

# SOUTH DOWNS NEWS

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SOUTH DOWNS  
NATIONAL PARK

## WORK AND PLAY IN YOUR NATIONAL PARK

This month:

- **Water is life!** Find out why we are setting our ambitions high to help restore precious rivers, lakes and streams and create cleaner, more wildlife-rich waterways.
- **Awe-inspiring autumn** Discover some fun ideas for days-out – including some spooky ones!
- **Improving access** Learn about a scheme to enhance accessibility to an iconic hill.
- **COMPETITION!** Win a family day pass to one of the south coast's most visited museums.

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

## Let's work together to help improve our rivers and lakes

**We're making a renewed call to improve the health of our rivers, streams and seas after a new study reveals the state of waterways across the South Downs region.**

The key finding is that most bodies of water are failing to meet good ecological standards, with an overall decline from 2014 to 2022. The study covers six river catchment partnerships across a vast swathe of Sussex, Hampshire and Surrey, revealing that 90 per cent of rivers and lakes are not achieving good status (under the Water Framework Directive).

Meanwhile, 75 per cent of estuaries and coastal waters are not meeting good ecological status – which is a benchmark for a healthy ecosystem that can support a balanced range of plants and animals. Some 55 per cent of groundwaters are also not achieving good status.

The reasons are many and complex and mirror a broader national picture, including sewage discharges, nitrates and phosphates, pesticides, physical barriers on watercourses, invasive species and urban pollution from roads.

The National Park Authority is now calling on partners, landowners, businesses, local councils and communities to come together to find long-term solutions that will help improve water quality and management, kickstarting nature recovery and bringing benefits to all.



The call to action comes as the National Park Authority is finalising its Partnership Management Plan (PMP) – which lays out priorities for the National Park for the next five years – and further strengthening its commitment to water.

Siôn McGeever, Chief Executive of the National Park Authority, said: "Water is fundamental to the biodiversity, landscape, and wellbeing of communities in and around the South Downs National Park.

"We also know that improving the water environment is really important to people as they've told us in our recent consultation for the Partnership Management Plan.

"Therefore we want the National Park to play a leading role in improving water courses so they can be healthier and richer in wildlife.

## Exciting insect discoveries!

"This is a commitment we're making knowing that there are a huge number of complex challenges ahead, from individual behaviour, to climate change and national policy. But we know this amazing landscape that's been designated for the nation deserves to have cleaner, healthier water."

And Siôn added: "Our powers and resources as a National Park are actually quite limited, so we want to bring everyone together, from water companies to landowners and river trusts, to use our collective strength to tackle this issue."

"Work to improve our water is already under way across the region as part of many different projects and partnerships, but we need more of them and with greater resources."



"This won't be an overnight fix and recovery will happen over many, many years. Under our ReNature initiative and emerging PMP, we've set our ambitious goal for more nature everywhere for everyone and this can only happen by prioritising water in the landscape."

"We've already seen how nature can bounce back due to better river management in places like the River Meon and Cockshut Stream, so that's hugely encouraging moving forward."

The report reveals a number of facts and statistics:

- The data shows that 82 per cent of consented licences for sewage discharges are not from water companies, indicating there is more work needed with individual landowners.
- Data from 2021 to 2023 shows there were more than 400 storm overflows across the survey area – of which 341 spilled for a total of 169,000 hours in 2023 (equating to over 7,000 days).
- Up to 14 per cent of businesses are not connected to the mains sewer.
- An increasing number of "forever chemicals" and pharmaceuticals are being found in rivers and streams. [A 2024 study](#) (University of York and Rivers Trust) sampled sites in the South Downs National Park on the Western River Rother, River Arun, River Ouse and River Cuckmere. All the rivers showed high levels of Metformin, antihistamines including Fexofenadine and Cetirizine, along with caffeine.

The Partnership Management Plan, which is set to include a priority around water, is due to be published and adopted by the National Park Authority as part of its five-year strategy before the end of 2025.

Read the "Water in the Park" report [here](#). Watch the [ITV report](#) about the issue.



### Two rarely-seen insects have been causing a stir at Seven Sisters Country Park.

Our rangers were thrilled to spot scarce blue-tailed damselflies at one of the Country Park's newly-restored wetlands.

The 'spot' has been confirmed by the Sussex Dragonfly Society and is only the second colony found in Sussex this year, and only the sixth in the county history, dating back to 1900.

