

SOUTH DOWNS  
NATIONAL PARK

# DOWNLAND THYMES

NEWS FOR THE SOUTH DOWNS VOLUNTEER  
RANGER SERVICE ISSUE 93 | AUTUMN 2021





# CHAIR'S CORNER

I was fortunate enough a couple of weeks ago to perform my first task since unlocking, flint walling with the National Trust. I hope that you are all finding the chance to get some volunteering done despite the current challenges.

Like some others I've found the limited tasks and cancellations less than ideal but in the midst of a pandemic I can live with a little disappointment.

I do sometimes wonder, when people talk about returning to normal whether they are really paying attention to what is happening in the world. For me a new normal means being infinitely more thoughtful, more flexible and receptive to change.

This week I enjoyed a walk from Eastbourne to Jevington for an 'inside' pint at the pub. En-route I passed the site where we had worked a couple of summers ago. We spent long days in hot weather cutting and raking by hand. The site is now a beautiful chalk grass meadow awash with wild flowers and wildlife. It was uplifting to see that the site was flourishing.

Conversely on the same walk I stepped into a barley field and the life stopped. The path across the field was a depressing monoculture. I counted the number of animals of any kind that I saw whilst crossing this field.

Over the next two minutes I counted a total of just three visible animals. Beyond the planted field the plants and wildlife were again abundant. I expect the farmer is pleased that nothing was eating their crops but I thought to myself how proud I am to be volunteering with the SDNPA that is working hard to improve this lovely space. I just have to keep reminding myself that change is a process and process takes time.

Anyway! It was good to find a nice day for walking when the climate changed weather has been so awful this summer. Everything at the allotment has got blight. Time to re-think my own crops and growing methods. Adapt or fail.

I read with interest Trevor Beattie writing in the South Downs Volunteer update about zero based budgeting. We volunteer exclusively through an organisation that is being hit hard by the fallout from a global pandemic, tackling climate change and increased housing pressures. The volunteer committee is watching this situation with interest to understand how budgetary pressure might affect volunteering.



On the subject of change I walked past the Seven Sisters Visitor Centre this week. The builders are evident. As part of the Eastern team and a local resident I am excited about the future of this site and volunteering opportunities evolving there.

But for those that are not close to this headline project I'd like to reassure all volunteers that the committee and the SDNPA remain focused on the whole volunteer experience.

An early heads up. Mick Heywood (secretary) and Helena Lewis (experience officer) are due to come to the end of their tenures on the VRS committee at the end of this year. Formal adverts to follow. Anyone with a view on the future of the committee or who might be interested in being on the committee can contact me for a chat. [vrschair@gmail.com](mailto:vrschair@gmail.com)

STEVE BROOKMAN – VRS CHAIR



## UPDATE FROM THE VOLUNTEERING TEAM

I hope you've enjoyed the summer, with what has been very mixed weather. I know many of you enjoy heading off on your travels, something which has been made more difficult of late. In the absence of international travel, I expect there may have been the odd trip to other National Parks in the UK, of which there are 14 more.



In July I spent a week in the Yorkshire Dales National Park, one of my favourite places to visit. It feels so different to the South Downs in terms of its rugged limestone outcrops and visible signs of industry like lead mining spilling out across the hills.

I am always struck by the sheer number of abandoned farmsteads and cottages in the more remote areas of the Dales. The place names are also quite wonderful, especially due to their links to Britain's Scandinavian heritage. The village of Askrigg's name derives from the ridge where the ash tree grows. Of course in southern England there are many 'Ashridges' as well.

The symbolism of the ash tree in Norse mythology is immense, with the world-tree of Yggdrasil perhaps based on an ash tree. It has also been a useful resource for settlers – the wood makes excellent axe handles (which Vikings were so dependent on!) and sheep favour its foliage. There are certainly plenty of sheep in the Dales.

Both the Dales and the Downs share ash trees as a symbol of home. In the Downs' chalky woods, ash has grown along with field maple and hazel for many thousands of years. Ash seems to be faring better up in Yorkshire than in the South Downs currently, though ash dieback disease is making in-roads and perhaps it's just lagging behind. Let's hope that the disease will not remove this significant tree from the landscape and thus cause its meaning to be completely lost.

