

SOUTH DOWNS
NATIONAL PARK

DOWNLAND THYMES

NEWS FOR THE SOUTH DOWNS VOLUNTEER
RANGER SERVICE ISSUE 94 | WINTER 2021



CHAIR'S CORNER

I DON'T NORMALLY SINGLE PEOPLE OUT FOR INDIVIDUAL PRAISE BECAUSE I DON'T GET TO SEE EVERY TEAM AT WORK.

However, I am going to extend my thanks to National Park Rangers Mark Hayward, Jan Knowlson and Max Sheldon for the way the joint Stanmer/Eastern Area 'Sussex-style hedging' task was structured on 16 November. Interesting pre-read (I like education), a pre-prepared practice session with individual instruction, tuition throughout the day. The landowner worked with us, providing context. Learning, technical challenge, hard work, socialising, context, and community. Great day.

THANK YOU.



I've been asked to plan my first self-led task since unlocking. I hope that this is something we see becoming more common into the future. It is important that volunteers step up to lead tasks when asked and support the National Park as fully as they can.

Recently I was privileged to listen to a presentation by the The Aquifer Partnership (TAP). Their aim is to protect the ground water and reduce pollution in the chalk aquifer beneath the Brighton area. Among the many take-aways from the presentation was data showing that waste from vehicle tyres and brakes creates more micro plastic pollution in our water than 'all other plastic waste' combined. I did not know that. Great meeting and interesting presentation.

Sadly, despite the great things going on locally there was also COP26. As someone who gives their time up to help the environment it saddens me to hear the government continue to climate deny.

Saying that it is not capitalism and human excess that creates harm, and that technology will bail us out feels to me like avoidance. The climate 'emergency' has not snuck up on us. First predictions around human related climate change were made in 1859. Prevention technology has existed since before climate change was reliably confirmed:

- 1831 dynamo invented,
- 1859 first rechargeable electric car (1886 first petrol driven car),
- 1979, first Global Climate Conference,
- Windmills since... forever!

Global warming and pollution are directly linked to human activity. Call it growth, call it innovation, call it excess, but the more human activity - the more damage is done. Technology can help limit the damage we are causing but it is not the whole solution.

On a positive note it was really encouraging to see the article in the Volunteer Update (8/10/21) regarding the Youth Ambassador residential weekend. How inspiring! Custodians and volunteers of the future hopefully.



A foggy Devil's Dyke at sunset © Frances Valdes/SDNPA

In my last Chair's Report, I mentioned that two members are leaving the VRS Committee. To date, I have not heard from anyone wishing to replace them. Without replacements a committee consisting of two elected and one co-opted members is not viable. The AGM is in March 2021, so please do consider applying. **Contact me for a chat.**

STEVE BROOKMAN
VRS CHAIR



VOLUNTEERING TEAM UPDATE

We are delighted that volunteering remains fully operational but with some continued limitations on tasks and volunteer numbers due to vehicle sharing safety restrictions and some ongoing impacts on capacity within partner organisations to host tasks. We will continue to adapt as Government policy necessitates over the winter months and will keep you updated on any changes to that may be necessary. The safety of volunteers and staff remains a key priority.

The South Downs Volunteering Network (SDVN) (partner organisations offering volunteering opportunities across the National Park) continues to be a strong partnership. Following requests from partners, we have recently created a Google site for the SDVN to share best practice, resources and policy documents and to host information to support organisations engaging volunteers across the SDNP.

Flexible volunteering models have been increasingly important throughout the pandemic and microvolunteering has really taken off! As you know, all UK National Parks are collaborating on a microvolunteering project called Look Wild using the iNaturalist app to identify and record species sightings across our protected landscapes. The South Downs remains top of the leaderboard and we are excited to be working with the City Nature Challenge team to create fantastic microvolunteering opportunities locally in 2022.