Claire Onslow, who manages the Country Park, said "Our specialists confirmed that our nature recovery work has created the perfect habitat for these damselflies."

"It's great to know that all our efforts are working!"

Meanwhile, a highly unusual "pink" grasshopper was recently spotted amongst the chalk grassland.

Ranger Laura Clapham explained: "Field grasshoppers are normally green, but we were amazed to find a pink one here in the South Downs National Park."

"Erythrism is a genetic mutation caused by the over production of red pigment. It's fairly rare to spot, but not unheard of and well documented."

"The red makes them vulnerable to predators so they tend to have shorter lifespans – also making them rarer to spot."

The National Park Authority took ownership of the iconic Seven Sisters site in 2021 and has invested over £2m in facility improvements, access upgrades, new holiday accommodation and nature recovery.





# The mellow magic of autumn



*"Her pleasure in the walk must arise from the exercise and the day, from the view of the last smiles of the year upon the tawny leaves and withered hedges"*

Powerful words from the great Jane Austen, who loved autumn walks in the South Downs countryside around Chawton, often covering five miles a day or so.

For Austen, autumn was a time of profound reflection, imagination and beauty.

And, with natural beauty in mind, we're expecting one of the most flamboyant displays of colour for many a year in the South Downs National Park over the coming weeks.

Bright reds, orange and gold colours will soon start to appear and, according to Forestry England, the tree display will be even more vibrant than usual this year.

Very warm and sunny weather over the summer means that trees have produced more sugar in their leaves, transforming them into brighter colours.

It's also a time when wildlife is busy – readying itself for the chillier months and some spectacular displays in the skies as birds flock en masse to colder or warmer climes.

To celebrate autumn, the National Park is sharing some of the most breathtaking autumnal images from over a decade of South Downs photo competitions, as well as offering some ideas for days-out.

The theme for this year's photo competition – which has a top prize of £250 – is *"Three cheers for 15 years: South Downs favourites"* and we're asking people to share some of their most cherished spots in the National Park.



Carlotta Luke, a Lewes-based photographer and one of this year's judges, said: "Autumn is a great time of year to head out into the South Downs National Park to photograph.

"Now that the seasons are turning, the quality of light will be changing as well. We'll be getting cooler misty

mornings and soft, raking afternoon sunlight. Your favourite places may even be starting to sport some beautiful autumn foliage.

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"Go out there with your camera and have fun!"

Here is some inspiration for a great autumn day-out in your National Park.

### A family photography day

There are so many little facets of nature to capture on camera during the autumn months – the weird and wonderful fungi, the warm hues of the foliage, pumpkin patches, wildlife preparing to hibernate, and the mellow fruits of the season.

The golden hour is particularly special. The soft light during sunrise and sunset really does bring an extra dimension to the South Downs landscape, enhancing the rich colours and contours.

Why not combine a lovely autumn walk with some photography all the family can get involved in? Our youth photo competition is still open until 31 October with some amazing prizes, including a family ticket to Marwell Wildlife and a GoApe adventure for two.

You could focus on macrophotography of leaves and lichens, broaden it out to show woodland scenes in dappled sunlight, right up to expansive, panoramic photography of the rolling landscape. Or how about capturing a mesmerising murmuration on camera? There are so many options! Find out all the details for our photo competition [www.southdowns.gov.uk/care-for/photo-comp/](http://www.southdowns.gov.uk/care-for/photo-comp/)

### Search for some spooky surprises

With humans inhabiting the South Downs for five millennia, it's a swirling cauldron of myths, legends, folklore and ghost stories.

There are a few spots that are particularly spooky.

Chanctonbury Ring, Devil's Dyke, Racton Ruins, the Devil's Humps of Kingley Vale – all are wrapped

up in stories of mystery and intrigue. Add a morning mist, or an evening fog, and you have the perfect recipe for spookiness!

There's an action-packed line-up of Halloween-inspired events throughout October at various venues across the National Park. The Weald and Downland Museum, at Singleton, is hosting a range of exciting activities for **All Hallow's Eve**, including ghostly storytelling, "mystics in the woods" and a chance to learn about "plague potions". Petersfield Museum & Art Gallery will be hosting some **ghost walks** to show people the grizzlier side of the market town. There'll be a special "Shriek Week" at **Drusillas**, near Alfriston, while **Amberley Museum** will have a pumpkin trail and broomstick-making activities around the grounds. Just outside the National Park will be a spooktacular evening under the stars at Saltdean Lido as the vampirish classic "The Lost Boys" is screened in an **outdoor cinema**.

