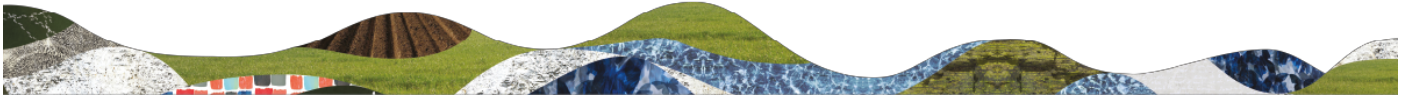


**SOUTH DOWNS
NATIONAL PARK**
CELEBRATING 10 YEARS

SOUTH DOWNS NEWS



This month:

- **Connecting with nature remotely** We look at ways to bring the beauty of the South Downs National Park to people's homes and how we can all play our part to save lives.
- **Top 10 biodiversity triumphs** Find out about which animals and plants have made remarkable recoveries over the past decade and our plans for a nature recovery network.
- **Get creative** Find out about a new wildlife art competition for children.
- **Doggy delight!** Tune in to one of our interactive Facebook dog training sessions.

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

A message from your National Park

Welcome to the April newsletter for the South Downs National Park. I hope that you and your families are keeping well during this very testing period.

We want you and our communities to stay safe, so we're asking people to stay at home and exercise safely near them, following the latest Government guidance. Together, we can save lives and protect our amazing NHS and other key workers.



The time will come again to travel to visit the South Downs National Park and we will welcome everyone back with open arms.

In the meantime, we're stepping up our digital engagement with people across the National Park and beyond, building on our already popular online community.



People have been sharing some wonderful pictures of the National Park from their photo collections. Please keep them coming! They really do inspire and uplift at a time when we most need it.

Beautiful wildlife and landscapes appeal to everyone, so we'll keep providing you with these heartening scenes from your South Downs on our social media channels.

Hundreds of people have already signed up to take part in our online quiz competition for our 10th birthday. This is a fun way to discover the joys of the National Park from the comfort of your own home and

Connecting communities with local support

to give you plenty of ideas of what to do and where to go when the restrictions are lifted.

The work of the Authority goes on, with National Park Authority meetings taking place via publically-streamed video conferencing and our planners continuing to deliver the Authority's important planning functions during this challenging time.

We have set up a Coronavirus Action Squad in which Authority staff can volunteer their time to help the NHS, partner organisations and the voluntary sector. We are also working to support the wider community of partners and small businesses who are central to our new Partnership Management Plan.



Enforced social distancing is also enforced countryside distancing for the millions around the National Park who live in urban areas and there are already signs that the lockdown has reinvigorated many people's love of nature.

We expect this to generate a wave of new interest in the South Downs National Park when the restrictions are lifted. This is when the health and wellbeing benefits of our beautiful National Park will really come into their own and I can assure you that the Authority will be ready to help everyone to make the most of it.

In the meantime, I hope you enjoy reading the newsletter and that you continue to be inspired by our wonderful South Downs National Park.

Stay safe,

Trevor Beattie

Chief Executive

South Downs National Park Authority



A detailed map has been created for people to find food, drink and other support services close to where they live.

Kat Beer, who works in the sustainable communities team and has been helping to put together the resource, explained: "During this challenging time we felt it was important to help connect our communities by providing information on local food and drink suppliers, and other help available, particularly for the vulnerable and elderly, being provided both by businesses and communities.

"We have created this interactive map so that you can search and find suppliers, deliveries and support, local to where you live.

"We have been overwhelmed by how many food and drink businesses have been able to adapt their operations and support people to access food, drink and other supplies during this difficult time. Many communities have created vital help for vulnerable and elderly residents through volunteering their time. You can find details of the community support groups covering your area on the map. Alternatively use the **Covid-19 Mutual Aid UK** website to find your nearest support group helping the most vulnerable in our communities."

Please follow the **latest Government advice** and practise social distancing if you are visiting a shop. You must contact the supplier before ordering or setting out to ensure availability of produce and delivery radius. Kat added: "This map isn't an exhaustive list of everything being offered across the National Park, but we hope you find it useful. It will be updated weekly."

