

# SOUTH DOWNS NEWS

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NATIONAL PARK

## WORK AND PLAY IN YOUR NATIONAL PARK

This month:

- **Pond life** Find out about the important wetland habitats that have been restored to provide new havens for flora and fauna.
- **Biodiversity boost** Learn more about a new scheme that will mean businesses can invest in nature recovery.
- **New cycle link** Find out about a new access route at the western end of the National Park.
- **Summer day out!** Win a family ticket to Winchester Science Centre and Planetarium!

As always, please send your comments and ideas to us at [newsletter@southdowns.gov.uk](mailto:newsletter@southdowns.gov.uk)

## Vital ponds for nature get new lease of life

**Eight derelict dew ponds have been lovingly restored and are now thriving with new life, thanks to funding of over £90,000 from the South Downs National Park Trust.**

After years of stagnation and dwindling water levels due to climate change, eight dew ponds across Sussex and Hampshire are once again providing a haven for scores of fauna and flora, including dragonflies, toads, frogs, pond skaters, water boatmen, yellowhammer, gypsywort and meadowsweet.

Work is due to start soon on restoring a further two ponds, near Emsworth, that will help support populations of white turtle dove.

The turnaround has been made possible by the "Pounds for Ponds" initiative, which is looking to restore around 100 dew ponds across the South Downs National Park and was launched exactly one year ago.

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.



Ranger Lawrence Leather next to restored pond at Seven Sisters

However, over many decades and due to changes in farming practices, dozens of these wildlife oases have fallen into disrepair or been lost completely. Climate change, with warmer, drier summers, has compounded the problem, meaning these bodies of water are more important than ever in providing refuge and drinking water for animals.

Jan Knowlson, Biodiversity Officer for the National Park, said: "Seeing these restored dew ponds springing back to life is absolutely amazing and just shows how nature can flourish if given the chance.

"There actually used to be around 1,000 dew ponds across the South Downs landscape, but this number has fallen dramatically over the past century.

## New route is completed



### The western gateway to the National Park at Winchester has been improved with a new 750m off-road route for cyclists, equestrians and walkers.

Work has now been completed on the Chilcomb Link, giving people a much safer, wider and more enjoyable route away from the busy A31.

The 100-mile-long South Downs Way exits Winchester by bridge over the M3 and A31, with the route then splitting into two for about a mile.

Up until recently, cyclists and horse-riders had to use a narrow tarmac path in the verge of the A31, just a metre or so away from the busy road.



The new multi-user path away from the road has been funded by the National Park Authority, with the work carried out by Hampshire County Council.

New interpretation has been installed on the route, giving people a warm welcome to the National Park and fascinating information about the landscape and wildlife.

Colin Carré, Project Manager for South Downs National Park Authority, said: "It's wonderful to see the Chilcomb Link completed and to see people making good use of it.

"Improving access to the countryside from urban areas is one of our priorities and this new path allows people to enjoy the views and tranquillity away from the busy traffic.

"It's significantly improved accessibility for Winchester residents and visitors and is likely to form part of future circular trails."

Magdalen Hill Down, run by Butterfly Conservation, is nearby and improvements have been made to the habitat to benefit wildlife, particularly butterflies and moths.

"Restoring these bodies of water is a really good way of tackling biodiversity loss because these ponds support almost three quarters of all freshwater species found in lowland landscapes like the South Downs.

"I'd like to thank everyone who has donated to make these restorations possible, and we're excited to be able to restore even more in the future. Pounds for Ponds is just one strand of the National Park's ongoing ReNature initiative and a concerted effort over the past three years has seen huge amounts of new habitat being created including woodlands, hedgerows, wetlands and wildflower meadows."

One of the dew ponds that has been restored is at Chantry Hill, West Sussex.



Lead Ranger Tom Garriock recently visited the dew pond and said:

"The pond is looking great! It has filled up nicely over the winter and is already providing a haven for wildlife. I've seen invertebrates such as whirligig beetles, pond skaters and water spiders on the surface of the pond, as well as farmland birds including yellowhammer and meadow pipit coming to drink."

A dew pond at Magdalen Hill Down, near Winchester, has also been given a makeover, thanks to a grant of £13,000 to Butterfly Conservation.

Fiona Scully, from Butterfly Conservation, said: "There are already water boatmen and pond skaters whizzing about, and birds are drinking from it."

