

# SOUTH DOWNS NEWS

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SOUTH DOWNS  
NATIONAL PARK

## WORK AND PLAY IN YOUR NATIONAL PARK

This month:

- **New Year, New Perspective** Find out about the winners of the annual photo competition and vote for your favourite in The People's Choice.
- **£3m boost** Learn more about the scores of initiatives around access, education, recreation and environment that are benefitting from the Community Infrastructure Levy.
- **Embrace the darkness!** A sneak preview of the Dark Skies Festival that returns next month.
- **Competition!** Win a romantic night for two in a boutique hotel at the gateway to the Downs.

As always, please send your comments and ideas to us at [newsletter@southdowns.gov.uk](mailto:newsletter@southdowns.gov.uk)

## Wintry woods and delightful duckling win photo contest

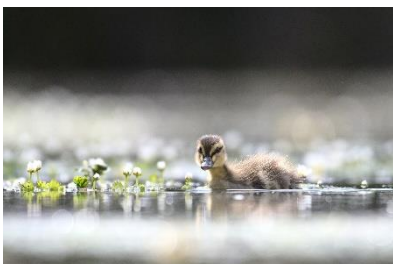
**A captivating image of autumn meeting winter, an adorably cute duckling and a misty iconic landscape are among the winners of the South Downs National Park's Annual Photo Competition.**

"Snow on Wolstonbury", by Matt Goddard, took the top spot in the popular photography contest, which attracted a record 522 entries this year.

With a competition theme of "New Perspective", judges agreed the contrast between the seasons resulted in a spellbinding shot that captured the beauty of a wintry woodland.

The competition judges were award-winning photographers Rachael Talibart, Finn Hopson, and Carlotta Luke, *Outdoor Photography* Deputy Editor Claire Blow, as well as Vanessa Rowlands, Chair of the National Park Authority.

Carlotta said: "It's a new perspective having the snow on the autumn leaves and the complete contrast. The shape of the path is drawing me into the photo and I just want to be there in that snowy South Downs



landscape. The orange leaves are just beautiful on the white snow."

Rachael added: "It's beautiful, simple, subtle and it invites me to explore."

The shot was taken at Wolstonbury in West Sussex. Picking up a prize of £250, Matt, of Hurstpierpoint, said: "My love of exploring the South Downs started during childhood and hasn't stopped since. Sussex is blessed to have the National Park's rich history, varied landscape, and stunning views. Capturing and sharing its beauty has played a big part in my career and enjoyment of landscape photography.

"I am truly honoured to be awarded for my Wolstonbury Hill woodland photo. A snowy landscape is always magical and the last of autumn's golden leaves came as a pleasant surprise. There's a timeless feel to Wolstonbury, as with all my favourite views of the South Downs."

“Kingston Ridge”, taken by James Ratchford, was runner-up, showing the criss-crossing hills near Lewes and a flock of gulls flying overhead.



Claire said: “I love the graphic quality of this image and it really shows off the South Downs National Park – it couldn’t be anywhere else.”

Finn added: “The soft light hitting the hills is wonderful. This is such a well-thought-out photograph. It’s incredible that this kind of landscape is on the urban fringe and is surrounded by the Brighton conurbation.”

James, from Lewes, who wins £100, said: “The South Downs bring me joy year-round and this image expresses much of what I love about them.

“The fog that hugs the hills on windless mornings, the criss-crossing gentle slopes, the singing skylarks and views to the sea.”

The third-place prize was awarded to “Wiggle Wandering”, by Ian Brierley, who captured a gorgeous springtime shot of Wildhams Wood, near Chichester.

Vanessa said: “This is the epitome of a beautiful spring day in the South Downs National Park. A lot of people don’t realise that a quarter of the National Park is covered by woodland.”



Ian, from Lindfield, West Sussex, who wins £50, said: “My image ‘wiggle’ was taken last May on a beautiful spring morning surrounded by a carpet of wild garlic and bluebells. The whole scene had an almost fairytale feel about it.”

Winning the competition’s wildlife category was “Duckling amongst the crowsfoot”, by David Jeffery, who captured the incredible shot at Steyning Upper Pond, which is currently being restored by the community to encourage wildlife.

Carlotta added: “This photograph is utterly adorable and I love the composition. The duckling is looking right at the camera!”

