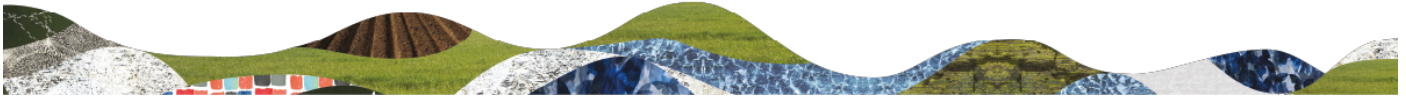


SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK

CELEBRATING 10 YEARS

SOUTH DOWNS NEWS



THE LATEST UPDATES FROM YOUR NATIONAL PARK

This month:

- **Inspired by nature** Find out how hundreds of families have been enjoying nature-based activities on their doorstep over the past year – and many have now picked up environmental awards.
- **Happy South Downs** The National Park continues to provide a much-needed uplift and, as lockdown is due to ease over the coming months, find out the little things you can do to keep nature happy.
- **Celestial beauty** Find out the winners of the National Park's first astrophotography competition.
- **Got 100 seconds?** Learn about the film shining a light on our varied National Park landscapes.

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

Families across region re-connect with nature

Bird-spotting in your garden, hunting for lichens, identifying trees, and learning birdsongs have been among the activities enjoyed by hundreds of families over the past year as they connected with our beautiful natural world.

Since the start of the pandemic, the National Park Authority has been running an innovative scheme where families can pick up an award for completing 25 hours of nature-based activities.

Spearheaded by the National Park Authority's Families Outreach Officer, Siân Jones, families across Hampshire and Sussex have enjoyed rediscovering the wonders of nature on their doorstep. Over the past 8 months, 36 families have achieved the award and over 320 families have used the initiative as inspiration for one-off nature-based activities.

Siân produced a series of newsletters and things-to-do sheets, full to the brim with activities that families could do at little cost in their local area and in line with Covid restrictions. Families were also encouraged to write in and share stories and pictures of the activities they had done.

Following a successful summer programme, the latest initiative was the "Wild Winter Awards", which started in the autumn. Among the award recipients was 13-year-old Mia Haimes, who completed the programme with the help of her mum Gemma.



Mia, from Middleton-on-Sea, in West Sussex, said: "I enjoyed all of the activities for John Muir Award – it was fun to take photos and create some art of different things to do with nature and show my friends and family. I also put together a nature dance with my friend on a walk we went on.

"It made it a bit different going outside in the autumn and winter time and would also be fun to do it again in the summer."

Mia produced a short video about her experience and shared it with family and friends.

Gemma added: "It's been a really rewarding thing for us to do together and it's made us look at nature with fresh eyes. I think it's really important for young people to be able to get away from the screens and connect with

Enjoying happy times – and helping nature to happily flourish!

nature and also understand what we need to do to care for it.”

The Seal family, from Waterlooville, Hampshire, have been especially busy over the past year, completing two awards in both the summer and winter.

Nigel and Samantha Seal and children Quinton, 13, Theandra, 11, and Theodore, 8, have clocked up well over 100 hours of nature-based activities, including creating a wildlife-friendly garden, fungi hunting, night-time wildlife watching, bat surveying, pond-dipping, woodland crafts, stargazing and attending online wildlife and ecological lectures.



Samantha said: “The children have all loved it! We’ve found some wonderful nature spots near where we live in places like Clanfield and Leigh Park and we particularly enjoyed doing the bat surveys.

“It’s also just been lovely going on country walks and feeling more connected with the landscape and all the little things going on around you. It’s not just walking on paths and you begin to notice all the wildlife. We’re so lucky to have the National Park and all its flora and fauna on our doorstep.”

All the recipients will receive a certificate for their accomplishment.

Siân said: “A big well done to all the families who took part!

“We know it’s been a difficult year for so many families but this initiative has really demonstrated that you don’t need loads of resources to connect with and appreciate nature on your doorstep.



“As we move into the recovery phase of Covid over the coming months and years, we’ll be looking to do more physical engagement and encouraging families from underrepresented communities, including in cities like Southampton, Portsmouth and Brighton, to have access to nature.

It’s a really exciting and important direction for National Parks. Aside from the obvious benefits for people’s mental health and well-being, we want to help foster new generations who will care for our natural environment. I think the crux of it is that we’re very much part of nature – nature isn’t separate to us – and we can all play our part in looking after the natural world around us.”

