

SOUTH DOWNS NEWS

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SOUTH DOWNS
NATIONAL PARK

WORK AND PLAY IN YOUR NATIONAL PARK

This month:

- **Wonderful wetlands** Find out about the £1.7m lottery funding that will help to restore internationally-important wildlife sites and help raise awareness about water.
- **Christmas is coming!** Learn more about the festive fun taking place across the South Downs.
- **Advent Calendar Quiz** Test your South Downs knowledge for a chance to win a luxury hamper!
- **Win a £50 voucher!** Wake up and smell the coffee at one of the region's best roasteries.

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

Massive cash injection to help precious wetlands

A huge funding boost will help restore precious wetlands across the South Downs region and help raise awareness about the vital importance of water in all our lives.

National Lottery Heritage Fund has awarded £1.7m to the "Downs to the Sea" initiative, which will increase and restore a network of vital wetlands across and around the South Downs National Park.

Downs to the Sea will help carry out much-needed restoration work to a number of internationally designated wildlife sites, such as RSPB Pulborough Brooks (*right*) and Pagham Harbour in West Sussex. The initiative will restore 15 ponds in the National Park to create biodiversity hotspots and support the movement of wildlife between sites, increasing resilience to a warming climate.

A range of activities are also planned to connect people with waterways, including volunteering to help rivers and social prescribing to tap into waters' benefits for health and wellbeing.



It comes as wetlands are under increasing threat from climate change, water usage, pollution, flooding, drought, and fragmentation. Some two thirds of all freshwater species



are supported by ponds and yet the UK has lost half of all its ponds since 1900. In the South Downs National Park, a survey of pond locations showed that almost 70 per cent are in poor condition, or have disappeared from the landscape, resulting in large swathes of downland where no surface water is available for wildlife.

The initiative is a partnership between the South Downs National Park Authority, South Downs National Park Trust, RSPB, Brighton & Hove City Council, Western Sussex Rivers Trust and Writing Our Legacy.

Tim Slaney, Chief Executive (Interim) of the South Downs National Park Authority, said: "This significant funding is wonderful news for the South Downs National Park, its surrounding communities and the wider area.

"With a network of rivers, chalk streams, ponds, wetlands, coastline and a major aquifer, the South Downs is already a landscape of many important 'blue' spaces that support both nature and people.

Win a hamper worth £100

"Yet, like so many parts of England, these water environments are under increasing threat and it's absolutely vital that we work together to protect and enhance this precious resource, in terms of quality, scarcity and, where appropriate, access to enhance our well-being. With this funding and alongside our partners, we're looking forward to restoring and improving vital wetlands, ponds and rivers, increasing the landscape's resilience to climate change.



"We also want to increase awareness of the pivotal role that water plays in all our lives, connecting people to water for its health and wellbeing benefits and also helping to upskill local communities to be able to look after these watercourses."

Downs to the Sea will have two main strands: water in the landscape and water in people's lives. On the landscape side, a number of schemes are planned:

- Wetland Restoration in the Arun Valley – delivering vital restoration works on a string of functionally-connected nature reserves down through the Arun Valley to the coast, at RSPB Pulborough Brooks and Amberley Wildbrooks, and at Ferry Pool wetlands, part of RSPB Pagham Harbour and Medmerry. These sites are internationally designated for their wildlife but need urgent investment to help increase biodiversity and build climate resilience.
- Up to 15 dew pond restorations across the National Park in, working with landowners.
- The restoration of the historic village pond at Falmer, led by Brighton & Hove City Council.

On the people side, there will be:

- Volunteering and apprenticeship opportunities around the monitoring and maintenance of watercourses.
- The creation of "Water Champions" to help lead community-based action and raise awareness of the importance of water in the landscape.
- A range of activities, including social prescribing, to help people experiencing loneliness, anxiety and depression.
- Schools will receive fun and interactive assembly presentations and workshops, supporting the National Curriculum Rivers topic with local information and ideas on how they can help their water environment.
- Led by Writing Our Legacy, there will be creative opportunities for those who may not have had access to wetlands before.