I look forward to the day when volunteers are able to plant disease-resistant saplings of ash trees, so the meaning of this special tree can be safeguarded for future generations to come.

Did you visit any other National Parks this year? If so, we'd love to hear about your experiences and any reflections you might have. As ever, please email [dt@southdowns.gov.uk](mailto:dt@southdowns.gov.uk) to share your wonderful articles, photos and ideas.

As autumn arrives you'll be unsurprised to hear that it's one of my favourite times of year because of the mushroom peak – I know several rangers and volunteers feel the same way!

So do keep an eye out for fungi on your walks and volunteer days and send us any photos you might gather along the way.

Wishing you good health and mushrooms this autumn.

DANIEL GREENWOOD,  
VOLUNTEER DEVELOPMENT OFFICER

## EDITOR'S NOTE

I hope this edition of Downland Thymes finds you relaxing after a fun-filled summer, refreshed and ready to start getting back into more volunteering for those that can this autumn.



The past few months here at the National Park Authority have been extremely busy, even without our usual events schedule to keep on top of there has been lots happening with the completion of ownership of Seven Sisters Country Park and the launch of our ReNature campaign. You can find out more about both of these further on in this Downland Thymes.

At the time of writing this I have been enjoying exploring the beautiful heaths which have been in full bloom in the September sunshine. If you haven't done so already have a look at the Heathlands Sculpture Trail which is great inspiration for discovering new heathland sites. On page 7 you can read all about the new Serpent Trail Guide which is now available and

divides the winding long distance route into manageable short walks – perfect for a day out amongst the purple heathery hues.

Thank you to everyone who has contributed to this publication, it's been a difficult time to feel creative about writing articles or taking photos when volunteering has been quiet. However as things pick up again, please do keep sending in your pics, poems and stories to [dt@southdowns.gov.uk](mailto:dt@southdowns.gov.uk).

Wishing you all a sun-dappled, rosy-cheeked, crunchy-leaved kind of autumn.

BECKA,  
EDITOR, DOWNLAND THYMES



# DEW PONDS

As most readers will know, dew ponds (sometimes called cloud or mist ponds) were a historical facility created by landowners to assist in the provision of drinking water for cows and sheep in grazing pastures where no natural source was available. It is thought that the first reference to the name was in the journal of The Royal Agricultural Society in 1865, though ponds have been built since medieval times.

On the South Downs in particular the ponds, once dug, were lined with clay. The clay was wetted, trampled with a layer of lime underneath and mixed with straw. The lime discouraged worms from puncturing it and the straw was a protection against cracking from the sun if the pond dried out. A layer of flints around the top prevented piercing by cow and horse hooves.

Modern or renovated dew ponds sometimes have a plastic layer which is sandwiched into the straw. Dew ponds attract a vast array of wildlife, such as toads and newts and the mud at the bottom of the ponds is a useful home for frogs to hibernate in the winter. If you are lucky enough to witness the flight and hovering of dragonflies it is truly a sight to behold.

So all in all, the restoration work that some of us have had the privilege to have been involved with has paid dividends so far as work satisfaction is concerned.

DAVID GIBSON,  
VOLUNTEER RANGER  
CENTRAL AREA

Restored dew pond between Stoke Hazel Wood  
and The Burgh in a hollow, near Amberley  
© David Gibson



Seven Sisters  
© Benjamin Davies

## NEW ERA FOR SEVEN SISTERS TO BENEFIT PEOPLE AND NATURE

As many of you will now know, ownership of the iconic Seven Sisters Country Park was transferred to the South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) in August.

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.

The Authority has 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.

Work has now begun on refurbishing the visitor centre and the 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 behavior.

- 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 better 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.

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 has 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:

[sevensisters.org.uk](https://sevensisters.org.uk)



# SOUTH DOWNS YOUTH ACTION RETURNS BIGGER AND BETTER THAN EVER!

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 have 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.

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.

Youth Action Days will be taking place from August to October, hosted by partner organisations across the South Downs National Park.