For more information about completing an award with the National Park please visit

www.southdowns.gov.uk/john-muir-award-in-the-south-downs-national-park/

The Families Outreach Project is kindly funded through grants from the South Downs National Park Trust, the official independent charity for the National Park.



Those happy moments and memories in the South Downs are something we all cherish.

Whether it’s going for a walk with loved ones and taking in the views, meeting up with a friend for a picnic, or just going for a stroll with your dog, the National Park has that remarkable ability to make you feel good.

So, as the lockdown restrictions begin to ease in a phased way over the coming months, we’ll be asking people to make the most of re-connecting with this beautiful natural space, while also helping to keep nature happy.

Small things that take little effort can make a big difference, says Allison Thorpe, Access and Recreation Lead for the National Park.

“After such a challenging year, we know people will be really keen to re-connect with nature and enjoy those uplifting experiences in the South Downs,” said Allison.

“We want everyone to have a happy, positive experience in the National Park and part of that shared experience is helping to keep nature happy. The South Downs is a landscape that is teeming with wildlife and oozing with history, as well as being a working landscape for farmers.

“So it’s important we all do the simple things to keep it a special, happy place for everyone to enjoy and to help nature flourish.”

Some of the little things people can do to help are:

- Leave no trace – enjoy the South Downs, but please take all your litter home, do not light fires and close gates behind you.
- Plan Ahead – some visitor hotspots may get very busy, so always have a plan B and check ahead for parking facilities, toilets and opening times.
- Stick to the paths, particularly during ground-nesting bird season (March to September)
- Keep your dog on a lead around livestock.

Allison added: “People should continue to follow the current Government guidance and we’ll be updating our [website](#) as and when changes are made.”

Celebrating diverse voices

Oh the joys of spring!



A blanket of blue blooms in the woods is surely one of the greatest sights of spring.

And, after a long winter that is now starting to ebb away, the joy of spring has been captured beautifully in this winning photograph of the South Downs National Park.

Dad-of-three Jamie Fielding took this majestic picture of a carpet of bluebells in woods near his home in West Sussex.

The photograph, called Springtime Blues, was one of over 400 to be entered in the South Downs National Park's Annual Photography Competition 2020/21, which had the theme "My Tranquil Haven". During January the public voted in their thousands for their favourite image in "The People's Choice" poll and Jamie's image took the top spot.

Jamie, a manager, who lives in Angmering and wins a £100 prize, said: "It's wonderful that this photograph has struck a chord with so many people. I think it's an uplifting picture and heralds better times ahead."

"I'm really lucky to have these amazingly beautiful woodlands on my doorstep and took the image during the first lockdown on one of my daily walks."

Describing his stunning image, Jamie added: "Spring is always a wonderful time of year on the South Downs – everything comes back to life and, best of all, the forests start to wake up too. There's something very peaceful about a spring forest, with nothing but birdsong at dawn and the chance of spotting a deer roaming around."

The UK has over half the world's population of bluebells. Bluebells usually flower from mid-April to late May, depending on the weather. If spring is mild they tend to bloom early and they will often first appear in the South West of Britain where it's a little warmer than the rest of the UK.

A flower with strong folklore connections, it's said that bluebells ring at daybreak to call fairies to the woods.

Craig Daters, a Lead Ranger for the South Downs National Park, added: "This really is a wonderful image capturing the essence of spring in the South Downs. Our native bluebells are a protected species and offer an important habitat for a range of bee and butterfly species. You can help protect native bluebells by keeping to the path on your woodland walks."



A new creative writing bursary is being launched for Black, Asian and ethnically diverse writers whose work aims to explore the landscape, wildlife and heritage of the National Park.

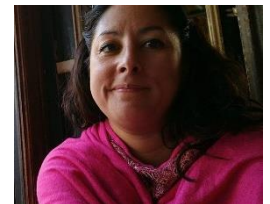
'Shifting the Gaze' will offer 15 bursaries of £500 to writers to fund time researching and developing new writing projects that focus on the beautiful South Downs landscape.

The bursary programme is a Writing Our Legacy project, in partnership with the South Downs National Park Authority and in association with New Writing South.