Over the past year alone, Pounds for Ponds has raised £200,000, meaning that more dew ponds can be restored in future funding rounds. Funding support has come from National Lottery Heritage Fund, Bannister Trust, BMW UK **Recharge In Nature project**, Southern Coop and Swire Charitable Trust, together with scores of donations from individuals. Because restoring dew ponds is expensive, the South Downs National Park Trust needs to raise an estimated £1m in total to restore 100 dew ponds.

The pond restorations have been supported with practical and ecological advice from Froglife, as well as National Park ranger teams.

Donate to Pounds for Ponds at [www.southdownstrust.org.uk/pounds-for-ponds/](http://www.southdownstrust.org.uk/pounds-for-ponds/)

To be put on the notification list for future rounds of funding, please email Miriam Swan, Grants Officer, at [Grants@southdowns.gov.uk](mailto:Grants@southdowns.gov.uk)

The full list of restored ponds: Magdalen Hill Down, Winchester; Rewell Wood, Arundel; Chantry Hill, near Storrington; Nepcote Green, Findon, near Worthing; Gallops Farm, Findon, near Worthing; The Rails, Alfriston, Foxhole Pond and Newbarn Pond, Seven Sisters, East Sussex.

Work is due to start on restoring two ponds at Church Farm, Stoughton, near Emsworth.

# Biodiversity scheme is launched at summit



**The fight against biodiversity loss took a huge step forward as the South Downs National Park announced a new nature recovery scheme for businesses of all sizes.**

The South Downs becomes the first National Park in the UK to open up a formal scheme for voluntary biodiversity gain to the private sector – meaning that firms of any size across England can invest in high-ethic, effective nature recovery.

The announcement was made as delegates from across the sector gathered at the National Park’s headquarters for a summit on ways to accelerate nature recovery through green finance.

The Voluntary Biodiversity Credits scheme is the latest among a growing package of green finance measures being offered by the South Downs National Park Authority.

Over 500 hectares – equivalent to more than 800 football pitches – of land on farms and country estates across Hampshire and Sussex have already been earmarked for biodiversity restoration through future green finance investment.

Announcing the new green finance scheme at the summit last month, Tim Slaney, Chief Executive (Interim) at the South Downs National Park, said: “This is a first for UK National Parks and underlines our commitment to tackling the biodiversity crisis through innovation.



“There is now a real appetite across the corporate sector to demonstrate first-class environmental integrity, meet national targets and invest in the planet for future generations and that’s exactly what Voluntary Biodiversity Credits can deliver.

Biodiversity Credits can deliver.

“This growing desire to invest in the environment dovetails with an ever-expanding need in the land and farming sector to diversify and find new revenue streams.

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Both sectors can work harmoniously together and National Parks can be the facilitator.”



The Voluntary Biodiversity Credits scheme is being launched in partnership with **Earthly**, a leading UK NatureTech company whose team of experts seek to drive investment in high-integrity nature projects around the world.

The voluntary scheme builds on the expanding role of the National Park Authority following the introduction of mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain earlier this year. creation, through green finance including consultancy services, woodland carbon creation, and nitrate offsetting.

To find out more about Voluntary Biodiversity Credits visit this [webpage](#).

Here are some images from the summit:



## Guardian gets makeover



**“The Guardian of the South Downs” has been given a fresh lick of paint and is looking more impressive than ever.**

Last month volunteers re-painted of The Long Man of Wilmington at the eastern tip of the National Park.

It followed the “Adopt a Piece of History” campaign, run by Sussex Past, to ensure the care and guardianship of heritage and landscape.

The re-painting was the finale of a fundraising campaign launched in December 2022 to support the work of the Sussex Archaeology Society, which owns and cares for the iconic hill figure.

The campaign has raised more than £10K to date and enabled donors to pay £30 to adopt one of the 770 blocks that make up the outline of The Long Man.

Many of those who donated have had the chance to take part in the re-painting, including Brewers Painting and Decorating, which donated the paint, Polegate Community Centre, staff from a local residential home and others.

The Long Man dates back to the 16th Century and is Europe’s largest portrayal of the human form. The mysterious monument has baffled archaeologists and historians for hundreds of years. Fertility symbol?



Ancient Warrior? Male or Female? We may never know!

Greg Talbot, General Manager of Sussex Past, said: “This is such an important day for us and demonstrates the enormous community spirit here in Sussex. The love and care for such a precious part of our heritage will ensure that it is enjoyed for generations to come.”

Sussex Past is the trading arm of Sussex Archaeological Society and was founded in 1846.

In the National Park, it also cares for Lewes Castle and Museum and Anne of Cleves House Museum & Gardens.