South Downs Youth Action is organised by the South Downs National Park Authority with additional funding from Generation Green, Clarion Housing, South Downs National Park Trust and the Ernest Kleinwort Foundation.



© SDNPA



© SDNPA

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: [southdowns.gov.uk/sdya](https://southdowns.gov.uk/sdya)



Walker on Chapel common  
© SDNPA

## EXPLORE THE NEW LOOK SERPENT TRAIL

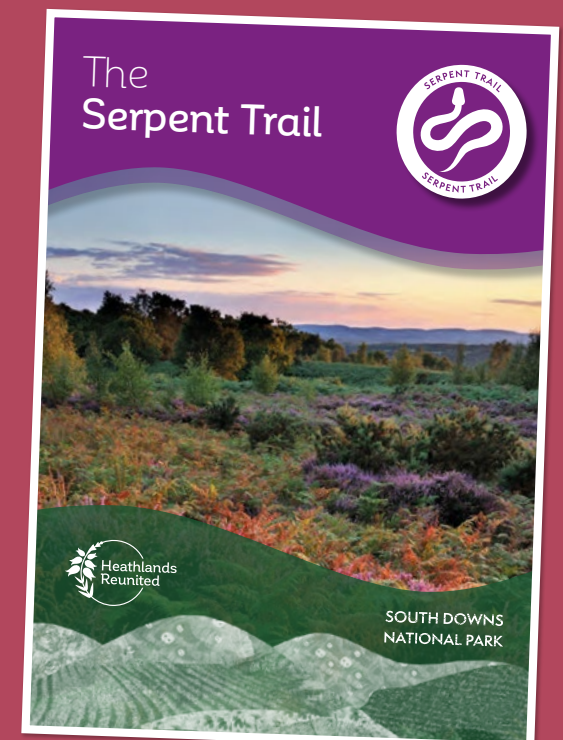
As its name suggests, the Serpent Trail is a waymarked path that twists and turns through stunning areas of lowland heath from Haslemere to Petersfield. A 65-mile trail, which can be broken down into 11 shorter, manageable stages – have a go and find out more about the beautiful heathland in the South Downs National Park.

Designed as part of the National Lottery Heritage Funded Heathlands Reunited project, the Serpent Trail helps you to discover the diversity of this precious habitat. Stages are of varying lengths and the newly updated Serpent Trail Guide helpfully gives public transport options for each section so that you can travel sustainably and leave the car at home. Each stage has a slightly different character and highlights the stunning wildlife you might see as well as describing features of the historic settlements you will pass.

Heaths are home to some wonderful wildlife that don't live anywhere else so keep your eyes and ears open for sand lizards, Dartford warblers, nightjars and silver studded blue butterflies.

If you haven't done so already you can also explore the Heathland Sculpture Trail – seven sculptures are waiting to be found on seven of the South Downs' stunning heathery sites:

[southdowns.gov.uk/heathlands-reunited/heathlands-sculpture-trail](https://southdowns.gov.uk/heathlands-reunited/heathlands-sculpture-trail)



The Serpents Trail front cover  
© SDNPA





White bryony  
© Kate Frankland



Wild clematis in gorse  
© Kate Frankland

# RAMBLING AND SCRAMBLING

The UK doesn't have many native plant species that are true climbers but it's fascinating to notice how these different species have evolved diverse strategies to get to where they want to be.

The familiar juvenile growth of ivy has aerial roots which attach to the host but take no nourishment through them.

Two woody climbing shrubs, the wild clematis, or old man's beard, and wild honeysuckle, or woodbine, are both familiar to all of us used to scrub bashing on the Downs.

Clematis has fluffy cream flowers followed by even fluffier seed heads. The stalked leaves are divided into three leaflets each on its own stalk. These leaf stalks grab and wind around anything within reach gradually almost smothering the host. Unchecked it can become rampant or invasive and unfortunately is apparently unattractive to grazing animals.

Honeysuckle is a climbing shrub with exotic-looking highly-scented flowers pollinated by night-flying moths. It uses its main woody stems to twine tightly clockwise around the trunk and branches of its host, producing its fragrant flowers in terminal clusters followed by red berries. It's an important plant in the conservation of the hazel dormouse which uses the shredded bark as a component of its nest.