David, of Portslade, who wins £75, said: “It’s always a welcome surprise winning a competition and it makes all the graft worth it. I was practically laying in the pond to get this shot of a particularly curious duckling from eye level. I love how the crowsfoot surrounds the duckling front to back in the image.

“The South Downs National Park never ceases to amaze me with its variety of wildlife on offer, from the big to the small.”

The standard of the wildlife category was so strong this year that a runner-up and third prize were awarded by the judges. An extraordinary shot of a fly on a leaf with a droplet of water that reveals a shimmering reflection of bluebells, called “Bluebells for All”, won second prize. Captured at Wyck, near Alton in Hampshire, the



photographer was Sarah Womersley, who lives in Binsted and wins £50. Winning the hearts of the judges was a dreamy photograph taken at Petworth of two badgers, called “Evening Embrace”. Richard Murray, of Waterlooville, wins a £25 prize for third place.

Scores of people took shots of the National Park on their mobile phones and Claire Cross, from Newhaven, in East Sussex, captured a beauty. Her photograph, called “Huddled Together” and taken at Exceat, shows a group of Sussex breed cattle, which have been introduced as conservation grazers to help restore precious wildlife-rich chalk grassland.

Vanessa said: “I love the colours and the image has that nice velvety warmth to it.”



Claire, who wins £75, said: “Winning the mobile category came as a lovely surprise!”

“This photo was taken back in the summer on one of my many walks with family. The South Downs

National Park is such a beautiful and thought-provoking place to be. I feel privileged to be able to see and enjoy its natural wonders.”

Several images were highly commended by the judges. They were: “Buddy Blues”, by Mike Blacknell, showing two chalkhill blue butterflies sharing their roost; “Marbled White”, by Lloyd Lane, showing a marbled white butterfly in a field on a breezy day; “Golden Beech”, by Michael Steven Harris, capturing a flock of birds at Chanctonbury Ring; “Islands in the sand”, by Lee Rouse, showing low tide and the Seven Sisters cliffs from Cuckmere Haven; and “Thunderstorm spooks horses grazing on the Downs”, by Ian Currie and taken near Devil’s Dyke.

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 from Monday, 15 January for their favourite photograph and the winning photographer will receive £75. The online poll closes at midnight on 31 January.

Visit [www.southdowns.gov.uk](http://www.southdowns.gov.uk) to cast your vote.

## Funding boost of £3m for local communities



**New off-road routes for walkers and cyclists, new play areas, school improvements and work to enhance a river are among the projects to benefit from a major funding boost from the South Downs National Park Authority.**

More than £2.5m will benefit 42 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 £2.5m, 37 parish councils across the National Park will be taking a share of just over £550,000 to support grassroot projects in their area.

The CIL funding is the highest amount ever given out by the National Park Authority.

Among the inspiring projects will be those that help connect people to the countryside, including the creation of a new 2.5-mile walking and cycling route linking Stanmer Park in Brighton to Ditchling Beacon and the South Downs Way.

East Sussex will also see improvements to Malling Recreation Ground in Lewes, as well as the creation of a new “wild” play area for children at Seven Sisters Country Park.

In West Sussex, significant funding is going towards extending the Centurion Way from Chichester along the old railway line to link with the South Downs Way at Cocking. There will also be the refurbishment of the village hall at Bury.

Ecological enhancements will be made to the River Rother to help fish populations.

In Hampshire, a series of projects will benefit from funding, including access improvements at St Catherine’s Hill at Winchester and at Queen Elizabeth Country Park, near Waterlooville, where a dew pond will also be restored into a wildlife-rich haven. Petersfield Rugby Club will benefit from a new renewable energy scheme to

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reduce running costs, while Petersfield Open Air Swimming Pool will be getting new toilet facilities.

Kelly Porter, Major Projects Lead, who helps to oversee CIL funding in the National Park, said: “As we begin 2024, we’re pleased to announce our highest ever amount of CIL funding to help local communities across the region.



“Having access to green spaces and first-class facilities are vital for the wellbeing of local communities, both inside and outside the National Park. So many of these initiatives will help connect people of all ages with the countryside and it’s wonderful to be able to make that difference.”

