



WORK AND PLAY IN YOUR NATIONAL PARK

This month:

- **Nature at its finest** Discover the winners of the annual photography competition.
- **Embrace the darkness!** The Dark Skies Festival returns with a bumper line-up of events.
- **£2m funding** Find out about the projects benefitting from the Community Infrastructure Levy.
- **COMPETITION WIN** a luxury dog hamper!

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

I will owl-ways love you! Winners are revealed

A heartwarming picture with references to Rudyard Kipling and showing the fatherly love of a Little Owl is the winner of the South Downs National Park's Annual Photo Competition.

"Little Owl Chick and Dad", by David Jeffery, took the top spot in the popular photography contest, which attracted over 500 entries this year.

With a competition theme of "Near and Far", the judging panel agreed the image was extraordinary and thought-provoking. Taken in Edburton in West Sussex, the photo shows a male Little Owl preening his young next to a weather vane showing west to east and spelling 'we'.

Meanwhile, the competition also included a separate category for best image taken with a mobile phone – with first place going to a dramatic photograph of a swan beating its wings on a frosty morning at Petersfield Heath.

The competition judges were award-winning photographers Rachael Talibart, Finn Hopson, and Carlotta Luke, as well as Nick Heasman, Countryside Policy Manager for the South Downs National Park Authority, and Doug Jones, SDNPA Member. The theme centred around macrophotography that showed off the National Park in intricate detail, as well as images capturing the size and scale of the South Downs. Images could also incorporate both "near and far" elements.

Nick said: "I like the east and west theme and it's very fitting for the South Downs, which is such a long National Park and changes so much from east to west. I'm also reminded of the great poet Rudyard Kipling who adored the South Downs and wrote of them 'running' from east to west. The photograph is out of the ordinary and something we haven't seen before."



Finn said: "I like the softness of this image. I also love the fact it spells 'we' – it's very heartwarming."

Carlotta said: "This is such a quirky image – I love it and it's perfect for the brief. I love the colours and it looks particularly good in print."

Rudyard Kipling started his poem "Run of the Downs" with: The Weald is good, the Downs are best – I'll give you the run of 'em, East to West.

Photographer David, who lives in Portslade, East Sussex and picks up a £250 prize, said: "I'm proud of the photographs I take but getting recognition is always a special moment.

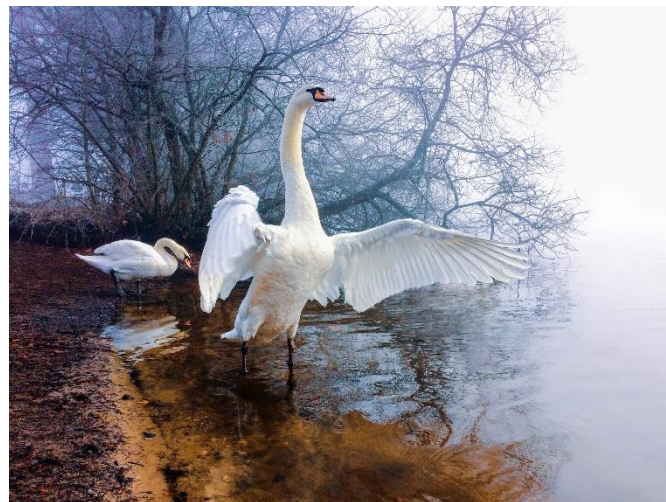
"I always love seeing natural behaviour when out photographing wildlife, but to see dad and his chick being so comfortable with my presence was especially rewarding. I've spent a lot of time over the past few years with this pair of little owls, but never had much luck photographing any chicks, so it was exciting to finally get some shots I'm happy with."

The runner-up prize went to "Hello World", by Carl Gough, which captures two juvenile kestrels taking their first look at the world before fledging from their hollowed tree nesting site.

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Carlotta laughed: "I love it, but I would be terrified if I was the photographer! The detail in the image is amazing."

Rachael said: "The near and far is really there in this image with the swan at the front, the swan behind and all the detail of the tree in the background."



Christopher, from Waterlooville, Hampshire, said: "I've had so many great photo walks in this National Park and I rarely need go further afield for photography. It has all I could ever want to capture."

Several images were highly commended by the judges. In the main category they included "Solar Eclipse at the Chattri", by Michael Harris, which poignantly captures the memorial that honours the Indian soldiers who came from afar and lost their lives in the First World War. An atmospheric shot called "Meon Valley Mist", by Simon Newman, and a stunning fungi image, "Saffron Drop Bonnet", by Rob Aro, were also given praise by the judges. In the mobile phone category the highly-commended photos were: "Sun Kissed" by Stuart Webb; "Paragliders at Bo Peep" by Frances Valdes; and "Chalk cliffs of Lewes" by Taylor Bell.

