UK, with 113,000 residents and millions of people living around it, and it can, and must, play a pivotal role in dealing with all the challenges and opportunities we now face. Ultimately, we want to make the South Downs an even better place with bigger and better wildlife habitats, more accessibility, more affordable homes and cleaner waterways.”

And Siôn added: “None of the objectives can be achieved alone and this plan is all about working together.

“The beauty of this partnership plan is that everyone can play their part, no matter how big or small. This is everyone’s opportunity to shape the future of their National Park and we’d like to hear from as many people as possible.”

To take part in the consultation visit this [webpage](#). Following feedback from the public and partners, the new plan will be adopted and begin from January 2026.

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Future looking bright for reserve



The future of a stunning nature reserve in the National Park has been secured thanks to a new lease agreement.

Butterfly Conservation has agreed with landowner The Church of England to keep managing the precious habitat at Magdalen Hill Down for at least another 10 years.



The iconic reserve, just east of Winchester, has been transformed by Butterfly Conservation staff and volunteers over three decades from scrub and farmland into the highest-quality chalk grassland, home to rare and unusual butterflies and moths.

Most recently, the South Downs National Park Trust has helped to install a new dew pond at the site through the “Pounds for Ponds” campaign and support from BMW UK through National Parks Partnerships (NPP).

A recent survey included whirlygig and great diving beetles, the larvae of dragonfly and damselfly along with water boatmen and pond skaters

Julian Bendle, Butterfly Conservation Senior Land Use Officer, said: “Almost lost to scrub in the late 1980s, Magdalen Hill Down has been transformed into one of Hampshire’s richest chalk grassland butterfly sites, with more than 30 different butterfly species recorded annually, including many rarities.

“Restoration work on one area of the site has transformed it from intensive arable production to flower-rich grassland and it is now one of the top ten sites in the county for many butterfly species.”

Alongside its conservation work, Butterfly Conservation uses the site to educate the local community about the importance of conservation including a Youth Rangers programme.

Site manager Fiona Scully added: “The new pond here will increase biodiversity and add an attractive feature for visitors to enjoy as well as offering engagement opportunities through pond-dipping activity.”

ReNature Festival returns!



People are being encouraged to connect with nature this summer as a popular festival returns to inspire us about the amazing wildlife on our doorstep.

Our ReNature Festival takes place from June 22 to 29 with a fascinating array of activities to help people connect with some of the rarest habitats in the world.

This year's festival explores the sights and sounds of nature, as well as three key habitats in the National Park: the butterfly havens of chalk grasslands, reptile-rich heathlands, and the dark night skies that are oases for nocturnal wildlife.



Fun activities include guided nature walks at stunning locations, "bioblitzes" to discover all creatures great and small, rock pooling, talks, night-time safaris and immersive nature sound experiences. Among the highlights will be a guided walk at a former golf course near Brighton that is now teeming with butterflies.

It comes as new ecological data reveals that the National Park's ongoing ReNature initiative – which is aiming to restore and create wildlife havens across Sussex and Hampshire – is having a significant impact.

Since 2020, eminent ecologist Neil Hulme has carried out butterfly surveys at 27 sites that are being restored or maintained by the South Downs National Park Authority and its partners.

Almost 6,000 butterflies from 36 species have been counted in that time, including the highest count of the rare Duke of Burgundy butterfly to date and new discoveries such as the Hornet Robberfly and Cistus Forester moth. The study shows that the richest butterfly fauna is being found on sites with good habitat management, including success stories such as Beeding Hill which is now bountiful in the iconic adonis blue butterfly.

Meanwhile, there is a growing list of scientifically backed studies reporting a variety of species bouncing back in the National Park, including the natterjack toad, bats and water vole.

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The ReNature campaign was launched four years ago in response to the national biodiversity crisis with the goal of transforming 13,000 hectares – or over 20,000 football pitches – into habitat for wildlife by 2030.

The campaign is now well over halfway to reaching its target. A total of 6,766 hectares – an area bigger than Portsmouth – has been created or improved to help nature thrive.