Work will now take place to appoint a project team and further updates on the initiative will be provided. For updates visit www.southdowns.gov.uk/downs-to-the-sea/



How good is your knowledge of the South Downs?

Our ever-popular Advent Calendar quiz returns next month for the chance to win a beautiful hamper packed with gorgeous goodies worth £100.

Each day there will be a new door to open, revealing a fun quiz question covering all manner of topics, including wildlife, history, geography, general trivia, popular culture, and Christmas, of course!

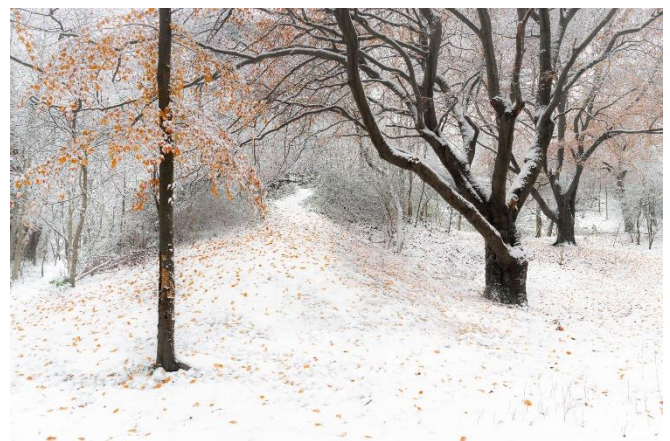
We'll be giving away a runner-up prize of a bottle of Upperton Nebula sparkling wine, lovingly made right here on the sunny slopes of the South Downs National Park.

Jeff Travis, PR Officer, said: "We started the calendar five years ago and it's grown in popularity ever since.

"As well as the questions, there's lots of images, video and trivia about the National Park and it's a great way to learn more about this very special area. It only takes a moment of your time every day and is a fun way of getting into the mood for Christmas. Be sure to sign up before 1 December to get the reminders as you only have one day to open each door. Good luck with the competition!"

Sign up here:

<https://southdownsnationalpark.adventcalendar.com>



Festive magic comes to the South Downs!



A winter wonderland of festivities is coming soon with a bumper line-up of events across the National Park.

From insights into the winter celebrations of Romans, Celts and Edwardians, to festive fayres with chestnuts roasting and carol singing aplenty, there's something for everyone to enjoy over the next few weeks.

Seven Sisters Country Park, near Seaford, will be hosting its popular Christmas Market over the weekend of 7 and 8 December.

Entry is free and there will be 25 gift stalls spread across the historic pump barn, while over in the nearby Salthouse Farm House there will be lots of merriment with live music and Christmas carols.

There will be no shortage of festive fare for people to enjoy with mince pies, Christmas cookies, festive coffee and, of course, mulled wine.

The National Park's Communications and Engagement team will also be attending, sharing ideas for Christmas walks, the best stargazing spots this winter and fun facts about the South Downs.



Richard Ayres, Visitor Service Manager at Seven Sisters, said: "Come and celebrate with us and get into the festive spirit! Our market stalls will include pottery, clothing, jewellery, prints, artwork, local

produce and homeware. It promises to be a wonderful weekend and is also a great way of supporting local, independent businesses."

Meanwhile, people will be able to explore Stansted House, near Rowlands Castle, as the Edwardian Mansion is beautifully decorated for the festive season.

Enjoy an 'upstairs, downstairs' experience as you stroll through the house and admire the traditional decorations.

Learn about how the Earls of Bessborough celebrated Christmas and discover more about the Queen Mother's visit in December 1939 before moving downstairs to learn about the servants' experiences during the festive season.



Stansted House will be open for free-flow visits on Sunday 8 December and Sunday 15 December.

Over at Butser Ancient Farm, near Waterlooville, there will be the opportunity to find out about the yules of yesteryear. "Midwinter's Magical Quest" will allow visitors to slow down, reconnect with nature and explore the ancient folklore of winter.

