

SOUTH DOWNS NEWS

HELP US TO #RENATURE
SOUTH DOWNS
NATIONAL PARK

WORK AND PLAY IN YOUR NATIONAL PARK

This month:

- **Biodiversity is bouncing back!** Find out about the success of the National Park's nature recovery initiative and get involved in free family fun for our exciting ReNature Festival.
- **YOUR National Park** This amazing landscape is everyone's to enjoy, so take a look at a thought-provoking new film trail that celebrates people's different perspectives on the South Downs.
- **Summer walks** Find out about wonderful rambles and strolls in Hampshire.
- **Competition!** Win a high tea for two and see views of the Downs from 350ft!

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

Success for ReNature scheme as festival gets underway

An ambitious goal to "renature" a huge swathe of land to help fight biodiversity loss is almost halfway to reaching its target.

Exactly three years ago the South Downs National Park set a goal of transforming 13,000 hectares – or over 20,000 football pitches – into habitat for wildlife by 2030.

A total of **6,082 hectares – an area bigger than Worthing or Portsmouth** – has now been created or improved to help nature thrive. The work has included planting almost **50,000 trees**, adding over **100 hectares of wildflowers**, planting hedges, restoring ponds, and improving rare habitats such as chalk grassland and lowland heath.

Some of the land, including on farms and large estates in the National Park, has also been formally secured for nature through planning agreements for biodiversity net gain.



The National Park is working on more than 350 different projects with its partners around nature recovery, including new wildflower meadows, hedgerows, wetlands, heathlands, woodlands and chalk grasslands, reflecting the sheer diversity of our landscapes.



The success story comes as the National Park launches its annual **ReNature Festival**, giving people the chance to learn about wildlife on their doorstep and how we can all help it.

A range of fun activities and guided walks and talks will take place across Sussex and Hampshire between 20 July and 28 July. The week will culminate in a free family-friendly celebration at One Garden Brighton on 27 July.

The theme of this year's festival will be the four "b's" – **bees, butterflies, birds and bats** – which are all iconic

The fight for the South Downs

species in the South Downs and tell us how nature is doing in the South Downs. People will be able to learn about why bees have five eyes, why chalk grassland is known as “Europe’s rainforest in miniature”, which birds are most endangered in the South Downs and how bats can eat up to 3,000 midges per night.

Applications for **ReNature Grants** also open this month, where community groups, charities, schools, businesses and parish councils can apply for funding to give nature a helping hand.

Tim Slaney, Chief Executive (Interim) of the National Park, said: “It’s wonderful to be reaching the halfway point in this initiative and absolutely none of it would have been possible without the support of local communities, landowners, farmers, businesses, and volunteers.

“With almost 1,500 native species of plants and animals in the UK now threatened with extinction, nature needs us now more than ever. We want nature to thrive everywhere for everyone, not only for biodiversity bouncing back but also people’s health and wellbeing. National Parks can and should be the nation’s nature recovery hubs and we’ve proved that we can do it and do it well.

“We’re excited about what we can achieve for the rest of this decade and we’re looking forward to looking in more detail at the ecological impact of the work we’ve been doing, including increasing our monitoring.

“Ultimately, we want nature everywhere for everyone and our ReNature Festival offers a wonderful opportunity for people to connect with the wildlife all around us.”

To download the full programme for the ReNature Festival visit www.southdowns.gov.uk/renature-festival

A free online pack is also available, crammed with fun nature-based activities and information for the whole family to enjoy.