## Sand martins bounce back



**Sand martins are being seen in record numbers at a wetland centre thanks to conservation work.**

This spring the beautiful birds have been busy nest building at Arundel Wetland Centre, which has specialised nesting banks for the avians.

The birds have been returning each spring since 2017 to raise young in the nesting banks that are built directly into the wildlife hide.

Every spring, swirls of sand martins move through the site, returning from winter homes in Africa and Europe as part of mixed flocks with house martins and swallows. More and more martins have been remaining at Arundel each spring to nest in the specialised hide, with its two artificial nest banks of pre-drilled nest holes.

A record 38 nests were found in the nesting banks after the martins migrated last autumn. The size of the colony has almost doubled every year – with two pairs of birds in 2017, three nests in 2019, seven nests in 2020 and 15 nests in 2021.

Visitors can watch the sand martins from the unique viewing hide nestled between the two banks.

Reserve Manager Suzi Lanaway, who works for the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust (WWT), said: “In 2022 we had 24 chambers used



of the entire hide with five of those nest chambers have been used every year for the past three years.”

The “Sir Peter Scott Centenary Sand Martin hide” – named after WWT’s founder – opened in April 2010 and attracted its first sand martins in April 2011 when two pairs began nest building, but sadly abandoned it after a few weeks. It wasn’t until June 2017 that two more pairs of sand martins moved into the nesting chambers.

If you would like to see the sand martins, [WWT Arundel Wetland Centre](#) is open 7 days a week.

## Conserving built heritage

## In search of the Adonis...



**Self-confessed butterfly fanatic Tim Squire, a ranger for the Eastern Downs around Brighton and Eastbourne, writes about his search for one iconic insect this spring.**



Last week I visited a farm in the Eastern Downs to try and find the famed Adonis blue butterfly. With its electric blue wings, this insect is found on our very best chalk grassland sites. I have seen the Adonis blue at this location before and was hoping to catch up with

this downland jewel. I could not find one though.

This year they seem to be very late emerging. They have two broods - an early brood that takes to the wing in May - and then a second larger brood, progeny of the first, that peaks in August. They love the short-grazed turf of the warmest south facing slopes, of which there are only a few on the Downs.

This particular farm that I visited has a lovely south-facing slope on which the National Park Authority has been working with the landowner for years. As well as brilliant chalk grassland, it has the remains of an ancient Bronze Age Field System.

We have been clearing the mature scrub, both to restore the chalk grassland and to reveal the archaeology so that the ridges of the old field system, or lynchets, are once again visible.

The Adonis blue might have eluded me last week but I still had the pleasure of watching some of the admittedly less vibrant, but equally beautiful, downland butterflies.

Aptly named, the dingy skipper was one of the first butterflies I saw on the site. It has a rustic charm and delicate beauty when viewed up close when it is very fresh and first on the wing.

Its smaller cousin, the grizzled skipper, is slightly more stylishly marked and a great butterfly to find in the spring.

A good consolation prize for not finding my Adonis!



**The National Park has been helping to support young people looking for new careers in building conservation.**

Through our Sustainable Communities Fund, support has been given to the Sussex Heritage Trust to deliver “taster day” opportunities to try out building conservation crafts.

The workshops took place earlier this month at the Weald and Downland Living Museum, in Singleton.

Twenty seven students from Chichester College and Crawley College, and young people at the start of their careers with local construction businesses, got the opportunity to try out four different building crafts: practical timber repairs, brickmaking, hurdle making, and wattle and daub.

Connor said: “Wattle and daub was good fun – it was weird to use cow dung as a wall!”

Sam said: “Making bricks from scratch has taught me a new skill and given me lots of confidence to learn new things.”

Tim Slaney, Chief Executive (Interim) of the National Park Authority, said: “Our approach to the built environment in the National Park is landscape-led and a key aspect of this is incorporating traditional materials and construction methods that respond to a location, its history and landscape features.

“The heritage within the National Park’s towns and villages is extraordinary – with over 160 conservation areas, more than any other National Park in the UK, and more than 5,800 listed buildings.



“It’s wonderful to be helping the next generation of building conservation craftsmen and women who will be vital to keeping this region so special.”

## London art gallery comes to South Downs village



An evening embrace, by photo competition winner Richard Murray

### A renowned London art gallery is hosting an exhibition of the winners of the National Park's photography competition.

The Woolff Gallery, which is famous for its contemporary art displays, will be coming to The Barn, Froxfield (pictured below), on the weekend of 22 and 23 June.

