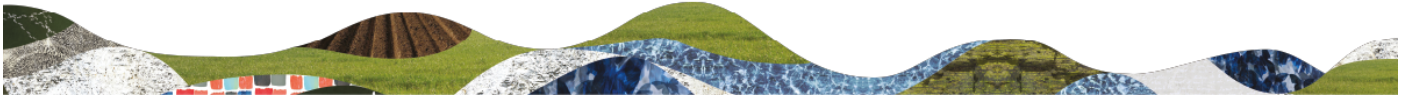


**SOUTH DOWNS  
NATIONAL PARK**  
CELEBRATING 10 YEARS

## SOUTH DOWNS NEWS



This month:

- **Where is your tranquil haven?** Our 2020 photo competition launches this month and, for the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary, we're also opening out the contest to budding young photographers.
- **Helping the recovery** Find out more about the National Park's new COVID-19 Recovery Fund and how your organisation may be able to benefit from support.
- **Tree-mendous!** A fundraising campaign to plant 5,000 trees raises £52k in just six months.
- **Connect with nature as a family** Sign up to a free activities programme to learn about wildlife.

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

## Annual photography contest is launched

**The South Downs National Park photo competition is now open, with a first prize of £250 on offer to the amateur or professional photographer who best captures this year's theme of 'My tranquil haven'.**

To mark the 10th anniversary of the National Park, the photo competition is also being extended this year to include a youth category for budding young photographers.

For the main adult category, judges will be looking for images that showcase the tranquil beauty of the South Downs – whether that be a stunning landscape, woodland, or piece of history.

Those capturing images of the National Park should adhere to the government guidance of social distancing and avoiding busy hotspots.

The top prize for the adult category will be £250, with a runner-up prize of £150 and third prize of £50.

There will also be a wildlife sub-category, with judges looking for images capturing the amazing wildlife of



*Into the Mystic by Andrew Gambling – 2019 competition winner*

the South Downs and the winner in the adult category will receive £100.

Meanwhile, there will be two further categories for budding young photographers – 10 years and under and 11 to 17. There will be a winner for the main theme of 'My Tranquil Haven', as well as best wildlife image, and the winner of each of these categories will receive a Colombia outdoors rucksack and a Colombia beanie.

Award-winning photographers Rachael Talibart and Finn Hopson are returning once again to judge the

## Wild chalk extravaganza returns this summer - virtually!



**Chalk grassland is one of the most unique and beautiful wildlife habitats on the planet.**

With its blanket of colourful wildflowers and incredible butterfly diversity, it's such a special part of the South Downs National Park.

So we're pleased to be bringing a six-day celebration of chalk grassland from Sunday 19 July.

The virtual event will be packed with videos and quizzes for people of all ages to have fun and learn more about this rare habitat.

### Take part!

Details of the virtual Wild Chalk event will be announced in the next newsletter. Please also follow the National Park's social media channels and check out

[www.southdowns.gov.uk](http://www.southdowns.gov.uk) where the programme will be published.



2020 competition and the panel welcomes acclaimed Lewes-based photographer Carlotta Luke.

Nick Heasman, Countryside and Policy Manager at the South Downs National Park, who chairs the judging panel, said: "We're excited to be able to launch our 2020 photo competition and it comes at a time when many people will be venturing into the outdoors for the first time to discover all the joys of spring and summer. Our priority is that people stay safe while taking photographs so please do follow the government guidelines of strict social distancing, avoiding busy hotspots and respecting local communities and farmers.

"The Covid-19 pandemic continues to be an extremely challenging time for everyone. During these difficult times, our wonderful National Park remains a tranquil haven, with the power to uplift people with the sight of a stunning vista, a beautiful bird or a shimmering dew pond.

"Photography has the ability to bring joy to all ages and we're looking forward to seeing images that really brighten people's days."

Nick added: "This year's competition is dedicated to the memory of our long-standing judge Steve Watkins, who sadly passed away last year. We know he was passionate about helping young people get into photography and that's why we wanted to add a youth category this year."

