

# DOWNLAND THYMES

NEWS FOR THE SOUTH DOWNS VOLUNTEER  
RANGER SERVICE ISSUE 89 | AUTUMN 2020





# CHAIRMAN'S CORNER

Hello fellow volunteers. I hope that you and your families are all well.

It seems really strange messaging again when there has been so little occurring in the volunteer world.

I'd like to thank everyone who filled out the volunteer survey in relation to Covid perception and the potential for unlocking. This information will prove invaluable for determining acceptable options for safe working.

As I've said before, the volunteer offering is at the behest of land owners, partner organisations and the National Park Authority (SDNPA). Amongst us as a group of volunteers there will be a whole range of views about how we view the risk to us as individuals. We've seen this amongst the population as a whole. Some people are happy to go on holiday abroad whilst others fear going to the shops. We must be understanding of everyone's needs and find an outcome that is workable. Recognising and managing everyone's needs in these untested times is a tricky balancing act.

Over this period the committee and I are gently acting as critical friends to the SDNPA, working to understand what a safe resolution might mean. I am really pleased with the support that has been provided by the SDNPA in terms of the constant reassessment of risk and in devising options for the future.

We are engaged in some really interesting discussions about the volunteer development plan and opportunities for the future. Exactly what this will look like is

a challenge in this seemingly ever moving pandemic landscape but talking through the options and possibilities is really exciting and interesting.

I'd like to say a few thank yous whilst I can. I'd like to thank Daniel Greenwood for pulling together some excellent educational material during lockdown. I'd like to thank the rangers for maintaining contact through their regular messages, in particular the fascinating articles that they've been sharing about some of the wildlife and cultural heritage of the area, as well as some personal ranger reflections on life in the times of Covid. I have learned so much over the last few months. My personal favourite was a little article that was shared about aphids. And another about a world war one airship station, that has long since disappeared but became a significant part of local life in the Willingdon area during that period. I do like boring people with those 'did you know facts'. Some of these articles have proven to be invaluable material for socially distanced wine drinking conversation. I like to call it 'advocacy' for the National Park. I've not sought feedback from my friends and neighbours as to what they call it. I'm not sure I want to know.

I am really conscious of the time and effort that has gone into providing this material and won't make promises that are not mine to make, but I'd really like to keep these educational opportunities going in one form or another as we move forwards. It has really added some depth to my appreciation of the region and the landscape we are helping to protect.



On a personal note I've been invited, by the committee treasurer, Jeremy Nason to meet him for a socially distanced visit to some of the significant sites across the National Park. We've been waiting for the right point in time to meet. It now feels as though we can achieve this safely, legally and morally. Some committee members have never met, having been elected post lockdown. Jeremy and I were elected treasurer and chair just as lockdown took hold. We've Zoomed and Skyped over the last few months but not met in person. We'll not be doing any physical work, until we get the green light but we can at least start to get to know one another, visit a few outdoor sites and take the opportunity to appreciate the work that has been going on in our absence.

All being equal I hope to report on how this goes in future editions of the Downland Thymes.

My best regards and thanks for your continued patience.

STEVE BROOKMAN  
VRS CHAIR

# NATURE'S BOUNTY

WHAT A BIZARRE SPRING AND SUMMER WE HAVE ALL HAD. HOPEFULLY THIS SEPTEMBER'S EDITION OF DOWNLAND THYMES FINDS YOU ALL WELL AND HAPPY, ADJUSTING TO THE CURRENT 'NEW NORMAL'.

At the time of writing this we are all enjoying a lovely stretch of sunny weather which is doing a great job of keeping spirits high and allowing us all to enjoy our gardens or the stunning National Park. This much needed connection with the natural world helps us process or escape the world's problems.

As we transition from summer into autumn, this is a great time of year to explore the hedgerows for some of nature's bounty. Blackberries are spectacular this year with bushes laden with berries. I'm sure many of you have your tried and tested jam recipes but this BBC Goodfood blackberry jam is an easy, beginner option – [bbcgoodfood.com/recipes/blackberry-jam](https://www.bbcgoodfood.com/recipes/blackberry-jam). Other top favourite uses in our house is the classic apple and blackberry crumble, blackberry smoothies and of course the simple, "chuck some berries in a bowl of hot porridge".

Along with laden hedgerows the cooler (and probably wetter!) weather will see the woodland floors come alive with various mushrooms and fungi. Our resident fun-guy Daniel Greenwood has written a great article on page 4 about how hunter



gatherers in the Mesolithic period used fungi to help light fires. We also have a fascinating article about the beautifully named slime mould – neither an animal, plant or fungi but a whole separate organism! And there's a rare finding of the silky rosegill mushroom in a Polegate cemetery. How lucky are we to live, work or volunteer in a landscape that gives us so much!

Whenever appreciating the gifts nature gives us we must remember that birds, mammals and insects all rely on nature's bounty to survive, especially in the colder months. Please always leave lots of berries on the hedges and if foraging for mushrooms only pick those that you are 100% sure are edible and always leave some in the ground – they play a vital ecological role which we must not destroy.

