



South Downs News

WORK AND PLAY IN YOUR NATIONAL PARK

This month:

- **It's official** We reveal our £2m plans to create a world-class visitor experience and improve wildlife habitats at a key gateway to the South Downs, Seven Sisters Country Park.
- **Competition time!** Win up to £250 for your community or an RSPB camera by submitting a project where you've helped your local wildlife.
- **Youth Action** Learn more about an exciting programme of free events for young people.
- **Secrets of the Heath** The festival returns with fun for all the family – and our four-legged friends!

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

New era for Seven Sisters to benefit people and nature

Ownership of Seven Sisters Country Park has been transferred to the Authority, heralding a new exciting chapter for the iconic site.

Completing a negotiation process that started over two years ago, management of the 280-hectare site has now been transferred from East Sussex County Council to the SDNPA, ensuring the beautiful site remains in public ownership.

We have committed just under £2m investment to help create a world-class visitor centre, as well as a long-term goal of improving habitats for wildlife.

Trevor Beattie, Chief Executive of the National Park Authority, said: "Today marks a new chapter for Seven Sisters – a truly iconic site of international importance that is a gateway to both the Sussex Heritage Coast and the wider South Downs National Park.

"We want to build on the work done by East Sussex County Council to create an outstanding habitat and world-class visitor centre that together do justice to the landscape and the location.



"Our significant initial investment underpins the Authority's long-term plans to conserve and enhance Seven Sisters Country Park, ensuring that it continues to be an iconic, healthy and



cherished place for future generations."

Work has begun this month on refurbishing the visitor centre and toilet facilities have also re-opened, with a full cleaning schedule in place.

The Authority has a number of initial plans that are part of a long-term commitment to improve the site for people and nature:

- Just under £2m of works to improve the current facilities at Exceat, including a refurbished visitor centre, new and accessible toilet facilities, a locally-sourced and sustainable takeaway food service, better signage, as well as renovated accommodation and facilities at Foxholes, allowing more people to spend a night enjoying the dark night skies reserve.
- Better educational signage for the public so they can explore and understand the history and wildlife of the country park.

- Making caring for the landscape easier by having bins available for rubbish and recycling, and supporting responsible dog behaviour.
- Improving habitat for a wide range of plants and animals including the Adonis blue butterfly, skylark, redshank, yellow horned poppy, ringed plover, bee orchid and wigeon.
- The appointment of a 'Writer in Residence', Alinah Azadeh, who will be telling stories of and from this special landscape, exploring themes of diversity, climate and resilience. Alinah's work will run until the end of 2022, and will explore Seven Sisters and the wider Sussex Heritage Coast through a series of writer retreats, workshops, podcasts, walks and live events. This inspiring new project is being supported by Arts Council England.
- A website to help people to plan their visit and navigate and understand the features of the country park.

As part of the National Park's wider goal for nature recovery, there will be careful landscape management to improve chalk grassland, grazing marsh and wet meadows to improve biodiversity.



Trevor added: "The site is part of a vibrant rural community and we want to widen the positive local impact of the country park. We want visitors to feel empowered to explore further along

the South Downs Way, or the new England Coast Path, to travel on to other local sites, and to enjoy the wonderful pubs, shops, breweries and vineyards that the local community has to offer."

Cllr Claire Dowling, Lead Member for Transport and Environment at East Sussex County Council, said: "The transfer of the Seven Sisters Country Park to the South Downs National Park Authority is great news for the residents of, and visitors to, East Sussex.

"Protecting our countryside sites for future generations is a top priority for the council and the Authority is an organisation with a great track record of conservation and safeguarding public access to the countryside.

"I am delighted that the transfer, which ensures this iconic Sussex beauty spot remains in public hands, has been successfully completed."

The dedicated Seven Sisters team are operating an information van seven days a week over the coming months to support visitors to enjoy and care for Seven Sisters.

Peter Cousin, the new Commercial Manager for Seven Sisters, said: "The team and I are thrilled to be onsite and interacting with the public.

