



SOUTH DOWNS NEWS

WORK AND PLAY IN YOUR NATIONAL PARK

This month:

- **Farming for nature** As we hit the harvest season, find out about a pioneering project that tells the stories of farmers of the National Park and their efforts to support wildlife.
- **Through the eyes of a ranger** Read about the National Park's Ranger Experiences that give visitors a real-life glimpse into the work of a South Downs Ranger.
- **Caring for the environment** Learn more about World Cleanup Day and how you can become a custodian of the National Park.
- **Win up to £250!** Send us your snaps as the deadline looms for the annual Photo Competition!

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

Innovative film trail showcases nature-friendly farming

The fascinating stories of seven farmers and their vital role in caring for the South Downs are part of a fun new "watch and listen" trail linked to short films about their work.

Seven "Meet the Farmer" plaques have been placed along the South Downs Way in West and East Sussex and will give people a unique insight into farming life on the South Downs. Simply holding a phone (with NFC function switched on) over the plaque, or reading the QR code, will reveal the film introducing the farmer responsible for caring for that stretch of land.

The films include new stunning drone footage of the South Downs and close-up wildlife shots.

The initiative, supported by the South Downs National Park Authority, showcases the work of members of the Eastern South Downs Farmers Group, which covers over 130 square miles of the Downs between Shoreham-by-Sea and Eastbourne.



Camilla and Roly Puzey, of Saddlescombe Farm, feature in the "Meet the Farmer" trail

Nature doesn't recognise farm boundaries so together the farmers are supporting endangered species such as the grey partridge and restoring priority habitats including species rich chalk grassland.

That's pawsome! Over 400 people enjoy Dog Fun Day

Farmer Ben Taylor, who manages the Iford Estate near Lewes, is featured in a film and speaks of on 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, who trained as a chemist before going into farming, said: "This land has been farmed for thousands of years since Neolithic times, so farming has made the landscape.

"We've achieved profitable farming in the 21st century and it's allowed us to also provide valuable new wildlife habitats. 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. This is such an important migratory point for birds that are coming from the north of England or from further afield and crossing towards Europe. They come here because they have places where they can feed, places to rest and refuel. 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."



Yellowhammer

Ben also speaks of farms' changing roles and diversification, including opening up holiday accommodation, fishing lakes and renting out offices to provide rural employment.

Ben added: "I enjoy being up on the Downs, whether it's a sunny day or the rain is beating in your face!

"It's just a nice place to be and do a job that you love."

Annie Brown, of Lower Paythorne and Perching Manor Farms, near Fulking, who is lead farmer for the Eastern South Downs Farmers Group, said: "Never has there been a more important time for farmers along the South Downs to tell the visiting public about their role as custodians of our iconic landscape. The farmers in our Cluster Group are all passionate about producing food in a good and sustainable way while making space for nature."

CLA South East, which represents farmers, landowners and rural businesses, has supported the initiative.

Tim Bamford, Acting Regional Director, added: "They really do help make National Parks the thriving, unique places that they are."

As well as the plaques, the films can be seen by visiting www.youtube.com/user/sdnpa/videos



More than 400 people – and plenty of pooches – enjoyed the South Downs National Park's annual Dog Fun Day at Woolbeding Parkland.

The action-packed event in West Sussex included a fun dog show, working dog demonstrations, "have a go" dog agility and rally obedience, top tips on dog training, and the opportunity to meet cows and sheep.

Dog ambassadors from the Heathlands Reunited project – which is working to protect and enhance the wildlife-rich heaths of the National Park – also attended and shared their expertise on dog obedience.

More than 30 people signed up to the "I Take the Lead Pledge", which encourages responsible dog walking in the National Park.

Chloe Beckerson, Events Assistant for the South Downs National Park Authority, said: "The event was the perfect platform for dog owners to learn more about how they can help care for the countryside and know what to do around livestock."



Beauty spot is made accessible for all after Gatwick funding boost



A once muddy and uneven path at a popular beauty spot has been transformed, thanks to a pioneering programme funded by Gatwick Airport to help make the National Park accessible for all.

The Disabled Ramblers were all smiles as they tried out the new and refurbished path around Swanbourne Lake, near Arundel.

