

SOUTH DOWNS NEWS

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NATIONAL PARK

WORK AND PLAY IN YOUR NATIONAL PARK

This month:

- **Glow and behold!** Find out about the reintroduction of the incredible beetle that shines brightly at night during the summer months.
- **Best picnic spots** Discover some of the best places to go for a long lazy lunch.
- **Discovery** Find out about the UK's biggest resident moth that was spotted at a nature reserve.
- **Phew it's hot!** Win a deluxe flask to keep your drinks cool on your summer walks.

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

Let it glow! Incredible insect is re-introduced

There's nothing quite like the magic of spotting the glimmering green lamp of a glow-worm on a summer's evening.

The incredible insect has now been introduced to a site in the South Downs National Park as part of ongoing efforts to help local populations recover.

The common glow-worm – which is in fact a beetle – is struggling across the UK due to the impact of habitat loss and light pollution, while across Europe five species of glow-worm are threatened with extinction.

The South Downs, which has a handful of sites where glow-worms live, offers good conditions for the species to thrive as it has some of the darkest skies in England. The National Park Authority recently made increasing dark skies coverage a priority in its five-year Partnership Management Plan.

Working with rangers from the National Park, a team of community volunteers released glow-worm larvae to a site near Alton, in Hampshire. The glow-worm larvae came from a site in Devon and were introduced with the



help of specialist consultants.

The larvae will continue to grow until the summer of 2027 when they will be fully-fledged adults. The males look like typical beetles, but the females have no wings and look similar to the larvae. During the summer months females put on a spectacular night-time display as they emit light to attract a male, which have large, photosensitive eyes.

Artificial lights, particularly white LED streetlights, can mask this glow, stopping males finding females, which disrupts their ability to breed.

The glow-worm introduction has been funded by the South Downs National Park Authority, along with the local parish council.

Paul Bushell, a National Park Ranger for the Western Downs, said: "Glow-worms are struggling across the UK due to artificial lighting, along with habitat loss and



Major enforcement action



Major enforcement action has been taken to remove unauthorised structures and caravans in the National Park after repeated warnings and formal notices were ignored.

A specialist team have been taking action at a large field in Long Road, Soberton, Hampshire, as part of a three-day operation led by the National Park Authority and Winchester City Council, who work jointly in partnership on planning matters.

The enforcement action has involved the removal of caravans, mobile homes, sheds, non-agricultural vehicles, fencing, domestic animals and gas bottles – all of which were unlawfully on the site without any planning permission.

It follows a long-running enforcement history dating back more than a decade. A number of enforcement notices, as well as a High Court injunction, have been served to cease residential and recreational use of the land, most of which have been ignored.

The only lawful use of the land, which is divided into plots, is agriculture. The structures that were put up on the land would require planning permission.



The work over the three-day operation has left much of the soil surface cleared of debris, allowing the land to naturally regenerate (*pictures show before and after*).

Tim Slaney, Director of Placemaking for the National Park Authority, said: "This has been a lengthy and difficult enforcement case that ultimately left us with no option than to take robust action.

"We seek to negotiate where possible on enforcement matters, but our warnings and notices were consistently ignored. The National Park is a very special landscape that has been designated for the benefit of the entire nation because of its natural beauty, wildlife and heritage. These unlawful activities were significantly harming the landscape and people's enjoyment of it."

connectivity, contributing to the decline of this magical species.

"The local community have worked hard to create a perfect habitat for glow-worms and it's been wonderful working with them on this re-introduction.

"Glow-worms would once have been more widespread across the south of England, but artificial lighting introduced over the past 100 years has disrupted breeding patterns.

"Being a dark night sky and on the edge of a large woodland with little light pollution makes this the perfect area for a reintroduction. We'll have a wait a while for the glowing to begin, but we're hoping it will be worth the wait!"

And Paul added: "Glow-worms are part of the natural food cycle and help balance the local ecosystem. They are also a symbol of hope and renewal and the bioluminescent glow has been used in folklore and art for hundreds of years. It's the kind of species that can capture people's imaginations and hopefully help develop a deeper appreciation for nature."

Nature conservationist Derek Gow, from Keep It Wild, said: "We are very proud to have provided the glow worms for this restoration project in the South Downs National Park in a time of nature crisis when the wildlife of this planet is finishing fast. Projects like this are essential for nature's restoration."

National Park rangers will be working with local volunteers to manage the habitat and carry out surveys over the next year to measure the success of the re-introduction. By next summer, it's hoped that the glowing displays will begin.

The National Park Authority's Partnership Management Plan, launched earlier this year, has set a goal of expanding the current dark sky core (the very darkest areas) of the International Dark Sky Reserve by 10 per cent by 2031 by working with lighting authorities and local communities. The South Downs International Dark Sky Reserve is celebrating its 10th anniversary this year. See the interactive digital Partnership Management Plan [here](#).