We hope you enjoy this edition of Downland Thymes, thank you to everyone who has submitted some words, photos or musings. The deadline for articles for the December edition is the end of October.

REBECCA SAUNDERS  
EDITOR



# UPDATE FROM THE VOLUNTEERING TEAM

Thank you to everyone who has kept in touch throughout the spring and summer. I hope you are all doing well and that you are adapting to the new social landscape we find ourselves in.



It's great to know that soon volunteers will be able to undertake autumn tasks to support the conservation and wider public enjoyment of the National Park. I know that you have had to wait a long time and I'm sure it will be a good feeling meeting up again with fellow volunteers and the staff you volunteer with. It is inevitable that your experience will be different to how it has been before so there will be a need to adapt to the new circumstances. It's an evolving situation and we will look to develop the best possible experience for volunteers. Keep an eye on the weekly Monday email for all the details about how things will work.

We had a great response to the volunteering survey which we sent out back in the early summer. The evidence is that the majority of respondents are happy to get back out there volunteering, with concerns mostly focused around social distancing and getting around. For those who aren't able or comfortable to volunteer just yet, you have our full support. For those who will be returning sooner, it's important to remember to please give other people the minimum of two metres that is advised. That is the main concern for returning volunteers. There should be plenty of space out there for you to keep your distance!

Situations like this throw up new challenges, as we have all seen, and we're committed to using the need to change to find improvements in volunteering. We will be giving volunteers another opportunity to feedback on how volunteering is working for you in the new way of operating.

Autumn is a special time, especially for those of us who are a little bit intolerant to full sun! It's a time when the birds are on the move, with summer visitors heading back south to parts of Europe and Africa. From northern Europe, places like Siberia and Scandinavia, we'll be welcoming geese and ducks to reserves like Pulborough Brooks and redwings

and fieldfares to the woods and fields of the Low Weald. As the Downs can be so cold and inhospitable in the winter, smaller birds will move down into the lower-lying fields, woods, gardens, towns and villages.

It's also a special time because the mushroom peak will be arriving in November. Hopefully you can find some inspiration in learning about previous residents of the Downs' non-culinary uses for fungi.

All the best from me and the volunteering team, wishing you all well.

DANIEL GREENWOOD  
VOLUNTEER DEVELOPMENT OFFICER





# HOW HUNTER GATHERERS USED FUNGI TO KEEP THE FIRES BURNING

I recently took an online archaeology course through the website *FutureLearn*. I was delighted to find that one of the sections was focused on ancient uses for fungi! I think some of this will be of interest to volunteers as well.

The course explores the Mesolithic (Middle Stone Age) archaeological site of Star Carr in North Yorkshire. The fungi section of the course covers the species discovered at the site and what they might have been used for by the people living there between 15,000 and 5,000 years ago.

I thought that for those of you having to make fires as part of your conservation tasks, you'd be interested in some species that could help on those cold winter mornings.

The findings from Star Carr have taught me about how these fungi were used by our ancient ancestors. Perhaps most interestingly, the fungi found were largely there because they had been foraged from elsewhere. Star Carr is a site next to a lake, so any woodland surrounding it will have been wet and it's likely the people living there travelled to other places to gather fungi. There is evidence of the trading of ornaments and other items from across Europe, so people were not confined to the area itself in the way we live now.

The fungal finds at Star Carr have produced specimens of species of bracket such as hoof fungus, willow bracket and birch polypore. This doesn't include the species known as cramp balls or King Alfred's cakes. From experience, this is the fungus that people in Britain today most recognise as one which can be used in the process of making fire. The fungus gets its most evocative name of King Alfred's cakes after an English folk story.

It is based on the tale of King Alfred who was exiled in the Somerset Levels during the Viking invasion of Winchester in 878 AD. Alfred failed to keep an eye on a peasant's loaves of bread that were in the oven and they burned. It is said that the woman had no idea he was the king, so far removed was he from his throne.

Birch polypore or razorstrop fungus is a very common species where it acts to control population density. It plays a crucial ecological role in that it breaks birch trees

down into nutrients and minerals, and therefore a substrate which can become soil. Fungi in woodlands are life-giving organisms. As a resource it was once used to sharpen tools in the manner of a leather strop, but it is also very useful in its ability to burn slowly and for long periods. This would have been crucial for people who were travelling and needed to make regular camps as we know Mesolithic people did.

Birch is an incredible resource. Like fungi, it can be used to make fire. There is no doubt that birch will have been used by hunter-gatherers for this purpose. The bark was used to make slippers, matting, boxes, even canoes. At Star Carr birch bark rolls were discovered. The evidence is that they were cut from a tree and would have been used as torches. The 'tar' inside birch bark could have been extracted and used to secure flint arrow heads. Nowadays it's known for being able to make birch wine when the sap begins to run in spring.

Hoof fungus, so named because it looks like a horse's hoof, appears to be a key species in Mesolithic Europe. It's present across the northern hemisphere so it will also have been of use to Native American people. It has another common name of tinder fungus. An important material deriving from hoof fungus is amadou. This is the spongy inside of hoof fungus that can be used to make embers. This video by the team at Star Carr shows how it can be used, along with pyrite, to make a fire. This is exactly what people in Mesolithic times would have done. Here's a video showing how the process works: [youtu.be/2KvKNN1Mte8](https://youtu.be/2KvKNN1Mte8)

It just goes to show how resourceful people were in the Stone Age. It also reminds us of how important fungi has been to us, not just on the ecological level of recycling organic matter and its place in the woodland ecosystem. It helped to keep people warm and therefore alive.