Wider support for volunteering activity across the SDNP continues with the imminent re-opening of the Volunteer Conservation Fund. This fund is managed by the South Downs National Park Trust in partnership with the Volunteer Ranger Service and allocates grants of up to £5,000 annually for projects that engage volunteers with the purpose of enhancing the National Park. The grant scheme is about to re-open for applications with revised criteria promoting diversity and inclusion and providing increased flexibility for applicants and will provide much needed support to our partner organisations.

Thank you to everyone who has volunteered for the South Downs National Park in 2021. We are incredibly grateful for your continued support, patience and resilience in these challenging and changing times; your ongoing contribution to the conservation and enhancement of all aspects of the South Downs are hugely appreciated.

From all of us in the Volunteering Team we wish you a very merry, peaceful and healthy Christmas and New Year.

DANIEL GREENWOOD, AMANDA ELMES AND KAT STEELE

EDITOR'S NOTE

THE FUTURE OF DOWNLAND THYMES

As ever, it's always a pleasure to read your contributions to Downland Thymes (DT). We love pulling the edition together for your enjoyment and to share information. It's always been an important tool to connect the different volunteering teams working across the wider National Park.

However, we are now at a crossroads with DT. Last year, through necessity, it became an online-only publication which has worked really well. Since then, we have reflected on the purpose of this quarterly publication alongside all of the other communications volunteers receive from the Authority such as the weekly Update. With so much information now dropping into your email boxes we are keen to streamline our publications to make sure we are not overloading you with content.

Going forward, our plans are to combine DT with the regular volunteer update emailed out to the VRS, making it more of a newsletter format. This will then be available for you to read on any device, computer, phone, tablet etc.. The distribution of this newsletter will also encompass other volunteers such as the growing Youth Action group and those that take part in micro-volunteering tasks in the National Park.

Fear not, we will still be interested in hearing about your volunteering projects, interesting stories and of course fascinating facts from your experiences around the National Park. It is simply that volunteering is evolving and Downland Thymes needs to evolve with it.

If you have any questions about this please contact Volunteer Development Officer Daniel Greenwood.

CHARLIE HELLEWELL,
EDITOR,
DOWNLAND THYMES



Above: Sheep in snow © Linda Barker

CELEBRATING 40 YEARS OF THE VRS

ON INTERNATIONAL VOLUNTEER DAY (SUNDAY 5 DECEMBER) WE LAUNCHED AN INSPIRATIONAL FILM TO CELEBRATE THE VOLUNTEER RANGER SERVICE'S 40TH ANNIVERSARY.

Thank you to everyone who helped to make this film. It really showcases the breadth of activities volunteers get involved in within the South Downs, as well as how volunteering can positively impact mental and physical wellbeing. Hopefully this film will inspire others to get involved in helping nature wherever they are based. And of course, happy 40th anniversary to the SDVRS!

WATCH THE FILM HERE



Below: National Park Ranger Chloe Goddard, Youth Ambassador Kirsty Ferris and volunteers David Ferris, Greg Tamlyn and Mike Sollom from the Central Downs team. © Sam Moore
Right: Still of the SDVRS 40th anniversary film by Neo Creative Ltd



TURN AND TURN AGAIN

BY ROGER P. READ

Summer moves on through to Autumn.
Long gone the Spring bloom and the blossom.
Bees buzzing, doves cooing and chicks squabbling.
Long gone the ducklings dabbling.
Gathering of the Harvest is complete.
Bales of straw gathered for the Winter, stored all neat.
Bedding, feed and animal heat.
Days grow shorter and wetter.
Night's grow longer and colder.
Green and yellow leaves fall from above.
Blown onto the ground and then around.
Ferns turn from green
To tufts of brown.
Trees and shrubs have begun to undress.
Gone their canopies to impress.
Though in the summer we have been blessed.
With the ruffle of their leaves that the winds did caress.
Slow creeping fingers of frost appear.
Making the landscape more bleak and austere.
Bringing its own still magic and allure.