Set against the backdrop of Butser's historic buildings, this immersive, family-friendly event will journey through time to experience the winter customs of the Saxons, Romans, Celts, and Neolithic peoples.

Kristin Devey, Commercial Manager at Butser, said: "It's an exciting alternative to the traditional Father Christmas experience, and has a message of the simple blessings of winter.

"Our beautiful houses will be open where families can meet the Rowena The Saxon Lady of Yule, Felix the Saturnalia Lord of Misrule, our Deer Queen and Holly King, do make-and-take natural crafts and warm themselves around a crackling fire for stories with hot, mulled drinks and sweet treats."

The quest is running three times a day on all weekends in December, from 7 to 22 December.

Historic towns and villages across the National Park will be hosting Christmas events, including **Petersfield** where the Square will boast over 100 stalls on 8 December



selling everything from handmade gifts to locally-produced food and drink. The centre of the town will come alive with festive cheer with a street party and tree lights switch-on on 7 December.

In Lewes, the picturesque streets will boast an array of stalls for the **Christmas Makers Market** on 7 December, with artisanal crafts, local delicacies like Sussex cheese, mulled wine, and festive performances by local choirs and musicians.

In **Midhurst**, the annual Street Party and Christmas Tree Light Switch will take place on 6 December, with a Santa's Grotto, music and businesses staying open late with a cheeky mince pie or two for customers.

For more festive events in the National Park, visit www.southdowns.gov.uk/events/events-calendar/

City hub for National Park

Torc will go on display



A gold torc believed to date from the Iron Age will be going on display in Lewes.

Five years ago a metal detectorist discovered the torc near Pulborough and now two fragments have undergone detailed analysis by the British Museum.

The research, led by Dr Sophia Adams, suggests the fragments to be the first evidence for an Iron Age gold torc from Sussex, with the artefact now estimated to date back to between 2,300 and 2,400 years ago.

The British Museum believes it formed part of a spectacular object, signifying status and power in late prehistoric society and hinting at powerful connections between Sussex and the Continent.

After its discovery five years ago, and following formal reporting to the Portable Antiquities Scheme, the torc was subject to analysis and examination, confirming it qualified as Treasure under the stipulations of the Treasure Act 1996.

Sussex Archaeological Society subsequently launched a funding bid to acquire the artefact for the Society's collection last year.

The Society intends to place the gold torc on public display at its Barbican House Museum in Lewes from spring 2025.

Emma O'Connor, Museums Officer at Sussex Archaeological Society, said: "The Iron Age gold torc fragment is a unique and beautiful object, and it is wonderful that the Sussex Archaeological Society has been able to acquire the torc, for it to be displayed and accessible within the county of its discovery. This is a significant and important addition to the Society's Iron Age collections.

"The Society is indebted to the generous support from grant bodies and the public alike. The museum is looking forward to welcoming visitors to see this fantastic treasure for themselves in the spring of 2025."

The analysis and examination concluded that the "simplicity of the design belies the complexity of the construction". While the examination concluded the overall shape is typical for 4th to 3rd century BCE torcs found in France, Germany and Belgium, the fact that that the fragments were discovered in Sussex are "particularly revealing", stated the research.



A Brighton school is to become the first "Ambassador School" in an urban setting for the South Downs National Park.

Moulsecoomb Primary School, on Lewes Road, is now proudly displaying its official National Park Ambassador School sign, which means it has become a hub for schools from the city and beyond to access learning opportunities about the landscape, heritage and wildlife of the South Downs.

It comes after extensive work has been carried out to restore the school grounds at Moulsecoomb and create an amazing outdoor learning hub. Work included the restoration of the replica medieval and Stone Age dwellings in the school grounds with the expert input of a local craftswoman and the support of the school grounds team.

The improvements were made thanks to a partnership between the National Park Authority, Brighton and Hove City Council's "Our City, Our World" project and Moulsecoomb Forest Garden.



