

SOUTH DOWNS NEWS

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SOUTH DOWNS
NATIONAL PARK

WORK AND PLAY IN YOUR NATIONAL PARK



This month:

- **Celestial beauty** Prepare to be dazzled with some incredible pictures of the Dark Skies as we announce the winners of our astrophotography competition.
- **Green wellness** Learn more about the power of National Parks to boost mental health and wellbeing.
- **Spreading the love** Find out about love in the air – in the animal kingdom!
- **Competition!** Win an afternoon tea for two in a beautiful Victorian glasshouse.

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

Starstruck! Breathtaking scenes of Downs at night

A shimmering purple heathland beneath the Milky Way, a seaside full of stars and the moon rising over a “haunted” tower are among the winners of this year’s South Downs National Park astrophotography competition.

Almost 100 entries were submitted to this year’s competition, which celebrates the National Park’s status as one of only 21 International Dark Sky Reserves in the world and one of the most accessible places in the UK to go stargazing.

The contest was judged by “Dark Skies” Dan Oakley, an expert on the dark skies of the National Park, Steve Broadbent, from Hampshire Astronomical Group, and Elinor Newman, an astrophysicist who works on the events team at the National Park.

Taking the top spot in the “South Downs Starry Skyscapes” category was a spellbinding night-time image of Cuckmere



Haven and the Seven Sisters, in East Sussex. “Galactic Bay” was captured by Giles Embleton-Smith, from Eastbourne.

Judge Steve said: “This image evokes



a wonderful atmosphere and shows just how spectacular the stars can be in the South Downs National Park on a clear night.”

Winning £100, Giles said: “The shooting conditions at the Cuckmere Haven were ideal, with the Milky Way lining up perfectly over the old wooden breakwaters. I’m absolutely delighted and honoured to win.”

Runner-up in the skiescapes category was a stunning image of Cissbury Ring – the largest hill fort in Sussex and dating back more than 5,000 years. Carl Gough, from Littlehampton, photographed an immense starry night in the National Park last summer and wins £50.

Don't be afraid of the dark!

It was a double victory for Carl, who came top in the "Nature at Night" category with his beautiful picture of heathland surrounding Burton and Chingford ponds, near Petworth, West Sussex.

Judge Elinor said: "Lowland heath is one of the rarest habitats in the world and this really does capture the magic of it at night. Those beautiful heathers support an array of wildlife, including sand lizards and nightjars."

Carl, who picks up £100 as category winner, said: "The National Park offers so many opportunities for someone like me that has a passion for astronomy and nature."

Runner-up in the nature category, which could also include images of humans connecting with the dark skies, was "A Sky Full of Stars", by Lorcan Taylor-Hood, taken at Warren Hill dew pond on the Eastbourne downland.

Lorcan, from Eastbourne, wins a prize of £50.



Taking the top spot in the "Magnificent Moon" category was an eerie image of a harvest moon rising over Racton Ruins, near Chichester, West Sussex. A harvest moon refers to the nearest full moon to the autumnal equinox and its incredible light enables farmers to work late into the night, helping them to bring in the crops from the fields. Judges

were bowled over by the composition of the photograph, which is a folly dating back to the 1760s and reputedly haunted by the ghostly figure of a woman. Nathan Hill, from Emsworth, Hampshire, picks up a £100 prize.

Judge Dan said: "This is an extraordinary image and so well-framed. It almost looks like a canon ball being fired!"

Runner-up in the moon category was a stunning picture of the full moon behind Beachy Head lighthouse, near Eastbourne, and wins Giles Embleton-Smith £50.

Four images were highly commended by the judges, including "There was a bear on Litlington Road" and "Orion over Black Pond" both by Steve Geliot. "The Power Above" by Janette Britton, was highly commended, together with "Golden Moonrise", by Giles Embleton-Smith.



All the winning images will be shared and celebrated during the National Park's Dark Skies Festival, which runs from 10 to 18 February. See the action-packed programme [here](#).

