



SOUTH DOWNS NEWS

WORK AND PLAY IN YOUR NATIONAL PARK

This month:

- **Biodiversity successes** Find out why otters have made a remarkable comeback in the National Park and learn about the fight to protect the iconic Field Cricket
- **Walking the South Downs Way – in one day!** Learn more about the community fundraiser to help fix damaged sections of the national trail
- **Walking and cycling season begins** Find out more about the many free opportunities to get out and explore the South Downs
- **Chocolate heaven!** Be in with the chance of winning a luxury hamper prize

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

Otters thrive on River Meon after water quality improves

Incredible footage of two playful otters is further proof that the elusive species is thriving on the River Meon.

Otters were thought to be locally extinct in Hampshire until recent years when reductions in river pollution due and to less intensive farming methods and river restoration through the Meon Valley Partnership have seen populations bounce back.

Rangers at the South Downs National Park now believe there are three breeding females on the River Meon, a chalkstream flowing from



the South Downs near East Meon and into the Solent.

The two otters were captured by the team's wildlife camera climbing on to a raft – used to monitor river-dwelling species – under the cover of the darkness.

"Seeing an otter, let alone two, is quite special so we were all really inspired when we saw this footage," said Elaina Whittaker-Slark, who works from the SDNPA's base in Droxford, near Fareham, and is Lead Ranger for the Western Downs

Thousands visit our ranger roadshows

“It’s been an incredible turnaround for this charismatic creature when you consider no otters had been noted on the River Meon, even 10 years ago. The return of the species is an indicator that water quality has significantly improved in the region, due to river restoration and declining use of pesticides.”

Elaina added: “It’s fair to say otters love eels – it’s their favourite meal!

“Good river bank management, including helping to create a diverse range of vegetation, has helped to support healthy eel populations, and in turn, helped the otters.”

The SDNPA and its partners have interacted with 56 landowners along the River Meon to help improve the water quality.

Rangers now plan to install a wildlife camera on the River Rother, which rises north of Petersfield and flows towards Pulborough in West Sussex, this summer. Four years ago a young male otter was captured on camera – the first sighting for 14 years – and it is hoped more otters will be recorded. It comes as efforts continue to improve water quality on the Rother, including reducing pollution running off surrounding land.

The River Meon is one of only 200 chalkstreams in the world and its unique chalk geology makes it an important site for wildlife.

The Meon has been the focus of a major reintroduction programme of the water vole – a vital keystone species to support apex predators such as the otter.

The European otter (*Lutra lutra*), was common in the UK until the 1950s, but had become rare in many parts of England by the 1980s due to pollution and habitat loss.

To watch the video footage of the otters visit <https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/otters-thrive-river-meon/>



Night footage of otters on the River Meon



More than 1,500 people enjoyed learning more about the South Downs National Park as our rangers went on a tour of towns and cities across the region.

People of all ages visited our free events in Newhaven, Horsham, Brighton, Southsea, Bordon, Worthing, Crawley and Guildford.

Coinciding with the UK-wide Discover National Parks fortnight from April 6 to 21, the roadshows celebrated all that is special and unique about the South Downs with a series of fun-filled family activities, including a giant colouring wall, virtual reality experiences, and woodcrafts. Led by the rangers, the events also gave people the opportunity to find out more about wildlife conservation in the National Park.

Laura Warren, Events and Engagement Officer for the South Downs National Park, said: “We had some beautiful Spring days and were very pleased with the tremendous turn-out.

“We had some lovely comments of how people loved the South Downs National Park and wanted to see more of it. We hope the event will inspire people to get out and enjoy this special landscape that is on the doorstep of these towns and cities.”



Join South Downs Way fundraiser



People are being invited to play their part in an exciting fundraising day to cross the entire 100-mile length of the South Downs Way in a single day.