Rachael Talibart said: "I can't wait to see all the wonderful photos celebrating this very special place that means so much to me."

Those wishing to go out and take photographs should visit the National Park's website page at [www.southdowns.gov.uk/national-park-authority/our-work/coronavirus-covid-19-update/](http://www.southdowns.gov.uk/national-park-authority/our-work/coronavirus-covid-19-update/) for advice on how to stay safe.

Entries close on Friday 23 October. Find out more and download the entry form at [www.southdowns.gov.uk/enter-the-south-downs-photo-competition/](http://www.southdowns.gov.uk/enter-the-south-downs-photo-competition/)



*Pony Heaven by Joe James – People's Choice winner 2019*



# COVID-19 Recovery Fund gets green light



**A COVID-19 Recovery Fund of £375,000 has been approved by the South Downs National Park Authority to help support local communities and step up the National Park's role as a 'natural health service'.**

Members of the National Park Authority voted to approve the release of funds at an Authority meeting.

The fund, from earmarked reserves, will be used to help support projects across the National Park as organisations and businesses make steps to move into the recovery phase of the COVID-19 pandemic. It will also help to maximise opportunities for people to connect with the National Park and its many health and wellbeing benefits.

The funding has been split into five priority themes: landscape and biodiversity, cultural heritage, sustainable access, connecting people and communities, and economy and tourism, with an additional, smaller amount going towards engaging more people with the National Park during this unprecedented time. These priority themes together deliver on the two statutory Purposes of the National Park as set by Government:

- Purpose 1: To conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the area.
- Purpose 2: To promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the National Park by the public.

Trevor Beattie, Chief Executive of the South Downs National Park Authority, said: "People need National Parks now more than ever and I'm firmly of the belief that they have a vital job in the nation's healing process through all their positive impacts on physical and mental health.

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"The current situation is having a profound effect on South Downs communities, local businesses, farmers, landowners, museums and visitor destinations and these impacts are likely to continue for some time.

"Leading collaboration across partners in Hampshire and Sussex, the South Downs National Park Authority has an important role to play in supporting the recovery and helping to ensure that communities survive and thrive.

"It's still early days and there are uncertain times ahead, but this Recovery Fund provides a positive step forward, laying the foundation to help revive communities amid an unprecedented challenge.



"Carefully-targeted interventions from the National Park Authority, working alongside other public bodies, may help to rebuild confidence and capacity. There may also be opportunities for the South Downs economy to become more sustainable and resilient post-pandemic, with longer-term interventions that support net zero carbon, local supply chains and help nature flourish."

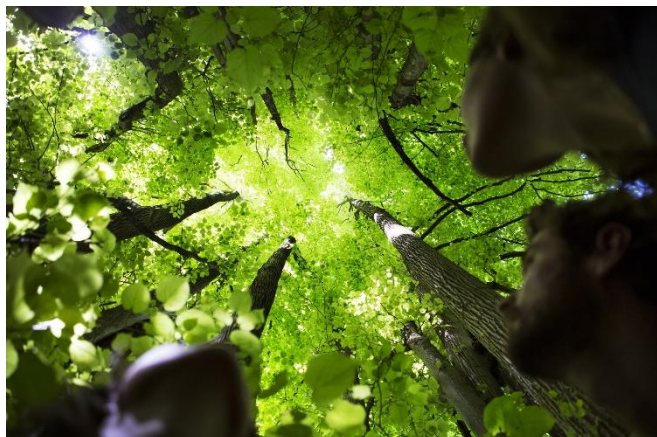
And Trevor added: "The creation of this Recovery Fund responds positively to the Government's Landscapes Review last year. In essence, we want our most cherished landscapes like the South Downs to fulfil National Parks' original mission for people – as places providing unrivalled opportunities for enjoyment and supporting the nation's health and wellbeing."

