



SOUTH DOWNS NEWS

WORK AND PLAY IN YOUR NATIONAL PARK

This month we are:

- Getting very excited about **our second South Downs Dark Skies Festival – 9 to 24 February.**
- **Discovering why slugs are being counted** as part of a project to improve South Downs water quality.
- Revealing **who won the people's choice in the South Downs Photo Competition.**
- Finding out **what the National Park Authority is doing to support South Downs farming.**

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

WE'RE GOING ON A SLUG HUNT...

Perhaps not a hunt exactly, perhaps more of a slug audit. But what does counting slugs have to do with a project to improve water quality in the Brighton & Hove area?

Charlotte Ely is a Geography undergraduate in her final year at the University of Sussex but since last October she's been going out every fortnight – come rain, shine, frost or snow – to bait and count slugs on two farms near Brighton. Her carefully logged results will help to decide whether an innovative way of farming has the potential to be a practical solution to reducing nitrate pollution in our water.

The chalk aquifer under the South Downs provides water to 1.2 million people but, like many aquifers and rivers across the world, it is polluted with nitrates from fertilisers, manure heaps and road run-off. The South Downs National Park Authority is a lead partner in the Brighton ChaMP project, which has been working with two local farmers to test a new method for helping to protect our drinking water using a system called 'cover crops'.



"Winter is a vulnerable time for water pollution in the National Park as bare fields and higher rainfall allow more nitrates in soil to leach through into the water," says ChaMP Project Manager Aimee Felus. "Six different crops have been planted on two fields that might otherwise be left bare over the winter together with a control area which has been left bare. Our researchers are going out regularly to test which plants are taking up the most nitrates."

"Some other trials suggest that cover crops can increase slug numbers which would be bad news for water – more slugs might mean that farmers need to use more pesticides – but there are also reports which suggest that cover crops help to increase numbers of natural slug predators. Charlotte's work will help to provide much-needed evidence so we don't see a

situation where one type of pollution is swapped for another.”

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Charlotte has been monitoring numbers of two different species of slug: *Derocerus reticulatum* (light brown with specks) and *Arion hortensis* (black with an orange underbelly).

“A lot of time the number of slugs I find seems very dependent on the weather,” says Charlotte. “Like us they like to stay huddled away when it’s really cold. But they do love the rain.”

“Although we won’t have conclusive results until the spring it’s encouraging that I’m finding similar numbers of slugs on the control area as some of the cover-crops which might suggest that the crops don’t increase their numbers.”

Other trials have seen a reduction in nitrate leaching of up to 59% and, in some European countries, cover crops are now compulsory in areas where drinking water is particularly vulnerable. Water companies have to monitor supplies carefully. If nitrate levels rise above 50mg per litre then water no longer meets the Drinking Water Standard and can’t be supplied to homes.

The Brighton ChaMP partnership is made up of the South Downs National Park Authority, the Environment Agency, Southern Water, Natural England, University of Brighton, Brighton and Hove City Council and the Living Coast; all striving together to protect the aquifer.

Find out more about the Brighton ChaMP for Water project www.southdowns.gov.uk/brighton-champ-for-water/



WHO WON THE PEOPLE’S CHOICE?

Thank you to everyone who voted for their favourite picture from the South Downs Photo Competition 17–18! We are very pleased to announce that the winner is Tom Hard for his photo ‘Sussex Farming’.

On a misty, golden morning a small flock of sheep are caught on a hillside, looking down across a wooded patchwork of fields. An atmospheric shot with great depth and light that completely captures the spirit of the South Downs as a growing place.

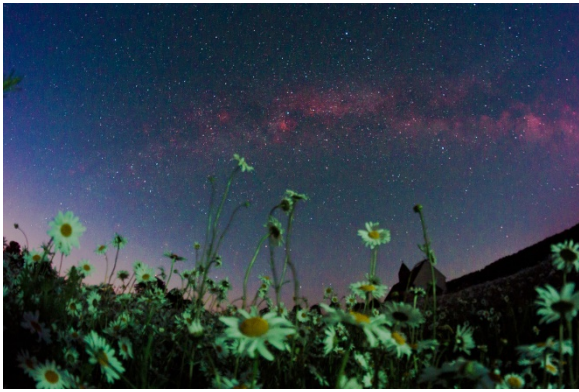
Congratulations to Tom from Horsham in West Sussex who, with almost 40% of the public vote, wins £100.