“Way In A Day” takes place on June 21 and will be a team effort, including South Downs National Park staff, to raise vital funds for the upkeep of the much-loved National Trail. The day is also an opportunity for people to learn more and be inspired by the South Downs Way.

The route, stretching from Winchester to Eastbourne, has been split into 16 legs for the purposes of the fundraising day. Designated teams of rangers and staff from the South Downs National Park will be focusing on 12 of the legs, whether that be walking, cycling or running the trail.

Members of the public are being invited to walk four of the sections to complete the 100 miles. The walks, each taking in stunning views of the National Park, will be:

- **Queen Elizabeth Country Park Visitor Centre to Cocking Car Park – a 13-mile route.**
- **Littleton Farm, Upwaltham, to Cocking Hill – a five-mile route.**
- **The Downland Church of the Transfiguration, Pyecombe Village, to the A27 Crossing at Housedean Farm – a seven-mile route.**
- **Eastbourne (Dukes Drive) to Exceat (Seven Sisters Country Park) – a seven-and-a-half-mile route.**

Participants are being encouraged to use public transport to travel to the starting points, as well as from the destination points, as parking is not guaranteed. All public transport links and further

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information on the above walks are available at the dedicated Way In A Day page at

www.southdowns.gov.uk/care-for/way-day-2019/

A member of staff from the South Downs National Park will be at each starting point to greet walkers, collect a voluntary donation and give information on the journey ahead. Participants are being invited to share pictures from their walk on social media using the hashtags #WayInADay and #SouthDowns. The starting points of the walks will be manned from 9am to 2pm.

Every person who takes part is being asked to make a minimum donation of £2. All funds will go towards repairing sections of the trail for the enjoyment of visitors. The



donation can be given to the member of staff manning the starting point of the walk, or alternatively in advance of the event online by visiting

<https://southdowns.charitycheckout.co.uk/sdw#!/>

Participants from the South Downs National Park will also be picking up litter they find along the way.

Allison Thorpe, one of the organisers and Access and Recreation Officer for the South Downs National Park, said: “We’re really excited for Way In A Day and it promises to be a real team effort that everyone can get involved in.

“Getting outside and active in the countryside has proven benefits for both mental health and physical fitness. Way In A Day will be a great opportunity to not only boost the health of participants, but also contribute to the long-term health of the South Downs Way which requires significant investment to keep it in good condition.

The fundraising day builds on the success of the Mend Our Way appeal, which saw the community rally round last year to raise £120,000 to fix sections of the Trail that were in desperate need of refurbishment. Led by the South Downs National Park Trust, work is now under way to fix four specific sections, but the ongoing need to maintain the South Downs Way at other damaged points continues.

Allison added: “We are looking at possibly expanding the Way In A Day initiative next year to coincide with the 10th anniversary of the South Downs National Park and having more public legs. Watch this space!”

Participants are encouraged to make use of the Discovery Bus Ticket, which covers the majority of bus operators in the area.

For more details see

www.southdowns.gov.uk/enjoy/plan-a-visit/getting-around/discovery-ticket/

Free guided bike rides are launched



An action-packed season of free guided cycle rides is being launched for people to boost their mental and physical health – all while enjoying the beautiful scenery of the South Downs National Park.

Ride The Downs features a full calendar of rides tailored to cyclists of all levels, from those who have no cycling experience and want to improve their confidence, right up to seasoned cyclists who want to discover new routes in the National Park.

The 20 weekend bike rides, all starting from Peacehaven or Seaford, are being run by Cycle Seahaven Club in association with the South Downs National Park Authority.

Guy Reynolds, Chairman of Cycle Seahaven, said: “The South Downs is a paradise for cyclists, but it can seem a little daunting for some riders to venture out on their own when they are not familiar with the trails. These guided events offer a friendly, sociable setting where cyclists can enjoy a relaxed ride on cycle paths, quiet roads and gently sloping off-road tracks.”