Ground slowly hardening and cooling.
Even the soil's nutrient slowly refuelling.
Sunrises and sunsets becoming more vivid and iridescent.
The horizon kaleidoscopic and incandescent.
The landscape becomes more barren.
No longer rabbits by their warren.
Many hedgehogs start to hibernate.
Flocks of birds and geese start to migrate.
Squirrels, mice and foxes with their buried treasure.
A food source of potential Winter pleasure.
Nature moves into a quieter mode.
Life's pace has slowed.
Plants, trees and bulbs dormant.
To protect themselves against Winter's torment.
Allotments dug and fields turned over and composted.
Manure to be broken down as they get Winter frosted.
It's all heading towards a time of darkness, stillness and rest.
With a possible covering duvet of pure snow.
Just to let us know.
One way or another.
Nature will always win the show.

Evening at Saddlescombe Farm
© Edward Mills, SDNPA Photo Competition 2016-17





Youth Action litter picking task at Seven Sisters © Daniel Greenwood

YOUTH AMBASSADOR TRAINING WEEKEND

OVER A WEEKEND IN OCTOBER, FIVE YOUNG PEOPLE TOOK PART IN THE FIRST EVER YOUTH AMBASSADOR TRAINING WEEKEND RESIDENTIAL, ORGANISED SUPERBLY BY DANIEL AND AMANDA SUPPORTED BY STAFF FROM SUSSEX CLUBS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE.



Youth Ambassador training at YHA South Downs Itford. © Daniel Greenwood

It was one for the SDNPA apprentices as Joely, Charlie and new starter Ollie spent the weekend at **YHA South Downs**, along with P&R Committee Member Lawrence and PHD Science student Rachel. It was a chance for them to develop their skills, engage with other like-minded young people, and learn more about the National Park.

The weather did its best to dampen our moods, however being limited to the classroom for the day wasn't a bad thing as we all jumped into the activities on offer. Starting with a few ice-breakers, we soon came to realise that Daniel is full of surprises (tip – don't mention the Titanic around him). After getting to know everyone, it was clear to see that we all had a passion for conservation and protecting the natural world, and recognised the unique landscape of the South Downs.

Next, we put our heads together to break-down how an individual can be assertive, which can be considered the art of finding balance between passive and aggressive behavior. Being assertive is key in giving us the confidence to use our voices as young people. As the discussion developed into future concerns of climate change, it seems pertinent that using our collective voice is as important as ever. We would like to thank the SDNPA for recognising this and actively encouraging a more diverse workforce, as well as being open to new perspectives.

But I digress - we then worked on our public speaking skills, complete with Amanda's funny rendition of a love poem to oranges. The evening was complete with an exciting (and slightly spooky) night walk with bat detectors as the weather cleared, followed by a games night which broke all the trust we had built during the day.

Sunday gave us better weather, and we could go out and explore what the South Downs had to offer. Daniel explained how to use iNaturalist, and we were all keen to get

scanning to discover the hidden gems one might overlook. We paired up and chose little areas of land to designate as our own National Parks, finding out about the different plants, trees, bugs, and animals that live there.

The last activity was a brainstorming session of how we can get more young people engaged with the South Downs, and encourage our Re-Naturing ambitions. This was a very creative and useful session, with one idea standing out – "South Downs Sunday", which would invite groups of young people to go for walks within the Downs and hopefully start their journey on the ladder of stewardship.

A big thank you to all involved as it was a great experience, and we look forward to seeing more like it!

CHARLIE PUGH AND JOELY COLLYER
SDNPA APPRENTICES

SOUTH DOWNS YOUTH ACTION

Our youth volunteering programme, South Downs Youth Action, has continued into the autumn with a total of 16 days of activity attended by 212 young people. Alongside our great ranger led activities, the Sussex Wildlife Trust supported a brilliant day at Stanmer Park and we held an iNaturalist bio-blitz event for students as part of Sussex University's Freshers week. In addition, the Winchester and Selborne farm cluster laid on three hedge-laying days for young people, staff and volunteers in November and we hope to repeat this activity next year.