The makeover involved resurfacing rough tracks and means the beauty spot can now be accessed by people with limited mobility, wheelchair users, families with pushchairs and less agile walkers.

It comes after Gatwick Airport donated a £60,000 grant towards the National Park's "Miles Without Stiles" initiative, which is working to create a number of new accessible routes by removing stiles, replacing gates and resurfacing rough tracks.

After using the new path, Val Rawlings, from the Disabled Ramblers, said: "It was a real treat for us to be able to see the sparkling water through the trees and we're very grateful to all for the work that has been done.

"We had a really super day and will definitely be going back.

"Gatwick Airport also helped fund a Miles Without Stiles route from Ditchling Beacon that's also now open for disabled users as well, so special thanks to them.

"It's two new routes for people with limited mobility and it really does mean a lot to us to be able to enjoy these special places in the National Park."

Melanie Wrightson, Gatwick Airport Community Engagement Manager, said "Gatwick is delighted that Swanbourne lake will now be accessible to all people. It

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is another milestone in the initiative 'Miles Without Stiles' and stems from our belief that no one should be excluded from enjoying the beauty of South Downs National Park."

Allison Thorpe, who leads on access and recreation for the South Downs National Park Authority, added: "The idea to improve the footpath along the western bank of Swanbourne Lake stems from a meeting between the landowner Norfolk Estate, the local SDNPA Ranger and Arundel Wetland Centre.



"To a large extent many of the issues with the path arose because of the site's popularity and the sheer number of visitors it receives.

"The National Park is here for everyone to enjoy and it's great that even more people will now be able to experience the physical and mental benefits of getting closer to nature."

Over the next two years, Gatwick Airport's sponsorship will allow more routes to be made accessible for all and ensure everyone can enjoy the beauty of the South Downs.

For more information on the Miles Without Stiles initiative, visit

www.southdowns.gov.uk/enjoy/walking/miles-without-stiles/



The route before the refurbishment work

The Disabled Ramblers is a small charity working across England and Wales to help make the countryside more accessible to people with limited mobility – which benefits everyone. They campaign to raise awareness of the needs of people with limited mobility and organise a national programme of rambles. For more information see www.disabledramblers.co.uk

Experiencing the National Park through the eyes of a Ranger



This summer saw the launch of a new pilot initiative for visitors to experience the National Park through the eyes of a ranger.

The “Ranger Experience” gave people a real-life glimpse into the work of a South Downs Ranger as they stepped aboard a Land Rover to visit iconic sites, heard extraordinary stories and saw conservation activities in action.

The initiative was aimed at giving people a deeper understanding of the spectacular landscape and its incredible wildlife.

Working closely with local communities, farmers and landowners, the South Downs National Park Rangers play a pivotal role in conserving and enhancing the 1,600km² of landscape, biodiversity, cultural heritage and the famous South Downs Way.

Following on from the success of the experiences this summer and positive feedback, a number of select dates will be available during the autumn.

The day out begins with one of the most breathtaking views in the National Park – the Seven Sisters cliffs – taking in the majestic scene from Seaford Head Nature Reserve. A guided tour of Seven Sisters Country Park is followed by a visit to the pretty medieval village of West Dean.

People enjoy a picnic overlooking Deep Dean – an amazing chalk grassland valley – before carrying out a butterfly survey and learning more about the rare species in the National Park such as the Adonis Blue Butterfly.

The famous Long Man of Wilmington, “the mysterious guardian” of the South Downs, is another highlight of

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the experience. People also have the option of visiting the Long Man Brewery to see where they make award-winning beer using barley grown in the surrounding farmland.

Tim Squire, a South Downs Ranger and self-confessed wildlife addict, has been leading the tour.

Tim said: “I feel very lucky to be a Ranger and it’s exciting to be able to show people a different side of the South Downs.

“This is a unique experience and a chance for people to go behind the scenes into the life of a Ranger.

“The South Downs is a very special corner of the world and sometimes visitors only get to see the view, without learning the story behind it. Our Ranger Experience is a memorable day where people can get immersed in the landscape and learn about the story of how it evolved, the humans who have shaped it and how we strive to protect it.”

One guest on the experience wrote: “I understand much more about habitat and how the Park is managed to benefit the wildlife. I will look at things differently next time I am out in the countryside. Very interesting and educational.”

