



SOUTH DOWNS NEWS

WORK AND PLAY IN YOUR NATIONAL PARK

This month:

- Time to **weigh and ring the barn owl chick stars** from our web cam
- Rangers on Tour – **coming to a town centre near you for National Parks Week**
- Amazing opportunities await on our **new apprenticeship scheme**
- **Is nature under threat** in our national parks?
- **Win a family ticket** to Go Ape in the woods

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

WHAT WE ACHIEVED IN 2017–18

Submitting the first South Downs Local Plan and launching a new charitable trust for the National Park are just two achievements highlighted in the National Park Authority's Annual Review 2017–18.

Over the course of the year 147 chalk grassland, woodland, heathland and river sites were maintained and enhanced; 5,221 volunteer days were given; and 89 per cent of planning applications were dealt with within agreed time limits.

Other highlights from the year include:

- Installing new accessible 'kissing gates' at Kingley Vale, opening up a special place for those with impaired mobility;
- Work with the Countryside Trust supporting 550 children from all backgrounds to learn more about where their food comes from and how farmers help to support wildlife and biodiversity;
- Volunteers working over the winter at Verdley Wood, near Henley, to help improve the habitat for



the Pearl-bordered Fritillary. This is one of the few places this woodland butterfly remains in Sussex;

- Finishing a two-year project led by the South Downs Volunteer Ranger Service to convert a disused depot at the old West Meon Station site into a nature reserve for the nearby primary school;
- 2,072 students from 33 groups enabled to benefit from Learning Outside the Classroom thanks to the South Downs Travel Grant;
- 32 young people aged 15–17, and five leaders (themselves aged 18–19) taking part in National Citizens Service in the National Park – for many their first experience of conservation;

- Working with new partners to develop hubs and gateways across the National Park; and
- Making a total of £76,254.39 in grants to 16 community-led projects through the Sustainable Communities Fund (SCF).

A full copy of the annual report is available to read at www.southdowns.gov.uk/annual-review-2017-18



HOW TO MAKE A MEADOW

Four years ago, South Downs Way ranger Ben Bessant and National Park ranger Jan Knowlson set themselves the challenge of turning a large patch of nettles into a wildflower meadow. For National Meadows Day, on 7 July, Jan tells us about their work.

Words by Jan Knowlson

We have lost 97 per cent of our meadows in Britain since the 1930s, a shocking statistic. So when the opportunity came to convert a large patch of nettles next to the South Downs Way at Itford came along we jumped at the chance – whilst nettles are a great food plant for some butterfly species, a meadow with a variety of native plants can support a much wider range of pollinator species.

With kind permission from the landowner, YHA South Downs, we brought in a local meadow creation expert to see what they thought. After they stopped laughing, they advised that it would be a lot of effort, but could be done.

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Before - just a field of nettles

The first year of work was spent clearing nettles and spraying-off the regrowth, clearing again and removing the cuttings to reduce soil fertility – meadow flowers thrive in poorer soils. We needed to make sure that we'd completely removed the nettles' rhizomes (underground plant stems) so we hired an excavator to take off the top six inches of soil. Then we had to wait to see if there was any regrowth and then cut and treat the area again. For anyone worried about species that love nettles, an enormous patch remains on the other side of the path!

The more time you spend preparing the ground the better chance you have of establishing a meadow.

The more time you spend preparing the ground the better chance you have of establishing a meadow. The Google satellites caught it at precisely this moment! It looks brutal but we wanted to create as much bare ground as we could to give the seedlings a better chance of establishing, without competition from stronger, dominant plants such as nettles and thistles. We did get some questions about what was going on.

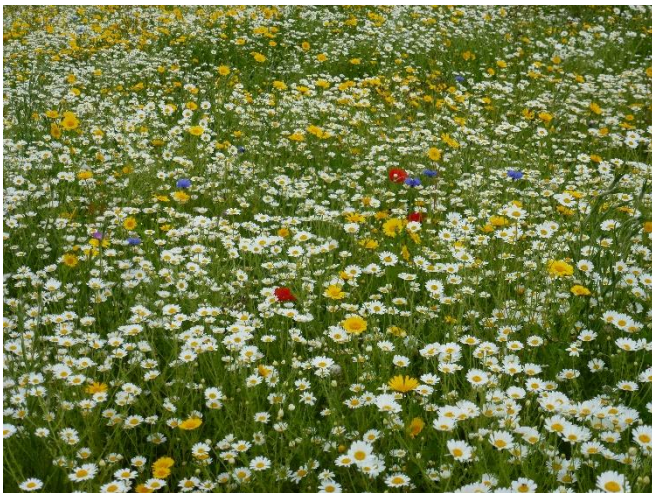


It looked a little bit brutal after the nettles were cleared...

