



WORK AND PLAY IN YOUR NATIONAL PARK

This month:

- **Tackling climate change** Find out more about new research that shows the tremendous potential to plant thousands more trees across our region.
- **Festive folklore** Delve into Yuletide stories and legends from the South Downs.
- **Nature at night** Find out more about the creatures lurking under the cover of darkness.
- **A winter wonderland!** Find out about a new accessible walking route launched in the National Park.
- **Give back to nature** Send a Christmas e-card and plant a tree!

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

Study reveals potential for 'huge carbon sink'

A new report has revealed the massive potential to fight climate change with woodland creation.

The study covered just over 439,000 hectares (all of Sussex plus Hampshire's portion of the National Park) and found almost 23,000 hectares is highly suitable for creating new woods – around 5 per cent of the land area.

Of that, around 5,500 hectares lies in the South Downs National Park, while woodlands could be created in other areas, including Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, such as the High Weald, and urban areas.

The potential new area of woodland – four times the size of Portsmouth and well over twice the area of Brighton – could store up to 37,667,500 tonnes of CO₂ after 100 years.

The research, led by the National Park Authority, Sussex Nature Partnership and Woodland Trust, has produced a detailed "Woodland Opportunity Map" showing precisely where new trees could be planted, as well as those areas that are not suitable for major tree planting.

It comes as over 28,000 trees are being planted across the South Downs in memory of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth.



As we head into the winter, scores of trees are going into the ground at more than 30 sites across the South Downs National Park.



Over 12,000 trees were planted last winter, and a further 16,000 are being planted this winter, as part of the Trees for the Downs and Queen's Canopy initiative.

As the National Park marked Tree Week last month, there were other exciting developments, including:

- Applications are now open for landowners, land managers, community groups, parish councils and schools to apply for tree planting in the next round of Trees for the Downs (2023-2024).
- A special tree, "The Queen's Elm", has been planted at Seven Sisters Country Park. The beautiful tree is resistant to Dutch Elm Disease.
- Goodwood employees joined the forestry team as they aim to plant 21,000 trees across the Estate during the planting season. The team will be mainly planting native broadleaf trees including oak, beech, hornbeam, field maple, and sweet chestnut to enrich the soil and provide food and shelter to insects and animals. The planting is

taking place between Halnaker and Westerton and will support future plans of the permissive path in this area.

• In June this year, a huge sculpture made of up over 300 trees took pride of place outside Buckingham Palace, in honour of the Queen's Jubilee. Made of pots containing native tree species, the sculpture forms part of the Queen's Green Canopy. We are honoured to say that the Wellerness Community Interest Group was nominated to be a custodian of one of these special trees and they have chosen to plant it at Wild Heart Hill, near Worthing. The Wellerness was selected as an organisation that embodies "a spirit of selflessness and support, with a purpose dedicated to the betterment of their communities, the environment, and the nation."

Sonia Lorenzo-Martin, who oversees woodlands in the National Park, said: "These life-giving trees are a fitting tribute to the memory of her late Majesty and all her years of public service to the country."

"Trees provide clean air for us to breathe, enrich our soils, provide a vital habitat for wildlife and, crucially, are amazing carbon capturers in the fight against climate change."

"This new research is very significant. It shows that we have the potential to create a major carbon sink in the South East of England that can help spearhead Britain's fight against climate change. Around a quarter of the South Downs National Park is already wooded, so adding to that even more across the region is a very exciting prospect for our nation's climate action."

So far, almost £200,000 has been raised by the South Downs National Park Trust, the official independent charity for the National Park. The Trees for the Downs campaign hopes to raise £260,000 to be able to plant 100,000 trees in total over the next few years.

The Trust is working with the National Park Authority's to deliver the project, which is a key strand of the National Park's ambitious "ReNature" campaign to create new habitats where wildlife can flourish.

And Sonia added: "Our big motto is 'the right tree in the right place'."

Click [here](#) for more information on the woodland research and map visit

To donate to Trees for the Downs, or to make an application for potential tree planting next year, visit www.southdownstrust.org.uk

The deadline for applications is 28 February 2023.



Tree pre-dating Romans is saved from collapse



A campaign to raise funds for the construction of a special brace to prevent one of Britain's oldest trees from collapsing has ended in success.

The 3,000-year-old yew tree in the Hampshire village of Farringdon is one the country's ten oldest trees and is of special national and international scientific interest. Despite its worn appearance the yew tree continues to show healthy signs of growth, which is why it has been so essential to save the tree.

A campaign set up by All Saints Farringdon Parochial Church Council in late 2019 has now raised over £13,000. This structure will ensure that the tree continues to grow and remain stable for many generations to come.