There are three rides available. Introduction Rides last between 30 and 60 minutes and are ideal for those who have little to no cycling experience and want to improve their skills and confidence. Health Rides last up to two hours, are at a relaxed, steady pace and are designed to build confidence and local knowledge. Rural Rides last up to three hours and are ideal for those who want to improve their physical fitness and discover new trails in the National Park.

For the full timetable of rides visit <https://cycleseahaven.org.uk/ride-the-downs-with-cycle-seahaven/>

For more information contact Kirstie Forcey or email rtd@cycleseahaven.org.uk

Join National Park's family cycle ride



The Winchester Criterium and Cyclefest will open at 10am on Sunday, June 9 with the popular Family Ride, in partnership with South Downs National Park and, new for this year, as an event in collaboration with British Cycling and HSBC UK.

The South Downs National Park Family Ride joins the community of HSBC UK Let's Ride festivals that will take place up and down the country this summer, offering a safe and friendly space to enjoy cycling. Whether you're a beginner or pro, this traffic-free environment provides the perfect opportunity for the whole family to have fun on their bike, before watching some spectacular racing and a enjoying a range of activities in the Broadway area and Abbey Gardens.

Participants will be led out onto the Criterium route at 10am before the races begin at 11 am.

Alister Linton-Crook, Cycling Projects Officer for the South Downs National Park, said: “We're pleased to be supporting the event and are excited for a great day out for all the family. “We encourage everyone to behave responsibly and share the space in the National Park and this is a great message to advocate when cycling on roads too.

“Winchester is on the doorstep of the National Park, so I hope this event inspires people of all ages to get on their bikes and make use of the many family-friendly cycling opportunities across this stunning landscape.”

The National Park rangers will be in Abbey Gardens with the events van offering a host of fun family activities.

Registration for the South Downs National Park Family Ride is now open and FREE to all so head to <https://www.letsride.co.uk/rides/south-downs-family-ride-winchester> to reserve places for the whole family.

Conservation campaign works to save Cricket's summer song



A Field Cricket, pictured by Gillian Pullinger

The South Downs remains the last bastion in the UK for the iconic Field Cricket, whose “cheep, cheep, cheep” is the quintessential sound of summer.

Now conservation groups have joined forces to save one of England's most threatened species from extinction.

A task force, working under special licence, have been carefully capturing and then transferring small numbers of male and female pairs to new heathland sites, an extremely special habitat that is even rarer than the rainforest.

There are currently six colonies across heathland sites in Sussex, Surrey and Hampshire and it is hoped that the rehoming efforts will allow new colonies to thrive at other protected locations.

It's a far cry from 30 years ago when the species was isolated to just one site of 100 field crickets in West Sussex. Despite a remarkable comeback largely thanks to volunteers – working in association with local landowners, the Natural England Species Recovery Project, London Zoo, the RSPB and the Back from the



Brink project – the Field Cricket remains one of the most threatened insects in the UK and setting up new colonies is vital for its long-term survival.



Two translocation days took place as volunteers and staff from partner organisations carried out “tickling”, a delicate exercise where the creatures are tempted to leave their burrows and can be carefully captured.

The project is being spearheaded by two National Lottery Heritage funded projects, Back from the Brink, lead by the RSPB and Heathlands Reunited who are working with the Sussex Wildlife Trust.

The rehoming exercise was successful and scientists will now be carefully monitoring the progress of new colonies.



Mike Edwards, an entomologist and director of Edwards Ecological and Data Services Ltd, explained: “The Field Cricket is a remarkable flightless insect that has really been in trouble for the last century due to changes in land use and forestry reducing its heathland habitat significantly.

“It's a creature that is synonymous with the South Downs, having inspired the great 18th Century naturalist Gilbert White to write of the ‘field-crickets calling on the edges of the heaths of Surrey and Sussex’ in his diaries.

“This southern tip of England is really its only stronghold in the British Isles. The South Downs is right at the northern extremity of the range of the Field Cricket, which is more common in sunnier climes such as Spain.

