



SOUTH DOWNS NEWS

WORK AND PLAY IN YOUR NATIONAL PARK

This month:

- An early **Christmas gift for the very unusual nativity scene** at Berwick Church
- **New funding for Egrets Way** – great news for walkers and cyclists heading south from Lewes
- Get **up to £5,000 funding for your community project** plus support from the South Downs Volunteers
- **A few of our favourite trees** and where to find them in the National Park
- **Win a tour and tasting for two at Wiston Farm Estate** – WineGB 'Winery of the Year' 2018

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

Berwick nativity gets early Christmas present

A large and unusual painting of the nativity at Berwick Church, East Sussex, in need of urgent restoration, has received an early Christmas gift in the form of a £2,000 grant from the South Downs National Park Authority's Sustainable Community Fund.

The nativity is one of many huge paintings filling the church, completed by artists Duncan Grant and Vanessa Bell between 1941 and 1943, all now at risk from serious paint flaking, salt damage and mould. The artists were commissioned by Bishop Bell, despite being atheists and part of the unconventional Bloomsbury Group of artists. Many of the models used were from the local community and even the lamb in the stable is the local Southdowns breed.



"The artists created what today might be called an 'immersive' experience of colour and design," Says Reverend Peter Blee, Rector of Berwick church. "Their paintings illustrate biblical texts drawing upon the European tradition of art and at the same time record the distinctively local landscape, rural life and people of the time. They express their love for place and people during a period in history when everything was at risk."

"They express their love for place and people during a period in history when everything was at risk."

"The Berwick paintings and the stories they tell are part of the National Park's heritage and have an important place in the community," says Doug Jones, a South Downs National Park Authority Member who sits on the Sustainable Communities Fund. "They were created at a time of great change in both the world and the local area. I hope our funding will help to secure them and allow more people to experience and enjoy them."

The funding from the South Downs National Park is just the start of a much larger campaign to stabilise the church's environment which requires removing the roof, adding new insulation and installing underfloor heating. A large fundraising campaign to raise £950,000 is underway

berwickchurch.org.uk/support-us

Any partnership or other not for profit organisations can apply for funding if they believe their project is bringing social, environmental, economic or cultural benefits to a community within the National Park.

www.southdowns.gov.uk/sustainable-communities-fund/



Funding secured for next section of Egrets Way

From early summer 2019, a new section of the Egrets Way network of shared paths will be available to people to walk and cycle to Lewes. This path will run for nearly a kilometre from the existing path at Ham Lane, passing under the railway and continuing into Lewes Railway Land Wildlife Trust Nature Reserve and on to the Linklater Pavilion close to the town centre.

SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

With planning permission for the new section of trail already secured, construction work will begin early in the New Year. An existing path, which runs from the Linklater Centre through the nature reserve is to be widened and connected to the new section of path to be built from Ham Lane.

When completed the Egrets Way will form a network of multi-user paths running from Lewes to Newhaven and connecting the villages in between. Nearly half of the planned network has been built and is in use, with sections of pathway running between Lewes and Kingston, Southease and Rodmell, and Southease and Piddinghoe.

Alister Linton-Crook, Cycling Project Officer for the South Downs National Park and a member of the Egrets Way Project Steering Committee, said:

"We're excited to get started on the next section of the Egrets Way – getting us a step closer to our ambitions for safe and traffic-free access between the towns and villages of the Lower Ouse Valley for walkers and cyclists.

"We always knew that creating the Egrets Way would take time, with sections being built as funding opportunities arose and landowner agreements were secured," says Neville Harrison, Chair of the Egrets Way Project Trustees, "so it is wonderful to put into place another piece of the jigsaw. We are very grateful to all of our funders and landowners without whose support the realisation of the Egrets Way would not be possible."

The funding for this project comprises a £75,000 LEADER grant from the Rural Development Programme for England, £78,000 from the South Downs National Park Authority and £23,000 from S106 money allocated to Lewes Town Council. A further £20,000 comes from the Community Infrastructure Levy and donations from the Joe Holden Trust and the Egrets Way Project Trust.

The delivery of this new route will be jointly managed by a project team made up of representatives from the SDNPA, Sustrans and the Egrets Way Project Trustees.

The LEADER scheme is part of the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE), which is funded by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development.

