

HEATHLANDS NEWS



HELPING YOUR HEATHS

Funding raised by
The National Lottery
and awarded by the Heritage Lottery Fund



Welcome to the newsletter for the Heathlands Reunited Project.

Send your comments and questions to us at heathlands@southdowns.gov.uk

Want to learn more about what is happening in the wider National Park? Sign up to the South Downs News www.southdowns.gov.uk/join-the-newsletter

YEAR ONE ACHIEVEMENTS

Rare heath insects will benefit from patches of bare ground totalling the size of 9 football pitches and 3km of wildlife corridor have been created. These are just two successes from the first year of our five-year project to save rare heathland species in the South Downs National Park.

"It may seem counter-intuitive but clearing ground can be as important for conservation as planting new species," says Bruce Middleton, Heathlands Reunited Project Manager. "Sixty per cent of heathland insects rely on bare earth at some stage during their life cycle - for basking, hunting or as a warm place to incubate their eggs. Each patch is small but the difference they make is huge."

Less than 1 per cent of former heathland remained in the National Park when the Heathlands Reunited project began in 2016 but thanks to the 11 project partners and an army of volunteers, work is underway to help save the heaths.



"It may seem counter-intuitive but clearing ground can be as important for conservation as planting new species,"

Other project successes include:

- From September 2016 to March 2017, 60 hectares of non-native invasive plants and scrub were removed to restore precious heathland.
- Eight training courses and networking events have helped the people who manage and volunteer on heathland to learn new skills – such as using fixed point photography to monitor heathland health.

- Bringing heathland experts together to share their skills and knowledge to support long-term sustainable heathland management.
- Re-launching the National Park's Take the Lead campaign to celebrate responsible dog ownership and access on heaths.

Sixty-six per cent of South Downs heathland is open access land which makes it an important recreation space for people to relax, exercise and walk their dogs. The second year of the project kicks-off this summer with a series of free events running across the area to encourage more people to get involved and #HelpTheHeath.

"The engagement side of Heathlands Reunited sees many fantastic free events taking place all over the heaths, there is something for everyone," says Fiona Scully, Community & Learning Ranger from the National Trust. "It's all about community and people learning more about their local wildlife, how and why we manage heaths the way we do, and how you can take part and contribute."

Where are the heaths? Find out more detailed information about the sites included in the Heathlands Reunited Project area here: <https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Final-Site-Areas-v2.pdf>

FOND FAREWELL



Bruce Middleton our Heathlands Reunited Project Manager is bidding us adieu. Bruce is moving on to new adventures and, as you can imagine, he has a number of interesting options open to him that he'd like to have a go at!

Bruce has been working in this area for 25 years with the Sussex Downs Conservation Board, The South

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Downs Joint Committee and, more recently, the South Downs National Park Authority.

Bruce says: "I would like to thank you all for all your support and hard work you have all put in to help the heaths. The Heathlands Reunited Project is making pioneering headway towards improving the heaths in this area. I do wish all of those involved with the Project all the best."

I am sure you will all join us in saying that Bruce, you will be truly missed! We wish you all the success and happiness in the future and thank you for all the knowledge you shared with us to date, Most of which cannot be found in a book!

PROJECT PORTAL

The project portal is up and running and available to use for all officially signed up volunteers.

The project portal is a great way to keep up to date with what is happening in the project. It is updated regularly meaning you will have the latest information on upcoming events and training courses whenever you choose to log in. The 2018 events calendar will be available on the portal soon.

There is even a discussion board on the portal where volunteers can set up discussion threads and talk to each other about what they have been up to.

It can be viewed on your mobile phone or a computer. We recommend that you save the login page as one of your favourites. Or you can go onto the Heathlands Reunited page on the South Downs website and simply click on the Heathlands Reunited logo with 'Partners Portal' written underneath it to reach the log on page.



Not got your log in yet? Email heathlands@southdowns.gov.uk and ask to be set up.

LOCAL HERITAGE STORIES NEEDED

An artist is being commissioned to design sculptures across 7 heathland sites in the South Downs National Park



Local communities are being asked for stories about their history and heritage to help inspire seven new pieces of art, linking seven heathland sites in the South Downs National Park. The artist will be commissioned to create the seven pieces as part of the Heritage Lottery-Funded Heathlands Reunited Project, a partnership project led by the South Downs National Park Authority.

The seven heathland sites will be:

1. Wiggonholt
2. Iping and Stedham
3. Lavington Plantation
4. Short heath Common
5. Graffham
6. Black Down
7. Woolbeding

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“We know people love their heaths and use them for exercise, to walk their dogs, for play and for relaxation. Through Heathlands Reunited we want to inspire them to get to know their own heaths better, visit and explore other heaths, and most importantly get involved in caring for these amazingly rich havens.”
Said Katy Sherman, Heathlands Reunited Engagement Officer “The seven pieces of art will tell the story of why heaths are so important – not just as individual commons but as part of a wider network of heathland.”