As custodians of the churchyard, the PCC decided to take action to save the tree for the village and the nation by setting up an appeal to raise the necessary funds", said Bryan Orchard, All Saints PCC Member. "Without the generosity and support of many individuals and organisations, the wear on the tree over the next decade would have resulted in its probable loss."

The funding has come from many people and organisations including Farringdon residents, friends of the village, The Woodland Trust, East Hampshire District Council, the Syder Foundation, South Downs National Park Trust, the Parochial Church Council, Farringdon Parish Council and visitors to the church.

Eleanor Marsden, of the Syder Foundation, said: "The Syder Foundation was delighted to support the efforts of the South Downs National Park to secure the future of the Farringdon yew: a unique witness to the regional landscape."

Dean Orgill, Chair of the South Downs National Park Trust, added: "Yew trees are synonymous with the South Downs. We must do everything we can to conserve and enhance this wonderful landscape for future generations to be able to enjoy as much as we do."

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The Farringdon yew is considered by arboriculturists to be one of the 10 most important trees in the UK and is recorded in the Ancient Tree Inventory as a tree of National Special Interest.

'Twas the night before Christmas!



It's a cold winter's day and the north wind whistles through the valleys of the South Downs as mossy trees sway in a merry dance.

Emerging from the forest is a flame-haired, green-gowned woman with a story. It's a tale that has stood the test of time.

Yet this is no fairy, wise woman, elf, or Mother Christmas – it's the National Park's very own storyteller Dawn Nelson!

Dawn, who is Place and Interpretation Officer for the National Park, is sharing some of her favourite festive folklore and has produced three short films that are guaranteed to put you in the Yuletide mood!

Dawn says: "Wintertime has so many ancient traditions and tales. It was a time when communities would gather round the hearth and listen to age-old tales of wisdom, good fortune and superstitions and, in many ways, these yarns would see you through the cold, dark months.

"There are stories aplenty in the South Downs, many of them intricately connected to this enchanting landscape of woodland, valleys, rivers and cliffs. They are not quite as scary as some around the world though, such as Iceland's Yule Cat or the Alpine region's terrifying Krampus, scaring children into good behaviour! I hope people enjoy listening to this local folklore and feel inspired to venture out and discover more tales of the winter woodland."

Holly King and Oak King

Each year the light waxes and wanes.

In the summer we have the longest days and in the winter we have the shortest. There are some Kings of the winter woodland that ensure that the light and the dark are kept in balance.

These kings are the Oak King and the Holly King. On each solstice night they do battle to see which will hold the light for the coming season.

In June, the Holly King takes the light from the Oak King and holds it behind the sharp dark green leaves as the days get shorter.

Finally they do battle again for the winter solstice between 21 and 23 December.

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During this battle the Oak takes back the light and sends it out into the world so that the days from this point forward start to get longer.

So next time you see an oak and a holly standing together, you know why that is!

Mistletoe and druids

Mistletoe, despite its festive appeal, is in fact a parasitic plant. An unwelcome visitor for the host tree but this didn't stop it from gaining a reputation as a sacred plant with the druids of old. An ancient tradition involved a druid in a white gown harvesting the mistletoe with a golden sickle in order to perform a ritual that would bring fertility and prosperity for the coming year. A young person from the village would be sent around the streets with the bough of harvested mistletoe to see in the new year.

It wasn't until the 18th century that mistletoe became a yuletide favourite. Before that, mistletoe was hung above the door because folk magic, the old ways of our ancestors, told that it offered protection, representing peace and hospitality. The sprig of mistletoe stayed in place all year in order to ensure this good luck held until a new sprig was placed there in the new year. It was even said to have the power to prevent nightmares.

On the subject of dreams, it is said that if you place a leaf of mistletoe beneath your pillow at night you will dream of your true love.

Wassailing

Wassail and to your good health!

During the winter the trees are bare and when we did not have the convenience of supermarkets we would have been pickling and preserving the last of the year's crops. Then our thoughts would have turned to the next season, what to plant and whether or not it would be prosperous.

There are many traditions that bless crops and one of these is wassailing. Wassail is the old English word for good health or good cheer and to wassail the apple orchards in the new year is a tradition that stretched backed to the 15th century and still goes on today.

To wassail the apple trees you will need a cup of ale and a local orchard. Gather together, sing to the trees and make offerings of the ale to ensure a good harvest of apples the following autumn. This event traditionally took place on Twelfth Night or Old Twelvey as it used to be known. This used to fall on 17 January but with the introduction of the Gregorian calendar, it now falls on 5 or 6 January depending on how you count the days. Wassailing originates from the West Country but these days there are wassailing events up and down the country.

Don't wait for Twelfth Night, just go sing to the apple trees but of course, do make sure, if they are not your apples that you have the landowner's permission!

Wassail, wassail to our town

The cup is white and the ale is brown

The cup is made of the ashen tree

and the ale is made from good barley



Explore a winter wonderland!



