



SOUTH DOWNS NEWS

WORK AND PLAY IN YOUR NATIONAL PARK

Welcome to the newsletter for the South Downs.

Send your comments and ideas to us at newsletter@southdowns.gov.uk

We are now in the formal pre-election period (PURDAH) leading up the general election on 8 June.

This means that South Downs News will not be able to cover as wide a range of issues as usual and our "You Ask" and "You Say" sections have been temporarily suspended. Our fuller newsletter will resume in July.

YOUR COMMUNITY NEEDS YOU!

Volunteering isn't only good for the National Park. We know our volunteers come for many reasons and get a lot out of it. They gain new skills, discover more about their local history, make new friends, get exercise and enjoy nature.

Whoever you are, there are opportunities out there that will fit to your specific skills, interests and time.

Are you an outgoing dog owner, who understands the importance of 'taking the lead' and loves talking to people? You'd make a perfect dog walking ambassador. Would you like to know how to identify different plants and animals on your local heath? Maybe biodiversity monitoring, with full species identification training, is for you. The Heathlands Reunited project is currently recruiting for both – find out more at www.southdowns.gov.uk/heaths-need-people

You might be surprised how few permanent members of staff your local museum or nature reserve actually has. These places are almost entirely reliant on the enthusiasm of their volunteers.



Tucked behind the railway station in Lewes lies a 25 acre wildlife site – the Railway Land Nature Reserve.

Owned by Lewes District Council the site is home to the Railway Land Wildlife Trust and their purpose built environmental education centre, the Linklater Pavilion. It is open to the public year-round, hosts school visits, runs events every Sunday afternoon throughout the summer and will run a full festival on 18 June. Helen Meade, Programme Coordinator, is the Reserve's only paid staff member.

"We always need more volunteers so we can do more things."



Volunteers at Petersfield Museum © Michel Focard

“From planning and running our events to supporting school visits, admin, building maintenance and practical conservation. You name it and our volunteers do it!” says Helen. “We only exist because volunteers campaigned for the former rail yards to become a nature reserve and then later raised funds to build the fully accessible Linklater Pavillion.

“We always need more volunteers so we can do more things. I work hard to fit people’s skills and abilities to jobs and I think most people have a lot of fun with it. Some of our events are for families – with crafts, pond dipping or guided walks – but we also host more serious talks on environmental issues.

“Our biggest challenge is the timing. We get a steady stream of volunteers coming forward but not always when we need them.”

The old Police Station in Petersfield recently became the new home of Petersfield Museum. The Museum has a good social history collection, the Flora Twort Gallery, Bedales Historic Dress Collection and the Edward Thomas Study Centre and runs a variety of activities year-round, from family activities during school holidays to monthly adult education talks. A fundraising campaign is underway to meet big plans to improve the museum, its exhibitions and work within the community.

The museum has three members of staff, which makes the 45 volunteers who work there crucial to keeping the galleries and activities running.

“We don't really have a 'typical' volunteer role,” says Katherine West, Museum Curator and Manager, “There are lots of ways people can get involved – from collections care and documentation to assisting with learning activities, leading guided tours and researching and preparing exhibitions.

“It can be difficult to find new volunteers. People have a lot of demands on and options for their spare time. Our challenge, and responsibility, is to make sure that volunteering with us is stimulating and interesting enough to be attractive. We try to match volunteer

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roles to individual skills and interests and have regular Volunteer Forums to gather feedback and improve our volunteer service.”

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With annual Volunteers Week celebrations running from 1-7 June why not find the projects in your community in need of your time?

“There are small groups like this all over the National Park in need of your help,” says Ian Hartle, Volunteer Development Officer for the South Downs National Park. “Getting involved can be incredibly rewarding – you’ll not only learn new skills and meet like-minded people but your support keeps these places open and available for others to enjoy.”

TOP TIPS FOR PROSPECTIVE VOLUNTEERS

We asked Helen, Katherine and Ian what advice they would give to would-be volunteers.

