

SOUTH DOWNS NEWS

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NATIONAL PARK

WORK AND PLAY IN YOUR NATIONAL PARK

This month:

- **The power of ponds** Discover how restoring and creating new ponds across the National Park is helping nature bounce back and providing vital refuges amid a warming climate.
- **Amazing animals** Learn about a new digital exhibition celebrating species of the South Downs.
- **Spooky season!** Find out about creepy creatures and mysterious places in the National Park.
- **COMPETITION!** Win a family trip to one of the region's most amazing pumpkin patches!

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

Pond transformations bring boost for wildlife

After one of the hottest summers on record, the humble pond is needed more than ever in the South Downs National Park.

Six new ponds will now be created or restored for nature as the National Park's **Pounds for Ponds** scheme announces a new tranche of projects.

Over the past three years more than 30 ponds across Sussex and Hampshire have been transformed into havens for wildlife and now several more are in the offing.

Dew ponds are synonymous with the chalk grassland of the South Downs, historically being dug by farmers as a watering hole for livestock and some dating back several hundred years.

However, over many decades and due to changes in farming practices, scores of these wildlife oases have fallen into disrepair or been lost completely. Climate

change, with warmer, drier summers, has worsened the problem, meaning these bodies of water are more important



than ever in providing refuge and drinking water for insects, birds, amphibians and mammals.

The South Downs National Park Trust, the official independent charity for the National Park, launched Pounds for Pond with the aim of reversing the decline and has been working with the National Park Authority and a variety of landowners and farmers.

The initiative is being run in partnership with pond specialist and wildlife charity Froglife, with the aim of raising £1m to restore 100 ponds in total. Funding so far has come from public donations and support from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, Bannister Trust, BMW, Ernest Kleinwort Charitable Trust, Portsmouth Water, Froglife and Swire Charitable Trust.

More than £325,000 has been invested so far creating or restoring ponds.

50th birthday for country park



A new natural woodland play area has opened at Queen Elizabeth Country Park to celebrate its 50th birthday.

The sprawling 1,400-acre country park, situated between Petersfield and Waterlooville, was officially opened in 1976 when Butser Hill and Queen Elizabeth Forest were brought together to create Hampshire's largest country park.

The park's visitor centre was opened by Her late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II in April 1976. The building was designed by renowned British architect Sir Hugh Casson, who also designed London Zoo's famous Elephant House and served as coordinating designer for Westminster's street decorations during The Queen's Coronation.

To celebrate the milestone, a new play area has opened that includes burrow tunnels, balance beams, a slide, swings and a nature kitchen table for younger visitors to use their imagination to play, enjoy and explore.

A cooper beech tree was also planted at a special event to mark the anniversary.



Elaine Whittaker-Slark, Lead Ranger for the Hampshire area of the South Downs National Park, said: "Queen Elizabeth Country Park is a key gateway to the National Park, providing a stepping stone from urban areas into some of the most amazing landscapes and wildlife in England I have fond memories of the opening of the country park, as I was there. I was very young and only really saw the Queen's hat, but it has always remained a special place for me to enjoy being outdoors in nature with the family."

The park is owned and managed by Hampshire County Council working in close partnership Forestry England, the National Park Authority and other partners.

Councillor Kirsty North, Hampshire County Council's Cabinet Lead for Universal Services, said: "We've been supported by amazing staff, fantastic volunteers and dedicated partners whose care and commitment have helped ensure the park remains in excellent health and is well placed to continue thriving for the next 50 years and beyond."

The National Park is celebrating the success of the initiative by releasing a series of beautiful new films that show the transformation of the ponds.

Jan Knowlson, Biodiversity Officer for the South Downs National Park, said: "Water in the landscape is vital for biodiversity and needed more than ever amid a changing climate, with increasingly hotter, drier summers. Ponds are a particularly important habitat in the agricultural landscape, supporting the highest number of freshwater plant species and some of the rarest species, such as the fairy shrimp, great crested newt (*pictured above*), common toad and the scarce blue-tailed damselfly. We'd like to thank each and every individual and organisation who has helped us so far as none of this really crucial nature recovery work would be possible without their support."