A few glow-worm facts:

- Across Europe, five species of glow-worm are threatened with extinction, another two are endangered, and the common glow-worm is classified as near threatened, according to the International Union for Conservation of Nature.
- Glow worms have long been a fixture in folklore across the world, traditionally associated with fairies, magic, and, in some contexts, spirits of the dead. Their glow has been interpreted as magical lights or natural lanterns.
- The larvae of glow-worms are predators, feeding on slugs and snails. They kill their prey by delivering a series of toxic bites, injecting digestive proteins that paralyse and eventually dissolve the soft body of the slug or snail.

Best summer picnic spots

Homemade quiche, cheese scones, a buttery sausage roll, a sumptuous Victoria Sponge and maybe even a glass of ice-cold sparkling South Downs wine.

Having a picnic with friends and loved ones on a warm summer's day, all while enjoying good conversation and an inspiring view, is one of the joys of July.

So, to mark National Picnic Month, we're sharing some of our favourite spots for a picnic in the National Park.

Swanbourne Lake



If you're looking for a tranquil waterside spot for a picnic followed by a stunning downland walk, this is it!

Just a stone's throw from the busy castle and high street in Arundel is this picturesque lake, which lies in the lower part of a deep steep-sided valley that has been eroded into the chalk bedrock.

With 15 rowing boats available for hire, this would be a lovely spot for a romantic picnic for two!

The lake is home to a variety of waterfowl, which children will love feeding (with seed purchased from the ice cream kiosk). On a sunny day, you'll be able to spot fish swimming in the crystal-clear water.

After your lakeside picnic, why not explore the expansive surrounding downland and enjoy the views from the 18th century Hiorne Tower?

Black Down



The highest point in the South Downs National Park, Blackdown Hill is a landscape of wavy hair grass, purple

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heather and pine trees that gives visitors a true sense of "wild".

The views have inspired many and none so renowned as Tennyson himself: 'You came and looked and loved the view, long known and loved by me, Green Sussex fading into blue with one grey glimpse of sea.'

As you amble down some of the ancient sunken lanes and drove ways, you can feel a sense of timelessness. Traders, shepherds and chert quarrymen have been using these tracks for thousands of years. Haslemere train station, with connections to London and the south coast, is just two miles away.

Cheesefoot Head



Situated just outside of Winchester in Hampshire, Cheesefoot Head is a natural amphitheater. A stunning viewpoint, it offers views out towards Butser Hill, the New Forest and the Isle of Wight.

The sloping walls of the amphitheater is comprised of chalk grassland and is home to dozens of species of wildflowers which attract pollinators of every sort – bees, butterflies and moths. Bird life, including Corn Bunting, Yellowhammers and the South Downs songster, the Skylark, are often spotted.

It also lays claim to playing an important role in World War Two, where prior to D-Day, General Dwight D. Eisenhower addressed US troops who were often entertained by shows and activities hosted by the USO (United Services Organisations).

Leave no trace! 😊

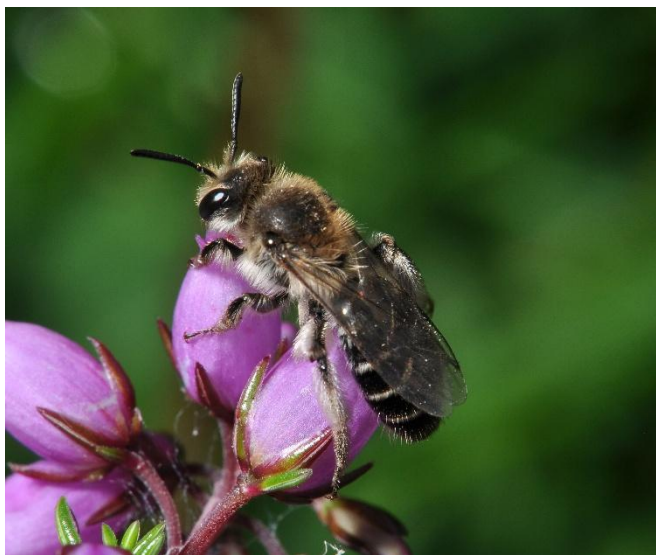
We all have a responsibility to help look after nature!

If bringing a picnic, do remember the following:

- Take home all your litter. Even if there are waste bins, these can often overflow after busy days and rubbish may not be collected immediately. Help wildlife and nature by taking this with you when you leave, this includes any dog poo.
- Keep dogs under control. If you are bringing your dog, please keep them on the lead to avoid disturbing wildlife, farmlife, rivers and ponds.
- No BBQs or open fires.
- Leave gates as you find them. As a rule, gates should generally be closed. However, farmers may intentionally leave gates open, particularly if livestock is moving between fields. If in doubt, please close the gate.