1. Don't assume that you can only volunteer with big organisations. You might make the biggest difference working locally.
2. Volunteering in an area you're interested in will make it more rewarding so do your research and find an organisation which fits you.
3. Don't be afraid to try it out. People who already volunteer are generally friendly, interesting and very welcoming to new people.

Find more local volunteering opportunities, and add your own, on the South Downs Volunteering Map at www.southdowns.gov.uk/volunteering-map/

To find out about volunteering with Petersfield Museum, call 01730 262601 or email curator@petersfieldmuseum.co.uk

To offer your skills to the Railway Land Nature Reserve call Helen on 01273 477101 or visit www.railwaylandproject.org/volunteering



BARN OWL CHICKS HATCH

Our barn owls now have four chicks which hatched between on Friday 19 May and Saturday 27 May.

There's a big difference in size between the oldest and youngest owlets. We're watching eagerly to see what happens next.

Watch the South Downs barn owl cam at www.southdowns.gov.uk/4-chicks-for-the-barn-owls/



Field cricket

INSECTS ON THE HEATH

The heaths of the South Downs can charm you at any time of year but during the summer months, when the purple heather blooms, they become truly magical places, ripe for exploration.

"Our heaths were created by people thousands of years ago as they cleared trees and worked the land," says Bruce Middleton, who runs the HLF-funded Heathlands Reunited project.

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"The soil is poor, exhausted of nutrients, and plants and animals have had to evolve to meet this challenge. Some even require patches of bare earth in order to survive. Today, lowland heath is one of the most threatened habitats in the country – which puts these specialists under threat."

Heathlands Reunited aims to bring existing heaths back to life and join up isolated 'islands' of heath so that rare wildlife such as the Dartford warbler, nightjar and natterjack toad can spread and thrive between them.

With so much to look out for we asked Bruce Middleton about some of the smallest characters to look out for on our heaths this summer, the insects.

Field cricket

In the 1990s ecologists realised that there were less than 100 of the rare field crickets left in the UK – all living on the heath at Lord's Piece common. Through a combination of captive breeding at London Zoo and translocation from the original site as part of a careful re-introduction programme, the tide is slowly turning. On a warm, early summer evening you can hear their chirruping song both at Lord's Piece and on Iping Common where they were re-introduced in 2007.

Minotaur beetle

Named after the mythological half-man, half-bull of ancient Greece, the male minotaur beetle has three 'horns' behind its head and enough strength to roll balls of dung 50 times its own weight over long distances. You might spot its home – a 1cm wide hole in the ground – but probably won't see the larvae as these can be as deep as a metre feeding off dung rolled home by the minotaur.



Look out for the minotaur beetle's home.

Silver-studded blue butterflies

Look out for these butterflies between June and July and take a moment to think of the 'deal' they've made to reach adulthood safely. Their caterpillar feeds on young bell heath shoots, protected from predators such as sand wasps by black ants. When the caterpillar starts to pupate the ants will even carry it into their nest in return for a sweet honeydew which the ants 'milk' from the grub as payment.



Black darter dragonflies

These acid heathland and wetland specialists are better known for living in the West Country, but we are fortunate to have them on many of our greensand heaths. Black with yellow on their bodies, at just 29 to 34mm they are our smallest dragonfly.

Green tiger beetle

A bright green and cream-spotted wing case makes the green tiger beetle easy to spot, out sunning itself on heathland. They move quickly, running or flying, if disturbed and have fierce jaws that fit their aggressive, predator, lifestyle. Their larvae lie in wait for prey, concealed in vertical sandy burrows with only their jaws protruding.

Sand wasp

Look out for female sand wasps dragging an immobilised caterpillar several times their size across the heath. This distinctive solitary wasp will find a sandy area to dig a burrow and store the caterpillar as live food for her young.



Sand wasps grow up to 24mm with a distinctive narrow 'waist' and red and black abdomen.