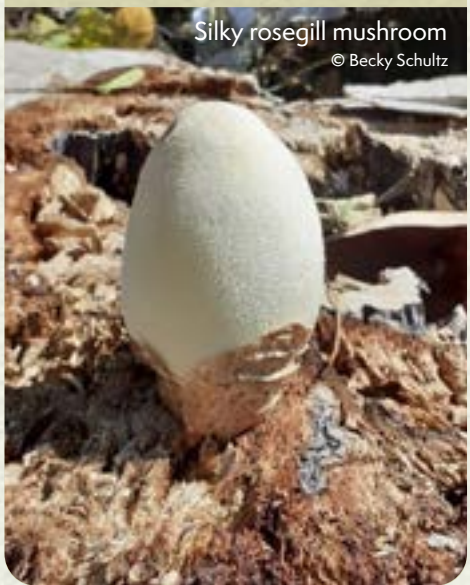
DANIEL GREENWOOD  
VOLUNTEER DEVELOPMENT OFFICER



© Daniel Greenwood

IN JULY, EASTERN AREA VOLUNTEER BECKY SCHULTZ DISCOVERED A SILKY ROSEGILL MUSHROOM, CLASSIFIED AS 'UNCOMMON TO RARE', IN A CEMETERY IN POLEGATE:

"Imagine how disappointed I was when it was time for my eleven o'clock break and time to sit down on my tree stump for a cup of tea to find a fungus growing out of it! The fact that it looked like an egg started to intrigue me and so a picture was taken and another tree stump was found to sit on. A couple of days later and it had grown up and looked more like what I thought a fungus would look like, although still not sure what I was looking at. Who knew a cemetery would be so interesting!"



Silky rosegill mushroom  
© Becky Schultz



*Ceratiomyxa*

# SLIME MOULDS

UNTIL LAST YEAR I HAD NEVER HEARD OF SLIME MOULDS. THEN I READ A BOOK BY SARAH LLOYD; *WHERE THE SLIME MOULD CREEPS*, AND I WAS HOOKED, I FOUND THEIR LIFECYCLE, BEHAVIOUR AND PHOTOGENIC QUALITIES FASCINATING.

They can be found throughout the world in most habitats including the Downs. Daniel Greenwood took me on a walk around Stanmer Park woods to show me several species he had spotted. They are usually found on damp rotting wood. There are only about 1,000 species globally (compared with millions of fungi).

Researchers in France and Japan have found that slime moulds have memories, can sense time, can learn new things like navigating complex mazes and find the shortest route between multiple food sources. This raises the question of how learning developed through evolution as they do not have a brain or any of the normal biological components required for memories to form.

Let's be clear, I am not referring to the black fungi mould found under your sink but to intriguing organisms that are neither animals, plants or fungi, and are classified as belonging to the Kingdom Protista. They are completely harmless to humans and plants, are not poisonous nor cause decay.



*Fuligo septica*



Plasmodium

There are two classes of slime moulds – cellular and plasmodial. Cellular slime moulds are rarely observed because of their size, they are microscopic. My interest is in plasmodia slime moulds, which are the ones you are likely to find.

The life cycle of a plasmodia slime mould starts as a spore that transforms into individual microscopic single cells that behave like amoeba moving around and consuming algae, bacteria, etc. Then there is a dramatic change stimulated by factors not fully understood. These cells swarm together and merge into a single colony, called a plasmodium that looks just like slime. The slime oozes out of its substrate, be it wood or soil. This slime can sense food sources and crawl to it by reaching out little creeping arm-like limbs at a staggering rate of about 1mm/ hour.

At a later stage in its life when food becomes scarce, the Plasmodium hardens to develop its reproductive bodies, from which the spores are released for the next iteration of its lifecycle. These fruit bodies are generally

very small. Some form little pinhead like stalks 1-2 millimetres high. I find them photogenic as they come in so many shapes, sizes, and colours. They grow in groups, sometimes forming clusters many centimetres in diameter, which makes them visible. When they are ready to spore they open up so the spores can be distributed by the wind. A commonly encountered slime-mould is *Fuligo septica* commonly known as "dog vomit" because of its appearance and yellow colour.

All the accompanying images here were taken on the Downs. They are a very small sample of the diversity and beauty of the species. They may not be correctly identified, but it's the best I can do. They are in various stages of their development and they can be found throughout the year in wooded areas of the Downs, so start looking!

ROGER KIERNAN  
SEVEN SISTERS VOLUNTEER RANGER

Images © Roger Kiernan



*Arcyria*



Fruiting  
*Arcyria*



*Trichia*



# FARMERS WEEKLY

## DECEMBER 1958

I recently came across a copy of the *Farmers Weekly* dated 5 December 1958. What a difference to today's publication. Apart from being much larger in size it also had 140 pages of articles which used a much smaller font than now. You can tell that this was in the days before universal television and the proliferation of colour images.

