



South Downs News

WORK AND PLAY IN YOUR NATIONAL PARK

This month:

- **Giving nature a home** As COP26 is in full swing, find out about our ambitious aim to create new wildlife habitat and tackle the climate and biodiversity crisis at a local level.
- **Europe's rainforest in miniature** Discover more about the multimillion-pound project aiming to restore chalk grassland and dew ponds in the National Park.
- **Embrace the darkness!** Enter our new astrophotography competition and win a £100 prize.
- **Festive fun** Sign up for our Advent Calendar and have the chance of winning a £150 hamper!

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

Can you answer the call of nature?

A major search begins this week to find new spaces for nature in the South Downs National Park.

With the UN Climate Change Conference (COP26) under way, the urgent need to save nature has never been clearer.

And now, as part of its ambitious 10-year campaign to ReNature the South Downs, the National Park Authority is launching a call-out for potential sites for nature.

The appeal is inviting farmers, land managers, communities and conservation groups across the National Park to put forward possible sites where new wildlife habitat could be created.

Proposals of any size or scale will be considered and could include, for example, creating wildflower meadows, new hedgerows, more natural rivers, planting trees, creating heathland or installing dew ponds. Village greens, road verges and allotments may also have potential.

#ReNature is a campaign that aims to raise £100m over the next 10 years to create an extra 13,000 hectares of habitat where plants and animals can thrive.



Andrew Lee, Director of Countryside Policy and Management at the National Park Authority, said: "As world leaders gather to discuss the colossal environmental



challenges facing our planet, we're taking decisive action at a regional scale in the South East of England.

"This appeal is a key element of our #ReNature campaign as we need to identify possible sites where wildlife can flourish once again.

"We have big ambitions. This is about taking places not currently managed for wildlife and specifically managing them for the benefit of nature. It's a first pilot round to see what ideas come forward, and we expect the initiative to adapt and evolve over the next decade, with more appeals for sites likely in the future.

"Many people may be familiar with the "Call for Sites" process in planning – which is to find potential sites for housing development. We're following a similar process, only our search is a little different – we want to find new spaces for nature."

The National Park Authority is not looking to acquire land as part of this process. Instead, the Authority will work

with landowners and communities, offering its specialist guidance to develop projects and connect with available funding opportunities.

One possible mechanism, for instance, could be carbon offsetting, where a landowner “renatures” a parcel of land to help capture carbon.

The natural environment can play a vital role in tackling the climate crisis, since healthy ecosystems store a significant amount of carbon in soils, sediments, vegetation and trees.

Andrew added: “It’s exciting to launch this appeal today and I hope it will be the first big step towards nature recovery across the National Park and beyond.

“We’re testing the water to see how many renature sites might be out there.

“We’re not asking anyone to make any formal commitments at this stage, just trying to identify potential projects at varying scales, ranging from well-developed projects which need extra support, through to expressions of interest to explore further.”



The South Downs National Park currently has 25 per cent of the land managed for nature, such as nature reserves, woods, heaths, ponds and flower-rich road verges.

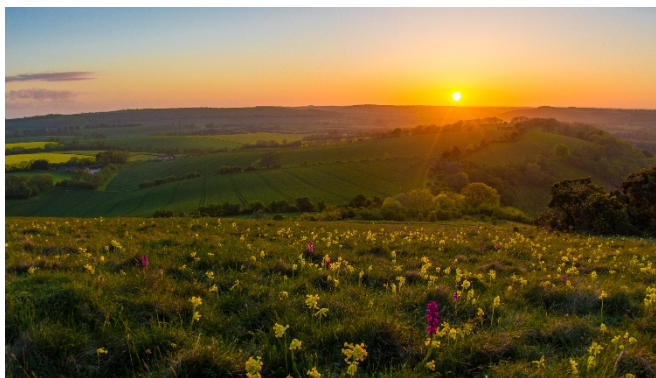
The additional 13,000 hectares would bring this to 33 per cent of land managed for nature – going beyond current UN-backed conservation targets of “30 per cent by 2030” (30 for 30).