The six new projects are:

- **Lancing Ring, West Sussex** – restoration of dew pond at a Local Nature Reserve popular with walkers. The scheme will help link the South Downs to the local residential area and is being run in partnership with Adur and Worthing Council.
- **Houghton Pond, Bury Hill, West Sussex** – Creating a new pond at Houghton Hill along the South Downs Way.
- **Levin View, Singleton, West Sussex** – Creation of new wildlife pond with planting near the newly-renovated Centurion Way walking and cycling route.
- **Truleigh Hill Camping Field, Youth Hostel Association (YHA), West Sussex** – Restoration of dew pond, including removal of invasive species like Canadian Pond Weed.
- **Boars Hole Pond, Eartham, West Sussex** – Installation of a pond to create new important habitat, food and water source for local wildlife, located at the end of and linked to Chichester District Council's strategic nature corridors project.
- **Windmill Farm, Colemore, Hampshire** – Re-instatement of a historic farm cart pond accessible along a country road.

Life is returning to ponds that have been restored so far, including at Seven Sisters, where meadow pipits, goldfinch and starlings are flocking to drink and dragonflies are buzzing around. Newts, toads and frogs have also moved in to create a rich wildlife oasis.



National Park Ranger Lawrence Leather (*pictured above*) said: "Having a place to capture the water brings loads of different species in, such as dragonflies, newts, frogs and toads. It's also great for bird species that are moving through the landscape, stopping for a drink. It's now such an abundant mix of species and you wouldn't see that without the wet landscape."

To donate to Pounds for Ponds, visit

<https://southdownstrust.org.uk/pounds-for-ponds/>

Bringing new meaning to nature through stories



The amazing butterflies, bats, birds and bees of the South Downs National Park are the focus of a new thought-provoking digital exhibition of poetry, stories, film and spoken words.

Species Stories is a fascinating creative exploration of the National Park's most recognisable wildlife, bringing to life people's reflections, feelings and imaginations.

The collection has been produced by talented writers and artists from Black and ethnically diverse backgrounds, as well as children and young people from across the National Park.

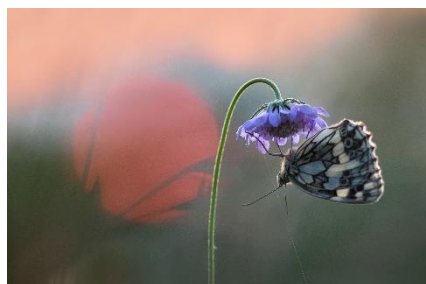
The free exhibition has been produced in partnership with Brighton-based arts and heritage organisation Writing Our Legacy, the South Downs National Park Trust and the Foyle Foundation.

Anooshka Rawden, Cultural Heritage Lead for the South Downs National Park, said: "The incredible landscape of the South Downs National Park has inspired stories for thousands of years, with generations of people moved by its beauty, biodiversity and heritage.

"At the heart of the South Downs story are species – the amazing birds, bees, butterflies and bats that have survived for millennia.

"*Species Stories* explores the fascinating connection between these extraordinary animals and humans, reminding us all that we are ultimately part of nature and our stories are intertwined.

"This enduring bond is brought to life and unpacked by a



range of new voices, bringing a fresh perspective on what South Downs nature means amid the unprecedented challenges it faces."

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Eight writers and artists produced a unique creative piece related to a South Downs species as part of the project. Illuminating work includes the diary of an endangered potter's flower bee, tales of the "Night Natterer" European vesper bat, and a moving song and spoken word piece inspired by the migrating turtle doves of the National Park.

The commissioned writers in the exhibition are: Dulani Kulasinghe, Jess Murrain, Jose Hall, Marva Carty, Rawz, Rona Luo, Sense Turner and Tamara Lois Ansah.

Meanwhile, schoolchildren from across Sussex and Hampshire took part in a creative writing competition, using the species of the National Park as their inspiration. Supported by writing prompts and learning materials inspired by the commissioned writers, produced as a pack by commissioned writer Gemma Weekes, pupils produced imaginative pieces that reflected their own connections with nature.