All the winning and commended images, as well as other shortlisted images, will now be put forward to the People's Choice. People will be able to vote online for their favourite photograph and the winning photographer will receive £75. The online poll closes at midnight on 31 January.

Visit the [website here](#) to vote.



Rachael said: "Kestrels are just the most majestic animal – doesn't matter how often you see them. I love this image. The composition and framing is fantastic. It looks like we've had a secret view into their world."

Finn said: "You don't often get to see kestrels as up close as this."

Photographer Carl, who hails from Littlehampton in West Sussex and wins £150, said: "The day the photo was taken I had just got back from work when a local farmer I've been friendly with 'due to our mutual love of nature' texted me to say he will be mowing. On arrival I couldn't believe my luck, as sure enough a juvenile kestrel was perched at the entrance with mum looking on from an adjacent tree, I knew my presence would disturb them so I backed away and made myself a little more conspicuous. That's when it happened, I once again put my gaze back on the nest and to my delight, a sibling had joined and was also perched at the entrance to the nest. I honestly couldn't believe my luck!"



Taking third place was Thomas Moore's "Look Down", a glorious shot of a cricket at RSPB Pulborough Brooks.

Finn said: "I like this image because it really has some personality. It's technically very good."

Doug said: "The length of the antennae is amazing. I like the message of this

image about 'looking down'. The South Downs is teeming with life, but you very often have to look down and see what's there, such as all the invertebrates and flowers, to appreciate how biodiverse it is."

Winning a £75 prize, Thomas, from Slindon, West Sussex, said: "I was out looking for dragonflies and damselflies but a movement in the grasses below me caught my eye where I saw a cricket staring back. There was very little light between the grasses, but just enough to allow me to get a portrait shot looking down."

"Swan at Petersfield Heath Pond on a frosty morning" wins photographer Christopher Pearson a prize of £75.

Major funding boost for local communities



New cycle tracks, better bridleways, school playground improvements and work to enhance a precious chalk stream are among the projects to benefit from a major funding boost from the South Downs National Park Authority.

Just under £2m will benefit 38 community schemes across Hampshire, West Sussex and East Sussex.

The investment comes from the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), which is paid by developers to support new local infrastructure, with the Authority playing an administrative role.

As well as the £1.95m, 40 parish councils across the National Park will be taking a share of just over £550,000 to support grassroot projects in their area.

Among the inspiring projects will be those that help connect people to the countryside, including funding for the final phase of the Egrets Way, completing the 'missing link' between Piddinghoe and Deans Farm in East Sussex. Once completed, the 7-mile walking and cycling path will provide an easy connection through the National Park from Lewes to Newhaven.

Significant funding is also going towards the restoration of Cockshut Chalk stream, one of only 200 chalk streams in the world. The project will help create over six hectares of wetland, including restoration of the natural course of the stream, removal of invasive non-native species, tree planting and the creation of a new bank to improve public access.

In West Sussex, funding will help scores of schoolchildren at Fittleworth Primary School through changes to their playground to learn about climate change, sustainable water management (SuDs) and nature recovery while a cash injection will provide improvements at Pulborough Brooks, including more accessible trails and an upgraded visitor centre. Funding will also help install a road crossing at South Harting.

In Hampshire, funding will help support outdoor fitness equipment and a multi-use games area in Liss. Investment will upgrade the network of bridleways around Marwell Zoo – a scheme that is linked to a future project of providing an off-road route between Winchester and Marwell.

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Tim Slaney, Director of Planning, said: "We're pleased to announce this significant funding of over £2m to help local communities across the region.

"It's wonderful to see such a diverse range of projects that will help people of all ages, supporting communities across the National Park, as well as people living outside who want to be able to access the South Downs and enjoy its biodiversity and beauty.

"This significant CIL funding emphasises the value of good planning and shows the benefits that flow from high-quality development in a protected landscape such as the South Downs."

The South Downs National Park Authority has opened the call for projects for the 2022/23 round of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding. The window for submission of Expressions of Interest will be open until 31 January 2023.

For more information, visit the [website](#).