This project follows a bumper 18 months of activity for Writing Our Legacy. The Sussex-based arts organisation delivered 'New Narratives', a programme of workshops, socials and retreats for writers of colour in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

'Shifting the Gaze' comes as the National Park Authority is celebrating a "Year of Creative Writing" with a number of projects that use the region's stunning landscape and history as inspiration for wordsmithery.

Amy Zamarripa Solis, Chair and Programme Manager of Writing Our Legacy, said: "Writing Our Legacy is delighted to be working in partnership with South Downs National Park and in association with New Writing



South to present an opportunity to hear from new voices from the South East's diverse creative talent. The Park's rich heritage and inspiring landscapes provide a place for writers to explore and connect with an incredibly important place of natural beauty in the region. We can't wait to see the applications from writers and we urge writers of all levels of experience and backgrounds to apply."

Anooshka Rawden, Cultural Heritage Lead for the National Park, said: "This is a really exciting initiative for the National Park to be involved with. We hope this project supports established and emerging talent, providing opportunities to explore the landscape through new stories, woven from the perspective of diversity."

Applications will open on 5 April and close on 5 May. Apply via www.writingourlegacy.org.uk

Pollinators and people get helping hand from National Park grants



Creating a new nature hub, bringing a “lost village” back to life and surveying important buried archaeological remains are among the exciting projects to benefit from a National Park fund.

A range of inspiring initiatives across Hampshire, West Sussex and East Sussex have been awarded grant funding from the Sustainable Communities Fund (SCF). The dedicated community fund is a partnership between the South Downs National Park Trust, the official independent charity for the National Park, and the South Downs National Park Authority.

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The “**Bees & Seas**” Project has been awarded a grant of £7,500 to help enhance links between the South Downs and the coast for pollinators, such as bees and butterflies. The initiative plans to create a pollinator hub in Brooklands Park, Worthing, by transforming an area of derelict land into a community garden, including a bee-friendly lawn, orchard trees, beehives, bug hotels and herb planting. Outdoor classroom areas would also be provided for children to learn about pollinators and biodiversity. The project aims to extend habitat links for bees to Dankton Barnyard in Sompting, within the National Park, where there is already an existing community garden.

Meanwhile, a £6,000 grant was approved for a community-led project at **Tide Mills**, in East Sussex. Spearheaded by LYT Productions, the creative heritage project plans to bring the fascinating story of the abandoned village to life through a series of digital, artistic and immersive experiences, culminating in a celebratory week in September of this year. The village dates back to the Tidal Mills built in the 1760s, but has also been home to a First World War seaplane station, racing stables, a radio station, a beach hospital, and even a pineapple pit. The last residents of Tide Mills were

SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY evicted during the Second World War and the village fell into ruin.

Heritage is also at the fore of another project to benefit from the Sustainable Communities Fund. A grant of £5,000 was awarded to **Liss Archaeology** to help buy a magnetometer, which measures the strength of magnetic fields in the ground. The five-year project would see non-invasive, geophysical surveys carried out at a number of key sites to find previously unknown, and potentially significant, archaeology.

A grant of £5,000 was awarded to help create a permanent home for **Liss Men’s Shed** through the renovation of a storage building at Newman Collard Playing Fields, in Liss. Supporting health and wellbeing, especially among older men, the hub would provide a workshop and meeting place for local people.

A number of smaller grants were also awarded to the following projects:

- **Butts Brow, Eastbourne** – Exploration and archaeological excavation of the Neolithic monument at Butts Brow to interpret and explore the cultural heritage of the area with the wider public (£1,800)
- **Dark Night Skies CPRE Sussex** – A project encouraging Sussex residents, including schoolchildren, to understand and enjoy the Dark Skies across the National Park and beyond (£2,000).
- **Fulking Ram Pump, West Sussex** – Installing an information board for visitors to understand the history and origins of the pump (£1,039)
- **The Living Coast Undersea Experience, East Sussex** – To develop the educational programme in schools to teach young people about the wildlife at Beachy Head West Marine Conservation Zone (£2,000)

Doug Jones, a National Park Authority Member, who chairs the SCF grants panel, said:

“This special landscape is dependent on volunteers and community organisations who give their time and support but often lack funds. We’re pleased to be able to award these grants to a variety of really inspirational projects.



“They are all themed around health and wellbeing, celebrating heritage, giving nature a helping hand and connecting people with place.