If you have something to add to the map or you know something that isn't now operating, please email **enterprise@southdowns.gov.uk**

Visit [here](#) to access the map

How to enjoy the National Park safely



Our commitment to you is that we will keep bringing the South Downs virtually to you in your homes until you are able to get out and enjoy the National Park again.

For residents lucky to live in the National Park you can continue to enjoy the National Park near you to get your exercise, but again, do not travel to other parts of the National Park to exercise.

Kate Drake, who leads on health and well-being for the South Downs National Park, says everyone has a part to play in helping and saving lives.

The Government is clear that people who are not self-isolating should be minimising time spent away from their homes, but people can leave their home to exercise once a day, provided it is done alone or with members of their immediate household and that they are not travelling to do so.

Based on the strict Government guidance, here is Kate's advice for staying healthy safely and responsibly:

- Keep it local. A short walk, run or cycle around your block or village green away from others is enough to feel the warmth of the spring sun.
- Try and make the time you spend outside of your household as short as possible.
- Do not meet or exercise in groups of more than 2 unless it is with your immediate household.
- Follow the Government advice and maintain a 2m distance from others while out exercising, whether that be walking, running or cycling.
- If you're going for a walk on your own, let others know of your whereabouts and take a mobile phone with you.
- Walking your dog is a great way to get our daily exercise and is good for them too. If you are

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out walking with your dog please Take the Lead and do so responsibly. Keep your dog on the lead to protect ground nesting birds and livestock. We have had reports of lambs being killed by dogs off the lead in the last fortnight. So, stick to the path and keep your furry friend on a lead to keep them, our wildlife and livestock safe. **Find out more about how to Take the Lead.**

Kate says: "We know that the next few weeks are going to be difficult and challenging for lots of people. We know this is going to feel very far from "normal" and many people are feeling anxious.

"The Government has been very clear that time spent away from your home should be minimised. With 117,000 residents in the National Park, we know many people will want to exercise in their local part of the National Park and that's why we're giving this updated advice so it can be enjoyed safely and responsibly.

"These are unprecedented times, but we can all work together to reduce the impact of this virus on our communities and NHS. Please do not travel to exercise."

Kate added: "The South Downs is very much a community of those living within and outside the National Park and it's great that so many people are sharing inspiring photographs of places they love on their social media. This is a great way for people to connect who may be unable to leave their home and perhaps are dealing with loneliness. It's important we all support each other in this challenging time."

Kate's ideas to connect with nature remotely:

- Join a virtual walk. The South Downs National Park has a number of walks at beauty spots. Find them on the National Park's video section on Facebook.
- Enjoy our wonderful wildlife. The National Park's **Instagram**, **Facebook**, **Twitter** and **YouTube** channels are a treasure trove of South Downs flora, fauna and breathtaking landscapes.
- Follow the daily wildlife diaries from the **Sussex Wildlife Trust**.
- Take notice – one of the five ways to well-being. Look out your window and be curious. Check out Wildlife Trust webcams for views from across the UK
<https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/webcams>

Please keep up to date at www.southdowns.gov.uk for the latest advice on getting out safely.

A digital delight! Explore the South Downs' amazing art, history and culture

A fascinating collection of digital assets, ranging from the delightful diaries of a founding father of natural history to a virtual tour of an iconic 17th century house, are available for the public to enjoy.

While most creative and cultural venues remain closed, Anooshka Rawden, Cultural Heritage Lead for the National Park, is encouraging people to connect with the heritage of the South Downs and surrounding areas – all from the comfort of their own homes.

Anooshka explained:

“There’s nothing quite like a visit to a museum, stately home or art gallery and having the chance to come face-to-face with a piece of history.



“Yet cultural heritage organisations across the National Park have really invested in their websites and digital assets in recent years, meaning you can step back in time and learn about something really fascinating from home.

“More than that, cultural heritage organisations have explored ways to help ease the impact of Covid-19 restrictions by offering great learning resources that you could incorporate into your home schooling plan, as well as activities and online classes to keep you entertained at home. Cultural heritage organisations have been hit hard by Covid-19 and like so many visitor-led organisations, this is going to be a challenging period for the cultural heritage sector. It’s important that we come together to support them and the great work they do. What we have found is that even when facing challenges at this scale, we still, as a society, crave creativity and connection, and many creative and cultural organisations are seeing significant interest in their online resources.