The winning schools were Midhurst Rother College, Midhurst Primary School and Bury CE Primary School. Each school won a Pollination Education Station, which is a handcrafted outdoor habitat and living classroom designed by the local charity Sussex Green Living. Built using repurposed materials like reclaimed pallets, the stations provide nesting, food, and water for bees, butterflies, and other vital pollinators while teaching communities about biodiversity.

Laura Braun, Senior Teacher at Bury CE Primary, said: "They were really inspired by the stimuli and eager



to create their own pieces to represent the species. They thoroughly enjoyed the process and it fitted so beautifully with our own nature-linked curriculum."

Amy Glass, CEO and Founder of Writing Our Legacy, said: "Species Stories creatively engaged the imaginations of children and young people in the rich biodiversity of the South Downs National Park, encouraging them to think and care about the beautiful species living amongst us. Writing Our Legacy was pleased to commission eight outstanding writers of colour to produce written and digital artworks, also engaging a fellow writer and educator to create an educational resource for local schools.

"It's exciting to bring the South Downs to life in the classroom and now to an even wider audience through this new platform."

To see the exhibition visit <https://species-stories.southdowns.gov.uk>

Creepy but cool creatures!



There's a chill in the air and an eerie mist shrouds the vast woodlands of the South Downs.

Scattered across the damp undergrowth are all manner of weird and wonderful fungi and watery spider's webs glistening ominously in the fading autumn sunlight. October is certainly one of spookiest and most mysterious times of the year in the South Downs National Park! We take a light-hearted look at six creepy, but utterly cool, creatures that call the National Park home.

Raft spider



One of the largest and most striking spider species in the UK, this bestial beauty was spotted at Longmoor, near Petersfield. This arachnid lives around the edge of ponds and ditches, and thrives on wet heaths in

the South Downs.

Adults sit at the edge of the water, or on floating vegetation, with their front legs resting on the water's surface in order to feel for the vibrations of potential prey.

Using the surface tension of the water, they chase out on to the water to catch their prey, which will even include tadpoles or small fish. Raft spiders also swim underwater, often diving beneath the surface when threatened.

Crows



The crow family (known as corvids) are wickedly intelligent. Many species have shown an ability to solve problems, recognise human faces and even use tools!

The National Park is home to common carrion crows (*Corvus corone*), which thrive across the

region's chalk grassland, farmland, and woodlands.

People historically associated crows with death because the birds scavenged on medieval battlefields. Large flocks of crows roosting together in winter are traditionally named a "murder," matching old folklore that associated them with impending doom. Aside from their spookiness, ecologically they're really important as natural scavengers, pest controllers and for seed dispersal across the landscape.

Biofluorescent snails

Some snails have a secret identity! Shine a UV light on them and they can glow with ghostly green or yellow colours thanks to a phenomenon called biofluorescence. By day they're ordinary garden snails. By night they're tiny glowing ghouls 😊

The fluorescent compounds are isolated entirely in the soft body tissues, the eye stalks, or freshly secreted mucus trails.

Fairy Fingers

These fragile white spires can suddenly appear in autumn, looking uncannily like a cluster of tiny ghostly fingers clawing their way out of the ground. No wonder they're called Fairy Fingers!



Also called white worm coral, these spindle mushrooms play a key role in nutrient cycling. It decomposes organic material in the soil, enriching the ecosystem and supporting plant growth. Its presence in grasslands and woodland edges indicates a healthy and wildlife-rich environment.

Magpie Inkcap



The Magpie Inkcap mushroom melts itself into black ink instead of dying.

This ghostly process helps spread its spores and can leave behind what looks like a puddle of dark liquid in the woods.

The cap can reach up to 7cm and at maturity the cap will start to deliquescing (liquefying into its spore mass). These eerie-looking mushrooms are as deadly as they look and should never eaten as they are highly toxic.

Greater Horseshoe Bat

Bats are often cast as the quintessential Halloween creature, associated with haunted houses and dark nights.

But here in the South Downs, bats are vital to maintaining healthy ecosystems,

The greater horseshoe bat is one of our largest bat species – about the size of a small pear.