More information is available on the new Egrets Way website **www.egretsway.org.uk**

Five things to do in the South Downs this November

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



- Get crafty at **Bolney Wine Estate**
- Board an **elf-powered boat to ride** through Arundel Wetlands Centre
- Take **a walk in Wilmington** with Brighton & Hove Geological Society
- Join a free walk and **get to know Chapel Common** with the Heathlands Reunited partnership
- Elves & binturong? It can only be **Christmas at Marwell Zoo**



Grants up to £5,000 plus the support of Volunteer Rangers available

Grants of up to £5,000 are available for non-profit organisations, parish councils and landowners in 2019 for projects that care for and enhance the South Downs National Park and promote opportunities for people to understand and enjoy it.

Daniel Greenwood, Volunteer Development Officer, for the South Downs National Park, said: "Got an idea for a project in your community that the Volunteer Ranger Service can help deliver? Whether it's refurbishing a community pond, creating a sensory garden, creating wildflower meadows or butterfly banks, this is your opportunity to make it happen."

"Whether it's refurbishing a community pond, creating a sensory garden, creating wildflower meadows or butterfly banks, this is your opportunity to make it happen."

The grants are available thanks to the new South Downs Volunteer Conservation Fund, managed by the South Downs National Park Trust in partnership with the South Downs Volunteer Ranger Service (VRS) and to be eligible, projects must use the practical support of the VRS.

Almost any project which helps to conserve or enhance the National Park is eligible, provided it fits with the National Park Partnership Management Plan and makes use of the South Downs Volunteer Ranger Service.

The deadline to apply for the first round of funding is 31 March 2019 and the first grants will be awarded in June 2019. Find out more at www.southdownstrust.org.uk/volunteer-fund

Trees of the South Downs

Wander through the South Downs and it is impossible not to be impressed by the beauty of our woodland. You can discover some of the largest yew woodlands in the UK, lose yourself in steep valley sides cloaked in hangar woodlands, large oak and beech woodland complexes and traditional coppice woodland.

In all, 23 per cent of the South Downs National Park is covered by woodland, and half of this has been there for over 400 years. Our woodlands play a huge role in the enjoyment of the South Downs – 10,000 hectares of woodland is open for public access, that's over half of all open access land in the National Park.

With all of that said, here are five gorgeous trees that you can find and be inspired by in the South Downs.



Queen Elizabeth Oak, Midhurst

Oak trees are possibly the most well-known tree in the UK and for good reason. They are one of the most common species and have played a key role in the development of civilisation. Oak has been used to construct houses, ships and fencing for millennia. Oak bark has been removed from trees for a process called 'tanning', whereby the tannins present in the bark were washed in with the animal hides to produce leather. Oaks are some of the oldest living trees in Europe, with the Queen Elizabeth I oak near Midhurst being possibly 1000 years old. That would mean it was a sapling in Anglo-Saxon England, imagine all it has survived through!



Beech trees, Ebernoe

Beech trees are a common tree across the chalk ridge of the South Downs. In old woods like Sussex Wildlife Trust's the Mens and Ebernoe Common, they reach the canopy and can become dominant. Beech was one of the last tree species to make its way across the land bridge between Britain and Europe before it flooded 8,000 years ago to create the British Isles. In 2015, a 200 year old beech tree on the Devil's Dyke estate was measured at 44 metres and declared the tallest native tree in Britain.



Sweet chestnut, Midhurst

Sweet chestnuts are not deemed a native tree to Britain because they are believed to have been introduced by the Romans to Britain after the end of the last glacial period, 12,000 years ago. But they have been used ever since their introduction for fencing, timber construction and for harvesting crops of chestnuts. These are the ones roasting on an open fire. Sweet chestnut is one of the most common timbers for fencing in the countryside, forming one of the most sustainable UK-based resources of woodland industry today. They also provide us with some of the oldest and grandest ancient trees to be found in the South Downs, including the Cowdray Colossus near Midhurst.



Ancient yew trees, Kingley Vale

Yew trees are often found in churchyards where some trees can be so old they pre-date the church itself. This is because Paganism was once the dominant religion in parts of the UK and many churchyards have remained as sacred ground for thousands of years. In the SDNPA, the yew trees at Kingley Vale National Nature Reserve are some of the oldest in Europe.