The work has included planting over 70,000 trees, adding over 160 football pitches of wildflowers, planting 35km of hedges, restoring ponds, and creating new wildlife havens on the edges of farms and urban development. Around a dozen new sites across the National Park are due to receive support to help create more wildflower meadows.

Figures show that the National Park's planning role is also having a big impact, with Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) coming out at three times the target for last year. This means that many developments are improving habitats for wildlife compared to what was there previously.

Jan Knowlson, Biodiversity Officer for the National Park, said: "We're really excited to announce the festival at a time when so much is being done to help wildlife bounce back. This is a great opportunity to learn more about the rare habitats of the South Downs National Park and what's being done to help them flourish.

"The biodiversity crisis is very real and not going away – there are almost 1,500 native species of plants and animals in the UK now threatened with extinction.

"But there's so much we can do to turn the tide on biodiversity loss by creating those spaces and refuges, however big or small, for wildlife.

"We want to inspire people to connect with nature and do their bit if they can, whether it's creating a pollinator-friendly garden, organising a community litter pick or doing some wildlife surveying."

And Jan added: "Nature recovery doesn't happen overnight, but the ecological studies are very encouraging and show that nature really can flourish given the chance. The South Downs is renowned for its butterflies, so it's wonderful to know they are doing well."

The full programme for the festival can be found at: www.southdowns.gov.uk/renature-festival/ Many of the events are free and drop-in, while others need to be booked in advance.

A free online pack is also available, crammed with fun nature-based activities and information for the whole family to enjoy.

As part of the ReNature initiative, schools across the National Park and surrounding areas can apply for grants of up to £1,000 to be used in their school grounds for supporting nature. Find out more [here](#). To donate to the campaign visit the [South Downs National Park Trust](#).

New history hub is launched



Aerial shot of Roedean School in 1920. Credit Historic England.

Are you a fan of local history and finding out how towns, villages and buildings have evolved through the ages?

Historic England has just launched a new Local Heritage Hub as a way for people to explore the culture and heritage of special places across the country.

The resource for the South Downs is crammed with fascinating facts and photos – from our iconic historic buildings to national stories that played out in the downland landscape.

You can even explore amazing archive and aerial photographs from all sorts of places, from Bramdean, to Roedean, Fernhurst and Arundel.



Anooshka Rawden, who leads on cultural heritage for the National Park, said: "Historic England's Local Heritage Hub is a fantastic resource. This really is a wonderful way to get to know the South Downs through time."

Visit the hub and discover more [here](#).



Arundel Castle in 1953. Credit Historic England

Boost for Park's heritage



Major lottery funding will support the next generation of craftspeople to help care for the National Park's incredible historic landscape and buildings.

Sussex Heritage Trust has received a grant of £207,000 from The National Lottery Heritage Fund to deliver its "Heritage Skills" initiative, encouraging young people to develop traditional building craft skills crucial to the future of conservation.

It comes as the UK is facing a shortage of skilled craftspeople to conserve historic buildings. Without urgent action, the traditional skills needed to care for our heritage may be lost.

This significant funding boost will enable the Trust, working in partnership with Weald & Downland Living Museum, Chichester College Group, South Downs National Park Authority and a network of local employers, to deliver an ambitious three-year plan to train the next generation in skills such as Following a successful pilot last year, the project will expand its reach to hundreds more students, offering practical skills training, bursaries, and direct pathways to work experience with employers.

The National Park really is a treasure trove for built heritage – with over 5,200 listed buildings and 166 Conservation Areas.

Siôn McGeever, Chief Executive at the National Park Authority, said: "Young people are vital to the future of the National Park – they will become the custodians of its nature and its heritage. This exciting programme provides young people with the opportunity to connect with the landscape and try out green careers, passing on the vital skills that will ensure the continued conservation of the South Downs' historic landscape and buildings."

Helen Reeve, Chief Executive Officer of Sussex Heritage Trust, said: "This funding will be transformative in helping us protect the historic built environment."



"The joy of being in a community"



Have you ever thought about joining a rambling club and doing your South Downs walks as part of a friendly group? Fiona El Hasnaoui is from Petersfield Ramblers and writes about the joys of

shared walking experiences.