Following the festival, the shortlisted astrophotography will go into "The People's Choice" with the chance for the public to vote for their favourite.



Tim Slaney at a Dark Skies event in Portsmouth last month

As diurnal creatures, we humans are probably pre-programmed to view darkness with a sense of both intrigue and fear.

One only has to look at our well-lit cities and towns to know how much safety and comfort light brings at night-time.

But seeing a dark sky, brimming with a cascade of stars and the Milky Way in all its limitless beauty, really is a sight that should be seen and enjoyed by everyone.

It's now eight years since the South Downs National Park was made an International Dark Sky Reserve – and it's as important now as it was in 2016.

We're so lucky to have these star-studded skies that are relatively free of light pollution and offer so many stargazing opportunities for people of all ages.

And it's not just people's connection with nature on a galactic scale that we're trying to protect.

Most birds, insects, mammals, reptiles and amphibians are either nocturnal or crepuscular and the clear shift between night and day is vital for healthy ecosystems. As you may know, the National Park Authority has big ambitions for nature recovery and dark skies will be crucial for this.

We know stargazing may feel a little daunting to some and that's why our Dark Skies Festival is the perfect introduction. We've got nine days of events taking place right across Hampshire and Sussex and it's a chance to find out more about how to enjoy the dark skies and where the most accessible stargazing spots are.

I was recently at a space-related event at Portsmouth Historic Dockyard helping our events team and it struck me how many people were not aware of the International Dark Sky Reserve on their doorstep and how close it was.

It offers a different experience of a National Park and, if you visit on a clear night with the universe in all its glory, one you will not forget.

So, my message is simple: embrace the darkness!

Tim Slaney,

Chief Executive (Interim) of National Park Authority

Beach cleans help wildlife



Plastics and other litter washed up on the beach at Seven Sisters Country Park are being recycled into useful products as part of an innovative new partnership.

Since taking over the management of the country park in 2021, National Park staff and volunteers have scoured the shoreline once a week for plastics and litter that often comes in with the tide.

Now the litter pickers have teamed up with ReAP, a charity dedicated to reducing the devastating impact of plastic waste on the planet's aquatic life and ecosystems, as well as the Anglers National Line Recycling Scheme (ANLRS) which recycles lost or littered material.

This year alone the teams have collected over 30 bags of rubbish, including 34kg of plastics, 24kg of general litter, 32kg of netting and rope, and 21kg of rubber. The total weight was 122kg and, thanks to ReAP & the ANLRS, around three quarters can be recycled.

ReAP takes the litter to its Sussex-based hub and, working with UK recycling partner MyRefractory, it's recycled into products that can be used elsewhere, including to make recycling bins, seating, display boards and outdoor tables.

It means that waste collected is kept out of landfill.

Sylvia King, Operations Assistant at Seven Sisters Country Park, said: "We want to improve the habitat for nature at Seven Sisters and so regular litter picks are an important way of helping our local wildlife.



"We're pleased to have this new arrangement with ReAP that means we're reducing impact on the planet and helping our precious habitats.

As part of the refurbishments at Seven Sisters, the National Park Authority has installed new litter and recycling bins in the car parks and building complex at the country park. The new "grab and go" food outlet and visitor shop also includes a range of plastic-free choices. It has been accompanied by strong messaging and education around "leaving no trace" on the country park, which is a Site of Special Scientific Interest and also part of a Marine Conservation Zone.

Targets are welcomed amid calls for greater resources

The South Downs National Park Authority welcomes a clear direction of travel for Protected Landscapes following publication of new targets from Defra.

As the National Parks celebrate their 75th Anniversary, the UK's youngest National Park stands ready to continue to innovate and forge partnerships to deliver real action on the ground to deliver for nature, climate and people.

Tim Slaney, Interim Chief Executive of the South Downs National Park Authority, said: As we celebrate the 75th anniversary of our glorious National Parks this year, we must once again summon the passion that coalesced around the simple but powerful idea all those years ago: We need access to nature and nature needs us.