#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.

Landowners and land managers can find out more about the Call for Nature Sites and download a form to make an expression of interest by visiting

www.southdowns.gov.uk/CallForNatureSites

The deadline for expressions of interest is 17 January, 2022.



Embrace our dazzling night sky!



The captivating Dark Skies of the South Downs National Park will be celebrated once again this autumn and winter as the popular astrophotography competition returns.

With the clocks going back and the cosmos coming into view earlier in the evening, people are being invited to capture the beauty of the night sky in and around the National Park.

This year there are three categories, plus an additional element – the beautiful Milky Way, which can be admired on a clear night from the National Park’s Dark Sky Discovery sites. The Milky Way is the galaxy that includes our solar system, with the name describing the galaxy’s appearance from Earth: a hazy band of light in the night sky. It’s estimated to contain well over 100 billion stars and at least that number of planets.

The categories are:

- **South Downs Dark Skyscapes** – an image that captures the star-studded Dark Skies of the South Downs National Park. Judges will be looking for awe-inspiring photography that shows off the landscape and/or cultural heritage and the dark skies above it!
- **Living Dark Skies: people and nature** – Ideas include images of people stargazing, people running or walking after dark, or images of nocturnal wildlife or trees at night.



- **Our Magnificent Moon and/or Milky Way** – judges will be looking for a breathtaking shot of our nearest neighbour in the solar system and/or a heart-stirring shot of our immense galaxy.

The South Downs Dark Skyscapes category must be taken in the South Downs, but

there is no geographical limit on the two other categories and it’s hoped people living in towns and cities around the National Park will take part.

The first prize for each category will be £100, with a runner-up prize for each category of £75.

For entry details and to download an application form visit www.southdowns.gov.uk/AstroPhotoComp

The deadline for competition entries is midnight on 12 January, 2022.

Multimillion pound funding to help restore our chalk grassland



Its beautiful butterflies and colourful wildflowers are unmistakable, giving chalk grassland the enviable nickname of “Europe’s tropical rainforest in miniature”.

Now a major partnership has secured £2.23m of funding to help restore this incredibly fragile habitat, which is synonymous with the beauty and biodiversity of the South Downs National Park.

The Changing Chalk partnership, which is led by the National Trust and includes the National Park Authority and eight other organisations, will work with local communities across the eastern Downs to restore and protect chalk grassland, bring diverse histories to life and provide new experiences in the outdoors to those who need it most.

A clutch of new jobs, apprenticeships and training opportunities will also be created across Brighton & Hove, Eastbourne and Lewes, while around 2,500 volunteers will have the chance to learn new skills and support the partnership’s vision.

It comes as chalk grassland is under considerable threat, with around 80 per cent lost since the Second World War.

Changing Chalk will address the challenges over the next four years, by bringing the eastern Downs and towns closer together. Eighteen ambitious projects will restore and protect nature and wildlife, break down complex barriers to participation in the outdoors, improve wellbeing and celebrate the heritage that has shaped the South Downs over the past 6,000 years.

Supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, 18 interconnected projects will deliver Changing Chalk’s vision across three areas:

Restoring biodiversity

Just four per cent of the National Park’s chalk grassland remains and the sites that are left are small and isolated, threatening the wildlife that depends on them.

Two new Chalk Life Rangers and an Education Ranger will lead community activities to support the care and restoration of chalk grassland. NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) programmes, apprenticeships and volunteering will promote skills development and give more young people an opportunity to discover the South Downs National Park.

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Over the four years partners will support the management of more than 800ha of land for nature, including 60ha of golf course returned to species-rich chalk downland and 40 sites returned to active grazing. Five new dew ponds, as well as new wildflower meadows and enhanced habitat for pollinators, will also be established. National Nature Reserves and Local Wildlife Sites will be improved and vital habitat research funded.

