



WORK AND PLAY IN YOUR NATIONAL PARK

This month:

- **A special place for all** As we celebrate Discover National Parks fortnight we shine a light on 10 reasons why the South Downs National Park is so amazing!
- **Groundbreaking wildlife survey** Learn more about a fascinating study about local biodiversity.
- **Fit for a king!** Find out more about a special celebration to mark the King's Coronation.
- **Big Green Give** Play your part in helping to restore precious dew ponds in the South Downs.

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

Celebrating 13 years of your National Park

For this edition we're celebrating the 13th anniversary of the South Downs becoming a National Park.

As you may, or may not, know we are Britain's newest National Park and cover more than 1,600 square kilometres of some of the most iconic, diverse and beautiful landscapes you're ever likely to see.

If you're looking for walking adventures, breathtaking views, connections with wildlife, and pretty chocolate-box villages, the South Downs is the place for you!

So, as we celebrate Discover National Parks fortnight this April, let's take a quick look at what makes the South Downs National Park so special:

1. It's for everyone

The South Downs was designated for the enjoyment of the entire nation. It's located in the busiest part of the UK and is a place to escape to, find inspiration and breathe just a little more easily.

2. It's buzzing with wildlife



Did you know the South Downs National Park has over 1,000 nature reserves and wildlife sites?

Its colourful chalk grassland is famous for being "Europe's rainforest" in miniature, with over



40 different species of wildflower and over 20 species of butterfly in just one square metre. Some of its purple heathlands have 12 of Britain's 13 native reptile and amphibian species and did we mention the South Downs has otters living in its rare crystal-clear chalk streams?

The biodiversity is incredible, but could be even more



diverse, so that's why the National Park is hoping to create 13,000 hectares of new habitat for wildlife over the next decade – that's the equivalent of 21,000 footy pitches!

3. It has bright blue butterflies

Who can fail to be captivated by the sight of an Adonis Blue dancing through the greenery?

4. It's super accessible

Wherever you are in the South Downs, you're never far from a major transport route. With railway stations at Petersfield, Liss, Amberley, Southease and Lewes and a large network of bus connections, it's so easy to escape for the day. If you're still "finding your feet" with walking in wide open landscapes, this is the place for you as there are several Miles Without Stiles routes that are perfect for all mobility and fitness levels.

5. It's got a bit of everything

The South Downs is a place where coast and country meet, where historic towns and downs sit side by side. Around a quarter of the landscape is



covered by woodland, while seven stunning river valleys cut through the chalk ridge. The stunning Seven Sisters cliffs are probably one of the biggest "wow" spots, but the 2,000-year-old yew trees at Kingley Vale are surely not far behind.

6. It's the sunniest National Park in the UK



With the South Downs Way trailing some 100 miles along the south coast of England, there are fewer nice places to walk on a warm summer's day. Owing to its sunny climate and

chalky soils, the South Downs is one of the biggest wine-producing regions in the UK, with over 50 vineyards dotted across the National Park.

7. The history will blow your mind

This is a landscape that has stood the test of time. While the geology is fascinating (the chalk beneath your feet is the remains of tiny sea animals that lived during the age of the dinosaurs), the cultural heritage to see and explore is quite breathtaking! Want to see a fairytale castle? Arundel. Would like to see an internationally-important art collection?

Petworth. Would like to see a Viking burial ground? Kingley Vale. The home of Britain's first birdwatcher? Selborne. The list goes on and on!



8. It has more people living in it than any other National Park in the UK

With over 117,000 residents, the South Downs is a thriving, friendly community. People are one of its greatest strengths as it means more people to care for the

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landscape and ensure future generations can enjoy this incredible National Park.

9. The adventures are endless

With over 3,300 km (more than 2000 miles) of rights of way, you'd have to walk from Lewes to John o'Groats and back again to cover it all.



10. It has water voles



Enough said! 😊

Get started on your next adventure in the South Downs National Park [here](#).

Watch the National Park in motion!