The horseshoe bats can be distinguished from other bats by the presence of a complex horseshoe-shaped noseleaf which is related to their particular type of echolocation system. Greater horseshoe bats emerge from their roosts within half an hour of sunset. Adept predators, they watch intently from a regular perch and fly out to take passing insects.

Far from being spooky, these acrobatic flyers are impressive pest controllers, and watching them on a quiet evening is a mesmerising experience, not something to fear!



13 Spookiest spots 🎃

As an International dark sky Reserve with an abundance of nocturnal wildlife, it's no wonder autumn and winter stir up a swirling cauldron of myths, legends, and folklore.

The hills and valleys harbour many a tale passed down the generations and some of these accounts are a little bit chilling!

Here are 13 intriguing tales and places to ignite your imagination:

Cowdray Ruins, West Sussex



There are many spooky stories connected to this Tudor home that was consumed by fire during restoration work in 1793.

Some attribute the fire to a curse that expired when the 8th Viscount Montague died two weeks after the blaze and the inheriting descendant died childless.

The Grey Lady is the ruins' most frequently seen spook and she manifests so often that her usual haunting route has been coined the 'Lady's Walk'.

Green men of Winchester



Was it the verdant spirit of Hampshire's countryside that led the people who built Winchester cathedral to carve mysterious Green Men into its ancient walls?

Estimates vary from 60 to 70 of these strange faces covered in leaves, spewing vegetation from their mouths or sprouting it from

eyes, noses, mouths and ears.

Hinton Ampner, Hampshire

The Tudor Old Manor House that previously stood on the site of Hinton Ampner was reputed to be one of the most haunted houses in Britain – complete with howling, shouting, gun shots, screaming, loud bangs, mysterious music and an overwhelming feeling of dread.

A ghost army of defeated Royalist soldiers is said to return to the nearby English Civil War battlefield at Cheriton.



Tichborne, Hampshire

The Tichborne Dole still takes place to this day and is the tradition of giving a measure of flour to all those in the community who need it.

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The story behind it involves Lord Tichborne and his wife Lady Mabella.

She would give alms to the poor every year but her husband did not agree with it.

When she lay dying she made her husband promise to continue it.

He said that he would give as much flour as the land she could walk on would give.

She dragged herself out of bed and crawled around 23 acres of land before getting back into bed and cursing her husband.

She said that if he did not keep his promise then one year there would be seven sons born and the next seven daughters.

With the seven daughters the Tichborne name would die out.

In 1796 the lord got fed up with 'too many beggars' and so stopped giving alms to the poor.

The curse came true with several heirs dying and the house burning to the ground.

The tradition was then reinstated and has happened every year since.

Owslebury, Hampshire

Marwell Hall is one of the locations of the "Mistletoe Bride" legend.

A bride goes missing on her wedding night while playing hide and seek and when the wedding guests could not find her they thought she must have run away, fleeing her new husband. In truth she became stuck in a chest and could not get out, starved to death and died. She now haunts the hall.

Heathlands, Hampshire



Lowland heath can have its spooky moments, and there are plenty of wonderful heathland sites on the edge of the National Park around Bordon, Petersfield and

Haslemere to explore.

You often see bats flitting about just after sunset, enjoying the large insect population that heathlands support, and using the wooded edges to find roosts.

At this time of year, the wildlife may be a little quieter but an early morning or late afternoon in the mists provides plenty of spooky encounters, with the possibility of hearing ravens kronking on Longmoor in particular.

And the spiderwebs coating the gorse bushes show up beautifully, limned in morning dew or frost.

Close to Bramshott Common is the village of Bramshott, possibly the most haunted village in England, with a history of highwaymen and murder!

Kingley Vale, West Sussex



Yew tree woods at Kingley Vale by Chris Doyle

Who or what lies beneath Kingley Vale?

A special place of Bronze Age burial mounds and Iron Age camps, tales of

hauntings in the dark and silent grove of ancient yews will come as no surprise to those who know this spot.

Stories tell of the Kings' Graves or Devil's Humps as the tombs of Viking leaders buried in 894, with the yews marking the battlefield site, stained red with the blood of dead warriors.

Legend has it that the woods are haunted by these Vikings, while one story suggests that the gnarled trees transform into human forms at moonlight.