Farmers and land managers will be supported in sustainable management of chalk grassland to improve its ecological resilience to the effects of climate change by re-connecting fragmented areas.

Connecting Downs and Towns

The partnership will improve well-being through connection with the local landscape. Eco-therapy activities will benefit local people with physical and mental health needs, and new accessible maps co-created with local charities will help underserved and less physically able communities to access green space. Meanwhile the South Downs will come to the towns with new chalk grassland planting on 12 city sites.

In addition, a Community Grants Scheme will award £150,000 to local communities for community-led initiatives supporting Changing Chalk’s vision.

Hearts and Histories of the South Downs

There will be community excavation projects in Eastbourne, the chance to ‘adopt’ local monuments and annual celebrations for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller History Month. There will also be creative writing, storytelling and other arts and cultural activity to engage writers and audiences of Black, Asian and ethnically-diverse people.

The South Downs National Park Authority will be leading on the grazing project, working with farmers and landowners to establish more conservation grazing to help restore and improve chalk grassland.

The Authority will also be driving the restoration of five dew ponds to help wildlife thrive. The restored dew ponds, all close to the South Downs Way national trail, will have potential for wider interpretation and education.



Claire Kerr, Countryside Policy Manager for the area of the National Park where Changing Chalk is taking place, said: “Chalk grassland was one of the reasons for the designation of the South Downs National Park as it’s such a rare habitat. It can have up to 40 different wildflowers in a single square metre and over 20 different butterfly species.

“Farmers and land managers are absolutely key to chalk grassland restoration and enhancement, through practices such as conservation grazing, and we’re looking forward to working closely with them to help deliver this inspiring project.”

For more information, including updates on how to get involved, visit www.nationaltrust.org.uk/projects/the-changing-chalk-partnership

Enjoy an autumn adventure in your beautiful National Park!



Queen Elizabeth Country Park in the autumn

The weather may be turning colder and the days shorter, but that's no reason not to get out and enjoy our glorious outdoors.

There's something really special about a walk in the countryside in the autumn, with misty mornings, early crimson sunsets and the crunch of frosted fallen leaves under your feet.

We've put together a list of some of our favourite walks to enjoy this autumn.

West Walk, Forest of Bere

This is one of our new Miles Without Stiles routes and provides the perfect autumn stroll for any level of mobility. Throughout West Walk, small areas of 19th century oak remain from a time when oak trees were planted to supply the navy with timber for shipbuilding.

Today, these trees have rare lichens growing on them, and are home to bats and nesting woodland birds. The children's woodland play area and den-building corners are not to be missed!

👉 Forest of Bere walks



West Walk is perfect for families with buggies

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East Meon

The village of East Meon, once owned by the Bishops of Winchester, is nestled in stunning downland and is home to many beautiful historic buildings, including the Old Court House. This walk starts at the imposing Norman church of All Saints with its magnificent spire which was added in 1230.

👉 East Meon walks



A view over the beautiful village of East Meon

Findon

Cissbury Ring is one of the jewels in the crown of the South Downs National Park. It's the largest hill fort in Sussex and has a history dating back over 5,000 years, while nearby Chanctonbury Ring is one of the most prominent landmarks along the South Downs Way. Both these special sites are known for their spectacular autumn and winter sunsets!

👉 Findon walks

Stanmer

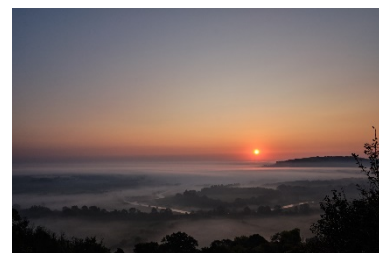
This historic 5,000-acre estate has been rejuvenated on a grand scale, thanks to £5.1m restoration project that has seen the walled garden transformed into an amazing horticultural space.