"Everyone we have spoken to have been so positive and supportive of our plans for improving the visitor facilities and also our work to help nature to thrive on the site."

For more information and to see the new Seven Sisters website visit www.sevensisters.org.uk

The South Downs National Park Trust, the official charity of the National Park, will be supporting the conservation and enhancement of the site. The refurbishments are being supported by a number of donors, including The

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Rampion Fund at Sussex Community Foundation and the Wolfson Foundation. Donations can be made via the website www.southdownstrust.org.uk

Plan your visit!

Our new website allows you to explore the area and to plan your visit. It includes useful information on accessibility, accommodation, eating, cliff safety and dogs. Visit <https://www.sevensisters.org.uk/plan-your-visit/explore-by-map/>



Commonly asked questions...

Are you looking to increase visitor numbers to the Country Park?

Our goal is to create a better experience for those visiting Seven Sisters Country Park. There are already between 500,000 to 1 million people visiting each year and we want to make sure that there are adequate and accessible toilets, signage, parking, bins and information, so that they can better find, enjoy, understand and experience the Country Park, leaving as little impact on the landscape as possible.

We also want people coming to Seven Sisters Country Park to see it is as a gateway to the wider Sussex Heritage Coast and South Downs National Park. We want visitors to feel empowered to explore further in the South Downs National Park, widening the positive local economic impact of the Country Park.

For more frequently asked questions about the transfer click [here](#).



Trevor Beattie and the new visitor experience team at Seven Sisters

Competition celebrates the things we do to help nature



An exciting competition has launched to celebrate the things we can all do to give wildlife a helping hand.

We want to hear from people who have helped nature at home, or in their community, since the start of lockdown last year.

There are some fantastic prizes up for grabs, including up to £250 towards helping wildlife in your community, family membership of the RSPB and a bug-hunting kit.

National Park Ranger Chloe Goddard, who was filmed building a swift box in her garden last year, explained: “The past 18 months has seen so many people reconnect with the wonders of the natural world, particularly the wildlife in their garden or local area.

“Have you spent time this past year making bug hotels or a mini pond? Or perhaps your community or school has planted new wildflower beds? If you’ve done something to help nature, we’d love to hear from you!”

The competition has been launched as part of the National Park’s ReNature campaign – the biggest initiative in the National Park’s history that is looking to create around 21,000 football pitches of new wildlife-rich habitat.

To enter the competition, people simply need to email a picture of their #ReNature project and a short description.

#ReNature projects could include:

- Putting up a bird or bat box in your garden or community.
- Planting a wildflower patch in your garden, on your window sill or at your local park.
- Organising a community litter pick to help clear up rubbish at green spaces.
- Digging a mini-pond in your garden to help aquatic insects and other wildlife.
- Planting trees at your school.
- Businesses creating a wildflower patch in their grounds.

There are two categories: one for projects carried out at home and one for projects carried out in the community (such as at the local park, at school, or in your business).

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The first prize for the “At Home” category is an RSPB camera or family membership of RSPB, runner-up is a Nature Hideaway Kit from The Den Kit Company, and third prize is an amazing entomology kit from The Den Kit Company.

The first prize for the “In the Community” category is £250 towards helping nature in your community, with a runner-up prize of £150 and a third prize of £75.

Chloe added: “We really want this competition to capture people’s imaginations about the simple things we can do to help nature – many of which can be achieved with little or no budget and a generous dose of creativity and determination!

“Everyone can play their part in tackling the biodiversity crisis and helping wildlife to thrive.”

The deadline for the competition is 30 September 2021.

See full terms and conditions and find out more at www.southdowns.gov.uk/renature/entering-your-renature-project-to-win-a-prize

Entries can be emailed to competition@southdowns.gov.uk with the subject line ‘My ReNature Moment’

The competition comes after the “Help Nature to ReNature” campaign launched last month with the aim of raising £100m over the next decade to help create an additional 13,000 hectares of wildlife-rich habitat. Find out more [here](#).

Have you taken a beautiful picture of your “happy place” yet?



Harting Down by Jill Howgate, from 2020 Photo Competition

Speaking of competitions, have you entered the National Park’s annual photo competition yet?

