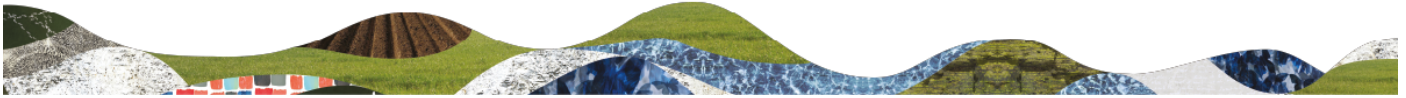


# SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK

CELEBRATING 10 YEARS

## SOUTH DOWNS NEWS



### THE LATEST UPDATES FROM YOUR NATIONAL PARK ★

#### This month:

- **Embrace the darkness** 🌙 Find out about a fortnight of cosmic fun as we invite you to learn more about the Dark Skies of the National Park and its incredible nocturnal wildlife.
- **Giving teachers a helping hand** Learn about our free online training programme for teachers to help connect young people with nature this summer.
- **Our amazing dew ponds** Discover how these pretty landscape features are helping nature recovery.
- **History in the making** Meet the artists bringing the "lost village" back to life in dramatic style.

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

## Celebrating the marvels of our Dark Skies

**The wonders of the "red planet", live tours of the night's sky, stunning astrophotography, nocturnal wildlife talks, children's colouring activities and a chance to win a top-of-the-range telescope are among the highlights of the South Downs National Park's Dark Skies Festival.**

The fortnight of cosmic fun begins on Friday, 12 February with an action-packed line-up brought directly to you, including top tips for stargazing from your garden.

The festival kicks off with a fascinating real-time tour of the night sky with acclaimed astronomer Professor John Mason, from the South Downs Planetarium and Science Centre. Professor Mason will be identifying what we can see in the sky that night and pointing out interesting sights and constellations.

Co-inciding with the expected landing of the NASA rover *Perseverance* on Mars on 18 February, Professor Mason will be giving an illuminating talk about the historic landing later in the festival. *Perseverance* launched on July 30 last year to explore the planet for evidence of alien life, both past and present.



The rover is targeting a landing site inside Mars's Jezero Crater – an ancient lakebed that may have once been habitable for simple life.

Meanwhile, the start of half-term on Monday, 15 February will see an



interactive Facebook Live session, with National Park Rangers Charles and Kate setting up a stargazing evening in their back garden.

A night-time safari walk, short films on wildlife, live Instagram chats with accomplished authors, and stunning footage of space will be among the highlights of the virtual event.

The event celebrates the National Park's status as an International Dark Sky Reserve – one of only 18 in the world and recognising it as one of the best places globally to capture immense views of the stars.

Dan Oakley, a Lead Ranger who helps oversee the National Park's Dark Sky status, said: "Our Dark Skies Festival will be different this year, but we're really hoping to be able to inspire people about how amazing and important our dark skies are."

"It's going to have something for everyone – whether you're interested in nocturnal wildlife, stargazing, astrophotography or people's connection with the cosmos throughout history. We hope it's going to give people of all ages some fun learning and interesting activities they can do while staying at home this half-term."

We are also hoping that people will share their stories, images and videos – such as sounds of nocturnal wildlife in their garden – that the National Park can then share on social media as part of the festival.

More than 150 entries have been received for the National Park's first astrophotography competition and the winning images, as well as other stunning shots, will be revealed throughout the festival. The top prize is £150 in each of the three photography categories – South Downs Dark Skyscapes, Living Dark Skies – People and Nature, and Our Magnificent Moon.



Dan, originally a physicist and known locally as "Dark Skies Dan", added: "Dark Skies are under threat – particularly in the South East. We think the star-studded skies above our heads are as valuable

as our beautiful rolling landscapes.

"There's growing evidence that dark skies help nature to flourish and are vital for ecosystems to function. The evidence is showing that light can be very disruptive to many different species, not just from a disruption to their circadian body clocks, but also as a barrier to migration, movement and ecosystem integrity. A whole range of species, including birds, bats, amphibians and invertebrates rely on dark habitat and the natural shift from night to day. Therefore, dark skies are a key component for nature recovery – which is one of key priorities for the South Downs National Park over the next five to 10 years.

"Apart from anything, it's a real spectacle to see these immense views of the night sky in the South Downs – connecting not only with nature but also the wider universe. I think most people would agree it's a very humbling and calming experience that gives us a much wider perspective. It's an amazing universe that we live in on this little planet called Earth and it's also amazing that Mars may also have had biodiversity."