Our YouTube channel is a great way to get to know more about the National Park and watch all kinds of video content.

Whether it's a fun wildlife film, tips for stargazing, new walking trails or an in-depth chat with a farmer, our growing YouTube channel has something for everyone.



Luke Walter, digital officer for the National Park, said: "Now is a really good time to subscribe to our YouTube channel as we're uploading new videos all the time.

"We already have dozens of films, covering all manner of topics around biodiversity, people, accessibility and history and are looking to post more and more YouTube shorts.

"We also have some breathtaking 360 films showcasing the amazing landscape, so they are definitely worth checking out!

"We know not everyone is on Facebook, Instagram or Twitter, so YouTube is a really good way of learning more about the National Park. If you already subscribe to our social channels, do consider adding YouTube as well as there's some really interesting content you may not have seen before!"

Search for [South Downs National Park](#) @sdnpa and hit subscribe 😊

Groundbreaking wildlife study 250 years later



It's a stunning region famed for Jane Austen's countryside and Britain's first ecologist Gilbert White.

Now a groundbreaking study has shone a light on the biodiversity of this quintessential English countryside – and shown wildlife around Selborne is not doing so badly after all.

The survey is the most comprehensive since Gilbert White's own studies almost 250 years ago that culminated in *The Natural History of Selborne*, which was first published in 1789 and has since run to nearly 300 editions worldwide. White was a pioneering naturalist who transformed the way we look at the natural world, his writings influencing the likes of Charles Darwin and David Attenborough.



The study, published this week after five years of painstaking data collection by a team of dedicated volunteers, collates around 10,000 species records across the animal kingdom in the Selborne

Landscape Partnership (SLP) area (5,600 hectares), much of which falls within the South Downs National Park.

The five-year study has already found 114 different bird species – just short of the 120 or so recorded by White, which he collected over several decades and across a much wider area in the 1700s. Eighty-eight of these bird species (more than three quarters), such as the swift, swallow, barn owl, linnets and grey partridge, are the same as those recorded almost 250 years ago and, while there have been some losses, there have been gains too.

The report has been produced by the Selborne Landscape Partnership (SLP), which has existed for almost 10 years and comprises around 30 dedicated farmers and land managers working together to create a joined-up network of wildlife habitat and promote nature-friendly food production.

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Debbie Miller, lead author of *Farming in Partnership with Nature – A New Natural History of Selborne*, said: "Nature is thriving because the area is being managed sensitively to retain and restore a range of habitats for farmland wildlife, creating greater connectivity across farm boundaries. In this commercially farmed landscape, farmers locally have worked really hard to create spaces for nature to thrive – collectively sharing skills and knowledge to better manage their land for wildlife.

"I'm extremely proud of what both the SLP farmers and volunteers have achieved, and I hope that these achievements will encourage and motivate others – just as Gilbert White's legacy continues to inspire the group."

The group has been working to support "target" species, such as the brown hairstreak butterfly and the iconic harvest mouse, which was first identified by White as a distinct species. The group has been supported by the South Downs National Park Authority and the South Downs National Park Trust, amongst other supporters and sponsors.

Some key findings from the wildlife survey include:

- Several bird species were discovered that White never spotted. These include introductions such as Egyptian goose, mandarin duck, red-legged partridge, white stork and little owl, plus natural range expansions such as gadwall, Mediterranean gull, little egret, goshawk and firecrest.
- A total of 79 barn owl chicks were recorded between 2017 and 2021 – benefitting from the installation of 53 nesting boxes and the creation of 93 miles of tussocky grass margins across the region.
- Changes in hedge cutting practices has created ideal habitat conditions for the brown hairstreak butterfly, enabling its recovery across the area.
- Farmland birds such as yellowhammers, linnets and skylarks are benefitting from conservation measures implemented by the group, such as the provision of 77 hectares of seed-rich plants and 40 song-bird feeders to provide winter food, as well as a network of good quality hedges and edges to provide nesting places and protection from predators.



