



SOUTH DOWNS NEWS

WORK AND PLAY IN YOUR NATIONAL PARK

This month:

- **Restoring our treasured trees** Find out how a major new tree planting initiative aims to bring trees back into the places that matter most to people.
- **Celebrating outstanding design** Discover the winners of the National Park's first Design Awards, recognising projects that contribute to the landscape, environment and community.
- **One big happy family!** Learn more about the mother otter and her cubs who are proving to be an internet sensation.
- **Festive fun** Find out about our celebratory calendar and ways to beat Christmas stress.

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

Campaign launches to plant thousands of new trees

A major new initiative has launched to plant 5,000 trees across the South Downs National Park.

Coinciding with National Tree Week last month, "Trees for the Downs" will aim to restore trees that have been lost due to pests and diseases, including Ash Dieback and Dutch Elm Disease.

The South Downs National Park Trust, the official charity for the National Park, is now aiming to raise £61,500 to plant the trees.

The campaign will aim to restore iconic trees that have been lost at community spaces and along roads or popular walking routes.

Trees for the Downs is being supported by Hillier, whose garden centres near to the South Downs will be helping with the fundraising drive. Leading horticultural experts from Hillier, who have pioneered disease-resistant trees, will also be growing and nurturing the trees for the Trust to deliver to the community once the fundraising target is reached.



It comes as diseases such as Ash Dieback and Dutch Elm Disease are significantly changing our national treescape. Experts believe Ash Dieback could result in the loss of over 90 per cent of Britain's ash trees in the next decade, while Dutch Elm Disease has already seen the loss of 60m British elms in two epidemics and continues to spread today.

Trees for the Downs will complement existing schemes run by the Forestry Commission and the Woodland Trust, focusing on planting trees at community spaces and along popular routes, rather than larger-scale replanting in woodlands.

Andy Player, who leads on woodland for the South Downs National Park, said: "Trees are a glorious

New celebratory calendar for National Park's 10th birthday



A special anniversary calendar has been created to mark the 10th anniversary of the South Downs National Park.

The beautiful calendar features a selection of some of the most breathtaking scenes from the National Park over the last decade.

The 2020 calendar is now available from the South Downs Centre in Midhurst, West Sussex.

Zara Kelleway, who helps to run the visitor experience at the South Downs Centre, said: "This delightful calendar marks a milestone in the history of the South Downs.

"It celebrates everything that is special about the National Park, from wildlife, to woodland, to wonderful landscapes. It's also a journey through the seasons of the South Downs. We've had a lot of interest in the calendar so far and are expecting it to be popular, not least because it would make a lovely Christmas gift."

The calendar can be purchased for £7.95. The calendar can be purchased via BACS if people call 01730 814810 or email info@southdowns.gov.uk for the details.

Postage is £1.34 for 1st class and £1.03 for 2nd class.



natural asset – they give us air to breathe, support countless species of wildlife, and enrich the beauty of our local environment. As a carbon capturer, they will also be a key tool in tackling climate change.

"But our wonderful trees are under unprecedented threat from an ever-increasing number of pests and diseases. Increasing the number and diversity of our native trees, and carefully introducing new species into the landscape, will be a big help in responding to these threats.



"Trees For The Downs' will be a historic replanting initiative and it's exciting to be able to launch this as the South Downs National Park prepares to mark its 10th birthday.

"Our focus will be on planting trees in places

where people can connect with them and form part of people's everyday life, such as on the walk to school. The point is that trees within our communities are just as important as trees in woodlands.

"We hope the community and local businesses rally round to support the fundraising drive and restore our lost trees. This initiative aims to create a lasting legacy, benefiting communities as they watch these new trees grow and flourish in the years ahead."

Adam Dunnett, a Director at Hillier Trees, said: "I can remember as a child seeing elms dying in my father's garden and in the surrounding woodland. Looking at the skeletons of formally glorious trees was one of the triggers which has made me follow a career in horticulture. To now be able to support the restoration of elms in the beautiful South Downs is a great moment, allowing new generations of nature lovers to experience the beauty of elms growing in the countryside."

And Andy added: "Disease-resistant elm will be key in the replanting as, ecologically speaking, it's the closest match to ash and supports many of the same insect and butterfly species.