“With help from our cultural heritage organisations in and around the National Park, we have compiled an informative list, giving a snapshot of the kind of digital resources out there. I hope people have fun exploring and support their local museums, galleries and heritage organisations from their homes.”

Visit www.southdowns.gov.uk/digital-delight-explore-south-downs-amazing-art-history-culture/ to start your arts and history hunt!

Taking the outdoors inside (the classroom)



The National Park’s education team are signposting schools to resources that will help pupils stay in touch with the great outdoors, including recording wildlife from home, creating colourful artwork of chalk grassland and a fun e-book.

Jonathan Dean, Education Officer, explained: “We know that staff in schools will be working especially hard to keep in touch with their pupils and families over the coming weeks and we recognise that the most important thing for everyone right now is to stay safe and stay at home, to look after themselves, their families and loved ones.

“Over the past 10 years, we have been lucky enough to share our love of the National Park with hundreds of teachers and thousands of pupils, exploring the wonders of the landscape with them through workshops, activities, events, training days and conferences.

“These next few weeks will feel alien to us and our colleagues in other education centres as we would normally be entering the busy summer season of trips and visits.

“But, while we can only engage remotely, we’ve started collating ideas from across the South Downs to help schools and their communities stay in touch with our incredible nature reserves, historic sites and breathtaking landscapes.

“We’ll keep updating our blog with great ways to stay in touch over the coming weeks, from videos to crafts, online games and more.

“It’s important to maintain our connection with our history, the wildness and beauty of the National Park.”

For further details visit

<https://learning.southdowns.gov.uk/learning/education-team-blog/staying-connected-with-nature-and-the-national-park/>

The top 10 biodiversity success stories



As we mark a decade of the National Park, we take a detailed look back at 10 biodiversity triumphs in the South Downs and set our sights on the challenges ahead.

The fight to protect and enhance this beautiful sanctuary of flora and fauna is not without its challenges, not least the globally-recognised threats of climate change and human impacts.

But the designation of the South Downs National Park 10 years ago on March 31, 2010, marked a significant step forward.

And, in the 10 years since, great strides have been made to help improve biodiversity. This vital work is ongoing but the green shoots of recovery are evident for a number of species.

Indeed, the UK's *State of Nature Report 2019*, which looked at not just what had been lost, but what needs to be fought for, highlighted "the range of internationally-important habitats, such as its lowland heathlands, ancient woodlands and chalk grasslands in the south".

Andrew Lee, Director of Countryside and Policy Management for the South Downs National Park, explains why biodiversity is so vital – for all of us!

"Biodiversity encompasses every living thing in all their forms and interactions," he said.

"And it's this incredibly complex network of nature that humanity relies on completely. The air we breathe, the water we drink, and the food we eat – all dependent on biodiversity.

"Animals and plants are also part of our cultural identity. Who can fail to be inspired by a walk on the South Downs and glimpsing blue butterflies hovering in a blanket of wildflowers, or the sight of a water vole on the river?"

Here are a few ideas from Jonathan if you've got a moment to spare:

- *The Fish, the Goatsucker and the Highwayman*. The magic, mystery and myths of South Downs heathlands have been brought to life in [this fun new e-book](#) that explores the history of this unique landscape.
- *The City Nature Challenge* with the Brighton & Lewes Downs Biosphere is going ahead from home, record how much wildlife you see from 24-27 April, www.nature2020.org.uk/city-nature-challenge
- *Chalk Grassland Colouring Sheets* are full of super species that can be found on the South Downs, learn about chalk grassland [here](#) and [download the colouring sheets here](#)
- *Heathland Colouring Sheets* were created to celebrate a sculpture trail inspired by our heathland communities and stories, learn about heathlands [here](#) and [download the colouring sheets here](#)
- *Tree tools for schools from the Woodland Trust* has some fun, interactive games. Test your ID skills and learn how we use trees to make tables, houses, bowls and musical instruments, www.treetoolsforschools.org.uk/
- *WWF's #LearnToLoveNature hub* is packed full of fun activities and ideas for pupils and families to explore our world from home, www.wwf.org.uk/updates/learn-love-nature



Jonathan adds: "When you've got a moment, take a moment, nature is still there and it still has the power to make us feel good."

