

SOUTH DOWNS NEWS

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SOUTH DOWNS
NATIONAL PARK

WORK AND PLAY IN YOUR NATIONAL PARK

This month:

- **Freshwater gems** Find out about the National Park's ambitious bid to restore and create 100 dew ponds across the landscape.
- **Call to action** Make a pledge to help nature and enter our free prize draw!
- **New trail** Discover a brand new immersive walk at Seven Sisters Country Park.
- **Ahoy!** Win a year's family pass to Portsmouth's Historic Dockyard and its naval attractions.

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

Pond life: Major bid to restore precious havens

An inspiring campaign has launched to bring dew ponds back to the South Downs landscape and help nature thrive.

The "Pounds for Ponds" initiative is seeking to invest around £1m to create and restore 100 ponds across Hampshire and Sussex over the next decade.

Dew ponds are synonymous with the chalk grassland of the South Downs, historically being dug by farmers as a watering hole for livestock and some dating back several hundred years.

These pretty ponds are also havens for all manner of species – supporting around 70 per cent of all freshwater species found in lowland landscapes in the UK.

However, over many decades and due to changes in farming practices, dozens of these wildlife oases have fallen into disrepair or been lost completely. With climate change bringing hotter, drier summers, ponds have an increasingly critical role to play in providing habitat and sources of water for wildlife.



There were once over a 1,000 dew ponds across the South Downs but this number has drastically reduced over the past century

Pounds for Ponds aims to reverse this decline by providing vital



funding to transform derelict ponds and create some new ones.

The initiative is being led by the South Downs National Park Trust – the official independent charity for the National Park – in partnership with Froglife.

Funding, including support from National Lottery Heritage Fund, Bannister Trust and BMW, has been secured to restore more than 20 ponds. The Trust is now looking to raise £800,000 to restore a further 80 ponds.

Jan Knowlson, Biodiversity Officer for the South Downs National Park, said: "We're really excited to be launching Pounds for Ponds to continue the National Park's commitment to nature recovery.

"Dew ponds are amazing, but sadly so many have been lost from the South Downs landscape over the past

Can you take action to help nature and climate?

century. These freshwater habitats are oases for wildlife, providing drinking and bathing water for birds, and a home for dragonflies and other aquatic invertebrates.

"They also make good breeding sites for frogs, toads and newts.

"The wildlife value of ponds is also considerably enhanced where you have a network of them, making it easier for species to move between them, meaning populations are more resilient to climate change.

"Every pound donated will make a big difference and will help wildlife flourish."

A few dew ponds have been restored during previous tranches of funding from the National Park and are already seeing biodiversity bouncing back. The Trust was able to restore a pond at Seaford Head and a recent wildlife survey at the dewpond recorded over 200 species. This included the rare lesser emperor dragonfly nymph, which is the first UK record of its breeding. A dew pond near Arundel (*pictured on P1 with National Park Ranger Sophie Brown*) was restored in partnership with the Norfolk Estate.

Scores of other ponds have been identified for similar restoration work, but fundraising is now needed to make the dream a reality.

Restoring or creating a dew pond involves significant landscaping and planting to create a welcoming environment for animals.



Kathy Wormald, CEO of Froglife, said: "It's fantastic for Froglife to be partnering the South Downs National Park Authority in this

project and to be able to contribute towards the costs of restoring valuable dew ponds. The Pound for Ponds project complements Froglife's Discovering Dewponds which is also working in the South Downs on restoring dewponds and working with local communities to raise awareness of the historical and biodiversity value of dew ponds."

"Pounds for Ponds" is one strand of the National Park's ReNature initiative, which aims to create 13,000 hectares of new land managed for nature over the next decade to help tackle the biodiversity crisis.

Donate to Pounds for Ponds at

www.southdownstrust.org.uk/pounds-for-ponds/

A grant round will be opening in the coming months for possible dewpond restoration projects. To be put on the notification list, please email Victoria Crespi, Grants Officer, at Grants@southdowns.gov.uk



It's gearing up to be a summer of busy bees – both people and pollinators!

