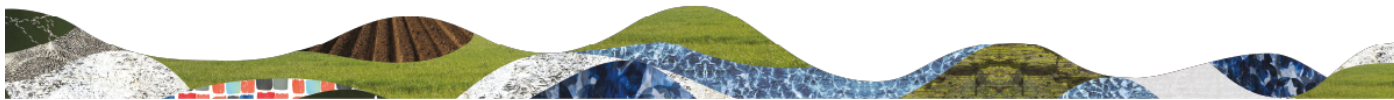


SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK

CELEBRATING 10 YEARS

SOUTH DOWNS NEWS



This month:

- **Bold vision for future** Find out about the 10 key priorities for the National Park over the next five years, including increasing biodiversity, volunteering and affordable housing.
- **Community goodwill** Discover how communities in the National Park are rallying round to help those in need during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **Grants boost** Water voles and young people are to benefit from charity funding.
- **Udderly moovellous!** Can you name the different cow species found on the South Downs?

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

Ambitious vision for future is unveiled

Tackling climate change, helping nature flourish, supporting the rural economy, creating a National Park for all and providing a green health and wellbeing service are among the priorities of an ambitious five-year plan being launched by the South Downs National Park Authority.

Ten key outcomes have been outlined in the new Partnership Management Plan, which sets out a bold collective vision for the future of the National Park.

The 73-page masterplan focuses on bringing together environmental organisations, land managers, farmers, community organisations, businesses and volunteers to make the National Park an even better home for people and nature.

As the National Park launches a revamped website, the 10 outcomes will be brought alive through the “Your National Park” campaign, which features a champion or hero who is helping to deliver on each of the goals. The first of the heroes, Paul Gorringe, a Ranger from Brighton & Hove City Council, is helping to deliver on Outcome 1: Landscape and Natural Beauty.



Margaret Paren, Chair of the South Downs National Park Authority, said: “This ambitious plan is a shared endeavour among all those who love and care for this very special National Park to positively shape and secure its future. It also fully supports the Government’s objectives in support of the environment and responds to the challenges ahead for National Parks, not least those related to climate change and ensuring nature and our communities flourish.

“We have to recognise that the unprecedented and challenging COVID-19 crisis demands an adaptable approach that nevertheless remains focused on our

longer-term ambitions for the environment and our local communities.”

Dozens upon dozens of partners from across all areas of work have committed to helping to deliver the shared objectives, including the RSPB, Sussex Police, Historic England, Parish Councils, Visit Hampshire and Forestry England, to name but a few.

Andrew Lee, Director of Countryside Policy and Management at the South Downs National Park Authority, said: “With such a large population in and around the South Downs National Park, there’s a wealth of resources to draw upon and everyone can play their part, no matter how big or small. This wide-reaching plan is that launch pad to increase ambition, deepen the partnerships, respond to the challenges set out in last year’s Protected Landscape Review and deliver more for nature and people. Now, more than ever, this important landscape is needed by both nature and people and, together, we are ready for the challenge.”

The Partnership Management Plan focuses on 10 outcomes:

1. Landscape and Natural Beauty

- Work is under way between a range of partners to create a “people and nature network” that identifies key areas for investment in biodiversity, local economy, climate change adaptation and flood risk management.
- The Authority will bring farmers, foresters and estates together with Defra and Natural England to pilot the new Environmental Land Management System (ELMS), which focuses on nature-friendly farming.

2. Increasing Resilience

- Improve the soil and water of the South Downs through innovations such as winter cover crops, which can reduce nitrate pollution by 90 per cent. The SDNPA, Brighton & Hove City Council, Environment Agency and Southern Water have joined forces to protect drinking water supplies via The Aquifer Partnership.
- Improve the quantity and quality of trees in the National Park. For instance more than 1,500 disease-resistant Elms have already been planted, with thousands more planned for the future.

3. Habitats and Species

- Create corridors for species movement and enlarge existing habitats for wildlife.
- Create a nature recovery network across the National Park and the wider South East region.
- Tackle invasive species, pests and diseases that threaten our habitats.