I can imagine a farmer sitting for a couple of hours each evening catching up with the news and views rather than sitting in front of the box; well he had to get his money's worth, it had cost him 9d, about 4p in today's currency. There were also pages devoted to Christmas shopping, by post – not online.

Looking through the magazine you get to realise just how farming has changed. The presumption of the magazine is that most farms are mixed farms and that the age of the chemical treatments are in their infancy. There are articles on potato planting by hand using the newest research on the ergonomics, showing the best posture to adopt to save fatigue. Another told how horses could be used for getting dung onto wet stubble fields and most articles dealt with stock rearing. There was nothing at all on care of the countryside. The whole magazine was based on getting more profit from the land.

Are the ideas changing now? Do we see that there was some merit in mixed farms? Should we go back to a less intensive way of food production? All very difficult as we have many more mouths to feed and we are unwilling to pay for the cost of producing food in the old ways. A debate that will continue for some time no doubt.

TERRY DOYLE  
WESTERN AREA VOLUNTEER RANGER



Front cover



Inner pages of the Farmers Weekly  
Images © Terry Doyle

H.G. WELLS SPENT PART OF HIS BOYHOOD AT UPPARK, WHERE HIS MOTHER, SARAH WELLS, WAS HOUSEKEEPER BETWEEN 1880 AND 1893. DETAILS OF LIFE AT UPPARK ARE ALSO REFLECTED IN WHAT IS USUALLY CONSIDERED WELLS' BEST BOOK, *THE TIME MACHINE*.

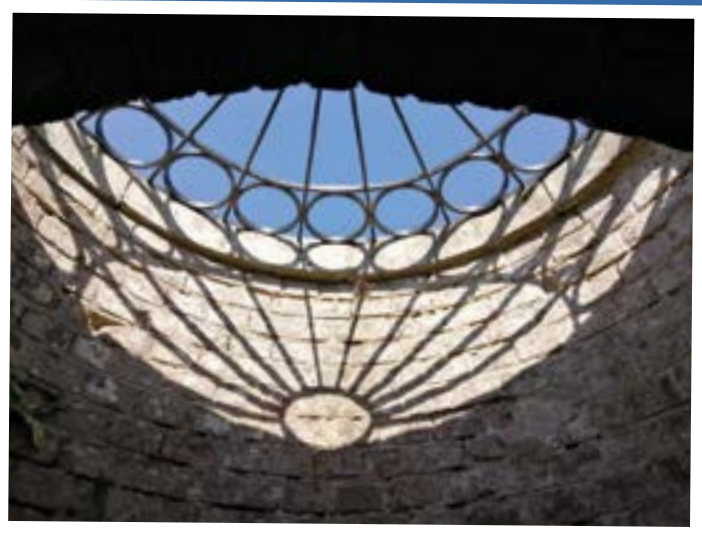
# TUNNELS AT UPPARK

At Uppark the fortunate aristocracy lived above ground in a beautiful house. The servants, Sarah Wells amongst them, had quarters below ground. This situation is reflected in the world of *The Time Machine* where the aristocracy have evolved into gentle, child-like indolent Eloi, who live above ground in a park. The servants meanwhile have evolved into light hating Morlocks who live below ground, and use the passive Eloi as food.

Ventilation shafts link upper and lower worlds in the novel, just as ventilation shafts link upper and lower levels at Uppark.

One of the ventilation shafts can be seen on the other side of this chamber which Wells saw as a boy in tunnels that run between Uppark's dairy and stables, restaurant and shop. There are three shafts here where the corridors meet, and two more on each corridor leading away from this central meeting point. Down here you will also see a number of dark bat roosts and beer cellars, giving a sense of what may have inspired the vision of the Morlock's world.

CHARLIE HELLEWELL  
SDNPA COMMUNICATIONS OFFICER



Uppark ventilation shaft  
© Charlie Hellewell



National Trust Uppark  
© Charlie Hellewell



# AUTUMNAL BIRDS

WITH THE NIGHTS DRAWING IN AND COLDER, WETTER WEATHER AFOOT, AUTUMN IS A TIME FOR GREAT CHANGE IN THE BIRD WORLD WITH MANY LEAVING OUR SHORES FOR WARMER CLIMES WHILE OTHERS ARRIVE FOR A MELLOW WINTER. SO WHAT CAN WE SEE THIS AUTUMN AND WHERE...



Lapwing

## THINGS THAT (DON'T) GO BUMP IN THE NIGHT

MY CHILDREN HAVE A KNACK OF CHOOSING JUST THE RIGHT GIFT AND LAST YEAR PRESENTED ME WITH A SKINNER MOTH TRAP.

Mine uses actinic bulbs which are fairly weather-proof and not too obtrusive to neighbours. Any mains connection must be beyond reproach, of course, and I usually place the trap and extension cable drum on a covered arbour seat as an extra precaution.

It's been used on several occasions and the results, large or small, have been very rewarding. My urban garden in the lee of the South Downs eastern escarpment has been cultivated in a wildlife-friendly fashion for twenty years but the paucity of insects remains a concern. It was a surprise then to discover the number and variety of moths that appear regularly when I set it up, a nocturnal world not previously apparent.

