

SOUTH DOWNS NEWS

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SOUTH DOWNS
NATIONAL PARK

WORK AND PLAY IN YOUR NATIONAL PARK

This month:

- **Protecting one of UK's most endangered species** Find out about efforts to save the rare European eel which takes an extraordinary journey across the Atlantic to live in the South Downs.
- **Planning for the future** Discover the latest on the National Park's Local Plan Review.
- **Historic destination re-opens** Find out more and win a free day-out!
- **Win a £40 voucher!** Enjoy a sumptuous coffee and brunch at a Cadence Clubhouse.

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

Reelly good news! Project fights to save elusive eels

Efforts are under way to help protect the elusive European eel that makes an incredible 4,000-mile transatlantic journey to the rivers of the South Downs National Park.

To mark **National Marine Week**, the National Park and its partners are raising awareness of the strong link between the health of rivers and seas - with eels as a prime example of how nature relies on both.

The European eel, once common but now one of the most endangered animals in the UK, is being given a helping hand in the South Downs as their habitat is being improved along the River Rother and River Ems.

The Western Sussex Rivers Trust is working to remove barriers along the watercourses, as well as install fish passes to help the eels move upstream.

The migration of these eels is quite extraordinary as they undergo several metamorphoses during their lives.

Spawning in the Sargasso Sea, off the coast of Bermuda,



The River Rother in Midhurst

the eel eggs hatch into wriggling pea-sized larvae that have the appearance of a see-through leaf. Over the next couple of years these opaque creatures drift along with the Gulf Stream,



their bodies elongating as they enter the next life stage as "glass eel. Upon reaching the English coastline they use the force of the tides - and their new-found body shape at around 8cm in length - to push themselves upstream to make a home in rivers, including the Rother and Ems.

Once in rivers, they go through more life cycles, growing up to 1m in length and living for up to 20 years, gorging on fish, molluscs and crustaceans. The end of their lives sees a fantastic finale. Entering the "silver eel" stage, their pectoral fins widen, muscle mass increases, their digestive tracts shut down and their eyes grow up to ten times their original size, all to help see them through one final swim. Fighting their way back against strong currents, silver eels head 4,000 miles back across the Atlantic to the Sargasso Sea to spawn.

Major review moves to next stage

Efforts to help eels on the Rother and Ems is just one of several water-based nature recovery projects in the National Park and part of a broader strategy to improve river, stream, pond and marine habitats. As part of the Downs to the Sea scheme (details below), eel brushes are being included on all the new water control structures installed at RSPB Pulborough Brooks and Pagham Harbour to help migration and encourage eel repopulation.

Aimee Felus, Chief Executive of the Western Sussex Rivers Trust, said: “The health of our rivers here in the South East is crucial to the quality of our coastal waters, and vital to the health of the many creatures who call these fresh and saltwaters home.

“With pollution, sewage and drought all playing a part in the diminishing water quality of our rivers and streams, it’s more important than ever that we work together to help protect and enhance these precious habitats for wildlife and humans alike.”

Jan Knowlson, Biodiversity Officer for the South Downs National Park, said: “The eels we have in the National Park are truly remarkable and their incredible migration underlines the important connection between our rivers and seas. There’s a continuum and all these watercourses are joined up. So healthier rivers ultimately mean healthier seas and vice versa.”

A number of exciting initiatives in and around the South Downs are currently taking place to help river and marine habitats:

- Earlier this year the “Downs to the Sea” project launched following a grant of £1.7m from the National Lottery Heritage Fund. Thanks to National Lottery players, Downs to the Sea is carrying out much-needed restoration work to a number of internationally-designated wildlife sites, including RSPB Pulborough Brooks and RSPB 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 warmer climate.
- As part as Downs to the Sea, two Water Champions, have joined the team at the Western Sussex Rivers Trust. They will be working with parish councils, communities and young people to help raise awareness of the importance of our riverscapes.

- Efforts are under way to improve the underwater kelp forest that stretches along the coast of Sussex and is home to both the long and short-snouted seahorse. Partners



are working together as part of the Sussex Kelp Restoration Project to reduce sediments that flow into the seas from rivers.