4. Arts and Heritage

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- Increase investment in the protection and interpretation of cultural heritage through Section 106 and Community Infrastructure Levy money.
- Promote awareness of heritage crime and its impact, encouraging public custodianship of heritage assets.

5. Outstanding Experiences

- Enable everyone to experience the National Park and reduce barriers (physical, economic and social). Projects include Miles Without Stiles, creating fully accessible routes for those with limited mobility and families with young children, and the Authority’s growing family outreach programme.
- Encourage the retention and expansion of rural transport services.

6. Lifelong Learning

- The highly successful South Downs Learning Network will continue to deliver high-quality learning outside the classroom for young people.

7. Health and Wellbeing

- Continue to build partnerships with health bodies and local networks to encourage social prescribing and a better appreciation of the South Downs as a place for healthy outdoor activity and relaxation.

8. Creating Custodians

- Increase volunteering, including more Youth Action Days where young people aged 16 to 25 can get hands-on conservation experience.

9. Great Places to Live

- Increase affordable housing stock in the National Park, with a focus on high-quality design and using local sustainable materials.
- Grow and retain business in the National Park by improving digital infrastructure right across the National Park.

10. Great places to work

- Work with Government to increase the amount of business support and ensure a good supply of employment space through the South Downs Local Plan.
- Supported by a wide variety of holiday accommodation, we want visitors to delve deeper and connect with wildlife, history, culture and cuisine. The Authority and its partners will work together and create unique experiences for visitors that will also benefit our communities and businesses.

The new Partnership Management Plan builds on the foundation of the South Downs National Park’s first PMP, which covered the period 2014 to 2019. Visit www.southdowns.gov.uk/national-park-authority/our-work/partnership-management/

Poignant video reveals ranger's love of 'magical' South Downs



As Paul Gorrington gazes out at the beautiful flower-studded chalk grassland, he knows he's found his own little piece of heaven.

Paul sees it as an honour and privilege to be a custodian of the landscape in and around the South Downs National Park, helping to continue a millennia-old tradition that has helped to create one of the rarest habitats on planet Earth.

Within a stone's throw of the bustling city of Brighton and Hove is his favourite place – Whitehawk Hill and Sheepcote Valley. A tranquil haven of flora and fauna, it is also a hub for the community – where people come together to connect with the landscape and, furthermore, conserve and enhance it.

As a ranger for Brighton & Hove City Council, Paul oversees a sheep grazing project that sees dozens of volunteer shepherds – or lookers – help to maintain the landscape through conservation grazing.

Sheep are at the heart of the story of the creation of the South Downs landscape since the arrival of the first farmers from Europe some 4,500 years ago. Stone Age farmers cleared the natural forest using flint-bladed tools, providing timber and grazing land for their animals.

A combination of sheep grazing over several hundred years and a chalky soil created short, springy grassland. Today it is a biodiversity oasis – with up to 45 different species of flowering plants and mosses per square metre and at least 20 species of butterfly on the wing at any time during the summer.

Paul, a dad-of-two from Portslade, features in a new inspiring video that explains his love of this special

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landscape and how sheep, and people, are vital for its survival.

"The wildlife of this area is extremely rich," says Paul.

"Chalk downland is known as a rainforest in miniature and it really is a case of getting down on your knees and discovering this huge biomass of plants and insects.

"When the sheep industry died off, getting on for 100 years or so now, we started to lose our Downs. So what we decided to do was bring back the animals that helped open up the Downs in the first place, thousands of years ago.

"We developed a volunteer programme called the 'Lookering' or grazing project and it basically means we have volunteer shepherds. Their role is to come and have a look at the sheep, get the sheep up and moving, check the fences and check the water supply is working.



"Many people have just never been up here before and when they come there's a real wow factor. How can you not love a place like the South Downs – especially one that's so connected to the city and the sea? I think it's magical."

Lookers attend a full day of training, covering topics such as why we graze, the history of the Downs, and livestock welfare.

Only 45 per cent of chalk grassland in the National Park is designated as SSSI, meaning that over half does not benefit from significant legal protection.