Two perennial herbaceous climbers both found in hedgerows are white bryony, our only member of the gourd family, and the unrelated black bryony our only member of the yam family. Both die back underground completely in the winter.

White bryony has separate male and female plants both softly hairy with large light green palmate leaves and small, greenish white flowers. It develops long questing unbranched tendrils which thrust out then contract into tight spirals when grabbing on to other foliage, pulling itself up and along. The female plants produce poisonous red berries.

Black bryony also has separate male and female plants but produces no tendrils. It has tiny insignificant flowers but beautifully shiny heart-shaped leaves netted with veins. It climbs by twining its thin green stems clockwise through a hedge. Red berries are produced in tempting pretty necklaces dangling in the hedgerows, but beware, they are also very poisonous.

KATE FRANKLAND  
VOLUNTEER RANGER



Black bryony  
© Kate Frankland



## PODCASTS CELEBRATE MAGICAL RIVERS OF THE SOUTH DOWNS



© SDNPA

A series of thought-provoking podcasts are being launched inspired by the beautiful and mysterious rivers of Sussex and Hampshire.

Seven acclaimed writers and poets have teamed up for Full Harvest – a series of audio stories and poems inspired by the South Downs National Park's landscape and available as free podcasts from 12 July 2021 via all major listening platforms.

It comes after the wordsmiths have spent the past few months exploring the scenic river valleys and engaging with the community on local stories, anecdotes and reflections about the landscape.

The result is an eclectic mix of writing styles featuring short stories, poetry and monologues.

The inspiring initiative has been led by arts charity Applause in partnership with the South Downs National Park Authority.

Sara Clifford, lead writer and hailing from Lewes, said: "This is both a beautiful National Park and a living landscape that supports people and work. I am interested in how the river has shaped the local community and its stories, from industry and jobs, to

the environment and leisure, and how local people view it today.

"I am particularly interested in people who might feel that the National Park is inaccessible for them, for whatever reasons, and finding ways of connecting groups with their local landscape, history and culture of the National Park."

Anooshka Rawden, who leads cultural heritage for the National Park, said: "Each story approaches the theme of 'rivers' very differently, from the darkness of horror to conversational monologues. The common thread throughout is that natural landscapes can provide hope and new perspectives, and the connection between nature and the journey to recovery.

"Our mental health and wellbeing is so centred on our sense of place and belonging, I hope people enjoy these stories for their entertainment, whether listening from home on a wet afternoon or walking the downland."



Sara Clifford  
© SDNPA



LISTEN TO THE PODCASTS HERE





Left: Fern nursery  
Right: Wood pasture  
© Terry Doyle

# BINSWOOD

On a tranquil Spring day in May this year, I took a walk around Binswood. Binswood is situated in the far North West corner of the National Park and is owned by the Woodland Trust.

Volunteers from the Western Area have carried out many tasks at Binswood over the years and it was rewarding to see the result that their labours have achieved. Knepp Estate in Sussex is aiming for this kind of woodland with their re-wilding project.

Binswood is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) due to it being a characteristic example of a rare habitat called wood pasture. It is a very interesting and important site as it is one of only a few lowland woodland pastures that were maintained by the traditional method of grazing by commoners’ stock, nowadays a grazier is used. Binswood contains a mosaic of habitats including large tracts of acid grassland, scrubby areas and woodland that have evolved over hundreds, possibly thousands, of years. These habitats are transient in nature, changing between grassland, scrub and woodland as areas are cleared, grazed or re-colonised with naturally regenerating trees and shrubs.

A fantastic range of fungi and lichens cling to the ancient trees and dead wood, and there are many woodland flowers. It is worth noting the number of standing dead trees, an ever decreasing asset in these days of tidying up for health and safety reasons.