With around 900 species of macro moths usually, but not definitively, taken to be those with a forewing length of 1cm or more, identification can be challenging to a beginner. It's essential though if findings are to be reported for entry in local or national databases, though reports are checked by experts

who will correct any errors in a kindly fashion. Also a requisite for that purpose is the means of taking reasonably sharp images of sometimes uncooperative subjects. That's led me down another road, though not one I plan to take as far as my fellow volunteer Roger Kiernan whose splendid results you will have seen in these pages.

The moths are none the worse for the experience though care must be taken when releasing them. It's quite common, for example, for birds to quickly learn a free breakfast is available! I usually leave the egg box holding tray in a small area of shrubbery and stand by until all have dispersed, a matter usually of minutes. The next step is to increase the number and variety of night-scented flowers available.

It's an absorbing interest and I recommend it if you're looking for another hobby in these difficult times.

**RON WELLS**  
EASTERN AREA VOLUNTEER RANGER



Broad-bordered yellow underwing moth

Elephant hawk moths

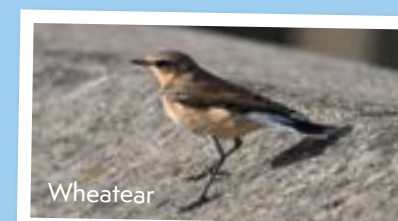
RSPB Pulborough Brooks is a great place to see flycatchers, redstarts and winchats perching on hedgerows and catching insects before they head further south for winter. You'll also be able to see green and wood sandpipers, greenshank and ruff enjoying the glorious mud! Check the nature reserve is open before visiting – [rspb.org.uk/reserves-and-events/reserves-a-z/pulborough-brooks](https://rspb.org.uk/reserves-and-events/reserves-a-z/pulborough-brooks).

Migrating geese start arriving in September – Petersfield Heath and Swanborne Lake in Arundel are great places for some goose and duck watching. Flock sizes of Canada geese vary each year but lookout for their famous V-shaped formations flapping across the skyline. If you're a fan of these geese add 'Fly Away Home' to your list of winter watches. This beautiful film set in Canada dramatises the true story of a man who trained his domesticated Canada geese to follow his ultralight aircraft and succeeded in leading their migration.

Starling murmurations are a stunning sight during the autumn months. Although not in the National Park, Brighton beach on the edge of the South Downs is a great spot to watch them dancing in the sky at dusk.



Baird's sandpiper



Wheatear

**This video on The Argus** gives you a taste of what you could see.

The Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust in Arundel is a great place to visit. They have areas where wild birds can be seen as well as the collection of captive exotic wildfowl. A small number of Bewick swans can often be seen here in winter. Visit [wwt.org.uk/wetland-centres/arundel](https://wwt.org.uk/wetland-centres/arundel) for more information and to book a visit.

Other birds to look out for on the Downs are the first of our winter thrushes like the redwing or fieldfare, or the wryneck moving through with the autumn migration. Wheatears are a characterful bird that can be found on the top of the Downs – they love perching on fence posts so are easy to spot. Watch out for ring ouzels in yew trees eating the berries before continuing their flight across the Channel – Cissbury Ring is a good place to see them.

If you're over in the eastern end of the National Park look out for rare waders on the River Cuckmere like the Baird's sandpiper, or the beautiful grey phalarope picking insects off the surface of a coastal pool.

As always there are little things we can do at home to help the birds in your garden this autumn and winter, this article from the RSPB has some top tips – [rspb.org.uk/about-the-rspb/about-us/media-centre/press-releases/autumn-feeding](https://rspb.org.uk/about-the-rspb/about-us/media-centre/press-releases/autumn-feeding)

Happy birding!

**REBECCA SAUNDERS**  
SDNPA COMMUNICATIONS OFFICER

(Thanks to Tim Squire for his help with pulling this article together and supplying some of his stunning bird photography. Visit [timsquire.co.uk/birds-photography-gallery](https://timsquire.co.uk/birds-photography-gallery) to see more of Tim's photos.)



Whinchat



# PLANTS IN THE PARK

## AUTUMN LADY’S TRESSES (*Spiranthes spiralis*)

This diminutive member of the orchid family likes dry, grassy, lime-rich habitats and makes up in charm what it lacks in size.

Aptly named, the scented white flowers spiral around the stems which apparently appear almost overnight from a hidden rosette of withered leaves, but next to this will be a fresh rosette which will produce the next year’s flower.

Those of us who have gardens of old chalk grassland (myself included) may be lucky enough to enjoy a spectacle of hundreds suddenly appearing around August/September, always taking me by surprise. Then I have to pick my way carefully so as not to trample these tiny gems.

KATE FRANKLAND  
EASTERN AREA VOLUNTEER RANGER



*Spiranthes spiralis*, commonly known as autumn lady’s-tresses  
© Adobe / Jaromir Klein



## TWO MEMBERS OF THE BEDSTRAW FAMILY (*rubiaceae*)

Bedstraws have their leaves in whorls around the stems. The family includes the common cleavers or goosegrass but two of the most attractive are lady’s bedstraw and squinancywort, both grassland plants.