Paul is passionate about community engagement and raising awareness of the wonders of this habitat, which makes up four per cent of the National Park.

Last year more than 1,700 people came to the National Park's Wild Chalk event at East Brighton Park which Paul helped to organise. Paul adds: "These two hills are where I cut my teeth as a ranger and as a naturalist. It's where I learned to engage with people and to get people involved in the sites themselves, rather than just coming up to visit, actually volunteering and having their own sense of ownership of these green spaces."

Paul's video is part of new series of short films to mark the National Park's 10th anniversary. To see Paul's video visit www.southdowns.gov.uk/poignant-video-reveals-rangers-love-of-magical-south-downs-landscape/

Community rallies round to create helpful online map



An interactive map is providing a helping hand during the Covid-19 crisis by signposting people to food, drink and other support services close to where they live.

Scores of businesses, organisations and community groups are providing a lifeline during the lockdown, delivering food boxes and ready meals for those who are isolating and supplies for residents in their local area.

With the help of communities, the South Downs National Park Authority has now created an online map of food and drink businesses offering services – attracting 3,700 unique views so far in just over a month.

Many organisations have had to quickly adapt, with a pub offering food boxes and a museum opening a village supplies shop.

Since launching the map now features over 200 businesses and 74 community support groups.

Kat Beer, who works in the sustainable economy team and has been helping to put together the resource, said: “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.

“A big proportion of the National Park is made up of rural communities, many without access to large supermarkets, so we felt it was crucial to help signpost people to the resources available locally.

“We have created this interactive map so people can search and find suppliers, deliveries and support, local to where they live.

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“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. People can find details of the community support groups covering their area on the map.

“Although packed with useful information, the map is by no means exhaustive and our plan is to update it every week for as long as it is needed.”

The Royal Oak pub, in West Lavington, Midhurst, is one of those listed on the map and has been helping to provide fresh food boxes for the local community.

Frankie Swan, who runs the pub, said: “I set up a community hub at the pub, offering fresh meat and fish boxes, fresh fruit and vegetable boxes and an essentials shopping list. We’re also making weekly batches of ready meals, all of which are being delivered locally to residents.



“We are going to continue offering our food boxes as long as they are needed, and now also have takeaway service. We have certain dishes on that menu which are available at 50 per cent off for all emergency services workers and anyone over 70.”

Meanwhile, further west in Selborne, Hampshire, the Gilbert White & The Oates Collections Museum has been working with the local pub, The Selborne Arms, to provide food supplies and deliveries.

Museum Director Steve Green said: “The museum is currently closed to visitors, but our cafe has effectively become the village shop, providing the essentials people need.

“This is a challenging time for everyone, but it’s been very rewarding to be able to do our bit to help the local community.”

People should follow the Government advice and practise social distancing if they are visiting a shop and should only travel close to home to pick up supplies. People should also contact the supplier before ordering or setting out to ensure availability of produce and delivery radius.

To see the map visit

www.southdowns.gov.uk/connecting-communities-with-local-suppliers-and-support-during-the-covid-19-pandemic/

Nearly £40k of grants to benefit wildlife and young people



New habitat for water voles, educational equipment for a children's learning centre and a new wildlife corridor are among the beneficiaries of a grants boost from the South Downs National Park Trust.

Seven projects across the National Park will receive grants from the charity, which is working to make the South Downs an even better place for nature and people. The grants are just one aspect of the charity's scope, which includes ongoing funding to improve access and increase opportunities for young people, as well as the high-profile "Bee Lines" and "Trees for the Downs" campaigns.

Some £4,500 has been awarded to Splash Farm, near Arundel, for a project that will allow water voles to thrive on the River Arun and its tributaries. The rodents are known as "ecosystem engineers" as their burrowing network is vital for a flourishing wetland habitat where plants and other animals can prosper. Until now, cows have been able to graze vegetation along the water ditches, reducing the amount of available habitat for water voles. The Trust's grant will pay for new livestock fencing that will allow vegetation to grow, helping to support and increase the existing water vole population.