There are three main areas of grassland, most of which are interlinked and overgrown by scrub in places. The south and west parts of Binswood are generally more wooded, although there is a more open parkland feel to the stands of trees in the north and east. A number of large veteran oak and beech trees are dotted throughout the wood, among areas of denser woodland and formerly coppiced areas now open to grazing. Binswood, before 1300AD, formed part of a large tract of wooded land known as Woolmer Forest (a Royal Hunting Forest). The wood is virtually surrounded by historic boundary banks and hedges, and remains designated as Registered Common Land and therefore commoners’ rights apply to the whole site.

This type of pasture woodland is a fascinating example of an evolved cultural landscape that provides a glimpse of the countryside as it might have been in medieval times. The site is connected via hedgerows, hollow lanes and other wildlife

corridors to two other nearby SSSI’s - Shortheath Common to the east and Wick Wood and Worldham Hangers to the west.

On the day that I visited it was great to see the English Longhorn cattle grazing, actually resting after grazing, and the butterflies and insects feeding on the early Spring flowers. So good to see when you remember how late Spring was this year. Being common land the woodland can be visited at any time. There is a public car park at Shortheath Common, to the east, where a public bridleway provides a pleasant walk to the site. The Public Bridleway enters the wood on the east side and exits at the north end, leading up to Green Street (B3004) between East Worldham and Kingsley. There are also public footpaths which cross the wood in the centre and at the west end, linking East Worldham and Shortheath. This is part of The Hanger’s Way Long Distance Footpath. Well worth a visit at anytime.

My thanks to Julie Morrow and Phil Truluck of the woodland Trust for their help with this article. Any errors are all mine.

TERRY DOYLE  
WESTERN AREA VOLUNTEER RANGER

The grazers © Terry Doyle



# THE FEAR OF FUNGI

## POISONOUS MUSHROOMS

In England we suffer with a condition that affects many people: mycophobia, a fear of fungi.

If you ask anyone about wild mushrooms, you’re likely to receive a response highlighting the fear of being poisoned. Mushrooms are a staple of the British diet but people have very little knowledge about ones you can eat from the wild, perhaps because it doesn’t seem worth the risk. Another thing most of us lack is an understanding of where we can forage if we are allowed to. It’s no surprise, the situation is complicated and in general foraging wild mushrooms is frowned upon, regardless of arguments for or against.

In this article, we’re going to talk about the species which can be found in the National Park and which are toxic to humans. First of all, it’s important to debunk some myths around fungi:

- Just because another animal eats a certain fungus, it does not mean it’s ok for a human to eat. Deathcaps can be consumed by other animals, whereas the result for us would be extreme.

- You can’t get sick from looking at, sniffing, listening to or even tasting a mushroom on your tongue, but only from ingesting a part of a toxic mushroom. All in all, it’s just not worth a taste-test of a mushroom that could cause you serious illness if you hold a general interest.
- Some species which are edible still cause sickness in people.



Fly agaric

## MYCOPHOBIA

The fear whipped up around these species is, unsurprisingly, exploited in the tabloid press, with the following being printed in one major English newspaper:

“Foragers are being warned about an alarming abundance of Britain’s most poisonous variety of mushroom this autumn.”

There’s mycophobia rearing its head once again. Anyone who knows what the deathcap’s features are is unlikely to ever mistake it for something edible. It’s about taking care.

That said, the impacts of the deathcap on the human body are very unpleasant. Though someone can eat the mushroom and not feel any effects for 12 hours or more, it will slowly be degrading the liver on the quiet and other vital organs, resulting in eventual death if not treated.

Deathcap mushroom



## MEET THE AMANITA FAMILY

The most toxic mushrooms in the UK are found in the Amanita family, home to famous species such as the red and white fly agaric. They have some extremely sinister names: deathcap and destroying angel, for example. The deathcap is common in the UK, especially under beech trees. There are other similar species like the false deathcap, however, but the similarity is not close.

The destroying angel gets its name from the fact it’s pure white but deadly poisonous. Other toxic Amanitas are the panthercap and, to a lesser degree, fly agaric. Confusingly there are some in the family which are edibles, including the blusher and Caesar’s mushroom (the latter named for its favour among Roman leaders). Remember: no one without relevant expertise should ever consider trying to eat an Amanita mushroom.

