



SOUTH DOWNS NEWS

WORK AND PLAY IN YOUR NATIONAL PARK

This month:

- **It's time to get moonstruck!** The Dark Skies Festival returns bigger and better than ever to mark the 50th anniversary of the moon landings
- **Five simple ways young people can help protect the National Park** Get involved in the "Year of Green Action" and help make a difference
- Spreading the love...**Romantic places in the National Park for Valentine's Day**
- **The first Local Plan for the National Park moves a step closer to adoption**

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

Stargazing and lunar extravaganza returns

The 50th anniversary of the first moon landings will be celebrated as the South Downs Dark Skies Festival returns with two weeks of cosmic fun for all the family.

With 2019 marking half a century since the Apollo 11 landing, this year's action-packed festival will have a lunar theme, with moongazing sessions, indoor planetarium shows, an incredible VR experience exploring the Milky Way and the ever-popular star parties.

The festival, now in its third year, celebrates the National Park's International Dark Sky Reserve status, which was awarded in 2016 and recognises it as one of the best places in the world to view the moon and stars.

The festival runs from Friday, February 15 to Sunday, March 3 with events across the length and breadth of the National Park. The festival's free flagship event, Stargazing South Downs, will return to Midhurst on



February 16 and, for first time, also come to Petersfield on February 18 and Lewes on February 20 during the school half-term.

Dan Oakley, "Dark Skies" Lead Ranger at the National Park, says: "With the full moon falling during the festival we're looking forward to telling the story of our nearest neighbour and the influence it has on plants, animals and us.

"The immense view of the starry sky over the National Park really is a spectacular sight and it's amazing when people see it in all its glory for the first time. We're

hoping to capture some awe-inspiring views of the moon and its cratered surface."

We would love you to share your images of the stars and moon using the hashtags #EmbraceTheDarkness and #SouthDowns over the two weeks.

The line-up of events for Stargazing South Downs is:

Saturday 16 February – Midhurst Rother College, Midhurst, West Sussex, 4pm to 8pm

Monday 18 February – Festival Hall, Petersfield, Hampshire, 4pm to 8pm

Wednesday 20 February – The Town Hall, Lewes, 4pm to 8pm

All the above events are free to attend with no booking required.

There are around 30 other events taking place across Hampshire, West Sussex and East Sussex during the Dark Skies Festival, including planetarium shows, moongazing, night-time walks, and puppet shows.

Laura Warren, Events and Engagement Officer, adds: "There is something for everyone at this year's festival, whether you're new to stargazing or a seasoned pro. The festival also ties nicely with the half-term holidays so it's a great opportunity for young people to learn more about astronomy.

"No matter what the weather is outside, you can still come and learn about the amazing dark skies in our National Park."



The Moon captured by Steve Knight, of Hampshire Astronomical Group

For further details on all the events and to book tickets visit:

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



Go green and take action for #iwill

Young people are being encouraged to get involved in the Government's "Year of Green Action" and do their bit to help protect and enhance the National Park.

As part of the #iwill4nature campaign, we're offering five simple ways in which young people across Hampshire and Sussex can get involved in helping the amazing natural environment on their doorstep and to share #iwill4nature and #SouthDowns.

Jonathan Dean, Education Officer, suggests five easy ways young people might want to take action to help the environment of the National Park.

1. #iwill - Save water

Simple measures such as reducing the amount of water used when brushing your teeth or washing up can make a big difference. The South East is currently an area of severe water stress with insufficient water to meet the needs of people and the environment. Average water use is 150 litres per person per day – against a national average of 135.

2. #iwill - Reduce plastic

Any type of plastic has the potential to end up in the natural environment and can take up to 1,000 years to decompose. Help the environment by avoiding plastic

straws, using reusable bags, and get a refillable water bottle.

3. #iwill - Pick up litter

The message is simple – bin it or take it home!

4. #iwill - Explore the National Park!

