



# SOUTH DOWNS NEWS

## WORK AND PLAY IN YOUR NATIONAL PARK

This month:

- **Could you be the first to win a National Park Design Award?** Find out more about a new initiative to celebrate outstanding design in the South Downs
- **Moonstruck!** Read about a mum's inspirational story at the Dark Skies Festival
- **Celebrating our women custodians** on International Women's Day
- **Toad patrol...** learn more about a ranger's bid to helping the amphibians stay safe

As always please send your comments and ideas to us at [newsletter@southdowns.gov.uk](mailto:newsletter@southdowns.gov.uk)

## Innovative design to be recognised as new awards are launched for National Park

An exciting new awards scheme is being launched to promote outstanding and innovative design in the South Downs National Park.

The **South Downs National Park Design Awards** celebrate projects that have made a standout contribution to the landscape, heritage, built environment and local communities.

The awards will recognise and promote high standards of design and raise awareness of the positive contribution that good design can make to the quality of the local environment.



Tim Slaney, Director of Planning at the South



Downs National Park Authority, says: "The awards are a fantastic opportunity to raise awareness of the contribution that good design can make to the quality of our local environments and communities.

"There is design work across Hampshire and Sussex that pays homage to this special landscape and has the highest standards of architectural and landscape design, conservation and sustainability. It's time that these kind of inspirational projects are recognised and we're expecting the standard of the competition to be very high."

A special awards ceremony will be held on 12 November – tying in with the anniversary of Hillary Benn signing the National Park's official designation.

Nominations are now open in the following categories:

- **Residential (individual building, housing development small or large)**
- **Non-residential (commercial, industrial, or infrastructure)**
- **Conservation (landscape, buildings, gardens or craftsmanship)**

There will also be a **People's Choice** award – voted for by the general public as their favourite across these three categories.

Tim adds: “We are welcoming entries of all sizes for each of the categories.”

Entries can be submitted by anyone who considers the scheme suitable for an award, including the owners, architects, designers, developers, parish councils, amenity societies or any member of the public. In all cases the consent of the owner must be obtained prior to making a formal nomination.

For more details and to download a nomination form visit [www.southdowns.gov.uk/designaward](http://www.southdowns.gov.uk/designaward)

The deadline for nominations is 5pm on June 28.

Completed entry forms should be e-mailed to [design@southdowns.gov.uk](mailto:design@southdowns.gov.uk)

National Parks England, of which the South Downs National Park Authority is a member, has produced a detailed paper on high-quality design and other aspects of planning in National Parks.

The collective of 10 National Parks believes urban and landscape design skills are a significant advantage in protecting and enhancing our most precious environments.

National Parks provide technical advice at inception and feasibility stages to ensure that design is integral to the planning process. Margaret Paren is Chair of both the South Downs National Park Authority and National Parks England. To download the document visit

[www.southdowns.gov.uk/designaward](http://www.southdowns.gov.uk/designaward)



## Record turnout for Dark Skies Festival

Thousands of people enjoyed a range of fun space-themed activities during the third annual South Downs Dark Skies Festival.

Events took place across the National Park during the fortnight and the headline events, Stargazing South Downs, saw a record turnout.

More than 700 people came to Lewes Town Hall to enjoy the family activities, while more than 350 people visited the event at Petersfield's Festival Hall. It was the first time the event had come to Hampshire and East Sussex. The ever-popular West Sussex event, at Midhurst Rother College, was another great success, attracting more than 550 people on the night.

Hundreds more people attended other events, including at the South Downs Planetarium, Petworth House, Goodwood and Brighton seafront.

The events celebrate the National Park's special status as one of the best places in the world to view the stars.

This year the event had a lunar theme as 2019 marks half a century since the Apollo 11 landings.

Dan Oakley, “Dark Skies” Lead Ranger, says: “It was a great opportunity for people, and especially children, to have fun and learn at the same time. The spectacular star-studded dark skies of the National Park are a real asset for this region, as well as being incredibly important for nocturnal wildlife.