For more autumn ideas, including forest bathing, click [here](#).



## Paranormal South Downs



**The South Downs has centuries of superstitions, folklore and ghostly tales that have been passed down the generations.**

Here are a selection of some paranormal sightings and village legends to let your imaginations run wild this Halloween!

### The Running Hound

Location: Alfriston - Between the Downs and Town Fields

Date / Time: Full Moon (reoccurring)

A large black dog is said to run from the Downs to Town Fields - here it stares over a flint wall before retreating the way it came.

### Little Fairy Folk

Location: Alfriston - Burlough (or Burlow) Castle

Date / Time: Pre-20th century

Fairies once made their home here and rewarded a local man with food after he helped one of their kind repair a kitchen utensil.

### The Ghost Bear

Location: Fernhurst  
- Ruins of Verdley Castle

Date / Time: 25  
December  
(reoccurring)

This is said to be the location where the last wild bear in England was killed; the creature's ghost now returns in protest.



### Jane Seymour

Location: Owslebury - Marwell Hall

Date / Time: Unknown

The Seymour family once owned this property, and Jane is thought to haunt the surrounding grounds. The shade of Anne Boleyn has also been reported loitering near a row of nearby yew trees.

### Petersfield Poltergeist

Location: Petersfield – former Green Dragon public house

Date / Time: 1950s

This pub was haunted by strange sounds, including marble playing, running, and banging. Several witnesses watched a jug swinging on a hook with no obvious means of motion.

To find out some of the spookiest spots in the South Downs click [here](#).



## Improving access to hill



**Much-needed improvements are being made to improve access to one of the National Park's most scenic viewpoints.**

Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust has begun work to replace the visitor steps at St Catherine's Hill Nature Reserve, in Winchester, ensuring safe and sustainable access to the top of the Iron Age hillfort and wildlife haven.

The current steps, installed nearly 30 years ago, have deteriorated significantly and now require frequent safety checks and repairs.

Their condition has not only made access more difficult but has also led some visitors to stray from the path, creating 'off-piste' routes that damage the site's fragile chalk grassland and has put the historic monument at further risk of erosion.

Funding was provided from the South Downs Natural Park Authority's Community Infrastructure Levy, along with a gift in the will of someone keen to help others enjoy wildlife and wild spaces.

Jayne Chapman, Senior Nature Recovery Manager at the wildlife trust, said: "The reserve's many chalk grassland plants and butterflies are less likely to be disturbed when visitors remain on the steps rather than creating new, unsanctioned paths.

"St Catherine's Hill is one of Winchester's most treasured wild places. It is home to a wide range of butterflies including the chalkhill blue, Adonis blue and silver-spotted skipper, as well as frog orchids, bastard toadflax, along with a variety of chalk grassland invertebrates.

"We believe that annual visitor numbers may now far exceed the 60,000–100,000 recorded in 2014, reflecting the city's growth and its popularity as a green space."

The new steps will provide a safe, slip-resistant route for visitors, with timber treated with a built-in anti-slip coating.

The works are expected to finish by November 2025. During this period, sections of the existing steps and bridleway will be temporarily closed.



## Poignant reunion for group who fought to protect South Downs



**A special reunion took place among people who fought tooth and nail to protect the South Downs and create a National Park.**

Some of the surviving members of the South Downs Campaign gathered at The Three Horseshoes, in Elsted.

Without their determination, the South Downs National Park might never have existed.

The creation of a National Park was first mooted in the 1920s when public concern was mounting about the threats to the downland.

It would take decades before calls for a National Park along the ever-expanding south coast conurbation gathered pace and, following two major public inquiries, hundreds of meetings and passionate campaigning from local communities, the South Downs National Park finally came into being on 31 March, 2010.



As the National Park celebrates its 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary, Margaret Paren, the National Park Authority's former Chair and a major protagonist in the fight for the South Downs, said: "It hardly seems possible that the National Park is 15 years old, though there are many who believe it has always been there.

"It was a long hard slog to achieve that status for the South Downs. For those of us who were involved it is especially important that those who live or work in the National Park, or visit to enjoy its special qualities, recognise what a truly exceptional place it is and how the area benefits from that status.

"We are all looking forward to the next big milestone, the 20th anniversary, when the National Park will have been in place for as long as the South Downs Campaign existed!"