Petersfield Ramblers is an independent walking club that has been running successfully for over 55 years and currently has around 70 members. We run walks twice a week on Wednesdays and Saturdays throughout the year, generally within 20 miles of Petersfield, many within the South Downs National Park. We are so lucky to live in this beautiful part of the country as it provides a wide variety of terrain and scenery. Walks vary from gentle strolls of around 6 miles up to more challenging walks up to 12 miles or more, although our average is around 8 or 9 miles.

An example of a recent walk would be a 10-mile circuit we completed from Cheriton, which took us across open meadows, along a section of the South Downs Way, through woodland rich in tree canopies, alongside farmland and various wooded tracks. We crossed the River Itchen joining the Itchen Way and enjoyed lunch in picturesque Ovington village. After refreshments, we headed down to Tichborne with its pretty thatched cottages and historic church and back to Cheriton.

Some of us have also just completed Mary's Crescent, a four-day walk split over 4 weeks, set against the spectacular backdrop of the South Downs, the walk links medieval churches in a crescent-shaped route from Portchester Castle to Chichester Cathedral, via Droxford, Buriton and Chilgrove.

Apart from the great outdoors, we are also a friendly club with regular social events, such as meals, picnics, days out and an annual BBQ (usually with a walk involved!) There is also an annual club holiday to different parts of the country such as Cornwall, the Peak District or Lake District which members can join, at a cost, should they choose.

The joy of the club is in the community it provides, getting to know local walks amongst friends, and all for the princely sum of £5 per year!

The benefits of joining the club are many – improved fitness, new friendships and exploring new places that you might otherwise not find. Do feel free to join us for three free walks before committing to membership. Find out more at www.petersfieldramblers.org



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The glorious butterflies of the Downs

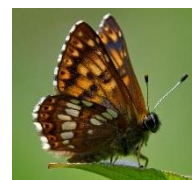


"Spending time with butterflies lifts the spirits and reinvigorates that sense of wonder in the natural world."

Poignant words from Sir David Attenborough, who, like so many of us, is enthralled by the sight of butterflies dancing from blossom to blossom in a wildflower meadow.

Spring and summer in the South Downs is synonymous with these fascinatingly diverse and colourful insects. Their incredible diversity is thanks to the chalk grassland – a truly unique habitat – that supports a huge medley of nectar-rich flowers. Combine the floristic diversity and all its many hues with these colourful creatures and you have any wildlife photographer's dream!

In fact, over 20 different species of butterfly can be on the wing at any given time above the National Park's chalk grasslands. The grasslands are just one of the habitats supporting butterflies as heathland and



woodland also support a multitude of species, and did we mention the South Downs is also a stronghold for the butterfly's close cousin, the majestic moths?

It's Butterfly Awareness Day in June and a good time to remember how important these insects are to our ecosystems in the National Park and beyond. Apart from being part of Britain's natural heritage, they have a vital role to play in pollination, pest control and an intrinsic part of the food chain. Where you find butterflies, you'll normally find lots of other species, so they help tell us how biodiverse somewhere is.

Some of the most iconic species associated with the South Downs are the adonis blue, the Duke of Burgundy, the chalkhill blue and the grizzled skipper.

We can all play our part to help butterflies. Avoid using pesticides in your garden and plant a variety of flowers to attract different species. You'll be rewarded with the sight of butterflies – one of nature's true delights!

[Click here](#) to find out some of our Rangers' favourite butterflies in the National Park!

Simple steps to prevent wildfires



People are being urged to take extra care over the coming weeks and months to prevent wildfires.

After a particularly dry and warm spring, the risk of wildfires is high.

Last month a wildfire – believed to have been started by a campfire – destroyed eight hectares of beautiful heathland at Chapel Common, near Milland, West Sussex.

The biggest thing people can do to avoid a repeat of this is to **never use disposable barbecues or light open fires in the countryside under any circumstances.**

Disposable barbecues can be particularly dangerous fire hazards as the ground beneath often remains searingly hot for hours after it has been removed, with the potential to ignite dry vegetation and posing a risk to any human, or animal, that might walk over the scorched earth. Wind can carry smouldering ash and embers from disposable barbecues, spreading the fire to other areas.