East Sussex

Egrets Way – Phase 7, 0.8km North Piddinghoe to Deans Farm, a shared-use path: £300,000

Regeneration of the Cockshut Chalk stream – creation of 6.8ha wetland including the restoration of the natural course of the stream and creation of new bank to enhance public access: £150,000

Seven Sisters Country Park – A National Park for all: Improving Accessibility – Warden accommodation to support year-round tourism and providing new facility block for Camping Barn: £96,000

Buzz Active – Improvements to Canoe Barn at Cuckmere, including flood protection measures and improved entranceway: £43,000.

Landport Skatepark, Lewes – new cycle track and skatepark at Landport Recreation Ground: £50,000

Lewes area – surface and habitat improvements to 1074m of Ouse Valley Way to enable year-round access to riverside path: £40,000

OVESCo – Get Bikery, Lewes – Ecargo bike service for Lewes: £27,000

Iford – off-road cycle way from Iford to Swanborough, including upgrade of footpath to permissive cycle path and bridleway. £26,000

Iford Bridleway – surface works to recently designated Iford Rise Farm Bridleway to enable year round shared use and adding to Ouse Valley Cycle Network: £15,000

South Malling School – replace and enhance playground equipment: £34,500

Keymer Road, Ditchling – new Parish-managed car park: £10,000

Improve mound by Heart of Reeds, Lewes Railway Land Local Nature Reserve – improvements to paths and handrails, additional wildflower planting: £10,000

St Thomas a Becket Church, Lewes – Make safe the 15th Century spiral staircase to Grade II* listed Church to enable public access again: £2,500

West Sussex

Fittleworth Primary School Playground improvements - project will focus on adapting to climate change, demonstrating sustainable water management (SuDs) and nature recovery as well as providing education, play and sporting opportunities: £200,000

Pulborough Brooks Takes Flight – improved visitor centre, upgrades and more accessible trails, improved volunteer facilities: £110,000

Bury C of E Primary School (South Downs Ambassador School) – Classroom extension to accommodate Year 5 and 6 pupils as they progress through the school: £100,000

Upper Beeding – Riverside walk improvements (includes 350m extension): £35,000

Steyning to Washington – a Proposed Permissive Bridleway (685m of surface improvements and installation of gates): £25,000.

South Harting - installation of Road Crossing on B2146 to South Gardens (the 14 acres of recreational space): £25,000

Petworth – Installation of solar panels at Sylvia Beaufoy Youth Centre: £20,660

Petworth Park Sports Ground – Sports and recreation equipment: £20,000

Upper Beeding – redesign and rebuild of existing facilities at Small Dole Skatepark: £10,000

Stedham Recreation Ground Improvements – replacement of old climbing frame with new rope pyramid and seesaw: £9,000

Arundel – New map and information board at Town Quay: £3,000

Hampshire

Liss – Newman Collard Recreation Improvements - outdoor fitness equipment and Multi-use Games Area: £118,000

Marwell to Winchester Bridleways - upgrade network of Bridleways in and around Marwell Zoo and Hotel - up to 1.5km of surfacing and drainage works (linked to future project to deliver off-road link from Marwell to Winchester): £100,000

Greatham Village Hall Recreation Ground – creation of all-inclusive accessible playground to replace existing playground: £90,000

Buriton Village Hall Enhancements – energy efficiency improvements - 12kw solar PV and provision of two fast-charge EV charging points: £50,000

Queen Elizabeth Country Park, near Clanfield – Changing Places Accessible Toilet: £40,000

Selborne – Traffic calming scheme – improve entrances to Selborne and widen footways: £40,000

The Petersfield School – installation of Climbing Wall that will also be open to community groups: £29,000

Access Improvements to the Watercress Way, Winchester (such as re-profiling of land, installation of hand rails and changes to existing ramps): £20,000

Meonstoke C of E Infant School - To improve a wooded area and bark pathways within the school grounds: £18,000

East Tisted – Highway improvements including review and reduction of existing highway signs, bespoke village gateway signs and new fingerposts): £15,000

East Meon - Highway improvements including review and reduction of existing highway signs, bespoke village gateway signs and new fingerposts: £15,000

Sheet – Highway improvements including reduction of junction with Village Green. £15,000

Twyford – Flood Alleviation Scheme (to fund Phase 1 - construct 115m length ditch to replace 90m section of pipe on Hazeley Road): £8,748.26

Embrace the darkness!



Stargazing sessions at 450ft, guided walks through the solar system, star parties, nocturnal wildlife, celestial storytelling and planetarium shows are among the highlights of the Dark Skies Festival.

Now in its sixth year, the popular two-week event returns with a bumper line-up of space-related activities to coincide with the February half term holidays.