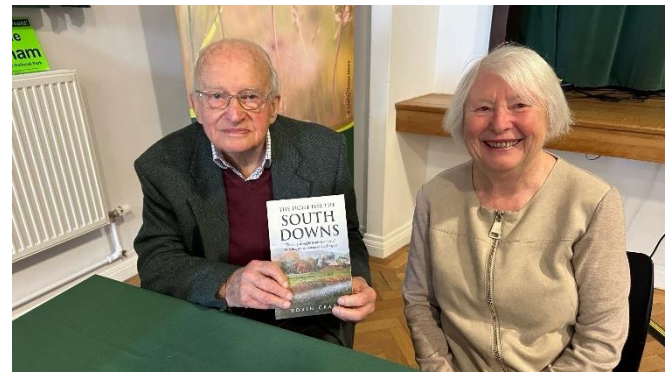
The festival includes a competition for people to win a family ticket to Marwell Wildlife. All people need to do is post an image of them doing their bit for nature – whether it be some wildflowers in the garden, creating a “bee hotel”, spotting wildlife, or climate action such as going car-free or saving water. Share the image on Instagram, X or Facebook with the hashtag #ReNature2024.



Anyone visiting the National Park’s visitor centres in Midhurst or at Seven Sisters Country Park will also be able to pick up a “Pledge and Plant” postcard that is crammed with wildflower seeds.

To apply for a ReNature grant, visit <https://southdownstrust.org.uk/grants/>

To donate to the campaign visit the [South Downs National Park Trust](http://www.southdownstrust.org.uk).



The South Downs National Park was first mooted back in the 1920s, but it would take almost a century for one of England’s most breathtakingly beautiful landscapes to be designated for the nation.

With the downland under increasing pressure from development, seven people met in a small office at Sussex Wildlife Trust HQ in 1990 with one dream – to help secure the long-term protection of this treasured landscape that had inspired the likes of Austen and Kipling.

By the time the dream of a “South Downs National Park” was realised, the campaign had swollen to a movement of 159 national, regional and local bodies.

It was a campaign full of twists, turns, setbacks and mini-victories, especially over the much-debated Western Weald, one of the most anciently wooded parts of England, which almost didn’t make it into the National Park.

A Public Inquiry, a change in the law, an Appeal Court decision, and a re-opened Inquiry that overturned the original findings, were all necessary before the National Park was confirmed in 2010.

The extraordinary story of the campaign to create the South Downs National Park – and the people and characters behind it – have now been brought together in a compelling book called *The Fight for the South Downs*, by Robin Crane.

Editing the book has been Margaret Paren, who served as the Authority’s Chair for almost a decade.

Robin said: “This is a story that I believe needed to be told, how a swathe of south-east England became a National Park, protected for future generations for them to enjoy and nurture. All of us who were involved are proud of what has become the South Downs National Park. John Templeton, one of our doughty campaigners, said of our story that ‘you couldn’t make it up, it is something too astonishing to be believed!’”

Margaret added said: “Every day I look out at the countryside around me and marvel at the legacy of the Campaign.”

The Fight for the South Downs is now on sale priced at £14.99 at the South Downs Centre and Seven Sisters Visitor Centre and is available on [Amazon](https://www.amazon.co.uk).

SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY Renovations at iconic Seven Sisters are unveiled

Experience the South Downs in a new way this summer!



A brand-new film trail is being launched this summer, telling the intimate stories of local heroes and their connection to the South Downs National Park.

Ten “viewing posts” have been installed along the 100-mile South Downs Way from Winchester to Eastbourne, each linked to a thought-provoking film that celebrates a person who makes a difference in the South Downs.

The trail, called “Your National Park”, includes the stories of a forester, a ranger, a teacher, an artist, a butterfly conservationist, and many more. The trail takes in popular beauty spots in the National Park, such as Old Winchester Hill, Queen Elizabeth Country Park, Truleigh Hill and Seven Sisters.

The new trail, which has its own map and guide, will be officially launched on Saturday, 27 July at a free family fun afternoon at One Garden Brighton, in Stanmer Park.



As well as previewing the films, visitors will be able to take part in fun activities, including a bioblitz to discover bugs and critters from the South Downs, a guided woodland walk, pond-dipping, arts and crafts, orchard tours and take part in a nature-based wellbeing session.

Davinder Dhillon, OBE, who stars in one of the films, will also be delivering a talk about the journey of the Hindu and Sikh soldiers from the First World War, for whom the Chattri Memorial, near Brighton, was built.