It's the most wonderful time of the year – a season to cherish your loved ones and enjoy laughter-filled family walks after one too many mince pies.

With frosty peaks, magical winter woods, and dramatic views to warm the cockles of your heart, the South Downs National Park is the perfect place for an invigorating Christmas stroll.

To mark the launch of the winter walking season, the National Park is launching a brand-new Miles Without Stiles route that is ideal for people of all ages and fitness levels.

The route, which now includes a new pedestrian bridge over a potentially boggy stretch, allows walkers to explore the stunning winter wonderland of Iping and Stedham Common with its mists, frost-covered heaths and, if you're lucky, the scratchy call of a Dartford warbler. A beautiful [video](#) has been produced to celebrate the launch.

Miles Without Stiles routes have been specially created as gentle journeys that are suitable for people with limited mobility, including wheelchair users, families with push chairs, dog walkers and less agile walkers. Supported by funding from Gatwick Airport, Iping and Stedham is the seventh route to be added in the National Park, with others exploring forests, downland and coast.

If you're up for a more vigorous walk, the National Park is blessed with more than 3,300km of rights of way (over twice the length of Britain if you were walk the island from north to south!) that offer awe-inspiring vistas and often lead to a cosy pub.

Allison Thorpe, who leads access and recreation for the National Park, said: "Whether you're looking for a gentle stroll with the children and grandparents, a high-octane hike, or a romantic ramble, there's something for everyone in the South Downs National Park this festive season.

"One of our big focuses is increasing accessibility, including for people with disabilities and families who may not want to negotiate stiles, so we're really excited to launch this new route at Iping and Stedham.

"Christmas is the most wonderful time of the year, but it can also be quite hectic. Just taking a couple of hours to escape and connect with nature in the South Downs can do wonders for your wellbeing!

"If it's a clear evening, you could always try a moonlit stroll at one of our 10 Dark Sky Discovery sites and take some

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images for our astrophotography competition which has a top prize of £100 this year!

"As always, leave no trace and do keep dogs on leads around livestock."

Here are some of Allison's recommendations for Christmas walks:

Iping and Stedham Miles Without Stiles, West Sussex



Scenic views abound! The route starts in the car park of Iping and Stedham Common, a nature reserve managed by Sussex Wildlife Trust and one of the best examples of lowland heath in the National Park.

The 1.25 mile/ 2km circuit is suitable for people with restricted mobility, including all-terrain mobility scooters and families with pushchairs. Typically takes 30 mins to complete. Why not visit the historic market town of Midhurst after for some well-deserved refreshment. Autumn and winter bring shorter days for exploring the South Downs, but the night-time offers its own dazzling display of the natural world.

Charleston, Ditchling and Monk's House, East Sussex

Writers, artists, poets and musicians have long drawn inspiration from the landscapes of the South Downs.

Earlier this year, the South Downs National Park Authority teamed up with three heritage venues in East Sussex – Charleston Farmhouse, Monk's House and Ditchling Museum of Art+Craft – to launch a new immersive walking experience telling the unique story of each.

The 'In Their Footsteps' app is a self-guided audio tour through the East Sussex countryside..

You can download the App from your phone's app store:

• Google Play store:

<http://bit.ly/InTheirFootstepsGoogle>

• Apple store: <http://bit.ly/InTheirFootstepsApp>

East Meon, Hampshire

The picturesque village of East Meon, once owned by the Bishops of Winchester, is home to many historic buildings including the Old Court House.



The **Ye Olde George Inn** and the **Izaak Walton Public House** offer delicious local food and real ales, along with a roaring fire to warm you up after a lovely stroll.

Our walking guide suggests two circular walks, both starting at the imposing Norman church of All Saints with its magnificent spire.

One walk of four miles should take approximately two hours and the second, a longer walk of eight miles can be completed in around four hours.

Download the East Meon walking leaflet.

For more walking trails and Miles Without Stiles routes visit www.southdowns.gov.uk/get-active

Creatures of the night!



As we head into our darkest days of the year, Elinor Newman, a Heathlands Engagement Ranger, takes a look at nature at night.



Have you ever been for a walk at night? Or sat outside in the darkness? Have you heard rustling in the bushes next to you, or heard a hoot across the road?

One of the categories in this year's South Downs National Park Astrophotography Competition is Nature at

Night, a broad theme covering pictures of nocturnal wildlife, people out at night in the landscape, and trees and other plants illuminated by the stars or the moon. So, if you were to head outside into the darkness this winter, what nocturnal wildlife might you come across?

The first group of wintry nocturnal wildlife that comes to mind are owls. Winter is a great time to get to know these wonderful birds.