We're excited to be launching our brand-new ReNature pledges, inviting people to pledge to take action to help nature and the climate.

The pledges are really simple and easy:

- Make a home for nature
- Give nature a helping hand
- Save water and energy
- Reduce, reuse, recycle & repair
- Buy local
- Do more car free days
- Get creative in nature

We're inviting everyone to sign up to as many pledges as they want to. Simply fill in the pledge form here:

www.southdowns.gov.uk/pledge/

People signing up will automatically be entered into a prize draw to win a **year's membership to The Wildlife Trust** or a **family ticket to Marwell Zoo**. Participants must register before midnight on 1 September for the chance to win a prize.

We'll keep a running total of how many actions people have signed up for, showing how collective action can make a huge difference!

And, if you're visiting one of our visitor centres in Midhurst or at Seven Sisters Country Park, you can also pick up a 'Pledge & Plant' postcard.

Tick off your pledges as you complete them and, when you're done, plant the postcard and enjoy the beautiful wildflowers which will grow. Blooming marvellous!

Please plant your wildflower seed pledge postcards in a garden or pots and not in the countryside 😊

The pledges come ahead of our ReNature Festival, beginning 22 July, which will have a host of in-person and online activities for people to enjoy.

Full details in next month's newsletter!

Blooming brilliant! Huge habitat creation for bees



More than 66 hectares – or 163 football pitches – of lush wildflower habitat have been created in the South Downs National Park to help bees flourish.

As the National Park marked World Bee Day last month, the Bee Lines initiative continues to give a helping hand to struggling pollinator populations by creating wildflower havens at farms, community fields, recreation grounds, road verges, schools, and even cemeteries and golf clubs.

Early ecological data shows that the wildflower planting is helping bees and butterflies bounce back.

It comes after Bee Lines launched exactly four years ago to create a new network of wildflower corridors to help support bees and other pollinators. These insects have been on a steep decline across the UK for several decades and are now under threat from climate change.

New planting effectively creates a “road system” for pollinating insects, allowing them to move through the landscape more easily.

Eighteen projects across Hampshire and Sussex have so far benefitted from a share of almost £95,000 of funding from the South Downs National Park Trust, the official independent charity for the National Park.

Nick Heasman, a Countryside Policy Manager for the South Downs National Park who has been helping to lead Bee Lines, said: “It’s blooming marvellous that thanks to all the donations from the public we’ve been able to create these new havens for pollinators.

“Bees are busy ecosystem engineers and by pollinating flowers they create food for other wildlife and, of course, humans. In fact, one out of every three mouthfuls of our food depends on pollinators such as bees.

“Bee Lines is just one strand of the National Park’s ReNature campaign and it’s incredibly exciting to see nature recovery in action.”

Prince’s Mead School in Winchester has been one of the beneficiaries of the funding (see full list below) and, two years on from the planting, a large section of the school grounds is now well-established wildflower meadow.

School bursar Poppy Hughes said: “The children clearly gain a huge amount of educational value from spending time making observations of the flowers and pollinating insects.

“We have without a doubt seen an enormous increase in biodiversity resulting from the new meadow as the children have identified snails, mice, buzzard as well as many species of butterflies and bees.

“In addition to raising children’s awareness of the importance of pollinating insects in the food chain, the wildflower meadow is also a wonderful source of peace, beauty and tranquillity.”

Sophie Green, of Dales Farm, Northchapel, West Sussex, said: “Our wildflower plantings are situated in the field where our shepherds hut rentals are and we’ve had so many compliments and amazing feedback from guests about how lovely it is.

“We actively encourage little bug hunters, which has been lovely for the children staying in the huts. We are looking forward to seeing how well everything comes back this year and have plans to establish further areas of plantings in the field this autumn.”