Pictured here are (left to right) Christopher Napier, Robert Cheesman, Robin Crane, Margaret Paren, Chris Todd and John Templeton.

## SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY Grazers settling in well at popular local nature reserve



**More than 50 ewes have taken up residence for the winter months at a nature reserve to help wildlife flourish.**

Herdwick sheep are now happily grazing Mill Hill Local Nature Reserve, near Shoreham, a 28-acre site which is owned by Adur and Worthing Council and managed in partnership with the South Downs National Park Authority.

The sheep are needed to improve the condition of the chalk grassland, known as "Europe's rainforest in miniature" because of the wealth of wildflowers, butterflies and other insects in a small patch of grass.

Without grazing, the chalk grassland deteriorates and overgrows with scrub and many indigenous flowers and animals will be lost.

Phillippa Morrison-Price, Lead Ranger for the Eastern Downs, said: "Mill Hill is an incredibly important site for wildlife in particular butterflies that are associated with chalk grassland as well as reptiles, such as adders. Numbers of specialist chalk species, such as Chalkhill Blue and Adonis Blue butterflies, have reduced significantly over the past five years and this is largely due to the lack of grazing, which is imperative for keeping chalk grassland in good condition."

Mill Hill has a 500-metre **easy access trail**, which enables those less mobile to enjoy this site.

Responsible dog walking is encouraged at the site as part of the National Park's Take the Lead campaign. This includes keeping dogs on leads around livestock to avoid sheep worrying and making sure gates are shut properly. Find out more about Take the Lead **here**.

In addition to the grazing, the Friends of Old Shoreham and members of Butterfly Conservation joined forces this month to tackle an encroaching privet on the steep bank of the reserve. Sixteen volunteers joined Lead Ranger Phillippa Morrison-Price to help with tree popping and mattocking bramble, privet and cotoneaster, which is starting to invade the important chalk grassland.

## Tourism brings boost to nature



**Well over £15,000 has been raised by tourism businesses over the past year to help protect the National Park for future generations.**

The Visitor Giving initiative continues to go from strength to strength, giving customers the opportunity to donate to the South Downs Trust, the official charity of the National Park.

Visitor Giving invites customers to contribute to nature recovery in the National Park, for example, by adding a pound on to a meal, hotel bill or product – and these small contributions, when added together, can make a big difference.

This year some of the main contributors have been The PIG in the South Downs in Madehurst, Woodfire Camping in Graffham and Firle, and the Hydro Hotel in Eastbourne.

Among the projects benefitting are Bee Lines, creating vital new wildflower patches to help dwindling bee populations bounce back. The Trust is also investing in schemes that help children from urban areas have access to green spaces and improving footpaths in the South Downs to help people with disabilities.

Chris Hannon, Sustainable Business Strategy Lead, said: "World Tourism Day took place recently and it's a good time to recognise the really important contribution hospitality businesses and visitors make to the South Downs National Park."



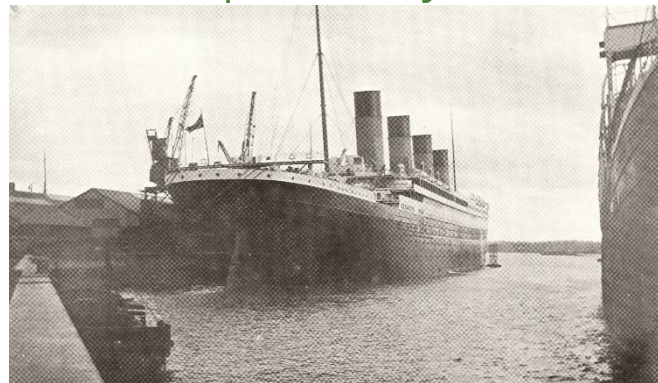
"Over the past five years, we've seen a steady increase in the number of Visitor Giving partners and we're keen to welcome more tourism businesses to the family. Our ambition is to raise £2 from each visitor to the South Downs National Park. This will go towards vital projects to help biodiversity, access, landscape management and heritage."

On average, the South Downs National Park receives over 18m visitors a year. The current partners are: Best of Britain Travel Guides, BKC Restaurants in London, Foot of the Downs – Glamping in West Sussex, Freshly Fermented– Gut health experts, Hydro Hotel, Eastbourne, THE PIG-in the South, Upwaltham Barns and Woodfire Camping.