Just over £10,000 has been awarded to The Goodwood Learning Centre, near Chichester. Goodwood Education Trust currently gives over 3,000 children a year an experience of the countryside and farming and the new centre will enhance opportunities for learning about the environment.

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The grant will help pay for kitting out the centre with equipment and furniture.

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Jamie's Farm, near Lewes, offers educational therapy for disadvantaged young people aged 11 to 16 and will be receiving a grant of just under £5,000. The farm has been working to improve biodiversity and the cash will help pay for 430 metres of new hedgerow – providing a wildlife corridor for birds, mammals and butterflies.

Meanwhile, Graffham Down Trust, based in West Sussex, will receive a grant of £4,760 to help replace cutting equipment that helps maintain the precious chalk grassland habitat on the Down.

A total of £4,250 has been awarded to the Ouse Valley Cycle Network Project, which is a community-based group working to provide a safe walking and cycle route to link Lewes and Newhaven and all the villages in between. Now well on the way to completion, the grant will help pay for new maps and leaflets, maintenance equipment and protective clothes for volunteers.

Meanwhile, a similar off-road pathway scheme to bring people into the heart of stunning countryside will benefit from a grant of £1,500. The Centurion Way is part of the National Cycle Network, following the old Chichester to Midhurst railway line. Chichester and District Cycle Forum and the Friends of Centurion Way will now be able to invest in a cycle counter that will help collect much-needed information on usage of the network and also make this data publicly-available.

Finally, just over £9,160 has been awarded to the charity, The Garden Classroom, which helps to provide outdoor learning experiences for children in inner-city London – many of whom will have never visited a National Park.

All the grants went through the independent charity's application process and were agreed by the board of trustees.



Julie Fawcett, Chair of the South Downs National Park Trust, said: "It's an honour to be able to announce this new round of grants as we know they will make a real difference and have far-reaching impacts.

"Helping these kind of community-driven grassroots projects are what our charity is all about – helping wildlife flourish, allowing more people to access the countryside, and connecting young people with all the benefits of the natural world. We'd also like to say a big thank you to all our donors who have made these grants possible.

"These are challenging times for lots of community and charitable organisations and we know some projects will have to be delayed, but we're proud to be able to bring some good news with these grants."

Buzz of activity for Bee Lines campaign



A flurry of donations have flown in for the Bee Lines campaign after Rolls-Royce announced the sweet success of its apiary near the South Downs.

Although car manufacturing has been temporarily suspended, production of another unique, distinctly British treasure is running at record levels at the home of Rolls-Royce near Chichester: the world's most exclusive honey. In their third full season of production, the dedicated 250,000-strong workforce in the company's Apiary are set, once again, to exceed their 2020 volume targets for the 'Rolls-Royce of Honey'.

The Apiary project is Rolls-Royce Motor Cars' response to the real and present threat facing Britain's bee population – a plight that is being tackled by the Bee Lines campaign. The South Downs National Park Trust is looking to raise £75k to plant a series of wildflower corridors – effectively a “motorway” for bees. These corridors will increase connectivity between habitats and help make pollinators more resilient to extreme weather events and climate change. Residents and businesses within the National Park boundaries are also being encouraged to get involved through initiatives such as planting wildflowers in gardens and grounds.

Richard Carter, Director of Global Communications at Rolls-Royce Motor Cars, said: “The Apiary further underlines our commitment to the environment, which informs everything we do at Goodwood. Through this project, which taps into the biodiversity of our site, including our huge living roof, we’re making an important contribution to conserving Britain’s vital bee population.”

Over £37k has now been raised for Bee Lines. To find out more and donate visit:

www.southdownstrust.org.uk/beelines/

SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

National Park launches brand new website



A new inspiring website has been launched to celebrate the National Park's 10th anniversary.

The Authority's revamped website aims to do justice to this nationally important landscape and includes a number of new features, including more user-friendly navigation, more video content and a detailed Discovery Map showcasing points of interest in the National Park.

The platform provides a seamless browsing experience, with easy access to planning applications, planning updates, committee meetings, the various work strands of the Authority and news stories.