The National Park has fantastic opportunities for walking, cycling or horse-riding, or add a twist to your adventures by searching for our South Downs GeoTour geocaches while out and about. By families getting outside and exploring the National Park, young people will have a better understanding of the special qualities of the area and why it's worth protecting.

5. #iwill - Volunteer

The National Park depends on hundreds of people who give up their spare time to carry out volunteer activities to protect the area's unique landscape and precious wildlife. There are dozens of local conservation groups with opportunities.

"We're proud to be supporting the Year of Green Action and really want to encourage the tens of thousands of young people living in and around the National Park to become custodians of this amazing landscape," says Jonathan.

"After all, it's their National Park and they are ultimately the future.

"Taking action to help the environment doesn't have to be complicated or time-consuming, but collectively we can all make a difference to help protect this beautiful and diverse landscape.

"There is also a double benefit to environmental social action as there's now strong evidence that spending time in nature helps improve mental health and wellbeing."

For further details on geocaching opportunities in the National Park visit: all the events and to book tickets visit:

www.southdowns.gov.uk/enjoy/geocaching/

Find out more about volunteering opportunities here:

www.southdowns.gov.uk/care-for/volunteering/conservation-groups/



Local Plan is a step closer to adoption

Following a series of public hearing sessions in November and December last year, the Planning Inspector has asked the National Park Authority to make a number of "Main Modifications" to the first ever Local Plan for the South Downs. Those changes focus on ensuring the "soundness" of the 15-year plan.

While the consultation is looking at the soundness of the Plan only, every comment on the Main Modifications will be passed, exactly as submitted, to the Planning Inspector who will respond to them as part of his examination into the Local Plan. The consultation started on 1 February and will run until 28 March.

The changes do not alter the planning approach of "medium level of growth dispersed across the towns and villages of the National Park" and the allocation of development sites remains unchanged, as do key policies.

Following further consideration, it is hoped the Local Plan will be adopted in the Spring. The Plan follows extensive consultation over the past five years and sets the policies against which planning applications will be considered and allocates land for a variety of uses:

- When adopted the Local Plan will replace policies from 12 different local authorities with a single set of policies covering the whole of the National Park from Winchester to Eastbourne.
- This landscape-led plan sets out to conserve the dark night skies, tranquillity and many services such as clean water and air, provided by the National Park.
- The Plan sets high goals for affordable housing – up to 50 per cent in some developments.
- Beneath our Local Plan sit over 50 Neighbourhood Plans developed by South Downs' communities which provide local development

management policies and allocate land for development.

Trevor Beattie, Chief Executive of the SDNPA, says:

"This is the first Local Plan ever produced for the National Park and recognises the national importance of the landscapes and our duty to conserve and enhance them.

"The Local Plan, once adopted, will guarantee the high standards that all proposed development must meet to protect nature and support local communities. The Local Plan is also a vital component in protecting the 'eco-system' services the National Park gives us such as clean water, food, and space to breathe."

Details of the Main Modifications can be found at:

www.southdowns.gov.uk/planning/national-park-local-plan/south-downs-local-plan-main-modifications/



"Protect and enhance our green lungs"

Met Office researchers expect to record one of the biggest rises in atmospheric concentrations of CO₂ in 2019.

Nick Heasman, Countryside and Policy Manager at the South Downs National Park Authority and an expert in woodland management to control carbon dioxide levels, says "green lungs" like the National Park are vital to help control excessive amounts of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere.

Nick says: "It's concerning that 2019 is expected to record one of the biggest rises in CO₂ and this is certainly a warning siren about the vital importance of protecting and enhancing Britain's forests.

"The South Downs has the most woodland of any National Park in England and Wales and, while only

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one woodland region of many, it's crucial that our green lungs are conserved to soak up the large amounts of CO₂ cities and towns produce.

"One of the key measures moving forward to help reduce CO₂ will be to lock up carbon not just in the trees but in the soil.

"A recent global study concluded that 26 per cent of carbon was locked up in trees, but the rest is held beneath the trees recycling hundreds of years of carbon production.