Andy Gattiker, who leads access in the National Park, said: “Humans have been walking the South Downs Way for over 5,000 years, so people have had a personal connection with this amazing landscape for millennia.

“This new trail adds a new fun element to walking, cycling, horse-riding or running the South Downs Way, which of course many people take on in sections, while others take on the entire 100 miles in one go. To watch the different films, walkers simply scan the QR code on the post that then links to the film on their mobile or tablet.”

For the full programme of the event at One Garden Brighton, download the trail map and [learn more here](#).



The latest phase in the £2m refurbishment of Seven Sisters Country Park is complete with the unveiling of brand-new visitor accommodation.

People will now be able to enjoy a holiday just a stone’s throw from the legendary white cliffs that have been used as the backdrop for many Hollywood movies.

The historic Foxhole Cottages, nestled in a stunning chalk grassland valley, have been sensitively restored into three charming holiday lets.

The new accommodation will help to fund the ongoing conservation and nature recovery work at the sprawling country park.

It comes after a fully refurbished visitor centre, shop, new food outlet and new toilets were unveiled in 2022.

The National Park Authority took ownership of the site in 2021 from East Sussex County Council and now has a dedicated ranger and visitor experience team that is helping to manage the landscape. Alongside the cottages, the National Park Authority has invested in a new camping barn and camping field for organised groups to immerse themselves in the South Downs landscape.

Claire Onslow, Commercial Manager of Seven Sisters Country Park, said: “We average almost a million day trippers every year to Seven Sisters who come to enjoy the breathtaking views, and now they can enjoy a break at the heart of this iconic location.

“These renovated holiday cottages and camping barn are very much part of the chalk landscape, surrounded by flower-rich downland and Sussex Breed cattle.

“This is a chance for people to really get away from it all, go car-free and immerse themselves in nature,”

Emma Neill, proprietor of Cuckmere Cottages and Camping, will be managing the accommodation for the National Park.

She said: “It’s wonderful to see guests experiencing a deeper connection to the environment through a longer stay.”

[Find out more and book a stay here](#).

Boy who goes extra mile to help reptiles picks up national award



Meet Reuben Martin, who recently won the BBC's Under-18 Springwatch Wildlife Hero Award for 2024. We caught up with 15-year-old Reuben, who lives in Shoreham, to find out about his volunteering work to help the reptiles and amphibians of the National Park.

How does it feel to be a wildlife hero?

It feels incredible and very surreal. There are so many other amazing wildlife heroes out there, so it was a great honour to be chosen for this award!

Why are you so passionate about helping amphibians and reptiles?



I'm extremely passionate about helping amphibians and reptiles for a few big reasons, one of them being my obsession with them ever since I was very young. Another is that I feel they are often very

neglected when it comes to habitat management, and sometimes demonised in the media. I want to try to change that as much as I can, which is why I'm so passionate about their conservation.

Where do you monitor reptiles exactly and how do you monitor?

I monitor six sites for reptiles and two for amphibians, all in the South Downs National Park.

The chalk downland is an extremely important habitat for our four so called "common" native reptiles – adders, grass snakes, slow worms and common lizards – which are all declining throughout the country, yet the chalk downland can hold really healthy populations. Adders are in real trouble through fragmentation and habitat loss, and chalk downland is one of the best habitats for them, and their continued presence on a site indicates a healthy ecosystem. I cannot give away the exact locations of the sites, as sadly there are people out there who may wish to hurt or collect reptiles, particularly adders, which could be devastating to their numbers.

We survey each site a minimum of six times a year. These surveys are completed through us slowly walking a route that's been plotted on a map through the site, and trying to find as many reptiles as we can. We also place down artificial cover objects which we lift to help us understand the populations of more secretive reptiles such as slow worms and grass snakes.

Why is monitoring important?