Racton Ruin, West Sussex



Completed in the 1770s, and arguably one of the "spookiest" places in Sussex, there have been reports of paranormal activity at the isolated folly, including bricks being thrown from the top of the tower.

According to local legend,

there is a "ghost tractor" in the fields that comes right up to you then disappears.

Visitors to the site should remember Racton Monument is a privately-owned property. Visitors should stick to the public bridleway and not venture on the property itself.

Chanctonbury Ring, West Sussex



This popular spot is reputed to be one of the most haunted locations on the South Downs.

The beech trees that circle the ring

were first planted in 1760.

But long before it was the site of Bronze Age burials, Iron Age forts and a Roman temple.

According to local stories, walking widdershins (anti clockwise) seven times round the ring will summon the Devil, ready to offer you a bowl of milk, soup or porridge in exchange for your soul.

Upwaltham, West Sussex

Ol' Sary Weaver lived at Upwaltham and was a village wise woman in the 1800s.

Local lore tells of her being a witch who could turn herself into a hare.

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According to the legend, two country workers were resting under a hedge and when they saw a hare bounding along they had their suspicions it was actually an old woman from the village.

A stone was thrown at the hare's leg and the creature let out a screech.

That night Ol' Sary Weaver was seen in the village hobbling to her cottage, struggling with the same leg.

Devil's Dyke, near Brighton



According to local legend, the devil decided to stop the Christian conversion of Sussex by digging through the Downs, letting in the sea and drowning them all.

Clods of earth thrown up by his digging formed Chanctonbury, Cissbury, Rackham Hill and Mount Caburn.

An old lady saw him, lit a candle behind a sieve and knocked her rooster awake.

The devil thought the sun was rising and ran away, throwing the Goldstone into Hove on the way.

One more clod fell from his hoof and became the Isle of Wight, or perhaps he landed so hard in Surrey he formed the Devil's Punch Bowl!

Mount Caburn, East Sussex

A giant called Gil is said to have walked the slopes of the hill, hurling his hammer from the summit.

A nearby barrow that once stood on the site of the chalk quarry near Glynde railway crossing, was called 'Gil's Grave'.

Other places bearing the giants name include Gil's Ridge near Crowborough and Gil's Lap in Ashdown Forest.

There are other stories of a silver coffin and a knight in golden armour at Mount Caburn.

The Long Man of Wilmington, East Sussex



A meeting of old men by Verity Stannard

There are many theories about the age and history of the Long Man – from a Prehistoric fertility

symbol to a 4th century Roman emperor.

One local legend claims that the Long Man of Wilmington is a memorial outlining the figure of a giant from Windover Hill who fell and broke his neck.

Another talks of a fight between the Long Man of Wilmington and another giant from Firle Beacon, which ended in the death of the tallest man to have ever lived in England.

Helping our rivers and streams



Natacha Bricks-Yonow is Project Manager for Downs to the Sea, which is working across the National Park to create, restore and improve blue spaces. Here she reflects on a busy season of tackling invasive species along rivers

and streams.

As another Himalayan Balsam control season draws to a close, the Downs to the Sea project and its partners; the South Downs National Park and the Western Sussex Rivers Trust, would like to extend a sincere thank you to all the parish councils, conservation groups and volunteers who have dedicated their time and energy to tackling this invasive plant along the River Rother and across other local sites.

Through countless hours of surveying and pulling, volunteers have once again made a significant contribution to improving river and wetland habitats. Their efforts help protect native wildlife, improve biodiversity, and support the long-term health of our waterways. Congratulations to everyone involved for another successful season and for the commitment and enthusiasm shown throughout the year.



Led by Ranger Angela Ward, our project is supporting a new catchment-wide approach to tackling Himalayan Balsam on the River Rother. Rather than

carrying out isolated removal sessions at a few locations, the programme works across the whole river system, bringing together parish councils, conservation groups, volunteers, landowners, and partner organisations to coordinate action along the river and its tributaries. The aim is to ensure that all sections of the catchment are monitored and managed, reducing the risk of reinfestation from upstream populations and creating a more effective long-term response.