There was a lot of evidence of rabbits so during this first year our fantastic volunteers came out to help us put up rabbit-proof fencing around the area we were going to seed. We needed to stop the rabbits from getting to the seedlings if we wanted the meadow to work.

We sowed the seed the following February and then waited expectantly for summer to arrive. By July the meadow looked incredible, it was so satisfying!

The meadow changes each year. In the first year we saw lots of the big flashy cornfield annuals such as ox-eye daisies and poppies. They were spectacular and I even met one group of walkers who'd left the hill tops specifically to find out what was making the big flash of white down in the valley.



Summer 2016 and the meadow is in full bloom

In the second year we started to see some of the perennial species come through. We cut the meadow in July to stop too many of the annuals re-seeding and encourage more diversity – the wider the variety of plants, the more different pollinators will come.

The meadow has to be managed to keep the diversity and so is cut annually and the cuttings removed, to keep soil fertility low. In the past meadows like this would have been managed for hay to feed the farm stock.

This year we're finally seeing the bird's-foot trefoil, kidney vetch and red clover all flowering for the first time.

I love our meadow and, being right next to the South Downs Way, thousands of people get to enjoy it. We see their faces change as they come around the corner. Even better it is literally buzzing with pollinators. I've spotted butterflies such as the small tortoiseshell, marbled white and common blue as well as lots of different bees and hover flies and in 2019 we plan to start monitoring species more formally.

The meadow at YHA SouthDowns is five minutes' walk east along the South Downs Way from Southease station. Include it as part of one of these walks around the Ouse Valley – it's a quick detour from the short route and the longer route goes right past it.

www.southdowns.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Walk_Ouse-Valley.pdf

IS NATURE UNDER THREAT IN NATIONAL PARKS?

On 27 June the Campaign for National Parks published a new report calling for National Parks in England and Wales to 'pull their socks up' in order to halt and reverse the loss of wildlife. Andrew Lee, Director of Countryside & Policy for the South Downs National Park Authority considers their case.

'There is no doubt that we would like to see more wildlife in the South Downs. Whilst the Campaign for National Parks are right to set down a challenge to national parks, the solution will be complex.

'First it is worth remembering that our landscapes are significantly different from our fellow National Parks on the uplands. Our wildlife – which includes many rare or endangered butterflies, reptiles and plants – depends on an intimate patchwork of woods, heaths, downs, arable land and riverside meadows created in a populated and farmed landscape over a period of 6,000 years.

'Some of our most species-rich habitats, such as chalk grassland, have been kept open by sheep and cattle grazing. In others, such as ancient woodland, regular coppicing has created glades and rides for butterflies and nightingales. It is true that in the twentieth century a great deal of habitat was lost as farming became mechanised and use of chemicals became widespread, but a great deal remains.

'there is no single or simple answer to how to get more wildlife back into our landscapes. Restoring biodiversity in the South Downs will require a mixture of approaches...'

The creation of the South Downs, Britain's newest National Park, has been a catalyst for new partnerships which are helping to protect and restore wildlife at a landscape scale. This builds on a strong tradition of working together which characterises this part of Southern England. In our first year of operations we became the only National Park to have a Defra-sponsored Nature Improvement Area – the South Downs Way Ahead project – which cleared scrub and restored grazing management to clusters of chalk downland sites from Winchester to Eastbourne.

The Heathlands Reunited project has already conserved 70 football pitches worth of rare heathland (see full story about this below). On the central downs, the farmland bird initiative has shown how grey partridges and corn buntings can thrive on working farms – bucking the national trend. Elsewhere more than 180 barn owl boxes have been put up by landowners. Water voles once again inhabit the river Meon, and red kites and goshawks are now widespread along the downs. Ninety five per cent of our SSSIs (designated for their special scientific interest) are in a good or recovering condition, but these are just important pieces in a much larger jigsaw. For example six farmer-led cluster groups now cover more than 65% of the National Park and all have better management for wildlife as a key aim.

