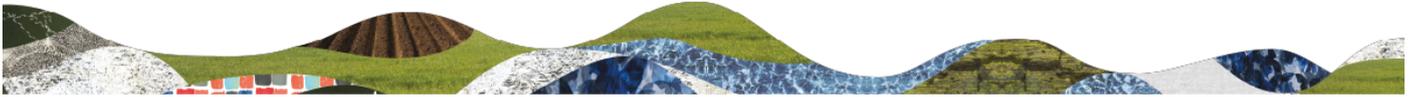


**SOUTH DOWNS
NATIONAL PARK**
CELEBRATING 10 YEARS

SOUTH DOWNS NEWS



WORK AND PLAY IN YOUR NATIONAL PARK

This month:

- **Top 10 achievements** We look back at some of the highlights of the last decade as we look ahead to the next chapter of the National Park's story.
- **Discover your National Park** Find out details of our ranger roadshows over the Easter holidays that are coming to 10 towns and cities in and around the South Downs.
- **Saddle up** Find out about a new initiative to create self-guided trails for horse riders.
- **Get your boots on!** Put a spring in your step and get outdoors to enjoy the wellbeing benefits.

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

Celebrating 10 years of your National Park

Nature recovery, year-round access to the countryside, restoration of precious landscapes, engaging young people and working with local communities to develop neighbourhood-led planning are among the achievements of the South Downs National Park as it marks its 10th anniversary.

March 31, 2020 will mark exactly a decade since the South Downs National Park was created – a day when 1,600km² of England's most-cherished lowland landscape was designated for the enjoyment of the nation as a special place for natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage.

Ten years on and significant strides have been made to conserve and enhance the National Park, promote opportunities for people to enjoy its special qualities, and to foster the social and economic wellbeing of local communities in the National Park.

As it reaches the milestone, the South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) is reflecting on 10 key



achievements, while now looking forward to the next chapter of the National Park's story.

Margaret Paren, Chair of the South Downs National Park Authority, said: "This is a very important year for the South Downs National Park as we celebrate its 10th anniversary.

"Although we are a young National Park we have achieved much over the past 10 years. This has only been possible thanks to the efforts of our local communities and a wide range of partners, as well as the hard work of volunteers.

"For all their contributions I would like to say a heartfelt 'Thank You'.

“As we look forward to the next 10 years, there are big challenges ahead, particularly from the pressure of global climate change and threats to biodiversity.

“But I am optimistic that the passion people have for this varied and dynamic landscape will remain our strongest asset and their commitment will ensure that the South Downs National Park will remain an important place for people and nature in this crowded corner of England.”

1. Nature recovery on a landscape scale

The SDNPA is providing strategic leadership on nature recovery at a landscape scale, working with partners to develop rich connected habitats for wildlife and diverse, living landscapes for people. Our work has delivered nature recovery across many key habitats and also local successes for rare and endangered wildlife.

Highlights include:

- Working with 11 partners to restore our heathlands and working to restore 12 species of British amphibian and reptile species. A total of 1,200 football pitches worth of heathland will be improved and expanded over the five-year project, which ends next year.
- Restoring “ecosystem engineers” such as the water vole.
- 67 per cent of woodland in National Park is now under active management.
- Engaging with 125 land managers to help protect chalk grassland.

2. Working with farmers and other custodians

The Authority is working with our farmers to contribute to the development of the Government’s new Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS) to ensure that quality local food production can sit alongside sustainable land management that supports work to combat climate change and biodiversity decline.

Highlights include:

- Testing and trailing ELMS (nature-friendly farming) with 120 farms across six collaborative farm clusters.

3. International Dark Sky Reserve

In May 2016 the South Downs National Park became the world’s newest International Dark Sky Reserve. It is now one of only 16 in the world.

Highlights include:

SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

- More than 15,000 people have visited, engaged and learned about the importance of Dark Skies through our annual Dark Skies Festival.

4. Improved access

National Parks are for everyone and we have worked hard to make the South Downs more accessible.

Highlights include:

- 48km of new or resurfaced cycle and multi-user paths have been installed.
- Five Miles Without Stiles routes have been created for families and people with limited mobility.



5. Discovering and sharing our cultural heritage

The South Downs is rich in cultural heritage and tells a tale of settlement for thousands of years. It is a landscape that has inspired some of our greatest artists, writers and composers.

Highlights include:

- The Secrets of the Highwoods project discovered 2,298 sites of archaeological significance showing traces of people who had lived and worked on the South Downs. Seventy five per cent of this had never been recorded.