Lady’s bedstraw has creeping stems with needle-like leaves and plumes of highly scented yellow flowers from July. Historically it was a common ‘strewing’ herb and, as its name suggests, it was used to stuff mattresses to repel fleas.

Squinancywort, tiniest of the family makes flat mats of pretty tiny white flowers, pink in bud, in mid-summer. Historically it was used as a treatment for quinsy, a complication of tonsillitis.

KATE FRANKLAND  
EASTERN AREA VOLUNTEER RANGER

Image top: Lady’s bedstraw; bottom: Squinancywort  
© Kate Frankland



# THINGS THAT HAPPEN

The South Downs Way  
© Martin Messent



ON A BLUSTERY WALK IN LATE JULY ALONG THE SOUTH DOWNS WAY ABOVE ALFRISTON, I ENJOY THE PUMMELING OF THE WIND. IT’S WARM AND CLEAR, MID-AFTERNOON. SEVERAL DAYS OF TORPIDITY ARE BLASTED FROM MY VEINS BY BRISK WALKING AND OPEN, BRIGHT VISTAS.

Skylarks are still pelting out rivers of song – nothing seems to deter them. One I watch remains pinned to the air in a thirty-miles-an-hour headwind and chirrups and fizzes like a bucket of crickets. Two Shetland ponies doze standing in a field by the footpath. Their manes ripple like grass in the wind. At their feet three foals sprawl, collapsed like puppets with cut strings. All are quiet and still as stones, yet more alive than I can comprehend.



Surprised water vole  
© SDNPA/Dick Hawkes

A little further along the path I catch a soft fluting whistle; it might be the wire fence singing; but the sound is too round and opaque; I stop to listen. Gusts drive across long, deep splits in the fence posts, which act like flutes, channelling the air, and raise gentle, clear wails that punctuate the near-silent rush of a strong, steady south-westerly. At first I think it’s just the one opposite me but when I continue downhill I hear others. Miles of fence post flutes blending their wind-driven calls with the larks and the sizzle of open chalk grassland.

Later, in the evening, I’m by the river at a wide, cool bend where swans like to drift and preen. The wind has ebbed. The water is still and reflects a waxing moon that’s risen since six and now is beginning to glow as the sky darkens towards dusk. From reeds along the bank come intermittent rustles and twitches; a low, urgent chattering too, like a discombobulated monk returning from pilgrimage to find an ancient byway redirected. A stoat; more likely a mink – I spotted three the first time I came here. My feet are inches from a gap in the reeds from where my rod pokes out. I’m fishing for

tench at sunset. The quizzical kerfuffle gets nearer and nearer; I concentrate on a spot just to my right where the thicket of growth is interrupted. At any moment a snout will poke out, almost indistinguishable from a leaf or a shadow, frozen and impatient, casing the open ground for possible threats. It’s a vole or a rat being hunted by a larger animal. Furtive commotion behind it betrays the pursuer – the gap has frustrated the prey’s hiding.

I think I see a black nose tremble in the half light, then in one smooth action a water vole shoots from its cover, gauges the angle, rears up and launches into a dive, leaping in a high arc, and like a furry torpedo enters the river and vanishes. I’ve never seen one move so fast, and gracefully, fiercely, with the greatest precision and economy. I laugh out loud with delight.

MARTIN MESSENT  
EASTERN AREA  
VOLUNTEER RANGER





# SURVIVING LOCKDOWN



## SDNPA – SOCIAL DISTANCING NATIONAL PARK ALTERNATIVE

Isolation and Social Distance  
Worried me in the first instance.  
Then realised we are lucky as such.  
We have a little Sussex garden.  
Nothing much!  
Attached is our modest semi abode.  
In a quiet seaside urban road.  
Frog came in the house  
with a hop and bound.  
Haven't seen a toad.  
Certainly Slow Worms,  
Spiders and Mice around.  
Even a Fox on the wall by the street.  
Bees, Moths and Butterflies abound.  
Slugs and snails.  
That leave their trails.  
Spring a treat.  
Garden borders not neat.  
But choked with Blue Bells  
Snow Drops, Tulips and Crocus.  
Daffodils and Marigolds.  
Lawn a swash of green grass.  
With points of yellow Dandelions,  
Daisies, Buttercups and Cowslips.  
Thistle, Yarrow and Plantains.  
Garden borders of brick.  
It is a mess.

Beds stuffed with plants and narrow.  
Flower scent is cloying and thick.  
It allows nature to self  
seed and feed.  
Cosmos, Aquilegia, Sunflower  
and Hollyhock.  
What is to knock ?  
Pigeon and Dove nesting  
on their Perch.  
In the Bay and the Silver Birch.  
The blossom of the Olive,  
Cherry and Plum.  
Pear and Apple have gone glum.  
But the fruits have begun.  
Rosemary, Lemonbalm,  
Basil, Mint and Sage.  
Aromas that nasally engage.  
Oh a veg plot, not to forget !  
Tomatoes, Potatoes and Courgette.  
So lockdown.  
Has gratefully allowed us to own.  
A garden where actually.  
We don't feel isolated or alone!