The rewilding movement is doing a great job in provoking debate – the Knepp Estate is a brilliant example right next to the South Downs which many farmers and estates are looking at – but there is no single or simple answer to how to get more wildlife back into our landscapes. Restoring biodiversity in the South Downs will require a mixture of approaches including: more nature-friendly farming; taking some land out of production; better woodland management; and making our river valleys more natural. Done well these things can also produce good food, cleaner water, cleaner air, healthier and more attractive places to visit and local jobs. This is a type of 'rewilding' which would breath more life into our managed landscapes rather than simply abandoning them to chance.

The first ever Partnership Management Plan for the South Downs National Park is now five year's old and we're currently working with every major conservation body, as well as many other organisations, to review it and make sure that we are all working towards the same goal: a thriving National Park for the plants and animals, including humans, who visit, work or make their homes here.

Read the full Campaign for National Parks report 'Raising the bar: improving nature in National Parks' at www.cnp.org.uk/news/raising-the-bar



HEATHLAND AREA THE SIZE OF 70 FOOTBALL PITCHES CONSERVED

An area of heathland the size of 70 football pitches (50 ha) has been conserved over the past year through the Heathlands Reunited project.

Heathland conservation includes scrub removal and creating patches of bare ground needed by many rare amphibians and reptiles found on the heath. Without conservation management heathlands would disappear along with the internationally rare species that rely on them.

The 50 ha of heathland includes:

- The equivalent of 14 football pitches (10ha) of scrub cleared
- Just under 10 football pitches (7ha) of non-native invasive species removed
- Just under 33 football pitches (23.5Ha) of bracken treated
- 14 football pitches (10Ha) worth of linking habitat created

Other successes during the year included:

- Commissioning artist Graeme Mitcheson to use volunteers and local community research to develop seven works telling the stories of seven different heaths
- Take the lead –our responsible dog ownership campaign which reached just under half a million people and recruited five new dog ambassadors for the project area.

The third year of Heathlands Reunited will include the recruitment of two heathland apprentice rangers, work

supporting grazing projects, and looking at the lasting legacy that the project will leave behind.

Heathlands Reunited is a partnership of 11 organisations in the South Downs National Park working together to create bigger, better, more joined up heathlands. The five-year project which started in 2016 covers 34 heathland sites and is supported by a £1.44 million from the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Find out more at southdowns.gov.uk/heathlands-reunited or search for #HelpTheHeaths on social media



APPRENTICES WANTED FOR SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK

A new apprenticeship programme for young people interested in conservation and the environment will launch in the South Downs National Park this September.

The programme, run by the National Park Authority and supported by the Foyle Foundation, includes seven new roles including four apprentice rangers, two business administration apprentices and a digital marketing apprentice.

Trevor Beattie, Chief Executive for the South Downs National Park Authority, said:

“This is a rare opportunity to gain the experience and qualifications needed for a career in the environmental sector. Get a head start by helping to make a difference here in the South Downs – caring for the landscapes and wildlife, and helping more people to understand and enjoy the National Park.

“Our ranger apprenticeships will be great for someone looking for a career outdoors but don’t underestimate the value of the work and experience you could gain

SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

indoors at our head office in the South Downs Centre. Helping to tell the public what we do, making sure that we pay our bills and getting involved in planning future work programmes will all provide a good training background for a career in environmental conservation.”