“These are core areas of the National Park Authority’s work and lie at the heart of our five-year Partnership Management Plan, which aims to bring partners together to create an even better home for people and nature. I’m certainly excited to see the progress of these projects over the coming months and years.”

For more information on the Sustainable Communities Fund and to find out about applying for a grant visit www.southdownstrust.org.uk/scf/

The celestial beauty of our wondrous dark skies



A mesmerising shot of the Milky Way over an Iron Age hillfort and a crab venturing out for a night-time forage are among the stars of the South Downs National Park's astrophotography competition.

More than 150 entries were received for the National Park's first cosmic photography contest and a judging panel has now chosen the winners across three categories. Judging the contest was Dan Oakley, "Dark Skies" Ranger for the National Park, Graham Bryant, a Fellow of the Royal Astronomical Society, and Petersfield-based Tiffany Francis-Baker, author of *Dark Skies*.

Taking the top spot in the South Downs Dark Skyscapes category is "Milky Way from Cissbury" by Neil Jones. The stunningly-intricate shot shows off the chalk landscape of Cissbury Ring with an immense view of the Milky Way, as well as night-time views of towns and cities near the National Park.

Dan said: "This is the best picture for Dark Skies that I've seen – I love it. It's got a bit of everything."

Graham said: "I like the juxtaposition of the dark monochromatic sky and the colours of the foreground. The Milky Way has not been overprocessed and you can see it in all its glory."

Taking second place is "Milky Way at Birling Gap," by John Fox. Third place is awarded to "Neowise over Arundel", also by Neil Jones, with a stunning view of Arundel Castle and the Comet Neowise in the sky. Judges also highly commended a "Meeting of Old Men", by Verity Stannard, showing the Long Man of Wilmington and the constellation of Orion.

In the Living Dark Skies category, the first prize is awarded to "Starry Crab", by Anthony Whitbourn, who captured a captivating shot of a shore crab at Cuckmere Haven.



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Tiffany said: "The colours are beautiful. It tells the story of nocturnal wildlife and all those creatures that come out when darkness falls."

Picking up second place is "Gazing at Mars", by Luke Chipperfield, who captured an enthralling image of his two children looking up at the red planet while at River Rother Nature Reserve in Petersfield, Hampshire.

Dan said: "There's a great story behind this image and it's the kind of photograph that really inspires people to go out stargazing for themselves."

Third prize goes to "Night Fox", by Richard Murray, who captured an incredible shot of a curious fox in his garden in Waterlooville, Hampshire. Judges also highly commended "Startrail Chestnut Tree", also by Anthony Whitbourn and taken at the Cowdray Estate in Midhurst, West Sussex.

The final category to be judged was Our Magnificent Moon, which had no geographic limit on where the photograph was taken.

Taking the top spot is "By The Light of the Silvery Moon", by David Oldham, with a hauntingly-beautiful shot of Lord's Piece in West Sussex.



Graham said: "I love the silhouette of the trees and the mistiness of this image."

Tiffany said: "I love this image because it really focuses on what the moonlight is touching and that's a really interesting concept. It's very ethereal, supernatural and captivating."



Second place is awarded to "Our Magnificent Moon", taken by Jashanpreet Singh Dingra. The incredible shot of the moon was captured from the Punjab region of India.

Tiffany said: "This is incredible photography of the moon and the detail in the craters is amazing."

Third prize goes to "Moonrise over London", by Martin Howe, who captured the moon rising at twilight next to St Paul's Cathedral. Judges also highly commended "Moon and Venus Skies", by Fiona Filly, who captured the amazing night sky from her front garden near Storrington, West Sussex.

Winners will be picking up a prize of £150 for first place, £75 for second place and £50 for third place.

Vote for your favourite image in The People's Choice! Visit www.southdowns.gov.uk

Catch up on video highlights from last month's Dark Skies Festival [here!](#)

Prestigious awards return



The Sussex Heritage Trust's annual awards have been launched, with a call for new entries for the prestigious architectural and landscape scheme.

The only Sussex-wide Heritage Awards supports excellence in conservation, restoration, and the good design of newly-built projects, while also encouraging the use of traditional skills and crafts.

This year the National Park Authority will sponsor a brand-new award, The South Downs Design Award, which provides an opportunity to promote outstanding design in a nationally-designated landscape. This coveted award will go to a project that clearly demonstrates a positive contribution to the South Downs National Park, including schemes that have conserved and enhanced the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the area.