Ash trees, Lewes

Ash trees are often found with field maple in woodland on the chalk downland. They are not a long-lived species unless their branches are cut regularly to become coppice stools (low down) or pollard trees (above head height). Ash has been a crucial resource for people for thousands of years, as tool handles, firewood and its leaves for summer fodder for livestock. Ash is disappearing from the landscape because of the spread of ash dieback disease, a deadly fungus that has spread across Europe via trade and trade winds, from Asia. Along the chalk ridge of the South Downs ash trees are dying back, but there is hope that the genetic diversity of wild ash trees in the UK might throw up strains that can survive and go on to form future populations.

www.southdowns.gov.uk/trees-south-downs/



Win a tour and tasting for two at Wiston Farm Estate

It's time to celebrate! Not just because it's Christmas but also because the South Downs is rapidly gaining world-wide fame for award-winning sparkling wines. This summer family-run Wiston Farm Estate were named as 'Winery of the Year' at the WineGB Awards 2018.

The lovely people at Wiston offering a pair of tickets to one of their Vineyard & Winery Tours. The tour will begin with coffee and an informative walk through Wiston's vineyard, then a trailer ride through the South Downs to their winery with their traditional Coquard Press (unique to the UK) where you can follow the journey of a grape from harvest to finished bottle. The tour concludes with a tutored tasting of four of Wiston's award-winning Sparkling wines in their Wine Barn overlooking the vines.

All you need to do to enter is sign up to the South Downs newsletter before 31 December 2018.

Anyone who signs up as a new member of this newsletter during December 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 December 2018.



To enter the draw email us with the subject 'Cheers to Wiston!' to newsletter@southdowns.gov.uk
Terms and conditions apply, please read them here www.southdowns.gov.uk/join-the-newsletter/

Find out more about Wiston Wine Estate at www.wistonestate.com/



Sheep lend a helping hoof for butterfly conservation

A flock of sheep are being employed to improve precious chalk grassland, vital for the survival of rare butterflies, in the South Downs National Park near Shoreham. The unusual looking sheep – called Jacobs – have two sets of horns and moved on to Mill Hill Local Nature Reserve, near Shoreham, on Friday 16 November.

The National Park are asking for people from the local community to volunteer to help keep an eye on Shoreham's new woolly residents. Dog owners are also being asked to keep their animals under careful control as well as picking up and binning dog mess, which can carry diseases harmful to sheep.

Mill Hill, owned and managed by Adur District Council with the support of the South Downs National Park Authority, is one of the best spots to see butterflies in the National Park thanks to the high quality of its chalk grassland, which only exists because of centuries of grazing. Reintroducing grazing animals, like these Jacob sheep, is essential to maintain and improve plant diversity and support the butterflies and other insects that thrive on them.

Jasmine Owen, Assistant Ranger at the South Downs National Park, says: "Chalk grassland is one of the most endangered habitats in the country but up to 30 different species of butterfly can be found at Mill Hill.

"We need local people's support to help our sheep settle into their new home if we're to keep butterflies such as silver spotted skipper, Adonis blue and wall thriving here for years to come."

Councillor Emma Evans, Adur District Council's Executive Member for Environment, said:

"Mill Hill is a real natural treasure which is accessible to everyone to learn more about our very special environment.

"I'm very pleased that the council is working with the South Downs National Park on this project and I look forward to meeting the new additions very soon."

Anyone interested in volunteering to become a looker, to keep an eye on the sheep's health and numbers, please contact jasmine.owen@southdowns.gov.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 with our volunteers in November 2018:

- **Led Heart Smart walks** in Eartham with 40 people, Clapham with 25 people and Binsted with 8 people
- Started the **new season of coppicing** Church Copse and Rewel Wood and cleared the pond
- Carried out **scrub control to improve chalk grassland** at Medley Bottom SSSI, Chantry Hill SSSI, Steyning Combe SNCI and Beeding Hill and more
- Completed **river maintenance work at East Meon** at a section recently naturalised and planted, work included removing invasive plants and completed scrub management on the a section of bank to open up blackthorn thickets and allow vegetation to establish.
- Supported a local landowner with tree planting following removal of poplar plantation. The **new woodland will be more wildlife friendly** with scrub species and oak trees.
- **Cut and collected seeds at Madehurst** Church wildflower meadow
- Working with farmers to **cut hedges in a way that improves biodiversity** and layed 100 yards of hedge in Plumpton village.
- **Replaced a kiss gate with a pedestrian gate** near Alfriston to improve access.

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

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.



David Friend from Burgess Hill asks:

"On the North face of the Downs near Plumpton we have V for Queen Victoria to commemorate her golden jubilee .

"I would like to see an E formed to mark our thanks to our Queen.

"This could be done by clearing an E from existing woodland."