“The species has been extremely vulnerable for many years, but our continued efforts over the past 25 of years are leading to a slow recovery.

“Ultimately, we want to make the Field Cricket populations more robust by extending and joining patches of habitat, as well as starting new populations by releasing crickets on restored heathland. We hope setting up these new colonies will further improve the chances of this fascinating little insect.”

Mike added: “As a native species to heathlands, increased populations will also have a knock-on effect of helping the entire eco-system and restoring these beautiful heaths to their former glory.”

The Field Cricket is a protected species and all conservation work is being carried out under licensed supervision. For more information visit

<https://naturebftb.co.uk/the-projects/field-cricket/>

Make a difference and join our panel

The South Downs Citizens Panel is looking for new members. Tanya Hibberd, Performance and Research Lead, explains why becoming a panel member is a small commitment that can have a big impact.



No matter how much you already know about the South Downs National Park, you can play a part in decisions made about its care and how more people can enjoy it.

Since 2017, over 1,600 people, living in or near the National Park (living in the postcode areas BN, GU, PO, RH and SO) have already joined the panel and work with the National Park Authority on key decisions.

Panel members are asked for their feedback on a range of things to help the Authority understand residents' views. This enables us to:

- Improve the information we provide about activities and events in the National Park
- Improve the volunteering or community work party opportunities we and our partners can offer
- Determine what issues are of importance to local residents; this can then feed into our work
- Define what the Authority and partners can do to improve peoples' health and wellbeing
- Raise awareness of our key campaigns.

We ask panel members to take part in two surveys a year and they may also be invited to take part in one off smaller surveys or focus groups. There is a prize draw entry to win £50 for each survey completed.

We have had some lovely positive feedback from people who joined the Citizens Panel about why they wanted to get onboard. One told us: "Having an opportunity to help develop more awareness of the South Downs National Park and the benefits enjoying the countryside brings."

So, if you're interested in becoming a panel member, we'd love to hear from you!

If you are interested in finding out more about the Citizens Panel, please contact research@southdowns.gov.uk

You can also keep up-to-date at our webpage www.southdowns.gov.uk/citizens-panel

Hotel signs up to support vital projects



A new partnership has been launched between the South Downs National Park Trust and leading Hampshire boutique hotel, The Village Inn.

With the aim of helping to protect the South Downs National Park for future generations, the Village Inn in Buriton, near Petersfield, has become an official Visitor Giving Partner of the Trust.

The partnership means guests have the option of donating on top of the cost of their stay to help protect the extraordinary landscape on Petersfield'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.

Owner Chris Cooper said: "We are very proud to provide a great standard of accommodation, food and service to people visiting the uniquely beautiful South Downs National Park – a very special place!

"We believe it is vital, as responsible citizens, that we give something back and that's why we're delighted to support Visitor Giving. The scheme mirrors our values of ensuring our surroundings and environment are sustainably maintained and preserved for the benefit and enjoyment of today's and future visitors to the area."

Visitor giving is a simple way of inviting voluntary donations from visitors, inspiring them to put something back into looking after the places they love to visit. Any business interested can contact Sandra Grant on Sandra.Grant@southdownstrust.org.uk or call 01730 819223.

Funding boost for chalk reef project



People will be able to learn more about one of the world's only chalk reefs thanks to a new project to create an interactive, virtual reality undersea experience.

The Living Coast Undersea Experience will enable people to explore the underwater environment of the Beachy Head West Marine Conservation Zone, which runs between Brighton Marina and Beachy Head.

The protected area is home to some of the best examples of chalk reef habitat, with specialised communities of animals and seaweeds, including the rare short-snouted seahorse.