“We were impressed with the enthusiasm everyone had for the topic.”

The Dark Skies Festival was supported by the Royal Commission for the Exhibition of 1851, which is a trust helping to promote science education. The festival will return in 2020 and details of how to get involved will be available later this year.

## Mum's emotional moment as she sees the moon for the first time in 20 years



She's not seen the moon or sparkle of the stars for 20 years.

But 45-year-old mum Natalie Mann finally got to see outer space in all its glory after attending a stargazing event for the Dark Skies Festival.

Overcome with emotion, the former nurse who suffers with severe sight loss said looking up at the wondrous night's sky through a powerful telescope is a moment she will never forget.

"It's been 20 years since I've seen the moon and I can't remember the last time I saw the stars," says Natalie, who lives in Brighton and attended a stargazing session on Brighton seafront.

"The moon is just a haze to me and I can't see the stars at all.

"I was able to see the moon in quite a lot of detail and see its craters. It was quite amazing.

"I was able to see the stars in less detail, but I could definitely see their sparkle.

"It was a very emotional moment for me. It made me feel very happy."

Natalie, who used to work as a staff nurse at Royal Sussex County Hospital, has three serious eye conditions and started to lose her sight 20 years ago, leaving her blind in her right eye and with just 25 per cent peripheral vision in her left eye. This means she has no central vision that allows the eye to focus on objects.

Dealing with the day-to-day struggle of sight loss, Natalie never had time to think about seeing the moon and stars.

But a friend recommended she attend the Brighton Seafront Star Party, an event organised by the South Downs National Park as part of the annual Dark Skies Festival. The fortnight of events celebrates the National Park's special status as one of the best places in the world to view the stars.

"It was just a spur of the moment thing," says Natalie.

"I was very excited about it, for two reasons. One, I've never looked through a telescope, and the other thing that came straight to my mind was it's been such a long time since I've seen what's going on up there!

"Sight loss can make you feel very insular because you spend your life only seeing what's going on three or four feet in front of you – everything beyond that is completely out of focus.

"Finally seeing the moon and stars again gave me an incredible feeling of connection between myself as a human being on Planet Earth and all that is going in outer space. It was a moment I will never forget."

So inspired by the experience, Natalie decided to attend the South Downs National Park's Dark Skies event in Lewes the following day and listen to talks by local astronomy experts.

Natalie was happy she got to share the experience with her nine-year-old daughter Ruby.

"Having Ruby was the best thing I ever did," adds the full-time mum.

"She was really keen for me to see the moon and stars again and I could tell how much it meant to her too."

And, now she has the stargazing bug, Natalie doesn't want the journey to end.

She explains: "It was inspirational for me and left me wanting to know more.

"Ruby and I have been talking about how much it would cost to buy a telescope. It could be a few hundred pounds so we've added to our Christmas wishlist!

"It's something I'd like us to take up to the South Downs and see what else we can see in the Dark Night sky."



## Joining forces with NFU for campaign



The National Farmers Union (NFU) is once again hoping to educate dog walkers about the need to use a lead near livestock and when in the countryside.

It is joining forces with South Downs National Park Authority rangers across Sussex, in a bid to reduce the incidence of dog attacks on farm animals by encouraging dog walkers to #takethelead. All too often sheep, in particular, end up being killed or horribly mutilated by out-of-control pet dogs.

Sheep farmers who are NFU members joined rangers in support of the Authority's Take The Lead campaign at events at Hassocks, Storrington Rise and Bury Hill.

West Sussex NFU chair Caroline Harriott says: "Most attacks are completely preventable, so we are appealing to dog owners to keep their dog on a lead around livestock and check that their properties are dog proof."