There is a top prize of £250 for the winning photographer and a clutch of great family days-out for the winners of our youth competition.

The theme this year is “Nature Makes Me Happy” and the broad theme can include landscape, wildlife, heritage or people.

Entries close on Sunday 31 October.

Find out more and download the entry form at www.southdowns.gov.uk/care-for/photocompetition2021/

Youth Action returns for 2021!



Young people are being invited to get involved in hands-on conservation as South Downs Youth Action returns with an exciting programme this summer and autumn.

A series of inspirational free events has been organised across Hampshire and Sussex to help young people connect with nature and find out more about the environment.

Well over 200 places have been made available and experiences include photographing wildlife, learning more about meadow wildlife, clearing plastic from beaches and learning more about chalk grassland, often called “Europe’s tropical rainforest in miniature”.

As well as the day trips, new for 2021 are two fun weekend residential experiences – at Truleigh Hill, near Shoreham, and the South Downs Youth Hostel in Southease, East Sussex.

The experiences are for anyone aged 16 to 25 and online booking is now open.

Daniel Greenwood, Volunteering Development Officer for the South Downs National Park, said: “It’s incredibly exciting to get South Downs Youth Action up and running again as we had to cancel last year’s programme because of the pandemic. We’re back for 2021 with a programme bigger than ever before.”



“These experiences are perfect for anyone who is passionate about making a difference for the environment and looking to learn practical conservation skills. The events and residential experiences are accessible for all and will be very relaxed and informal, with no previous experience necessary.”

“We know volunteering and conservation activities have been limited over the past 18 months, so this is a great opportunity for young people to get out into the fresh air, socialise, get up close to the amazing South Downs landscape and wildlife, and learn some new skills. It could even be the start of their green career!”

All activities are free of charge. Participants can claim back expenses for travel and meals. Registration is essential and people can book a place by visiting www.southdowns.gov.uk/sdya

SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY Improved access to hidden gem



The story of a remarkable church and its setting within beautiful downland has been brought to life thanks to a massive community effort.

St Hubert’s Church, often called “The Little Church in the Field”, has enjoyed a number of improvements, including new interpretation, walk leaflets, a children’s adventure trail and disabled access.

The work has been led by a partnership between the Idsworth Church Friends Trust and the South Downs National Park Authority, with support from East Hampshire District Council and Hampshire County Council.

The completion of the four-year project was celebrated as partners gathered last month. The church dates back at least a millennium, having been ordered to be built sometime around 1030AD by Earl Godwin, head of one of the most powerful families in Anglo-Saxon England and father to King Harold. The building’s foundations are believed to date back to Roman times.

Today the inside of the church contains some of the best surviving medieval wall paintings in Britain, while the outside is a photographer’s delight, offering breathtaking views of chalk downland.

Andrew Callender, Chairman of The Idsworth Church Friends Trust, said: “St Hubert’s is one of the jewels in the crown of the National Park and, despite all the challenges over the past 18 months, we’re really excited to unveil these important additions that will enhance people’s enjoyment of this very special little church and the landscape around it.”

The Idsworth Church Friends Trust, together with the National Park Authority, worked closely with church historian Tanya Heath, from Oriel College, Oxford, to produce the content for an interpretation panel that is crammed with fascinating information on the church and the Idsworth Valley. Two new leaflets – one recounting the **history of the church** and the other featuring **two walking routes** – are also available by the panel for the public to enjoy.

Meanwhile, children can now enjoy an adventure trail activity – aptly named “Hubert’s Adventure Trail” – when visiting the church.

Doug Jones, the local National Park Authority Member for the area, said: “I hope visitors get many hours of enjoyment learning more about the church and walking these wonderful trails.”

New trail launches at iconic hill



Visitors to Cissbury Ring will be able to enjoy a brand new digital interpretation trail to help them explore and understand the landscape seen today.

The exciting project is helping reveal the hidden stories and bring the character of this fascinating site to life. Thanks to funding from the South Downs National Park, the National Trust has worked in collaboration with Worthing Museum and local filmmakers to create the trail.