This approach is being piloted on the River Rother with the ambition of progressively reducing Himalayan Balsam across the catchment and empowering local communities to become active custodians of their river environment. Local groups are encouraged to "adopt" stretches of river for regular monitoring and removal, supported by training, resources, and guidance from the Downs to the Sea project and its partners. Activities are recorded and mapped on **INNS Mapper** to help track progress and target future efforts.

A new instructional video is now available, offering practical guidance on identifying and managing Himalayan Balsam. You can see it **here**

If you have any questions or would like to get involved please contact **DownstotheSea@southdowns.gov.uk**.

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Win a trip to pumpkin patch!



After a long, hot summer, Rogate Pumpkin Patch is gearing up to throw open its gates for another spectacular Halloween season – and this year promises to be bigger, brighter and spookier than ever!

Hundreds of pumpkins will be waiting across the patch, with visitors able to wander through the fields and choose the perfect pumpkin to take home. But there's far more to discover than pumpkins alone.

Families can explore a host of themed play areas, tackle spectacular Halloween games and activities, and enjoy plenty of thrills and spills along the way. There will be fun fair rides for all ages, the much-loved Sussex-famous Corn Blaster, maizes to get lost in, tunnels to explore and muddy pits for those brave enough to get stuck in!



And after all that excitement, visitors can refuel at a range of catering stands, with plenty of food and drink options to keep everyone happy – from little pumpkins to hungry grown-ups.

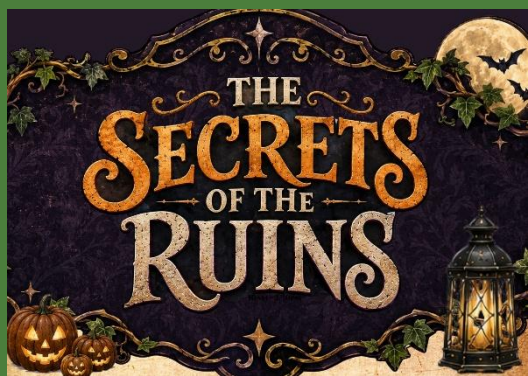
But keep your eyes peeled... there may be some unexpected visitors roaming the patch! Ghostly characters and Halloween surprises will be making appearances throughout the day, adding an extra dose of spooky fun to the experience.

Whether you're looking for the perfect pumpkin, a family day out, or simply an excuse to embrace everything Halloween, Rogate Pumpkin Patch is getting ready to welcome you for a season packed with pumpkins, play, laughter and a little bit of fright! The patch is open from 16 October to 1 November.

We've teamed up with Rogate Pumpkin Patch to offer a family admission ticket (two adults and two children) to a lucky reader. All you need to do to enter the competition is email "Spooky South Downs" to **newsletter@southdowns.gov.uk before midnight on 16 October. 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/



- Are you interested in taking up some **free training** to learn more about climate action?

Are you concerned about climate change and want to understand what we can do to make a difference? The South Downs National Park Authority is offering two free training days to deliver training to residents, community groups, parish councils and businesses. The course has been created by the Carbon Literacy Project. Training days take place on 11 and 12 November. The training will be held online via MS Teams.

To find out more and book your place please visit this [webpage](#).

- People are invited to learn more about the fascinating history of Falmer Pond in Brighton as work continues to restore one of the South Downs' most distinctive freshwater habitats.

Over the next few weeks, site ranger Nick Lane is leading a series of community events, including guided tours, bat walks and practical conservation days. Find out more and register for an event [here](#).

- From 24 October to 1 November 2026, enjoy a wild October half term at [Marwell Zoo](#), where autumn adventures, seasonal activities and amazing wildlife come together for a fun-filled family day out.

Explore the twists and turns of the Autumn Maze and keep your eyes peeled for the Golden Acorn hidden along the way!

- Something mysterious is stirring among the ruins of Cowdray at Midhurst. For centuries, a chilling legend has told of a curse of fire and water. Now, the clues are beginning to appear once again!

'The Secrets of the Ruins' is a Halloween adventure trail for all young detectives and runs between 28 October and 1 November.

Pic credits:

P1 Mike Lane; P2 James Valente; P3 Anne Purkiss; P3 Butterfly Emma Varley; P4 Snail Richard Murray