To donate visit www.southdownstrust.org.uk/beelines/

Anyone interested in future rounds of Bee Lines funding should contact Victoria Crespi at grants@southdowns.gov.uk to be put on the notification list.

Plant conservation charity Plantlife is supporting the project by providing landowners with advice on establishing and enhancing wildflower habitats.



Celebrating Nature Reserves

New trail at country park



Have you ever been on a walk exploring the countryside, wondered what that bird is or why the landscape looks like that and thought: "I wish we had a walking guide with us!"

Well, dream no longer, because Seven Sisters Country Park has a brand-new guided audio trail for visitors that will help people learn about the incredible landscape and its flora and fauna.

The Cuckmere Accessible Audio Trail connects people with the sights, sounds and seasonal changes of this breathtaking coastal gem that's home to dozens of species, such as chiffchaffs, kingfishers, adonis blue butterflies, and yellow horned poppies.

Perfect for people of all fitness and mobility levels, the trail follows the Cuckmere Miles Without Stiles route along flat concrete, gravel and grass paths.

Walkers simply need to scan a QR code – conveniently located on public benches – to tune in to an immersive audio that delves into the wonderful wildlife at the country park.

The free audio trail is the latest offering at the East Sussex site, which has seen £2m of renovations over the past three years since the National Park Authority took over ownership and management.

Dawn Nelson, Place and Interpretation Officer for the National Park, said: "It's a really wonderful walk with some beautiful scenery and this audio trail adds an extra dimension that helps you immerse yourself in the landscape even more.

"As you travel along the trail you can listen to five unique audios with commentary and soundscapes. Egrets fishing in the salt marsh, crickets stridulating under the dark night skies and skylarks trilling – these are all the stars of this show!"

The country park now boasts a fully-refurbished visitor centre crammed with interesting displays and activities, as well as fully accessible toilets, a grab and go food outlet, water stations, new recycling facilities and dog poo bins.

Further refurbishments to buildings on the 280-hectare site will be completed later this year.



To mark National Nature Reserve Week, Michaela Hawkins takes a look at the importance of these sites at the western end of the National Park.

Hello readers! I'm one of the Reserve Managers working for Natural England in Hampshire and, until recently, I worked for the National Park Authority.

There are nine National Nature Reserves in Hampshire, four of which are in the National Park and they are: Old Winchester Hill, Beacon Hill, Ashford Hangers and Butser Hill.

Across the country there are many more! From the very first six in 1952, there are now 221 NNRS in England.

As well as being havens for wildlife, National Nature Reserves act as outdoor laboratories where learning, science and discovery come together.

Natural England manage Beacon and Old Winchester Hill (*pictured above*) so I thought I would share some fun facts about the two sites:

Old Winchester Hill

- It's a 63.8 Hectare chalk downland reserve
- The South Downs Way runs through the site
- The main feature is that the highest point of the site, at 197m, is the remains of an Iron Age Hill Fort. So the hilltop, ramparts, earthworks and the south-facing slopes are designated as a Scheduled Ancient Monument.
- Sheep are important to help manage the chalk grassland. The breeds used are native Herdwicks and Black Welsh Mountain sheep

Beacon Hill

- It's a 40-hectare chalk downland reserve
- The South Downs Way runs adjacent to the reserve.
- There is also a Scheduled Ancient Monument on this site as well, comprising a barrow cemetery and medieval Holloways
- We're currently monitoring butterflies, plant species and other invertebrates.

Wonderful wanderings

Meet the Ranger!



It's World Female Ranger Day this June, so we caught up with Lead Ranger for the Eastern Downs, Philippa Morrison-Price...

What made you think of becoming a ranger?