The process of reviewing the South Downs National Park’s Local Plan continues at pace after more than 3,700 comments were received to a consultation.

The National Park Authority has been analysing all the feedback to the consultation that was held between January and March as it prepares for the next stage of the Local Plan Review. The award-winning South Downs Local Plan is being updated to ensure it addresses important issues such as nature recovery, climate change, affordable housing and helping local communities thrive.

Earlier this year more than 1,000 people visited 20 consultation events across the National Park and over 10,400 people viewed the online consultation. More than 1,900 individuals responded to the consultation, making 3,714 separate comments.

Following a meeting of the National Park’s Planning Committee last month, the next stages have been agreed:

- In response to the first consultation, 28 new sites were put forward to the Authority to consider for development. In addition to this, further feedback was submitted regarding 38 existing sites that the Authority had previously excluded or rejected in the Land Availability Assessment (LAA). An updated LAA, outlining the Authority’s assessment of potential sites for development, will be published this autumn and inform the next consultation in 2026.
- Further engagement with National Park Parishes will take place during the autumn about any proposed changes to potential site allocations.
- All the feedback so far will be considered as the Authority prepares the next stage of the Local Plan Review, with the second public consultation taking place between May and July 2026.
- Submission of the revised Local Plan to the Government’s Planning Inspectorate is expected in the autumn of 2026 and full adoption as planning policy by the National Park Authority in 2027.

Summaries of the feedback by policy and site allocation are also available to read at

www.southdowns.gov.uk/local-plan-review

Harnessing the sun's power



Community-based energy in the region has taken a big step forward with the launch of a rooftop solar power scheme.

Solar panels will be installed at three sites after Energise South Downs raised over £300,000 through its first-ever community share offer.

In addition to community backing, the share offer attracted generous support from the South Downs National Park Trust and Co-operatives UK's Community Shares Booster Fund.

Energise South Downs is a Petersfield-based community energy organisation, supporting the transition to renewables through locally-owned energy infrastructure.

The solar panels will be installed at Britannia Reeves removals warehouse in Petersfield, Energique Health and Fitness Centre in Alton, and Hayling Island Sailing Club. It will be enough to power local buildings, while cutting 54 tonnes of CO₂ annually, equivalent to planting 2,100 trees.

All surplus revenue will be reinvested through a Community Benefit Fund, supporting future social, environmental and cultural projects across the South Downs

Catriona Cockburn, Founder and CEO of Energise South Downs, said: "This incredible response shows the appetite for grassroots climate solutions.

"We can't wait to start installing and seeing the impact of these three rooftop solar installations, from decarbonisation to lower energy bills for our communities."

James Winkworth, Director of Growth and Organisational Development at the National Park, said: "The driest spring on record, together with the hottest June, are stark reminders of our changing climate and the challenges we face. We need more innovative, community-based climate action on the ground and that's exactly what this project is. It brings together local businesses to strengthen energy resilience and grow the region's green economy, so we're really pleased to be supporting it."

The community share offer was hosted through ethical investment platform Ethex and reached its target in just 10 days. Learn more [here](#).

The joys of late summer days



Warm afternoons enjoying the sunshine, a comforting crispness in the morning air, farmers busy harvesting amazing local produce and breathtaking seas of purple heathers across the National Park – this time of year is so very special!

As we enjoy the last few weeks of summer and head into autumn, it's a time to really savour the South Downs landscape and its incredible beauty.

These late summer days are also a wonderful time to capture photography.

It's quite fitting, therefore, that World Photography Day takes place in August!

Have you thought about entering our competition yet for the chance to win £250?

As the National Park is celebrating its 15th birthday this year, people are being invited to photograph some of their favourite things about the South Downs – whether that be locations, views, towns and villages, heritage, food and drink, or whatever the imagination can think of!



The prizes for the competition, *Three cheers for 15 years: South Downs favourites*, will be £250 for first place, £150 for second place, £75 for third place and £50 for fourth place.