More about the roles:

- **Apprentice Rangers** (two posts) – this will require attendance at Sparsholt College Winchester for one day per week during term time to undertake the Certificate and Diploma in work-based Environmental Conservation Apprenticeship Level 2, and then placements from one of our four area offices across the park.
- **Apprentice Ranger, Heathlands Reunited** (two posts) – these posts are to support our Heathlands Reunited Project Team so as well as working with the SDNPA you will also have some placements with our partners – National Trust/West Sussex Wildlife Trust/Hampshire County Council etc. The placements will be mainly in the Western area of the Park. You will be required to attend Sparsholt College Winchester for one day per week during term time to undertake the Certificate and Diploma in work-based Environmental Conservation Apprenticeship Level 2.
- **Digital Marketer** (one post) – this will require attendance at Farnborough College for one day per week during term time to undertake the Level 3 NVQ Diploma in Digital Marketing and placement within our Communications and Engagement Team based in Midhurst.
- **Business Administrators** (two posts) – this will require attendance at Farnborough College for one day per week during term time to undertake the Business Administration Level 2 Intermediate Apprenticeship. Your work placements will be based in Midhurst with the support services, HR, facilities, procurement and tourism teams on a rota basis to give you a broad overview of what we do.

Applications close on 16 July 2018.

Find out more and download an application form www.southdowns.gov.uk/job/sdnpa-apprenticeships/



BARN OWL CHICKS WEIGHED AND RINGED

There must have been a plentiful supply of mice and voles this June because our web cam barn owls have kept all five of their chicks alive into July! With the youngest chick now almost a month old we were lucky enough to join Graham Roberts, a volunteer for the Sussex Ornithological Society, to ring them.

Barn owls are protected under the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 which means that it is an offence to disturb their nests or handle them without a licence. For the record Graham and Angela are both trained and licenced. This was the eighth brood that Graham has ringed in and around the National park this year.

Barn owls can live up to 12 years in the wild and they have been breeding on this site for thirty years. As we approached the barn owl box's secret location we saw one of the adults flying off. In a corner of the barn we could see one of their regular perches – identified by the large patch of droppings underneath. Angela double-checked the webcam to make sure that the chicks were alone and told us that it's possible to weigh and ring the chicks without the adults being any the wiser.

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SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

Graham set up his ladder and opened the box. The chicks may look cute but the nest didn't smell great. He then transferred each chick into a cotton bag and carefully carried them down to the ground.



One-by-one, Graham removed each chick from its bag, and fastened a small ring around its leg.



The rings are part of a scheme run by the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) with the Barn Owl Trust and each has a unique number. Graham showed how he fastens each ring so that it sits loosely enough for the bird not to feel it but tight enough that it won't catch in a claw.



Then he measured the seventh wing feather emerging from the fluff – apparently a very accurate way to measure a chick's age because the feathers always grow at the same rate no matter how much food there is around.



Barn owl chicks are incredibly docile. One had their eyes shut entirely whilst another's face might be described as bearing the resigned expression of a routine dental inspection.

After he'd weighed each chick Graham laid them out in age order so we could see the different stages of their development.



Then it was back in the bags, up the ladder and home to their box before the parents could return.

Barn owls are slower to develop than some other birds but will fledge between eight and nine weeks. With the oldest chick now five weeks old we'll be watching the webcam carefully over the next few weeks and keeping our fingers crossed that the mice and voles keep coming.

Watch the barn owl's live on our webcam at www.carnyxlive.co.uk/jwplayer/streams/barnowlIsSSL.html



SOUTH DOWNS RANGERS ON TOUR

With the long school holidays on the horizon we're joining our fellow National Parks across the country to celebrate National Parks Week, from 23 to 29 July. Look out for our rangers – coming to a town centre near you!

There are 15 National Parks in the UK and from the Cairngorms in Scotland to Dartmoor and Exmoor in Devon, Pembrokeshire Coast in Wales to the Broads in Norfolk, there will be events happening around the country – look out for them if you're on your summer travels.

For National Parks week 2018 we're taking our rangers out on tour – visiting towns on the edges of the National Park to encourage more people to come and enjoy the South Downs over the summer holidays.

We can't wait to get making forest friends, printing sashes and testing wildlife knowledge with our giant jigsaws. Look out for our giant colouring wall which we'll be testing for the first time.

We'll be ready to share tips for nearby places where parents can easily take their kids to for a taste of the National Park without being intimidated. We'll also be inviting the people we meet to join us for a free guided ranger adventure out in the South Downs over the school holidays.