"This is why we're working really closely with woodland partners and farmers to not only protect and plant more trees, but to protect the soils.

Nick added: "One of the main threats to controlling excessive CO₂ in the atmosphere is the prevention and management of increasingly prevalent tree disease such as Ash Dieback Disease.

"This will be a continuing challenge for woodland partners in the years ahead."

The South Downs National Park has over 38,000 hectares of woodland which covers approximately a quarter of the landscape.

Do you own or manage woodland within the South Downs National Park?

We are happy to provide free advice concerning woodland management that is tailored to your objectives for your wood. We can also put you in touch with experts from the Forestry Commission, Woodland Trust and Wildlife Trust.

For further details visit

www.southdowns.gov.uk/care-for/woodland/

Telling the story of the South Downs – Writer in Residence is announced

Applause Rural Touring and the South Downs National Park Authority are delighted to announce an exciting new project to support a creative Writer in Residence.

Playwright and community arts practitioner Sara Clifford will work closely with communities across the National Park this Spring, gathering material on what it means to local residents to live in the South Downs, and exploring the rich cultural heritage of the region.

She will shape her research into performances which will be staged in host pubs located in towns and villages as part of Applause Rural Touring's Inn Crowd Scheme in Autumn 2019.

For many rural communities, local pubs are the central hub. Inn Crowd supports pubs across Sussex to host exciting and inspiring spoken word, poetry and storytelling performances, helping to reinforce pubs as central to vibrant rural community life. Sara Clifford will lead this exciting residency by working with communities in seven host pubs across the South Downs National Park.

Through a series of open workshops, work with schools and community groups, Sara and her team will creatively engage with locals, gathering their feelings and responses to this special landscape, and their thoughts on any local and national issues which may affect them. She will explore how living in the South Downs impacts on residents in all aspects of life and encourage locals to reflect on their own relationship with the land. The final performance pieces in the host pubs will be accessible to all and will also be published online to reach a wider audience.

Sara says: "As a Lewes based writer, I am very pleased to be working on this exciting project, which will seek to capture people's stories, memories and responses to our wonderful National Park. I will be spending time talking to



a variety of people from different parts of the park, from the rural farmlands to the coastal areas to the busy towns." Anyone interested in getting involved in the project in any way should contact Sara at

inroadsproductions@mac.com



Leading tourism business supports vital projects in National Park

Leading holiday business Best of Brighton has launched an innovative partnership to help protect and enhance the South Downs National Park for future generations.

Best of Brighton, which runs more than 120 holiday cottages and apartments across the city and Sussex, has become an official Visitor Giving partner of the South Downs National Park Trust.

The partnership, which launched on February 1, will mean that holiday-makers have the option of donating £1 on top of the cost of their stay to help protect the extraordinary landscape on the city's doorstep.

All voluntary donations will go to the Trust, which is working closely with national and community-based organisations for the benefit of the Park and the people for whom it was created. Among the initiatives the trust is helping to fund are new community cycling and walking routes and the protection of endangered species such as the White Letter Hairstreak Butterfly.

Abi Radford, from Best of Brighton, says: "We are honoured to announce this partnership with the Trust in becoming a Visitor Giving partner.

"The National Park and its beautiful landscape is the 'back garden' to the city of Brighton and Hove, bringing millions of pounds to the tourism economy and a wealth of leisure opportunities. We're proud to be playing our part as a local business in helping to protect this important asset."



Romance is in the air: Five ideas for Valentine's Day

The beautiful landscape of the South Downs has inspired many tales of romance, including the distinguished novelist Jane Austen. With so many impressive venues and inspiring locations, couples are spoilt for choice in the National Park. Here are five ideas on how to celebrate the special day this February:

Afternoon tea at Goodwood House

Who could resist a sumptuous afternoon tea served in the magnificent ballroom of the great English country house?