"However, we'll be looking at a range of native species for the replanting. The focus will be the 'right tree in the right place'."

For more details on the campaign and find out how to get involved by visiting www.southdownstrust.org.uk/trees-for-the-downs/

Winners announced for Design Awards



The Innovation Award winners pick up their trophy

The winners have been announced for the South Downs National Park's first Design Awards, recognising outstanding design projects in the first decade of the National Park.

Architects, local community representatives, designers, and planners gathered at the South Downs Centre for a special awards ceremony, which was also attended by Ian Tant, President of the Royal Town Planning Institute.

More than 60 nominations from across the National Park were received following the launch of the awards earlier this year. The awards celebrate innovative and inspirational projects that have made a standout contribution to the landscape, heritage, built environment and local communities of the National Park.

The winner of the Non-Residential Category went to Ditchling Museum, in Ditchling, East Sussex. Judges said the scheme "showcases really thoughtful architectural design, respecting and connecting with its history and setting".

In the Conservation Category, the winner went to King Edward VII Sanatorium, in Easebourne, West Sussex. Judges noted that there was "no finer example of conservation architecture" and " marvelled at the consistency and attention to detail".

The winner of the Residential Category was The Riverside House, in South Street, Lewes, East Sussex. Judges were impressed by the way the design team had "exploited this space to its full value, with a robust yet graceful building of high architectural merit".

A special award for Innovation was given to Nithurst Farm, in Upperton, West Sussex. Judges remarked that the scheme "challenged perceptions" to the extent that

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it required its own award category. Judges said the scheme was "groundbreaking" and noted that it was a "bold and intellectual" building.

Meanwhile, more than 1,200 votes were cast for the People's Choice Award, which included an online poll for the public's favourite among 16 shortlisted



Conservation Award winner King Edward VII Sanatorium

schemes. The winning trophy went to Easebourne Community Space, in Easebourne, West Sussex. It was noted that the scheme was an "impressive mix of play area and habitat creation" and a fine example of the "power of using the National Park for health and well-being purposes".

A number of schemes were also highly-commended or commended by the judges, which included members of the National Park's Design Review Panel.

Commenting on the awards, Ian Tant said: "Design is a key theme for the Royal Town Planning Institute and our work this year.

"Put that alongside the fact that 2019 is also the 70th anniversary of the National Parks Act and the combination of National Parks and design are absolutely what the Royal Town Planning Institute is interested in."

Tim Slaney, Director of Planning at the South Downs National Park Authority, said: "I would like to say a huge thank you to everyone who has been part of these inaugural awards, including the many people who took the time to vote in the People's Choice. We're privileged to be able to accommodate these exemplary schemes into the landscape we all treasure."

Margaret Paren, Chair of the South Downs National Park Authority, said: "We believe that it is a privilege to build in a National Park. High-quality design matters to the National Park and to the local communities within it.

"These schemes demonstrate incredible innovation and creativity, using the diverse landscape as a compass for great design.

"With our Local Plan adopted earlier this year and setting the bar high for design excellence, it certainly bodes well for the future of the South Downs National Park."

One big happy family! First footage of mother otter and cubs



Residents at Easebourne Community Space celebrate the win

The full list of winners and those highly-commended:

Non-residential category

Ditchling Museum, Ditchling – Award Winner

Depot, Lewes – Highly Commended

Brook House Studios, East Chiltington – Highly Commended

Weald and Downland Museum, Singleton – Highly Commended

Conservation category

King Edward VII Sanatorium, Easebourne – Award Winner

Gilbert White Museum, Selborne – Highly Commended

Buckmore Studios, Petersfield – Highly Commended

Hound Lodge, Goodwood – Highly Commended

Residential category

South Street (The Riverside House), Lewes - Winner

Timberyard Lane, Lewes – Highly Commended

Black Cat Barn, Cocking – Commended

Innovation category

Nithurst Farm, Upperton – Winner

People's choice award

Easebourne Community Space, Easebourne – Winner

The Flint Barns, Rathfinny - Commended

Follers Manor Gardens, Alfriston - Commended



Adorable footage of a mother otter and her two cubs provides the first definitive proof that the iconic creatures are breeding on the River Meon.