ROGER P. READ  
SEAFORD 15/05/2020



Nesting pigeon



Flowering borders



Our garden oasis



Fox visitor

Images © Roger Read

# DID YOU KNOW?



## MONK'S HOUSE AND VIRGINIA WOOLF

Monk's House

MONK'S HOUSE IN RODMELL IS KNOWN TO THE PEOPLE OF SUSSEX AS THE HOME OF VIRGINIA AND LEONARD WOOLF BUT THERE'S A BIT MORE TO IT THAN THAT.

Mrs Woolf lived in London, Cornwall and various spots in Sussex and never really settled to Monk's House after buying it in 1927. Virginia would buy things on impulse and she had just bought a renovated windmill when she saw an advert for Monk's House to be sold at auction in the White Hart Hotel in Lewes. They paid the grand sum of £700 for a house without 'hot water, nor a bath, and as for an E. C. [earth closet] 'I was never shown it' wrote Virginia.

Selling the windmill they moved into Monk's House, a property that had never played host to any monks but perhaps got the name because it was situated next to Rodmell Church. The Woolfs were competitive bowls players, using the garden as a green and in the field at the end of the property stool ball, the ancient Sussex predecessor to cricket, was still played.

There were servants of course, since the middle-class of this period could not do without them, although Virginia did have her one and only experience of doing the washing up in the little kitchen there. The Woolfs would not settle for the house they had bought and spent years updating and improving it, largely on the back of Virginia's fees for her writing. She wrote to a friend: 'I'm out to make £300 this summer by writing & [will] build a bath & hot water range at Rodmell.'

The bath would end up just above the kitchen, the domain of their servant Louie Everest who would hear Virginia in the bath 'talking out loud scenes she had written or thought of in the night as she lay in the bath.'

It was not all peace and quiet and Virginia was disturbed by the 'cursed shrill voices' of the children from the school across the road that stopped her writing. She must also have been plagued by the arguments between gardener Percy Bartholomew and Leonard since her biographer notes that 'he and Leonard argued over every single gardening decision.'

I think it proved to be a happy home even so, although it was from here that Virginia set out to the local river to drown herself after falling into renewed mental illness in 1941. She had, in a way, already seen the future since she had written early on that Monk's House would be their address 'for ever and ever, indeed I've already marked out our graves in the yard which joins our meadow.'

BENJAMIN BRUCE  
VOLUNTEER AT THE  
SOUTH DOWNS CENTRE



Sitting room – Monk's House

Images © Benjamin Bruce



# PROMOTING POSITIVE BEHAVIOUR

IN A VERY UNPRECEDENTED TIME, THE NATIONAL PARK HAS BEEN PROVIDING SOLACE FOR VISITORS NEW AND EXISTING. PEOPLE ARE CONNECTING OR RECONNECTING WITH NATURE AND UNDERSTANDING ITS IMPORTANCE TO US ALL.

With an increase in people has come an increase in issues, particularly at some hot spots. We have been working hard to support everyone visiting the National Park, both locals and visitors travelling in from outside the National Park, to behave responsibly so that they get the best from their visit and can leave as little trace on this wonderful landscape as possible. As part of this campaign, we have developed 11 top tips to address the most common issues such as littering and sticking to paths, as well as the less common but very harmful, wild camping and lighting fires and BBQs. We have also been working with our rangers and partners to use these top tips to create signage for particularly hard hit sites such as Kingley Vale.

Welcome to the SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK

**TO KEEP YOU AND THE NATIONAL PARK SAFE, HERE ARE OUR TOP TIPS**

Plan ahead before you travel.

Travel sustainably. If you can, journey by foot or bike.

Practise social distancing at all times.

Do not wild camp, have BBQs, or light fires.

Respect wildlife, heritage and local communities.

Keep your dog on a lead, and stick to the path.

Avoid popular hotspots.

Do not park on verges.

Support our farmers. Do not picnic on private land or disturb livestock.

Be cliff aware.

Take your litter home.

Enjoy your visit and thank you for caring for your South Downs National Park

[southdowns.gov.uk](http://southdowns.gov.uk)



WITH COVID-19 RESTRICTIONS PUTTING A STOP TO OUR ANNUAL WILD CHALK FESTIVAL NEAR BRIGHTON IT WAS TIME TO GET CREATIVE. AND SO THE VIRTUAL, WEEK LONG WILD CHALK FESTIVAL WAS BORN!

Over 6 days in July, with the help of staff from right across the organisation, we delivered facebook and Instagram live sessions as well as some pre-recorded films covering a huge range of chalk-focused topics. From pollinators, chalk grassland flowers and grazing animals to Neolithic flint knapping, wildlife colouring sessions and making an edible aquifer out of ice-cream and marshmallows to name just a few. We also launched our first set of Pinterest boards to get families creative at home.

Overall we reached around 83,000 people with our most popular video of an interview with Paul Gorringe

with his sheep at Whitehawk Hill near Lewes reaching a staggering 19,491 people!