Funds will be disbursed through the Authority's existing project allocation mechanisms – Theme Programme Boards. Each board will receive an additional £70,000 to help support projects. A further £25,000 has been allocated to help increase engagement with the public during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Certain projects may be prioritised for funding support, such as those helping partner organisations with under 49 employees or those partners not receiving other emergency funding. Priority will also be given to those projects that help deliver the National Park's Partnership Management Plan 2020-2025, which includes outcomes around wildlife recovery, enabling more young people to access the National Park and making the National Park a better home for both people and nature.

**Interested in receiving support from the Recovery Fund?** Expressions of interest are being taken over the coming weeks. Please email [recovery@southdowns.gov.uk](mailto:recovery@southdowns.gov.uk) to make initial contact.

# Celebrating our magical woodlands for World Environment Day



**A majestic tawny owl in full flight, a rare barbastelle bat and a gorgeously-cute hazel dormouse are the stars of a new series of films celebrating the woodlands of the South Downs.**

The National Park marked World Environment Day on Friday, 5 June with three films that showcase the trees, animals and people who make woodlands such beautiful, enchanting and life-giving places.

The first video is a treat for wildlife-lovers, with stunning close-up footage of birds, mammals and insects. The second focuses on the Guardians of the Woodland – a unique insight into the people who help manage woodlands and ensure they remain special places.

The third film is a fascinating account of forester Nina Williams, who recalls how her lifelong passion for woods came from her childhood adventures at Kingley Vale's 2,000-year-old yew forests.

Nick Heasman, Countryside and Policy Manager at the South Downs National Park and who narrates in the films, said: "It's wonderful to be able to share these films with the public and we hope they inspire and educate people about just how amazing our woodlands are."



"When people think of the South Downs they think of its rolling chalk grasslands. But follow the Downs west and pasture gives way to some of the richest and most diverse woodland in the country.

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"Trees actually cover almost a quarter of the National Park – more woodland than any other National Park in England or Wales.

"No two woodlands in the South Downs are the same and each is home to a unique cast of trees and animals.

"These films are not just about woods, though. They are also about the people who are the stewards of these amazing places, revealing the physical, economic and spiritual connection people have with woodlands. There's a sense of belonging to the landscape that is reflected in a remarkable symbiosis – of woods shaped by people and people shaped by woods."



Woodsman and eco-builder Ben Law, who makes his living from around 100 acres of mainly coppice woodland, said: "People have a really important role to play in South Downs woods – particularly coppice woodland. If you take people out of the coppicing cycle, the biodiversity decreases. The coppice grows tall and becomes high forest and the light doesn't get through and flowers, that are food for the insects, don't appear. By cutting the coppice we're starting to see an increase in wildflowers, the butterflies coming back and a really nice mix of birds.

"My time in the woods is just like the flicker of a leaf. These woods have been here thousands of years and will go on way beyond me and probably all of us. So it's small time frame I'm here but you can make a big impact by passing something on in a better condition than when you started."

And Nick added: "The woods of the South Downs National Park are our life support – providing us with oxygen, carbon storage, timber and incredible places to explore and enjoy. They are a precious resource under increased threat from climate change and pests, so it's vital that they are carefully managed."

World Environment Day is the United Nations day for encouraging worldwide awareness and action to protect our environment.

You can watch the videos in the [news section](#) of the South Downs National Park's website.



# How Nina's childhood adventures inspired a passion for our wonderful woodlands



**The gnarled trees are among the oldest living things in Europe – beginning their lives some 2,000 years ago at a time when Roman legionaries were first landing on England's southern shores.**

Countless generations since then have looked in awe and wonder at the yew forest of the South Downs at Kingley Vale – a fittingly regal name for such an enchanting place.

One of those children captivated by the woods was Nina Williams.

Fast forward 30 years and those childhood adventures have inspired a life-long passion for caring for our woodlands.

Nina's story is featured in a beautiful short film that celebrates the woodlands of the South Downs National Park and reveals the important role foresters play as custodians of this delicately-balanced ecosystem.

To give it some context, the South Downs has more woodland than any other National Park in England or Wales – with 23 per cent of the National Park being covered by this habitat. So the careful management of these vast treescapes is vital for both people and nature.