Brighton – 22 July, 11:00-17:00

- Find us at the Wild Chalk event in East Brighton Park
<https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/event/wild-chalk-free-family-fun-day/>

Crawley – 22 July 2018, 11:00-15:00

- Find us in Queens Square, Crawley Town Centre

Southsea – 26 July, 11:00-15:00

- Find us at the Play area by the canoe lake, Clarence Esplanade, Southsea Seafront

Worthing – 27 July, 11:00-15:00

- Find us at the junction of Montague Street and Montague Place in Worthing Town Centre

National Parks have an important role to play in supporting people to experience the mental and physical benefits from being in nature but and the social benefits of being outside – for a walk or a ride or to volunteer – with other people. If you read that and thought, “well that's obvious!” then you're lucky. Not everyone has the chance to experience the countryside, feels comfortable walking out on a footpath or even realises that this amazing free resource is here for them to enjoy.

Our education team go out to schools all year, introducing young people to our landscapes and wildlife and, hopefully, setting them up for a lifetime of knowing that National Parks are for everyone. They've engaged tens of thousands of children and, through our travel grants, have enabled more than two

SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

thousand students from more deprived communities to experience learning outside the classroom in the South Downs.

You can help us spread the word too. If you know someone who thinks nature is for other people why not invite them on your favourite walk or to your favourite picnic spot to celebrate National Parks Week and introduce them to the glories of the South Downs.



WIN A FAMILY TICKET TO GO APE AT ALICE HOLT

The South Downs is lucky enough to have more trees than any other national park in England or Wales. With the summer holidays on their way now is the time to get to know some of them a bit better.

The lovely people at Go Ape are kindly offering one lucky family the chance to win a day out at Go Ape Alice Holt. Choose from the Tree Top Adventure or Tree Top Junior and fly down zip-wires, leap off a Tarzan swing or hop across stepping stones.

Anyone who signs up as a new member of this newsletter during July will automatically be entered but to make sure our existing readers don't miss out you can also enter by emailing us at the address below before 31 July 2018.

To enter the draw email us with the subject 'I want to Go Ape in the South Downs' to newsletter@southdowns.gov.uk

Terms and conditions apply, please read them here www.southdowns.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/South_Downs_News_Go_Ape_prize_draw_terms_conditions.pdf

FIVE THINGS TO DO IN THE SOUTH DOWNS THIS MONTH

Find these & more events across the National Park and submit your own events at southdowns.gov.uk/events/



- Celebrate wildlife, history and water with family fun at 'Wild Chalk' in Brighton
- Take a bat walk with Gilbert White's House
- Get to grips with macro-photography at RSPB Pulborough Brooks
- Enjoy outdoor theatre at Petersfield Shakespeare Festival
- Meet working animals at the Weald & Downland Living Museum



COMMUNITY HEROES

You could travel along the A32 at Exton a hundred times and still have no idea that you'd passed through the centre of an archaeological treasure but, thanks to the Meon Valley Archaeological Heritage Group, we now know a lot more about life here 2,000 years ago.

The remains of a hall found on one side of the road in 1980 now sit in the British Museum and were first thought to be from a farm building. However following the discovery of Roman coins by detectorists in the field on the other side of the road, a geophysical survey in 2015 revealed a much bigger complex and a curious hexagonal building. Thanks to the discovery of

a Dea Nutrix figurine goddess during a dig between 2016 and 2017 we now know that this building was a Roman temple. The dig also revealed that the first building found was in fact 30m long, as well as a bath house with the remains of a plaster stucco – students from Winchester University are now trying to put the scene back together. A £1,754 grant from the South Downs National Park's Sustainable Communities Fund supported the costs of the professional surveys and getting a report written up.

Photo shows John Snow, Alison Smalley and Joan Terry of the Meon Valley Archaeological Heritage Group

Find out more at
www.saxonsinthemeonvalley.org.uk

ON THE GROUND

From meeting with farmers, offering training and support to local communities, leading walks, organising and training volunteers, controlling invasive species and supporting key species, South Downs National Park Rangers are out in the National Park every weekday and many weekends over the year.