The South Downs National Park Authority will open the call for projects for the 2023/24 round of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding on 1 January 2024. The window for submission of Expressions of Interest will be open until 12 April 2024. For more information, guidelines and application forms please visit this [webpage](#)

### East Sussex

Malling Recreation Ground, Lewes – path improvements for walkers and cyclists. £67,000

Beachy Head – chaplaincy improvements. £50,000

Lewes Rowing Club – building new clubhouse. £49,000

Linklater Pavilion, Lewes – replacement lift. £15,000

Seven Sisters Country Park – creation of 'Wild Play' area. £50,000

Stanmer Park to Ditchling Beacon Link to South Downs Way – creation of 4.2km off-road route for walkers and cyclists. £181,505.70

### West Sussex

Centurion Way Phase 2 – construction of part of a new 5.3km walking and cycling path from West Dean to South Downs Way at Cocking (following the former Chichester to Midhurst Railway Line) £650,000

Midhurst Rother College – canopy to amphitheatre. £125,000

Petworth Park Sports Ground – sports pavilion redevelopment. £100,000

Bury CE Primary School – classroom extension. £100,000

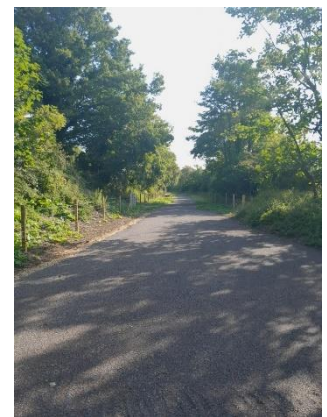
Fittleworth – improvements to Serpent Trail. £100,000

Bury Village Hall – refurbishments including sustainability improvements. £100,000

North Mill, Easebourne – improvements to the River Rother to comply with Water Framework Directive for fish. £50,000

Midhurst Green Walkway – improvements from the Grange Community Leisure Centre to the Old Town including planting and signage. £25,000

Lilac Cottage (part of the Old Library), Midhurst – refurbishment for Midhurst Community Hub. £15,000



Newly-constructed Centurion Way

## New Interim Chief Executive leads National Park Authority



### The South Downs National Park Authority has appointed Tim Slaney as its Interim Chief Executive Officer.

Following a meeting of Authority Members, Tim has succeeded Trevor Beattie, who retired on 1 January after 12 years at the helm of Britain's youngest National Park.

Trevor was the Authority's first permanent CEO, overseeing the significant progress the National Park has made on biodiversity restoration, landscape enhancement, creating new access routes, raising the profile of the region at a national level and ensuring more people of all ages and backgrounds can enjoy the South Downs.

Tim steps up after 12 years on the Authority's Senior Management Team, setting up and leading one of the country's busiest planning teams.

During this time as Director he has overseen the creation of the award-winning, landscape-led South Downs Local Plan, a leading neighbourhood community planning programme, new affordable housing, more vital infrastructure for local communities and a groundbreaking Community Infrastructure Levy scheme in a National Park.

Tim has taken a leading role on managing operations at Seven Sisters Country Park.

He is most proud of the award given by the Royal Town Planning Institute for environmental excellence around planning as a whole, including teambuilding and culture.

Tim said: "It is an honour to be appointed interim Chief Executive of the South Downs National Park Authority and I look forward to building on the tremendous legacy that Trevor has passed on."

Tim will be leading the Authority's team of 180 staff.

The process of appointing a permanent Chief Executive Officer will begin later this year.

Mike Hughes has stepped up as Interim Director of Planning during this period.

Stedham Recreation Grounds – improvements including installation of wheelchair accessible roundabout and accessible path. £11,000

Steyning Downland Scheme – restorative grazing project. £5,570

Park Mill, Shillinglee Road, near Plaistow – restoration project including part of Shillinglee Lake Site of Special Scientific Interest. £50,000

Findon village – new interpretation boards. £2,575

Lavant Village Green – restoration works. £2,000

### **Hampshire**

St Catherine's Hill, Winchester – replacement steps to southern slope and reducing recreational pressures to Site of Special Scientific Interest. £114,650

East Meon Village Hall – refurbishment (including sustainability improvements) £100,000

East Meon Byway 46 – byway improvement works including surfacing and drainage. £25,000

East Meon – improvements to multi-use games area. £7,500

Newman Collard Playing Fields, Liss – drainage improvements works. £78,000

A32 Farrington, Chawton – flood alleviation scheme. £70,000

Queen Elizabeth Country Park, near Clanfield – improvements to South Downs Way, increasing access for all. £60,000