And another guest said: “We saw magnificent landscapes. We saw butterflies. We saw the real Sussex. We learned about the real work of these rangers.”

Katharine Beer, who heads sustainable tourism in the National Park, added: “Our Rangers have an intimate knowledge of the South Downs, so this is a wonderful opportunity to learn more about the wildlife and habitats of the National Park from the experts.

“We’ve been really pleased by the feedback from participants and have a few more dates coming up this autumn. Please check the website for availability.”

Each experience departs at 10am from Seaford Station, East Sussex, returning to Seaford Station by 2.15pm.

Each tour has a maximum of four participants.

The cost of a Ranger Experience per person is £60

For more details visit

<https://www.airbnb.co.uk/experiences/918179>



“The South Downs is just as much a wilderness as Yellowstone”

Ranger Charles Winchester examines whether the South Downs can ever be called a “wilderness”.

It might sound like a crazy notion, but there really is a lot of sense in this claim.

Granted, as landscapes go, the South Downs is substantially domesticated and agrarian and there’s no doubt that Yellowstone is one of the more remote protected areas in the world. But when it comes to wilderness, all is not as it seems.

We can blame the Romantics for the way we think about



wilderness today. Starting in the late 18th Century, poets and philosophers redefined how people thought about wild areas. Before them, wildernesses were at best wastelands and, at worst, terrifying places to be avoided at all costs. After them, however, wildernesses were rebranded as some of the most incredible landscapes in the world.

It was in 1872 that National Parks were created. Held aloft as examples of pristine nature, these landscapes were considered to be totally unaffected by civilisation. The only problem is that they weren’t.

So-called ‘wild’ places like Yellowstone have always been used by people. The US National Park Service itself highlights archaeological evidence for the human settlement and use of Yellowstone since the ice sheets retreated 11,000 years ago. If people have been using, managing and modifying wild places since the last ice age, then I would argue the absence of human beings isn’t such a good yardstick for “wilderness” after all.

Maybe we should take the time to recognise the elements of wilderness in landscapes all around us – including our beautifully managed chalk grasslands, and our thoroughly cultural, but no less magnificent, heathlands.

The Romantics might not agree, but I would argue there is just as much wilderness (in the fullest sense of the word – wildlife, cultural history, sublime vistas and all) to be found in the South Downs as in Yellowstone.

And by acknowledging its very human past – and the important role people will inevitably play in its future – maybe there’s even more so.

New bridleway is a boost for our biodiversity



A new bridleway in Hove will open up a missing link in the city’s footpath network and provide new habitat for wildlife.

The new path, which links rights of way on Benfield Hill and the New Barn Farm area with the Dyke Railway trail and beyond, has been created by West Hove Golf course and Brighton and Hove City Council’s countryside team and the South Downs National Park Authority.

The opportunity to open the path arose after West Hove Golf Club approached the SDNPA for planning permission for an acoustic bund, buffering the course from the A27. Creating the new bridleway and opening up the surrounding access land was one of the planning conditions.

The work has created an attractive east-west route, north of the A27 for cyclists, horse riders and walkers.

Biodiversity will also be boosted after wildflowers have been planted in the chalk grassland. These flowers are a fantastic source of pollen and nectar for bees, butterflies, hoverflies and other insects. Hibernacula, which are animal refuges, have been created to support several reptile species.

Andrew Lee, Director of Countryside Policy and Management at the South Downs National Park Authority, said: “This project significantly improves the rights of way network in the National Park’s Hangleton and Portslade area and creates a wonderful opportunity for the public to enjoy this new species-rich chalk grassland. It also creates an important wildlife corridor to help support biodiversity between existing nature sites.

“The chalk grassland will be managed by cut and collect for a few years and, ultimately, the plan is for the land to be grazed by sheep. This will be a better way of managing the site and will be much more productive for the biodiversity of the area.”

Taking action to care for your National Park



'Take only photos leave only footprints' should be the motto of anyone spending time in a National Park.