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“The National Park has some of the rarest animals and plants in Britain and, without our collective efforts to give nature the space and protection to flourish, these ‘natural works of art’ could be lost forever.

“Biodiversity loss is global and unprecedented, with climate change only heightening the need for action. We’re working really hard to turn the tide on biodiversity loss on a big and small scale, through larger landscape projects and via smaller initiatives for individual species such as the Field Cricket.”

And, as the National Park enters its second decade, Andrew added that one of the key priorities will be producing a Nature Recovery Strategy that engages and collaborates with partner organisations, landowners and local communities.

Andrew explained: “The Defra 25-Year Plan, Environment Bill and of course, the Glover Review, are unequivocal – much more must be done to restore nature, and urgently, and National Parks must play a strong role in this.

“Our new Partnership Management Plan and the Local Plan establish a clear policy framework. Now we need more action on the ground. As a planning authority, we will be required to produce a Nature Recovery Strategy, but we want to go further than this and engage partners in a wider nature recovery campaign.

“We are also working with neighbouring AONBs and Local Nature Partnerships to create a nature recovery network across the wider South East.

“The need for action is clear and we should take the opportunity, be ambitious and move fast. The South Downs National Park Authority has a key role to play by showing leadership, using its convening power, and facilitating nature recovery.”

Two iconic cricket species

The South Downs remains the last bastion in the UK for the iconic Field Cricket, whose “cheep, cheep, cheep” is the quintessential sound of summer.



Thirty years ago the species was isolated to just one site of 100 field crickets in West Sussex. But a concerted effort, led by volunteers and conservation

organisations, has helped to establish six colonies at heathland sites in Sussex, Surrey and Hampshire.

A favourite of South Downs National Park Ranger Charles Winchester, he says: “Hearing a field full of them singing on a warm day in May is a pretty special experience. Being part of the creation of new colonies has been a real highlight for me.”

The wart-biter bush cricket is one of the UK’s most endangered insects and gets its name from the ancient Swedish medical practice of using them to eat skin warts. It was once found across southern England but numbers have declined so dramatically that they are now found only in five locations, three in the South Downs.

A pioneering project has seen the rare insect reintroduced into new chalk grassland habitat around the Deep Dean Water Treatment Works in East Sussex, thanks to a collaboration between South East Water, Natural England, Buglife, and the Zoological Society of London.



Water Voles

A species you may be lucky enough to spot on the River Meon in Hampshire, the water vole is the fastest declining mammal in the

UK. During the 1990s, the UK population fell by almost 90 per cent.

Water voles are essentially ecosystem engineers – their burrowing and feeding behaviour along the edges of watercourses creates the conditions for other animals and plants to thrive.

The water vole has made a remarkable comeback in the South Downs National Park, thanks to the work of the Meon Valley Partnership, of which the SDNPA is a partner. Over six years, a total of 2,833 water voles have been released to 30 locations along the stretch of the river.

The project ticks every box for why the South Downs became a National Park – bringing volunteers, landowners and the local community together to care for landscapes and support wildlife.

Matt Owen-Farmer, from Portsmouth Services Fly Fishing Association, said: “Our rivers are under huge pressures and angling is just one of the demands we place upon them. Being part of the water vole project has enabled us to take a wider look at how we manage these habitats for everyone.”

Adam Cave, a Biodiversity Technical Specialist at the Environment Agency, added: “It’s been one of the best projects that I have worked on since joining the Environment Agency, so very rewarding, and it is great when people tell me that they have seen a Water vole on the Meon, or heard the classic ‘plop’ of a water vole entering the water.”

Farmland birds



A wide range of birds can be found on farmland across the South Downs, including the grey partridge, lapwing, yellowhammer and skylark.

Farmland bird species have seen widespread decline across the UK over the past half century, but the South Downs Farmland Bird Initiative was launched six years ago to help reverse this decline.

A collaboration between the National Park Authority, Natural England, the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust, the RSPB and farmers and landowners, the initiative has focused on introducing nature-friendly farming and restoring priority habitats, including wildflower-rich chalk grassland.

