

Case Study

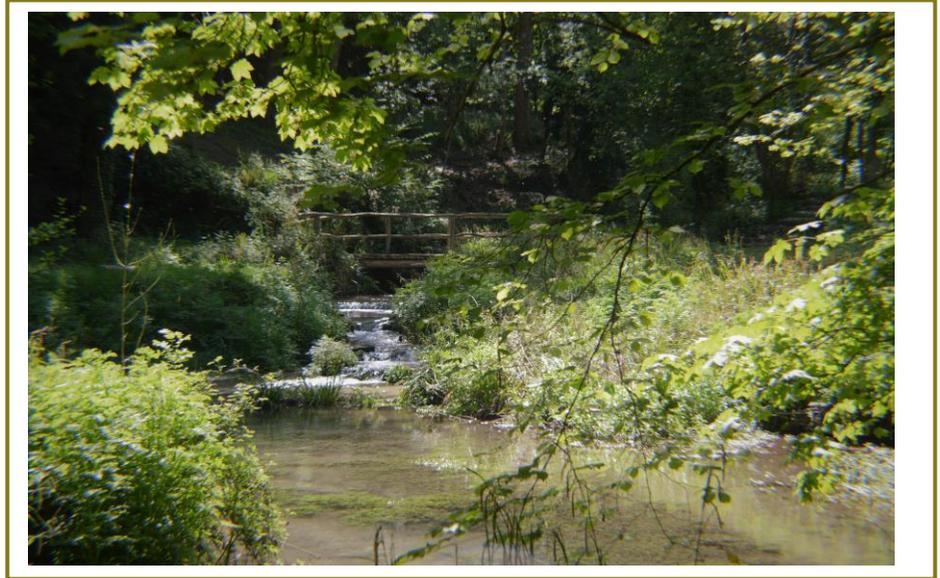
Botany Bay Community Interest Group

Background

Tucked away at the foot of the South Downs near Duncton, Botany Bay is a small, but incredibly diverse site. Mostly wooded – but also containing a small meadow and orchard – it is bisected by a rare chalk gill stream. More commonly associated with upland areas, gills are steeply incised valleys carved out by the streams that flow in their base. The result of this is a small wooded ravine with its own unique microclimate: several degrees cooler and significantly more humid than its surroundings, it is the perfect place for moisture loving bryophytes (small, non-vascular plants, such as mosses) and ferns to flourish.

As Botany Bay is also an ancient semi-natural woodland (having been continuously wooded since at least 1600 AD), the site plays host to an impressive variety of species, including: English oak, ash, alder, yew, lime, field maple, hazel, willow and black poplar, as well as ancient woodland indicators like bluebells, wild garlic, yellow archangel and wood anemone.

Botany Bay hasn't always looked this way. Following its conversion to a trout farm in the 70s, when the stream was dammed and several on-line ponds were dug, Botany Bay has been the subject of an ambitious restoration. Led by its co-owner, Anne Dennig, restoration work began in 2014 and, following the founding of Botany Bay Community Interest Group (CIG) in 2016, has been continuing apace ever since.



The project

Habitat improvement work

Over the course of the past year staff from the South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) and volunteers from the South Downs Volunteer Ranger Service (SDVRS) have helped with a wide range of practical habitat improvement tasks, including:

- Removing grass from the banks of the pond to encourage wildflowers
- Coppicing hazel and dead hedging so visitors can more safely use the site
- Improving paths and making steps up some of the steep banks to help more people access more of the site
- Removing invasive bamboo and cherry laurel to let in more light and allow the ancient woodland ground flora to flourish

Support, advice and surveys

As well as the practical work undertaken by Rangers and volunteers, SDNPA has supported the restoration project at Botany Bay in several other ways, providing:

- Woodland management advice through a visit from SDNPA's Woodland Officer, Bob Epsom
- £10,000 of financial support, via the Sustainable Communities Fund, and £665.55 from the Wealden Heath area budget for a new bridge and outdoor classroom able to seat a group of up to 30 children
- Help with the felling of unsafe trees and £3000 of grassroots financial support to shore up a drainage system feeding the top end of the stream
- Surveys revealing new hidden treasures, including the Triangle Web Spider, *Hyptiotes paradoxus*, previously known at one other site in Sussex
- Riverfly monitoring training for CIG members and Seaford College students, ensuring the water quality of the stream continues to be checked

“The wonderful SDNPA volunteers have helped us in the pouring rain...and blazing sun.”

Anne Dennig, site co-owner and secretary of Botany Bay Community Interest Group

The outcome

SDNPA's involvement with the restoration of Botany Bay has significantly boosted efforts to return this site to a more natural state. Improvements in habitat quality at the site are evidenced by impressive survey results, including: 13 species of butterfly (including silver-washed fritillary), 18 species of bird (including kingfisher and spotted flycatcher), over 6 species of bat (including brandt's bat) and 71 species of bryophyte (including the very rare fountain feather-moss).

Furthermore, by contributing to the cost of the outdoor classroom, SDNPA's support has helped to open up the site to more visitors and education groups. In 2018, for example, classes from Duncton Junior School and Seaford College used the site for educational activities, as well as the College's BTEC students getting involved with practical management for their wetland module.

Cumulatively, the work undertaken has helped Botany Bay become an ecologically healthier and more publicly accessible site – something of which all the staff and volunteers involved can be proud.

The future

Although Botany Bay is still very much a work in progress, the past year has brought some significant achievements towards restoring the site to its former glory following years of use as a fish farm.

The work done so far shows how much can be achieved through the hard work of volunteers and the support and advice of the National Park.

Botany Bay Community Interest Group will continue to work towards the re-naturalization of the site and has several exciting elements of work planned for the coming years, including establishing an area of chalk grassland in the meadow.

SDNPA's Wealden Heath area Ranger team hope to continue to support this work and help restore the site to its former glory.

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The South Downs National Park Partnership Management Plan (PMP) 2014–19 sets out a shared vision for how we all would like the National Park to be in the future. It includes 11 long-term outcomes, and provides a framework for communities, landowners, charities, businesses and public bodies to work together to make this vision and these outcomes a reality.

This project successfully achieved the following PMP outcomes:

Outcome 1: The landscape character of the National Park, its special qualities and local distinctiveness have been conserved and enhanced by effectively managing the land and the negative impacts of development and cumulative change.

Outcome 2: There is increased capacity within the landscape for its natural resources, habitats and species to adapt to the impacts of climate change and other pressures.

Outcome 3: A well-managed and better connected network of habitats and increased population and distribution of priority species now exist in the National Park.

Outcome 6: There is widespread understanding of the special qualities of the National Park and the benefits it provides.

southdowns.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/SDNP-Partnership-Management-Plan-2014-19.pdf