Andrew Lee, Director of Countryside Policy and Management at the South Downs National Park Authority, adds: "Our ranger teams work closely with farmers across the South Downs to ensure that farming, wildlife and people enjoying the National Park can happily co-exist."

"Our Take The Lead campaign has made some great strides in raising awareness of the importance of keeping dogs under control, but there's still work to be done."

Andrew adds: "The National Park is a great place to walk dogs and we just want owners to follow a few simple steps to take extra care. Collectively, they can make a big difference."

**The final event takes place on Friday 22 March at Telscombe Tye, Saltdean, BN2 8DY, East Sussex from 10am to noon.**



## Kate joins Toad Patrol

*Kate Dziubinska, Ranger with the Central Downs Team, recently went on an evening toad patrol.*

*Here's her account of the night in her own words...*

As March eases us into warmer, damper nights, the annual toad migration begins. Unlike frogs, which will breed and lay spawn in any old puddle, toads return to the same breeding ground each year to continue their life cycle. It is not uncommon to see males hitching a piggyback from females they've already clasped on to! Unfortunately, human development hasn't much considered these ancient amphibian routes and nowadays their journeys are often criss-crossed with perilous challenges such as fences, high kerbs, fast roads and gutters.

Therefore local wildlife groups around the country have undertaken the task of helping toads along their journey, patrolling roads and giving them a lift across. At busy times this involves buckets full! Myself and fellow ranger Charles Winchester joined a local volunteer near Bury last Friday evening, where we aided 50 plus toads across the road.

As there were only three of us covering a 1km stretch there were sadly some casualties, but that only spurred us on to stay longer. To think it only took a couple of hours out of the evening, seeing those little toads safely crawl off to 'hoppier' times ahead made it a very heart-warming experience.

So as you're driving out and about in these warmer, damper evenings, please keep an eye out for crossing toads and do your best to slow down and be vigilant around wetter areas.

If you'd like to find out more about toad patrols or want to get involved, visit the Froglife website and go to their 'Toads on Roads' page

<https://www.froglife.org/what-we-do/toads-on-roads/>

# Eastbourne's Hydro Hotel helps to support vital projects

A new partnership has been launched between the South Downs National Park Trust and one of Eastbourne's leading and most iconic businesses, the Hydro Hotel.

With the aim of helping to protect the South Downs National Park for future generations, the Hydro Hotel has become an official Visitor Giving Partner of the Trust.

The partnership, which launched on March 1, means guests have the option of donating on top of the cost of their stay to help protect the extraordinary landscape on Eastbourne's doorstep.

All donations will go to the Trust, which is working closely with national and community-based organisations for the benefit of the National 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, including for those with limited mobility and young families, and the protection of endangered species such as the White Letter Hairstreak Butterfly.

Jonathan Owen, General Manager at the Hydro Hotel, says: "It's important for our heritage that such a unique setting is preserved for future generations. The South Downs National Park's stunning scenery is the backdrop to our hotel and this amazing landscape and all its leisure opportunities continue to boost Eastbourne's holiday sector.



"This donation scheme is a wonderful way for local businesses and their customers to play their part in protecting and enhancing this asset."

Sandra Grant, who oversees the Visitor Giving Scheme for the South Downs National Park Trust, adds: "We're delighted to welcome the Hydro Hotel and are looking forward to working closely with them to help protect and enhance our National Park."

Any business interested in signing up to the scheme can contact Sandra Grant at

[Sandra.Grant@southdownstrust.org.uk](mailto:Sandra.Grant@southdownstrust.org.uk)



## Butterflies, bees and beetles...protecting a vital link in ecosystem

With a major global scientific review reporting alarming loss of insect biodiversity, Lead Ranger Tom Parry explains that the South Downs National Park Authority is playing its part to protect populations in the South East of England.

The review, *Worldwide Decline of the Entomofauna: A review of its drivers*, found that more than 40 per cent of insect species are declining and a third are endangered. If the current trend continues, the worst case scenario could be insects reaching mass extinction within a century.