Nina, who is Head Forester of the Cowdray Estate in West Sussex, says: "I was very lucky to grow up near the woods at Kingley Vale and coming back to this landscape really does feel like coming home. It's so lovely and just a great place to play when I was a child.

"At the top of the hill are these yew forests that are dark and foreboding and feel truly ancient. It was really

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quite thrilling as a kid and it inspired me to do what I do now.

"A woodlands character changes throughout the seasons and it's one of the most fascinating qualities of any woodland. You really get a sense of that slow heartbeat that is part of forestry and a woodland. It perseveres and is to be respected."

A key aspect of Nina's role is the "trifecta" of forestry – commerce, biodiversity and recreation.

Nina explains that the woodland landscape requires active management in order to be healthy and meet those three purposes.

She explains: "When we manage woodlands we're thinking about productive aspects of harvesting the trees for timber and various woodland products. Then there's also the very important biodiversity and habitat management. The third element is looking at the recreational and societal benefits as well. All three are equally important and need to be managed in a balance.

"One of the challenges I face in forestry is that perception of 'Why are you cutting down trees?'



"At Cowdray we plant at least 50,000 trees each and every year and that's a process of restocking every single area that we have felled trees in. The work I do is about managing these wonderful vistas, views and forests and making sure they are just as healthy, productive and biodiverse for the next person who has to look after them."

The South Downs National Park Authority is working with foresters like Nina to increase the resilience of the National Park's natural resources, habitats and species so they adapt to climate change and other environmental pressures.

Nina's video is the second instalment of "Your National Park", a series of short films about the South Downs to mark the National Park's 10th anniversary. The clips feature dedicated local heroes of the National Park, including foresters, farmers, historians and local people, who collectively are helping to care for this special place and ensure it will be there for future generations to enjoy. Each hero represents one of the outcomes of the **Partnership Management Plan** – which reveals 10 key objectives for the future of the National Park.

# National Park introduces inspiring scheme to connect families with nature



**An exciting new initiative has launched to help connect families with the joys of nature through fun learning activities.**

Inspired by the “founding father” of the National Park movement, John Muir, the South Downs National Park is announcing a new scheme that will help families learn more about the amazing natural environment.

Whether at home, in the local park, or in the area of the National Park near where they live, families will be able to do a range of nature-based activities and work their way towards a Family John Muir Award.

The South Downs National Park Authority has teamed up with conservation charity John Muir Trust to run the prestigious internationally-recognised environmental award, which is focused on connecting with and caring for wild places.

Supported by the South Downs National Park Trust, the activities programme is fully adaptable for each family’s circumstances, whether they are shielding vulnerable family members, have access to green space or not, or going to work or school.

All people have to do over the next few months is 25 hours or more of fun activities which help them discover, explore and do something to care for a wild place, and then share the experience with others.

Those who sign up will be sent regular ‘ideas’ newsletters that will be full to the brim with activities to choose from.

Example activities include:

- Building a “bug” hotel in your garden.

- Growing something you can eat on your windowsill at home.
- Watching a wildlife video about the National Park.
- Going for a walk in the local park and surveying birds and other wildlife seen en-route.
- Nature-based craft activities such as making a wild snake bookmark.
- Finding how many different shaped leaves there are in your local green space.
- Sharing your discoveries with others by text, film, over the phone, or through social media.

Siân Jones, Families Outreach Officer for the South Downs National Park, said: “We’re really pleased to be launching this new initiative which will inspire people of all ages to connect with nature and take a more active role in caring for it.



“Along the way families will also discover more about the legendary John Muir and explore the wonders of the South Downs National Park – whether that be immersing themselves in its natural splendour or from the comfort of their homes. The beauty of this awards programme is its flexibility. So your wild place might be a window box, your garden, the tree outside your window, the plants that grow through the cracks in the paving stones, or the park around the corner. This is the opportunity to get to know more about the wildlife that is right on people’s doorsteps.”

Families who complete the 25 hours of activities will receive a special certificate to recognise their achievement.