Maybe the biggest reason is that until we know something is there, they usually aren't considered in habitat management. Our data all goes to the rangers of our sites,



which tells them exactly where we have found certain reptiles, hotspots for them, hibernation areas, and how many we have found. That way, us and the rangers can assess the health of these populations as well as plan for habitat management, and how we can boost those populations. Through monitoring, we can also see if the population is increasing or decreasing, which tells us if something is maybe going wrong on a site, or if things are improving. Another huge reason why monitoring is important is due to our surveys being a part of the national reptile/amphibian survey run by The Amphibian Reptile Conservation Trust (ARC), who we volunteer for. The data from every single survey countrywide carried out by all the volunteers goes to ARC, so that they can learn patterns and trends within these species, to build our understanding of their lives, so that we can learn how to conserve them.

What was it like to meet Chris Packham?

Meeting Chris Packham (*pictured left*) was the coolest thing ever. He's been my wildlife hero since I was very young, so to meet him was a very surreal and awesome experience. He was so kind to me through the whole experience, and even brought with him old grass snake egg to show me!

What's next for you in terms of helping nature?

During my spare time, I will continue to survey at as many sites as I can and get involved in any way possible to help these misunderstood and underrated creatures, as they need all the help that they can get. In the future, I want to pursue a career in conversation, I'm not sure exactly in what way yet, but a job which helps our native reptiles and amphibians to thrive is the goal for me.

Dad Tim Martin, who nominated Reuben, added: "I nominated Reuben because he gives so much of his time and energy to helping our native reptiles and amphibians, and cares so much about helping them. He never moans about it, he always wants to go, and when he can't be out there, he does what he can from home with habitat management advice, and through his Youtube channel, Reuben's Reptiles.

Rangers share dog walking tips

Explore Hampshire's Downs!

**Did you know a third of the National Park lies within historic Hampshire?**

While the Sussex Downs are perhaps the most well-known and visited, Hampshire's rolling hills, woods, heaths and river valleys have their own unique magic.

As we mark Hampshire Day this July, we're sharing five great summer walks in this beautiful county.

Winchester to Cheesefoot Head

Distance: 5 miles

Difficulty: Moderate

Begin your journey in the historic city of Winchester, home to the magnificent Winchester Cathedral and the legendary King Arthur's Round Table.

From the city, follow the South Downs Way eastwards towards Cheesefoot Head (*pictured above*).

This walk takes you through picturesque countryside, ancient woodlands, and open chalk downland.

As you reach Cheesefoot Head, you'll be rewarded with sweeping views of the Hampshire countryside. This route is perfect for history buffs and nature lovers alike.

Check out [the route](#).

Butser Hill

Distance: 3 miles

Difficulty: Moderate to challenging

For those seeking a more challenging hike, Butser Hill offers a rewarding climb. Standing at 270 metres, Butser Hill is the highest point in the South Downs National Park.

The walk starts at the Queen Elizabeth Country Park, where you can explore waymarked trails and learn about the area's rich biodiversity.

As you ascend, enjoy the variety of wildflowers and butterflies in summer, and keep an eye out for grazing sheep and cattle.

The summit offers breathtaking views and a glimpse into the park's ancient past, with remnants of Iron Age field systems. Find out more [here about Butser Hill walks](#).

Discover more Hampshire walks [here](#).



Alfie, the maltichon, at Old Winchester Hill

Calling all dog walkers!

There will be an opportunity to find out more about an amazing nature reserve and how we can help care for it on Friday, 9 August.

Our Western Rangers will be on site at Old Winchester Hill from 8.30am to 12.30pm for a **"Paws on the Path"** pop-up.

The morning will be an opportunity to find out more about the beautiful site, which offers far-reaching views as far as the Isle of Wight, and its wildlife and heritage.

Elaina Whittaker-Slark, Lead Ranger for the Western Downs, said: "We're looking forward to engaging with like-minded wildlife friendly dog walkers for a happy, healthy stress-free walk and to enjoy the fabulous nature and environment.

"We'll be giving away some doggie goody bags and sharing ideas on great places to walk your dog in the National Park.

"We'll also be sharing 'Take The Lead' tips on responsible dog walking in the National Park. These simple guidelines really do help look after this special landscape and its incredible biodiversity. Do come and say hi!"

To find out more about Take The Lead visit www.southdowns.gov.uk/take-the-lead/



What will big excavation find?