Benefiting from a £7,000 grant from the Sustainable Communities Fund, The Living Coast Undersea Experience is being created by Simon Wilkinson of CIRCA69 and Karen Poley of KP Projects CIC, in partnership with The Living Coast Brighton & Lewes Downs, UNESCO designated Biosphere Region; Sussex Inshore Fisheries & Conservation Authority (IFCA) and the Sussex Wildlife Trust.

Version One of The Living Coast Undersea Experience launched at The Old Market for Brighton Digital Festival in October of last year with some great feedback.

Further development is now under way and a pilot tour of the virtual reality experience has been taking place this spring at venues across the region.

Participants enter the experience as if preparing for a dive. On the 'seabed' they can walk around, explore and interact with the environment, as well as see through the eyes of sea creatures.

The Living Coast Undersea Experience has been created using existing seabed mapping to imagine a chalk reef gully teeming with marine life created graphically using high quality imagery.'

Mark Rose, External Funding Co-ordinator for the Sustainable Communities Fund, said: "This worthwhile project will open up one of the UK's most unique

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marine environments to everyone – without getting wet!

"We're pleased to have been able to help provide some funding towards the VR experience, which will be a powerful educational experience that will help people understand the environment and the things we can all do to help conserve it."

For more information visit <http://www.kp-projects.co.uk/the-living-coast-undersea-experience/>

Catching the rain from roads to protect our precious groundwater



Rainscapes are an innovative and cost-effective way of reducing water pollution caused from highway run-off. Susie Howells, Brighton ChaMP project manager, explains how rainscapes can help protect and improve drinking water supplies in the Brighton chalk aquifer.

When rain falls, water finds its way into the Brighton chalk aquifer – a hugely valuable asset for the region, providing drinking water supplies for around 365,000 people in Brighton, Hove and beyond.

But this precious resource is now under threat. Over many years, nitrate pollution from farming and sewage leaks; chemicals from industry, and pollution from vehicles and urban development have placed increasing pressure on the Brighton Chalk. The upshot of these complex influences is that drinking water quality could now be at risk.

We know the road network has a major part to play in causing pollution. Several studies suggest a significant source of water pollution in the UK is from highway run-off. Brake pads and tyres wear down, cars leak fuel

Win a luxury hamper!

and oil and heavy metals, and hydrocarbons and nitrates are released on to the surface of the road. You can see this when it snows – which quickly turns to black mush as it combines with the pollutants that usually lay unseen on the road. It remains there until the next rainfall, and is then washed into the drainage system – ultimately ending up in our rivers, streams, groundwater and seas. The highest proportion of microplastics in the ocean comes from car tyres.

ChaMP is developing a number of interventions including rainscapes, also known as Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) to clean the polluted water which runs off busy roads, stopping it from getting into soakaways. These soakaways present vulnerable pathways through which urban pollutants can travel into the aquifer.

Raingardens and rainscapes are shallow planted areas which use natural processes to prevent groundwater pollution by storing and treating polluted water and silts running off the surface of the road. Rainscapes clean the water naturally by slowing and holding water to allow time, sunlight, vegetation and bacteria in the roots of the plants and soil to break down pollutants. Sustainable drainage techniques include swales, bioretention systems, green roofs, permeable paving, tree pits, basins, ponds and wetlands.



They are also excellent for mitigating flooding, and for nature and people: encouraging biodiversity and transforming public space. Through urban walkovers in Source Protection Zones and partnership work ChaMP has identified several sites in Brighton and Lewes for feasibility studies to see if we can develop these schemes locally.

We are pushing groundwater protection in the urban setting up the local and regional agenda with our partners, as well as supporting other organisations' efforts to create SuDS to ensure groundwater protection is fully considered in new developments, and looking for opportunities to integrate good SuDS design in road schemes.

ChaMP plans to develop the projects to demonstrate SuDS efficiency at removing pollutants with a view to encouraging more rainscapes as a solution to groundwater pollution from busy roads.

For more information on the ChaMP partnership visit <https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/care-for-water/brighton-champ-for-water/>



Easter may have come and gone, but there's still World Chocolate Day to look forward to on July 7!