The project culminated in a fantastic Heritage Open Day event over the summer. Moulsecoomb is the National Park's third Ambassador School, following in the footsteps of Bury CE Primary School and Droxford Junior School.

Amanda Elmes, Learning, Outreach and Volunteer Lead, said: "Ambassador schools are an important way of us extending the benefits of the National Park to local communities and connecting more children with nature. We know that learning outside can present challenges to schools and these ambassador schools are a great solution – offering local learning opportunities within a school setting and delivering curriculum topics that are locally relevant."

Karen Taylor, Deputy Headteacher at Moulsecoomb, said: "We are so proud of our amazing grounds and excited to welcome other schools who want to have the valuable experience of outdoor learning onto our site."

[Find out more here.](#)

“We returned home feeling content after our autumn adventure”



Portsmouth-based mum Nicki Robertz has discovered the restorative powers of the South Downs National Park in recent years. Here she writes about a wet autumn walk with her family at a 2,000-year-old yew forest, discovering ancient trees, fungi and birdsong and returning home breathing a little more deeply than before.

Ten years ago, on a rainy autumn day, you would have found me tucked into the corner of a sofa, reading a book and drinking a large mug of tea – with no plans to leave my comfy spot.

Fast forward to life today and it's all about getting out of the house (whatever the weather!) because as any parent or dog owner knows, things will not end well if you try to have 'a cosy day in'.

So this is how we find ourselves in Kingley Vale National Nature Reserve on an October day, donning raincoats and wellies and eating egg sandwiches under the shelter of a tree!



I'm going to be honest, when we first started doing weekend family walks I thought "well I'll at least get some steps in" but gradually I started noticing benefits other than a high step count. I felt calmer, I breathed more deeply, I had a sense of connection.

There are good reasons for that. Did you know that birdsong is scientifically proven to regulate your

nervous system?

To our ancestors, a lack of birds was a signal of predators so it makes sense, doesn't it, that we would instantly feel more relaxed hearing joyful chirping. And did you know when you hug a tree you release a hormone called oxytocin, which produces that uplifting feeling of love and trust.

I recently learnt a lot about the power of nature walks from Tansy Dowman (@tansyinthewild), who strips away the stereotype of forest bathing and makes it accessible for everyone.



She reminds us that you don't have to dance through the forest wearing a floaty dress and a daisy wreath in your hair to connect to nature – although feel free to do that if you want – you just have to be present and tune into your senses.

Today, as we wind our way through the magical Yew Tree Trail, we listen out for the distinctive crow of a pheasant, we spot faces in the twisted bark of the incredible 2,000-year-old trees, we breathe in the scent of damp air and we run our hands over the moss and bark.

Another mindful activity I've learned is to take 'an offering' on our walks.

My son loves this idea. For example, he'd collected conkers on a previous walk so, today on the trail, he gives a conker to each tree he climbs to say thank you.

Once we've finished exploring the tree trail, we take a deep breath and start the steep ascent to the top of the hill.



Usually I'm so focused on my aching calves that I don't notice much else! But today I look out for the little signs of the changing seasons and am rewarded with fleshy mushrooms, tiny bright berries, glistening spiderwebs and an array of beautiful autumnal colours.

Before I know it, we're at the top, invigorated by our climb and ready for the obligatory selfie with the stunning backdrop of the South Downs!

Then we drive home feeling content, enjoying that perfect combination of rejuvenation and tiredness.

So maybe our parents were right all along: The fresh air WILL do us good. What I do know for sure is, after a day out in the elements, the cup of tea on the sofa tastes even better – another excellent reason for an autumn walk!



Arts project up for awards



An inspiring arts project that underlines the power of National Parks to boost health and wellbeing has been shortlisted for two prestigious awards.

Timescape has been shortlisted for awards from the Royal Society for Public Health, as well as the Park Protector Awards run by the charity, Campaign for National Parks.

It comes as people across the region have taken part in a series of workshops to learn ancient arts and craft techniques, all with a connection to the amazing cultural heritage of the South Downs.