Feeling inspired?

Our 2018/19 competition theme will be ‘Perfectly Seasoned’.

Spring, summer, autumn, winter – every season in the South Downs has something to offer. But our judges are looking for something different. Can you impress them with a fresh perspective on the changing seasons in the National Park?

Watch this space for details on how to enter.



EMBRACE THE DARKNESS

South Downs Dark Skies Festival returns for 2018. Celebrate the South Downs International Dark Skies Reserve with star parties, wildlife encounters, talks and family activities happening every day across February half-term.

The South Downs Dark Skies Festival returns for a second year this February with the flagship event, Stargazing South Downs, on Saturday 10 February. As well as outdoor stargazing (fingers crossed for a clear night) we'll have indoor talks and activities, including a chance to meet some of the wildlife that loves the night and workshops revealing the secrets of taking stunning dark-sky photography, as well as outdoor stargazing.

New for 2018 is 'Cycle the Solar System' a 4.5km family bike tour with science-artist Nick Sayers exploring our Solar System at a billionth of its true scale.

'Dark-Skies' Dan Oakley, Lead Ranger at the South Downs National Park, said:

"The star-studded skies above our heads are as valuable as our beautiful rolling landscapes and we want people to embrace the darkness.

"The South Downs Dark Skies Festival is our chance to show-off our skies, share tips on how to enjoy them and explain why they are worth protecting."

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The South Downs Dark Skies Festival runs from Friday 9–Sunday 24 February 2018

Find times, locations and booking details for all festival events at

www.southdowns.gov.uk/darkskiesfestival2018

For the full programme for Stargazing South Downs and book your place on an astrophotography workshop visit

www.southdowns.gov.uk/stargazing-south-downs/

Please note that some events are weather dependent, please check our website and social media before travelling.



LOCAL STORIES NEEDED TO INSPIRE SOUTH DOWNS HEATHLAND ARTIST

Local communities are being asked for stories about their history and heritage to help inspire seven new pieces of art, linking seven heathland sites in the South Downs National Park.

Graeme Mitcheson has been commissioned to create the seven pieces as part of the Heritage Lottery-Funded Heathlands Reunited Project, a partnership project led by the South Downs National Park Authority.

The seven heathland sites being considered: Wiggonholt, Iping and Stedham, Lavington Plantation, Short heath Common, Graffham, Black Down and Woolbeding

"We know people love their heaths and use them for exercise, to walk their dogs, for play and for relaxation," says Katy Sherman, Heathlands Reunited Engagement Officer. "Through Heathlands Reunited we want to inspire them to get to know their own heaths – importantly get involved in caring for these amazingly

rich havens. The seven pieces of art will tell the story of why heaths are so important – not just as individual commons but as part of a wider network of heathland.

“Graeme’s work will reflect what each community values about their heath – from their history and past economic importance to their rare plants and animals. We are right at the very start of this process so if you have a story which you think could inspire him, your community and future generations please let us know.”

Graeme Mitcheson has created public art all over the UK including sculptures in Belfast, Northumberland and North and South Wales. He will begin putting together designs in April 2018 after a 6-month period working with trained volunteers who will be collecting oral histories and carrying out archive research with the local community.

Graeme Mitcheson, Artist and Sculptor said “I am excited to get to know the sites and work with the local communities surrounding the heaths to create inspiring and engaging pieces to convey their stories for future generations to enjoy. I try to create tactile artworks that engage the viewer on a number of levels and take much inspiration from the natural world.”

“Through Heathlands Reunited we want to inspire [people] to get to know their own heaths better, visit and explore other heaths, and, most importantly, get involved in caring for these amazingly rich havens.”

Heathlands only exist today because of human intervention over thousands of years. This means that if heathlands aren’t actively managed by people – by local communities, conservation groups, the National Park Authority or others – they will be lost alongside the rare and endangered species that live there. Today heathland covers just 1 per cent of the South Downs National Park, mostly separated into small ‘islands’ where isolated plants and animals are far more vulnerable to local extinction.