The estate includes a pretty village, manor house, farm, church and café and is well worth a trip this autumn. It is thought that the word Stanmer comes from the Anglo-Saxon words 'stan' and 'mere' which mean 'stone' and 'pond'.

👉 Stanmer Park walks

Hamsey

The picturesque villages of Cooksbridge, Offham and Hamsey sit within a serene mixed landscape of chalk downland, water meadows and the woodlands of the Low Weald. Be sure to take a good camera as there are great viewpoints from the top of Offham Chalk Pit!



👉 Hamsey walks

£1m investment to strengthen gateway to National Park



A £1m investment for the Eastbourne area announced in last week's Budget has been welcomed by the South Downs National Park Authority.

Eastbourne Borough Council has landed a total of £19.8 million investment in the town after a bid to the Government's levelling up fund unlocked the multi-million pound windfall.

Just over £1m of the funding will be invested in the Towner's Centenary project, creating a number of legacy public artworks across the town that will provide an arts trail connecting the seafront, town centre and the South Downs National Park.

The trail will extend the 100-mile-long South Downs Way – which runs from Eastbourne to Winchester along the famous chalk escarpment – into the centre of the town.

Trevor Beattie, Chief Executive of the South Downs National Park Authority, said: "This is fantastic news and kickstarts a long-held ambition to extend the start of the South Downs Way right into the heart of Eastbourne town centre outside the Towner.



"The South Downs Way is an internationally-renowned 100-mile trail that connects people with one of the most beautiful landscapes in Britain and I'm thrilled that more people than ever will be able to enjoy this millennia-old route by starting their journey in Eastbourne town centre.

"This exciting announcement will significantly strengthen Eastbourne as a key gateway to the National Park and all the South Downs has to offer for both local residents and visitors.

"This will match the considerable work we have done at the western end of the National Park in the centre of Winchester, meaning that both ends of the National Park will be connected to major urban centres."

Further details about the wider plans for Eastbourne are available [here](#).

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Vibrant murals and maps transform bus shelters



A colourful makeover has transformed three bus shelters and created a useful information point for exploring Haslemere and the stunning surrounding countryside.

The community has rallied round to bring a new lease of life to the shelters, which are located just outside Haslemere Railway Station.

The new-look shelters now feature key information about the town and wider landscape. Maps and vibrant photography are designed to highlight Haslemere as a gateway to the South Downs National Park and Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

Amazing photography of local wildlife, including the sand lizard and Darford Warbler, is featured on the new interpretation panels, intended to inspire visitors to explore further and experience some of the natural wonders the local landscape has to offer.

Walkers stepping off the train will be able to choose to explore two different trails. The National Park's Serpent Trail – a 65-mile-long route that starts in Haslemere and weaves its way through reptile-rich heathlands to Petersfield – or the Greensand Way – running for 57 miles through Surrey before winding down to Kent, and linking to the North Downs Way.

The work has been a collaboration between Haslemere Community Station, the South Downs National Park Authority, Surrey Hills AONB, the Community Rail Network and Heathlands Reunited. Funding also came from Shottermill Great War Memorial Trust and South Western Railways.

Unveiling the new shelters, Simon Dear, Mayor of Haslemere, said: "This project establishes a continuing relationship with the South Downs National Park and the public transport systems in the town. It's also a statement of civic pride in the area.

"We had a pretty rundown conventional bus shelter before and because of the effort and enthusiasm of the people involved in this project we now have something much more substantial, attractive and informative."

Ken Griffiths, Acting Chairman of Haslemere Community Station, said: "This is a fantastic 36ft-long mural that really stands out. It not only promotes the town, but also the countryside around us."

Passion for South Downs is turned into powerful prose



“The South Downs make me feel alive and I cannot wait to spend some autumn days there.”

Those are the poignant words from Georgina Aboud, who is one of eight talented wordsmiths awarded creative writing bursaries to explore the amazing landscape, wildlife and heritage of the National Park.

Over the coming months, the writers will be using their creative talents to produce prose, poetry and other chronicles inspired by the stunning landscape and their experiences of it.