Blooming marvellous!

Helping bees bounce back



More than 100 hectares – or 4,000 tennis courts – of lush wildflower habitat are being created in the National Park to help bees flourish.

Our Bee Lines initiative continues to give a helping hand to struggling pollinator populations by creating wildflower havens at farms, community fields, recreation grounds, road verges, schools, and even cemeteries, football and golf clubs.

In the UK, around 13 species of bee have been lost already and another 35 are currently at risk of extinction.

The inspiring campaign launched in 2019 and since then there has been an amazing transformation at sites across Hampshire and Sussex, with carpets of beautiful wildflowers springing up and many sites are now buzzing with bees and butterflies.

The “Bee Lines” effectively create a “road system” for pollinating insects, allowing them to move through the landscape more easily.

To date, the South Downs Trust, the official charity for the National Park, has funded 37 projects and 106 hectares of habitat has been transformed into wildflower oases.

A further eight projects, yet to be confirmed, across Hampshire and Sussex will benefit from more funding later this year.

Jan Knowlson, Biodiversity Officer for the National Park, said: “It’s fantastic to see this network of wildflower corridors really becoming established and there are early signs that bees and butterflies are returning, but there’s still so much more that needs to be done to help pollinators.

“These insects have been on a steep decline across the UK for several decades and are now under threat from climate change and habitat loss, so it’s really important we create more spaces for pollinators to thrive.

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“One out of every three mouthfuls of our food depends on pollinators such as bees.

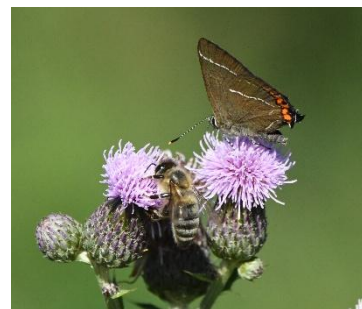
“People can also do their bit to help on a smaller scale by simply creating wilder areas of their gardens and planting some wildflower seeds. Working together we can turn this around and our countryside and towns can once again be buzzing with bees!

“We’d also like to thank every single person and donor who has helped with the fundraising as without them none of this nature recovery work could happen.”

One of the sites benefitting from funding is Blacknest Fields, in Binsted, Hampshire. The site is managed by community volunteers with a focus on creating a haven for all kinds of wildlife, including bees and butterflies.

Sarah Womersley, one of the volunteers, said:

“With the help of National Park rangers, we now have a brilliant meadow management regime in place.



“We’re seeing a much more diverse range of flora in the meadows and that in turn is helping our pollinators. Back in 2022 when the site was first opened to the public, there had never been any wildlife recording here at all. Since then, we have a brilliant group of volunteers who record regularly. We’ve seen over 30 species of butterflies on the field, more than 30 species of bees and wasps and over 190 different species of moths. Seeing what Blacknest Fields has become over the past five years has been wonderful.”

Meanwhile, a 1.5-hectare field called Tangletrees, near Graffham, West Sussex, has benefitted from funding and has transformed into a beautiful wildflower meadow.

Landowner Ian Forrest said: “It’s encouraging to see oxeye daisies and other species starting to thrive in the new meadow. Creating habitat takes time, but this grant has given us the chance to make a real start for pollinators and biodiversity. We’re very grateful for the support.”

Bee Lines has been supported by plant conservation charity Plantlife, including providing landowners with bespoke advice on establishing wildflower habitats with the help of meadow expert Matt Pitts.

Bee Lines is part of our wider ReNature campaign, which is aiming to create vital new wildlife habitats.

Bee Lines has been made possible with the support of the many individuals who have donated, as well as Aspinall of London, the Big Green Give Fund, the Boltini Trust, Chalk Cliff Trust, Friends of the South Downs, Howdens, Jude’s, Lawson Trust, Nyetimber, OSB Group, the PIG-in-the-South-Downs, Shanly Foundation, South East Water, Southern Co-op, and founding patrons of the South Downs Trust. To donate to Bee Lines visit

<https://southdownstrust.org.uk/>

Access for all on Trail



A community ramble to encourage people with disabilities to use the South Downs Way takes place later this month.

The externally-run event, supported by the National Park, will be held from 25 to 31 July at a number of sections along the stunning National Trail, including Southease, Devil's Dyke and Queen Elizabeth Country Park.

There is one main Challenge of about 8.4 miles (13.5km) from Cocking Hill to Whiteways, but participants can do as long or as short a section as they want.

The event is in memory of the late Andy Davies, who passed away earlier this year.

Andy was a passionate outdoor man enjoying cycling, hiking and sport.

In 2019 he was diagnosed with limb girdle muscular dystrophy – a condition that results in progressive weakness and wasting.