"If we put the resources and powers needed behind this idea, we can harness the innovation and partnership working taking place across all of our Protected Landscapes and ensure our precious protected landscapes remain world-class havens for wildlife and people. The nation deserves nothing less.

"We look forward to working with Defra and the wider Protected Landscapes family to unlock the funding and powers needed to further the South Downs National Park's innovative and ambitious work for nature, climate and people."

Jayne Butler, Executive Director of National Parks England, said: "The challenges that we face to restore nature and tackle climate change are enormous and so we must have ambition to match. Within National Parks we have that ambition and we see the role of National Park Authorities as key to achieving these targets. Yet, whilst the ambition grows, our resources to deliver on this are dropping – in the last 13 years National Park Authorities funding has seen real-terms cuts of around 40%. Targets like these centre National Parks and other Protected Landscapes in the vision to restore nature and tackle climate change and now we must be given greater financial resources to deliver this vision."

This renewed commitment from the National Park Authority comes following the publication of Defra's **Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework**, which includes a clear acknowledgement that protected landscapes are not only crucial to delivering on commitments to tackle climate change and restore nature, but that they also are vital to supporting the nation's health and wellbeing through providing better access to green space.

Just one example of innovation is our ambitious **ReNature** initiative to create 13,000 hectares of new habitat for wildlife, tackle biodiversity loss and improve access to nature for all. The Authority is engaged in pioneering work to develop new ways to deliver nature recovery, including our groundbreaking **ReNature Credits scheme**.

The power of National Parks to boost mental health



An inspiring arts project has shown the power of National Parks to boost mental health and wellbeing.

People from across the region have taken part in Timescape – a series of workshops helping participants to learn ancient arts and craft techniques, all in the beautiful and tranquil surrounds of the South Downs National Park.

The free sessions, delivered by Havant-based charity Artscape, took place at Amberley Museum in West Sussex and Butser Ancient Farm, near Waterlooville, in Hampshire.

The participants were experiencing loneliness and isolation and had the chance to meet up, share stories, and get hands-on with cordaging, felting, weaving, painting, and pottery.

An exhibition of all their amazing artwork and craftsmanship took place at New Park Centre in Chichester.

Clare Grover, from Bishop's Waltham, Hampshire, made a collection of pots and wet-felt hats and was full of praise about the impact of the project on her wellbeing.



She said: "It's just been so rewarding. This has given me my confidence back and it's encouraged me so much that I now go back to Butser to volunteer every week."

Adrian Mundy, from Portsmouth, made a set of spoons from birch wood. He said: "I'm an environmental artist and this has given me the opportunity to try some more primitive craft techniques."



Graham Hearn, from Worthing, said: "Nature is my medicine – it's better than any antidepressant. It's been wonderful to be part of this project and I've met some great people."

The project is part of the National Park's 'natural health' strategy. Its first Health and

Wellbeing Strategy was published three years ago, setting out a vision to connect more people with nature to help improve both mental and physical health.

The plans include working with GPs, healthcare and community-based providers to deliver more opportunities for "green social prescribing". A GP or social prescriber may refer a patient for non-clinical services that boost health, such as walking or cycling in the South Downs, becoming involved in arts-based activities or surveying wildlife.

The long-term strategy also identifies priority areas in the region where the Authority will work with communities, partners and healthcare providers to help more people discover the wellness benefits of the National Park.

Mandie Molyneux, Director of Artscape, said: "Doing this arts project in the National Park has been phenomenal – who wouldn't feel uplifted and empowered by being in this amazing space!"



Anne Rehill, who manages the National Park's people, health and wellbeing work, said: "National Parks contribute to the mental and physical health of the nation, providing a place for escape, adventure, enjoyment, inspiration and reflection.

"The benefits of green spaces for health are well-researched and, with the right resources, National Parks have the potential to really expand our 'natural health service' to support the amazing work of the NHS.

"The impact on the people who have participated in this project has been life-changing in some cases and I'm humbled by the fact that our funding has made such a difference."