Eleven organisations have joined forces to expand the existing heathland left in the National Park. By creating

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stepping-stone scrapes and wildlife corridors the Heathlands Reunited partnership hope to create an area of heathland greater than 1,200 football pitches over a 5-year project.

If you would like to find out more, volunteer or have stories that you would like to share please contact heathlands@southdowns.gov.uk

To find out more about our appointed artist visit his website here: www.chisel-it.co.uk/about

WIN A TELESCOPE!

Want to get even closer to the skies? Thank you to the lovely people at 365Astronomy in Worthing we have this beautiful entry-level telescope to give away!

Anyone who signs up as a new member of the Newsletter during February will automatically be entered but to make sure our existing readers don’t miss out you can also enter by emailing us at the address below before 28 February 2018.



The telescope is a KONUSMOTOR-70 70MM/900MM f/12 Motorised Refractor Telescope which retails at £148.00.

To enter the draw email us with the subject ‘Thank you 365Astronomy – Embrace the Darkness!’ to newsletter@southdowns.gov.uk

[Read the draw terms & conditions](#)

Visit the 365Astronomy website www.365astronomy.com

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/



- **Stargaze, learn about the skies, ask astronomers questions, meet some of the wildlife that loves the dark, and learn skills to take amazing astrophotography** – at Stargazing South Downs in Midhurst
- **Cycle the Solar System** on the Centurion Way
- **Join stargazing parties** at Old Winchester Hill, Butser Ancient Farm, Pulborough Brooks, Harting Down, Devil's Dyke, Whitehill and Borden, Goodwood and Eastbourne.
- Join **family stargazing crafts and activities at Amberley Museum** and stay late to see the stars themselves.
- Be **introduced to astronomy** by Hampshire Astronomy Society.
- **Become a family of space explorers** at Gilbert White Field Studies Centre.

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 January 2018.

- Gave a talk on the Meon Valley Partnership to West Meon Women's Institute who asked lots of questions and shared their own stories about the River Meon.
- Carried out six days work on chalk downs near Winchester with Butterfly Conservation as part of their work to improve habitat for the nationally threatened Duke of Burgundy butterfly.
- Coppiced hazel and felled larger field maple at Avington Park, supporting the landowner with woodland management.
- Ran a Big Community Work Party at Lynchmere Community Orchard to prune the fruit trees.
- Restored Iping Common Geocache (we're not going to tell you where exactly...)



- Tidied brambles, rhododendron, dead birch and overhanging willow in Midhurst Common car park with Friends of Midhurst Common, Mind and Cowdray Estate.
- Completed this season's work at Verdley Wood to improve the habitat for the rare pearl bordered fritillary. They'll be heading back to monitor in a few months' time.
- Arranged Scheduled Monument Consent for improvement works to Heyshott cross dykes.

- Completed coppicing in one coop at Church Copse and at Clapham Woods – the latter in partnership with Butterfly Conservation.
- Put up a barn owl box at Peppering High Barn.
- Cleared scrub at: Bepton Down Long Furlong SNCI; Oxenborne Down, Butser Hill with Hampshire County Council; Lancing Ring LNR; Pepperscombe SNCI; Warren Valley; Long Man SSSI; Mill Hill LNR/LWS; Anchor Bottom SSSI and Beeding Hill SSSI.
- Cleared scrub at Riverside Park in Newhaven in partnership with East Sussex County Council to create toad habitat.

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- Cleared fallen trees on South Downs Way, widened rides in West Dean Woods to support the population of wild daffodils and planted trees at Kingston Field.
- Supported a volunteer group from MIND at Graffham Downland Nature Reserve
- Carried out pond maintenance work at Telscombe, clearing reed mace;
- Restored a pond at Truleigh Hill YHA as part of the Rampion/National Grid Habitat and Access Improvement Project.
- Continued management (stump treatment) of Mile Oak Local Wildlife Site.

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

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

Please note that only contributors who submit their full name and address can be considered for publication though we will not publish your full address. Please make it clear whether you are speaking on your own behalf or that of an organisation you represent. We reserve the right to shorten comments and edit where necessary.