The artist’s work will reflect what each community values about their heath – from their history and past economic importance to their rare plants and animals. We are right at the very start of this process so if you have a story which you think could inspire Graeme, your community and future generations please let us know.

Heathlands only exist today because of human intervention over thousands of years. This means that if heathlands aren’t actively managed by people – by local communities, conservation groups, the National Park Authority or others – they will be lost alongside the rare and endangered species that live there. Today heathland covers just 1 per cent of the South Downs National Park, mostly separated into small ‘islands’ where isolated plants and animals are far more vulnerable to local extinction.

Eleven organisations have joined forces to expand the existing heathland left in the National Park. By creating stepping-stone scrapes and wildlife corridors the Heathlands Reunited partnership hope to create an area of heathland greater than 1,200 football pitches over a five-year project.



If you would like to find out more, volunteer or have stories that you would like to share please contact heathlands@southdowns.gov.uk

SAVING SUNDEWS WITH KEW GARDENS

*The Millennium Seed Bank based at Wakehurst (Kew) discovered, when checking their national seed source of *Drosera intermedia* (oblong-leaved Sundew) stock, they had very little viable seed to use. So they realised they needed more to ensure the nations seed stock was there in freeze dried storage to ensure this species will be available for any future reintroduction programmes needed.*

A botanist at Kew had visited Heyshott Common and found there is a good population of Oblong-leaved Sundew there. Kew asked the Heathlands Reunited Project if they could help.



Stephanie Miles and Jenny Peach collecting seed for the Millennium Seed Bank

The project offered to obtain the landowner's and Natural England's permission to ensure it was ok for Kew to come and collect the Oblong-leaved Sundew seed from site. Kew then waited until late August when they believed the seed would be ripe and ready to collect until they came to visit. So on the 23/08/2017 Bruce Middleton from the Heathlands Reunited Project met up with Stephanie Miles and Jenny Peach from Kew to show them the perfect location to find what they wanted. On the day the weather was sunny and they found plenty of ripe seeds to collect. Although they took enough seed for what they wanted it was only a very small percentage of the seed that they removed from site.

There are two species of Sundew found in the Project area and they are *Drosera intermedia* Oblong-leaved Sundew and *Drosera rotundifolia* Round-leaved

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Sundew. They are found on the wetter areas on the heaths and they especially like bare wet peaty ground. The sundews do not have a ready supply of nutrients to supplement their diet – so they have become carnivorous. They have a very clever way to catch small insects in that they have leaves covered in red 'hairs' tipped with glistening droplets. These droplets attract the insects to settle on the leaves to investigate them – now these are sticky and once the insect touches these 'hairs' the leaves come into action and close up around the trapped insect. The enclosed insect is then digested and absorbed into the plant.



Oblong-leaved Sundew

TAKE THE LEAD

Become an ambassador and Watch the canine confessions



Since the vast majority of dogs behave well, the National Park launched a celebration of great responsible dog owners by launching our very own 'Take the Lead' campaign. The campaign started in March 2017 where we began recruiting dog ambassadors, launched a social media competition and created a new series of engagement films, known as the canine confessions.

From March to September 2017 over half a million people engaged with the Take the Lead campaign through Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube.

HERITAGE VOLUNTEER CO- ORDINATOR

Meet Mary Saunders – who is joining us for six months to work with Cultural Heritage volunteers



My role as Cultural Heritage Community Projects and Volunteer Co-ordinator is an exciting and interesting one, on a tight schedule!

I have until April 2018 to co-ordinate 20 volunteers to find 100 interesting, if possible, horrible, stories about the heathlands of the South Downs National Park.

Ten of these volunteers will conduct interviews with people who have stories to tell – either of their own experience, or handed down – about the heathlands. People see events in very different ways, which makes the oral history interview a poignant, personal account seen through just one pair of eyes. Recordings of people talking about their experience bring the past to life in a way that history books can never achieve.

The other ten volunteers will delve into the archives of museums, record offices and libraries to source articles, photos, drawings and so on, that can be catalogued for future interest.

The volunteers will begin by focusing on finding stories from seven specific heathlands – Black Down, Woolbeding, Iping and Stedham, Lavington Plantation, Graffham, Shortheath and Wiggonholt. These heaths have been chosen to display works of art, inspired by

The #TakeTheLeadTo photo competition also engaged over 121 people, proving most popular on Instagram. See the winning photo and runners up below:



Central: Winning Photo. Surrounded by 4 runners up

In October 2017 with assistance from 'Natalie Light Dog Training', the Heathlands Reunited project started its pilot "recruitment" of three volunteer dog ambassadors with the support of project partners.

A 'Countryside Ability' dog training course was also developed. The course is a spoof on countryside agility and covers all four of the campaigns key messages:

- Keep dogs on a lead near livestock
- Bag and bin your poo, any public bin will do
- Protect ground nesting birds. Stick to the paths, especially between 1 March–15 September
- Do not enter military training areas when the red flags are flying.

Owners are asked to recall their dog, walk through a field of fake sheep, pick up their poo and avoid the ground nesting temptations. Everybody receives a certificate graded at bronze, silver or gold. We hope the ability course will make an appearance at more of our events across the project area this coming summer. So make sure you come along to give it a go! We'd love to meet you!

