

**SOUTH DOWNS
NATIONAL PARK**
CELEBRATING 10 YEARS

SOUTH DOWNS NEWS



WORK AND PLAY IN YOUR NATIONAL PARK

This month:

- **Taking positive action** As we celebrate the National Park's 10th anniversary, learn more about our extended line-up of environmental activity days for young people.
- **Embrace the darkness!** As the Dark Skies Festival swings into action, find an event near you and be in with the chance of winning a new telescope!
- **Meet the poo fairy** Discover how responsible dog walking can give a helping hand to wildlife.
- **Shaping the future** Could you be a Member of the National Park Authority?

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

Protecting nature as free Youth Action Days return

Youth Action Days return to the National Park for 2020 with an extended calendar of exciting events to give young people the opportunity to get hands-on in conservation.

Following the success of the events last year and to mark the National Park's 10th anniversary, Youth Action Days will be back during the February half-term, as well as further events during the Easter and summer holidays.

For the first time, there will also be a week-long series of action days related to helping to protect and enhance the National Park's 41 heaths, which are a habitat rarer than the rainforest.

South Downs Youth Action Days are for anyone aged between 16 and 25 who is passionate about making a difference for the environment and is looking to learn practical skills to conserve and enhance the South Downs National Park.



Daniel Greenwood, Volunteering Development Officer for the South Downs National Park, said: "With the global climate change and biodiversity crisis so high on the agenda, we know that young people are incredibly engaged with environmental issues.

"These free events are both fun and educational and give people a chance to get involved with the range of conservation activities happening in the South Downs National Park. It's also a great opportunity for young people to upskill, particularly if they are keen on a career in conservation or perhaps just want to become

a more regular volunteer. Nature needs your help and Youth Action Days are a great place to start!

"February is a fascinating time in the South Downs as we start to see the early signs of longer, warmer days, so we're hoping for some enjoyable days in the great outdoors."



Feedback from last year's Youth Action Days has been very positive. One attendee said: "I would just like to say thank you for the great day yesterday for my first day of conservation. I have wanted to be involved in conservation for a while. I also have a learning disability so this is a rare opportunity for me, so thank you so much."

The events for February are:

Monday, 17 February, 11am to 3pm at Pulborough Brooks, West Sussex. Activities include a wildlife camera making workshop and birch popping.

Tuesday, 18 February. 11am to 3pm at Church Copse, Clapham Woods, Worthing. Activities include hazel coppicing and small tree felling.

Wednesday, 19 February. 11am to 3pm at St Catherine's Hill, Winchester. Activities include cutting back scrub to protect the rare orchids and butterflies.

Booking is essential for all these events and details can be found online.

Details of events during the Easter and summer holidays will be announced later in the year. The Youth Actions Days focused on heathlands are set to take place during July and details will also be announced over the coming months.

For full details and to book a place on one of the February Youth Action Days visit

www.southdowns.gov.uk/care-for/volunteering-2/south-downs-youth-action-2/

"These action days are a chance to make a real difference to the environment"



Young people are more engaged with the environment than ever before, writes Kirsty Ferris, a student and Youth Ambassador for the National Park

While celebrating the 10th Anniversary of the South Downs National Park it's good to remember that conserving the natural beauty of the National Park is just as important now as it was when it was designated.

Issues such as climate change and biodiversity decline are at the forefront of young people's minds now more than ever before, and while many young people may feel powerless to such problems, Youth Action Days offer the chance to make a real difference to the environment and help to safeguard our precious habitats. During February half term there will be three practical conservation days for young people to attend where they will gain knowledge of our special habitats, learn new skills and help protect our beautiful landscape.

However, Youth Action Days aren't just about making your CV look good, they're about gaining confidence by talking to new people, making yourself proud as you give back to the planet and taking the time to relax and destress amongst nature. After a long and wet winter there aren't many things better than spending time in nature and getting moving!

Enjoy the magic of the night's sky!