So, as we mark World Cleanup Day on September 21, here are some of the most important ways you can help care for the South Downs:

- Leave no trace – take home any litter and recycle as much as possible
- Challenge anyone you see dropping litter
- Use refillable water bottles to reduce plastic waste – it's important to stay hydrated. Fortunately, in the South Downs, you're never too far from potable water, whether on the South Downs Way or rambling on the many other trails across the Park.
- Pick up after your dog and take it home or put it in a bin
- Join local clean-up teams – volunteers are the backbone for so much conservation activity in the National Park, from repairing trails to tree coppicing and planting, to helping to pick-up litter, volunteers in the National Park do a sterling job.
- Plogging – jogging and picking up litter!
- Report overfilled bins and flytipping – you might be the first person to spot these, find out who is responsible for removing these. Some items, like fridges or old car batteries, are particularly hazardous to just be left outside.

All these steps have a part to play in protecting this special area for future generations. But we have also come to realise that this is not enough, and we have to take action to clean up what past generations have dumped into our precious habitats.

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This is particularly evident in some of the coastal areas of the South Downs National Park such as Seven Sisters Country Park, where plastic waste is lurking among the shingle and is being broken down into ever smaller pieces by the action of the waves as they pound the beach, and then being blown into the surrounding wetland habitats,

This summer the South Downs National Park Authority launched its first series of Youth Action Days to provide the next generation of custodians with some practical ways to make a difference to their local environment. A group of young people spent four hours removing plastics from around the estuary mouth at Seven Sisters.

The Youth Action Days also included clearance of Himalayan balsam – an invasive species along river banks – at Rotherlands Local Nature Reserve in Petersfield, as well as a butterfly conservation day near Storrington.

Daniel Greenwood, Volunteer Development Officer for the South Downs National Park, said: 'Chatting to the youth volunteers it's clear we have an emerging generation of people who are one of the most environmentally aware.

"It is hugely exciting in terms of how policies will be shaped by their desire and drive for positive environmental change.

"They want to be involved in making a difference for their futures and it's great to be able to offer them a chance to take action."



A number of free Youth Action Days are planned for the October half term holidays. Please check the South Downs National Park website for updates and to book at <https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/care-for/volunteering-2/>

Call for all photo competition entries!



The clock is counting down to the deadline for the National Park's annual Photo Competition and the chance to win a cash prize.

Our judges are looking for inspiring images that capture the beauty of the National Park – all while being active!

So whether it's walking in the woods, cycling, horseriding, walking the dog, counting butterflies, bird-watching or having a picnic, we're looking for images that show people out enjoying this amazing landscape.

Photographs that include people are encouraged, but stunning images of the landscape taken while people are out enjoying and being active in the National Park are also welcomed.

First prize is £250, second prize is £150 and third prize is £50.

This year the judges are also looking for images capturing the amazing wildlife of the South Downs and the winner will receive £100.



Entries close at 12:00 GMT on Friday 18 October 2019

Laura Warren, Events and Engagement officer for the National Park, said: "September and early October are a beautiful time of year to take pictures of the National Park, with amazing sunsets and an array of colours in the treescape.

"People may have a picture on their mobile phone of the National Park taken over the summer, so please do consider sending it in to our judging team.

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"We've had a steady stream of entries so far, but want to encourage more people to make the most of these autumn days and take some great snaps! Landscape, wildlife, history, people – there's so much material to inspire the photographer."

To more details and to download an entry form please visit <https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/care-for/enter-the-south-downs-photo-competition/>

Things to do in the South Downs this September

Find these and more events across the National Park and submit your own events at southdowns.gov.uk/events/



- Discover the horrible histories and wonderful wildlife of South Downs heathland on 7 and 8 September as the **Secrets of the Heath** festival returns to Petersfield.
- Enjoy a walk in the National Park and take a picture for our **photo competition**. You can win up to £250!
- Join the **Inspired by Nature** workshop day at RSPB Pulborough Brooks on 14 September. Hone your creative photographic and writing skills and enjoy some fantastic food.
- Explore Iron Hill, near Liphook, Hampshire, in a free ranger-led **health walk** on 16 September. Just turn up!
- Visit Amberley Museum for the **Autumn Bus Show** on 22 September. Explore more than 40 exhibits and discover a working print shop, the only one of its kind in the South of England.

YOU SAY:

Do you have a story you want to tell about the National Park? A burning issue that you think needs to be addressed? Please let us know!



To submit a comment for our newsletter please email newsletter@southdowns.gov.uk. For a fast and direct response to your questions please email info@southdowns.gov.uk

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