Don't forget to say hello if you spot them out working. Here's a taste of what they achieved in June 2018:

- Spent four days **tackling Himalayan balsam**, an Invasive Non-Native Species, at two key sites on the River Meon and **pulled ragwort from Chapel Common** and at Pepperscombe with the Steyning Downland Scheme
- **Replaced three South Downs Way finger posts**, including one at an important hub in Queen Elizabeth Country Park and **installed a waymarker and a gate** with West Sussex County Council allowing access to a bridleway off the South Downs Way into Cocking
- **Cleared invasive nettles at a local archaeological dig** in the Meon Valley to help clear the way for the next dig
- **Completed butterfly surveys at three sites** as part of the Winchester Downs Farm Cluster
- Carried out **one final water vole release to top up populations in West Meon**. A week of activities involved volunteers, the local community, the education team, two visits with school groups and latrine monitoring
- Ran the **first Winchester Downs farm cluster Bioblitz** with species experts and the local community
- **Installed a new pipe under a brick built culvert from the 1800s at Ebernoe** to make sure that a pond drains properly to benefit biodiversity and keep the culvert in good structural condition
- Gave a **Dark Night Sky talk in Cheriton Village Hall** to promote the International Dark Sky Reserve and good lighting principles
- Sprayed **invasive floating pennywort in a pond at Frog Farm** near Petworth to prevent it spreading into the river Rother
- Recorded **silver-studded blue butterfly numbers on Stedham and Iping Commons** for the Wildlife Trust to help them assess the effectiveness of their management and the impact of an earlier fire



- Met with Woodland Trust to develop a management plan for Garbetts wood, Rogate
- Began **checking barn owl boxes** for chicks to assist the ringer in his work
- Started **reviewing and repairing an old fence line at RSPB Pulborough Brooks** with aim to return a field back to a wildflower meadow
- Completed a number of **South Downs Farmland Bird surveys** including at East Dean and Up Marden
- Conducted **flower survey at Stedham Mill meadow** to monitor the effectiveness of the restoration
- Helped the Friends of Midhurst Common volunteers **conduct their annual vegetation survey**
- **Resurfaced the footpath** on western bank of Swanbourne Lake
- **Brush cut scheduled ancient monuments** at Graffham Down
- Led **35 people on Heartsmart walk** with Ferring Healthy Walking Group
- **Completed lapwing surveys** at South Stoke and Offham – five chicks have now fledged
- Continued work on Mill Hill LNR to **enhance the chalk grassland by removing invasive species**. Butterfly Conservation have recorded large numbers of Adonis Blue on the site this year
- Cleared regrowth at Longbridge, Cloth Farm and Mill Hill

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

DAY IN THE LIFE

World Ranger Day is an annual celebration 31 July of the work that rangers do across the globe. To mark the occasion **Charlotte Wray, Assistant Ranger**, shares a day in her life.



No two days are the same, just as no two rangers are the same – the diversity of the job keeps us all on our toes and means we use a huge number of different skills...

08:00

Surveying 1km squares as part of the South Downs Farmland Bird Initiative. These help to track the population trends of important farmland birds like yellowhammer and skylark and are best done before 9am.

09:30

Practical conservation tasks with our volunteers, such as cutting back hawthorn and blackthorn on chalk grassland, coppicing woodland to open up clearings for wildlife and improving accessibility on the South Downs Way.

14:00

Clearing nettles at a local chalk grassland site, so we'll carry out a butterfly survey too. The results go to Butterfly Conservation, but any data also helps us and the landowner gauge the recovery of this threatened habitat.

15:30

Back to the yard with our volunteers where we unload and carry out tool and vehicle maintenance. If we have time we'll make some barn owl boxes for local farmers. We monitor these in the spring with the Hawk Conservancy Trust.

16:30

A good time to catch up on emails and start planning for tomorrow when we're attending an event with the Country Trust. We'll be engaging with school children of all ages, teaching them about the National Park and the ecology of barn owls and water voles.

17:00

Time to check one of our South Downs geocaches on the way home – it's been reported missing but after a short hunt we've found it nearby and hidden it again, ready for the next intrepid explorer to find!

NEXT MONTH: You ask returns with 'Events in the National Park'

Laura Warren, SDNPA events manager answers your questions.

Send them to 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? Please let us know.



To submit a comment for our newsletter please email newsletter@southdowns.gov.uk. For a fast and direct response to your questions please email info@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.

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Sign up to receive this newsletter by email every month. With the latest South Downs news, stories, ideas for days out, competitions, to hear about our ranger and volunteers' work and much more...

www.southdowns.gov.uk/join-the-newsletter/