It will help visitors use local archaeological expertise to connect with the multi-layered history of the site shaped by 6,000 years of industry, defence, farming and ceremony.

Cissbury Ring is an iconic Sussex landmark dominating the surrounding landscape, with views south across the coastal plain to Worthing and as far as Brighton and north across the Weald.

James Brown, National Trust archaeologist, says "Cissbury Ring is a fascinating site rich in heritage that preserves the evidence of human activity from Neolithic people mining flint with antler picks 6,000 years ago through to WWII mechanised defence. There is so much to celebrate at this one site, but many of our visitors are often unaware of the ingenuity and endeavour of the people who have walked this landscape before so this is a great opportunity to start telling their and our stories in an engaging and informative way".

The trail can be accessed using personal handheld devices including smartphones.

Ten small plaques hidden around the hillfort will reveal a different piece of the landscape puzzle

James Sainsbury, Worthing Museum Archaeologist, added: "This digital interpretation approach allows us to visibly link the site you stand on with the archaeological finds excavated from beneath the ground as well as the maps drawings and photographs captured over 200 years of research from the Worthing Museum collections."

Anooshka Rawden, Cultural Heritage Lead for the National Park, said: "We were pleased to be able to fund this fantastic partnership initiative, bringing people new ways to learn about the 'deep time' of this special place, and to find out more about how the landscape is cared for by the National Trust today.

"From a prehistoric 'industrial revolution' to wartime defence, the story of Cissbury Ring is now one you can follow around the site with your mobile phone."

Heath extravaganza returns!



The popular Secrets of the Heath event returns next month, celebrating our local heathland's vibrant history and wildlife with an action-packed programme.

The festival takes place over the weekend of 4 and 5 of September from 11am to 4pm at Hogmoor Inclosure, near Bordon, in Hampshire;

From a Stone Age camp, have-a-go archery, to close encounters with reptiles that call the heath home, there are activities to keep the whole family entertained.

As well as re-enactments, and immersive storytelling sessions, visitors to the free annual festival can bring their dog and have a go at the Countryside Dog Ability Challenge, win a certificate and sign up to support our #TakeTheLead campaign. On Saturday night there is also the chance to join in an expert-led bat walk around the inclosure.

Colin Carré, Project Manager for Heathlands Reunited, said: "We're so pleased to be able to bring this community event to Bordon this year.

"As coronavirus restrictions are lifted, it's wonderful to be able to hold these in-person events once again, following what has been a tough year for so many. We hope the weekend of exciting events will encourage visitors of all ages in the local area to learn more about our unique and fascinating heathland habitat."

The event will take place within the Government's Covid guidelines.

The festival has moved from Petersfield to Bordon this year to celebrate the legacy of the Heathlands Reunited project, which focuses on the Wealden Heath Special Protection Areas situated around Bordon. Working with local authorities and organisations such as the Deadwater Valley Trust and The Land Trust, the project aims to inform, inspire and engage local communities to use their heathland sites in a responsible and sustainable way.



Heaths are rare and protected habitat which are home to a wide variety of fascinating and endangered wildlife species, including the Sand lizard, Natterjack toad and Nightjar.

The festival is organised by the Heathlands Reunited project.

That's toadally awesome news!



Almost £250,000 of lottery funding will help to create new dew ponds to help wildlife thrive.

Dew ponds are synonymous with the chalk grassland of the South Downs, historically being dug by farmers as a watering hole for livestock and providing a home for all manner of species, including frogs, toads and dragonflies.

However, it is estimated that up to 40 per cent of the dew ponds may have been lost in the region.

Now The Froglife Trust has been awarded a grant of £249,000 for its Discovering Dewponds project.

The trust will be working with Brighton & Hove City Council and the South Downs National Park Authority to create nine dewponds, working closely with land managers to achieve conservation goals.

The project will also be working with local communities to create wildlife corridors, improving local green spaces, parks and school grounds for wildlife.

Alongside the habitat work, the project will be delivering a programme of public engagement, including working with local groups to gather wildlife memories.