Tom says the study is of concern, but explains that everyone can play their part in helping to sustain and enhance the biodiversity, particularly for pollinators that are a vital component in the ecosystem.

"We are working with farmers to map features in fields that provide habitat for pollinators such as beetle banks, flower rich margins, and hedges," explains Tom.

"From this we hope to identify gaps in connectivity that are hindering the spread of pollinators through the landscape."

Tom says once these gaps are identified, actions can be taken, such as wild flower planting, to increase connectivity throughout the farmed environment and existing wildlife sites.

He adds: "This will create a more resilient ecological network capable of withstanding climate change and allowing species to move more easily through the landscape."

"Insect pollinators really are vital to our environment and that's why we will soon be launching a major campaign. Watch this space!"

# Celebrating the custodians of the National Park



Some 112,000 people live and work within the South Downs National Park boundaries, with many more coming in to visit. Conserving and enhancing the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the area takes a lot of dedicated work.

Women are at the forefront of those efforts and on International Women's Day we're celebrating the women who serve as custodians of the South Downs National Park.

We sat down to talk with Julianne Evans, Senior Site Manager for RSPB's South Downs RSPB reserve, who is responsible for managing key wetlands sites across the National Park for wildlife and visitors.

## **What drew you to conservation work?**

It was in my blood from the word go. Ever since I can remember I have been into wildlife conservation and nature.

I can remember being the last one in from the playground at nursery school because I was watching a kestrel, waiting for it to catch something.

I was a member of the Young Ornithologists Club (now Wildlife Explorers) and got my first pair of binoculars when for my 8th birthday and I used to watch birds in the garden and draw their behaviour.

## **What were your first impressions of working for the RSPB and how was that changed over time?**

The thing that's always struck me about the RSPB is just how passionate everybody is about their work and the cause.

## SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

The RSPB's mission for saving nature is obviously something close to my heart and I've had the privilege of working with so many great people.

The organisation does so many things, including working on partnership projects. For instance, as part of an HLF-funded partnership project called Back from the Brink, we're working on ditch management for a tiny rare snail we've got here at Pulborough Brooks all the way up to our species recovery team eradicating albatross-eating mice on Gough Island to save the Tristan albatross from extinction.

So we're doing big international projects, right the way down to managing habitat for a tiny little snail.

## **What's your most vivid memory of working for the RSPB?**

There's probably lots but the one I pull out of the bag quite often is when I was working as a reserves ecologist.

I was doing a project that involved radio tracking spotted crakes on the Ouse Washes in Cambridgeshire. They're not very common but they were regularly breeding at the Washes. We had to try and catch them at night and I remember spending all night trying to catch this one bird. I was concentrating so hard I hadn't realised that dawn was breaking. I was looking at the warden and I said: "I think we might have to call it a night."

## **What has most surprised you about working in the South Downs?**

For me, what's really rewarding about working at this site in particular, although we are a reserve belonging to the RSPB, we couldn't do what we do without the people around us - the staff, volunteers and building up the partnerships between different landowners and organisations who also have an interest in the area.

It's such a biodiverse landscape, it's got all these different habitats. You've got the wet grassland, you've got the chalk downland, you've got the woodland, you've got the heathland. There's always something to find to be interested in out there.

It's been really nice working with South Downs National Park staff and building up a really good working relationship with them. We're in a partnership with South Downs National Park for the HLF funded Heathlands Reunited project and that's been really valuable for building up links with other organisations. That's what I've found most rewarding. That and the surroundings.

Every sunset here is amazing. I never get bored looking out at the wet grasslands and the pools with the Downs in the background and the sun reflecting off the water. You can't help yourself but to take a photo.

## Project to shed light on river's health



A community group working to protect and enhance wildlife in West Sussex will benefit from a £1,500 grant from the Authority's Sustainable Communities Fund.