6. Young People

We want as many young people as possible to be able to visit and learn outdoors in the South Downs and we are working with partners across the National Park to make this happen.

Highlights include:

- 21,177 young people have used the SDNPA’s School Travel Grant to access learning outside since 2013.
- The SDNPA has engaged with 70 per cent of schools in and around the National Park.
- Over 4,500 individuals have started a John Muir award to learn about caring for the environment.

7. Championing the National Park

The National Park has developed a place brand for use by local partners, communities and businesses.

Highlights include:

- 259 projects are now using the National Park’s Shared Identity.

Discover the National Park this Easter

8. Supporting our Communities

In the past 10 years the Authority has invested directly into communities to help them plan for the future.

Highlights include:

- £1.75m invested in 202 community projects across the National Park as part of the Sustainable Communities Fund.



- Through its planning function, £2.9m has been invested through Section 106 agreements, funding 109 projects.
- £2.5m of Community Infrastructure Levy was collected between 2017 and 2019, with £300,000 given to local parish councils to spend and dozens of community projects allocated funding.

9. Planning that delivers on our Purposes and Duty

The Authority has developed an award-winning landscape-led Local Plan and raised the bar in planning design.

Highlights include:

- First-ever South Downs Local Plan formally adopted.
- 56 Neighbourhood Development Plans incorporated in the Local Plan.
- Four national and regional planning awards to recognise excellence.

10. Engaging people with the National Park through volunteering

Volunteers are the lifeblood of much of National Park's conservation work.

Highlights include:

- Over 91,000 different volunteering days a year, supported by many different organisations, to conserve and enhance the National Park.

The South Downs National Park Authority will be unveiling its new Partnership Management Plan, which sets out the priorities and goals for the next five years, on 31 March.

NEXT MONTH: More on nature recovery and 10 biodiversity success stories from the past decade



Ten towns and cities will be visited by a fun ranger roadshow over the Easter holidays to showcase the amazing South Downs National Park.

Co-inciding with the 10th anniversary, the National Park Authority is pulling out all the stops to bring the wonders of the South Downs to communities across the south east.

The free events will be celebrating 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 bushcraft activities. The roadshow is also the perfect opportunity to meet a ranger, learn about wildlife conservation, and get ideas for days-out in the National Park.



The Easter fun ties in with Discover National Parks fortnight, which runs across the UK from 4 April to 19 April.

All the events are free and will run from 11am to 3pm, with no prior booking required.

The full line-up will be:

Monday, April 6 – South Street Square, **Worthing** BN11 3DF.

Heavenly photograph wins people's hearts



It's a picture that's captured the hearts and minds of thousands of people.

As ponies gathered around a tree at sunset in the South Downs National Park, budding photographer Joe James snapped away – and the result was pure magic.

Now his blissful photograph has won the People's Choice Award in the National Park's Annual Photography Competition. "Pony Heaven" received 2,020 unique votes – winning with just over 70 per cent of the online public poll.

Joe ventured to Cissbury Ring, near Worthing, West Sussex, to take the picture as he and his son Simon watched the sun go down.

Joe, a 38-year-old security manager from Horsham, who wins a £100 prize, said: "To win really means the world to me.

"The picture was just a bit of fun initially – I was trying out my new camera. We went up to Cissbury Ring and saw these ponies gathering around the tree. I just thought it was a perfect moment so I captured it straight away. As the sun went down my son and I listened to 'What a wonderful world' by Louis Armstrong on Spotify."

Joe, who is a well-known local advocate for autism awareness, has been taking images for the past two years and has been honing his talent.

"I'm autistic and proud," said the dad-of-two, who has never entered a photo competition before.

"Being autistic also allows me to hyperfocus on photography to really hone this skill so I can get the perfect image."

Commenting on the South Downs National Park, Joe added: "It's that feeling of pure and utter freedom – having that breathing space around me. I can just take it all in and I'm overwhelmed by the beauty."

Tuesday, April 7 – Meridian Shopping Centre, **Havant** PO9 1UN

Wednesday, April 8 – London Road, **Bognor Regis** PO21 1QU

Thursday, April 9 – West Wittering Beach Car Park, **West Wittering** PO20 8AJ

Tuesday, April 14 – Hogmoor Inclosure, **Bordon** GU35 0FJ

Wednesday April 15 – Commercial Road, **Portsmouth** PO1 1BY

Wednesday April 15 – East Street, **Shoreham** BN43 5ZP

Thursday April 16 – The Level, **Brighton** BN1 4ZN

Thursday April 16 – Public Gardens, **Alton** GU34 1JL

Friday April 17 - The Martlets Shopping Centre, **Burgess Hill** RH15 9NN



Laura Warren, Events and Engagement Officer for the South Downs National Park Authority, said: "This is a special year for the National Park and to mark our 10th birthday we wanted to take our roadshow on an extended tour, visiting some new locations.