Thought to be locally extinct in Hampshire until a few years ago, the incredible video is further evidence of reductions in river pollution that is allowing the secretive mammals to thrive.

The otter family was captured under the cover of darkness by a wildlife camera installed by the South Downs National Park Authority.

The mother, with gleaming bright eyes, is seen climbing on to a raft – a device used to monitor river-dwelling species. Her two curious cubs are then seen following in her tracks before the trio glide back into the water.

Monitoring the wildlife camera was Dave Strutt, a Volunteer Ranger for the South Downs National Park.

Dave said: "To see an otter is incredibly rare – let alone a mum and her two cubs. After watching hours and hours of waving leaves and reeds, it was a delightful moment to see this otter family appear on the screen. It's a rare treat for any nature lover!"

After tottering on the brink of local extinction, otter populations have bounced back due to less river pollution – which was a historic issue caused by factors such as intensive agriculture. The Meon Valley Partnership, which includes the SDNPA and other partners, has also worked with landowners to help restore river banks.

Elaina Whittaker-Slark, Lead Ranger for the Western Downs, said: "Although a short clip, this video provides a fascinating insight into otter behaviour. We can see the mother checking her territory and the cubs following her. There's a very close bond."

Watch the video on the National Park's [**YouTube channel**](#).

Supporting the next generation of nature custodians



A new nature space that will help children learn about the environment and how to care for it has been unveiled following a huge community effort.

Just one year ago, an outdoor area at Amberley School was an overgrown wilderness of weeds.

But fast forward to today and the space has been transformed into an amazing outdoor classroom, with vegetable and herb patches, a bug hotel and areas for hands-on learning about plants and animals.

There were cheers from schoolchildren, teachers, governors, parents and guests as Amberley School's Nature Space was officially opened by Lady Emma Barnard, of nearby Parham House.

The project is the culmination of months of hard work by the school community, spearheaded by Glenys Rowe, a governor at the school. The transformation was made possible thanks to funding from the South Downs National Park's Sustainable Communities Fund, which contributed £7,500, together with £2,000 from Tesco Bags of Help, and over £5,000 from the Friends of Amberley School. There were numerous other financial donations from local organisations and businesses, as well as donations of labour and of plants.

At the unveiling, Margaret Paren, Chair of the South Downs National Park Authority, said: "This is a truly inspirational and exciting project that will enthuse generations of children to come. It provides them with the opportunity to enjoy and learn about the natural world. As a National Park looking to help create the next generation of custodians for nature, this is just the sort of community project we want to support."

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Jon Gilbert, Headteacher at Amberley School, said: "The Nature Space will provide a significant addition to the children's curriculum at Amberley School. The children will use the space to grow and harvest a range of fruit and vegetables and will learn about the native creatures and plants that live in the South Downs. The Nature Space will provide a new dimension to the children's learning.

"We're delighted with the support we've received from local companies and individuals and with the number of volunteers who have willingly given their time to support this project. Amberley School is clearly at the heart of the community which it serves."

And Jon added: "Special thanks must be given to one of our Governors, Glenys Rowe, for all she has done to turn our vision into a reality."



Margaret Paren, Jon Gilbert, Glenys Rowe and Lady Emma Barnard at the unveiling of the new Nature Space

What is the Sustainable Communities Fund?

Any partnership or other not-for-profit organisations which include social enterprise, community interest companies, voluntary organisations and 'for profit' organisations (these projects cannot be for financial gain to the business) can apply for funding if they believe their project is bringing social, environmental, economic or cultural benefits to a community within the National Park.

Grants are available for up to 50 per cent of the project cost from £250 to a maximum of £10,000. Please note that the criteria of the fund are regularly reviewed and may change without notice.

For those interested in applying for funding, we encourage an initial conversation about your project – please contact the External Funding Co-ordinator Mark Rose on 01730 819219 or email grants@southdowns.gov.uk.

Championing our amazing soil



Aimee Felus, who manages the ChaMP project, marks World Soil Day on December 5 by digging deeper into why soil is so important...and explains how plant power is being harnessed as nature's cleanser.