Finding the right person to contact for enquiries has never been easier, thanks to a new, streamlined contacts page.



Luke Walter, Digital and Social Media Officer for the South Downs National Park, said: “To mark the National Park's 10th birthday it was only fitting to give the South Downs website a well-deserved refresh.

“Although with many currently staying at home and keeping their exercise local, the South Downs is usually one of the UK's busiest and most popular National Parks and we wanted to create a website built around the visitor experience, as well as providing the practical information people need on planning and our committees.

“We're committed to help keeping members of the public safe at this time.

“When lockdown restrictions begin to ease, the website will provide up-to-date information on how people who live in and near the National Park can continue to explore it safely.”

Visit the new website at www.southdowns.gov.uk

We'd love to hear what you think about the website.

Please send any comments to comms@southdowns.gov.uk

Former industrial site to become high-quality wildlife-friendly housing scheme



A brownfield site will be transformed into a landscape-led housing scheme, providing new affordable homes, a café, shop and a community hub.

The Planning Committee of the South Downs National Park Authority voted unanimously to approve plans submitted by Comer Homes Group for the former Syngenta site, south of Fernhurst village, in West Sussex.

The 10.5-hectare plot was developed as an army barracks at the end of World War II, before being redeveloped in the 1980s as the UK headquarters for ICI.

The scheme delivers a number of benefits, including the creation of new wildlife habitats, sustainable drainage and high-quality landscape-led design.

Among the highlights are:

- 210 dwellings, a small café, a retail unit and a community hub to be provided.
- 20 per cent of the new homes will be affordable housing, and three quarters of these affordable units will be social rented.
- 57 per cent of the site will be green/blue infrastructure, including a new 20m-wide stretch of woodland running east to west across the site for 465m.
- A net zero carbon emissions development. Emissions to be tackled by improvements to the building fabric beyond Building Regulations requirements, photovoltaic panels and wood burning stoves

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- Net gain of around 209 trees.
- 10 per cent of roofs will be green roofs.
- Comprehensive range of measures to protect species including:
 - Replacement bat roost
 - Bat, bird and dormouse boxes
 - Information and educational packs for residents
 - Improvements to adjacent Nature Reserve
- Re-opening of a culverted watercourse
- Approximately half of car parking spaces to be provided underground
- A range of sustainable transport measures, including:
 - A 1.5m footway from the site to Fernhurst village
 - All dwellings to have electric vehicle charging points
 - A minibus service to Fernhurst and Haslemere
- 10 per cent of all dwellings to be fully wheelchair accessible.

Landscape Officer Ruth Childs said: "This scheme integrates with the landscape character of the area, driven by woodlands and water. Significant enhancements include resurfacing a culverted watercourse and the creation of meaningful new managed woodland connecting key habitats together through the site.

"The scheme brings positive woodland management into the heart of a new housing scheme for residents to see, experience and take part in. It's a wonderful way to connect people with the landscape and celebrate the area's local history. The opportunities for net gain in biodiversity are significant, and the different architecture offers a huge variety of niches for all sorts of species."



Kelly Porter, Major Projects Lead, added: "This scheme delivers housing on a brownfield site, allocated in a Neighbourhood Plan, that has been vacant for many years.

"The high-quality landscape-led design of this major

development is to be commended and will provide multiple benefits, including health and wellbeing benefits for the people living in these new homes in the future."

Big boost for conservation of our precious rivers



The conservation of chalk streams and their amazing wildlife has received a major boost after almost £2m of National Lottery Heritage Funding was awarded.

A partnership of 15 organisations, including The South Downs National Park Authority, has secured funding for a five-year landscape project called Watercress and Winterbournes. The name pays homage to the fact that watercress has always thrived in the Itchen Valley.

The initiative will work with local communities to restore and celebrate seven chalk streams, including those feeding the River Itchen in the South Downs. Of the seven, Cheriton Stream lies within the National Park.

The chalk streams are globally-scarce environments that are home to species like water vole, brown trout, and white-clawed crayfish, and have inspired a rich cultural heritage. Unfortunately, these special waters face increasing pressure from issues like pollution, loss of habitat, and poor land management.