The project has now been running for five years and this year 20 people took part in workshops at Butser Ancient Farm and Fishbourne Roman Palace. Many of the participants were referred to the scheme through social prescribing or because they are facing some life challenges.

A celebration event took place recently at the New Park Centre in Chichester, with participants displaying some of their crafts and artwork.

Laura Sercombe, Director of Landscape and Strategy for the National Park Authority, said: "I felt totally honoured to be invited to join the celebration event for Timescape. The fact that this has been running since 2019 and clearly impacts in the lives of individuals in such a positive way is really inspiring but to be included in something that also felt so personal for those attending was very special.

"The project has given people a helping hand to join a group setting and enjoy not only these wonderful settings but also connect with heritage and the landscape – and that's where the magic happened. I witnessed first-hand real friendship and confidence borne from the project and know this simply would not have happened without Timescape in their lives. It works because people are generous with their time, believe in the project and turn up regardless of how they are feeling on the day."

The award winners will be announced later this year. We're keeping our fingers firmly crossed!

New focus for tourism



Tourism that gives back to our natural environment and makes it better for future generations is one of the new focuses for the National Park.

Alongside the other 14 National Parks, the South Downs is supporting a shared vision towards "regenerative tourism".

While sustainable tourism aims to do "less harm", regenerative tourism goes a step further by leaving a destination better than it was found, including promoting biodiversity, initiating climate action and enhancing the landscape.

Chris Hannon, who is leading work for regenerative tourism for the Authority, explained: "The National Park receives around 18m visitors each year, and as the most economically active National Park in the UK, there's a unique opportunity here.

"If our National Park becomes a leading area for regenerative tourism, it will create a virtuous loop that benefits our landscape, wildlife, communities and ultimately tourists, who will want to come back again and again to experience this special place. We're privileged to already have so many businesses leading the charge on sustainability and, as a National Park Authority, we can play an important role in supporting, connecting and championing them, and inspiring others to be part of the regenerative tourism movement."

Examples include Oakwood West Holiday Cottages, at West Ashling, which uses 100% renewable energy from their supplier, create and maintain hedgerows, bird boxes, wildflower meadows and plant a tree for every stay in their lodges, built from timber sourced on their own land. Visitor Giving is another area that the National Park is looking to grow. Woodfire Camping, at Graffham and Firl, support the South Downs Trust, collecting £2 per visitor at booking to support vital work such as tree planting, pond restoration and planting wildflower meadows for pollinators. Planning is also likely to play a key role in terms of how new and evolving tourism businesses build regenerative tourism into their offer.

Anyone interested in learning more can contact Chris Hannon Chris.Hannon@southdowns.gov.uk

Autumn awe on heaths



As the heathland's rich purple heather loses its summer brilliance, we see bright yellow flowers blossom amongst the spikey gorse. Rust-coloured bracken, and golden russet grasses give the surroundings a feel of copper and brass. The landscape takes on a more tranquil atmosphere.

Autumn also brings misty mornings, and the work of spiders is particularly noticeable during this time as the dew clings to their delicate cobwebs which glisten in the early light. Late bees visit gorse flowers

Wildlife is preparing for winter, building up reserves and finding shelter. Berries, seeds, and insects become critical resources, as birds and small mammals gather what they can before the cooler months. Reptiles, such as adders and common lizards, will take advantage of the last warm days to bask in the sun and soak up heat. Later they will begin to seek out suitable hibernation spots, deep in tree roots, rock crevices, or burrows that will protect them from the coming frost.



While some of the distinctive heathland birds have travelled abroad for warmer climates, others are buzzing with activity preparing for winter. The Nightjar is heading to Africa,

but Dartford warblers are becoming more visible as they forage in the increasingly bare vegetation. They can be seen darting in and out of gorse bushes, using the dense cover to stay safe from predators and chilling winds. Stonechats - named for their call like two stones being knocked together - often perch prominently atop heather and gorse. This is a good time of year for birdwatchers to get an unobstructed view.