The Awards calls for entries across nine categories from residential to public and community to ecclesiastical to building crafts. Last year saw a total of 25 Award winners, of which 8 featured in the South Downs National Park, including the Historic Stew Ponds Project at Arundel Castle and West Dean College Roof Restoration at West Dean College of Art and Conservation.

The Sussex Heritage Trust Awards will be taking entries until 26 March. Winners receive a hand-crafted slate presented by the President of the Sussex Heritage Trust, The Rt Hon Lord Egremont DL on 14 July.

David Cowan, Chairman of the Sussex Heritage Trust Awards Committee, said: "Sussex Heritage Trust is delighted to welcome the South Downs National Park Authority as an Awards partner to help us highlight outstanding design in the South Downs in Sussex."

Tim Slaney, Director of Planning at the South Downs National Park Authority, said: "High-quality design matters to the National Park and to the local communities within it.

"That's why we've created a template for design excellence in our Local Plan, encouraging architects and builders to use this diverse landscape as a compass for great design. We look forward to seeing the variety of entries that showcase the first-class built environment in the National Park."

For an entry pack and to enter the Awards please go to www.sussexheritagetrust.org.uk or email: office@sussexheritagetrust.org.uk

Streams teeming with life



Chalk streams are home to some incredible fauna and flora and a new project aims to raise awareness of these globally-significant habitats. Sophie Evingar, from the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, gives an update.

Exciting times are afoot for seven local chalk streams, as the Watercress and Winterbournes Landscape Partnership Scheme goes from strength to strength. This five-year scheme brings together 16 partner organisations - including the South Downs National Park Authority - to protect, enhance, and celebrate the headwaters of the Rivers Test and Itchen.

While the rivers themselves are iconic features of the Hampshire landscape, the chalk streams that give them life are among its greatest hidden treasures. These globally scarce environments are home to species like water vole, brown trout, southern damselfly, and white-clawed crayfish, and have inspired a vibrant cultural heritage.

Unfortunately, these special waters face increasing pressure from issues like pollution, loss of habitat, and poor land management. The scheme partners, with support from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, are seeking to change this situation through projects ranging from habitat enhancements to creative opportunities.

The scheme's early stages have been impacted by Covid-19, but great progress has been made nonetheless. Restoration to the Pillhill Brook at Abbots Ann has added natural bank defences, planted trees, and created fish spawning habitat. At Hurstbourne Priors, sensitive alterations to a historic mill have opened 3km of the Bourne Rivulet to species like brown trout and grayling.

Over in Alresford, the historic Eel House has been fortified by crucial repairs, thanks in part to a donation from the scheme. Our support has also helped primary school children in Cheriton to improve their village stream - by planting wildflowers along the banks, they have helped boost wildlife habitat and tackle soil erosion. Our volunteers have gained new skills through online training in water vole ecology and invertebrate identification. Scheme research has provided insight on natural solutions to flooding, and our photography competition is capturing the streams in all their glory. Very soon, our small grants will be empowering communities to run their own stream-related projects too. Find out more [here](#).

Children to help design revamped wildlife garden



Aspiring young designers and naturalists are being invited to submit ideas for a new feature in a revamped nature space.

The South Downs National Park Trust is helping to support the development of Rolls Royce's wildlife garden, which is set to have a new lease of life with new nature-friendly features.

The Chichester company is asking children aged from 5 to 11 to suggest features that would enhance the garden and its habitat value to local flora and fauna. As well as ideas to nurture wildlife, such as pollinator-friendly plants, trees and flowers, bird feeders, bug hotels and nest-boxes, children can design seats, shelters, sculpture and other items.

The winner of the design competition will be chauffeur-driven to the Home of Rolls-Royce, then perform an official opening ceremony for the rejuvenated Garden, before viewing their winning feature in its new setting.

Julie Fawcett, Chair of the South Downs National Park Trust, the official charity for the National Park, said: "We've worked with Rolls-Royce for a number of years, notably on its wonderful Goodwood Apiary project. We're delighted to support this development of the wildlife garden and a National Park Ranger will also be carrying out a formal wildlife survey.