The exhibition will showcase an impressive collection of photography selected from the National Park's Annual Photography Competition.

The winning photographs will be accompanied by Woolff Gallery's stable of innovative contemporary artists.

Nick Woolff, founder of the gallery and who has organised the Hampshire exhibition, said: "The exhibition aims to present the beauty of the South Downs National Park and its variety of animals, vistas and night skies, alongside a varied selection of over 40 internationally-acclaimed contemporary artists and sculptors."

There will also be an outdoor sculpture garden during the weekend.

Entry is free.

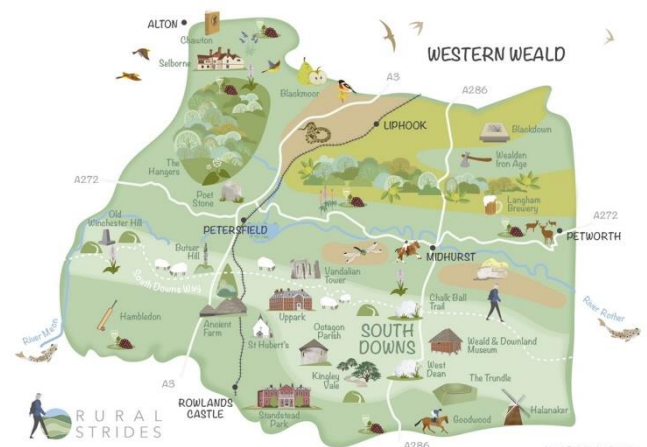
The exhibition will be open from 11am to 6pm and include some interpretation about the habitats of the National Park.

The exhibition has been sponsored by Hambledon Vineyard and Triple fff Brewery, based in Alton.



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## Discover the wonders of the Weald as new walks launch



### Avid walker Malinka van der Gaauw, who founded Petersfield Walking Festival, writes about a new opportunity to explore a lesser known section of the National Park.



Enjoy walking and learning about the nature and landscape around you? Well, why not come and explore the Western Weald this summer with a Rural Strides' Western Weald Wednesday Walk. Whether you are a walker or wanderer I warrant that a walk around the Western Weald will be worth your while!

On Wednesdays (mostly) throughout the summer, from June to mid-September, you can take your pick of leisurely, guided walks to explore and better understand the Western Weald's unique landscape, history and general splendour. The walks programme includes:

- Walk The Chalk - there is much more to this soft white substance than meets the eye
- The Flintstones - never look at a piece of flint or flint wall the same way again
- Dead to Yew - learn about the 'Hampshire Weed's' connection with churchyards
- Up The Garden Path - a chance to not only explore Woolbeding Gardens, but also to experience it within the local landscape

Some of the walks will be starting from the South Downs Centre, in Midhurst.

Wondering where to find the Western Weald? Well, it is the area at the western end of the National Park, where chalk meets trees and Sussex meets Hampshire and Surrey. It's a term used to describe an area unified by nature rather than marked by administrative boundary. Being the bulbous end of the national park, it comprises much more than just the prominent chalk ridge. The inclusion of the Weald provides that extra dimension and complexity to the landscape, not found elsewhere in the National Park. **Find out more and join a walk here.**

## What is conservation grazing?



**Sussex Grazed is a meat box scheme sourcing high quality, grass-fed animals from the South Downs and is focused on promoting sustainable food production. Laura Hockenhull, development officer for Sussex Grazed and Land Use Plus, explains what the often-misunderstood term of “conservation grazing” means.**

Grazing animals tend to have a bad reputation when it comes to environmental concerns. In fact, we at the Brighton and Hove Food Partnership advocate for a **reduction in meat consumption** as an environmental measure.

Following on from our **article** about the importance of **chalk grassland** and how our **Sussex Grazed** meat box scheme is aiming to support its recovery, the **Land Use Plus** team have been investigating what “conservation grazing” means.

On its surface, conservation grazing uses animals to clear scrub and manage grasses. Different animals serve different purposes; cattle wrap their tongues around grasses and rip them out, opening up the sward so that new plants can move in. Sheep nibble away at grass bringing the height down, and some breeds even enjoy brambles. Goats eat just about anything! Ponies can be particularly useful in creating mosaic habitats due to their sporadic grazing style and tendency to trample scrub. In general, animals can access areas too steep or remote to be managed by machinery, and go about things in a more “natural” manner.