We were thrilled to be able to hold our first Youth Ambassador training weekend residential at YHA South Downs on 2-3 October in partnership with the YHA and Sussex Clubs for Young People. This event was fully-funded by **Generation Green**, a UK wide consortium aiming to increase nature connection and pathways to green employment for young people. Following this successful event, we have recruited a further three youth ambassadors, bringing the total to five young people in this key youth voice role for the National Park. We are now working with colleagues from all of the UK's national parks, alongside colleagues in Defra to establish a UK wide youth voice group – with our Youth Ambassadors flying the South Downs National Park flag on this national platform!

Another new and exciting collaboration for the National Park Authority is with Clarion Housing, a large national housing association that encourages youth voice and supports young people to access wider opportunities in their communities. This partnership has connected youth groups and young people from difficult and challenging backgrounds to the multiple positive opportunities that the National Park offers. In October we welcomed a youth group from North London to Seven Sisters Country Park for an introductory session including kayaking along the Cuckmere. They stayed at YHA Truleigh Hill, discovered the Downs at night through a dark skies walk including bat detecting and contributed to our iNaturalist project very early on the Sunday morning. We have several Clarion partners from across London and the south east looking to engage in similar activities with a conservation focus and we are hoping to build these connections into 2022.

AMANDA ELMES
SDNPA LEARNING, OUTREACH
AND VOLUNTEER LEAD

Above: Youth Action hedge laying training at Selborne, Hampshire (L-R Kat Steele, Cameron Macdonald, Rosie Brown, Charlie Pugh and Joely Collyer) © Kat Steele



GETTING LOST IN FRISTON FOREST



Plastic tube clearance team at Friston Forest © Alan Jones

I WAS LOOKING FORWARD TO A RECENT TASK IN FRISTON FOREST, KNOWING I WOULD SEE SOME OF THE COLLEAGUES THAT I HAD NOT SEEN SINCE BEFORE LOCK DOWN.

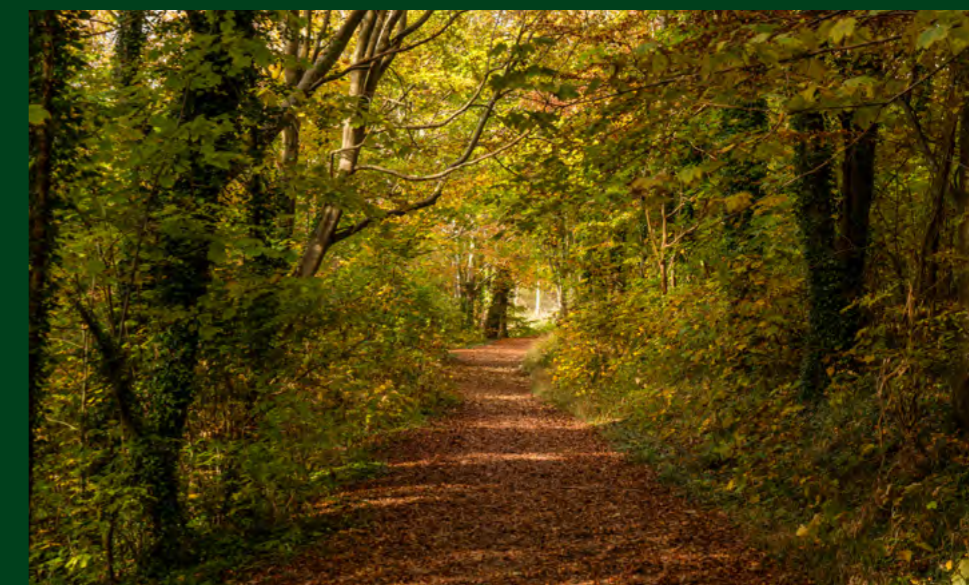
The task involved the clearance of plastic tubes previously used to surround newly planted saplings. I was amazed at how many there were, most just lying on the ground. As Rod Gentry, our Forestry Commission volunteer, explained, many trees had blown down in the 1987 storm. Afterwards, there was a concerted attempt to replant them using, of course, the protective tubes. These now need to be removed because the material used at the time does not degrade and the now long redundant tubes were not only a considerable eyesore but also a detriment to the local wildlife.