ChaMP protects the groundwater beneath our feet – a vital resource we all rely upon. But to safeguard groundwater we also need to consider another element which is vital for our well-being: soil. So often overlooked, soil is the living skin of the Earth, performing many important services. Formed from weathered rock, air, water, and living and dead organic material, healthy soil is a key component in healthy groundwater.

So, with that in mind, what are we doing to protect this incredible natural resource? ChaMP is encouraging farmers to use cover crops, which are special seed mixes and planted over winter to grow as an alternative to leaving the soil bare. Cover crops, such as clover or phacelia, grow in the off-season and prevent nitrates being washed through the soil to pollute the groundwater beneath. Over time, cover crops improve soil quality and health, increasing the diversity of organisms in the soil. An amazing natural cleanser and biodiversity amplifier!

To quote environmentalist Tony Juniper: "The living diversity held even within a small amount of soil is dizzying — 10 grams of soil from a healthy arable landscape can be home to more bacteria than there are people on Earth, and that is before you begin to count the fungi, protozoa and more familiar inhabitants present such as earthworms and insects."

The roots of cover crop plants, and the soil-dwelling animals living nearby, allow air and water into the ground. One species of beetle burrows down to a depth of three feet. This creates pathways for water to percolate through soils, reaching down into the chalk and recharging the groundwater.

To make way for the next crop, cover crops can be grazed off or be incorporated into the soil. What goes in to the animals must come out! So both methods increase organic matter in the soil. Healthy soils with more organic matter act as a sponge, holding water.

This is important for preventing drought, and allows gradual recharge of the aquifer, which in the South Downs provides water to over 1.2m people.

Compare this cover crop scenario to bare soil, especially which has been compacted by animals or machinery. This soil, often with low organic matter, allows water to rush straight through or run off rapidly, increasing the likelihood of flooding and soil loss to erosion.

As well as improving soil health and fertility, cover crops also reduce the need for artificial fertilisers, which in turn further improves soil health, and the cycle continues.



With climate change higher

up the agenda than ever before what role can soils play? The answer is that they are one of the star acts! With increasing probability of drought and extreme rainfall, healthy soils provide us with a vital tool to help adapt to these changing conditions.

As well as resilience to climate change, soil can be at the forefront of the battle to capture carbon, locking up carbon dioxide in organic matter, rather than in the atmosphere where it can accelerate global warming.

Healthy soil is vital in the fight against urban pollution too. In many busy urban areas, such as Brighton, pollutants mix with rainwater and wash off the roads. The run-off drains into soakaways, which are chambers bored down into the chalk of the South Downs. This polluted rainwater percolates through the chalk and can become a pathway for groundwater to become polluted.

But there are innovative ways to protect groundwater from this pollution – namely plant and soil power! ChaMP is leading the way in creating rainscapes, which at their simplest are shallow planted areas which soak up road run-off.

Harnessing the power of nature, these rainscapes can break down pollutants through the activity of microorganisms and plants. A complex web of natural processes can remove nitrates, oils and even deal with toxic heavy metals such as lead and arsenic. 'Conan the Bacterium' is one species which transforms lead to reduce its toxicity. It's easy to see how that bacterium earned its nickname! In comparison with traditional piped systems, these rainscapes can remove 80 per cent of pollutants, keeping them out of the soakaways and protecting the aquifer. Healthy soils = healthy life, for humans and the ecosystems on which we depend.

Generosity and goodwill of guests gives big boost



More than £3,000 has been donated by guests at one of East Sussex's most iconic hotels to help protect the South Downs National Park for future generations.

The team from Deans Place, in Alfriston, were beaming with pride as the donation was given to the South Downs National Park Trust, a charity working to support vital community and biodiversity projects across the region.