The award can be completed indoors or outdoors and participants should follow the advice of “restraint, responsibility and respect” on enjoying the National Park safely: [www.southdowns.gov.uk/national-park-authority/our-work/coronavirus-covid-19-update/](http://www.southdowns.gov.uk/national-park-authority/our-work/coronavirus-covid-19-update/)

For more details and to sign up to the initiative [www.southdowns.gov.uk/learning/achieve-the-family-john-muir-award-from-home/](http://www.southdowns.gov.uk/learning/achieve-the-family-john-muir-award-from-home/)



## Saying a big thank you



Every June 1 to 7 the voluntary sector says thank you to volunteers across the UK. In 2020 it has been decided that, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, a change of tone is required. Volunteers' Week will not be celebrated in the same way as usual out of respect to the current situation surrounding the pandemic.

We would like to thank all who have volunteered their time in the past three months to support people in their local communities in the South Downs and further afield. In mid-March we found ourselves in a state of crisis and people rallied to give their time in support of other people threatened by Covid-19. Volunteering has become a key part of people's lives in the UK, and evidence suggests people want to continue to help.

While we, like all other National Parks and partner organisations, have taken the decision to pause volunteer groups until it is safe to resume, we would like to express our thanks to our volunteers and those across the South Downs National Park for their support.

In 2019 volunteers donated over 4,000 days towards the purposes of the National Park, contributing more than 24,000 hours of their time collectively. Though the National Park will be missing the impact of volunteers, we all know there will be plenty to be getting on with when the time is right and it is safe for our groups to meet again. In the meantime we hope the amazing volunteer and community response to the Covid-19 pandemic will set a benchmark of the role for volunteers in civil society.

It should be a reminder that when times are hard there are people who want to help. We also hope this will inspire young people, people from under-represented communities, and people who were unaware of ways to become a volunteer, to donate their time, energy, skills and knowledge to support the many important causes in need of support in the UK.

**Daniel Greenwood, Volunteering Development Officer**

## Stay safe on the coast



### Walkers are being urged to stay safe along the Sussex coast this summer.

Since Government guidance changed to allow people to travel for unlimited exercise, there has been an increase in visitors to the area's iconic white chalk cliffs.

People are being reminded of the serious risk the unstable cliffs pose to those getting too close to the edge or walking at the base of the cliffs, and beach walkers who get cut off by the tide.

Last month there was a cliff fall in Peacehaven, the rescue of a visitor stuck at the base of the cliff after being cut off from the tide in Seaford, and people posing for a selfie at the edge of the cliff in Eastbourne.

The safety messages are part of an ongoing joint campaign being promoted by East Sussex County Council, HM Coastguard, The National Trust, South Downs National Park Authority, Sussex Wildlife Trust, Seaford Town Council, Wealden District Council, Eastbourne Borough Council and Lewes District Council.

Councillor Claire Dowling, East Sussex County Council's lead member for environment and transport, said: "Nearly 50,000 tonnes of cliff has crashed on to the beach below in recent years which is why it is so important that, while enjoying the beauty of the coast, people understand the dangers and take every possible precaution to stay safe. I would strongly urge people to stay well away from both the cliff edge and the base of the cliffs when walking on the beach. I would also encourage people to check tide times before setting out as it is possible to get cut off by the incoming tide or be forced to walk beneath the cliffs."

The South Downs National Park Authority is asking those visiting the National Park to exercise the three Rs – restraint, responsibility and respect and, where people can, to keep the journey car-free by visiting on foot or bike. People should also avoid popular hotspots. With 3,300km of rights of way, there is plenty of space to visit the National Park safely. If you arrive at a site that is already busy, please find an alternative.

# South Downs tourism sector pulls together for recovery preparations



**The South Downs National Park Authority is working with partners on recovery plans to help revive the region's important tourism sector.**

Over 360 people from the Sussex tourism sector have virtually come together to discuss the myriad of challenges facing the sector, including restoring consumer confidence, finding innovative revenue streams, adapting to social distancing measures and the use of technology in tourism.