Debbie Tann, Chief Executive of Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, said: "We look forward to working closely with our partners, and with the communities in the area, to ensure we achieve real and lasting change for these precious chalk stream environments."

Jeremy Burgess, Biodiversity Lead for Water in the National Park, added: "We welcome the approach of this project which has a major focus on supporting and developing skills in communities to look after their rivers. The Cheriton conservation group will be leading work on the Cheriton Brook with our support."

"Clearly the focus on improving the headwaters will have an impact downstream on the whole river. Although at the Western fringes of the National Park the Itchen is one of our best-known chalk rivers, hosting amazing wildlife from a wealth of river flies and beds of water crowfoot to brown trout and otters."

SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY Economic Recovery Plan for Brighton region gets go-ahead



Leaders have agreed to work up a sustainable Economic Recovery Plan to help the Brighton region bounce back from the COVID-19 pandemic.

With lockdown affecting many of the tens of thousands of businesses and one million residents across the area, the Greater Brighton Economic Board – which is made up of representatives from local authorities and businesses and includes the South Downs National Park Authority – acknowledged the need to work together to outline ways it can support residents and firms.

With one of the UK's main airports, a thriving visitor economy and a large commuter workforce, Greater Brighton is expected to face big challenges in the months ahead.

The board has agreed to pool public and private sector expertise to work up proposals which could support sectors adversely affected by COVID-19, such as hospitality and tourism.

Leaders also acknowledged the crucial role that education, skills and infrastructure could play to ensure the Greater Brighton area – which stretches along much of the Sussex coast north to Gatwick – can get up and running again after the pandemic.

Councillor Daniel Humphreys, Chairman of the Greater Brighton Economic Board, said: "There's no doubt that our businesses and employers are facing a challenge which we have never experienced before."

"While there remain a lot of unknowns and uncertainty around the impact of COVID-19, one thing that's certain is that a united voice and purpose will be essential in making sure our economic area is ready to get going once restrictions are lifted."

"By working together, pooling our resources and sharing our expertise, Greater Brighton can play a key role in helping our city region not only bounce back but also adapt to what will be a very different world."

Inspiration for your wellbeing during lockdown



We want to thank people for staying home and not travelling to visit the National Park during the lockdown in order to help save lives and protect the NHS. We know connecting with others and nature are vital for wellness, so Kate Drake, the National Park's health and wellbeing officer, takes a look at how you can support your physical and mental health during lockdown.

The last few weeks has been a rollercoaster of emotions for most people. Adjusting to a new way of being and living has thrown a lot of what makes us who we are, up in the air. Hopefully you are beginning to settle into this new way of being. This period in history has seen some incredible acts of kindness and people and communities pulling together to respond.



Although we can exercise outside once a day and hopefully more in the coming days, some people are not so fortunate and might not have access to green open spaces or are socially isolating, so here are some ideas around connecting to nature that you can do in your own home. Hopefully we can all find more ways to connect with nature where we live that will carry on after the lockdown. These are based on the five ways to Health and Wellbeing, which is an evidence-based tool developed by the New Economics Foundation and a well-established way to support your wellbeing.

Be active

Download an app and try a new form of exercise, Health Matters or Sports England has a range of 10 minute workouts you can do solo, with loved ones or your children. Doing exercise can really change your mood to then support you to focus on something else in the day.

Learn something new

Now is a great opportunity to learn something new. Make a new recipe, play a game you haven't played before. There are lots of creative projects that can be done, with tutorials on YouTube.



Read a book, write a book, write a poem and learn a new musical instrument or something that keeps your mind active. Learn about a new location in South Downs National Park in preparation for when you can go there in person or learn what habitats and species live in National Park.

Give

The community is pulling together – people putting notes through neighbours' doors to say they will help with shopping and setting up support circles with friends and family to keep in touch and help out if people do need to self-isolate. Bake a cake or new recipe and give it to a loved one.

Connect with others

Although we might not be able to see our loved ones physically we can keep in contact via phone, What's App, Skype, virtual games night or virtual get together's via Zoom, Houseparty or other social media platforms.