If you're interested in becoming a partner please email Chris at [visitorgiving@southdownstrust.org.uk](mailto:visitorgiving@southdownstrust.org.uk)

## SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

### Win a free pass to city museum!



Titanic berthed at Southampton on 9 April, 1912

**Just over 10 miles from the National Park boundary is a city famous for its rich maritime history, its ancient city walls and as the place where RMS Titanic and the Mayflower left our shores.**

It's Southampton of course.

Sandwiched between the South Downs National Park and New Forest National Park, not to mention the Isle of Wight, it has some of the most breathtaking landscapes in Britain on its doorstep!

At the heart of the city and just a short walk from the railway station is the impressive **SeaCity Museum**.

The home of Southampton's Titanic story, you can discover the story of RMS Titanic and how the tragedy affected the city and people of Southampton.

The museum features an interactive model of the Titanic, recorded messages of its passengers from that fateful night, and original objects from on board the world-famous ship.

There is also a visual depiction of Titanic's 897 crew, over three-quarters of whom gave a Southampton address when they signed on.

But this amazing venue is not just about the Titanic! The museum follows 200,000 years of Southampton's history, from Roman traders to Saxon settlers, to the Second World War and the introduction of the docks in the "Gateway to the World" and "Southampton Stories" exhibitions. All are bursting with an exciting collection of models, costumes, artworks, photographs, incredible stories and much more!



The National Park has teamed up with SeaCity Museum to offer a free family day entry ticket.

People signing up to the newsletter during October will

be automatically entered into the draw to win the family pass. Those who are already signed up can email "Molly Brown" to [newsletter@southdowns.gov.uk](mailto:newsletter@southdowns.gov.uk) before midnight on 31 October.

Sign up to the newsletter **here** and see competition T&Cs **here**.



# Things to do in the South Downs this October

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/)



## Half Term Autumn Crafts

Wednesday 29 - Friday 31 October (Daily 10am - 2pm)

Drop in autumn themed crafts and activities for all ages at the Seven Sisters Visitor Centre. Free, no booking required. £2 suggested donation

[www.sevensisters.org.uk](http://www.sevensisters.org.uk)

SEVEN SISTERS  
SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK

- Do you know your chanterelles from your shaggy ink caps? Explore Waggoners Wells with Fungi expert Daniel Greenwood and discover more about the magical world of mycelium! Book [here](#) for this guided walk on 18 October which is run in partnership with the National Park's Heathlands team.
- Join a guided walk at Weaver's Down on 28 October for "things that glow bright at night". Discover nature's hidden light show as we explore the rare phenomenon of biofluorescence- when certain plants, fungi and insects glow in vivid colours different from the light they absorb. Book [here](#)
- Are you interested in helping to conserve one of the rarest habitats in the world? South Downs heathland makes up just 1 per cent of the National Park and has some of its rarest wildlife, such as the sand lizard and Dartford Warbler. People are being given the opportunity to do some conservation volunteering at Broxhead Common and Shortheath Common in Hampshire this autumn and winter (current timings are 10am to 3pm on 28 Oct, 25 Nov, 30 Dec, 27 Jan and 24 Feb). Tea and coffee provided as well as all tools. For more information, please contact the local rangers at [northern.sites@hants.gov.uk](mailto:northern.sites@hants.gov.uk)
- Don't miss the 18th annual **Bonkers for Conkers** **Championship** at Langham Brewery! It promises to be a 'smashing' way to spend an autumnal afternoon at the Brewery and Taproom on Sunday 12 October at their 'brewery in a barn' near Petworth, from midday until 8pm. It's just £5 to play, with all proceeds donated to Chestnut Tree House Children's Hospice.
- **Arundel Wetland Centre** will be hosting a "supernatural" October half term week, with the opportunity to make magical memories and experience the wonder of wetlands through making a willow wand, mixing magical potions, making monsters, writing with invisible ink and more!
- Head to Seven Sisters Country Park's Visitor Centre at Exceat between 29 October and 31 October for some fun drop-in **[autumn-themed crafts and activities](#)** for all ages.

## Pic credits:

P1 Guy Edwardes; P2 Steve Brookwell; P2 (insects) Seven Sisters Country Park Rangers; P3 Christopher Pearson; P4 left Caroline Rix; P4 left Finn Curry; P4 Right HIWWT/Tom Hilder; P5 Right Keith Walder; P6 Right **[Wikimedia Creative Commons](#)**.