Nature doesn't recognise farm boundaries so together farmers are supporting endangered species such as the grey partridge.

The project is ongoing and more monitoring studies will be required, but the anecdotal evidence from farmers is there has been an impact.

Farmer Ben Taylor, who manages the Iford Estate near Lewes, spoke of the amazing turnaround on his land, where the creation of new wildlife habitats has seen bird biodiversity flourish from just a handful of species to well over 100.

Ben said: "I really enjoy seeing how farming and conservation can sit neatly side by side. We can look after the environment and, at the same time, produce food for people.

"As you walk along the South Downs you can hear the birds singing. Ten years ago we didn't have a great deal of birds, but we've now got 140 different species on the farm, and 35 are red-listed because they are so rare. It's because of the environment they find that they are here."

For more information see www.sdfarmbirds.com



Rare reptile and amphibian species

The smooth snake can only be found at a few sandy heathland sites in southern England.

The reptile looks a bit like an adder, but lacks the distinctive zig-zag pattern along its back.

The Heathlands Reunited Project, led by the National Park Authority and involving 10 partners, has been working to restore our heathlands and ensure this species and other rare reptiles have a brighter future.



The project has also been working to help the natterjack toad, which is found at just a few locations in England and Scotland, where it prefers shallow

pools on sand dunes, heaths and marshes. The heathlands of the South Downs National Park provide a vitally-important habitat for the amphibian, whose spring-time mating ritual is the stuff of legend! The males all sing together at night to attract females and their distinctive calls can be heard up to a mile away!

Natterjack toads need a habitat of short vegetation for the active hunting of their prey and will avoid vegetation such as bracken.

Heathlands Reunited, working with the Amphibian and Reptile Conservation charity, has funded four hectares of bracken clearance to improve the quality of the habitat at Woolmer Forest, on the Longmoor Ministry of Defence estate in Hampshire. Longhorn cattle are also playing a vital role in keeping the vegetation height down to help sustain the natterjacks.

Rob Free, Weald Reserves Manager at Amphibian and Reptile Conservation (ARC), said: "The Heathlands Reunited Project has enabled ARC to complete an extra 20 hectares of heathland conservation work on Woolmer Forest, a unique and important expanse of heathland that supports 12 of our native reptile and amphibian species. We were pleased to record that 96 natterjack toad spawn strings were laid at Woolmer in 2019 – which was the second best spawning year for them since our records began in 1970."



The Round-Headed Rampion and the Pyramidal Orchid

The Round-Headed Rampion, also known as the 'Pride of Sussex', can be found throughout the Sussex and Hampshire Downs. Scrub removal followed by sheep grazing has allowed this chalk grassland specialist to flourish. This has only been possible thanks to partnership working at sites like Old Winchester Hill, where the combined efforts of the SDNPA, Natural England and our Volunteer Ranger Service has really helped the recovery of this species.



Meanwhile, The Pyramidal Orchid is another chalk grassland favourite in recovery. Scrub management by our volunteers, staff and contractors takes place during the winter months and has helped increase numbers of this beautiful flower.

Duke of Burgundy butterfly

The nationally declining and threatened Duke of Burgundy butterfly responded spectacularly to habitat management work performed as part of the South Downs Way Ahead Nature Improvement Area (NIA), recovering from the brink of extinction and extending its territory. This involved the SDNPA, Wiston Estate, Steyning Downland Trust, and Butterfly Conservation.



In the 'Chantry to Chanctonbury' area of the NIA, annual counts rose from 82 to 408 between 2012 and 2014, an increase of 398 per cent.

Further west, at Heyshott Escarpment near Midhurst, peak daily counts rose from 31 in 2012 to 104 in 2014, an increase of 235 per cent.



Wild Trout

The Rother Revival project, with support from The Sussex Lund grant programme and working with Leconfield Estates, is

currently under way and focuses on restoring and enhancing a stretch of the western Rother in West Sussex.

The work involves lowering the river bank to help reconnect the river with its floodplain, narrowing the channel to increase flow and introducing woody debris and newly-planted trees to provide valuable habitat for wild fish. The work is helping to reduce erosion and sedimentation – something that will benefit spawning wild trout, which need clear well-oxygenated water and clean gravels to lay their eggs.