Originally around 2,000 acres of chalk downland, Friston is a relatively new forest owned by the Water Board. It sits on the chalk aquifer serving as a catchment area for the nearby waterworks and pumping station. In the 1920's the Water Board became concerned about the increasing use of pesticides and chemicals by the resident farmers and so leased the land long term to the Forestry Commission who planted the trees (predominantly beech and sycamore) in the 1930-40s. Friston is now primarily a commercial forest used for the production of timber but there is a growing community of leisure users including dog walkers, horse riders and mountain bike riders.

Rod lined us up for the task but there were so many plastic tubes scattered on the ground that it was very easy to lose track of the others and to keep an eye on where you were. It was only later when we were sipping our coffee, that we realised that one of our group was missing! He had somehow become detached from the rest of us and was consequently a bit lost. Thankfully, Rod guided him back to us over the phone, with his detailed knowledge of the forest paths.

However, I will say that Friston Forest is very dense and that he must have been so focused on clearing as many plastic tubes as possible. We did pretty well that morning as you can see with the pile of tubes shown in the image.

**ALAN JONES, VOLUNTEER RANGER,
EASTERN DOWNS AND WITH
THANKS TO ROD GENTRY FOR
DETAILS OF FRISTON FOREST.**



Images of Friston Forest © Sam Moore/SDNPA

RARE SIGHTINGS ON THE SOUTH DOWNS

RARE TREES AT THE SEVEN SISTERS COUNTRY PARK VISITOR CENTRE?

I WAS RECENTLY INTRODUCED TO INATURALIST BY A FELLOW VOLUNTEER RANGER AND DISCOVERED WHAT A USEFUL APP IT IS. I STARTED PHOTOGRAPHING EVERYTHING IN SIGHT THEN FOLLOWED THIS UP BY JOINING A ZOOM SESSION ON INATURALIST CONDUCTED BY DANIEL GREENWOOD.

I walk my dog with my friends Marion and Anne, (who are also VRS Volunteer Rangers) and their dogs. I asked them if they knew the name of the trees alongside the Seven Sisters Country Park Visitor Centre as I couldn't get a positive ID from either iNaturalist or the Seek app. Marion thought they were a rare variety and a few days later contacted me with some more information.

She said she found the following information about the trees in 'The Guide for Volunteers Working in the Information Centre' an article that she wrote a few years ago: "The trees that edge the path between the Visitor Centre and the A259 are *Phillyrea latifolia*. This evergreen tree is normally found in Mediterranean woods. It can reach a height of 10m and has a rounded crown with very glossy foliage which appears almost black. The bark is smooth and grey. It has small whitish green flowers which appear in short axillary clusters in June."

Since then I've had lots of conversations with a member of the iNaturalist group and Daniel Greenwood regarding identification of the tree.

NOW IT SEEMS THERE ARE QUESTIONS AS TO WHETHER THIS IS A HOLM OAK OR THE RARE PHILLYREA LATIFOLIA (COMMONLY CALLED THE GREEN OLIVE TREE). I FOUND **THIS ARTICLE** ABOUT THE GREEN OLIVE TREE ON THE INTERNET.