The big Dark Skies quiz runs from 15 to 28 February, with prizes including a state-of-the-art telescope worth £300, a year's subscription to BBC Sky at Night magazine, a wall chart of the cosmos and a wall chart of the moon. People can register to take part by visiting

<https://bigdarkskiesquiz.makequiz.no/>

All the details for festival and how to take part are available at [www.southdowns.gov.uk/dark-night-skies/festival/](http://www.southdowns.gov.uk/dark-night-skies/festival/)

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**Dates for the diary – some of the highlights of the Dark Skies Festival (see website for full programme)**

**Friday 12 February 10am** Short Film South Downs Dark Skies Festival Launch with 'Dark Skies Dan' – Dan Oakley, Dark Skies Lead for the South Downs National Park welcomes you to this year's festival

**Friday 12 February 7pm Real-time Tour of the Night Sky** direct from the South Downs Planetarium with Dr John Mason – find out what's going in the sky tonight!

**Saturday 13 February 10am** Short Film 'Embrace the Darkness' - the South Downs National Park's journey to becoming an International Dark Sky Reserve

**Monday 15 February 5pm** Facebook Live 'Stargazing at home' with South Downs National Park Rangers, Charles and Kate, setting up for an evening of stargazing in their back garden whilst looking at simple things you can do to help nocturnal wildlife.

**Tuesday 16 February 7pm** Instagram Live 'The Human Cosmos - A Secret History of the Stars' interview with author Jo Marchant, on her new book about our relationship with the starry sky over millennia, and why it's important to reconnect with it now.

**Wednesday 17 February 7pm** Real-time Tour of the Night Sky with a focus on Mars ahead of the NASA rover 'Perseverance' Mars landing (the following day at noon), direct from the South Downs Planetarium with Professor John Mason.

**Friday 19 February** 6pm Facebook Live Question and Answer with Dr John Mason – a chance to ask questions about the Mars landing or any other astronomy related subject!

**Thursday 25 February** Facebook Live 'Nocturnal Wildlife Walk' with National Park Ranger Jan Knowlson and Sussex Bat Group's Kim Dawson as they take a walk around their local village.

**Friday 26 February** – The National Park shares your stories, experiences, videos and images from the past two weeks.

**Saturday 27 February 10am** Short Film 'Let's Take of our Dark Skies' with South Downs National Park's 'Dark Skies Dan' explaining what we can all do to keep our wonderful starry skies dark.

**Sunday 28 February** Voting opens for the Astrophotography 'People's Choice Award'.





# Connecting young people with our amazing natural environment



**Teachers across the region are being offered free online training support to prepare for a summer of outdoor learning to help connect young people with nature.**

Working in partnership with the South Downs Education Network, the National Park Authority is offering 20 online CPD (Continuing Professional Development) training sessions, covering ideas and activities to take pupils outside this summer (subject to current COVID restrictions being eased in the summer).

Thirteen organisations in the network have joined forces to help deliver the training.

The fun and informative webinars this spring are a continuation of nine online training sessions which ran during autumn term of 2020. Teachers can book the sessions to join them live or catch up later with the online recordings.

Jonathan Dean, Education Officer for the South Downs National Park Authority, explained:

"With all pupils forecast to be back in school this summer, we want to help teachers feel confident stepping outside the classroom.

"Building a connection with nature can help all of us cope with the stresses and strains of the past 12 months.

"There is a wealth of evidence that outdoor learning improves attainment for pupils and benefits the health and wellbeing of pupils and staff.

"Teachers can choose from the 20 sessions and benefit from the flexibility of being able to catch up online if they can't join the session live.



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"Some sessions will uncover how to make the best use of schools grounds and nearby green spaces to teach curriculum subjects and topics.

"Other sessions will focus on how to use woodland effectively, build fieldwork skills and make improvements to school grounds.

"Several sessions share ways to use outdoor spaces for health and wellbeing, which is especially important in supporting pupils through these challenging times."

The autumn online training sessions were a big success, with more than 200 teachers taking part and lots of positive feedback.

"One participant said: "It was really useful and I've got lots of lovely ideas to take back to school. I can't wait to get started!"

Jonathan added: "We want to encourage as many teachers as possible to get outside with their pupils this summer term and we hope that this ongoing training will help them feel confident and ready to do exactly that.

"While our sessions draw inspiration from the landscapes and stories of the South Downs, teachers from across the country will be able to benefit from the knowledge being shared by the network of education providers."