Queen Elizabeth Country Park, near Clanfield – restoration of Butser Dew Pond £20,000

Churcher's College / Penns Place, Petersfield – 430m permissive path linking south side of Penns Place to River Rother footpath. £50,000

Hampshire-wide – Hampshire County Council's Parish Pollinators Project increasing diversity in hedgerows and other planting. £50,000

Petersfield Open Air Swimming Pool – toilet refurbishment. £50,000

Petersfield Rugby Club – green energy initiative (renewable energy to reduce increasing energy costs) £40,000

Liss Forest Recreation Ground – improvements including replacement play area, drainage improvements and expansion of basketball area. £40,000

East Worldham – public realm and highway improvements. £25,000

Butser Ancient Farm, Chalton – accessibility improvements. £20,000

Twyford Community Centre – refurbishment including sustainability improvements. £20,000

Mingledown Woods, Chawton – access and ecological improvements including tree planting. £20,000

The Ford and Berry Lane, Twyford – footpath improvements £15,000

Petersfield Central Car Park, Park Road – installation of Changing Places Toilet. £15,000

Stroud – replacement bus shelter. £10,000

Allan King Way / Nuns Walk, Winchester – footpath improvements. £8,000

Stepping Stones Playgroup, Sheet – improvements to outdoor learning and play area, including creation of covered play area. £4,000

## Brilliant news for barn owls!

## The highs and lows of swifts



**Swifts have declined across the UK by more than 50 per cent over the past two decades. Tim Norriss, a Trustee for the charity Hampshire Swifts, writes about the highs and lows of this charismatic species and the volunteers' valiant efforts to help populations bounce back.**

The highest-nesting swifts are in the tower of Winchester Cathedral – a dizzying 150 feet – while the lowest are in the eaves of a single-storey porch of a small church at Ildsworth, near Horndean.

Another high, albeit metaphorically, is the growing success of the swift box installation scheme, run by Hampshire Swifts.

But there is a low causing concern for our charity – the lack of national legislation to compel developers to include swift bricks at a ratio of at least one per dwelling. These specially-designed bricks have been developed with the help of conservation experts and provide a safe and spacious area for swifts to nest in .

Although swift nests are, extremely rarely, found nesting in cliffs and trees, they are actually more often found in structures built by humans.

The towns on the western boundary of the National Park are important for swift populations. In Winchester a new colony was started by the installation of boxes in the cathedral's tower and, as a result, nine nesting pairs were recorded last year. An incredible win for nature.

Meanwhile, a declining population in St Cross Hospital, an ancient alms house, has been revitalised by installing new boxes within the eaves and removing old wire blocking access. In Alton, a thriving colony of swifts now exists below the shingles of the steeple of St Lawrence's Church. Our charity was able to successfully intervene when the colony was threatened by scaffolding and netting during the breeding season.

In all three locations, residents have a growing interest in the birds and the installation of the boxes has been warmly welcomed.

I can't write a column about swifts and the National Park without mentioning Selborne – not only for the stunning weathervane featuring swifts on the village hall but also because of the attention that the famous naturalist Gilbert White paid to swifts, with his journals recording great details of their fascinating lives.

This is such a beautiful bird species that needs everyone's help to recover – did you know they are the fastest birds in level flight, with an impressive top speed of 69mph!

To find out more about the charity and ways you can help swifts, or to report swift activity in your area visit

[www.hampshireswifts.co.uk](http://www.hampshireswifts.co.uk)



**Six barn owl boxes and three little owl boxes have been installed in the Lower Ouse Valley, thanks to a grant from the South Downs National Park Trust.**

Sussex Barn Owl Study Group (SBOSG) were successful in obtaining a grant from the Volunteer Conservation Fund, which is administered by the Trust.

The group are all volunteers who give their time to ring birds and record nests to monitor owl populations right across Sussex.

The new boxes are in addition to those already installed by the National Park Authority over the past few years. Alongside National Park rangers, the study group have been monitoring and maintaining these boxes.



Jan Knowlson, Biodiversity Officer for the National Park, said: "Barn owls are a really iconic species of our countryside.

"They're a good indicator of the health of landscape because, as a general rule, the more barn owls we have, the

healthier the eco-system is.