"The South Downs is such a special landscape and we want to encourage people of all ages to get out and discover it for themselves. This is a great opportunity to learn more about the National Park and get ideas for days-out over the spring and summer.

"Our roadshow will have lots of activities for children and we're hoping it will inspire them to want to find out more about this wonderful place."

For further details see

www.southdowns.gov.uk/discovernationalparks

Calling all riders!

Horse riders are being called upon to help with the creation of a new series of self-guided trails.

The call to action comes as the SDNPA is developing handy downloadable guides that will include some of the best circular routes across Sussex and Hampshire.

The Authority is working with the British Horse Society to produce the guides – and now needs feedback from horse riders.

The Authority is keen to hear from riders about where they like to ride and what their favourite routes are.



Allison Thorpe, who leads on access and recreation for the National Park Authority, said: "The National Park offers some of the best lowland riding opportunities in the UK and we're really excited to be developing this new series of self-guided trails.

"We're keen to get all the information we can from people who regularly ride in the South Downs. This will help us to test out the routes, take photographs and produce the trail guides.

The team is looking for circular trails of between five and 10 miles, but shorter routes will also be considered. The online resources will be available to download, print and share with fellow equestrians

If you'd like to recommend a route, please send Allison the following details:

- Start point – ideally with horsebox parking. See the SDNPA Horsebox Parking guide for up-to-date information.
- The length of ride.
- A short description of the route and a simple map showing the route.

Initially, Allison is keen to hear from riders who use the following areas, but routes in other areas are also welcomed:

- Queen Elizabeth Country Park, Hampshire
- Harting Down, West Sussex
- Heyshott Common, West Sussex
- Eartham Woods, West Sussex
- Seven Sisters Country Park, East Sussex
- East Dean, East Sussex.

Responses can be sent to:

Access@southdowns.gov.uk

All the colours of chalk grassland



Beautiful artwork created by the community to celebrate our chalk grasslands has taken pride of place at The Manor Gym in Brighton.

People were all smiles as the colourful mural took centre stage in the community centre's foyer as part of a new wall to inspire people to get involved with helping the environment.

Hundreds of families from Whitehawk and surrounding areas helped to colour in the canvass during last summer's Wild Chalk event, held at East Brighton Park and organised by the South Downs National Park Authority and Brighton and Hove City Council.

The artwork shows the amazing variety of life found in the chalk grassland habitat around Brighton and Hove – including 29 species of butterfly and rare plants such as the round-headed rampion.

Tanya Saunders, Centre Manager and Director of the charity that runs The Manor Gym, said: "We all really enjoyed the Wild Chalk event last year and the colouring wall was certainly a highlight for a lot of people. We like how the whole community of Whitehawk came together to create this beautiful artwork."

"It's just amazing having the South Downs National Park on our doorstep. We have the South Downs to the left and the sea to the right, so we all feel very lucky to have this nature around us."

Laura Warren, Events and Engagement Officer for the South Downs National Park, said: "Chalk grasslands really are a national gem, sometimes likened to being 'Europe's rainforest' as you can find up to 40 different species in a square metre."

Wild Chalk will return on Sunday, 19 July to East Brighton Park with a packed line-up of fun activities. Details of the event will be announced later this year.

Katy Sherman, Heathlands Reunited Activities and Engagement Officer, said: "We're really pleased to be announcing this new initiative that brings the community together to care for our precious heaths. It combines the tremendous enthusiasm there is locally in Whitehill and Bordon to care for these wildlife havens with the expertise and knowledge of the Heathlands Reunited project.

"Heaths are enjoyed by so many people for appreciating nature, walking, cycling and horse riding. They are extremely important sites for community health and wellbeing, as well as being important military training areas. Everybody who uses the heathlands has a part to play in safeguarding these special sites for future generations to enjoy, and to protect the rare and threatened wildlife that lives there.



"The new Engagement Ranger will be the friendly face of the Commons, bringing people together to care for the heaths and hopefully reaching new

audiences who might not be aware of how amazing these habitats are."

Cllr Andy Tree, Leader of Whitehill Town Council, said: "The Town Council is very happy to be funding a seasonal Engagement Ranger for Broxhead and Kingsley Commons. We have a number of special and rare species in our town council area and protecting our heaths is so important."