Holm oak or the rare Phillyrea latifolia at Seven Sisters Country Park Visitor Centre. © Sue Dent



The article explains that these trees, also described as 'the nearest thing to giant broccoli you'll ever see', have been sold to English Heritage and National Trust 'when they're restoring Tudor, Elizabethan or medieval gardens. There's masses of evidence to show that *Phillyrea* was used extensively hundreds of years ago. The diarist John Evelyn (a keen gardener in the 17th century) writes of them frequently – as if they were then as common as box, yew and holly. What happened?

There are similarities between the photos and the descriptions regarding the smooth grey bark and the broccoli look-alike. I will have to return in the spring to check the flowers and berries. This is becoming quite a talking point...any contributions and a positive identification would be wonderful!

SUE DENT
VOLUNTEER RANGER, EASTERN AREA

UPDATE: It would appear that the trees pictured are in fact holm oak. Anyone else know the whereabouts of the *Phillyrea latifolia* at Seven Sisters?



Holm oak or Phillyrea latifolia? © Sue Dent

RARE BIRD SPOTTED AT BEACHY HEAD

On another note, on 2 November once again when out walking with the same friends and their dogs, I spotted a rather unusual bird in the field behind the buildings of Cornish Farm, Beachy Head. Looking through my binoculars, it looked similar to a curlew or whimbrel only this one was glossy black with a small grey head and bill and had a more prominent curve towards the tip of its bill.

Having looked it up on the net and various reported sightings I think it was a glossy ibis. I couldn't get a photo of it as it was too far away. Marion, however managed to get one on her phone and posted it on the **Sussex Ornithological Society website** (see photo right). She believes it could be a northern bald ibis and was informed that it was an escapee from a zoo and had been in the area for about three weeks.

I contacted Daniel about this rare sighting, and he also believes it could have been a glossy ibis and thinks it may be an invasive species as it displaces some others, and is becoming more common due to climate change.

GLOSSY IBIS
NORTHERN BALD IBIS

Once again, there are similarities between the birds, but I believe it was a glossy, as using the binoculars, it had a grey bill whereas the northern has a red bill.

The Jury's out on this one too, but either way, what a treat to see such a rare bird!

SUE DENT
VOLUNTEER RANGER, EASTERN AREA



Glossy or northern bald ibis? © Marion Trew



HEDGE LAYING

UNDER THE WATCHFUL EYE OF GILBERT WHITE

ON OUR ARRIVAL WE WERE WELCOMED BY KATE FAULKNER WHO HELPS MANAGE THE CONSERVATION MEASURES ON THE FAMILY-RUN NORTON FARM, PART OF A 10,000 ACRE FARM CLUSTER NEAR SELBORNE ON THE EDGE OF THE HAMPSHIRE WEALD AND JUST WITHIN THE NATIONAL PARK BOUNDARY.

It would be our venue for a day's hedge laying tuition and practice. The farm entered into a Countryside Stewardship scheme more than 20 years ago and has been working with the Park Authority and other conservation bodies on various projects. During which time the family has planted over 2,000m of hedgerow... so lots for us to lay!

As we are all aware hedgerows are a vital network between other hedgerows and woodlands and a perfect habitat for a wide range of insects, birds and mammals. Our efforts were to begin the improvement to one of Kate's mature hedges in support of the "Hampshire Hedgerows" project to restore and connect over 20km of hedgerow within Hampshire. As largely a beginners' group of hedge layers, comprising representatives of the Youth Action Group, VRS and National Park staff, our ambitions were quite modest.

To help us during the day, an experienced woodsman, Darren Hammerton, and his assistant Vivienne were already standing by our target hedge as we approached them along a broad field margin, another aspect of the farm's conservation efforts. Arrayed before him were the tools for the day – bilhooks, bow saws and loppers and (only for his use) a chainsaw. Darren gave a brief H&S talk and then proceeded to describe the process of hedge laying consistent with the South of England style. We were paired off to work on the various stages of laying from clearing the work area of stinging nettles and the like, disentangling the hawthorn bushes, removing branches from the side of the trunk that would be closest to the ground, to the actual 'pleaching' itself under Darren's watchful eye. The first step was to make an angled incision at ground level through 50% of the trunk then carve the wood away

carefully aiming to leave the cambium layer intact. In reality it is harder than it seems and Darren's guidance, and use of a red marker, were key to a successful pleach. We all managed to experience each of the stages and then it was time to insert the final stakes and add the binders, actions which perfect the look of a well-laid hedge.