"Landowners have a great affinity with barn owls because a long time ago they very often had an owl loft roosting or breeding in a barn, but many of those barns have been converted or lost over the years.

"Most of the landowners are very keen to have barn owls back and put up nest boxes, but they don't have always have the time to do it. That's where the National Park comes in advising landowners on nesting sites and boxes, working alongside the study group in Sussex and other experts across the wider National Park.

"It's also helps us talk to landowners about habitat for barn owls, as well as all sorts of other species such as ground nesting birds, small mammals and everything going up into the food chain, with barn owls at the top of the food chain. It's fantastic that the study group can put up more boxes for these two owl species and we look forward to seeing the impact on population numbers!"

The Trust is the official independent charity for the National Park.

Find out more about the Volunteer Conservation Fund and apply for funding [here](#). The deadline for applications is 31 March, 2024.

## Talking about climate change



**One of the most precious habitats in England, the chalk grasslands of the South Downs, are as rare and important as the Amazon rainforest and, like much of the environment, under threat due to climate change.**

The National Park's former Writer in Residence, Sara Clifford, and her company, Inroads Productions, received funding from the National Park Authority towards developing the first stage of an ambitious three-year project exploring the chalk grassland landscape.

*Conservation Conversations* is a series of events creatively exploring the fragile habitats, focussing on voices that are often the most impacted by food production, transport and access issues but that are under-represented in the conversation around climate change.

For the first of these, *At the Edge*, Sara offered a series of creative workshops and walks exploring the environment and climate change with young people and community groups in and around Newhaven over the summer months of 2023, using dance, visual art and creative writing.



This culminated in an event at the Hillcrest Centre, where participants shared creative responses inspired and informed by the workshops, along with speakers from Changing Chalk

and Lewes District Food Partnership, and Tidemills Choir.

One participant said: "So lovely to blend spoken word,, art and song to celebrate our extraordinary landscape. Thank you!"

Another added: "The number of different flowers that grow on chalk grassland! I enjoyed having time to just sit and draw."

Along with the National Park Authority, Sara's team are working in partnership with the University of Brighton/ Arts and Humanities Research Council, the Hillcrest Centre, Sussex Community Development Association, Creative Newhaven and others as the project develops.

Watch this space for more events in 2024!

For further information, please visit [www.inroads.org.uk](http://www.inroads.org.uk) or contact Sara at [inroadsproductions@mac.com](mailto:inroadsproductions@mac.com)

## Dark Skies Festival is back!



**Are you ready to embrace the darkness?**

The National Park's popular Dark Skies Festival returns from 10 to 18 February with an action-packed line-up of events across Hampshire and Sussex.

Among the highlights will be stargazing sessions at 450ft, guided walks through the solar system, star parties, nocturnal wildlife, and celestial storytelling.

Despite being located in the bustling south east, the South Downs remains one of the darkest areas of England, offering immense views of the universe on a clear night.

One of only 21 International Dark Sky Reserves, the darkness is essential for wildlife to thrive as so many animals and plants rely on the natural rhythm of daylight into nighttime.

Among the in-person events in the evenings will be:

**Saturday 10 Feb, Brighton seafront – star party and i360 talk.**

**Tuesday 13 Feb, Goodwood Country Park, Counters Gate – star party**

**Thursday 15 Feb, Queen Elizabeth Country Park – *Walk The Planets*, telescopes, storytelling, owl displays.**

**Friday 16 Feb, Hogmoor Inclosure, Bordon – *Walk the Planets* trail.**

**Saturday 17 Feb, Seven Sisters Country Park – *Walk The Planets* trail, telescopes, storytelling.**



A range of other exciting events are taking place across the National Park, including Butser Ancient Farm and Amberley Museum.

Online there will be a range of useful films giving tips on stargazing and the winners of the astrophotography

competition will be revealed.

The full programme will be available soon **here** and will also be shared in next month's newsletter. Booking may be required and events are weather-dependent.

## Groundbreaking wildlife study in parish is a first for National Park



### **A South Downs parish has produced its very own nature “health check” to show the state of wildlife in its boundaries and how biodiversity can bounce back.**

Kingston-near-Lewes Parish Council has published the report, which provides a detailed baseline of the state of the natural environment in Kingston Parish today.

It's the first detailed parish-wide mapping project of its kind in the South Downs National Park.