Not all owl species are nocturnal; some hunt during the day and some are crepuscular or most active at dawn and dusk (wonderful word, crepuscular!). This time of year you might see the ghostly barn owl, scouring, or quartering, along field boundaries for their preferred prey of mice and voles.

Their wings are designed so that they fly almost silently and the shape of their face focuses sound to pick up the tiniest twitch.



Or you may hear the call of the tawny owl, too-whit, too-whoo, which is actually two owls calling to each other. Tawny owls are the most traditionally nocturnal owl, living in woodland, farmland and even in some urban areas. They have big dark brown eyes to help them see in the dark while crepuscular owls, like the barn

owl, have amber eyes, and day-hunting owls, such as the short-eared owl have yellow ones. Shorties, as they are affectionately known, have been seen regularly in the winter at Seven Sisters Country Park.

Other species that you might see on a winter's night of the four-legged variety include foxes, badgers and deer. Keep your eyes open for your local foxes even if you live

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in a big city – urban foxes are on the rise! I have often seen foxes running across roads at night so watch out for them if you are driving. If you are really lucky, you might see a badger, snuffling around, although they are less active in the cold winter months. Deer are generally more active at dawn and dusk and can look majestic in a wintry landscape.

It is unlikely that you will see any of our cold-blooded amphibian friends in the depths of winter but I have seen common toads out in the dark in early February, crawling along a path. We are lucky to have both native species of toad in the National Park, Common and Natterjack. It's always a treat to see a toad!

Photographing nature at night, especially fast-moving, shy, nocturnal wildlife might seem tricky. Try being creative and playful in your approach, use the light of the moon (the next full moon is 6 January), or become crepuscular and make use of the light just after sunset or just before sunrise.

At this time of year it can be great to get out early in the morning and look for dew, or frost, highlighted spiderwebs or perhaps try and capture them in the moonlight. Remember to be respectful of any wildlife, especially as this is a difficult time of year for them as well, and always follow the countryside code.

There's so much to explore after dark, so get out and embrace the darkness!

Other birds associated with the night include migratory species like the nightingale and the nightjar, both of which fly thousands of miles from southern Africa every spring to nest in suitable habitat across the National Park. Both have clever plumage and are extremely well-camouflaged in their breeding habitats making them difficult to see, even in the day-time, while their unusual or distinctive night-time songs are often better indicators of their presence.



Another group of animals that fly by night are the bats. Bats are mammals, and in this country, they prey primarily on nocturnal insect species, including midges, mosquitos, moths and beetles. We have 18 species of bat in the UK, with 17 of those species having been recorded in the National Park.

There are also some amazing beetles to look out for, including the increasingly endangered stag beetle, the impressive tanner beetle, and glow worms of course!

I'm also a big fan of our magnificent moths – we have over 2,500 species in the UK, not all of whom are active solely at night - many species fly during the day.

I would highly recommend going along to a moth event if you have the opportunity, for a chance to get a closer look at some of these magnificent creatures!

To enter this year's astrophotography competition visit www.southdowns.gov.uk/dark-night-skies/enter-the-2022-2023-astrophotography-competition/

The deadline for entries is midnight on 11 January. Good luck!

Plant a tree this Christmas with stunning e-card



'Tis the season of goodwill and what could be more joyful than the gift of life?

Give back to nature this festive season by sending a beautiful South Downs e-card to your friends, family or business contacts.

A donation of £5 could plant a new tree in the National Park.

Cards can be personalised with your message and scheduled to go out automatically at a date you decide.

Businesses and organisations can send out the e-cards in bulk to customers or suppliers, even adding their logo or an image.

All donations will go towards the South Downs National Park Trust, the National Park's official independent charity, for the Tree for the Downs initiative.

"We're really excited to have launched this e-card initiative," explained Nick Heasman, who leads the 'Our South Downs' team that is working to help create a sustainable economy in the National Park.

"It's a way of giving back to nature and is a very sustainable alternative to paper cards.

"Trees provide us with clean air to breathe, boost our soils and provide havens for so many birds, mammals and insects, so a £5 donation, or more if you are able, really can go a long way and leave a lasting legacy!

"With your donation, we'll put the right tree, in the right place."



There are five striking designs to choose from.

Individuals who would like to gift a tree and send an e-card can visit [here](#).

Businesses or organisations that would like to gift trees and send e-cards can visit [here](#).



Thank you for taking the time to read the South Downs National Park's newsletter this year.

We hope you have a Happy Christmas and a peaceful, restoring New Year 😊



Pic credits

P1 left – Jamie Fielding; P1 right Ron De'Eath; P2 right Solent News Agency; P3 Jeff Travis; P4 Jeff Travis and Charlie Hellewell; P5 (fox) Richard Murray; P5 (crab) Anthony Whitbourn; P5 (owl) Leandro Hang; P6 right Sam Moore; P6 bottom right Nick Heasman