Phillippa Morison-Price, Lead Ranger for the eastern South Downs National Park answers:

"Hi David, you're not the first person to have this idea, in fact there is already an 'E' for Elizabeth II on the Firle Estate created as part of the Diamond Jubilee celebrations.

The Victorians had very different ideas on the countryside to us – can you imagine if someone tried to install a cable car at Devil's Dyke today? The South Downs is now a National Park so careful consideration had to be given to the location of the 'E' and the way it was created. Instead of planting trees in the shape of a letter, the edges of a patch of scrub were cleared, in the process helping to create new chalk grassland, a priority habitat and one of the most endangered habitats in the country.

You can just about spot it if you look south east from the top of Mount Caburn – see the photo below (apologies for the poor quality), for the location. You can also see it on Google Earth at <https://goo.gl/maps/LZhuWFBsW182>



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.

MOST ASKED...

Answers to questions about a particular area of work in the National Park – some sent in by you and others that we get asked all the time.

Answering this month is: **Elaina Whittaker-Slark, Lead Ranger for the western end of the South Downs National Park**



WHAT DOES A LEAD RANGER DO?

I manage a team of two rangers, two assistant rangers and an apprentice ranger and am the main point of contact about ranger work in the western part of the National Park. Our area stretches from the edge of Winchester to just east of Petersfield and reaches to Farnham in the north and Wickham in the south. I also have my own patch, the Meon Valley, to manage – working with the local communities and our volunteers to make a positive difference for biodiversity, access and community. We lead volunteer habitat tasks which, at this time of year, might mean coppicing, tree planting, hedgelaying and chalk grassland management.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE PART OF THE JOB?

It's just so varied. One day I might be planning a five-year project to reintroduce water voles, the next I'm out on the hills managing scrub. This is also the most challenging part of the job – trying to stay on top of all the different tasks, contacts and sites we work with. Recently one of the Assistant Rangers from the team moved into a Ranger post – I was sad to see her leave

but it's well-deserved and great to see our Assistant Ranger roles working as they should.

A big success was working with a local consultant to get a Facilitation Fund for our Winchester Downs farmer group. Our application had a chalk and water theme and detailed how farmers and landowners would work together to enhance this unique landscape. The group is now working well together facilitated by one of our Rangers.

ANY TIPS FOR SOMEONE WHO WANTS TO BECOME A RANGER?

I'm going to start by assuming that you already have an interest in nature. The next step is to volunteer with as many different organisations as you can and work out which area of being a ranger you enjoy – for example, it might be running ecological surveys, leading walks or doing practical work. Then you need to get a theory-based qualification, traditionally at degree level (I studied Environmental Sciences) but there are also apprenticeship schemes available – we have an apprentice, Jane, in our team at the moment. group on Facebook you could ask for help.

Read more of Elaina's answers at www.southdowns.gov.uk/asked-elaina-whittaker-slark-lead-ranger-western-part-south-downs-national-park/



LOTTERY FUNDED

NEWS FROM OUR HEATHS

Heathlands Reunited is a partnership of 11 organisations, led by the South Downs National Park Authority, who have joined forces to expand and connect rare heathland in the National Park, supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund. Heathland is home to some of Britain's rarest wildlife, including all 12 of our native reptiles and amphibians. Over the 5 years of the project they are creating wildlife corridors forming an area of heathland greater than 1,200 football pitches.

Walk the heath this winter

Starting in December and running throughout the New Year a programme of FREE heathland walks will be published in the projects new 'Walk the Heath' programme.

This programme will feature a variety of themed walks, all aimed at different audiences, interests and walking levels. Some will be led by site managers, others by nature enthusiasts and dedicated volunteers. Themes will include wildlife dog walks, land management, heathland species and heritage. Some of the walks will be short healthy heath strolls, whilst others may be longer for the more advanced walker.

The programme kicks off with its first walk on 14 December at **Chapel Common**. The winter programme is just a taster of what's to come and the Spring programme is set to launch in February. You can also kick start 2019 by joining our **New Years' walk**.

The programme will be released quarterly throughout the year (Winter, Spring, Summer and Autumn). Keep an eye out for our downloadable PDF programme at www.southdowns.gov.uk/Heathlands-Reunited



Find out more about the Heathlands Reunited project at www.southdowns.gov.uk/heathlands-reunited/ and follow all the partners' work on social media using **#HelptheHeaths**

SIGN UP TO THIS NEWSLETTER

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/