The farmers have introduced a long list of conservation measures to help retain or create wildlife habitats. The SLP area now boasts 25.1km (over 15 miles) of restored hedgerow, 151km (93 miles) of tussocky field edges, 74 hectares of flower-rich habitat and

has started restoration work on some of its 100 ponds. Wildflower planting has also taken place as part of the National Park's Bee Lines initiative and the farmers aim is to create up to 3 hectares of high-quality, flower-rich habitat per 100 hectares for pollinators.

For more information on the Selborne Landscape Partnership visit

<https://selbornelandscapepartnership.org.uk/>

Challenge is on to restore South Downs dew ponds!



An amazing opportunity has come up to help transform centuries-old dew ponds into wildlife havens buzzing with biodiversity!

As Earth Day approaches this month, a huge week-long nationwide effort to help the environment is launching as part of the Big Give.

Here in the South Downs, the National Park Trust is hoping to raise £5,000 – an amount that could then be match-funded to raise a whopping £10,000 to help bring life back to dew ponds.

But the clock will be ticking as the Trust will need to have raised £5,000 by midday on 27 April for the fundraising to be doubled.

Sophie Ritson, who oversees fundraising for the Trust, explains why dew ponds are so incredible.

“Dew ponds are amazing! They are truly an oases for wildlife, providing drinking and bathing water for birds, and a home for dragonflies and other aquatic invertebrates.

“They also make good breeding sites for frogs, toads and newts and they typically support around three quarters of all freshwater species in lowland landscapes.

“Unfortunately so many have disappeared across the South Downs and many of them are in a very poor condition.

“We want to change this for the better, bringing life back to these dew ponds and providing vital water for grazing sheep and wildlife in an otherwise dry landscape. Just imagine what these dew ponds could look like in five years’ time if we can raise this money!”

And Sophie added: “The race is on to raise this vital cash in super-quick time and every penny really will make a big difference. It’s exciting to think that every donation we get can be doubled in value, allowing us to do even more than we normally would.”

The fundraising challenge begins at midday on 20 April.

[Donate here.](#)

Celebrate King’s Coronation in style at Seven Sisters



A special screening of the King’s Coronation is taking place at Seven Sisters Country Park next month.

The historic Pump Barn will be open to the public and people will be able to enjoy watching the coronation of King Charles III on a huge screen.

It comes after almost £2m has been invested by the National Park Authority in renovating the facilities, including a refurbished visitor centre with fun displays and activities, a new shop, grab-and-go food outlet and new toilets.

It’s now been almost two years since the National Park Authority took over the running of the country park from East Sussex County Council. A huge amount of work has already been done to help improve the wildlife-rich chalk grassland, including the introduction of cattle as conservation grazers and active management of the landscape by staff and volunteers.

Work is currently under way to create new visitor accommodation on the 280-hectare site using existing buildings.

The coronation event takes place from 11am to 5pm on Saturday 6 May and entry is free.



Peter Cousin, Commercial Manager for the country park, said: “This is a brilliant opportunity to see the coronation and take in one of the UK’s most iconic views all in the same day.

“Whether you want to watch the entire historical event, or just pop in before a walk across the country park, we will be displaying the coronation on our new big screen.

“Alongside the coronation, we’ll be serving locally produced beer, Pimms and a selection of nostalgic confectionery. There will also be a number of activities for young children.”

The country park is well served by buses from Brighton, Seaford and Eastbourne, and from further along the coast. All buses stop at the park entrance. **[View the timetable for the Coaster 12, 12A and 12X services.](#)**

Volunteers tackle litter



Volunteers from across the Winchester area are joining forces to tackle the problem of litter left strewn across roadsides, lanes, and public spaces.

Over ten villages in Winchester district now work in cooperation with The Litter Partnership, which was founded by Tom Bristowe several years ago after he moved to Upham and was shocked by the amount of litter by the roadside.