Picture by Ismail Mungul

As the National Park's Dark Skies Festival swings into action, Graham Bryant, President of Hampshire Astronomical Group, writes about the amazing sights in the night's sky as winter comes to a close and the first signs of spring beckon.

Last year I wrote a piece inviting you to step outside and experience the beauty of a star studded night sky whilst at the same time take the opportunity to hear and see some of the night time creatures that inhabit our night time world.

We are blessed with having the South Downs National Park on our door step and with it their dark sky reserve. We should remember that 50 per cent of the natural environment is above our head. That half needs protecting as much as any other part of our environment. Fortunately, the South Downs National Park appreciates this need and strives to protect the beauty of the night sky for us, and preserve the darkness so badly needed by nocturnal creatures.

There is a fantastic ecosystem working at night, often unseen by us as we are tucked up in our cosy homes. We can all appreciate a glorious day with the sun in a blue sky and birds wheeling high above and the sight of a profusion of flora and fauna in fields and hedgerows. But so often we ignore the beauty of the night time environment, but it is there nonetheless, it just takes a little more patience to appreciate its beauty and wonder.

Becoming familiar with some of the more easily recognised constellations will get you started in becoming comfortable and familiar with the night. High in the southern sky at the moment is Orion the Hunter, easily seen with the sloping three stars of his belt. We often think of the starry sky as largely

SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

unchanging, but careful watching of the sky will reveal some of the subtle changes that occur.

At the moment the bright red supergiant star Betelgeuse in the left shoulder of Orion should be one of the brightest stars in that constellation. But over the last couple of months it has mysteriously faded and currently remains only as bright as the other stars in the constellation. It has many astronomers baffled; we do know however, that at some point in the future this star will explode and when it does so it will become visible in the daytime; but not yet though.

Following the belt of Orion down and towards the left will lead you to a bright blue star, Sirius, the 'dog star'. This star marks the collar of Orion's hunting dog in the constellation of 'Canis Major' or the large dog. It is the brightest star in the entire northern and southern hemisphere skies. Low down in our sky we see it strongly twinkling is if drawing attention to itself.



Following the three belt stars in an upward direction and to the right leads you to the constellation of Taurus the Bull with its bright red eye Aldebaran. Continue along the same line and you will stumble upon the small tight group of stars known as the Seven Sisters or the Pleiades. They look wonderful when viewed through a pair of binoculars or a small telescope, either of which will show not just seven stars, but hundreds, like blue gems on a black velvet cloth.

It appears that in almost all cultures around the world from the Aborigines, Polynesians to Native North American people there have been mythological tales concerning these seven stars. The Greeks believed these sisters were fathered by the Titan, Atlas, who was tasked by Zeus to hold the world on his shoulders with their mother Pleione being the mythical protector of sailors. No wonder that for thousands of years so many sailors learnt to carefully watch the stars to guide them safely across the seven seas.

Now you too can identify and watch their nightly progression to the western horizon over the remaining spring time months.

Win a telescope!



Our Dark Skies Festival returns with an extended line-up this month – and we're offering the chance to win a telescope!

The flagship free event, Stargazing South Downs, is being extended this year to include a new roadshow in Steyning, joining Lewes, Midhurst and Petersfield.

The festival runs from February 7 to 23 and includes events across the length and breadth of the National Park. Now in its fourth year, the festival celebrates the National Park's International Dark Sky Reserve status, which was awarded in 2016.

Visitors to Stargazing South Downs will be able to enjoy indoor planetarium shows, an incredible VR experience exploring the Milky Way, nocturnal wildlife displays, talks by Dark Skies experts and a giant colouring wall of the solar system. And, if the night's sky is clear, there will be moonazing and stargazing outside.

To see the full line-up of events across the National Park visit

www.southdowns.gov.uk/enjoy/events/south-downs-dark-skies-festival-2020/

We're also offering the chance to win a deluxe Skywatcher 90 AZ3 telescope, so you can get out in the South Downs this year and see the wonders of the sky for yourselves!



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 29 February 2020. 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 29 February 2020.