Three villages in the South Downs will be the focus of community excavations this summer as people dig deep to discover the area's archaeology.

The Burpham Big Dig is a fascinating project that will involve community excavations in Burpham, Wepham, and Peppering in West Sussex.

Based on previous finds in the area, these excavations hold the potential for uncovering evidence of significant archaeological features, and artefacts from the Stone Age, right through the Iron Age, and into more recent times. The excavations will see a total of 34 test pits dug in the gardens of village residents.

The digs will take place from during August, undertaken by members of the Worthing Archaeological Society, residents of the villages, James Sainsbury, from Worthing Museum, and a small number of student volunteers.

The project is being led by Worthing Museum, in association with Worthing Archaeological Society, with support from the South Downs National Park Trust, South Downs National Park Authority, Ian Askew Charitable Trust, Burpham Parish Council, Burpham Village Hall and Recreation Ground.

There will be an official open day on 17 August, where locals and visitors will be invited to take a closer look at what's happening.

Excavations over the last 200 years have unearthed remarkable finds in the area. In the early 19th century a mammoth was discovered in Peppering, and other palaeolithic tools were found in the 20th century. In Burpham, Neolithic flint tools have been found as well as Iron Age coins, and even a Bronze Age burial site.

Worthing Museum's archaeology curator James Sainsbury said: "This will be Worthing Museum's first active archaeological investigation in the 21st century, and has the potential to be a pilot project for further work in and around Worthing in the coming years."

Learn more [here](#).



SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY Get involved in Local Plan Review



People can have their say on a review of the South Downs Local Plan and how they would like to be involved.

The adopted South Downs Local Plan, which gives a blueprint for all planning and development in the National Park, has to be reviewed by law to make sure it's up to date and addresses important issues including nature recovery, climate change and supporting local communities to thrive.

An initial, informal survey will take place from 8 July to 16 September and we'll be inviting feedback on the scope of the Local Plan Review and how you would like to be involved in preparing the review.

There will also be a "youth survey" for 13 to 25-year-olds, with the chance to enter a prize draw for a £50 gift voucher.

We hope that the formal consultation on the Local Plan Review will begin early next year.

Claire Tester, Planning Policy Manager for the National Park Authority, said: "There is much of the Plan that we propose to keep, such as the landscape-led approach, ecosystem services and the strategy of a medium level of development dispersed across the National Park.

"The review will give us the opportunity to address issues, such as climate change and nature recovery, review development needs and provision figures, and allow us to address changes in national policy.

"This is a great opportunity to look at the Local Plan and see where it could be improved further."

The South Downs Local Plan includes policies and maps around strategic development, affordable housing, renewable energy, building conservation and design, helping wildlife, and protecting the South Downs aquifer, among many other topics.

Take part in the online survey here.

The planning policy team will also be attending National Park engagement events throughout the summer and will be promoting the survey.



**SOUTH DOWNS
NATIONAL PARK
LOCAL PLAN**

Exciting shortlist is revealed



A public park makeover, café, eco-home, temple, and the restoration of a 570-year-old timber house are among the exciting mix of projects shortlisted for a prestigious South Downs Design Award.

More than 60 nominations were received across Hampshire, West Sussex and East Sussex for the National Park's award scheme that celebrates outstanding design, architecture and innovation.

Sixteen unique projects have been shortlisted by judges and are now in with a chance of winning a stunning trophy, beautifully hand-carved in South Downs oak by acclaimed West Sussex-based sculptor, Alison Crowther.

Among those shortlisted are the restoration of a river, a glasshouse, a school extension and many more.

A judging panel, which includes members of the National Park's Design Review Panel, will visit each shortlisted site and decide the winner in each category: Residential; Non-residential, Conservation and Future Projects.

The public will also get to vote for their favourite out of the 16 for an overall **"People's Choice" award**.

All the winners will be revealed at a glittering awards ceremony, to be held at the South Downs Centre – itself a converted Victorian school – in Midhurst on 2 October.