If you are interested in linking up with the Seasonal Engagement Ranger and are local to Broxhead and Kingsley Commons please email

heathlands@southdowns.gov.uk to register your interest.

What is Heathlands Reunited?

Heathlands only exist today because of human intervention over thousands of years. This means that if heathlands aren't actively managed by people – by local communities, conservation groups, the National Park Authority or others – they will be lost alongside the rare and endangered species that live there. Today heathland covers just one per cent of the South Downs National Park, mostly separated into small 'islands' where isolated plants and animals are far more vulnerable to local extinction.

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.

New initiative will inspire more people to learn about their local heath



An exciting new partnership is being launched to inspire more people to learn about their local heath and help care for the rare wildlife.

Whitehill Town Council is teaming up with the South Downs National Park's Heathlands Reunited initiative, which is working to protect heathlands that are among the world's rarest habitats.

The Town Council will be funding a seasonal Engagement Ranger for Broxhead and Kingsley Commons, near Bordon. Delivered by the Heathlands Reunited team, the ranger will be onsite from March to September and will be running a series of wildlife identification, guided walks and dog walking activities.

The appointed Engagement Ranger will also be offering talks and site visits to local community groups and schools in the Whitehill and Bordon area.



Both Broxhead and Kingsley Commons are what remain of a vast lowland heathland habitat that once stretched across Hampshire and Sussex and is

now confined to a few isolated pockets. Both are Special Protection Areas and support several rare species such as the European Nightjar, Dartford Warbler, Sand Lizard, and the Silver-studded Blue and Grayling butterflies.

The magic of heaths



Stedham Common – Picture by Mark Couper

Kate Dziubinska, a Ranger for the National Park, explains why heaths hold a special place in her heart.

When asked where my favourite place in the South Downs National Park is, I really struggle to pick just one. Each beauty spot has its own special character that helps to make up our wonderful tapestry of landscape.

However I have come to realise that I am most happy when among tall pine trees and blooming purple heather. To share the feeling I get in these places let me set the scene: on a balmy summer's evening you step on to the heath and feel the setting sun radiate the last of its rays on your skin.

The sandy ground is warm to the touch and hot and cold air pockets weave across the lie of the land. The reptiles and insects that once basked in the sun have returned to their burrows and, as darkness descends, Dartford warblers and stonechats retreat to their gorse bushes, giving way to gently chirring nightjars and hooting tawny owls. Walking through the aromatic heathland, scents of coconut from gorse flowers, honey-like heather, musty bracken and – when nearing the edge of the nearby plantation – sweet pine resin can be smelt. You look up to the tree tops as a gentle breeze echoes through the pine needles and notice the first stars have appeared in what will be a very dark night's sky.

Although this scene depicts the calm of wooded heaths, there's a lot of hard work that goes on behind the scenes to keep them in harmony. The SDNPA works closely with forestry teams to achieve heathland conservation in and around their operations. Simple collaborations such as scraping the ground after tree thinning (heathlands occur on thin nutrient-poor soils) or spreading heather seed can really improve the biodiversity of a plantation. I think everyone should experience the magic of wooded heaths!

Restoring an iconic tree species of England's lowlands



Rangers joined over 20 volunteers as the community came together to plant elm trees that had been lost due to disease.

Saplings were planted in Binsted, West Sussex, as part of a project between Mid Arun Valley Environmental Survey, Arun Countryside Trust and the National Park Authority.

It comes as disease-resistant elm trees are being reintroduced to the landscape following the national decimation of the tree species caused by Dutch Elm Disease.

Ranger Simon Mockford said: "We all know the devastating effect Dutch Elm Disease has had on our elm trees and projects like this offer a glimmer of hope that mature elms will once again be a feature of the landscape in the future.

"Elm trees are also key to the survival of the White-Letter Hairstreak butterfly whose caterpillar feed on the flowers of elm trees.

"The idea for planting the elms at Binsted came from the community and they did all the work in deciding where best to plant them and obtaining landowner permission. It's great when a community project like this comes together."

Julia Plumstead, Chair of MAVES, added: "We feel very privileged to be part of this project to reintroduce these iconic trees to the English landscape. The trees have been planted close to footpaths or on the edge of Binsted Lane where we hope they will be enjoyed and appreciated by many people.

"We will of course, monitor their growth and wellbeing and look forward to watching them mature."

Dark Skies Festival is enjoyed by thousands



More than 3,000 people came to enjoy the Dark Skies Festival to learn more about the amazing stargazing opportunities on their doorstep.