Supported by Winchester City Council's street scene contractor, idverde, and countryside charity CPRE, the partnership also works with a growing number of other organisations, including the University of Winchester, Corhampton Golf Club, the Army Training Regiment, VolkerFitzpatrick, Southern Water and local scout groups.

Every week teams of volunteers collect dozens of bags of rubbish from across the area.

One group is even collecting cans across the district and trading in the metal to raise money for Hampshire and Isle of Wight Air Ambulance.

Explaining how the partnership started, Tom (*pictured left below*) said: "After moving to the countryside, I was just astonished and shocked by the rubbish that people chucked out of their car windows and on to the sides of roads.

"Once you have your eye in, you can't stop seeing the litter and you see it all the time everywhere.

"One Sunday morning I thought I would go out and start clearing it up and picked up a couple of bags of rubbish. It became quite addictive as it's very satisfying.



"I litter-picked a few times and thought there was no way I could tackle the problem alone. So I thought I would try to encourage as many people as possible to help out, which is when The Litter Partnership was born.

"Apart from litter-picking regularly with a local group, my role is as a convener of people. I've found myself at the centre of an increasing large web of individuals who recognise the litter problem and want to do something about it. I help give them routes to do that."

Tom is now looking at a long-term solution to the litter issue and is working with behaviour change experts with a view to launching a major social media campaign in South Hampshire.

For more information about The Litter Partnership visit thelitterpartnership.org or to get in touch via email hello@thelitterpartnership.org

Preserving our heritage



A heritage venue that was once owned by Jane Austen's brother is launching a fundraising campaign as it marks a milestone.

This year is the 20th anniversary of Chawton House, in Hampshire, opening to the public.

To mark the occasion, the historic house is launching a fundraising appeal to ensure its legacy continues for the next 20 years and beyond.

The site has seen a major turnaround in recent times. Just a few years ago, the parkland and woodland were neglected to the extent they were unsafe, with ill-maintained paths and stiles, and parts declared a sterile wildlife environment.

Now the 100 hectares of land have seen significant improvements, with a network of walks and accessible gates, restoration of Mingledown woods, and the removal of dangerous and dead trees.

Chief Executive Katie Childs said: "Since 2015, Chawton House has thrown open its doors to the public and transformed from a by-appointment academic library into an award-winning and much-loved historic estate with beautiful grounds and gardens.

"2023 marks 20 years since Chawton House opened to the public for the first time, and whilst we want to celebrate what we have done and look forward to what we will do – especially running up to Jane Austen's 250th birthday – we face a perilous and uncertain future, and need your help to realise our full potential.

"Chawton House is special. It is a place you can visit on your own and not be lonely, where children are encouraged to explore, or where you can lose yourself in the stories of women's writing.



"It is a space for community, where you can find inspiration, comfort or even cake! We would be missed now if we were gone."

Find out more [here](#).

Join in the fun of world's biggest wildlife survey!



One of the world's biggest wildlife spotting events returns to the South Downs later this month.

People are being encouraged to make their walks a little wilder and spot the amazing animals and plants on their doorstep for the International City Nature Challenge.

The challenge has grown from humble beginnings several years ago when it was a wildlife-spotting competition between San Francisco and Los Angeles in California.

Now a truly global event, Brighton & Hove, together with the surrounding downland from Littlehampton to Beachy Head, will be one of 19 areas in the UK making a special effort to get people out and surveying as much wildlife as possible.

The challenge takes place between 28 April and 1 May.

Amanda Elmes, Learning, Outreach and Volunteer Lead for the National Park, said: "This is a wonderful opportunity to get involved in a worldwide community science initiative, whether you're new to wildlife spotting or a seasoned pro!"

"The information you collect will give scientists a better understanding of biodiversity in the region.

"You don't have to be a wildlife expert to take part.

"Just take a picture of the nature you find, and upload it on to the iNaturalist app."



iNaturalist is available to download on smart phones. Visit www.citynaturechallenge.org.uk to find out more.