Wild trout are excellent indicators of the health of a river – and where they thrive you can be sure that other wildlife will thrive too!

Otters

Thought to be locally extinct in Hampshire until a few years ago, otters have made a comeback on the River Meon.



Populations appear to be bouncing back due to less river pollution. The Meon Valley Partnership, which includes the SDNPA and other partners such as the Environment Agency,

Portsmouth Water and Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, has worked with landowners, local fishing groups, and volunteers to help restore river banks and encourage more nature-friendly land management.

It's believed there are now three breeding females on the River Meon and there are also confirmed sightings of otters on the River Rother.

An adorable wildlife cam video last year of a mother otter and two cubs attracted thousands of views online and was further proof that reductions in river pollution is allowing the secretive mammals to thrive.

Barn owls

An iconic species of the British countryside, barn owls are an apex predator and a good indicator of the health of the farmed landscape. As a general rule the more barn owls we have, the healthier the eco-system is!

Fifty years ago rural areas had plenty of owl lofts in barns, but many of those barns have been converted or lost over the years.



The National Park Authority and the Sussex Ornithological Society have been working with landowners to reverse this trend and introduce more barn owl boxes. There are now 97 barn owl boxes spread across an area – which stretches from Petersfield to Pulborough – with dozens more across the rest of the South Downs National Park.

Ranger Angela Ward said: "Most of the landowners we work with are very keen to have barn owls back and put up nest boxes, but they don't have always have the time to do. That's where the National Park comes in advising farmers on nesting sites and boxes.

"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

Wildlife art competition is now open!



Do your children or grandchildren love drawing, colouring or painting?

To celebrate the 10th anniversary, Midhurst's biggest music, arts, and culture festival, MADhurst, has joined forces with the South Downs National Park with a nature-loving art competition.

Rebecca Osborne, who works at the National Park and is helping with the competition, said: "We're looking to inspire children to turn one of our iconic species into a piece of art.

"Whether it's an otter, barn owl or Adonis Blue butterfly, we want children to let their imaginations run wild from the comfort of their homes.

"This is a great activity for youngsters during the Easter holidays and there are so many beautiful photographs online to inspire them. It's very simple to submit an entry, as we're just asking people to take a high-res image of the artwork on their mobile phones and email it in.

"Winners will have their artwork turned into a limited edition postcard, which will be available for sale in the South Downs Centre, while stocks last."

Any profit from sales of the postcard will be donated to the South Downs National Park Trust, the official charity of the National Park.

The closing date for entries is 31 May and entries should show one of the following animals: otter, water vole, sand lizard, emperor dragonfly, barn owl, natterjack toad, red kite, Adonis blue butterfly, hare or potter bee.

There are three age groups: five years and under, six to eight years and nine to 11 years.

For further details and to download an entry form visit <https://madhurst.co.uk/childrens-art-competition-is-open-for-entries/>

going up into the food chain, with barn owls at the top of the food chain."

Every spring hundreds of people tune in to watch barn owls and their chicks at a specially-designed owl box at a site in West Sussex. See more at the South Downs National Park Barn Owl Watch at

<https://www.carnyx.tv/LiveCameras/WildlifeCameras/BarnOwl.aspx>

Pearl bordered Fritillary

Work by the South Downs Volunteer Rangers is helping to save the regionally endangered pearl-bordered fritillary butterfly by creating special



havens for this 'very fussy' species in woods on the Norfolk Estate, near Arundel, in West Sussex.

The pearl-bordered fritillary declined by 95 per cent nationally between 1976 and 2014 but has been hit hardest in the south east. The butterfly is now extinct in Kent and Surrey and there are only a handful of colonies left in Sussex and Hampshire, one the result of a successful re-introduction programme.

However, its fortunes are on the up following "Fritillaries for the Future" – a three-year project led by Butterfly Conservation with the South Downs National Park Authority and supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund.

The work involved volunteers hand-cutting bays into the edges of sweet chestnut coppice – creating the perfect breeding habitat for the butterfly.