MOST ASKED...

Send us your questions about a particular area of work in the National Park.

Answering this month is: Nigel James. One of four Countryside and Policy Managers at the National Park Authority, Nigel leads on the National Parks work on the future of farming in the South Downs



WHY IS FARMING IMPORTANT IN THE SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK AND TO THE NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY?

Farming comprises 85 per cent of the South Downs National Park's landscapes – impacts on farming will therefore impact the National Park.

Farming here is very diverse and made up of a mosaic of farm types including small family run farms and large farming estates both of which have stayed with the same family for generations. The mixture of livestock and arable farming gives the South Downs a very special feel.

Whatever happens to farming after we leave the European Union (EU) will directly impact the South Downs so we need to work with our farmers and the Government to get it right.

HOW HAS BECOMING A NATIONAL PARK CHANGED THINGS FOR FARMERS?

We endeavour to listen and talk to our farmers as much as possible because we need to understand the reality of farming in the National Park. Farmers are running a business and like any business it needs to be sustainable and economically viable. We therefore need to make sure that anything we ask them to do fits in with their farming / business operations.

There are great opportunities for diversification within the South Downs – for example, we're seeing some farmers introducing camping and other

accommodation. Becoming a National Park does not mean that the South Downs will not change and that farming will not develop.

WHY ARE FARM CLUSTERS IMPORTANT?

A group of farmers working together to achieve environmental benefits on a scale that they couldn't achieve alone has got to be a good thing. The six independent, farmer-led, farm cluster groups (which cover approximately two thirds of the National Park) are working to improve and connect habitats on a landscape scale for threatened species, including a number of farmland birds.

To promote the work of the farm clusters and encourage joint working between the groups we're developing a range of joint / shared training courses. The first one we're about to run is training on social media so expect to see more news about their work coming out in the near future,

Farming in the South Downs is perhaps going through its greatest time of change within a generation. The UK hasn't had its own agricultural policy in over 40 years and with the decision to leave the EU the Government is going to need to test things out to find out what works, what doesn't and what's practical. The new 25 Year Environment Plan talks about public money being used for public goods – but what would that actually look like on the ground? We see huge potential for the farm cluster groups within the South Downs to test out possible future schemes.

NEXT MONTH: Learning, outreach and volunteering in the National Park

Amanda Elmes answers – send your questions to newsletter@southdowns.gov.uk



BARN OWLS RETURN

If you were following the sad story of our web-cam barn owls last summer you'll remember that we not only lost the chicks but were very concerned for the adult female, who hadn't been seen returning to the nest for several days before the chicks died.

Ranger Angela was checking our cameras this month and found footage of a pair of barn owls back roosting in the box. While it is possible that the male might have found a new mate we think it's likely that our female survived.

Let's hope that this year we'll be able to watch them successfully raise a new family!

Find out more about Project BOB (barn owl boxes)

www.southdowns.gov.uk/discover/wildlife/species/barn-owl-boxes/



ADVICE AND OPINIONS NEEDED TO HELP SUPPORT THE SOUTH DOWNS

The Trust is carrying out research to make sure we get our messages right and are looking for people to participate in two-hour focus groups on 20 April 2018. We'll be looking at the issues and projects in the National Park where we should be prioritising our support; getting feedback on our fundraising material;

and understand whether people would be happy to be asked for funds in other ways, such as a gift in your Will. We really want to make sure we "get it right" and do not upset our potential supporters.

Your guidance will help us get our tone right, be as efficient as possible and could help us raise thousands for the National Park in the future.

If you are willing to volunteer, we would be very grateful if you would complete this online survey with your preferred time and contact details

www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/SDFocusGroups



LUCKY 13!

The South Downs Way National Trail came in at number 13 on ITV's Top 100 British Walks presented by Julia Bradbury and Ore Oduba.

The eagle-eyed may spot South Downs Assistant Rangers Chloe and Kate who were interviewed hiking up Helvellyn in the Lake District which came in at number one. Excellent work ladies!



itv Britain's Favourite Walks: **Top 100**
Yesterday 7.30pm
Which walk is the nation's favourite? Julia Bradbury and Ore Oduba present a guide to the finest 100

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