Sulfer tuft



## OTHER POISONOUS MUSHROOMS TO KNOW

One toxic mushroom that is very common is sulphur tuft. Sulphur tuft grows in woods, parks, gardens and even the street. It’s known to cause mild to severe illness in people. There are other deadly species which are very common, including funeral bell(!) and brown roll-rim.

It’s also important to know that species which are edible to some like chicken of the woods may cause mild sickness in other people. The same goes for honey fungus, which is edible but can make people sick, especially after eating a certain amount of it.

DANIEL GREENWOOD  
SDNPA VOLUNTEER  
DEVELOPMENT OFFICER







Image taken from the South Downs  
Nature Recovery campaign  
© SDNPA

# HELP NATURE TO RENATURE!



Hopefully most of you will have seen that we launched a new, inspiring campaign over the summer to “renature” the South Downs National Park and create new havens for wildlife to flourish.



Image taken from the South Downs  
Nature Recovery campaign  
© SDNPA

In the biggest initiative ever launched by the National Park, the **Help Nature to ReNature campaign** is looking to raise £100m over the next 10 years to create an extra 13,000 hectares – or around 21,000 football pitches – of habitat where plants and animals can thrive.

These ambitious plans would mean an area over three times the size of Portsmouth City (40km<sup>2</sup>), almost double the size of Southampton City (72.8km<sup>2</sup>), over a third again bigger than Brighton and Hove (87.5km<sup>2</sup>), managed for nature.

A beautiful and emotive film, “**The Night We ReNatured**”, has been launched to kickstart the initiative, telling the story of a young girl who dreams of nature rekindling in our countryside, villages, towns and cities as people work together to create a home for wildlife. The South Downs currently has 25 per cent of the land managed for nature, such as nature reserves, woods, heaths, ponds and flower-rich road verges. The additional 13,000 hectares would bring this to 33 per cent of land managed for nature – going beyond current UN-backed conservation targets of “30 per cent by 2030” (30 for 30).

But the National Park also wants to go one step further – ensuring that the remaining 67 per cent is nature-friendly by 2030.

#ReNature is being spearheaded by the South Downs National Park Authority and the South Downs National Park Trust, the official independent charity of the National Park, working with a range of partners.

It comes as national statistics show nature is in crisis everywhere. The latest national State of Nature report revealed that 41 per cent of UK species studied have declined, and some 133 species assessed have already been lost from British shores since 1500. Around a quarter of the UK’s mammals could also be at risk of disappearing altogether. Climate change, pollution and habitat loss are among the causing factors.

Ecologist Andrew Lee, who heads Countryside Policy and Management for the National Park, said: “The biodiversity crisis is real and it’s happening before our eyes, but the good news is it’s not too late to turn the tide of wildlife loss. Nature can thrive anywhere given the right support and we can all work together to make a real difference.

“Located in the busiest part of the UK in the South East, the South Downs National Park has a crucial role to play to lead nature recovery and be

Image taken from the South Downs  
Nature Recovery campaign © SDNPA

the hub of an interconnected ‘nature network’ for the entire region.

“Nature needs us now and we also need nature, perhaps now more than ever before in this post-pandemic world where green spaces have taken on a new level of importance.

“Apart from being incredibly beautiful and part of our shared appreciation for Planet Earth, nature gives us everything – whether it be clean water, fresh air or food to eat. We’re launching this campaign without a moment to lose because it’s time for all of us to help nature to renature.”

As all volunteers know, the National Park already has some amazing biodiversity – including over 20 species of butterfly being found in just one square metre of chalk grassland and some heaths having all 12 native reptile and amphibian species. But even here in the South Downs, nature is struggling and needs our help.

Andrew explained: “The crux of this initiative is that we want nature everywhere for everyone.

“Our goal will be achieved by working with our farmers, land managers, communities and local authorities, as well as other partners and environmental charities. It will include everything from hedgerow

restoration, to planting thousands of trees, to the restoration of individual village ponds, to planting new wildflower corridors.”