As this was one of our first virtual events we are extremely pleased with its success. Lots of lessons have been learnt which we applied to our first ever virtual *Secrets of the Heath* event at the start of September. You can catch up on all the videos from this event here [facebook.com/sdnpa/videos](https://facebook.com/sdnpa/videos).

## DISCOUNTS FOR VOLUNTEERS

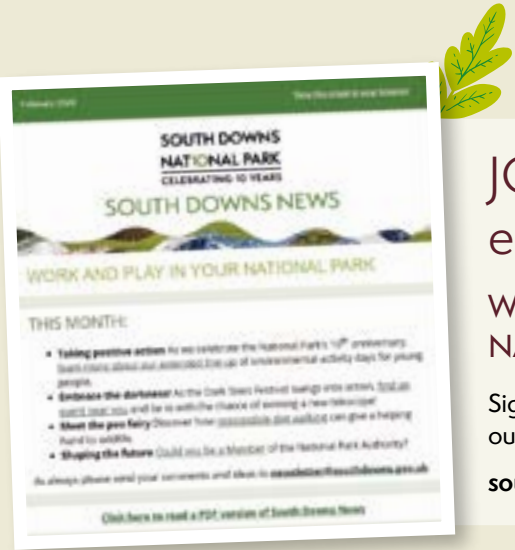
You'll be pleased to know that several retailers are offering discounts on the sorts of things you'll need in the countryside. The VRS has successfully negotiated discounts with:

**Cotswold Outdoor, Snow & Rock, Gatleys, Runners Need, Clusons, JDSports/Milletts/Blacks/Ultimate Outdoor, Goodrowes, Rohan, Roger Gunn and Southdown Bikes.** Also **Fitzcane's café** in Midhurst.

Simply present your VRS photo identity card at the time of your purchase – or use an online discount code. The discount amount varies, and is not available in conjunction with any other discounts or offers and is subject to terms and conditions.

Please visit the **SDVRS Volunteer Information webpage:** [sites.google.com/view/southdowns](https://sites.google.com/view/southdowns) for full details of each discount.

If you don't have an ID card, or have lost, damaged or mislaid it then please email [volunteering@southdowns.gov.uk](mailto:volunteering@southdowns.gov.uk) for a replacement.



## JOIN THE SOUTH DOWNS MONTHLY eNEWSLETTER

WANT TO KNOW MORE ABOUT WHAT'S HAPPENING IN YOUR NATIONAL PARK?

Sign up for our monthly newsletter for the latest South Downs news, stories, ideas for days out, competitions, to hear about our ranger and volunteers' work and much, much more...

[southdowns.gov.uk/join-the-newsletter](http://southdowns.gov.uk/join-the-newsletter)







The White Lion  
© Terry Doyle



## BY THE WAY – SOBERTON

EXPLORING SOME OF THE HIDDEN GEMS WITHIN EASY REACH OF THE SOUTH DOWNS WAY

The little village of Soberton in the Meon Valley lies about three miles south of the junction of the South Downs Way with the Meon Valley Trail (the former railway line).

Soberton is mentioned in the Domesday book and, to be truthful, hasn't grown too much since then, but is definitely worth a visit. As you approach the village, uphill from the old railway, on a bend in the road you will come across Soberton Towers. Built in the late 19th century by Colonel Charles Brome Bashford, this imposing all flint edifice was, during its lifetime, a private residence, a primary school and a home for Wrens from HMS Mercury.

Carry on to the village and you come to the archetypal English village centre. A green with the church on one side and the pub on the other. St Peter's church was built in the late 12th century and in the Lady Chapel

you will find a gravestone fragment in the floor containing a tulip emblem. This has led to speculation about a possible connection to the Dutch Tulip Mania of 1636-37. Was this a wealthy resident who could afford the 15 guineas that one bulb might have cost?

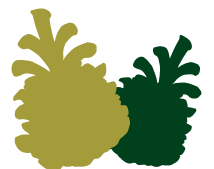
The first Baron Soberton was Lord Anson, a major figure in Britain's navy in the mid 1700s and was responsible for a great deal of the modernisation of the Navy during the long running wars with France and Spain. Anson commanded the fleet that defeated a French squadron at the first battle of Cape Finisterre in May 1747. His force captured the entire French force – four ships of the line, two frigates and six merchantmen. This treasure amounted to £300,000 an enormous sum in 1747, no wonder Anson was given a peerage. Lord Lichfield (Patrick Anson) is a direct descendent.

The White Lion pub is worth a visit for many reasons (please check it is open before visiting – [thewhitelionsoberton.com](http://thewhitelionsoberton.com)).

A 16th century Grade II listed building, it is one of those places that you are glad you found. Good food, good ale and pleasant staff await the weary traveller – you may also take advantage of their modern accommodation and stay the night.

Give Soberton a try – find it on the Meon Valley Trail.

**TERRY DOYLE**  
VOLUNTEER RANGER, WESTERN DOWNS



**SOUTH DOWNS  
VOLUNTEER  
RANGER SERVICE**

**SOUTH DOWNS  
NATIONAL PARK**

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The information contained in this newsletter was, as far as known, correct at the date of issue. The South Downs National Park Authority cannot, however, accept responsibility for any error or omission.

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