To enter the draw email us with the subject "Embrace the Darkness" to newsletter@southdowns.gov.uk
Terms and conditions apply.

Milestone in fight to save sea's kelp forest



The South Downs National Park has 14 miles of coastline in Sussex

Efforts to restore a vast underwater kelp forest off the Sussex coast have made a significant step forward with the introduction of a new byelaw.

The new rules, which will see trawling excluded from a vast 304 km² of Sussex coastline year-round, was agreed by the Sussex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority.

Sussex IFCA's decision brings the first-ever UK kelp rewilding initiative one step closer, and aims to give the kelp the breathing space it needs to recover. Over time, repeated passes by trawling vessels have torn kelp from the sea floor and prevented natural regeneration.

Sir David Attenborough lent his support to Help Our Kelp campaign, led by the Sussex Wildlife Trust and partner organisations, last year.

Jeremy Burgess, a biodiversity lead for the National Park Authority, explained the importance of kelp for the vitality of entire ecosystem. He said: "The forests provide shelter which is beneficial for fish nurseries, rare species such as seahorses and crustaceans including various crab species and lobsters. Kelp is a keystone species and so the loss of kelp leads to the collapse of whole ecosystems. For example in Sussex the decline in kelp beds has led to a decline in fish fry and overall stocks.

"Kelp has many other ecosystem service benefits. Kelp forests slow ocean currents and reduce wave action, acting as a natural coastal defence. Kelp forests are also excellent short term carbon sinks and can take up 20 times more CO² per hectare from the atmosphere than land-based forests."

“Poo fairy” urges dog walkers to “bag it and bin it” to help wildlife



Dog poos don't just disappear by magic – and can cause long-term harm to fragile wildlife havens.

That's the message from Katy Sherman, Engagement Officer for the lottery-funded Heathlands Reunited project, which is working to protect and enhance the 41 nationally-important heaths in the region.

Katy and other partners in the project are urging dog walkers to “bag it and bin it” after 123 dog poos were counted along the main pathway at Broxhead Common. The Hampshire nature reserve is home to several rare and specialised heathland species, including the sand lizard, Dartford Warbler, woodlark and the silver-studded blue and grayling butterflies.



Katy explained that dog poos can cause long-term damage to the heathland habitat.

“Whatever some people may believe, there's no such thing as the dog poo fairy”, said Katy, who donned “poo fairy” wings during the clean-up of the dog fouling to help raise awareness of the problem. The poos had also previously been sprinkled with eco-friendly paint powder to highlight the issue for dog walkers on the site.

“It's also a myth that it is fine for the environment to leave dog poo on the ground to ‘decompose’. Heathlands in particular are very vulnerable. These heaths have nutrient-poor soils and it's this lack of nutrients that allows the heathers to thrive and therefore supports all these rare animals.

“Dog poo contains nitrates which leach into the soil and, over time, change the soil's profile. It means that invasive species such as bracken can grow, outcompete the heather and undo all the conservation work. Without management, it could mean we lose these heathlands, a habitat rarer than the rainforest.”

Katy cited the National Park's Take The Lead the campaign, which encourages dog walkers to enjoy the countryside responsibly by sticking to the paths on sites with ground nesting birds from March-September, bagging and binning dog poo and keeping dogs on leads near livestock.

Katy added: “We're urging people to keep their dogs in sight and to always bag and bin their dog poo, wherever and whenever they choose to go. You could even make it a resolution for 2020 and, in doing so, help our wildlife thrive.”

At Broxhead Common, there is a dog poo bin at the layby near the entrance.

Katy added: “On many special protection areas like this, there aren't any dog poo bins but it's still the owner's responsibility to pick that poo and take it home or put in a general waste bin.

“We also promote dicky bags which are a leak-proof bag with air freshener in it. You can pop your dog poo into that, zip it up and not even know you've got it. Then you can safely dispose of the bag in your bin at home or any public bin.”