With the theme of “Nature at Night”, the festival includes a free downloadable pack of resources for the whole family, including useful stargazing guides and cosmic colouring sheets of the planets and nocturnal wildlife, such as badgers, barn owls and hedgehogs.

Breathtaking imagery will be shared throughout the two weeks from the National Park’s astrophotography competition.

Among the events will be a 45-minute stargazing ride in Brighton’s i360 pod and a fun “Walk the Planets” experience at the picturesque locations of Seven Sisters Country Park, Queen Elizabeth Country Park and Hogmoor Inclosure.

Performance storyteller Dawn Nelson will be sharing fascinating folklore from the Milky Way galaxy with bite-size videos, mini-podcasts and live sessions.

Astronomers from South Downs Planetarium and Winchester Science Centre will be hosting stargazing sessions, with the chance to use professional telescopes that show stars millions of light years away.

The festival, running from 4 to 17 February, celebrates the National Park’s status as one of 20 International Dark Reserves in the world, recognising it as one of the best places globally to capture immense views of the stars.

Joshua Esan, Engagement and Events Officer for the National Park, added: “We think everyone should be able to experience the wonder of our dark skies and learn about the incredible biodiversity that emerges when the sun goes down.

“As always, we are very dependent on the weather, so please do check our website and social media channels on the day of attending one of the stargazing sessions or walks.

“Many of the events you can just turn up to, while some need to be booked in advance, so please do check the programme carefully!”

For more details and the full programme visit www.southdowns.gov.uk/dark-night-skies/dark-skies-festival/

Help protect our heritage



People are being given the chance to adopt an iconic piece of South Downs history.

The world-renowned Long Man of Wilmington, in East Sussex, can now be “adopted” by members of the public as part of a unique fundraising drive.

Europe’s largest portrayal of the human form has stood on the hillside for centuries, becoming known to many as the “Guardian of the South Downs”.

Thanks to regular maintenance by its owners The Sussex Archaeological Society, the scheduled ancient monument remains free to access and visible for miles around.

By adopting one of the 770 blocks making up its outline, people can now play an active role in its protection.

Leanne O’Boyle, Executive Director of the Society, said: “The Long Man of Wilmington is a unique and much-loved historical landmark which we are proud to be custodians of.

“By adopting a piece of the Long Man, you will be supporting our work and helping keep the heritage of Sussex safe and accessible to inspire generations to come.”

Anooshka Rawden, who leads cultural heritage in the National Park, added: “The Long Man of Wilmington is symbolic of the South Downs, part of the mythology of the landscape and captured by artists including Eric Ravilious and Philip Leslie Moffat Ward. Sponsoring one of the 770 blocks that create this mysterious figure on the hill will help secure the ongoing maintenance of the Long Man, creating a longer term guardianship for our very own ‘guardian’ of the Downs.”

It costs £30 to adopt one of the 770 blocks and details are [here](#).



Win a dog hamper!



It’s a new year, it’s #WalkYourDogMonth and what better incentive to get out into the stunning South Downs with your pooch than this exciting basket of goodies!



To be in with a chance of winning these scrumptious treats for your favourite four-legged friend simply snap a pic of your dog on a lead enjoying the many stunning views in the South Downs National Park.

Be it a peaceful paws on top of a hill, or a tongue-out shot of your pooch, we want to see photos of your pups taking the lead this January!

To enter simply:

- Post a pic of your dog enjoying a walk on the lead in the South Downs National Park
- Tag your photo with @southdownsnp and #TakeTheLead

As all good dogs (and their owners) know, being responsible when out in the countryside is the best way to have a safe and enjoyable adventure. Stick to the paths, keep on the lead around wildlife and livestock and always bag and bin those stinky poos!

Happy Exploring! Woof!



Put the joy into January!



As we enter the coldest weeks of the year and with purse strings tightened after the indulgences of December, it's little wonder the January blues hit hard for so many of us.

Yet there is a simple and low-cost way to put the joy into January – and it's right on your doorstep!

Connecting with nature, finding those green spaces and exploring the great outdoors can put a welcome spring in your step, combatting low mood and helping to restore that "joie de vivre".

With its wondrous landscape, winter wildlife and charming heritage, the South Downs National Park can provide such an uplifting boost – and you may not even realise the power of good it's done for you until the end of your walk, heart pumping and lungs full of fresh air!

Kate Drake, health and wellbeing officer for the National Park, said: "One in four people will experience a mental health problem in their life and everybody has mental health that needs looking after.