Nearly 50% of the parish is in a priority habitat and 20% of the parish is in a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

The report identifies a series of opportunities to halt and reverse biodiversity decline in the parish, as well as combat and adapt to climate change.

The parish council has established a dedicated Kingston Nature Recovery Group to take the recommendations of the report forward through an action plan.

Some of the projects being planned include a “garden pledge” scheme to encourage householders to manage their gardens in a wildlife-friendly way, a parish-wide initiative to monitor a range of species and changes to the management of parish council land to encourage biodiversity.

Ian Douglas, Chair of Kingston-near-Lewes Parish Council, said “My fellow councillors and I are most grateful to the South Downs National Park Authority for its support towards this important and ground-breaking report by Wild Business. It provides detailed analysis of the natural environment of the parish and will allow us as a community to plan how we address the challenges of nature recovery collectively and individually.”

The SDNPA is viewing it as an exemplar pilot project and there is potential for nature recovery mapping in other parishes in the future.

Claire Kerr, Countryside and Policy Manager, who leads nature recovery in the National Park, said: “This work is also not only important directly for wildlife, but also helping to demonstrate to other communities on how action can be taken forward.”

## SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

## Win a romantic trip for two at a luxury beachfront hotel!



### **Officially one of the sunniest places in the country and oozing Victorian seaside charm, Eastbourne is the eastern gateway to the breathtaking South Downs landscape.**

On the doorstep to Beachy Head and the world-famous Seven Sisters, it's a town that offers the best of both worlds. You can be enjoying the bustling centre of shops, bars, galleries, restaurants, and pier, while just a short journey away, you can immerse yourself in a tranquil haven of cliffs, coastline, downland and nature.

Situated on the stunning beachfront is a hotel that takes inspiration from its amazing surroundings.

Port Hotel has been lovingly restored to create a 19-bedroom boutique venue, with a contemporary open-plan restaurant and bar and an award-winning interior.

Masterminded by renowned interior designer Imraan Ismail, the sea-facing rooms draw on a pebble-like palette with putty and stone toned walls, while the back rooms, overlooking the South Downs, embrace colours from nature.

Tapping into the local art scene, Port have partnered with Devonshire Collective, a visual arts organisation in Eastbourne, which will be curating this year's exhibitions, giving a platform to emerging and mid-career local artists.

With Valentine's Day and spring around the corner, Port Hotel offers a wonderful opportunity for a romantic trip away, soaking up Eastbourne's seaside air and spectacular South Downs views.

We've teamed up with Port Hotel to offer a free overnight stay in a Sea View Room for two people, including breakfast. The stay would need to be redeemed on a Sunday to Thursday day option and would be subject to availability.

People signing up to the newsletter during January will be automatically entered into the draw.

Those who are already signed up can email “Wish Tower” to [newsletter@southdowns.gov.uk](mailto:newsletter@southdowns.gov.uk) before midnight on 31 January. Sign up to the newsletter [here](#) and see competition T&Cs [here](#).

# 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/](https://southdowns.gov.uk/events/)



- On 17 January you can meet the team responsible for the maintenance of the collection of heritage roses in the six quarters beds in [Gilbert White's garden](#), Selborne. The roses will be undergoing their annual pruning and staff will be on hand to give demonstrations of pruning techniques and answer questions on the rose collection.
- Join three acclaimed songwriters for a cosy winter night of stripped-back performances and candid storytelling at [The Empire Hall](#), Graftham, Petworth on 20 January. In a setting that blurs the lines between performer and audience, hear the inspiration behind the music from the artists themselves. Spanning across folk, country and Americana, each songwriter will showcase their original songs.
- Join [Walk The Chalk](#) at South Harting to learn more about how this peculiar substance has shaped a landscape, way of life, culture and national identity. The guided seven-mile walk takes place on 30 January.
- Looking ahead, [Night Sky Live](#) takes place at Winchester Science Centre and Planetarium on 8 February. Learn the skills you'll need to identify what's above us and observe the stars, constellations and planets!
- Find out more about where all the magic happens for hit BBC show [The Repair Shop](#). Throughout January, the Court Barn will be open for visitors at the Weald and Downland Living Museum at Singleton.

## Pic credits

P5 swift David Moreton; P5 owl Richard Murray; P6 right Richard Murray; P7 marbled white butterfly Paul Sharman; P8 Winter Fields by Durford Woods by John Richardson.