Katy works with a team of dog ambassadors who are members of the local dog walking community and help to spread the message about responsible dog walking. Anyone interested in becoming an ambassador can email heathlands@southdowns.gov.uk

Broxhead Common, just outside Bordon, is 42 hectares of dry heathland, as well as birch and oak woodland. Its wildlife is so rare that it has Special Protection Area status and is also a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

Heathlands Reunited is a National Lottery Heritage funded partnership project and is working to save our heaths, which provide a habitat to all 12 of the UK's native reptiles. Eleven organisations have joined forces to expand the existing heathland left in the



National Park. The Heathlands Reunited partnership aim to create an area of heathland greater than 1,200 football pitches over a five-year project. Learn more at www.southdowns.gov.uk/heathlands-reunited For more information on Take The Lead visit www.southdowns.gov.uk/enjoy/take-the-lead/

Dedicated volunteers earn national honour



Volunteers who give up their free time to help protect some of Britain's rarest habitats have received national recognition in a prestigious award scheme.

The group of 17 volunteers from the Heathlands Reunited project were highly-commended in the National Parks' UK Volunteer Awards, which recognises outstanding volunteers across the UK's 15 National Parks.

The commendation came after the group undertook extensive research into the history of South Downs heathland, culminating in them writing a fun and informative storybook that is now available in libraries and soon to be circulated to local schools.

Meanwhile, Kirsty Ferris and Cameron Macdonald, who both volunteer to be Youth Ambassadors for the National Park, were also highly-commended in the awards scheme.

Reacting to the commendation for Heathlands Reunited, volunteer Elaine Ireland, from Fernhurst, West Sussex, said: "As a cultural heritage volunteer, I learned so much about our local heathland through field trips, archive research and oral history. It was a pleasure to volunteer. What a wonderful opportunity to volunteer and be guided into turning our research into stories for children – and be published!"

The book, entitled *The Fish, The Goatsucker and The Highwayman*, includes stories relating to 18th century family life on the heath, the tales of highwaymen, the Selborne and Headley riots, and World War II.

Katy Sherman, Engagement Officer for Heathlands Reunited, said: "It's an amazing achievement, highlighting the unique heritage of the South Downs and the hard work our volunteers."

Celebrating apprenticeships



Meet the new apprentices who are starting their environment careers by learning life-long skills in the South Downs National Park.

For National Apprenticeship Week (3 to 7 Feb) the National Park Authority is celebrating its apprentices – a new generation helping conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the South Downs.

It comes as the National Park's apprenticeship programme enters its second year. The initiative has now added three more ranger apprentices, one planning apprentice and one facilities management apprentice.

The new apprentices are: Apprentice rangers Gemma North, Madeline Crews, and Rachel Bonnici (not pictured), planning apprentice Thomas Light and facilities management apprentice Sam Smith.

Apprentice Ranger Madeline Crews said: "I'm getting the practical and relevant experience I need to fulfil my dream of working in the great outdoors."

Apprentice Ranger Gemma North said: "My favourite part so far has to be tree management work. I absolutely loved doing my training and have had lots of opportunities to use those new skills since!"

Trevor Beattie, Chief Executive of the South Downs National Park Authority, said: "This innovative programme is aimed at teaching young people some of the core skills and knowledge needed to care for our landscapes and wildlife, as well as help more people to understand and enjoy the National Park. Our apprentices add value to the Authority's work and it's great that they find the roles so rewarding."

The National Park's apprentice programme starts recruiting again in June.

The Right Tree in the Right Place!



Lesley Foulkes, of Langham Brewery in West Sussex, reveals why she loves trees and is supporting the Trees for the Downs campaign.

All of us at Langhams are passionate about our steam heated microbrewery, nestling in the heart of the South Downs. That's why we believe it is so important to raise awareness of the South Downs National Park Trust and its work to raise funds for key initiatives to preserve and protect our environment, and in particular the Park's 10th Anniversary campaign to plant 5,000 trees across the South Downs.