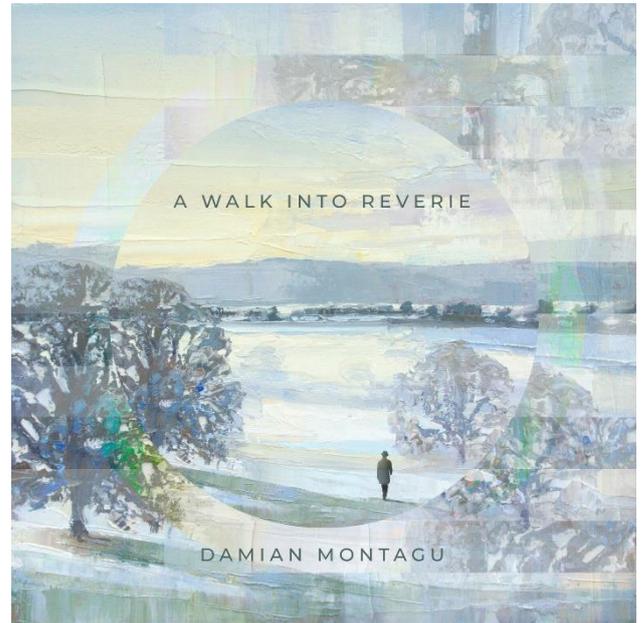
The hotel was the first Visitor Giving Partner for the Trust and the impressive sum was raised in a single year. The initiative means guests have the option of donating on top of the cost of their stay to help protect the extraordinary landscape.

Among the initiatives the Trust is helping to fund are new cycling and walking routes, including for those with limited mobility, protection of endangered species such as the white letter hairstreak butterfly, and re-establishing historic hedgerows to support more wildlife. The charity is also funding a project to ensure more children can learn outside and get closer to nature.

James Dopson, Manager at Deans Place, said: "We're thrilled to be able to help care for one of Britain's most cherished landscapes through this donation. It wouldn't have been possible without the generosity and goodwill of our guests, so a big thank you to them.

"We've experienced an increase in visitor numbers over the past year and it's clear our guests have a deep fondness for the National Park and the South Downs Way. We're so lucky to have this amazing asset on our

Breathtaking beauty inspires melodies



A musician's love of walking in the South Downs landscape has inspired a new album.

Composer Damian Montagu is releasing *A Walk Into Reverie* next month, following the success of his album *In A South Downs Way*.

The collaboration with actor Hugh Bonneville attained the No.1 spot in the UK Classical Charts.

A Walk Into Reverie is a brand new collection of work inspired by Damian's deep love of the breath-taking beauty of his local South Downs area and the profound peace that walking there brings him.

Damian said: "This is a wondrous space for me. I derive so much pleasure and a deep sense of calm by walking alone in the landscape of the South Downs.

"It is during immersion in this tranquillity and stillness that the melodies come to me."

This album is the second in the Walk Upon England project, led by Damian and Stewart, which aims to be a celebration of the English countryside as a source of creativity in music and poetry.

Damian adds: "Spending time in this wonderful landscape is both a productive and meditative experience. We are living in a new digital age; one in which we can now become overloaded by screens and excessive information and technology.

"I very much hope that this album will help to transport people to the kind of peaceful and reflective space that I found myself in whilst writing it."

The album will be released on the Walk Upon England label, supported by Absolute Label Services.

“Our family days-out inspired me to care for nature on my doorstep”



Her inspiration to volunteer came from a hilltop view.

With the innocent eyes of a child, Kirsty Ferris looked out across the skyline from Highdown Hill and saw a scene of stark contrast.

Conurbation met country...and dusky icons of industry were juxtaposed with the intense green expanse of the South Downs.

It was a profound view that stayed with Kirsty throughout her childhood and then inspired her to become a Volunteer Ranger for the South Downs National Park.

Kirsty is now loving helping to protect the beautiful wildlife-rich landscape, just a stone's throw from her home in Littlehampton.

And, for International Volunteer Day on December 5, the 20-year-old is encouraging other young people to get involved and do their bit to help the National Park, including the many “microvolunteering” opportunities such as a two-minute litter pick, tracking mammals or monitoring rights of way.

“I fell in love with the South Downs from those trips to Highdown Hill with my parents,” says Kirsty, who has been a Volunteer Ranger since she was 18.

“You can see where the South Downs ends and the coastal plain with towns like Littlehampton and Worthing starts. It just shows how important it is to

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keep this natural space intact, both for people to enjoy and all the wildlife that depends on it.”

Kirsty juggles being a student with volunteering for the National Park.