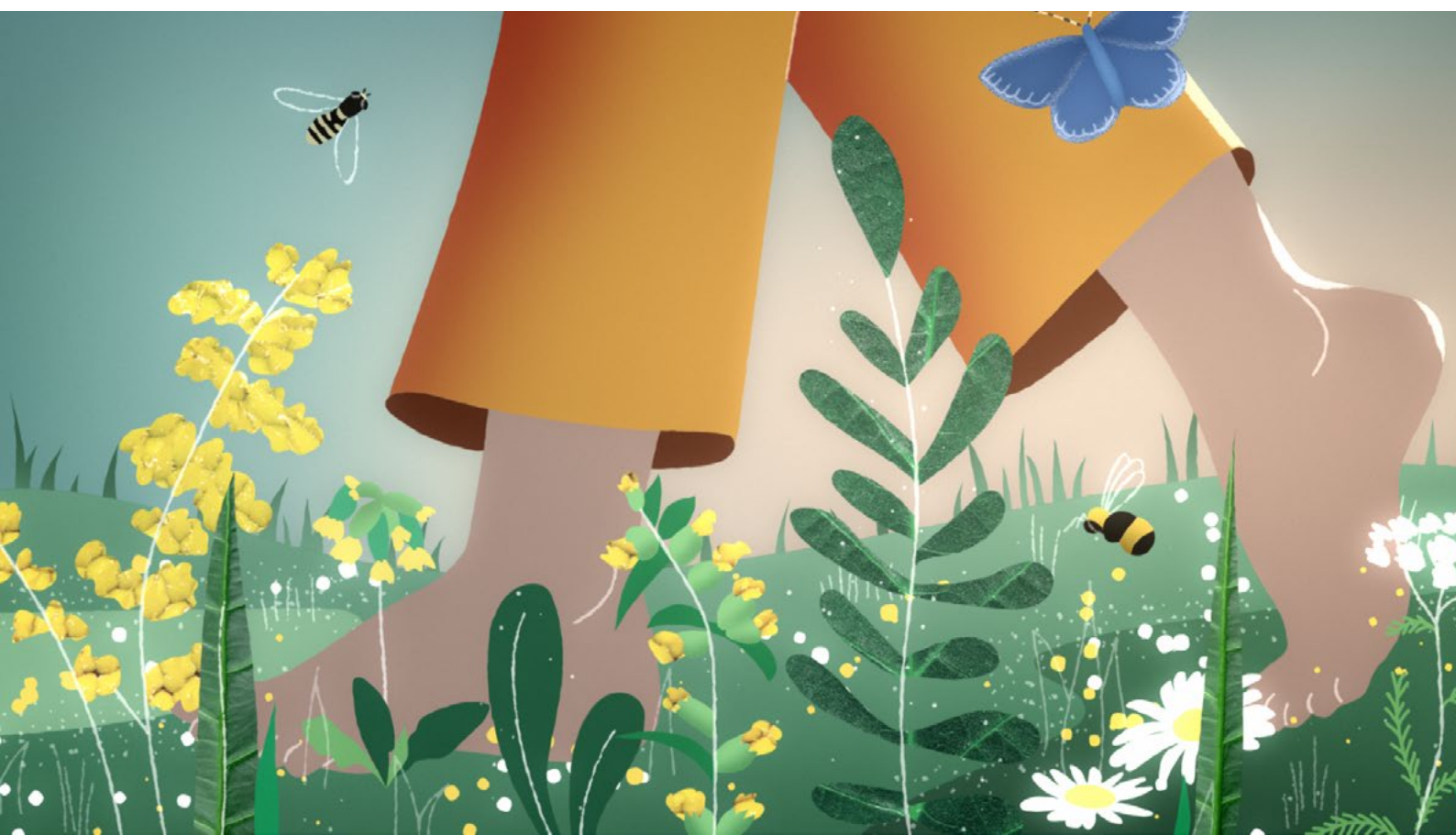
Individuals, communities, businesses and funders are now being encouraged to help with the fundraising.

Julie Fawcett, Chair of the South Downs National Park Trust, said: “We know we’re aiming big with our fundraising target, but nature desperately needs our help. As a charity, we hope to raise the funds over the next decade in a variety of ways, including donations, grants, public funds and private finance.”