With many venues and sites only re-opening when it is safe to do so, the focus has been on ensuring the sector continues to get the support it needs and is able to “survive, revive and thrive”.

The strong collaboration comes as a new report underlines the value of the visitor economy in the South Downs.

It comes as English Tourism Week this year focused on the theme of supporting the recovery of English tourism and raising awareness of the importance of the sector to the UK economy.

The independent study into trends, commissioned by the Authority and showing the latest-available data, shows direct expenditure by visitors went up by over seven per cent – from just over £304.39m in 2017 to £327.25m in 2018. The overall economic value was £436.81m in 2018 – up by over seven per cent from £406.12m in 2017.

The sector employed 5,775 people in 2018 – a rise of six per cent from 5,426 in 2017.

The data also shows that the number of visitors rose to 19.08m in 2018 – up from 18.88m in 2017.

Kat Beer, who leads sustainable tourism for the South Downs National Park, said: “There’s no doubt that the tourism, heritage and hospitality sector has been hit

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extremely hard and there are still uncertain times ahead.

“During this unprecedented time, I think it’s really important the sector pulls together and that’s why we are collaborating with partners across the region and across a variety of niches within the visitor economy.

“The South Downs is still a relatively young National Park and still developing its sustainable tourism offer, but these new statistics are very encouraging.

“Our focus has not been looking for a big rise in visitor numbers, rather an increase in expenditure and employment, and this data clearly shows some very positive growth. As we mark English Tourism Week, it underlines the value of the South Downs tourism sector to the economy.”

The webinar project is being curated by Experience West Sussex, Sussex Chamber of Commerce, Coast2Capital Growth Hub and the South Downs National Park Authority.

Two Sussex MPs, Andrew Griffith, of Arundel, and Sally-Ann Hart, of Hastings and Rye, attended the first webinar.

Kat added: “The safety of our visitors and those living and working in the National Park remains our priority and the Government guidelines



remain to stay at home as much as possible. That means it may be some time before ‘tourism’ as we know it returns.

“However, we’re looking at the long-term recovery picture and part of that could mean people spending more time locally, visiting attractions nearby and an increase in staycations.

“When it is safe to do so, this could present a real opportunity to help the recovery of visitor attractions and hospitality businesses in the South Downs.

“We will be working closely with partners across the sector to help facilitate this recovery.”

Visitor attractions are looking into adapting their operations with new social distancing arrangements and if people are planning a visit they should check with the business before they travel to ensure they are open.



# Tree-mendous! Campaign to plant 5,000 trees goes from strength to strength



**An inspiring campaign to plant 5,000 trees across the South Downs National Park is edging closer to smashing its fundraising target – and now expressions of interest for planting are being taken.**

Trees for the Downs was launched during National Tree Week at the end of November and, in just six months, £52,000 has been raised from donations and gifts. The campaign is aiming to raise £61,500 to restore trees that have been lost over the past few decades, including those to Ash Dieback and Dutch Elm Disease.

While the fundraising continues in earnest, the South Downs National Park Trust is now in a position to be able to open the initial online application process.

The Trust, the official charity of the National Park, would be looking to carry out the planting over the winter and is seeking to identify suitable projects that will provide benefits to people, wildlife and the landscape of the South Downs.

Leading horticultural experts from Hillier will be growing and nurturing the trees for the Trust to deliver to the community.

Nick Heasman, Countryside and Policy Manager who heads the National Park's woodlands team, said: "We're really excited to have raised £52,000 in six months and I'd like to thank each and every person, business and organisation who has made a donation so far. I think it underlines the love people have for trees in the South Downs. Whether a dense enchanting

woodland, or a single tree immersed in the rolling landscape or on a village road, our trees are synonymous

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with the beauty of the South Downs and also critical to its community and ecological value.

"With 85 per cent of the funding secured, we can open the online application process and we're interested to hear from anyone who wants to plant trees in the South Downs – trees of any size, and planting at any scale, in towns, villages, or in the countryside.