"It's inspiring to see major local companies taking a real, tangible interest in their surrounding environment, and making an important contribution to the ecological health of the wider area. Nature doesn't recognise boundaries, so a key aspect of the National Park's Nature Recovery Strategy is to help create a network of wildlife havens right across the South East. This wildlife garden is nature recovery in action and it's great to see people collaborating to boost biodiversity."

The development of the garden is also being supported by Chichester District Council. Councillor Penny Plant, who leads the environment portfolio, said: "Wildlife corridors are incredibly important for protecting biodiversity, particularly pollinators, by linking areas of habitat that have been fragmented by human activity."

For more details visit:

www.rolls-roycewildlifegarden.com

SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY A toad-ally brilliant community effort!



A village has rallied round to help save the local population of toads that embark on a treacherous migration every year. Elaina Whittaker-Slark, Lead Ranger for the Western Downs in Hampshire, reveals more.

Recent research from Froglife showed that common toads have declined across the UK by 68% over the past 30 years.

However, the villagers of Newton Valence are going to great lengths to protect their important migration of toads to help buck this trend.



Each year more than 1,000 toads attempt to cross Hulam Lane in Newton Valence to reach the local ponds to breed, but sadly many don't make it. To find a solution, villagers have organised a project to install a road closure for the period of the toads' migration.

The project has been supported by Froglife and the National Park's Western Downs Team, as well as Hampshire County Council and East Hampshire District Council.

The toads have now started their migration and the best evening so far is 71 toads crossing safely, showing the signs are already working. This is great news for nature recovery in the South Downs!

If you would like to do your bit for toads (and other wildlife) leave an undisturbed wild area in your garden with uncut grass, log piles and large stones and rocks.

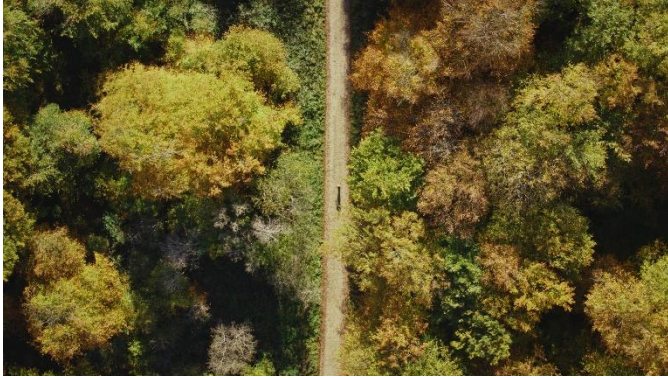
If you're a gardener you may also want to help toads in your garden as their diet consists of snails and slugs as well as ants and beetles. Toads actually live away from water and only head to ponds to breed, so you do not need a pond in your garden to attract toads. Just make sure that if you do have one there is a way out for toads (and other wildlife).

Keep an eye out for your local amphibians – you'll know if you have a toad, rather than a frog, as they walk or crawl rather than hop.

Froglife would also like to know your sightings and you can log them [here](#).

Looking after the majestic birds of our heathlands

A unique tour of National Parks – in 100 seconds!



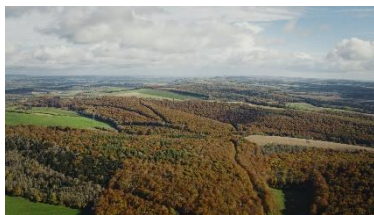
Have you ever wondered how National Parks might look from a birds-eye view hovering 100ft up?

Well, the kaleidoscope of landscapes, from forest to farmland, mountains to rivers, have been dramatically captured on film by National Geographic Explorer and Guerilla Geographer Daniel Raven-Ellison during his one-man navigation of all of the UK's 15 National Parks.

The resulting footage is "UK National Parks in 100 Seconds" – a unique snapshot of the variety of National Parks and the impact of humans on these living and working landscapes. The film was shot by drone filmmaker Jack Smith and narrated by former Catatonia singer Cerys Matthews and seeks to explore whether perception of protected landscapes meets the reality.

The piece balances the screen time of its subjects according to the percentage of land each kind of environment comprises in our National Parks. Pasture for livestock, for instance, gains just over 24 seconds, peat bogs 11 seconds and water just over a second.

Daniel said exploring the treescapes and heaths of the South Downs were a highlight for him.



"Before this project I had not known about the work being done to restore some of the National Park's heathlands and it was a pleasure to film those from the air", said Daniel.