A remarkably warm sunny November day came to an end with the group unanimously voicing its gratitude to Darren and Vivienne and saying how enjoyable the entire day had been.

JEREMY NASON
VOLUNTEER RANGER,
WESTERN AREA

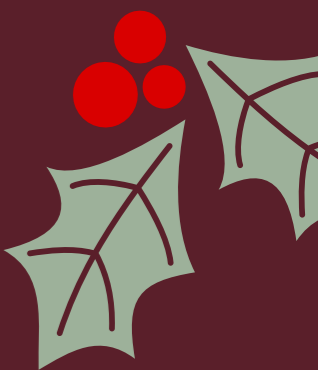


Images © Charlie Hellewell/SDNPA

FOREST FUNGI

VOLUNTEER MALCOLM WALFORD ANSWERED THE CALL FOR IMAGES WHEN HE WAS OUT FOR A RECENT WALK IN THE BEECH WOODS AT ANGMERING PARK, WARNINGCAMP NEAR ARUNDEL.

He grabbed these lovely snaps showing how incredibly diverse fungi can be in its shape and form. Malcolm thinks he's identified them correctly but is prepared to be corrected!



Pale oyster on dead beech



Lilac bonnet



Magpie inkcap

Images above © Malcolm Walford



PLANTING THE RIGHT TREE IN THE RIGHT PLACE!

KATE FRANKLAND, VOLUNTEER RANGER EASTERN DOWNS

© Jane Chandler SDNPA



HAWTHORN

Crataegus monogyna

Hawthorn supports over 300 species of insects. It will grow on all soils. The flowers are a source of nectar and pollen for many bees, butterflies and other pollinators and are attractive to dormice. The berries attract many birds like thrushes, blackbirds and redwings.

© Nick Heasman



SILVER BIRCH

Betula pendula

This graceful tree will grow in most soils. It's tiny seeds are attractive to birds such as long-tailed tits, siskins, redpolls and greenfinches.

© Marcin Łazarczyk / Adobe



CRAB APPLE

Malus sylvestris

The native ancestor of modern apples will grow on most soils in sun or part shade. The pretty blossom provides a rich source of nectar for bees and other pollinators. Thrushes, blackbirds, fieldfares and redwings gorge on the abundant fruit and mice, voles, dormice and badgers also enjoy them.

© Laura Warren



WILD CHERRY

Prunus avium

This will make a large tree in full sun on fertile soil. It's glorious white blossom is a rich source of nectar and pollen for butterflies, bees, bumblebees and other insects, while the cherries are loved by birds.

SIX OF THE BEST

I'm sure none of you has failed to notice that these days we are all being exhorted to plant trees to combat climate change. If you are considering planting in your garden or in your community spaces it's important to choose native species as these provide the most beneficial habitats for species biodiversity. Here are six of the best tree species recommended by the Woodland Trust and the RSPB.

© Derek Middleton SDNPA



ROWAN

Sorbus aucuparia

Rowan is very hardy and will grow in all soils. The leaves are attractive to caterpillars, the flowers are pollinated by bees and many birds enjoy the rich harvest of berries in the autumn.

© Charlie Hellewell



HOLLY

Ilex aquifolium

The dense prickly foliage of holly provides safe cover for birds. It's an important food source for the Holly Blue butterfly caterpillar and many birds enjoy the berries which are only produced by female plants.

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RANGER SERVICE**

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Downland Thymes: News for the South Downs Volunteer Ranger Service. Issue 94, December 2021. © SDNPA.

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: Winter on Butser © Ron De'Ath

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