Making art sculptures out of petals, twigs, shells and taking pictures and sharing with your loved ones is another great way to connect.

Take notice



Taking notice of what is around you can help reduce stress levels. Notice the signs of spring and summer. Birds singing, leaves unfurling, feel the sun on your skin, wind blowing through your window and of course listen to the spring showers.

Breathe it in. Is it cold or warm? Notice the smell and scents around you. Breathe in and take notice.

Draw what you see – a flower, a tree. Use this for inspiration or just to be. Connecting with nature can be really helpful and can reduce anxiety and help with grounding ourselves. Plant something if you can and notice the changes each day. Have a go at some of these ideas and let us know how you get on by posting photos on social media and tagging the South Downs National Park!

Please visit www.southdowns.gov.uk for the latest advice on getting out safely in the National Park

Uncovering one of nature's most important masterpieces: the humble mushroom

Daniel Greenwood, Volunteering Development Officer, looks at a lesser-known gem of the South Downs...fungi!

The South Downs National Park is renowned for the 100-mile chalk ridge that passes from Eastbourne in East Sussex all the way to Winchester in Hampshire.

But the National Park reaches further north and south beyond the ridge. At the foot of the Downs woodlands of oak and beech can spread for miles.



This wooded landscape is the Low Weald, a mixture of clay and sandy soils. Combining the Low and High Weald areas, the entirety of the Weald itself comprises the most wooded part of England.

Deep in these woods something very special is happening. We all know the iconic mushroom, growing from the woodland floor in the autumn. But this is only the apple on the tree, because in the woodland soils a secret network of nature is fizzing with life. The fungal mycelium is a root-like system of what are known as 'hyphae', spreading through soils and connecting with the roots of trees and other plants. These mycelial networks are what produce the mushrooms that we see above ground and some of which make it to our dinner plates. In this way fungi are also crucial to the creation of soils through the recycling of organic matter like wood, leaves and animal remains.

The interconnectedness of trees and fungi in woodlands is crucial to the survival of these lifeforms. The root hairs of trees connect with fungal hyphae and are even able to direct fungi to find resources in the soil that trees alone are unable to extract. This symbiotic relationship likely goes back billions of years on our planet.

Scientific experiments have also shown that trees that have fungal life support live longer and grow more vigorously, compared with those that don't. We all know how important trees are for our own health and existence as a species on Earth, so let's not forget the role of fungi in that!

If you get the chance to look across the wooded Weald from up high on the South Downs Way, consider not just the trees but the role of all the fungi in making this amazing National Park so green.

SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

Spotlight: Why grazing can be amazing for conservation



Livestock are a common sight in the South Downs, but what role do they play in the eco-system? Katy Sherman is an Activities and Engagement Officer for Heathlands Reunited, a National Lottery Heritage-funded project working to save our heaths, and delves deeper into the importance of grazing – and what types of livestock you might see on heaths.

Across the National Park there are livestock of all different shapes, sizes and breeds grazing on a variety of different landscapes. To ensure that wildlife habitats are managed for the greatest environmental benefit, the type, number and timing of livestock grazing is tailored to the needs of each individual site.



Different types of livestock graze in different ways and this influences their suitability for grazing individual habitats, such as farmland, chalk grassland and heathland. Even within livestock types individual breeds can graze differently. So this is why you will see a mixture of horses, cows, sheep, and goats in the South Downs National Park.

Conservation grazing plays a key role in maintaining rare habitats like heathland by controlling aggressive species which would otherwise dominate areas through scrub encroachment. In the past, the countryside would have been grazed by wild animals or through traditional farming and common land grazing practices. Many landowners seek to replicate these kinds of grazing systems to maintain and increase biodiversity. Livestock grazing removes plant material more gradually than cutting or burning and is a very natural and sustainable way to manage a landscape.