Olivia French, who leads the National Park's heathlands project team, said: "The National Park has a number of incredibly rare and sensitive heathland sites, as well as chalk grasslands, scheduled monuments and forests, and all are very vulnerable to wildfires.

This time of year is ground nesting season, which makes it even more important to be vigilant, with rare bird, amphibian and reptile populations across the National Park at risk and not able to escape to safety in time.

"It's more important than ever that people do their bit to care for wildlife by not using disposable barbecues or lighting fires in the countryside. It's just not worth the risk of the terrible damage it could do to internationally-important wildlife habitats, as well as farmland.

"Consider having a picnic instead as there are some wonderful picnic locations in the National Park. There is also a dedicated barbecue site at **Queen Elizabeth Country Park** that is safe for visitors to use.

"Please properly dispose of cigarettes, matches, glass and litter to prevent fire hazards."

If anyone does see a fire, or the first signs of smoke from a fire, make sure to get to a safe place and please dial 999 immediately and request the fire service.

SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY Win stay at hotel with a view!



The National Park is blessed with some wonderful and unique hotels, with arguably some of the best views in Britain!

One of those amazing venues is **Tottington Manor & Terra Restaurant**, set in a serene location just a 15-minute drive from central Brighton and within easy reach of Worthing, Horsham, Crawley and Burgess Hill.

Surrounded by beautiful farmland, this independent hotel and events venue prides itself on its AA Rosette restaurant, serving dishes created from local ingredients from Sussex farms and producers. The sumptuous food offer is also available in its private dining rooms.

With 12 individually styled bedrooms Tottington Manor is great for those exploring the South Downs Way, or looking for a break away from the city. The venue is also fantastic for celebrating family occasions, with capacity for it up to 100 guests in its South Downs Suite.



We've teamed up with Tottington Manor to offer a night



away in the hotel's Duplex suite, which features 17th century roof beams, a jacuzzi bathroom and rainforest shower. The prize includes bed and breakfast, but other dining will be charged as normal.

People signing up to the newsletter during June will be automatically entered into the draw to win the hotel stay. Those who are already signed up can email "Tottington Manor" to

newsletter@southdowns.gov.uk before midnight on 30 June.

Sign up to the newsletter **here** and see competition T&Cs **here**.

Things to do in the South Downs this June

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/



- Why not get involved in our ReNature Festival? We've got a nature day at Hogmoor Inclosure, Bordon, on 22 June and another nature day on **28 June at Seven Sisters Country Park**, near Seaford. Open to all and a wonderful chance to get to know more about the wildlife of the National Park!
- Discover the moths of Selborne at **Gilbert White's House and Gardens** on 13 June!
- Get off the beaten track and enjoy a guided walk around **Ebernoe Common** on 14 June. Nestled on the fringe of the Western Weald, Ebernoe Common is a living relic, untouched by modern haste, cloaked in story and shadow! Its towering oaks – gnarled, hollow, and centuries old – stand like sentinels from another age.
- Head to **West's Wood Fair**, at East Dean, near Chichester, for a fun event featuring the many interesting ways in which wood is used. All the action takes place between 20 and 22 June, including a gun dog display, live music, a kids corner, lawn mower racing, and over 100 exhibitors.
- Discover more about one of the rare chalk streams of Sussex, as well as the beautiful gardens and an 11th century church along its course. The **event at Cocking** takes place on 21 June.
- A series of free guided walks are taking place in the National Park, organised by Alton Climate Action Network. The next one on 14 June is all about the pollinators of the South Downs, while another on 6 July will help walkers understand the impact of climate change on the South Downs. The summer walk on 10 August will observe the different seasons of the South Downs. **Find out more.**
- Looking ahead, would you be interested in heading out with a National Park Ranger and doing some **birdspotting**? Join expert Tim Squire on 22 July for a fun-filled day at Seven Sisters Country Park – suitable for beginners or more experienced twitchers!

Pic credits

P1 Ben Evans; P1 Kingfisher Anthony Hurren; P2 Chalkhill Blue Nigel Symington; P3 Red Kite Melanie Randall; P4 right Annette Mary Radford; P4 Jill Windmill Ian Micklewright; P5 Common Blue Emma Varley; P5 Duke of Burgundy Neil Hulme.