Mike Hughes, Planning Director (Interim) for the National Park Authority, said: "I want to thank everyone who nominated and it's been a really difficult task to shortlist as the calibre was so high.



"We've got an incredible mix of projects that show how diverse the built environment is in the South Downs, which is by far the most populated of any National Park in the UK and is a place where people, nature and history come together.

"Many of the projects incorporate first-class biodiversity and climate enhancements, while others showcase design innovation that creates wonderful living spaces or the amazing restorations of extremely old buildings. Other projects show the vision for the future to continue enhancing this treasured landscape.

"I'm looking forward to finding out the public's favourite and I would invite everyone to have a good look at the brochure to find out more about each project."

Find out more and vote in "The People's Choice" [here](#). Voting will close at midnight on 6 September.

SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY Enjoy a high tea with stunning views!



How do you fancy enjoying a high tea – in every sense of the word at 350ft up in the sky?!

We've teamed up with Portsmouth's Spinnaker Tower to offer an incredible prize in this month's newsletter.

The iconic tower stands at a soaring 170 metres tall, offering awe-inspiring 23-mile views over Portsea Island, the Solent, the South Downs and the Isle of Wight.

The experience starts in the high-speed lift and in 30 seconds you step onto the viewing decks where Portsmouth, 'the great waterfront city' is showcased in all its glory.

These are unmissable sights, seen from a 350-degree panorama, and each sight with its own story.



Discover the rich history behind the view with informative touch screen displays and take in the sea air from the open 'Sky Garden'.

For those brave enough, there's a thrilling 'Sky Walk', 100 metres above sea level or the opportunity to abseil down the Tower!

Our newsletter prize is a high tea for two people in The Clouds Café, located on the second viewing deck. Elevate your afternoon with breathtaking views while indulging in delightful sandwiches, scones, and pastries.

If you wished to stay on (*not included in prize*), from 8pm The Clouds turns into Sky Bar – the perfect setting to drink in the view. Enjoy sunset, evening and night views while sipping a classic cocktail or the signature 'Spinnaker Tower'.

People signing up to the newsletter during July will be automatically entered into the draw. Those who are already signed up can email "Macmillan Cancer Support" to newsletter@southdowns.gov.uk before midnight on 31 July.

Sign up to the newsletter [here](#) and see competition T&Cs [here](#)

Things to do in the South Downs this July

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/



- Enjoy nature-based fun in our ReNature Festival! Look at the [full programme here](#).
- Head to the beautiful [Stansted Park](#), near Rowlands Castle, on 13 and 14 July for a summer festival. It will be an eclectic weekend of family fun, quirky entertainment and a little bit of the eccentric all within the setting of a quintessential country estate. Highlights will include a Napoleonic Camp and re-enactments!
- Calling all Shakespeare fans! The annual summer [Petersfield Shakespeare Festival](#) will be bringing entertaining and accessible Shakespeare in the enchanting open-air setting of Wylds Farm in Liss. Performances will be in the evenings from 16 to 21 July.
- It's free admission at [Gilbert White's House and Garden](#), Selborne, on 20 July as the venues celebrates the famous naturalist's 304th birthday.
- The annual [Treve Art Festival](#) takes place on 24 July, set in a traditional Sussex timber-framed cottage. Each summer resident artists Sally and Euan, their artist friends and selected guests come together to exhibit, demonstrate their art and run workshops for visitors. You can meet and chat to the artists, watch them work, see inside the printmaking and painting studios and relax in the beautiful garden with a picnic or snacks bought from their Pop Up Cafe.
- The [South Downs Summer Music Festival](#) returns to the beautiful East Sussex village of Alfriston from 16 to 21 of July. If you love classical music, this is for you as a collection of international performers descend on this stunning corner of the National Park!



Pic credits

P1 Simon Mockford; P1 Barn Owl Bruce Middleton; P2 Becca Saunders; P3 Right Sam Moore; P4 Reuben and Tim Martin; P5 Cheesefoot Head by Nick Heasman; P6 left Worthing Museum; P7 right Spinnaker Tower.