Midhurst Rother College, the venue for the first Stargazing South Downs event, saw a record turnout as more than 1,100 people came to enjoy the cosmic fun. Meanwhile, the National Park's stargazing extravaganza continued to be popular throughout February, with hundreds of people coming to events in Petersfield, Steyning and Lewes.

Partner organisations putting on their own events during the festival, including the National Trust's Petworth House, Butser Ancient Farm, and South Downs Planetarium, also had great success.

After two false starts due to the February storms, the final event saw over 90 people enjoy a special talk by Dark Skies Ranger Dan Oakley in Brighton's i360.



Dan said: "Once we came back down to Earth, we had lots of questions from local people about the best stargazing spots around Brighton, and we were able to signpost them to local astronomy groups such as Brighton Astro to help them further their new-found interest in the night sky."

SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

Christina Szwarc, whose family won a raffle prize of a telescope at the events, said: "The stargazing event was fantastic. My children especially loved the dressing up, the informative talks and the visit to the planetarium.

"Your event sparked a real interest in my eldest boy for stargazing and we now have tickets to go to other observatories in the near future. Thank you for inspiring the next generation."

The winner of the newsletter competition to receive a new telescope worth £150 will be picked this month.

Time is running out to apply for grants



People have just a few weeks left to apply for grant funding from the Volunteer Conservation Fund,

The Volunteer Ranger Service and South Downs National Park Trust, the official charity of the National Park, have opened the Volunteer Conservation Fund for 2020.

The Fund will allocate grants of up to £5,000 annually (£2,000 is the average grant) to projects that enhance the National Park and include practical support of the Volunteer Ranger Service.

Eligible applicants include charities, parish councils, community groups, not-for-profit organisations and landowners.

Full details can be found on

www.southdownstrust.org.uk/vcf

where a short application form can be downloaded.

The deadline for submissions is 31 March.

**SOUTH DOWNS
NATIONAL PARK TRUST
VISIT • GIVE • PROTECT**

Get your boots on and enjoy a springtime family walk!



With the Spring Equinox on the way, Sian Jones, Families Outreach Officer for the National Park, encourages people to walk off the winter cobwebs.

National Workouts and Wellbeing week starts on 23 March and is a great time for families to get out into the National Park for a wellbeing workout.



The Spring Equinox means the days are getting longer and lighter and the school holidays are just around the corner, so there's no excuse not to get outside more!

Taking a walk and connecting with nature are all ways we can improve our wellbeing.

Whether you are walking through woodland, across heathland or beside the sea, try stopping for a moment, closing your eyes and noticing what sounds you can hear.

Listen for the sound of birdsong, leaves rustling in the wind, or perhaps the crash of waves on stones.

As you walk check out how many signs of spring you can see, new leaves beginning to unfurl, the early spring flowers bringing bursts of colour to the hedgerows, birds nesting, frog spawn in ponds and all the different shades of green. Really noticing what's around us when we are out walking in the countryside is great for our wellbeing.

As a family you could each take a photograph of something beautiful that you see on your walk to share with friends when you get home.

SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

Whatever the weather, a walk in the South Downs National Park is good for the wellbeing of everyone in the family.

On our website you will find a selection of walks that are great whether you are going out with a pushchair, a wheelchair or a bike. We also have lots of walks that are easily accessible by public transport.

So put on your boots and come for a wellbeing workout in the South Downs National Park!

Visit www.southdowns.gov.uk/enjoy/walking/



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/



- Calling all runners! A **Coastal Trail Run** takes place on 14 March with amazing views of Seven Sisters and Beachy Head. The route provides awesome views out over the English Channel and the route shoulders the coastal towns of Eastbourne and Seaford in East Sussex which lies in the eastern-most leg of the South Downs National Park.
- Join dog behaviourist Natalie Light and a warden from the RSPB on 14 March for a walk around **Wiggonholt heath** with your dog.
- Listen to a fascinating talk, courtesy of Friends of the South Downs and expert Michael Joseph, on how to grow a **wildflower meadow** on 20 March.
- Join a spring session of **Little Wild Things** at RSPB Pulborough Brooks. This is a nature group aimed at 2 ½ – 5 year olds and sessions include plenty of hands-on, wild activities that encourage children to make a lasting connection with nature.

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.

SIGN UP TO THIS NEWSLETTER

Sign up to receive this newsletter by email every month. With the latest South Downs news, stories, ideas for days out, competitions, to hear about our ranger and volunteers' work and much more.

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