"January and February can be particularly hard months for a lot of people and it's fine to acknowledge that you may be feeling a bit low.

"Fortunately, there are so many simple joys to be experienced during the winter that don't cost the earth. Simply getting out into the fresh air and going for a walk in a tranquil space is a very powerful way of releasing stress and allowing those 'happy hormones' such as serotonin to bounce back.

"You may need to wrap up warm, but you'll be surprised how much better you feel after being out in nature to enjoy a moment of calm and appreciate its beauty."

Here are eight nature-based ways to put the joy into January:

1. Take a walk in a green space

Wrap up warm and take a walk in your local park, or along one of the many walking trails in the South Downs. See what you can notice – perhaps the first flowers emerging, buds on trees or leaves on the ground? Take yourself somewhere with a view and see what you can see as you look North, East, South and West. What can you see close up and far away?

2. Keep a nature diary

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While you're out and about, why not jot down things you see, words that come to mind and even make a quick sketch of wildlife you see?

3. Listen

This is a great way of centring yourself and being in the present moment. Simply close your eyes and listen to the sounds you can hear in nature – perhaps it's the rain, a gust of wind or the trilling of birds?

4. Night walking

Winter nights can be long and dark but that doesn't mean you have to stay indoors! It can be really exciting to explore outside at night time.

The South Downs National Park is one of 20 International Dark Sky Reserves, with some of the best stargazing opportunities in the UK. Here are some top tips for stargazing from "[Dark Skies](#)" [Dan Oakley](#), a Lead Ranger for the National Park.

There's lots of information on the National Park's 10 Dark Sky Discovery sites and how to get the most of your visit on our [YouTube channel](#).

5. Look down and look up!

It can be so easy to go out into the outdoors and not really notice what's beneath your feet or above your head. Notice the patterns and shapes you see on the ground when you are out walking, such as shapes of puddles, ice, leaves, and roots. You might even see some footprints. Are they human or non-human?!

Take a moment to look up and cloud watch. Notice the shapes of the clouds and how the sky changes with time.

6. Help nature

Why not survey the wild birds visiting your garden? You could take part in the RSPB's Big Garden Birdwatch from 27 to 29 of January. [Sign up on their website](#) to get your free kit and take part.

You could also try one of the National Park's ReNature resolutions – such as designating part of your outdoor space for wildlife, creating a window box or helping to clear litter from your local green space? Find out more [here!](#)

7. Sun worship!

It's amazing how much better the sun can make us feel. When the sun is shining find a sunny place to relax and bask in the sun. Feel your body warming up. Notice how you feel. Natural sunlight helps to replenish Vitamin D that in turn can help your mood.

After a hard day, it can be very uplifting to take a short walk to admire the sunset. Did you know every day we gain approximately two minutes of daylight?

8. Set goals

It's great to create new memories by setting yourself a little challenge. It could be as simple as taking 15 minutes a day to go for a walk at lunchtime, or it could be more extravagant such as walking a section of the 100-mile South Downs Way every month in 2023. Perhaps you're a history lover, so why not visit all the historic stately homes in the National Park or the different Iron Age forts such as Cissbury Ring and Old Winchester Hill? Whatever challenge you set, make it an uplifting one!

For more ideas on exploring the great outdoors, visit www.southdowns.gov.uk/get-active/

Things to do in the South Downs this January

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/



- Find out about the life of 19th century explorer and naturalist Frank Oates and his relationship with King Lobengula of the Ndebele nation. The **exhibition** runs until 26 March at Gilbert White's House in Selborne.
- Join She Runs Outdoors for a beautiful 10-mile women's **trail run** on 15 January exploring the Sussex Downs between Cissbury Ring and Chanctonbury Ring.
- Come, discover more and reign in the New Year with our Heathland Rangers by making a toast to nature and celebrating the way nature changes through the seasons and over the year on a walk at **Shortheath Common**, near Bordon, on 17 January (booking required)
- Explore **RSPB Pulborough Brooks** on 21 January as dawn breaks and the brooks come alive with the sights and sounds of the hundreds of waders, ducks, geese and swans that spend their winter there.
- Explore the dark skies with Eastbourne Astronomical Society on 28 January with **a stargazing session** at the Beachy Head Story.
- Find out about the amazing wonder plant, sphagnum moss, during a **guided walk at Shortheath Common** on 3 February.
- Head to Pallant House Gallery in Chichester to enjoy the first **major exhibition** to celebrate the Sussex landscape as a place of inspiration for artists.

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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