I love animals, wildlife, being practical and being outdoors. I

had originally got a place to be a veterinary nurse at a University in London, but after a gap year in South Africa and Tanzania, working with various conservation projects, I got a place to do Nature Conservation in South Africa. I ended up swapping this for a place at Coventry University to study ecology, to be closer to my future wife and build up my experience in this country. It was only after I had graduated and I had a temporary job at East Sussex County Council that I saw a trainee ranger role come up and I realised that was the job for me! I didn't get it though. I had to volunteer for a full year with Kent Wildlife Trust, getting all my tickets, before I was even considered.

What's it like being a ranger in the South Downs National Park?

It's a dream job! I get to work in an amazing landscape with amazingly knowledgeable people.

Can you describe your typical day?

No day is the same. You could be scrub clearing one day, putting in a gate on the South Downs Way or carrying out a survey for butterflies or chalk grassland plants on another. It's hugely dependent on the season, so we tend to work in three-month rotations.

What's the best and most difficult part of the ranger job?

The best part of the job is seeing your hard work pay off. I restored a defunct dew pond a few years ago. What had been a soggy puddle with a tree growing out of it is now a haven for wildlife. I was up there the other day watching great-crested newts bobbing up to the surface, then two grass snakes appeared and swam across it. There are lots of challenges to the role, but that's what makes it interesting!

What's been the highlight of your ranger career so far? I don't think I can name one single thing, it's all in the day to day – the team I work with, the projects that go well, the wildlife you see.

What would you say to any youngster thinking of becoming a ranger? Do it! Get out there and experience what it's like, volunteer, go on guided walks, get to know your local wildlife.

Why do you love the South Downs?

I love the history, the story they tell, the wildlife they support and the opportunities they provide.



Hidden gems and fascinating stories from the South Downs National Park have been revealed as part of an innovative project led by explorer Saira Niazi.

Saira, founder and guide for [Living London](#) which documents wanderings in both urban and rural settings, has helped to produce a "Portrait of the South Downs National Park". The initiative is part of the Campaign for National Park's New Perspectives Bursary, which gives a platform to those voices less heard in our National Parks.

During the spring and summer of 2022, Saira Niazi met, interviewed and photographed people from all walks of life about their unique and personal connections to the National Park.

Saira says: "I've always loved exploring hidden gems and unearthing the stories that surround them.

"My creative practice combines photography and writing – I felt 'Portrait of the South Downs' would be an ideal project to allow me to do the things I most enjoy; explore hidden gems, connect with others and tell stories."

Saira's project beautifully highlights the unique human connection to nature. Everyone has a story to tell and taking time to listen and share can be so valuable and enriching.

Saira says: "Much of my work centres around connecting people and places through story. I felt the New Perspectives bursary would enable me to do this in the context of a landscape I enjoy and feel strongly about."

While working on the project, Saira was granted funding from the South Downs National Park to lead on a separate project that sought to engage people from urban areas by opening the South Downs to them through a series of Community Wanderings projects.

As part of the project, Saira designed and delivered four wandering tours in different parts of South Downs. The project culminated in a series of portraits and a **short film** made by film-maker Luke Baker.

All the material from the project can be viewed [here](#).

Campaign for National Parks is a charity dedicated to securing the future of National Parks in England and Wales.

Delving into Sussex folklore



At the southern tip of England with lofty viewpoints across the English Channel, Sussex has always been a strategic stage where history has played out.

For thousands of years it has been a historical hotspot – a story of invasion, conquest, discovery, innovation, rebellion and romance.

From the 5th century, this beautiful land was its very own Kingdom and had a succession of rulers until submitting to Egbert of Wessex in the 9th century.

Today this enchanting county makes up two thirds of the South Downs National Park. Its heritage is etched into the breathtaking landscape with its forts, castles, chocolate-box villages, forests, cliffs and river valleys.



It's not surprising, therefore, that there are some weird and wonderful tales that have been passed down the generations, some including dragons, witches and fairies!

For **Sussex Day**, Dawn Nelson (*pictured above at Stansted Forest*), Place and

Interpretation Officer for the National Park, shares three of her favourite stories of old...