As always there will be a separate wildlife category, with a £150 prize for the best shot and £75 for the runner-up image.

The youth competition returns this year for budding young photographers – with categories 10 years and under and 11 to 17. Young photographers are being challenged to snap an amazing shot of their favourite aspect of the South Downs National Park. The prize for 10 years and under will be a family ticket to Marwell Wildlife, while the winner of the 11 to 17 category will win a GoApe adventure for two.

So get snapping and submit your images!

Find out more [here](#) about entering the competition.

To give you some inspiration here are some of our favourite August and September photographs.

Uppark reopens to public



One of the grandest historic buildings in the National Park has just re-opened after repairs and renovations.

The National Trust's Uppark House and Garden, near South Harting, has reopened after being closed for the last year and a half.

The 17th century house and landscaped garden are open four days a week from Sunday to Wednesday until 1 October. Visitors can now enjoy the tranquil garden, café and second-hand bookshop free of charge.

Uppark's beautiful Georgian interiors, including its atmospheric servants' quarters, can be explored on new bookable guided tours.



Michaela Saunders-Hall, Visitor Operations Manager, said: "We're thrilled to be welcoming visitors back to Uppark, and excited to be opening our gardens, café and second-hand bookshop for free so that everyone can enjoy popping here for a delicious slice of cake and a brew with a view!

"Our enthusiastic volunteers are all ready to guide visitors through the house with stories of the Fetherstonehaugh's, H.G Wells and Lady Emma Hamilton as well as a new, informative exhibition on the conservation and collections management that has taken place over the last nineteen months and ongoing."

The garden, which offers spectacular views over the South Downs, has seen some changes.

Head Gardener Chris Skinner: "Our new garden pathways allow all our visitors to roam more freely through glades of trees, past flower borders and into the wildflower meadow. We've introduced new planting schemes too, with a strong focus on colour and scent, invoking the spirit of Humphrey Repton, the gardens' original 19th century landscape designer."

For more information click [here](#).

COMPETITION! We've got a pair of free tickets to offer to newsletter readers! Simply email "The Time Machine" to newsletter@southdowns.gov.uk before midnight on 31 August for your chance to win.

£350k boost for wildlife haven



Much-needed improvements are on the way to a nature reserve to make it even better for wildlife and visitors.

Funding of around £350,000 will be invested to improve Rotherlands Local Nature Reserve, a 7.6-hectare (19-acre) wildlife haven near Petersfield that includes a stretch of the River Rother and is home to otter, brown trout, and kingfisher.

It comes as erosion of the riverbanks has increased in recent years, with more invasive species taking hold, and pathways around the site are often water-logged during the winter months.

The project will improve access and water quality at the reserve, as well as help biodiversity to flourish.

The majority of the funding has come from National Grid's Landscape Enhancement Initiative, with additional funding from Southern Water. The partners on the project are the South Downs National Park Authority, Western Sussex Rivers Trust, and the landowners, East Hampshire District Council and Petersfield Town Council. Work is due to start in September and be completed by 2028.

Among the improvements will be:

- Tree planting and hedging to reduce the visual impact of electricity pylons and improve tranquility.
- Enhance pathways to ensure they are more accessible year-round and to prevent further erosion.
- Improve the woodland by planting native trees and shrubs, including Sussex Black Poplar, Britain's rarest native hardwood tree that thrives in wetlands.
- New interpretation boards and riverside viewing platforms.
- A dedicated "dog beach" to help riverbanks flourish.

Laura Sercombe, Director of Landscape and Strategy (interim) at the National Park Authority, said: "We made a commitment as part of the newly formed Rother Partnership to restore the river to a state worthy of a National Park and this is one of the first projects to be delivered as part of that landscape-scale commitment. It's exciting to be announcing this project."

Free farm visits for schools



Free farm trips are being offered to schoolchildren thanks to an exciting new initiative beginning next month.

The **Goodwood Education Trust**, the independent environmental education charity operating on the Goodwood Estate near Chichester, is offering 15 free farm trips to schools who might not otherwise have the opportunity.