**Teachers can find out more and sign up by visiting [www.southdowns.gov.uk/onlineteachertraining](http://www.southdowns.gov.uk/onlineteachertraining)**

All the online training has been put together taking into account the latest COVID-19 guidance on keeping children and staff safe.

The South Downs Education Network comprises over 100 sites, centres and providers which deliver a range of learning outside the classroom experiences relevant to the South Downs National Park and its special qualities.

Members of the network share ideas and connect with each other to build strong partnerships and create bespoke learning packages.

The National Park Authority connects schools with the network through our school newsletter, travel grant scheme and partnership projects.



## Creating new habitats for birds and insects



**Work is under way on restoring a dew pond to create an oasis for birds and aquatic insects.**

The South Downs National Park Authority has partnered with the Norfolk Estate on a nature recovery project to reinstate a wetland habitat at Peppering, near Arundel.

Dew ponds are synonymous with the chalk grassland of the South Downs, historically being dug by farmers as a watering hole for livestock. In fact, the South Downs are thought to be home to Britain's oldest known dew-ponds, with a few known to date from the Bronze Age.

These pretty ponds are also havens for all manner of species, explains Central Downs Ranger Simon Mockford.

"Dew ponds are oases for wildlife, providing drinking and bathing water for birds, and a home for dragonflies and other aquatic invertebrates," says Simon.

"They also make good breeding sites for frogs, toads and newts. According to Pond Conservation small clean water ponds such as dewponds can be exceptionally rich wildlife habitats.

"They typically support around 70 per cent of all freshwater species found in lowland landscapes. The wildlife value of ponds is also considerably enhanced where you have a network of them, making it easier for species to move between them, meaning populations are more resilient local climate change."



*A restored dew pond at nearby South Stoke*

The Authority is looking at creating a network of ponds in the area.

Claire Kerr, Countryside Policy Manager, who is helping to lead the National Park's Nature Recovery strategy, said: "This is a great example of partnership working to give a real boost to nature.

"With biodiversity under threat across the world, it's these kind of grassroots initiatives, creating new habitat and stronger ecosystems, that will make such a difference as part of a network of nature recovery projects."

## Busy autumn and winter for Western rangers



**Did you know a third of the National Park lies in Hampshire? Lead Ranger Elaina Whittaker-Slark explains the rewards of recent conservation and community work in the county.**

Amid these testing times, important conservation work continues, where it can, in the great outdoors of the Hampshire countryside. Our rangers in the Western Downs have been busy on a number of projects to enhance this beautiful landscape, help nature flourish and create opportunities for young people to access it.

Back in October, the Volunteer Ranger Service were delighted to take part in a month's work of chalk downland restoration at Oxenbourne Down, a 210-acre Local Nature Reserve near Clanfield. We were really pleased to be working with the landowner, Hampshire County Council, to further improve this Site of Special Scientific Interest. A satisfying job that will hopefully pay dividends for wildlife, including the butterflies that thrive on chalk grassland!

In November the ranger team spent several days at St Catherine's Hill in Winchester, managing scrub on the chalk downland of the Dongas – an amazing set of gullies worn into Twyford Down. They are actually ancient trackways where animals were herded to markets in Winchester. Over many centuries of continued use these deep gullies were created.

In December we supported the local Natural England team at the National Nature Reserve at Beacon Hill (*pictured above*) to get site management work completed. There were fabulous views, even though a little murky! A flock of 120 sheep graze here and Natural England has been trailing light summer grazing on site to restore some of the grasslands.

We've also helped with some woodland work at Clare's Copse, near Hambledon, that should create some wonderful opportunities for children to enjoy nature. Our rangers have been working with the landowner, who is looking to provide courses and outdoor experiences for adults and children involved in Hampshire Scouting. It's really rewarding that the work we have done is contributing to a local community project in the making!



## Artist line-up revealed for heritage initiative



**Artists, musicians, designers and performers are coming together to bring the history of the “lost village” of Tide Mills back to life in dramatic style. Rachel Cunningham, who is helping to lead the project that is being supported by the National Park Authority, reveals the list of artists who will using their creative talents to put on a great show.**

We're really excited to have launched the full website for the Tide Mills Project. It's packed with information about the celebratory week, from 20 to 26 September, and a huge range of learning resources, as well as details of how to participate.

The team have been working hard with the commissioned artists, designers, performers and musicians to create memorable projects for September.

Art Lewry and Jack Beccegato are mapping the site in high-definition 3D, with the help of drone pilot, Gary Bruggenwirth. They're creating an augmented reality landscape, with overlaid stories, historical buildings and artefacts to explore.