"The South Downs is fortunate to be so wooded and most of the forest you see in the film was shot at a very autumnal Queen Elizabeth Country Park. The South Downs is hands-down one of my favourite places in the UK to both enjoy and work in. For another project I walked across the National Park from Rowlands Castle to Alton via Petersfield. I love exploring the steep Hanger hills and the landscape's woodlands."

And Daniel adds: "In the UK our National Parks are quite different to some of the world's "wilder" protected areas. They are living and working landscapes that are home to hundreds of thousands of people as well as wildlife."

See the video on our website [here](#).



Olivia French is an Engagement Officer for the Heathlands Reunited project and shares four of her favourite bird species – and offers tips on how we can all help protect them!



March sees the start of ground-nesting bird season when an array of avian species make their homes on the ground. South Downs heathland is home to a number of beautiful birds that choose the protection of the heather, gorse and soft sandy soil to lay their eggs and raise their young.

Nightjar

A master of camouflage, the nightjar is a ground-nesting bird that migrates long distances from Africa to breed and nest on our heath in late April. Their plumage is a grey brown colour and makes for perfect camouflage on the heath. They feed on nocturnal insects such as flies, moths and beetles, using the hairs around their mouths to detect their prey's wingbeats. During breeding season males put on quite a show by making a unique "churring" sound and loudly clap their wings together to mark their territories. Females lay their eggs directly onto the bare ground and then use their camouflage to blend perfectly into their surroundings.



Dartford warbler



A small brown bird often found singing its scratchy song from the tops of gorse bushes it resides on our heaths all year round. It has a distinctive red eye ring, rusty breast and long tail. The Dartford Warbler begins nesting in April and builds its nest on the ground

amongst dense heather and gorse. Both males and females help to build the nest and females often have two or three broods a year.

Woodlark

The woodlark is another bird which builds its nest on the ground on the heath in the south of England. It is a small mottled brown bird with a distinctive black and white mark on the edge of its wings. The secretive woodlark can be hard to spot. It nests on the ground on our southern heathlands and uses scattered trees and woodland edges for lookout posts. Their musical song can be heard by day or night, particularly between March and August. These birds nest earlier in the year than others, sometimes before the end of March and females can raise several broods each year.



Stonechat

Listen out for this bird on the heath, named stone chat due to their song sounds like two stones being hit together. This bird is a little smaller than a robin male and has a black head with an orange red chest. Highly territorial, males are often seen sitting on top of trees, power lines and gorse. Females build their nests under or in gorse bushes and pairs rear two or three broods per season.



All of these birds rely on lowland heath to survive. For years the lowland heath in Britain was considered a wasteland and much of this habitat was lost due to development, farming and plantations. Heathlands Reunited is a partnership of 11 organisations, led by the South Downs National Park Authority and is working to restore the heath for these vulnerable species.

How can you help?

These species of groundnesting birds are particularly vulnerable to disturbance. Their camouflage makes them difficult to notice and inquisitive dogs can trample nests or frighten the birds into abandoning their nests.

As a result, during the season from March to September, please keep your dog on a lead and stick to the paths while walking on the heath to help protect them for future generations to admire 😊



Schoolgirl interviews South Downs farmer

In 1995 Eastbourne hosted the first ever international conference on the environment for children titled 'Leave It To Us'.

More than 850 children from all around the world discussed their pressing environmental concerns of the time – which included animal welfare.

To mark the 25th anniversary last year, Antonia Lucas, a founding member of the Eastbourne Downland Group, has made a touching short film, with the help of Eastbourne farmer Henry Brown and Eastern Downs Ranger Max Sheldon.

Overcoming the challenges of lockdown, Antonia, invited local schoolgirl Clara Hampshire, 10, to represent the children of Eastbourne.



Clara visited Chalk Farm and was introduced to Henry's dog Midge.

Antonia said: "She had never seen a sheep dog in action before and was totally amazed that Midge was able to round up a large flock of sheep in under 10 minutes."

The film also explains the importance of dog walkers keeping their pooches on leads around livestock and working farms.

Antonia added: "The short film is a resource for all schools that have local access to the National Park and is designed to stimulate classroom discussion on the purpose of the South Downs."

Watch the video [here](#).

Pic credits

p1 – Daniel Greenwood; p3 Right Column – Stewart Garside; p6 Right Column – Linda Pitkin/HIWWT; p8 Right Column – Trevor Baker