Jeremy Burgess, who leads landscape and biodiversity for water habitats in the National Park, said: "Dew ponds are an important feature in the landscape of the South Downs National Park and many are part of our cultural heritage, with a long history of sheep grazing and droving.

"The ponds are also key for biodiversity, providing a vital source of water in the dry chalk landscape, habitats for aquatic species and drinking and bathing for a wide range of birds and animals. This wonderful project complements our existing nature recovery work to help restore dew ponds and create a network that will help wildlife, including amphibians, flourish."



Kathy Wormald, CEO of Froglife, said "Thanks to National Lottery players, we will be able to restore and create dewponds currently missing from the landscape. It is a great opportunity for us to improve the biodiversity value of the South Downs, and to raise nature conservation awareness amongst new audiences."

Taking the lead with new film



Top tips on how to make dog walks fun and interesting – while also helping to protect our beautiful countryside – are being shared by a leading canine behaviourist as part of a new regional initiative.

Dog expert Natalie Light and her Jack Russell "Fish" are the stars of a new series of informative films called "Love Dogs, Love Nature".

The opening film explains Natalie's passion for pooches and how her walks are a great time to bond with her dog and introduce playful elements – all while keeping her best friend under control and sticking to the paths.

Over the coming months, five bitesize 50-second top tips films will be released, with Natalie sharing advice on how to get a better recall, new games to make walks more fun and ideas for working on your dog's behaviour around distractions in the outdoors.

The initiative is being spearheaded by a new group, called the Southern Counties Canine Access Management Partnership (SCCAMP). It includes the South Downs National Park Authority, New Forest National Park Authority, Bird Aware Solent, Heathland Hounds, Dorset Dogs and Devon Love Dogs.

It builds on the South Downs National Park's successful **Take The Lead** campaign, which has been running for several years and encourages responsible dog walking with simple actions, such as keeping dogs on leads around livestock and bagging and binning dog poo.

Natalie said: "I hope these tips help dog walkers to make the most of their time in the countryside, enjoying a stress-free walk and perhaps giving them some training ideas they might not have thought of."



"Dogs are certainly wonderful for our physical and mental wellbeing. When I'm walking with my dogs I'm enjoying myself and they're able to explore lots of new sniffs and smells."

"Our walks are a time for us to be together and enjoy some time outside and also keeping me, as well as my dogs and other visitors, safe by using a lead when I need to. This is particularly important when there's livestock around."

The opening film can be watched [here](#).

Things to do in the South Downs this August

Please follow the links as booking may be necessary. Find these and more events across the National Park and submit your own events at southdowns.gov.uk/events/



- **Steampunk** is making a return to Amberley Museum on 14 and 15 August with two days of live entertainment, retail therapy by specialist traders and of course, steam!
- Langham Brewery will be hosting its **Live at Langhams** event on 21 August with live music and an award-winning bar.
- Enjoy a **Proms Spectacular** at Stansted Park on 21 August. Commencing with a breathtaking 8,000ft freefall parachute display followed by a majestic spitfire display accompanied by well-known British war themes. This will be followed by a proms concert with London's Orion Orchestra.
- Enjoy a big wild summer at **RSPB Pulborough Brooks** with a range of activities during August, including minibeast hunting and reptile walks.
- Join in a free family event hosted by **Bees & Seas** at Brooklands Park, Worthing, from 20 August to 22 August. Activities include beekeeping demonstrations, food foraging and stone painting.
- Looking ahead to next month, enjoy a visit to **South Downs Green Fair** at the Sustainability Centre, East Meon, on 5 September.

YOU SAY:

Do you have a story you want to tell about the National Park? A burning issue that you think needs to be addressed? Or would you like to pen your own article about why you love the South Downs? Please let us know!



To submit a comment for our newsletter please email newsletter@southdowns.gov.uk. For a fast and direct response to your questions please email info@southdowns.gov.uk

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P1 left Tim Squire; P2 Rudiger Nold; P3 left Daniel Greenwood; p5 left Anne Purkiss