Grant funding supports arts and landscape project



A five-day celebration of history, landscape, wildlife and the arts will take place later this year after major grant funding was announced.

The National Lottery Heritage Fund has awarded £213,800 to deliver Walk The Chalk, which will be a huge extravaganza among nine national events to mark the opening of the England Coast Path.

The South Downs section of the England Coast Path opened last year and further sections will be opened across the UK. When completed the path will be a 2,700-mile coastal trail around the country, and the longest of its kind in Britain.

The celebrations are being delivered by LYT Productions in partnership with Lewes District Council.

The event is set to take place in late September at a number of locations, including South Hill Barn, Seaford Head Nature Reserve, Cuckmere Haven and the Seven Sisters.

Walks, talks, and exhibitions will be among the line-up of activities.

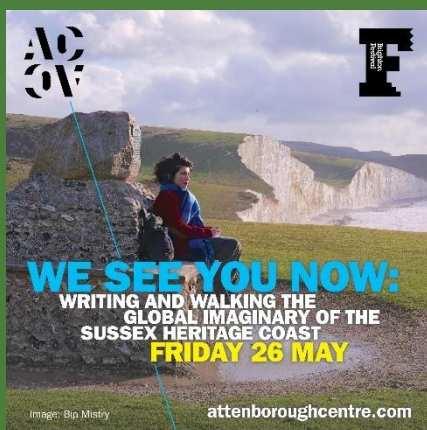
Phil Rose, Artistic Director at LYT Productions, said: "This generous funding gives another golden opportunity for young people to engage in heritage in new and exciting ways, and to feel connected to their spectacular environment. We can't wait to start work on this amazing project."

Helen Browning-Smith, Tourism and Arts Manager at Lewes District Council, said: "We are thrilled to have received this support thanks to National Lottery players and are confident the project will benefit local communities and fill them with a sense of pride and ownership of this world-famous and fascinating section of England's coast."

The 33-mile (53km) stretch of the England Coast Path, linking Shoreham-by-Sea to Eastbourne, opened in May last year. Find out more [here](#).

Things to do in the South Downs this April

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/



- Calling all green-fingered folk! The stunning gardens at [Fittleworth House](#), Pulborough will be open for the National Garden Scheme every Wednesday from 19 April to 10 May between 2pm and 5pm.
- Join dedicated birder Andrew Armitage on 21 April and experience the tremendously varied birdlife of the [Steyping Downland Scheme](#) on a gentle stroll through the woods and meadows.
- Are you a fan of transport heritage? On Sunday 30 April [Amberley Museum](#) will be hosting its annual Spring Bus Show showcasing buses from the Museum's collection, the Southdown Omnibus Trust collection and a number of visiting buses. A unique former Southdown Motor Services bus, Leyland Titan TD1 (number plate UF 4813) has recently been acquired by the Southdown Omnibus Trust and joined the collection of seven other former Southdown buses dating from 1914 to 1937.
- Head to [St Hubert's Church](#) in Idsworth on 26 April for a fascinating talk about the area's history from Mark Seaman, of Chichester and District Archaeology Society. All are welcome with tea and biscuits served at 2.40pm before the talk starting at 3pm.
- Explore the [Wiston Estate](#) on 28 April for a guided walk with Estate Manager Richard Goring and local ecologist Matthew Thomas. The three-hour walk will take you into the nooks and crannies of Wiston's old woodlands as you discover the living evidence of their ancient past.
- **COMING UP NEXT MONTH!** Join writer-in-residence at Seven Sisters Country Park, Alinah Azadeh, and guests for an immersive evening of readings, discussion, song, sound and video, inspired by the iconic and shifting coastal landscapes of the Sussex coast. The event is part of the Brighton Festival and takes place at the Attenborough Centre for the Creative Arts, in Brighton, on 26 May and [tickets are on sale now](#).

Pic credits

P1 Hope Gap by Karolina Krasuska; P5 Right Claire Lewis; P6 left Jan Knowlson; P6 left John Lauper.