The £500 bursaries have been awarded as part of Writing our Legacy’s ‘Shifting the Gaze’ – a project working with Black, Asian and ethnically diverse writers from across the South East to share new voices and stories about these ancient rolling hills. Earlier this year, seven other writers were awarded bursaries following the first round of applications.

The second round of bursaries have been awarded to:

- Ümit Öztürk, Brighton
- Josephine Hall, Brighton (*pictured here*)
- Katy Massey, Brighton
- Georgina Aboud, Brighton
- Saira Naizi, London
- Tamara Gordon, Lewes
- L. Oluwafemi Hughes Jonas, Brighton
- Naluwembe Binaisa, London



Georgina, a freelance writer and poet, said: “Working on this project is a wonderful opportunity to spend time on the South Downs and research how best to engage the public in this space, making the most of its nature and beauty.

“The writing work I want to undertake on this project relates directly to my heritage and family. Writing Our Legacy is the perfect supportive programme to collaborate with because it seeks to uncover and tell hidden stories and histories. I’m utterly inspired by the magnitude of the South Downs landscape.”

Saira said: “I love the South Downs, and am really passionate about opening up the landscape to others from diverse backgrounds, both through my writing and by organising a trip to the National Park for young writers from London. This project will allow me to do just that!”

For more information visit www.writingourlegacy.org.uk

Creating flower-rich verges to help pollinators bounce back



An innovative project is exploring the potential for grass verges to become important havens for wildflowers, insects and pollinators to help tackle the biodiversity crisis.

The three-year pilot scheme is being spearheaded by a partnership of West Sussex County Council and the South Downs National Park Authority.

The research will focus on the potential benefits of removing grass cuttings (known as arisings) from the grass verges alongside our roads.

Traditionally, verges are mown and the grass cuttings are left on the ground to decompose, enriching the soil which encourages coarser grasses to dominate and outcompete any wildflowers.

Removing the cuttings means that the soil is not enriched with nutrients. Without the soil enrichment, a variety of wildflowers are able to grow and provide habitat for bees, butterflies and other insects.

Using special equipment, the process of removing cuttings is currently being trialled by West Sussex County Council at verges in the Chichester District of the National Park, including Midhurst, Rogate, Bury and Lurgashall.

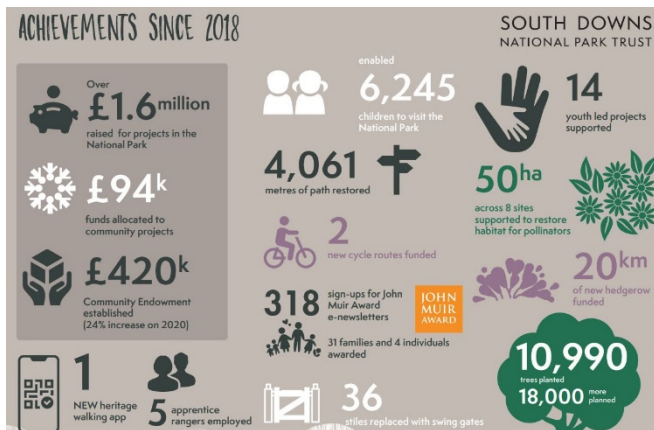
The National Park Authority, working with ecological surveyors The Ecology Co-Op, will be leading on the biodiversity monitoring over the next three years. The surveys will look at the impact of the “cut and collect” system on the diversity of flora and fauna.

Andy Beattie, a Countryside Policy Manager and who is leading the project for the National Park Authority, said: “This is a really exciting pilot project to see whether this fairly simple change to how our verges are cut can give nature a real boost.

“There’s strong evidence that pollinators everywhere have struggled in the past four decades, with a recent study showing that a third of British wild bees and hoverflies are in decline. Without action, some of these species that are vital for biodiversity and food production could even become extinct nationally.