Autumn is a peak time for fungi on heathlands, and this habitat comes alive with mushrooms that thrive in the acidic, sandy soil, all playing a crucial role in the nutrient cycle of these ecosystems.

Autumn on the heathlands isn't just a time of change for wildlife - it invites us to slow down and consider our own pace, to appreciate the natural world around us.

If you're looking for activities near you, keep an eye on the [Heathlands Reunited](#) event page.

Will Dickson, Heathlands Engagement Ranger

Win a £50 voucher to café!



Who doesn't love a warming cup of tea or coffee on a chilly winter's day?

EDGE Tea & Coffee is an award-winning family-run Sussex business spanning three generations, expertly roasting coffee and blending tea since 1981.

The historic Dutch barn, at Ford, is the heart and soul of EDGE, an escape amongst the hedgerows and the perfect spot to find a moment of calm.

Across the roastery's courtyard is the EDGE café, which welcomes dog walkers, cyclists and anyone interested in a spot of people watching for a coffee and a chat.

Poppy Chandler, from EDGE, says: "Relax in our courtyard, smell the warm aromas of coffee roasting and bring your pup along for a treat too.

"When it comes to coffee, we do not like to compromise. We travel the globe in search for the world's top 5% of beans, for you to enjoy at home or in our café.

"Adjacent to the café you'll find our EDGE Store stocked full of local goodies. You'll find the whole range of our specialty coffees, loose leaf teas, and treats from Sussex bakeries, independents and local artisan suppliers. At our in-store refillery, when you bring in your own container, or use one of ours, you'll receive a cheeky 15% discount on your coffee. Win for the planet and a win for your pocket!"



We've teamed up with EDGE Tea & Coffee to offer a £50 voucher to spend online, in-store or in the EDGE Café.

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

Those who are already signed up can email "Sip, sip, hooray! It's tea time" to newsletter@southdowns.gov.uk before midnight on 30 November.

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

Things to do in the South Downs this November

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/



- Calling on Dark Skies fans! Last chance to see the **immersive installation of Mars** at Chichester Cathedral, which ends on 10 November.
- Meet the members of the Bentley Wildlife Wood Carvers and see their hand-made models of wildlife in wood at **Arundel Wetland Centre** on 10 November. The carvers display their beautiful work and demonstrate carving techniques. Drop in for a chat – many pieces of work are for sale, with 10% of sales donated to Arundel Wetland Centre
- Join a guided walk, entitled “**War Footing**”, from Iping Common on 12 November. On the 6.5-mile walk you will travel back through 1000+ years of military history, discovering the imprint of war upon the landscape of the Western Weald.
- On 16 November **The Goodwood Hotel**, near Chichester, is welcoming one of the UK’s best-known stand-up comedians, Russell Kane and his entrepreneur wife, Lindsey, who have turned their passion for increasing people’s health spans, as well as their lifespans, into a rapidly growing business. Join Russell, Lindsey and Stephanie for a special afternoon of conversation as they expand on how they approach the ageing process, how gut health is key to a healthy lifespan and, of course, a whole heap of quick-witted hilarity too! Ticket revenue will be donated to The Samaritans.
- Head to **Gilbert White’s House and Gardens**, Selborne, from 21 November to 21 December for a lights festival with a difference. The venue will be using renewable energy sources, solar power and low-level lighting with environmental consciousness at its core, remembering Gilbert White and his internationally important legacy to ecology. Fun for all the family, this is a chance to make new memories and discover how you can make changes to help wildlife and the environment around you.
- Are you aged 16 to 25 and want to make a difference to the South Downs National Park? A free **Youth Action Day** is taking place at Seven Sisters Country Park on 17 December, with a focus on nature recovery. Immerse yourself in the wonders of nature as we explore the stunning landscapes and diverse wildlife of the Seven Sisters area.

Pic credits

P1 RSPB and Tim Squire; P2 Robin by Corinne Kozok; P2 Wolstonbury Hill by Matt Goddard; P4 right Ann Purkiss; P6 left Steph Horne; p8 Sam Moore