Picnic and a romantic stroll

Comestibles Deli and Community Café in Midhurst offer a ready-made picnic for pick up. Follow by a walk round Cowdray, Petworth Park or Black Down.

A table for two in stunning surrounds

How about a very special Valentine's lunch in the stunningly restored formal rooms of the 18th century mansion, Stanmer House?

Cosy pub dinner with memorable views

Enjoy dinner in one of the oldest buildings in Ditchling, The Bull, which dates back to the early 16th century. Serving food sourced from their own kitchen garden and the best local farm estate.

Pamper yourselves

The Winchester Hotel and Spa is the perfect place to spend Valentine's with some blissful relaxation.



Calling all bird-lovers! Win a selection of birdcare essentials

With the freezing weather conditions we're experiencing, it's more important than ever to give our feathered friends some extra care.

The lovely people at Hillier Garden Centres have given us the wonderful prize this month of a selection of winter birdcare essentials, worth £50.

The prize includes:

- Sunflower Hearts 12.75kg
- Large Heavy Duty Sunflower Hearts Feeder
- Supreme Suet Balls 6 Pack
- Mealworm Suet Feast

Advice for this time of year is to leave out a good supply of high-fat food for the birds visiting your garden and make sure water hasn't frozen over. For more tips visit www.hillier.co.uk/garden-centres/ideas-and-inspiration/caring-for-garden-birds-all-year-round/

To be in with a chance of winning this fantastic prize, all you need to do is sign up to the South Downs newsletter before 28 February 2019.

Anyone who signs up as a new member of this newsletter during February 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 28 February 2019.

To enter the draw email us with the subject "Feed the birds" to newsletter@southdowns.gov.uk. Terms and conditions apply, see www.southdowns.gov.uk/join-the-newsletter

Find out more about Hillier Garden Centres at
www.hillier.co.uk/garden-centres/



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 five years of the project we are creating wildlife corridors forming an area of heathland greater than 1,200 football pitches.



Be careful where you tread! Help protect rare bird species with some simple steps

National Nest Box Week takes place every year from 14 to 21 February, but did you know not all birds nest in trees and boxes? As we approach Valentine's Day and are thinking about romance, so too are the birds, who are sensing the onset of spring and are thinking about finding a mate, setting up a home and raising a family. Things really do happen that quickly in the bird world!

While some birds are expert builders and others professional decorators, some species choose to do as little construction work as possible, preferring to nest on the ground. It may come as no surprise that these are some of our most rare and threatened species, being particularly susceptible to disturbance.

Out on the heathland, which covers only 1% of the South Downs, the rare Woodlark simply nests in a depression in the ground among a tuft of grass or heather. They start their breeding season early and hope to raise two or three broods of chicks between March and August. The Dartford Warbler is restricted to lowland heath in the South of England and, while it is most easily spotted singing from the top of a gorse

bush, it too nests on the ground and is vulnerable to disturbance.

Later in the year they are joined by the Nightjar, a species that has flown more than 5,000 miles here from southern Africa to breed. Nightjars are ground nesting birds, relying on their superb camouflaged plumage to keep them hidden during the daytime. The female will lay two eggs, timing her laying so that the chicks hatch around a full moon – more moonlight means better hunting conditions for the adults who fly at dusk and dawn looking for moths and other insects to feed their chicks. Once hatched, the female will continue to feed and brood the young for a further 12 days, then abandon her first clutch to start a second. The male will continue to look after the first brood of chicks for a further week until they fledge.

Many of us enjoy exploring the heathland but it's important to remember that you and your dogs may inadvertently damage nests and eggs, or scare the adult birds away. Life for these rare birds which nest on the ground is tough, but we can help them by sticking to the path during ground nesting bird season (normally March to September) and keeping our dogs on the path and in sight. This could also prevent your dog stumbling across an adder or, if you are on a Ministry of Defence site, stop them picking up potentially dangerous military debris.