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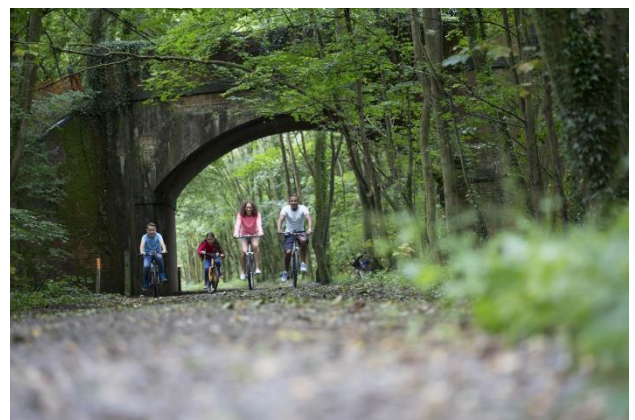
One of the best ways to experience these heathlands is by following the winding route of the Serpent Trail, which snakes its way from Haslemere to Petersfield taking in more than twenty different heaths along its 103km (64 mile) route.

The National Park is running a free six-day guided tour of the trail from 17 to 22 July as part of the Heathlands Reunited project.

Find out more about the free guided Serpent Trail walk www.southdowns.gov.uk/make-the-serpent-trail-your-next-walking-challenge-this-summer

Pick up a copy of the Serpent Trail guide from the South Downs Centre in Midhurst.

www.southdowns.gov.uk/contact-us



YOUR SUMMER OF CYCLING STARTS HERE

Freedom, fresh air, fitness or fun. There are many reasons why people choose to see the South Downs by saddle and we have something for everyone – from new or nervous riders to mountain bikers.

We asked South Downs Cycling officer, Alister Linton-Crook for his recommendations.

Best place for beginners

If you're new to cycling or haven't ridden for a while you'll be looking for a wide, flat surface well away from traffic where you can build up your confidence. There are a number of trails following old railway lines across the National Park which fit your needs, open to cyclists, walkers and horse riders, many of which start and end at current railway stations. Try the Downs Link from Shoreham, Centurion Way which starts in Chichester, the Meon Valley Trail and the new route linking

Petersfield to Queen Elizabeth Country Park, both in Hampshire.

Best place to venture out on the roads

If you're feeling ready to explore further, but would like a bit of support or company, it's time to join a group ride. Bespoke Biking will be running a series of short guided rides out from Winchester this summer, perfect if you want to go a bit further afield but might need a hand fixing a puncture. Visit bespokebiking.com for more information.

Find more organised rides and cycle events at www.bigbikerevival.org.uk/

Best mountain biking

Seeking a more adrenaline? You can find dedicated bike parks with graded trails at Queen Elizabeth Country Park, Rogate Downhill, Stoughton Forest, Steyning MTB and Friston Forest.

You can also find and download plenty of off-road routes in the South Downs on the View Ranger app.

Best bike challenge

From its new official start point at Winchester City Mill, the 160km South Downs Way follows the chalk ridge across the entire length of the National Park all the way to Eastbourne. This is one of only two National Trails that can be cycled in full and along the way you'll pass through farmland, ancient woods, butterfly-rich grassland and finish by the chalk cliffs of Beachy Head at Eastbourne. Or reverse the route to finish in Winchester, the Saxon capital of England.

The crazy people will do it in a day but we prefer to take two or three and stop to smell the flowers along the way. Find accommodation on the South Downs Way National Trail site www.nationaltrail.co.uk/south-downs-way

Best place to find out what you're made of

You've been cycling for a while and are feeling confident on the road, but how do you measure up against other cyclists? Ditchling Beacon, north of Brighton, with a height gain of 143m in 1.45km and a top gradient of 16% is the place to test your mettle. In the 2014 Tour of Britain, Michael Kwiatowski completed it in 4 minutes and 5 seconds but just getting to the top in your lowest gear for the first time will make you feel like a King of the Mountain.

Best place to watch cycle racing

On Sunday 11 June the streets of Winchester will close for a day devoted to cycling at the Criterium, a 1km circuit race around the city.