Knucker Dragon – Lyminster

In Lyminster, near the church, there is a tranquil pool referred to locally as a Knucker Hole. Deep beneath the waters there once lived a fearsome beast named, The Knucker Dragon. Its name is thought to have been derived from the Old Saxon word 'nicor' meaning 'water monster' and this particular beast became the subject of legend when it began a reign of terror over the villagers of Lyminster.

In some versions of this tale, it is said that the dragon within the pool had slept for many hundreds of years until the men of Lyminster, curious as to how deep the water

hole really was, dropped a bell into it to see how long it would ring for. Some say it is still ringing now but either way it definitely woke the dragon that slept there and thus it began rising from the pool each night to eat cattle and even villagers in order to sustain itself.

No one could rid the village of this plague until a wily young chap made a particularly toxic mushroom pie, lured the Knucker out of the hole and convinced it to eat the pie instead of him. Some say that the young man met his fate soon after when celebrating his victory in the local inn. After drinking his pint, he wiped his mouth with the back of his hand and quickly discovered he should have washed them after he had picked the toxic mushrooms.

St Cuthman of Steyning

In another tale featuring a church, it is thought that the church at Steyning was the result of an arduous journey by St Cuthman. Even as a child St Cuthman was saintly. It was observed that whilst watching the sheep on the hill he could draw a ring around them and call on Jesus to help him keep them safe. As he became a young man his parents naturally grew older too and after the death of his father, he and his mother were left destitute and his mother unable to walk. Seeking food and shelter, Cuthman roped himself to a large wheelbarrow and began his journey across Sussex, with his mother in the wheelbarrow. His intention? To find a place to settle and build a church

When the rope on the barrow broke, some farmers in the fields they were walking through took entertainment from the makeshift rope Cuthman had made from hazel and willow twigs. It is said that Cuthman continued on his way unhindered but the farmers' fields were ruin by unseasonal rainfall that same day.

The next time the rope broke, the wheelbarrow was upturned and his mother deposited on the ground and so it was that the church was built on that very spot and that very spot was Steyning.



The Fae Folk Of Beeding Hill

In Beeding the fairies foiled two men's attempt to steal a pig. Whilst they were making their way back across the fields the pig's kicking in the sack they had caught it in had become tiresome and so they stopped for a breather on the hill. What they did not know was that the hill they stopped on was Beeding Hill and famous as the home of the fae folk.

Rested, they picked up the sack with the pig and began on their way once more. They had barely set one foot in front of the other when they heard a tiny voice shouting behind them 'Jim where are you?' The two robbers scratched their heads and looked around for where the voice had come from when to their horror a voice replied, 'I'm here in the sack on his back;'. A talking pig was too much for the pair and they dropped the sack and ran. Of course, it was one of the wee folk that had accidentally ended up on the sack with the pig and thankfully he returned home to his family and the pig ran all the way home too.

Introducing Green South Downs



An exciting new initiative has launched to recognise the business community's efforts to go green and be more sustainable.

Businesses of all sizes across the region are being invited to apply for Green South Downs – a new programme that awards enterprises for taking steps towards helping the environment and local community.

It comes after a successful pilot scheme saw 19 businesses win gold, silver or bronze certificates for taking simple measures to help the planet, such as reducing carbon consumption, reducing water usage, volunteering and creating space for wildlife. Businesses that have so far received awards include a brewery, farm shop, museums, and holiday firms.

The scheme is being launched by the National Park Authority in partnership with Green Tourism.

Businesses that sign up to Green South Downs will receive a step-by-step bespoke package to help them on their journey and will receive training on sustainability and carbon literacy, as well as strategic support around waste management, climate action, nature, and energy.

Firms that have won awards in the pilot scheme are delighted with the journey they have been on.

Ben Ward, CEO of Wonderseeker (*pictured above*), the charity behind Winchester Science Centre, said: "Taking part in the awards pilot actually helped us realise just how much we are already doing. We're thrilled to be awarded Gold!"

