



SOUTH DOWNS NEWS

WORK AND PLAY IN YOUR NATIONAL PARK

Welcome to the newsletter for the South Downs.

Send your comments and ideas to us at newsletter@southdowns.gov.uk

JOIN THE SOUTH DOWNS DARK SKIES FESTIVAL

10–26 February 2017

In 2016 the South Downs National Park became the world's newest International Dark Sky Reserve (IDSR), the 2nd in England and only 11th in the world. What better way to mark the occasion than a two-week festival in the dark winter months?

Whether you live in or close to the South Downs there are stargazing events happening near you. Local astronomy groups will be pointing their telescopes to the heavens at special star parties, there will be talks on nocturnal wildlife, night walks and more.

"The winter sky is a great time to search for the Great Orion Nebula in the southern sky," says 'Dark Skies' Dan Oakley, Lead Ranger for the National Park. "The cross of Cygnus the Swan is overhead, shining within the Milky Way and the brightest star in the sky – Sirius – lies just south of Orion."

If you have trouble remembering the Roman or Greek names Dan suggests using a little modern mythology: "Sometimes when I'm talking about the night sky I change Taurus to Voldemort and Orion to Harry, with his wand replacing the sword. That certainly helps them to stick in some people's minds!"



Dark skies above Birling Gap, East Sussex

The highlight of the festival will be Stargazing South Downs on Saturday 18 February. During the day the South Downs Planetarium in Chichester will have special showings of the winter night skies (booking necessary). Celebrations continue in the evening at Midhurst Rother College in Midhurst with experienced astronomers on hand to show you the highlights of the night sky, hands-on activities for children, the chance to learn how to get the most out of your own telescope, a programme of talks and astrophotography workshops.

"There is nothing like seeing someone discover the stars for the first time," says Dan. "It's then that people appreciate dark skies overhead are as important as the National Park's beautiful rolling landscapes. With properly dark skies in the South East of England under threat, the skies above the South Downs are worth protecting."

As well as helping us see the stars and planets, dark skies are vital for many nocturnal animals. There are about 16 protected species of bats breeding in the UK and most of the UK's 800 species of larger moths are strictly nocturnal including the big and colourful hawk-moths which you can spot in the South Downs. Barn owls are unmistakable, appearing like floating white ghosts as they patrol field margins for mice and shrews whilst tawny owls are commonly found in woodland with their bodies streaked in brown and grey for camouflage.

The National Park Authority is now in the final stages of producing the first Local Plan for the National Park to put good planning in place that puts landscapes first, cares for views and night skies; supports the local economy, promotes recreation; enables affordable local housing; and makes sure that our green spaces are properly valued and cared for.

There are a few things you can do too to help protect dark skies and the wildlife which depend on them. "Check the outdoor lighting around your home," says Dan. "Is it really needed? If not, turn it off, or if it is, make sure it's fully shielded so light is directed down on to the ground. Buy lamps under 500 lumens to reduce light pollution. Also spread the word! Tell your family, friends and neighbours why dark-sky friendly lighting is important. The more people that know, the better protected our dark skies will be."

Now we just need to keep our fingers crossed for clear skies...

Find South Downs Dark Skies Festival events happening near you

www.southdowns.gov.uk/enjoy/events/dark-skies-festival/

See the full programme for Stargazing South Downs and book your place on an astrophotography workshop www.southdowns.gov.uk/stargazing-south-downs/

FARMING FOR THE SOUTH DOWNS IN POST-BREXIT BRITAIN

Since the early hours of Friday 24 June 2016 politicians, the media, economists and many of us ordinary, diverse Brits have been trying to understand or predict what life will be like after Brexit. For those of us involved with farming or the environment this future feels uncertain but, as with most change, life without the European Union's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) could present opportunity as well as risk.



Harvest mouse by Derek Middleton

"Now is the time to explore new and innovative land management techniques and types of funding which reward farmers for the contribution they make to public good," says Andrew Lee, Director of Countryside Management and Policy for the National Park Authority (SDNPA).

More than 85 per cent of the South Downs National Park is farmland and two-thirds of this – 93,561ha of land – is managed through some kind of agri-environment scheme, currently funded by the EU CAP, to support land managers who farm in a way that also benefits wildlife and the environment.

"There are considerable legal, financial and administrative challenges ahead," continues Andrew. "This landscape's future depends on whatever system is put in place of CAP, so we are working through National Parks England to argue for a much stronger role, and that any new scheme at the very least, gives the same level of protection and support to the environment as current schemes, and preferably improves on it.

What would this nature-friendly farming look like? In the South Downs a promising testing ground is 'farm clusters'. These are groups of farmers, land managers, foresters and other local partners who join together to secure funding and benefit the environment in ways that they wouldn't be able to achieve alone.

There are currently six farm clusters across the National Park. One of the first was set up around the village of Selborne in Hampshire in 2013 with the aim of taking direct action to support key species such as the barn owl and harvest mouse and their habitats, as well as getting the local community involved.