If you're quick there may still be time to register for our own South Downs National Park Family ride first thing in the morning around the closed street circuit, although places are limited. After that races will run throughout the day. We'll be based in the Abbey Gardens with pond dipping, fun and games, face-painting and crafts to get our younger riders in the spirit of thing so please come and ask us any questions about exploring the National Park – by bike or other means.

Other cycling to watch this summer include the Tour of Sussex stage race from 6 to 9 July

[www.tourofsussex.com/news-which-takes-in-Ditchling-Beacon, Goodwood and Beachy Head](http://www.tourofsussex.com/news-which-takes-in-Ditchling-Beacon-Goodwood-and-Beachy-Head)

Find out more about cycling in the National Park www.southdowns.gov.uk/cycling/

Visit the South Downs Way National Trail website at www.nationaltrail.co.uk/south-downs-way

FIVE THINGS TO DO IN THE SOUTH DOWNS THIS MONTH

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



- Enjoy living history at Bignor Roman Villa
- Introduce your dog to cattle in our Hairy –not Scary event
- Join a walk celebrating Sussex Day
- Watch millers attempt to break a world record at Winchester City Mill
- Visit a farm for Open Farm Sunday

ON THE GROUND

Don't forget to say hello if you spot our rangers and volunteers out working in the National Park. Here's a taste of what they achieved in May 2017.



- **Surveyed for rare Duke of Burgundy butterflies** near Winchester, found some egg-laying and occupying areas cleared last winter.
- Found **kidney vetch and horseshoe vetch, both food for blue butterflies, establishing** near Winchester, following work to restore chalk grassland.
- Received a **special mention for work supporting silver studded blues** on Chapel Common in new *The Butterflies of Sussex* book.
- Started the summer events season by **attending the Green Fair in East Meon and Plumpton Open Day**.
- Made **good progress in controlling invasive species on the River Meon** to improve the important bankside vegetation for wildlife.
- Began a **new season of water vole latrine surveys** on the River Meon to monitor release sites.
- Gave **landowner advice on managing river banks, meadows and woodlands** as part of the Meon Valley Partnership Project.

- **Finished staking and binding hedge** at Stedham Campsite.
- Spent a week **restoring the historic flint wall at Stanmer**
- **Cut out invasive rhododendron** on Stedham Common, started **tackling invasive Himalayan balsam** along Rother near Chithurst and **scythed bracken** from a heathland site in Hammer Wood, Chithurst.
- **Gave talks on South Downs Dark Night Sky** Reserve to Crewkerne Astronomy Society, Ebernoe Parish, the Society for National Parks Staff and Bepton Parish.
- Moved **cattle above Steyning for conservation** grazing to new area of chalk grassland.
- Gave a **lecture on Nature Conservation** to Law & Policy Masters Students at Brighton University.
- Carried out **surveys of access land** between Ditchling and Lewes
- Installed **four new South Downs Way finger posts** on Eastbourne Downland, put in **two new kissing gates** on access land, **replaced a stile** and **picked up litter** at Littlington and replaced a field gate at Lullington Heath.
- Worked to **enhance habitat** at Mill Hill Local Nature Reserve and Anchor Bottom Site of Special Scientific Interest.
- Carried out **farmland bird surveys**.

southdowns.gov.uk/national-park-authority/our-work/on-the-ground



Locals and visitors can find out where to eat, buy and enjoy local food at southdownsfood.org

SOUTH DOWNS THIRST QUENCHERS

Will you be marking **International Beer Day** (15 June) with a pint or are you more of a **World Gin Day** (10 June) person?

A quick search on the SouthDownsFood.org Food Finder has revealed at least **six breweries and distilleries in and around the National Park** such as Langham Brewery, Winchester Distillery, Long Man Brewery and Chilgrove Spirits. There's also **11 producers of non-alcoholic drinks**.

So there's no shortage of ways to quench your thirst and support our local businesses this summer.



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southdowns.gov.uk/join-the-newsletter/