It comes after funding from the Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) programme, which is administered by the South Downs National Park Authority.

The farm visits are suitable for both primary and secondary classes, with content tailored to particular curriculum areas.

Students will have the opportunity to experience all aspects of one of the largest organic farms in the country, meet the dairy cows, gain insight into potential careers in agriculture, make the connection with the food they eat, and learn about how nature-friendly farming benefits the landscape.

The Education Trust is based at a stunning and sustainable Education Centre, offering a comfortable and accessible base for visiting groups.

Catherine Cannon, Trust Manager, said: "We've been welcoming schools to the farm for almost 50 years. We know how valuable it is for children to spend time on the farm, meeting the animals, learning about jobs, and learning about where their food comes from. Beyond that, spending time outside, in nature, is so important for both physical and mental health."



Amanda Elmes, Learning, Outreach and Volunteer Lead for the National Park, said: "Around 70 per cent of the National Park is a mixed farm landscape, providing space for food production as well as some amazing biodiversity.

"It's wonderful to be able to support this initiative to help more children – many of whom may have never visited a National Park – to learn how farming, nature and heritage can work in harmony."

Race is on for donations!

People are being invited to rally round to support a range of initiatives that could help the environment and reduce carbon footprint in the Ouse Valley.



Nine projects have been shortlisted in the "Community Pitch" programme, which is running as part of Ouse Valley Climate Action (OVCA).

The shortlisted projects are:

- Blooming Biodiversity Peacehaven – Wildlife haven for pollinators and vegetable growing area at Meridian Community Primary School and Nursery, Peacehaven
- Season of climate change and sustainability events – Lewes Climate Hub
- Growing Together, Seaford Forest garden and raised beds for growing food – Friends of Walmer Road Recreation Ground
- Bat survey and conservation initiative – Barcombe Bats, Barcombe Parish Council
- Malling Recreation Ground, Lewes: New and Extended Shared Use Paths for All – Cycle Lewes
- Outdoor learning area, wildlife gardening – High Cliff Academy
- eCargo Bikes for Seahaven Community workshops promoting e-cargo bikes – Get Bikery, Lewes.
- #PlasticFreePeople Seaford – reduce impact of disposable incontinence products – Seaford Environmental Alliance
- Wellbeing/Connect with Nature Space – Peacehaven Community School

Thanks to funding from Lewes District Council and support from the South Downs National Park Trust, this round of the Community Pitch is offering match-funding of up to £5,000 to a range of local organisations, community groups, clubs, parish and town councils, and non-profit businesses.

The groups are now inviting donations in order to meet 10 per cent of their costs.

In 2022, OVCA beat over 600 applicants to be awarded £2m from the Community Lottery Fund to create one of the first communities in the UK to fully embrace climate action.

A flurry of activity has been taking place and there are now well over 50 separate "mini-projects" around climate action, including creating community gardens, protecting wetlands and promoting community recycling.

For more information about each project and to donate **[visit here](#)**.

The deadline for donations is midnight on 31 September.

Club is above par for wildlife



A golf club in the National Park is proving that golf and nature can thrive together.

From restoring ancient woodland and boosting rare butterfly populations to installing solar power and creating wildlife habitats, Corhampton Golf Club is taking a lead in nature-friendly land stewardship.

Initiatives have included creating chalk scrapes to support rare species like the small blue butterfly (*pictured*), as well as expanding wildflower meadows and long-grass habitats. The Hampshire club is now restoring Shepherds Copse, a native ancient woodland.

Work to create new wildflower meadows was supported by the National Park's Bee Lines campaign, which is looking to create new "highways" for bees and butterflies to be able to move through the landscape. Since launching six years ago, more than 160 football pitches of new wildflower patches have been created across the South Downs.

Corhampton's Course Manager Iestyn Carpenter said: "We're showing that you can have a top-quality golf course that also acts as a conservation corridor, a learning space, and a community hub.

"Sustainability isn't a bolt-on – it's part of how we manage the course, the land, and our relationships."