Learn how you can get involved with National Nest Box Week here: www.bto.org/about-birds/nnbw

An interview with sculptor Graeme Mitcheson



Graeme Mitcheson was commissioned in February 2018 to create seven artistic pieces for seven heathland sites to reflect what each community values about their heath – from their history and past economic importance, to their rare plants and animals, capturing the unique individual stories of each site while also showing how they are connected. Throughout last year Graeme was out in the local community working with schools, rangers and local community groups to inspire the pieces. The designs have now been finalised and the full planning application will be submitted in the coming months.

Here Graeme shares more about his life as a sculptor, his inspirations and aspirations.

Qualifications: Graduating from Loughborough College of Art in 1995. Graeme's public art pieces can be found across the UK. Graeme is an elected member of the Royal British Society of Sculptors.

Inspired by? Henri Rousseau, Eric Gill, Henry Moore

How did you become interested in art? My first interests probably began when I was a child. My dad used to make model trains. They were very small and detailed. I remember once he came back from a competition really miffed. It was because he had lost out on a placing as the judges thought he had used a modelling pack, rather than making it from scratch. He then found out which trains didn't have model packs and made sure he constructed one of them for the next competition.

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He made sets as well and was always so creative, using tiny pieces of crushed stone to make miniature dry stone walls.

Favourite art style? Figurative – this form of art refers to art that retains a strong reference to the real world – particularly to the human figure.

What is your most important tool? Imagination

Proudest achievement? Making the Naval Service Memorial at the National Memorial Arboretum. A very important memorial for so many people, the unveiling was on live TV and attended by 3,000 people.

What was the first sculpture that you sold? I sold two large stone sculptures from my degree show that helped to pay off my student loan! They were sculptures containing carved fabric draped over objects as part of my Degree show in 1995. They were both put on public display at the Fellers Centre for Arts and Crafts in Leicestershire until very recently when a delivery driver reversed into one and broke it in half. The other is still there and still going strong.

Do you have any other hobbies? Almost every sport! Football, cricket, hockey, darts, karting, golf. I'm very competitive!

Which piece do you think will be most challenging to make? I think the sculpture for Graffham with the small horse standing on the pig will be the most challenging and will probably take the longest to carve. This is the largest of all of the works so there are logistical challenges with that too.

How long does it take to make each piece? It varies but generally two to three weeks per sculpture.

Do you have a favourite piece? I will let you know when I've finished!



What are you most looking forward to? Most of the sculptures are very large and the carving and removing of large quantities of unwanted rock is a very physical task. The sculpture for Black Down, however, consists mainly of small hand-drawn and hand-carved letters which will be a far more enjoyable process.

Free guided heathland walks and events



New this year is the launch of our FREE guided heathlands walks programme. There will be routes for all abilities and different interests, whether you're a regular rambler or a countryside beginner, with walks

over a range of distances. Different walk themes will include ecology, local heritage, conservation, health walks and even wildlife dog walks. The programme runs across the whole calendar year and is available to download here: www.southdowns.gov.uk/care-for/heathland/heathlands-reunited/walks-talks/

All the walks will explore internationally rare lowland heath habitats with the aim of highlighting the many different benefits actively managed heathlands provide. You can also learn how people can help to protect these precious heathlands for future generations to enjoy.

Don't fancy a walk? Why not take a look at our 2019 heathlands events programme, there is something for everyone.

Please contact heathlands@southdowns.gov.uk for more information or call 01730 819320

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**

Things to do in the South Downs this February

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



- **Learn more about the moon and stars** in The Dark Skies Festival – more than 30 events across the National Park. Not to be missed!
- Join **two free guided walks** of Chapel Common, one of the best heathland sites in Sussex. Running on February 12 and February 28.
- Get some advice and suggestions on **all things nest boxes** at the Arundel Wetland Centre
- Take part in **Little Wild Things** – a hands-on nature group run by RSPB Pulborough Brooks, aimed at preschool children aged between 2 1/2 and 5 years old.
- Enjoy lots of **fun and creative activities** over the Spring Half Term at the Weald & Downland Living Museum.

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