"Priority will be given to those planting trees that will provide benefits to people, wildlife and the landscape of the National Park. So the trees being planted should be visible from a public place, such as the footpath or highway, and provide benefit to wildlife in the South Downs.

"We've still got a little way to get to the finish line of fundraising, so help us get there by donating if you can!"

A full list of criteria for consideration can be found on the application website page. Applicants should have control of the land, or permission from the landowner, as well as any other permissions that might relate to the land being planted. Eligible projects must be within the boundary of the National Park.

And Nick added: "Trees for The Downs will be an historic replanting initiative as the National Park marks its 10th anniversary. Our focus continues to 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.

"This initiative aims to create a lasting legacy, benefiting communities as they watch these new trees grow and flourish in the years ahead."

Disease-resistant elm will be key in the replanting as, ecologically speaking, it is the closest match to ash and supports many of the same insect and butterfly species. However, Trees for the Downs will be looking at a range of native species for the replanting, with the emphasis on the 'right tree in the right place'.

For more information and to find out about making an expression of interest visit

[www.southdownstrust.org.uk/trees-fund/](http://www.southdownstrust.org.uk/trees-fund/)

To donate visit [www.southdownstrust.org.uk/trees-for-the-downs/](http://www.southdownstrust.org.uk/trees-for-the-downs/)



## Get creative for nature!



### **A new environmental art competition has opened for children and young people.**

Sussex Green Living and the South Downs National Park Trust have joined forces for “Clean Up & Create”, a competition for five to 16 year olds in Sussex and Hampshire.

The initiative has been made possible thanks to a grant from The Boltini Trust.

Julie Fawcett, Chair of the South Downs National Park Trust, said “Young people are the future custodians of national gems such as the South Downs and this is a fantastic way to inspire them”

The aim is to encourage young people to design some artwork with a powerful message to raise awareness of the environment and represent the theme of a bright new future they want for the world.

There are two categories to choose from in each age group:

- An eco-art sculpture - using litter, recycling and unwanted items, the focus of the creation and thought-provoking message is the children's choice. There is no size limit.
- A poster – youngsters can use litter if they wish but not compulsory. Once again, the focus of the poster and message are up to the children but it must portray either challenges to the environment and/or solutions. There is no size limit.

There are 16 prizes of £150 to be won and the competition closes on 10 July.

Carrie Cort, from Sussex Green Living, said: “The pause in our lives has given everyone the opportunity to reflect and learn how quickly nature recovers when there's less human activity. We hope this competition will encourage young people to use their imaginations to engage with nature and the environment.”

For more information and to enter visit [www.southdownstrust.org.uk/clean-up/](http://www.southdownstrust.org.uk/clean-up/)

## Let's work together to prevent wildfires



### ***With a potentially hot summer on the way, Katy Sherman, Engagement Officer for the Heathlands Reunited project, looks at the dangers of wildfires and how we can prevent them.***

You may have seen the devastating consequences recently of heathland wildfires in Dorset and Surrey. It's hard not to be emotionally moved by these incidents when you consider the impact on delicate eco-systems that have taken hundreds of years to harmonise. There will inevitably be warmer, drier spells this summer and heathland sites will be at a high fire risk.

Therefore it's important we all take precautions to keep the fire risk to a minimum. It's all about being environmentally responsible and understanding that you should “leave no trace” when visiting these wonderfully diverse habitats!

So a few tips:

- Don't have barbecues at heathland sites, nature reserves, or woodlands. The land is often tinder dry and one spark is sometimes all it takes to start a major fire. Only use barbecues in suitable and safe areas and never leave them unattended.
- Avoid using open fires in the countryside
- Sunlight shining through glass can start large fires - take glass bottles/jars home.
- Only picnic in designated areas
- Never throw cigarette ends out of car windows – they can ruin whole fields of crops

Very different to wildfires are controlled burns. They can be a management technique on heathland to remove mature plants, creating regeneration of new heather and grass shoots. These are only ever carried out by skilled, trained members of staff who carefully establish a burning plan.