Timescape will take place again this year, with sessions at Butser Ancient Farm and Fishbourne Roman Palace. The project is aimed at those experiencing loneliness and isolation who would like to meet new people and be creative. To register your interest please email kate.drake@southdowns.gov.uk The deadline to apply is 5pm on 4 March.

For more details on the National Park's work, including information for healthcare professionals, visit www.southdowns.gov.uk/health-and-wellbeing/



Celebrating heritage and craftsmanship



The very best buildings showcasing architecture, high-quality craftsmanship and conservation techniques will be celebrated once again this year in the Sussex Heritage Trust awards.

The charity, which was created in 1977 to preserve, improve and encourage the appreciation of the architectural and natural landscape of Sussex, is calling for nominations for the prestigious awards.

There are 11 categories to enter from small scale residential, public and community, to building crafts.

The awards have special categories with The Eco Award and The South Downs Award, which is sponsored by the South Downs National Park Authority

Last year's South Downs winner was The Woodcarvers Studio, at Nyewood, which is a sustainable studio space for professional artist and wood sculptor, Alison Crowther.

Highly-commended in the category was Littlewood Lookout, a woodland regeneration project in the centre of the National Trust's Slindon Estate (*pictured above*).

David Cowan, Chairman of the Sussex Heritage Trust said: "The Sussex Heritage Trust Awards continue to stand out as the most important architectural and landscape Awards in Sussex. None of this would be possible without the support of our sponsors."

The Awards ceremony will take place at Lancing College Chapel on 10 July. Winners will receive a hand-crafted slate plaque presented by the President of the Sussex Heritage Trust, The Rt Hon Lord Egremont DL.

Do you have an architectural or landscape project in Sussex that could win a 2024 Sussex Heritage Trust Award? Could you nominate an individual who deserves praise and recognition for their work? Does your project inspire excellence in sustainability and biodiversity?

The Sussex Heritage Trust will be taking entries until 22 March, please visit www.sussexheritagetrust.org.uk for a copy of the entry pack and application form.

SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

Meet the woodland apprentice

We're celebrating National Apprenticeship Week this February, this year by getting to know Holly Whitehouse, one of our forestry apprentices.

Can you tell us more about your apprentice role at the National Park?



I am a forestry crafts person apprentice. This involves working with the National Park, attending college at Plumpton (near Lewes in East Sussex) and also working closely with Powell Forestry.

At Powells I work with their management teams, hand cutters and machine operators, learning about the operations of the UK forestry industry.

This involves woodland establishment and maintenance, invasive species, pest and disease management, building woodland infrastructure and felling. I also work with the South Downs ranger teams where tasks are orientated around conservation, public access, wildlife monitoring and volunteer engagement.

Why did you choose an apprenticeship at the South Downs National Park?

I hadn't really thought about a career in forestry before, but reading the required qualities and interests needed, I thought "I could do that, why not?"

What's been the highlight of your time in the National Park as an apprentice?

There have been many great moments, and even on seemingly the worst days, working in pouring rain, being soaked to the bone on the side of a hill can still be laughed about later (tough lesson no.12 always bring spare dry clothes!).



Driving a harvester and the college tractor and forestry trailer were brilliant, they are such incredible bits of machinery.

I'm also really proud of getting my 35 year old brain to engage back with college academia.

What are your future aspirations for your apprenticeship?

To keep learning, keep being challenged, to keep gaining qualifications and experience.

Animal love stories in the South Downs National Park



Beneath the stars of the South Downs is a beautiful place to fall in love. With our Dark Night Skies Festival in full flow this week, why not surprise a loved one with an evening out to marvel at the night sky wonders? And while you're staring up, have a think of all the wildlife in the South Downs who might just be sharing that loving feeling with you this Valentine's Day...

Did you know that it's not just humans who find monogamy attractive?