Last year saw impressive counts for the butterflies, with the count reaching 243 over six areas – the highest count since 2011.



Picture of barn owl by D Middleton

Farmers work closer together to care for landscape and wildlife



Farmers across the South Downs have joined forces to create an online portal as they aim to work closer together to care for the landscape.

More than 75 per cent of the National Park is farmland and farmers play a critical role in looking after the landscape and its wildlife. Although the UK is in lockdown, their work goes on, caring for the land and providing vital food production to keep the country going in these difficult times.

Now more than 120 farms through six farmer-led groups across Hampshire and Sussex are collaborating on a new online platform to share updates, projects and best practice. The site also showcases the ongoing work of farmers to deliver nature-friendly farming, including providing wildlife habitats such as hedgerows and wildflower margins, to encourage bees, butterflies and farmland birds and improving the quality of soil, air and water.

Bruce Fowkes, Farming Officer, said: "Farming is integral to the South Downs, producing quality food and looking after the landscape that we love and enjoy.

"Well-managed farmland can deliver high-quality food, wildlife, an inspiring landscape, clean water and soil, flood defence and climate change mitigation.

"It's for all these reasons that we've launched this website as a collaborative tool for farmers to showcase their projects and best practice. These are busy and challenging times for farmers, with the UK leaving the EU



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and quality food production more critical than ever during this global virus crisis. We hope the website will explain the vital role farmers undertake for society and provide an opportunity for people find out more detail about the work that farmers do."

The South Downs has a number of successful 'farm clusters'. These are farmer led groups, consisting of farmers, land managers, foresters and other local partners, who work collaboratively across the landscape to achieve more than they are able to do on their own.

There are six farm clusters in the South Downs National Park; the Eastern South Downs Farmers Group, Arun to Adur Farmers Group, Rother Valley Farmers Group, South Downs Farmers Group, Selborne Landscape Partnership and the Winchester Downs Farm Cluster. They range in size from just under 5,000ha to over 30,000ha and have anywhere between 10 and 45 members.

The South Downs National Park is also working with farmers and the farm clusters to contribute to the



development of the Government's new Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS). Through a series of tests and trials, the aim is to provide feedback from the farming community to ensure that future agricultural policies and support ensures the production of quality local food can sit alongside sustainable land management that also helps combat climate change and biodiversity decline.

Colin Hedley, Cluster Group Facilitator, said: "The creation of farmer-led groups aiming to deliver environmental benefits at a landscape scale is one of the most exciting developments in how we manage the countryside in recent years. Many farmers are keen to explore opportunities for enhancing the environment as a core part of their farm business alongside food production. They're able to deliver major benefits to protect their local communities from the effects of climate change, such as through carbon storage in soils and trees, and holding water on farmland to reduce flood risk.

Visit www.southdownsfarming.com

Any farmer or land manager interested in finding out more, or who is keen to join a farm cluster, should contact Bruce Fowkes on 01730 814810 or e-mail farmclusters@southdowns.gov.uk

Major initiative launches to protect our precious aquifer



A major five-year £500,000 project has launched to help safeguard the chalk aquifer of the South Downs that supplies water to 1.2m people and is under increasing threat from climate change.

The Aquifer Partnership will work to protect groundwater in the Brighton Chalk Block from pollution, as well as increase resilience to climate change and extreme weather events that can cause flooding and drought.

Led by a partnership between the South Downs National Park Authority, Brighton & Hove City Council, Southern Water, and the Environment Agency, the wide-reaching programme will work with residents, farmers, landowners, and schools across the Brighton, Hove and Lewes area to safeguard our drinking water.

It comes as there is a pressing need to tackle rising nitrate levels in groundwater that leaches into the aquifer from urban and rural sources such as road run-off and fertilisers. Southern Water projections also show that within their supply area in the South East a third of its water sources may be lost 25 years from now due to the impacts of climate change, while the population it serves could have grown by 15 per cent.

The Aquifer Partnership is a re-launch of the Brighton ChaMP for Water



project, which was established in 2016 to protect and improve the quality of groundwater in the chalk landscape around Brighton. The team has already engaged with scores of farmers and land managers, as well as conducted vital research into using the power of nature to reduce pollution. This includes plant-powered drainage systems in busy urban areas and winter cover crops on fields that would normally be left bare.