"An individual farm might improve the margins around a field to create better space for harvest mice and therefore a better feeding ground for barn owls," says Andrew. "But working together the Selborne farmers are creating a network of joined-up habitats, such as field margins, allowing harvest mice and many other

species to spread across the landscape and saving them from the threat of local extinction.”

The group chose the harvest mouse as a flagship species because these tiny mammals, which depend on a healthy farmed environment, were first identified as a separate species by Gilbert White in Selborne in 1767. The Hampshire Biological Information Centre only had one record of harvest mouse across a 28km² area around Selborne from 1999, so more survey work was clearly needed to check how the population was getting on.

Working with the Game and Wildlife Conservancy Trust SDNPA has helped volunteers from the local community to carry out nest surveys in hedgerows and field margins. Over the last three years they have found more than 550 nests, most of which can be directly credited to habitat improvements delivered through the Higher Level Environmental Stewardship scheme. Local farmers have also worked together with the SDNPA to create new hedgerows and expand a network of species rich meadows.

“Our farmers and foresters manage the land our drinking water filters through, where much of our wildlife lives and where we walk, ride and cycle for fresh air and enjoyment,” Andrew continues. “These are just two examples of the range of public benefits they can deliver, beyond Brexit and CAP, given the right opportunity and incentives.”

www.southdowns.gov.uk/farming-for-the-south-downs-in-post-brexit-britain/

CHAMPIONING OUR WATER

You're thirsty. You turn on a tap, the glass fills and you drink without a second thought.

But did you know that if you live near the National Park – particularly on the southern coast – it's the chalk of the South Downs we have to thank?



Cattle in a man-made dew pond at Ditchling Beacon, one of the few places you'll see water on the South Downs chalk

Chalk is porous and holds water like a sponge.

Between the Adur and Ouse valleys alone this aquifer enables Southern Water to pump groundwater to fill more than 15,000 Olympic swimming pools each year. A vital resource for both homes and businesses in an otherwise relatively dry part of the country. It also sustains rare and nationally important habitats such as chalk streams and wetlands.

But as with many of our natural resources this groundwater is under threat – from population pressures and as a side effect of modern farming and life styles. There is a delicate balance between meeting our own need for water against that of our wildlife even before adding the impact of pollutants.

Fertilisers, pesticides and herbicides used in farming, parks, golf courses and gardens can all find their way into the groundwater. Recent scandals have raised the profile of air pollution from cars but they are also one of the greatest contributors to water pollution. Particles of heavy metals from brake pads and tyres, and oil and fuel leaks create a cocktail of chemicals which washes from the road and eventually into the chalk.

But all is not lost. We asked Aimee Felus, Project Manager for the new Brighton Chalk Management Partnership (ChaMP) about work to improve and protect our water.

“There's a great deal we can do,” says Aimee. “In rural areas nitrates are our biggest concern and we want to work with farmers and land managers to develop pilot projects tackling this. For example, in looking at how nutrients are applied, how manure is dealt with, planting cover crops to reduce run off and even planting new woodland in problem areas.

“In towns and cities we need to reduce the amount of chemicals reaching the aquifer from golf courses, allotments, industrial and commercial sites and roads. We'll be offering advice and training to support people who want to play a part in improving this vital resource hidden beneath our feet in turn benefiting our landscape and wildlife.”

ChaMP is led by South Downs National Park Authority, Southern Water and the Environment Agency, in partnership with Natural England, Brighton & Lewes Downs Biosphere Reserve, Brighton & Hove City Council, and the University of Brighton.

Find out how you can get involved by contacting aimee.felus@southdowns.gov.uk

FIVE THINGS TO DO IN THE SOUTH DOWNS THIS MONTH

Find these & more events across www.southdowns.gov.uk/enjoy/events/



- Stargazing South Downs, an evening of family fun in Midhurst.
- Daily science stage shows, planetarium shows and extra hands-on activities at Winchester Science Centre and Planetarium
- Spot galaxies, planets and stars in a daytime planetarium at Birling Gap
- Stargazing at RSPB Pulborough Brooks, enjoy the nature reserve by night with hot chocolate.
- Find out about Isaac Newton and the Surrey Pumas in an offbeat talk at Clanfield Observatory

ON THE GROUND



Don't forget to say hello if you spot our Rangers and volunteers out working in the National Park. Here's a taste of what they achieved in January 2017.

- Installation of new tramper friendly kiss gates, **improving access at Kingley Vale NNR** in West Sussex.
- Volunteer spent **42 task days clearing scrub on chalk grassland and heathland** on 30 different sites, with 8 different organisations including National Trust, Natural England, Sussex Wildlife Trust, Lewes District Council, Eastbourne Borough Council and Pyecombe Golf Course.
- Work to **improve rare chalk grassland** was carried out at Beeding Hill in West Sussex and Beddingham Hill in East Sussex.