This isn't the first time we've campaigned for trees. Every year the brewery hosts Bonkers for Conkers, a charity event in aid of the Chestnut Tree House Hospice. In 2012 we spearheaded a local campaign to save the great British Conker, as we were struggling to find conkers for our competition. Horse-chestnuts, a non-native tree, were and still are under threat from two types of fungi and leaf mining moths.

According to research by the Forestry Commission almost 50 per cent of the UK's horse chestnut trees could become affected. But it's not just the horse chestnut that is under threat – Dutch Elm disease and Ash Dieback, modern farming methods and development – all threaten our woodland heritage.

We cannot take our countryside for granted. Trees are one of our most valuable natural assets. Not only do they give us air to breathe; are home to countless wildlife and enrich our local landscape, they are also one of nature's best carbon capturers. This is not just a local, or even just a national challenge, it is a global opportunity. The Glover Review last year also tackles

SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

the challenge of climate change and amongst its priorities for the response to climate change, is managed tree planting and peatland restoration. The right tree, in the right place, with the right care to thrive.

Help us to plant a tree in 2020! Together with the South Downs National Park Trust we are hosting two great fundraising music and beer festivals this year for their Trees for the Downs Campaign.

So please make a note for your diary – Live@Langhams 18 April and MADhurst Live@ on 22 August. All are child and dog friendly! Look forward to seeing you.

Flurry of donations for new initiative



More than £10,000 has already been raised for the campaign that aims to plant 5,000 trees across the South Downs National Park

Launched during National Tree Week last November, "Trees for the Downs" aims to restore trees that have been lost due to pests and diseases, including Ash Dieback and Dutch Elm Disease.

The South Downs National Park Trust, the official charity for the National Park, is looking to raise £61,500 to plant the trees. Trees for the Downs is being supported by Hillier, whose garden centres near to the South Downs will be helping with the fundraising drive.

Andy Player, who leads on woodland for the South Downs National Park, said: "Our focus will be on planting trees in places where people can connect with them and form part of people's everyday life, such as on the walk to school."

To donate visit www.southdownstrust.org.uk/trees-for-the-downs/

Opportunity to shape strategy of South Downs National Park



Picture by Simon Parsons

Would you be interested in helping to shape the South Downs National Park's future?

As part of a nationwide recruitment drive for protected landscapes, Defra is seeking to appoint five new Members of the South Downs National Park Authority.

Lord Gardiner of Kimble, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Rural Affairs and Biosecurity, explained: "I am looking for a diverse group of passionate and committed individuals who want to help shape the strategic direction of our National Park Authorities and AONB Conservation Boards.

"As a Secretary of State appointed member, you will have the opportunity to help conserve and enhance our most treasured landscapes now and for future generations.

"I welcome applications from people who have a clear understanding of land management, rural communities, as well as protection and enhancement of the environment.

"Applications are also encouraged from people with experience in planning, commercial and business leadership, communications and stakeholder outreach."

The overall role of a Member is to contribute to the leadership, scrutiny and direction of the National Park Authority and further the statutory purposes.

For more information and to apply visit <https://publicappointments.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/appointment/national-park-authorities-and-area-of-outstanding-natural-beauty-conservation-boards-secretary-of-state-members/>

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/



- Embrace the darkness! From Petworth House to the South Downs Planetarium and Science Centre, there are dozens of astronomical events across Sussex and Hampshire. See the [full list of events here](#) for the Dark Skies Festival.
- Do you love snowdrops? If so, visit Gilbert White's House in Hampshire for its ever-popular **Snowdrop Weekend** on 15 and 16 February. Or you could join the Half Term **Snowdrop Stroll** at Northchapel on 19 February.
- **Queen Elizabeth Country Park** in Hampshire is hosting fun activities for children during half term week, including a "Little Adventurers" treasure hunt.
- Join a **free guided walk** on 18 February at the beautiful Chapel Common as part of the Heathlands Reunited project.
- Looking for Valentine's Day ideas? See [five ideas](#) for a romantic day out in the National Park!

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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