“Whether it be making a donation, putting up a bird box in your garden or planting a tree at your school, everyone can help nature.”

To donate to the South Downs National Park Trust’s appeal visit [southdownstrust.org.uk/help-nature-renature](https://southdownstrust.org.uk/help-nature-renature).

For more information about the initiative visit [southdowns.gov.uk/ReNature](https://southdowns.gov.uk/ReNature)





# NURSERY WEB SPIDERS ARE GOOD MUMS!

Nursery web spiders (*Pisaura mirabilis*) are common on the South Downs in a wide variety of habitats and are usually seen between May and August stretched out on nettle leaves sunbathing. They are easily recognised as they are quite large and have thin 10-15mm long, cigar shaped bodies and long legs. The carapace (front section of body) usually has a narrow white or yellow line down its centre while the top of the abdomen can have leaf shaped markings with wavy edges. Their colour tends to be variable but is often brown or grey.

They do not create webs but wait on a leaf for flies and other insects to land and then use a quick sprint to catch their prey. As with many spider species, the male can find it dangerous to approach the female as she may regard him as lunch. The male minimises this risk by capturing an insect and wrapping it in silk as a nuptial gift. He then puts this gift down by the female and lays perfectly still. When the female investigates the food, the male will seize the opportunity, jump on her and mate.

Images of nursery web spiders © Roger Kiernan

After mating the female lays her eggs on to a pea sized silk cocoon that she creates for that purpose. She carries this cocoon with the eggs around in her fangs. Just before the eggs hatch, she creates a “nursery”. She does this by selecting a tall plant such as hogweed and uses silk to stitch together the stems to create a tent like structure for the eggs. This nursery can be +10cm diameter. After the eggs have hatched the spiderlings remain in the nursery until their first molt, usually a couple of days. The mother provides some maternal care during this time by staying close to the nursery to ward off predators until the spiderlings have left. This maternal care disappears after a few days and those spiderlings that hang about and don’t leave the nursery are likely to be eaten for breakfast by mum!

As is the case with all UK spiders, these spiders are harmless, and their fangs cannot pierce our skin.

ROGER KEIRNAN  
EASTERN AREA VOLUNTEER RANGER



Nursery and female spider © Roger Kiernan



# CATCHING UP

Our regular team (Central and Wealden Heath) decided that we needed to get together for a reunion in the absence of tasks. We decided that a good meeting place would be the Fountain Inn at Chichester, a central place for all of us to convene, and 4th of August was a convenient date, although sadly three of the team were absent.



From left to right: Ron McCann, Clive Timlin, Mike Rowe, Peter Stafford, Dick Cole, Tom Caton, James Tolson, Roger Townsend

It is amazing to think that some of us have been involved in tasks since the 1990s, initially with the previous Sussex Downs Conservation Board, and subsequently the National Park.

A quick total up of the years we have contributed gives a figure of approximately 125 years, which hopefully has provided the South Downs with a significant contribution during that time!

The tasks we attended from Droxford in the west to Chantry Hill in the east are as varied as they are many, and have included sheepfold thatching at Singleton Museum, reed cutting at Burton Mill, heather burning at Iping Common, stone facing at Woolbeding Common, and scrub clearance at Tower Hill, not forgetting hours and hours of ragwort and Himalayan balsam pulling!

It was a pleasure to see the team together again, and to look forward to many more enjoyable days with a great team when we eventually return to normal.

MIKE ROWE  
CENTRAL AREA VOLUNTEER RANGER



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# BARN OWLS

With the evenings starting to draw in you might be lucky enough to capture one of those quintessentially English moments of a beautiful owl flying down across your horizon while on an evening walk or drive. Here are some stunning photos Roger Kiernan took recently of barn owls. And if you want to find out more about these fascinating birds follow this link to the barn owl trust:

[barnowltrust.org.uk/barn-owl-facts/](http://barnowltrust.org.uk/barn-owl-facts/)

All images © Roger Kiernan



**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.

Cover image: Autumnal fungi at Ebernoe Common © Daniel Greenwood / SDNPA

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