- **Repaired fences to enable cattle to graze** at Mill Hill nature reserve near Shoreham and **installed a new water trough to support grazing** at Graffham Down in West Sussex.
- Birch and pine have been cleared from a small pocket of heathland at Hammer Wood as part of **developing a network of heath wildlife corridors**.
- Pines were removed from Woolmer Forest to **support this nationally important heathland site**.
- Over the month of January there were **16 days of coppicing on 8 sites** across the National Park.
- This included **coppicing to support the pearl bordered fritillary** at Church Copse, ancient semi-natural woodland, in West Sussex; Rewel Wood and Lodge Copse in West Sussex; Verdley and Brickfield Copse in Hampshire.
- Meanwhile coppice rotation continues at Avington Park near Winchester – some of the resulting stakes will be used for **securing latrine floats to help monitor the reintroduction of water voles**.

www.southdowns.gov.uk/national-park-authority/our-work/on-the-ground

MOST ASKED...

Send us your questions about a particular area of work in the National Park.

Answering this month is:

'Dark Skies' Dan, Lead Ranger for the SDNPA



YOU ASK

Do I need to buy a telescope?

DAN ANSWERS

Really nothing beats being able to see the Milky Way with the naked eye. If you want to discover the hidden gems of the sky you will need a telescope. For about £100 you can buy one that will help you see galaxies, clusters, nebula and planets but the best way to get started is to join a star party organised by a local astronomy group who will have their telescopes set up ready for you to enjoy. There are lots of star parties happening during the South Downs Dark Skies Festival and you can find more during the year on the Southern Area Group of Astronomical Societies (SAGAS) website www.sagasonline.org/

YOU ASK

I need outside lights for security. What should I install?

DAN ANSWERS

The main use for security lights is as a deterrent and a way to spot individuals behaving suspiciously. You don't need more than 500 lumens to achieve this and can reduce the impact further by installing the lights just above head height, pointing down and with a proximity timer. The main thing is to avoid the cheap over-bright and undirected lights which pollute the sky, literally for miles around.

Read more of Dan's answers at

www.southdowns.gov.uk/you-ask-dan-oakley

NEXT MONTH: School activities in the South Downs

Will you come and teach my class? How can I encourage schools to visit our site in the National Park?

Send your questions for Jonathan Dean, Education Officer for the South Downs National Park newsletter@southdowns.gov.uk



YOU SAY

Do you have a story you want to tell about the National Park? A burning issue that you think needs to be addressed? Send it to us at newsletter@southdowns.gov.uk

Please note that only contributors who submit their full name and address can be considered for publication though we will not publish your full address. Please make it clear whether you are speaking on your own behalf or that of an organisation you represent. We reserve the right to shorten comments and edit where necessary.

www.southdowns.gov.uk/national-park-authority/our-work/on-the-ground



NATIONAL PARK OF THE YEAR



VOTE SOUTH DOWNS!

The South Downs has made the shortlist for Countryfile Magazine's National Park of the Year! Please give our landscapes your support, voting closes on 28 February.

www.countryfile.com/awards#national-park-of-the-year



TAKE THE DARK SKIES PLEDGE AND WIN A TELESCOPE!

In 2016 the South Downs National Park became the 11th International Dark Skies Reserve in the world. Take the pledge to enjoy and care for our dark skies and be in with a chance to win our South Downs Dark Skies Appreciation Kit.

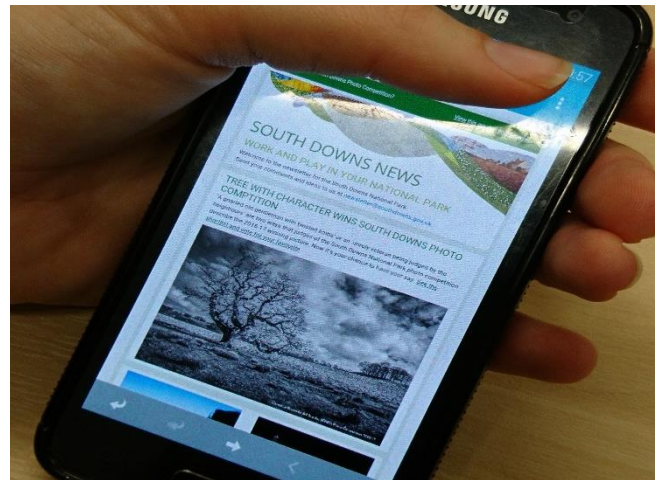
www.southdowns.gov.uk/take-the-south-downs-dark-skies-pledge-2



SUSHI WITH A SOUTH DOWNS TWIST

Shunji Irokawa is a Japanese chef with more than 40 years' experience. Originally from just outside Tokyo he now heads up Kyoto Kitchen in Winchester. His recipe for Winchester Roll using local smoked trout and wasabi features as 'Recipe of the Month' on Southdownsfood.org

www.southdownsfood.org/com/



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