The Parishes Wildlife Group plan to use the grant to commission a survey of dragonflies on the River Kird, as well as hold a series of talks and guided walks to raise the profile of local wildlife and the pressures it is facing.

It comes as the River Kird has been identified as not reaching a good standard for the condition of its water.

The group will work with the South Downs National Park Authority, Parish Councils and organisations, such as the Sussex Wildlife Trust, to deliver the project.

Volunteers will be given training courses to help assess water quality and record dragonfly numbers.

Part of the longer-term strategy is to map wetland habitat within the Parishes and ensure they are in good condition and connected up to help support biodiversity.

Chichester District Council also awarded a £1,000 grant to the project.

Mark Rose, External Funding Co-ordinator for the South Downs National Park Authority, said: "We are very happy to be able to support communities to look after their natural assets and this is an important conservation initiative that will reveal a clearer picture of the current health of the River Kird.

"A key part of our Partnership Management Plan is to improve the sustainability of water resources and conserve and enhance priority species. This project is an ideal fit and we wish the group every success."

## National Park apprentices – the inside story

March sees National Apprenticeship Week to celebrate the contribution apprentices make to organisations. The South Downs National Park Authority currently has seven apprentices, with plans to recruit at least four more this year.

We caught up with Frances Osborne, a Business Administration Apprentice for the lottery-funded Heathlands Reunited Team, which is working to protect and enhance our precious heaths.

### Can you tell us more about your apprentice role at the National Park?

It's very varied! My responsibilities includes organising events, minute-taking at meetings, data entry, administering finance and just generally assisting other members of staff with projects. No two days are the same.

I also have to fit in time for going to exams at college and attending volunteer days or walks that the project has organised.

### Why did you choose an apprenticeship at the South Downs National Park?

My route to starting an apprenticeship was a bit unusual as I went to university for a few years, but needed to interrupt my studies in order to be at home. I started looking at apprenticeships as they allowed me to develop my skills, get work experience in an office-based role and usually only needed GCSEs or A levels. I applied to the SDNPA in particular as I'd like to work in a job role or for an organisation that supports environmental conservation.

### What do you think are the benefits of apprenticeships?

Apprenticeships are a great way of getting work-related skills and experience from the very start of your training or career. Over time I've been able to carry out work fairly independently and still have support for when more challenging tasks come up. I think it would have been unlikely for me to find a job that has similar responsibilities to what I'm doing at the SDNPA without having more years of experience or more qualifications.

They are also good at encouraging you to be ambitious.



**What's been the highlight of your time in the National Park as an apprentice?**

The 'atmosphere' at the SDNPA really stands out – it's very supportive, friendly and everyone is open to new ideas and creativity. Lots of other little things also make it a nice place to work in. I really like the location of the South Downs Centre - in a pretty town but also having regular buses and a high street nearby.

**What are your future aspirations for your apprenticeship?**

I'd like to keep improving my IT skills through college courses and to learn more about the SDNPA through working with other teams. I also think that it will be interesting to see how the work of the SDNPA changes during the summer, when the Heathlands Reunited Project will be running public events. After completing my apprenticeship, I'm planning on going back to university to finish my degree in Arts and Sciences.



## Things to do in the South Downs this March

Find these and more events across the National Park and submit your own events at [southdowns.gov.uk/events/](http://southdowns.gov.uk/events/)



- Welcome the start of Spring with some fascinating walks and talks during the **Discovers Birds Weekend** at Arundel Wetland Centre on March 16 and 17.
- Head to the Bolney Wine Estate Spring Fayre on March 17 and browse an area of stalls **selling local crafts and produce**.
- Enjoy exploring a charming village and **the lovely sandy Graffham Common** in a health walk on March 20.
- **Calling all mums!** A Mums Can Do weekend takes place at Amberley Industrial Museum on March 30 and 31, with a range of activities including pottery, train driving and bus conducting.

## 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!



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