The certification is based on Green Tourism's industry-leading assessment framework, which provides a holistic review of a business' sustainability performance, based on three areas: people, place, and planet.



Nick Heasman, who leads Our South Downs enterprise team at the National Park, said: "So many businesses are beginning, or thinking about, their journey to net zero and we want to give them a helping hand."

To apply and find out more visit www.greentourism.com/green-south-downs

SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY Win a year's entry to dockyard!



The South Downs region has a long and celebrated link with Portsmouth and Britain's maritime heritage.

The 1860 edition of "The Forester" described "the oak forest north of Portsmouth" as key to the shipbuilding industry, and to the Royal Navy in particular.

This heritage was recognised seven years ago with the creation of the Shipwrights Way, a 50-mile route connecting Alice Holt Forest to Portsmouth Historic Dockyard, home of the Mary Rose, HMS Warrior and HMS Victory.

A forest has stood in this corner of Hampshire for over 5,000 years. Alice Holt still stretches for a mile in any direction but was originally much more extensive.

A 1635 survey of the forest recorded that it comprised "oak with some beech of full growth and others decaying", valued according to its fitness for housebuilding, shipbuilding and cleaving at £9,997 – almost a million pounds in today's money.

Shipbuilding was again significant for the forest leading up to and during the Napoleonic Wars and, between 1777 and 1788, a staggering 1,800 loads of timber were cut, producing ships similar to HMS Victory.

Today Portsmouth Historic Dockyard is quite rightly the UK's premier destination for naval history.

We've teamed up with the dockyard to offer an amazing prize in this month's newsletter – unlimited visits for a whole year to Portsmouth Historic Dockyard, including its Gosport sites, and entry for up to 2 adults and 3 children. The Ultimate Explorer includes entry to: The Mary Rose Museum (*pictured above*), HMS Victory (currently in scaffolding), HMS Warrior, HMS M.33, Explosion Museum of Naval Firepower, Royal Navy Submarine Museum, Harbour Tours and Action Stations, among others.

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

Those who are already signed up can email "Western Weald" to newsletter@southdowns.gov.uk before midnight on 30 June.

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

Things to do in the South Downs this June

Please follow the links as booking may be necessary. Find these and more events across the National Park and submit your own events at

southdowns.gov.uk/events/



Swanbourne Lake at Arundel in June

- A [new exhibition](#) starts at Petersfield Museum from 13 June and runs until 9 September. Anita Klein is an acclaimed painter and printmaker. Her art is witty, charismatic, warm and poignant. The exhibition presents paintings and original prints that explore the intimacy of motherhood and family.
- Head to [West's Wood Fair](#) near Chichester from 16 to 18 June. The fair will explore the many interesting ways in which wood is used!
- Calling all beer lovers! The [25th CAMRA South Downs Beer & Cider Festival](#) will be held on 16 and 17 June at the Corn Exchange, in Lewes. There will be a selection of 70 beers together with a plethora of real ciders, perries and speciality ciders.
- Dads go free at [Amberley Museum](#) on Sunday, 18 June when there will be a wide collection of vintage and modern emergency vehicles.
- The first Brighton and Hove Walking Festival starts on 24 June, with over 50 free walks. If you like historical tours, nature walks, mindful experiences or you just want to start moving again, have a chat or get out and about, there's something for everyone! This two-week event offers the opportunity to rediscover how good walking is good for us, regardless of fitness or ability. Find out more [here](#)
- Gather around Butser's very own standing stones for stories of the sun and ancient megaliths [for "Stories of Light and Stone"](#) on 30 June.

Pic credits

P2 Dragonfly – Tim Squire; P2 left – Becca Saunders; P3 top right – Tim Squire; P4 right Daniel Greenwood; P4 left Alex Cassels; P6 LillyCantabile; P6 Public Domain Pictures; P7 right NMRN; P8 Sam Moore