When livestock are allowed to graze freely, they can pick and choose what and where they eat. This selective eating creates a mix of different conditions benefiting a wide range of wildlife – from insects, birds,

reptiles, mammals, plants and fungi. For example, when cattle eat grass they curl their tongue around the sword and pull, creating tussocks of differing heights and structures. This creates the ideal habitat for small mammals and insects. Meanwhile, ponies and sheep are nibblers. Sheep create a fine lawn-like habitat, while ponies are more selective which can result in some taller vegetation remaining untouched.

Light poaching of the ground by grazing animals also creates bare ground in which wildflower seeds can germinate. This open ground creates a whole micro-climate in itself, attractive as a home and hunting ground for warmth loving invertebrates and reptiles. And let's not forget about the wonders of cattle dung. Over 200 insects and invertebrates are associated with this wonderful stuff! So if you are out and about getting your daily exercise in the South Downs National Park watch out for our helpful grazing friends hard at work and remember to #TaketheLead and keep your dogs on a lead around livestock.

Specifically on our heathlands you might see the following breeds:



Sussex Red



Belted Galloway



Highland Cow



Shetland Cow



British White

Our Heathlands Reunited project is working to bring back grazing to help restore, recreate and reconnect the remaining 1% of our fragmented heathland habitats across the National Park. The project aims to reintroduce conservation grazing on 300ha of heathland across five sites.

So far the project has contributed toward the funding of the fencing at Iping common which has allowed Sussex Wildlife Trust to extend their grazing of British Whites. We are also working with the Lynchmere Society to establish their community 'Cow Club' which supports the grazing of Belted Galloways at Lynchmere Common.

This year we will see the re-fencing of the MOD land at Woolmer Forest and the introduction of Longhorn cattle across 220ha, adding to Hampshire & Isle of White Wildlife Trust's British Whites and Shetland cattle that are grazing at Longmoor. The project is also working with the National Trust to help progress their plans to introduce conservation grazing on Ludshott common.



LOTTERY FUNDED

“Why our heaths are so special”



Beth Nicholls, Heathlands Reunited Communities Outreach Officer, explains why heathlands are such an important British habitat that are worth conserving and enhancing.



The South Downs National Park might not quite reach the coast on its western side, but walking along the white sandy tracks criss-crossing over our lowland heaths feels reminiscent of a stroll along the beach. This sandy soil provides the perfect basking spot for all six of our native species of reptile, including the very rare smooth snake.

Insects such as solitary bees and ground beetles find it easy to build their burrows in the sand, and many insects such as butterflies and crickets feed on the nectar and leaves of heather. These insects themselves provide a tasty treat for ground-nesting birds such as the woodlark and heathland specialist the Dartford warbler. In late spring nightjars also arrive back to nest on our heaths after their long migration from Africa, filling the dusk sky with their distinctive churring call. You can learn more about the wildlife living in this unique open landscape by watching our heathlands documentary on the National Park's YouTube channel.

Lowland heath has actually been heavily shaped by the activity of humans over thousands of years. The characteristic sandy soil results from the clearing of large areas of dense forest that once covered the South of England by neolithic humans. This was to make space to grow crops and graze their animals, but eventually the removal of trees led to the erosion of the top soil. The sandy soil that remained was too dry and nutrient-poor for growing crops, which allowed plants adapted to these conditions, like heather, to flourish. As farming practices have changed over time, heaths have lost their value as grazing sites and places to harvest raw materials such as wood, and without proper management they are under threat of turning

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back into forests, leading to the loss of all the special plants and animals that depend on this habitat.

England is home to approximately one fifth of all the heathland in Europe, and sadly 85% of the original heathland in the national park has been lost.

The Heathlands Reunited project, now in its fourth year, is a partnership of 11 organisations, led by the South Downs National Park Authority, that aims to expand, create new and improve existing heathland to cover an area greater than 1,200 football pitches. Currently heathland covers just one per cent of the South Downs National Park, and is mostly separated into 'islands' where isolated plants and animals are far more vulnerable to local extinction. The project aims to reengage and inspire communities to visit their heathlands, learn more about them and work together to look after them so they can be enjoyed for generations to come.

To find out more visit:

www.southdowns.gov.uk/heathlands-reunited