Meanwhile, Filmspot are animating depictions of characters from Tide Mills' past and will also create flipbooks featuring current residents at drop-in workshops. These will be digitised and displayed on screens at the redundant Tide Mills station.

Romy Loughton and I are recreating the stationmaster's cottage as a theatre set. During September, the set will be brought to life by actors as historical characters.

Abbie Stanton is making a giant zoetrope on the site of the stables for racehorses in the 1920s. She will be fashioning 20 horses from willow, with community members, to create the animated illusion.

Ellie Johnson-Bullock and Sam Ford are building a pop-up bakery inspired by food produced at Tide Mills Village in its heyday – and also a giant pineapple sculpture referencing the original pineapple pit!

Meanwhile, Christian Funnell is creating a giant water wheel, powered by the remaining tidal flow. Each revolution will display images of flora and fauna connected to the site.

All exciting stuff and we'll have more to share over the coming months! Find out more at [www.tidemillsproject.uk](http://www.tidemillsproject.uk)

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## Living archaeology venue launches major campaign



**The team at Butser Ancient farm, near Petersfield in Hampshire, have launched a crowd-funding campaign to help secure the future of the site.**

They are currently looking for 100 ambassadors to fund the creation of an online membership platform to share and support their work, bringing the special atmosphere of this unique heritage site to an online audience and raising vital funds for their ongoing work.

Maureen Page, Director of the Farm, said: “We normally welcome thousands of education groups and visitors each year to explore the ancient past and are hoping to be able to celebrate our 50th anniversary next year.

“But, like many small independent organisations and heritage sites, the farm has been very hard hit through the coronavirus pandemic, with an 80 per cent drop in income over the past year.

“It's a really important cultural heritage venue in the National Park.

“The farm showcases a timeline of ancient homes from the Stone Age to Saxon periods and, for many, is a haven of peace and an escape from the modern world. The site is also a pioneering location for the discipline of experimental archaeology – understanding the ways things were done in the past through re-construction today – and the Butser team regularly work with many archaeologists and academics to bring the past to life.”

The online platform will feature professionally shot video content, giving a behind-the-scenes insight into the many projects and ancient skills practiced at Butser. Supporters will pay a small monthly donation to access the online platform and, in so doing, will also contribute to the survival of the heritage site.

The Crowdfunding campaign runs to 18 February, and all money raised will help fund the development of the platform in order to be launched in the spring.

To find out more details of what is planned, and how you can help make it a reality, please head to:

**[www.butserancientfarm.co.uk/100-ambassadors](http://www.butserancientfarm.co.uk/100-ambassadors)**

## Helping the vulnerable with creative art kits



**Towner Eastbourne and the South Downs National Park have joined forces to send creative kit bags of arts materials and suggested activities to some of the most vulnerable in East Sussex's communities.**

Thirteen community groups, charities and local services will receive over 1,000 bags in total, including Eastbourne Food Bank, Waves Seaford, Holding Space, Eastbourne NetworX, Community Stuff, Memory Lane, Children's Services, East Sussex, Brighton Women's Centre, AiM, Enthum Foundation and the Association of Carers.

The recipients will get making guides and art materials with the theme of 'Making Sense', exploring nature, natural materials and seasonal change over the course of February and March.

The bags will include illustrated guides by artist and award-winning illustrator Somang Lee, with prompts around 'noticing'; how things feel, seasonal change and raw natural making materials such as chalk, charcoal, clay and water.

Willow Mitchell, Learning Curator at Towner Eastbourne, explained: "Noticing could be anything from opening a window to hear birdsong to sitting on doorstep and watching the world go by or walking round local park, as well as local adventures in the South Downs when and where it safe to do so."

Towner Eastbourne began distributing creative materials to the community during the first lockdown last year and the latest initiative builds on the success of this work.

Anooshka Rawden, Cultural Heritage Lead at the National Park Authority, said: "We know this pandemic has hit some people much harder than others, and we wanted to support those charities and community groups who have been there for all our friends and neighbours who have found themselves experiencing difficult times.

"These free kit bags of art materials and activities provide a chance to find space and contemplation in the natural world, whether that is the landscape of the National Park or connection to nature on your doorstep. Creativity is a wonderful way to find moments of peace and space. It really has the power to bring people together and provide a much-needed uplift."

## Learn to love our precious pollinators!



### Passionate about pollinators? Buzzing about bees?

An un-bee-lievably exciting free event is taking place this February for anyone eager to learn more about protecting local pollinators.