There are several types of grazing considered to be useful in conserving grasslands, and perhaps the most widely known is “mob” or “mobile” grazing. This technique involves grazing land fairly intensively for a brief period before moving on. Animals are not returned to this patch of land for a minimum of 40 days. This mimics migration patterns and the traditional farming that helped create this habitat, as well as **removing excessive nutrients** from the soil and redistributing them.

For a deep dive into this surprisingly complicated term, read our emerging conservation grazing **blog series**.

Shop Sussex Grazed on the **Open Food Network**. The next two shares are on 28 June and 12 July with collection from the Food Partnership Club House at Waterhall, just outside Brighton.

## Win a free family day-out!



**Would you like to win a free family day-out this summer holiday to learn all about the natural wonders of us, our planet and the universe?**

This summer Winchester Science Centre and Planetarium is hosting “Fiesta”, an exciting children’s festival of curiosity with the theme of the Olympics and Paralympics!

You can adventure outside to enjoy interactive activities, perform on mini-stages and compete against your friends and family in the stunning backdrop of the National Park.

Inside the science centre, you will be able to enter the curious world of our bodies and discover the science of us.

Visitors can also try out the “Bug Olympics” and find out the answers to questions such as: Are you as fast as a dragonfly? Do you have the accuracy of a Bombardier Beetle? Are you as strong as an ant? You will be able to join forces with your friends and family to take on the bugs of the South Downs and beyond.

It wouldn’t be the Olympics without an epic opening ceremony, so you can have a go at creating the sounds of nature with musical instruments.

Have you ever wondered what it takes to be a superstar athlete at the Olympics and Paralympics?

The Science Theatre will be hosting a brand-new science show – “What Happens: Our Body and Exercise”. Exciting experiments and inspiring demos will bring this energetic topic to life in an exciting 20-minute live show.

Meanwhile, in the planetarium, there will be a live presenter-led show called Solar System Adventure.

We’ve teamed up with the science centre to offer a free family ticket, including the planetarium, for two adults and up to three children.

People signing up to the newsletter during June will be automatically entered into the draw. Those who are already signed up can email “1896” to **newsletter@southdowns.gov.uk** before midnight on 30 June. Sign up to the newsletter **here** and see competition T&Cs **here**.

The tickets will be valid up to and including 2 September.

## 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/](https://southdowns.gov.uk/events/)



- **Graffham Festival 2024** takes place from 14 to 23 June and is offering an action-packed line-up of events. Set in the heart of the South Downs between Midhurst and Petworth, there will be more than 25 events across 10 days, with something for all ages and all tastes – concerts, a floral celebration in the church, an artists' studios trail, open gardens, films, a talk by arguably Britain's top sculptor, painting and singing, cabaret, a revue, children's activities and much more. Among the top music names booked are the Benedetti Foundation Ambassador String Quartet, Future Talent's young musicians, top folk duo Noble Jacks and an American Songbook cabaret trio. The world of theatre is represented by Shake It Up Shakespeare, while internationally renowned sculptor Philip Jackson share secrets from his workshop.
- Find out about the untold story behind world-famous modern art collector, patron, and self-described 'art addict' Peggy Guggenheim (pictured left), who was at the centre of the 20th-century art scene and lived at Yew Tree Cottage near Petersfield from 1934 to 1939. "Peggy Guggenheim: Petersfield to Palazzo" opens on 15 June and runs until October at **Petersfield Museum** and Art Gallery.
- The tranquil three-acre gardens of **Fittleworth House** will be open to the public on 12 and 19 June and then again on 10, 17, and 24 July (2pm to 5pm). The house was built around 1720 from locally quarried stone as a home for the squire of the village. The stunning garden contains both formal and informal areas with much emphasis on wildlife and habitat creation.
- Celebrate Father's Day at **Stansted House** on 16 June and enjoy free admission from 1pm to 5pm for all Fathers. Enjoy a true upstairs, downstairs experience this Father's Day as you visit the family seat of the Earls of Bessborough. Explore the stunning State Rooms, once used to entertain politicians, actors and royalty, and learn about Frederick and William Ponsonby's experiences during the Battle of Waterloo in the Ponsonby Room. You can then journey downstairs to discover the extensive Servants Quarters, including the Butler's Pantry and the Old Kitchen. For younger visitors, there will be a special trail around the House to enjoy.

### Pic credits

P1 Jeff Travis; P2 right Charlie Hellewell; P3 left Lewis Watt; P4 right Cam Parfitt; P5 left Neil Hulme; P5 right Weald and Downland Living Museum;