Many animal species across the globe find their soulmate and stay together for the entirety of their lives, often facing long times apart while partners forage for food or look after the young. Here are some of the lovers for life who you might spot while out and about in the South Downs, and a few facts about how our animal friends also experience the trials and tribulations of love. And let's not forget there's the platonic love between family and friends – in both the human and animal world – that is just as sweet!

Mute Swans



These graceful birds are a familiar site across the National Park, often found gliding across water in parks or rivers. Being the largest and

heaviest water bird, they also have the biggest hearts for love as they pair for life. Often choosing to nest in areas where there is an abundance of food such as common duckweed, paired swans usually remain in the same area for their whole lives too, making a loving home for their broods to grow up in.

If both swans remain healthy they usually stay together for life. Although like in all relationships there is the risk of change as sometimes a new, stronger cob (male) coming on the scene can force a change of partner for some

female swans. With territorial disputes sometimes leading to nasty fights to the death, the female swans generally go through a period of mourning before moving on to a new fella.

Pigeons

These unassuming birds have a loving side that's rarely acknowledged. Mating for life, pigeons spend the majority of their time together – so if you see one pigeon bobbing around, you'll likely spot their mate nearby. They also have a ritualistic mating process, with various stages of courtship, some involving dances not too dissimilar to those witnessed in human night clubs on a Friday night...

Pigeons remain faithful to each other until death do them part. However, they seem pretty speedy at recovering from heartbreak and will often find a new mate to start a new chapter of their lives again should they be unlucky to lose their loved one along the way.

Barn owls

With heart-shaped faces it's no surprise that barn owls are loving and loyal creatures. Faithful to the bitter end, barn owls mate for life and both share parental care for their offspring. The male often expresses his initial feelings towards a female by bringing her food. After that if the female is interested they'll exchange calls and elaborate displays to secure their relationship before delving into copulation.



With a screech like call you are most likely to hear barn owls calling to each other at the start of the spring breeding season. Males call to attract a female, whereas females call to beg the male to bring them food!

Badgers



Badgers are usually monogamous and pair for life, which can be as long as 15 years. This species is somewhat gregarious, and several pairs will live in harmony

in the same complex of burrows. A social group of badgers living together in the same sett is known as a clan

If you are instead celebrating self-love, love for a friend, unrequited love, a lost love or a love of your family, whatever love it may be, know that the South Downs is a welcoming place waiting to be loved.

So come and let your heart fill with the beauty of the views and your mind be calmed by the peace and fresh air. The way all love should be!

Honouring the legacy of “The Snowman” artist

Win an afternoon tea for two!



Hidden within 1,800 acres of ancient woodland on the Hampshire and West Sussex border, Stansted Park, with its stunning stately home and forest, is a wonderful setting for family and friends to gather.

In the heart of The Walled Garden is a beautifully-restored Victorian glasshouse, which now houses The Pavilion

Tearoom.

The Pavilion is a truly blissful location to meet with friends and family, whether inside with its light and airy atmosphere or outside where you are sheltered by the high brick walls.

The menu has been created with local suppliers in mind and changes with the seasons – more soup on cold days and extra fresh local crab on hot summer afternoons.

The venue is famous for its cheese and fruit scones which are homemade every day by its cooks and the traditional afternoon teas served from 3.15pm every day.



What better way to relax after a forest walk than a cup of finest tea and some lovely scones, clotted cream and jam?

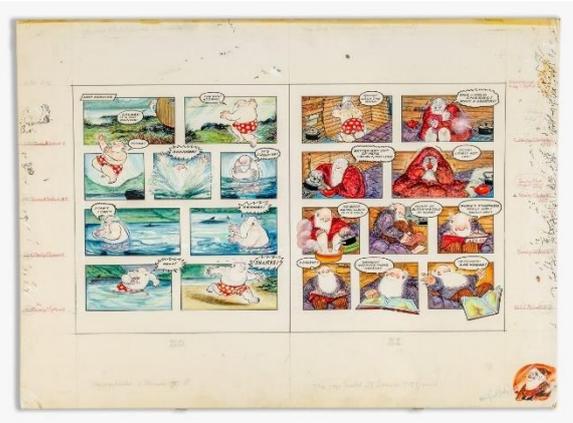
We've teamed up with The Pavilion Tearoom to offer an afternoon tea for two.