Thanks to partnerships with local ecologists and organisations like the Bishop's Waltham Men's Shed – who build wildlife boxes from recycled materials – Corhampton now supports over 50 bird species, alongside growing bat, bee, and butterfly populations.

Sustainability practices on-site also include electric vehicles, robotic mowers, rainwater harvesting, and solar energy.

Over the past two years the South Downs Trust, the official charity for the National Park, has provided grants to Lewes Golf Club, East Brighton Golf Course and West Hove Golf Club to help with nature-friendly mowing equipment.

"Being in the South Downs is a privilege, and we treat it as an important responsibility," added Rob Bailey, Course Management Chair.

"Every step we take is about long-term value – for wildlife, for golfers, and for the generations to come."

Giveaway! Win £40 voucher



Cadence span the South Downs, serving sustainably-sourced coffee and food to go from their quirky Clubhouses.

They've become a destination. Providing the perfect meeting point and somewhere to stop off mid-walk, run, or ride, to refuel. Renowned for their sourdough toasties, power porridge pots and coffee offering, they're also attracting a following for their low-impact Clubhouses and relaxed vibe that's centred around community and the beautiful outdoors.

From timber-clad containers, to repurposed farm buildings, each of their eight locations has been designed with the lightest footprint. They also recycle, reuse and repurpose wherever possible, use compostable cups and plates, source locally and support ethical supply chains.

The South Downs Way X Cadence 100

If you're completing the South Downs Way, pick up a Cadence 100 card at one of their Clubhouses at either end of the trail. Get a staff signature at any five Clubhouses as you pass by, or a selfie outside, and claim a Cadence 100 embroidered patch on completion.



Cadence Clubhouses are open every day in Winchester, Cocking Hill, Upwaltham (seasonal), Newhaven, Seaford, Litlington, Beachy Head and Eastbourne. Details are at cadencecycle.club. Join their community @cadencecycleclub

WIN! We've teamed up with Cadence to give away a £40 voucher to spend on food and drink at any of their Clubhouses or online at cadencecycle.club, plus a bag of their house blend espresso beans ready to grind at home and some Cadence merchandise.

People signing up to the newsletter during August will be automatically entered into the draw to win the cabin stay. Those who are already signed up can email "Cadence" to newsletter@southdowns.gov.uk before midnight on 31 August. Sign up to the newsletter [here](#) and see competition T&Cs [here](#).

Things to do in the South Downs this August

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/



- The month-long **MADHurst Festival** continues in the heart of the National Park at Midhurst. Running until 31 August, the festival brings together local talents, families and visitors for a packed programme of concerts, workshops and creative events that showcase the very best the town has to offer. Highlights include an art exhibition at the SDNP Memorial Hall, outdoor theatre at Cowdray Ruins, a bat safari at South Pond, the Midlife Crisis Band and much more!
- Discover the **Petworth Way**, a scenic new walking trail linking Haslemere and Arundel, with historic Petworth at its heart. This linear route offers walkers a chance to explore the diverse landscapes, rich history, and quiet charm of the Western Weald. This is a special opportunity on 16 and 17 August to experience the trail as part of a guided walk.
- Explore the butterflies of the National Park with butterfly and **insect expert Seniz** (@senizdoesnature). Seniz is a youth panellist for Butterfly Conservation and a published author on white storks in Sussex. The online talk on 19 August will be an introduction to butterflies found in Sussex for beginners and those with an interest in butterflies, tips and tricks on identification, sites to visit and how to get involved.
- Do you fancy doing a spot of **river-dipping** and finding out the amazing wildlife that lives in our waterways? Wild Wednesdays are an hour of hands-on activities for children and their parents to experience local wildlife. The event is being run by Gilbert White's House and Gardens at the Oakhanger Stream in Hampshire.
- Coming up on 11 September at Seven Sisters Country Park is a **bat evening** with renowned naturalist Michael Blencowe. The evening will begin with an illustrated talk then you'll head into the wood armed with bat detectors to loom and listen for pipistrelles, Noctules, Serotines and other species. Last few tickets remaining!