Visit www.southdowns.gov.uk/takethelead for more information and to watch the canine confessions.

GUEST PARTNER INTERVIEW

the stories, to celebrate the rich cultural heritage of these precious areas.

Once sufficient stories have been gathered from the seven heathlands, volunteers will focus on the other thirty three heathland sites.

It is so important to capture stories from the heathlands before they disappear. The project stretches its tendrils way beyond our lives as the information will be accessible by future generations so that the stories of our South Downs' heathlands will live long into the future.

In the short term, the information from this project will be stored on the South Downs National Park Authority's website and in the local record offices for future generations to access. Some may be included in the artwork on the seven sites and in the creation of a horrible histories ebook. These resources will also be available for schools and community groups to access, and for storytellers to sift through to fuel and develop their stories.

Do you have a story to tell about any of our heaths?
Do you know anyone who has a heathland story?
Please contact the team if you do!

Only by capturing people's stories, can we truly understand and appreciate how important the heaths have been in the past and how we can help preserve and maintain their fragile biodiversity.

We are so lucky to live in an area of the world that is home to one of the rarest and most endangered environments.

We are still looking for volunteers to gather information from the archives. Are you inquisitive, thorough, reliable, and a good communicator? Do you like solving problems? Would you enjoy researching online, visiting museums and record offices, interacting with a range of documentary materials? Do you have basic computer knowledge, including MS Word and internet browsing?

Please email mary.saunders@southdowns.gov.uk if you would like more information or if you are interested in joining this worthwhile and fascinating project.



Name: Joe Bassett

Organisation: RSPB – Pulborough Brooks

Job Title: Assistant Warden

How has Heathlands Reunited helped the sites you look after?

Heathlands Reunited has helped us monitor progress on the heath by giving us the guidance and training on fixed point photography to help us set up points so we can see the changes our management is making out on the reserve.

The Heathlands Reunited Project is also running on our site at the same time as our HLF 'Back from the Brink' project. The Back from the Brink project is reintroducing the threatened Field Cricket. The Field Cricket relies on the heathland habitat. The Heathlands Reunited project is helping us to create more and improve the quality of our heathland habitat. So it is great that the two projects are working in parallel.

Has the project helped you personally?

I have attended free training days that the Heathlands Reunited team have put on where I have learnt from other heathland managers and specialists.

For me the heath at Wiggonholt is a change in habitat type from other reserves I have worked on. Here my focus is to encourage heather to grow back on the common, I do this by managing scrub and tree growth. We carry out 'tree popping' where we remove birch saplings and pull pine saplings with volunteers. Trees are vital in other habitats but healthy heaths need clear open space to thrive.

We have work parties on the heath each week and we have had help from the South Downs Volunteer Ranger Service. The work out on the heath is amazing!

Has the project helped your volunteers?

The project has helped the volunteers to physically see the difference the work they are doing is making.

With the set fixed point photography areas on the heath they enjoy seeing the changes they make. They are seeing the progression of the habitat management and understand how they are helping the heather thrive on the heathland.

What's your favourite thing about heathlands?

Heathland is such a rare habitat and it's great to have a bit of heathland on my own patch where I can personally help to make a difference. I can do my bit to help restore and maintain the habitat to bring in Heathland specialist species. As well as increasing awareness by showing members of the public, staff and family the potential heathland has for us and for wildlife.

Why should people help the heaths?

I think that people should help heaths otherwise we would lose heaths altogether and it will all become pine woodland. I would encourage anyone and everyone to come out and join me on the heath so I can show them what management we are doing and what the tasks are and why we are doing it. I want to encourage people to get out and do their bit for nature.

What is your favourite heathland species or animal?

I have to say, I do love a Dartford Warbler!

GET INVOLVED!

Through Heathlands Reunited we have several volunteering opportunities available for you to get involved with.

We provide free training for you all and want to hear from anyone who wants to be involved.

Our volunteer opportunities include:

- Wildlife Monitoring
- Fixed Point Photography
- Dog Ambassador
- Heath Walk Leader
- Archive Investigator
- Oral History Interviewer
- Practical management volunteer
- Heathland Host

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Visit www.southdowns.gov.uk/heathlands-reunited to find out more about these roles and to read the role descriptions.

SAVE THE DATE

Volunteer Networking Event

24th February 2018, South Downs Centre, Midhurst

We will be inviting all Heathlands Reunited volunteers, from every volunteer stream to join us for lunch and an afternoon of networking.

Find out how your area of work contributes to the overall project and what other opportunities might be available to you. Or simply come along for a scrumptious lunch and to hear what everybody has been up to.

Invitations with further details will go out in the New Year. So keep an eye on your inbox!



FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Don't forget to follow the project using the hash tag #HelpTheHeaths. Follow the take the lead campaign using #TakeTheLead



Receive this newsletter by email by contacting heathlands@southdowns.gov.uk and asking to be added to the electronic mailing list.