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

Those who are already signed up can email “Forest of Bere” to newsletter@southdowns.gov.uk before midnight on 29 February.

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

For ideas on walking at Stansted Forest, [click here](#).



A fascinating exhibition is coming to the National Park featuring never-seen-before items and artworks from one of the UK’s most beloved author illustrators.

Bloomin’ Brilliant: The Life and Work of Raymond Briggs is a highly personal show that will bring together 30 items from the late author’s estate with over 100 original artworks from his 60-year career.

The exhibition, at Ditchling Museum of Art + Craft, joins up with the acclaimed, currently touring show from Quentin Blake Centre for Illustration (*Raymond Briggs: A Retrospective*).

Bloomin’ Brilliant includes work from Briggs’s (1934-2022) pioneering titles, including *The Snowman* (1978), *Father Christmas* (1973), *Fungus the Bogeyman* (1977) and *When the Wind Blows* (1982), plus the autobiographical graphic novel *Ethel and Ernest* (1998), delving into the origin and creation of these classic images and stories. Also on show are his drawings, hand-lettered typography and page designs from his earliest commissions to his 2004 book *The Puddleman*.

For the first time following the author’s death in 2022, this exhibition will also offer a deeply personal view of the items and objects that surrounded the author in his Sussex home, which was just a mile down the road in the village of Westmeston. This will include Briggs’ own writing and drawing desk which he used for over 40 years and where he first originated some of his most famous works.

Never-seen-before artworks will also be included featured, including artwork for *Father Christmas Goes on Holiday* (1975), as well as several portraits and other illustrations that for decades never left his home.

These will all join hundreds of artworks that show why Raymond Briggs was – and still is – viewed as one of the most exceptional draughtsman and storytellers that this country has produced, with innovative journeys of both the magical and seemingly mundane, from monsters, flying snowmen, and miniscule humans, to heartfelt relationships, real-life war, and a hard-working Father Christmas.

The exhibition runs from 27 April to 27 October.

Things to do in the South Downs this February

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/



- Ever wondered about volunteering but don't know where to start? **"We love our Volunteers Day"** is a relaxed drop in coffee morning at Gilbert White's House on 14 February where you can find out about local volunteering opportunities.
- As we welcome the beginning of the amphibian breeding season, Froglife's Discovering Dewponds project is delighted to be hosting the third South East Toad Summit on Saturday 17 February, from 10am to 2pm, at the Linklater Pavilion in Lewes. The Toad Summit is an opportunity to learn more about our charismatic common toad, its ecology and conservation, through a series of talks and workshop activities. All are welcome, whether you are an experienced toad patroller or just want to find out more about toads! This event is free to attend, but sign-up is essential – find out more and register via Eventbrite: <https://toadsummit2024.eventbrite.co.uk>
- Step inside **Stansted House** on 18 February and join one of its knowledgeable tour guides on a guided tour of the stately home. Discover the family seat of the Earls of Bessborough and explore the beautiful state rooms, furnished as though the 10th Earl was still at home. Enjoy a true upstairs, downstairs experience as you learn about those who called Stansted Park home before heading downstairs to see the extensive servant quarters, described by one visitor as 'one of the very best I have seen in England.'
- Calling all equestrians! A workshop on "healthy horse, healthy land, and healthy water" will take place at Tottington Manor, Henfield, on 22 February. The workshop will include expert speakers and will cover how to improve the health of your horses, your land and the water environment. Anyone interested in attending should email TAP@southdowns.gov.uk

Pic credits

P6 top swan image – Philip Nind; P6 swans at Bury by Philip Nind; P6 barn owl by D Middleton; p6 badgers by Richard Murray; P7 left spring at Stansted by Ron De'Ath; P7 right Ditchling Museum of Art and Craft