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TAP has an ambitious programme of work designed to bring people together to care for this precious resource, including:

- Pushing for new developments to address groundwater protection and climate change resilience.
- Creating new and innovative “rainscape” projects in the Brighton, Hove and Lewes area, including in parks and at schools. These are sustainable drainage systems that use areas of vegetation to collect run-off and naturally cleanse the water so it enters the chalk aquifer in a much cleaner state.
- Working with farmers and landowners to promote groundwater-friendly interventions, such as the use of cover crops to help soak up nitrate and improve soil quality (potentially reducing nitrate leaching by 90 per cent)
- A wider urban awareness programme to promote more groundwater-friendly land management at recreation and industrial sites.
- A programme of community engagement and school workshops across the Brighton, Hove and Lewes area to raise awareness of the importance of the aquifer for future generations.
- Collaboration with equestrian facilities to include them in the wider TAP programme of sustainable manure management.

Trevor Beattie, Chief Executive of the South Downs National Park Authority, said: “Today marks the start of an ambitious programme that will put the Brighton aquifer well and truly on the map as a vital natural resource. From towns to Downs we all rely on it – now, next year, in the next decade and in the next century. We’ll always need it and this is why the launch of The Aquifer Partnership today is so incredibly important.

“We know the challenge of climate change will require considerable innovation and no single organisation can tackle it alone. TAP represents the future of how climate change mitigation will be delivered, bringing together expertise from a wide field. This partnership works in tandem with the National Park’s priorities to protect our ‘eco-system’ services, improve soil quality, and create nature recovery networks, as well as working towards the Government’s 25-year Environment Plan for a green future.”

Funding for TAP will be contributed equally between the four partner organisations and spread over the next five years.

For more information on TAP visit www.wearetap.org.uk

A date for your virtual diary - The Countryside Canine Series



This Easter weekend you can catch animal behaviourist Natalie Light talking live on Facebook about all things dog!

With the current social distancing restrictions in place, our four-legged friends have become brilliant distractions from the woes of the world. And with only one walk allowed a day, it's more important than ever that we make the most of that time to safely explore the countryside close to home. This is also the lambing season for farmers, so there's the added importance of dogs being on the lead at this time of year.

As part of our Take the Lead campaign, Natalie will be live on Facebook over the bank holiday weekend giving top tips on how you can be a responsible dog walker and answering all your dog related questions.

With over 14 years' experience in the companion animal sector, Natalie has some great tricks up her sleeve, such as games to play with your dog to keep them on the footpath and away from ground-nesting birds, how to keep your dog calm and happy near cattle or other animals and exactly which poo bags are best for the planet but also, importantly, won't rip in your hand!

Natalie tells us more: 'The South Downs National Park is a great place to walk with your dog, and in times like these it's so important that we are able to do this safely. I'm excited to share some of my dog training knowledge with you all to hopefully help make your

SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

countryside adventures with your pooches that bit more fun.'

'In these isolating times it'll be great to have the opportunity to virtually interact with you all too so please do ask any questions you have during these sessions. What better to cheer us all up than a good chinwag about dogs!'

This Countryside Canines series includes three live and interactive talks on some of the key topics for the dog walking community such as how to keep your dog calm when walking near livestock, why it's important to stick to the path and exactly why picking up your dog's poo is vital for the health and wellbeing of animals and humans alike.

During each talk you can ask Natalie anything you like about the conversation topic and she'll be trying her hardest to answer as many queries as possible.

So, grab a cuppa, cosy up with your pooch and come join us on Facebook live at:

Friday 10 April - 10:30am - Keeping your dog calm and happy near livestock

Saturday 11 April - 10:30am - How you can stick to paths to protect ground-nesting birds

Sunday 12 April - 10:30am - Why picking up dog poo is important

If you'd like to find out more about our Take the Lead campaign visit

www.southdowns.gov.uk/takethelead

Grow your own!

A fun blog giving useful tips for people to grow their own food in their gardens has been started by Laura Warren, Events and Engagement Officer for the National Park.

To find out more visit

www.southdowns.gov.uk/grow-help-green-fingered-laura/