The lovely people at Noble and Stace Chocolatiers have given us the wonderful – and delicious – prize of a luxury chocolate hamper worth over £40.

Noble and Stace Chocolatiers are just one of the many artisan food producers in the South Downs, priding themselves on using locally-sourced ingredients. A three-time finalist in the Sussex Food & Drink Awards for Food Producer of the Year, the West Sussex-based business has been fulfilling chocolate cravings since 2015 under the helm of Head Chocolatier Mike Noble. Mike stepped away from the corporate world to fulfil a lifelong dream of becoming a chocolatier and now prides himself on sticking to small batch production to ensure absolute freshness and collaborating with other like-minded local food producers. He also runs chocolate-making workshops at locations across the South Downs.

To be in with a chance of winning this fantastic prize, all you need to do to enter is sign up to the South Downs newsletter before 31 May 2019.

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

To enter the draw email us with the subject "chocolate craving" to newsletter@southdowns.gov.uk

Terms and conditions apply, please read them here www.southdowns.gov.uk/join-the-newsletter/

Find out more about Noble and Stace Chocolatiers at www.nobleandstace.co.uk or by following them on social media.

Explore the stunning landscape on your doorstep with free health walks



A range of free guided walks to help improve physical and mental health by getting out into the South Downs National Park launches this month.

Wave Leisure Trust has teamed up with the South Downs National Park Authority to organise "Walk The Downs", a series of health walks between May and September.

The walks start from Peacehaven, Newhaven and Seaford and then follow a route into the South Downs. They are led by expert guides and aim to encourage people to get active and explore the amazing landscape on their doorstep.

Duncan Kerr, Chief Executive of Wave Leisure Trust, said: "Public Health England recently found that six million Britons are failing to manage even one brisk 10-minute walk a month, increasing their risk of developing conditions such as diabetes and heart disease.

"Walking is great for improving both physical and mental health and spending just five minutes surrounded by nature is proven to boost your mood by releasing feel-good hormones known as endorphins.

"Everyone's invited to these walks, so come on down, meet some new people and enjoy the positive effects on your mind and mood!"

There are two types of walks to take part in, health walks and rural rambles. The health walks take between 60 to 90 minutes, while the rural rambles take between two and three hours to complete. The rural rambles offer longer routes for those that want to explore more of the South Downs.

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Alister Linton-Crook, Project Officer at the South Downs National Park, said: "With the South Downs on our doorstep, these guided free walks are a great way to get out, meet new people and relieve stress. We're delighted to be working with Wave Leisure to encourage people to adopt healthier lifestyles.

"We want people of all ages and fitness levels to make the most of this amazing 'breathing space' that is very accessible to people living in East Sussex.

"As well as having a positive impact of walking outdoors, you can enjoy the beautiful sights of the South Downs National Park and reconnect with the outdoors."

Booking is essential and can be arranged by contacting Luke from the Wave team on: 01323 408862 or luke.greenwood@waveleisure.co.uk

Children are welcome to join when accompanied by a parent or guardian. Further information about the walks and what to bring can be found at www.waveleisure.co.uk

Things to do in the South Downs this May

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



- Join local writer and storyteller, Dawn Nelson for a workshop that explores **Faerytale, Folk and Fable**, the stories of our childhood and the oral storytelling tradition at Butser Ancient Farm, near Clanfield, on 18 May.
- Take a **foraging trip** and learn how to identify different Spring shoots, plants, flowers and mushrooms at Queen Elizabeth Country Park on 19 May.
- On 20 May, enjoy a **gentle health walk** through Iron Hill, taking in beautiful views along the Sussex Border Path and Serpent Trail.
- Discover **new life awakening** in the ponds and meadows this spring at Arundel Wetland Centre. Daily pond dipping, crafts and spring family trail activities throughout the half term holidays from 25 May to 2 June.

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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