She smiles as she recalls just some of the variety of new skills she has acquired – how to put up a fence, use a scythe, and do a survey for dormice.

“I look forward to volunteer days as I come home every time feeling exhausted but happy,” she explains.

“Having time to breathe in fresh air and knowing that I’m making a difference has also benefitted my mental health.

“During stressful exam periods volunteering has given me the chance to relax and think about something else.”

To join the Volunteer Ranger Service, Kirsty underwent training that included learning about countryside management and conservation.



Every week, she has the opportunity to apply for tasks, including coppicing, building fencing, hedge laying, chalk grassland conservation, and improving public access.

Kirsty loves the teamwork and collective impact – being one of 300 volunteers involved with the South Downs National Park Authority to conserve the special qualities of the area.

“Volunteering has meant that I can give something back to an area that has given me so many happy memories,” adds Kirsty, who recently became a Youth Ambassador for the Volunteer Ranger Service and helps to give talks to schools and community groups.

Taking the first step to caring for the National Park couldn't be simpler, says Kirsty.

“Just go out and experience it!” she says.

“I actually think the National Park is probably underused among my age group and it would be great to see more young people connected with nature.

“Ultimately, that's the only way we can save nature. By connecting with it, you can then care for it.”

Kirsty's microvolunteering task:

The two-minute clean

Beach clean, litter pick or path clean, take part when out and about on a dog walk or on the way to work and help reduce the amount of litter dropped.

For more information visit

www.walksaroundbritain.co.uk/pathclean

Beating Christmas stress – the South Downs way!



The Christmas season is upon us and it's meant to be a time of joy, but for some it can be a time of stress, anxiety and disappointment. The high expectations that come with Christmas can be stressful.

Here are five ways you can help beat the Christmas stress and reconnect with the true meaning of the season:

Spend some time in nature

For lots of families, a Boxing Day walk is a Christmas ritual.

But why not make a bit of time to head out for an early morning walk before a day of present shopping, wrapping and baking?

Take some time out and head for the hills and woodlands of our beautiful National Park. It's guaranteed to put you in the Christmas mood.

Get to know your community

Find out what's on locally and get involved!

Whether you're carolling or attending local markets, getting out and about and enjoy the Christmas spirit.

If belting out a few Christmas carols won't reduce your stress levels then nothing will.

See what community events are happening in and around the South Downs this December.

Exercise

It's fair to say that at this time of year many of us allow ourselves a little bit of extra indulgence. After all, when

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else can you allow yourself to eat chocolate every morning for a whole month!

Rather than wait until January to make that New Year's resolution, you can start this December.

With over 3,300km of rights of way, the South Downs is the perfect place to hike, run or bike!

You can check out the Visit section of the [website](#) to find a list of trail and cycle routes across the National Park.

Volunteer

Yes, Christmas is self-indulgent but it's also a time to reflect and offer to help others.

For those who are short on time, microvolunteering is the best way to give back for those who are looking to help in short, bite-sized chunks.

For anyone who has a bit more time to give at this time of year, check out volunteering opportunities on [Do-it.org](#)

Make the time to see loved ones

Spending time with family on Christmas Day is a whirlwind of emotions. It can be delightful, daunting and stressful in equal measures.

With so many pressures on the big day itself, why not make time to see family and friends in a less stressful setting?

How about enjoying a flask of tea or hot chocolate at one of the South Downs National Park's many viewing spots?

And, if the British weather lives up to its name, you're always spoilt for choice with great country pubs in the South Downs for a festive get-together.



Things to do in the South Downs this December

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



- Meet Green Father Christmas! Seated in his chamber, traditionally decorated with seasonal greenery, **Green Father Christmas** will be selecting presents from a large wooden chest to give to each child that he meets. Dates throughout December at the Weald and Downland Living Museum in Singleton, West Sussex.
- Join a National Park ranger to explore the countryside around Heyshott. Focusing on the heathland and its wildlife/history, the **Heyshott Hike** takes place on 10 December.
- Take part in the **Lynchmere Common Health Walk** on 17 December. A gentle, generally easy going walk, looking at some of the special natural and cultural features of our heathlands.

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!



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