The online event will include talks by bee expert Professor Dave Goulson, the Sussex Wildlife Trust, guitarist Richard Durrant and West Sussex County Council's Youth Cabinet, to delve a little further into how we can all love pollinators better.

Anyone joining can expect to learn about the importance of bees and pollinators, what work is already under way to protect and enhance pollinator-friendly spaces and how to create bee-friendly habitats at home.

Deborah Urquhart, who leads Environment for West Sussex County Council, which is organising the event, said: "This is a really exciting opportunity to hear from wildlife experts about how we can all work together to protect bees and pollinators.

"Pollinators play a vital role in our eco-system. Without them we would have far fewer varieties of plants, insects and animals in West Sussex.

"But the bee population is falling and it's up to us to take simple steps to protect them. I would really encourage residents to come along to the event and find out more."

It comes as the South Downs National Park Trust is embarking on one of the biggest charitable wildflower planting initiatives the South East has ever seen as part of the Bee Lines project.

The community has rallied round to raise £75,000 to create a new network of wildflower corridors – effectively a "road system" for pollinating insects, allowing them to move through the landscape more easily and over time become more resilient to changes in the environment.

Community organisations and landowners were able to make grant applications last year and more details on those receiving funding for wildflower planting will be revealed later this year.

The 'Who loves a pollinator?' event will be held on Thursday 18 February from 7pm. Tickets are available [here](#).

# "I have never learned so much, so quickly"

**With National Apprenticeship Week in February, we catch up with one of the Authority's new apprentices, Tom Reynolds, from Petersfield.**

## **Can you tell us more about your apprentice role at the National Park?**

I am a business admin apprentice at the SDNPA and I split my time between the Support Services team and the Communications team. I've worked on various projects and most recently I have enjoyed helping out with an

Astrophotography competition we are running in conjunction with the Dark Skies Festival. I spend one day a week working on tasks for my apprenticeship award, which are business related.



## **Why did you choose an apprenticeship at the South Downs National Park?**

I think my personal values match really well with those of the SDNPA. The core values of respect, innovation and collaboration are really important, and of course a love and appreciation of the outdoors is something I share with my colleagues. Having grown up enjoying the Downs it's a pleasure to now be working at the SDNPA.

## **What do you think are the benefits of apprenticeships?**

Three months into this apprenticeship I feel as though I have never learnt so much so quickly. I think most people probably feel they are learning lots when they join a new organisation, but we also have our award to complete. It's very stimulating and I think it's a great way to enter the world of work.

## **What's been the highlight of your time in the National Park as an apprentice so far?**

Getting to know both the Support Services and Comms teams has been great, I owe so many people a big thank you for being so welcoming. I have really enjoyed getting stuck in with the retail team selling calendars and looking for new potential merchandise options. It has also been really interesting learning about the digital and social media strategy.

## **What are your future aspirations for your apprenticeship?**

I'm looking forward to getting to know the organisation better and putting some of what I have learn into

SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY practice. Hopefully there will be the chance to get out into the downs soon too.

## **As an apprentice how have you adapted to the challenges of the pandemic?**

Two days into my time at the SDNPA we went into a national lockdown. Fortunately, I feel I have taken to homeworking well. I have been lent some extra kit to ensure I have a good workspace, and regular team meetings mean I feel I have a lot of contact with my colleagues.

## **Meet our other new apprentices Charlie Pugh and Joely Collyer.**

# Take part in survey

**Whole Estate Plans are an important planning tool in a National Park that has a number of major landowners.**

**These plans help to identify opportunities and aid decision-making for both landowners and the National Park Authority.**



A survey is launching this month to look at the process of creating them.

Land Use Consultants has been appointed to evaluate the development of Whole Estate Plans (WEPS) for the South Downs National Park Authority.

The survey will run for six weeks from Monday 8 February to Sunday 21 March.

The Whole Estate Plans in question include the following Estates: Wiston, Newton Valence, Iford, Highfield, West Dean, and Eastbourne Downland. The local communities on these estates are likely to have been consulted during the production of the plans and we would like to understand how you were included in the consultation, and how effective you felt this process was.

Your feedback on your experience will help us to understand the impact and challenges of the process, and will inform any recommendations for future changes in approach if required.

Take part in the survey [here](#).

*Pic credits*

P1 – Right column – Les Hunt

P2 – Right column – Daniel Greenwood

P3 – Left column – Nick Robinson

P4 – Left column – Tim Squire

P6 – Left column – Jamie Fielding

P6 – Right column – Jane Chandler