“The good news is that grass verges full of wildflowers can act as ‘highways’ for these pollinators, providing much-needed habitat and also linking up their foraging areas. We’re looking forward to seeing the results of this trial and seeing how it complements our wider nature recovery strategy for the National Park.”

Big things achieved by Trust in past three years



Did you know over 6,000 children have been able to visit the National Park thanks to the South Downs Trust and its supporters?

The Trust's achievements since the birth of the charity in 2018 are covered in its Annual Report for 2020-21.

Among the highlights are:

- Over £1.6m raised for projects in the National Park
- Over 10,990 trees planted - and 18,000 more are planned
- A total of 50 hectares of land supported to restore habitat for pollinators
- Over 4,000km of paths have been restored and refurbished



Julie Fawcett, Chair of the Trust, said: "I am exceptionally pleased with what the Trust has achieved and must note my thanks to our Trustees, staff and partners for driving forward under difficult circumstances.

"While we might have suspected philanthropy to drop in the wake of uncertainty, it seems the

opposite has been true. Our supporters and communities have been more generous and determined to support the conservation and enhancement of the South Downs National Park, for which we remain hugely grateful.

"This support has enabled us to plant thousands of trees, to smash our fundraising target for Beelines, enhancing our ability to deliver for pollinators, to increase the number and quality of walking and cycling routes in the National Park and to enable thousands of children to get back outside after an extended period of remote learning.

"With the launch of the ReNature campaign, it's certainly a busy and exciting time for the Trust and I would encourage people to take a look at the Annual Report to get a good overview of all the worthwhile work under way."

The Trust is the official independent charity for the National Park and its Annual Report can be read [here](#).

Win £150 hamper in our Christmas Advent Calendar!



How well do you know the South Downs National Park?

A myriad of fascinating topics, from weird and wonderful wildlife to local history, will be covered in our popular Advent Calendar Quiz.

Every day until Christmas from 1 December, people will be able to open a door to reveal a new question about the South Downs.

At the end of quiz, the winner with the most correct answers will receive a £150 hamper of sumptuous South Downs produce.

Luke Walter, Digital Officer for the National Park, said: "We love a bit of festive cheer at the South Downs, so we're thrilled to see the return of our Advent Calendar.

"It's a great way to learn more about the National Park and also test your existing knowledge. Be sure to sign up in advance before 1 December to avoid missing out on the first door. Good luck everyone!"

To sign up visit

<https://southdownsnationalparkauthority.adventcalendar.com/>



Things to do in the South Downs this November

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/



- Take part in [guided afternoon walk](#) on 6 November to spot birds of prey and brown hare at The Burgh, near Arundel.
- Come and enjoy Kingley Vale, near Chichester, at its best on a crisp morning under the rising sun for a [winter wellbeing walk](#) on various dates.
- Calling all ale-lovers! [Langham Brewery](#) near Petworth is holding tours on 13 November and 11 December.
- Limber up for a [Full Moon yoga evening](#) in an Iron Age Roundhouse, around the open fire at Butser Ancient Farm, near Waterlooville, on 19 November.
- Enjoy an open-fire dining experience with seasonal delights from the South Downs at [“Down at The Farm”](#) – an evening foodie event happening at Hollycombe Home Farm, near Liphook, on 20 November.
- Build a decorative Ceramic Christmas House with Claire Burns at a workshop at [Ditchling Museum of Art + Craft](#) on 20 November (no previous experience necessary!)

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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Sign up to receive this newsletter by email every month!

www.southdowns.gov.uk/join-the-newsletter/

Sign up to the National Park's Planning Newsletter, issued three times a year, by visiting

www.southdowns.gov.uk/planning-newsletter/

Pic credits

P1 – Daniel Greenwood; P1 bottom left – Dick Hawkes; P2 left – Lewis Watt; P2 right – Ismail Mungul; P6 left – Guy Edwardes; P6 right – Sam Moore; P7 right (horses) – Jamie Fielding; P7 right – Gill Copeland.