Before Andy started experiencing these symptoms, outdoor activities were an integral part of his life, and many were centred around the South Downs.

At the time of his death, Andy was liaising with the National Park Authority to organise this event for people with many different conditions and disabilities to walk, wheel and ride sections of the South Downs Way to show that the South Downs are not off limits to people with disabilities or restricted mobility.

Andy Gattiker, National Trails and Countryside Access Lead for the National Park Authority said, "I was so impressed by Andy's desire to enable more people to be able to access the National Park. I, like Andy Davies, don't want anyone to feel that they can't enjoy the National Park. I hope people will come out, join in and support the event. The more we can engage with a wide variety of people, who have a wide variety of needs, and share the stories of people who are getting out in the countryside, the better.

"The event will be a wonderful tribute to Andy and his passion for everyone being able to access the outdoors."

Find out more details and updates on the event [here](#).

Water vole is thriving



A water vole survey has revealed the species is thriving along a stretch of the River Meon at St Clair's Meadow Nature Reserve.

Water voles are Britain's fastest-declining mammal. Once widespread across the country's rivers, streams and wetlands, they have declined due to habitat loss, pollution, agricultural pressures and predation by non-native American mink. National estimates now stand at between 58,000 and 186,000 individuals, making every stronghold for the species increasingly important.

The survey, carried out by Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust with the River Meon Conservation Volunteers, recorded extensive evidence of water vole activity including feeding stations and remains, burrow entrances and latrines.

The findings suggest a healthy and active population.

Andy Reeves, Reserves Officer (Central Rivers & Downs) for the Trust, said: "What makes a survey like this so exciting is seeing just how much evidence water voles leave as they go about their daily lives.

"Water voles can be difficult to spot, so we look for clues. Some of their green, tic-tac-shaped droppings have been flattened into what we call 'trampled latrines', where water voles stamp them down to scent mark their territory during the breeding season. Finding so many of these signs shows that the population is feeding, breeding and thriving here at St Clair's Meadow Nature Reserve."



The results reflect a wider encouraging picture emerging along the River Meon. A key reason for the species' recovery on the River Meon has been the Meon Valley Water Vole Project. Launched in 2013 by the SDNPA and the Meon Valley Partnership, with support from Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, the project saw more than 2,800 water voles released into the river.

Spotlight: The joys of summer on heathlands

Will Dickson, Assistant Engagement Ranger for the Heathlands Reunited SAMM Project, reflects on the start of summer on South Downs heathland and the wildlife you can expect to see on this incredible rare nature haven.

It has not escaped anyone's notice that it's been rather hot recently! The signs indicate that a particularly warm English summer is upon us. Ponds are shrinking, vegetation is looking a little crispy around the edges, and pink-faced punters are enjoying cold drinks in the pub garden.



While many of us welcome the warmer weather, summer can be a challenging time for heathland wildlife. Long dry spells put plants and animals under real pressure, and the risk of wildfire rises sharply.



Heathlands are especially vulnerable: sun-dried heather, grasses, and gorse can ignite with alarming ease, allowing flames to spread rapidly across large areas. Even a small spark can have devastating consequences for wildlife and habitats that have taken decades to establish. That is why barbecues and open fires are strictly prohibited across our heathland sites.



Even so, summer is still one of the best times to visit the heath. It's the peak season for heathland wildlife. Heather is already beginning to bloom, and if conditions remain favourable, the landscape will soon be awash with vivid purple and pink, transforming the heath in one of its most spectacular seasonal displays.

Insects like the Ivy bee take advantage of sun-facing sand banks, digging a hole for their nest in the soft soil. Silver-studded Blue Butterfly, a low flier that flits over the heather sipping the nectar.

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Warm sunny days also offer the chance to spot some of our reptilian residents. Lizards and snakes can often be seen basking in open patches of sunlight, soaking up the warmth to raise their body temperature before slipping quietly back into the cover of the vegetation.



As evening draws in, another heathland specialist begins to make itself known. The distinctive churring call of the nightjar, a migratory bird that spends the summer here after travelling from Africa, can often be heard carrying across the heath at dusk.

Paired with the scent of warm heather and the soft fade of summer light, it creates one of the most memorable experiences these landscapes have to offer.



Summer is such a wonderful time to experience these landscapes. If you do visit, remember to take care: stick to paths where possible, avoid lighting fires or barbecues, and please pick up after your dog. Help us protect these rare and special places during the driest months of the year.

If you are looking for ways to enjoy the heath this summer, keep an eye on the [**Heathlands Reunited event page**](#) for guided walks and activities taking place across the season.

Our next one is a "Mothy Morning" at Ludshott Common, near Hindhead, on 23 July. Join the rangers and our moth expert Keith for our monthly moth survey on Ludshott common as we unpack our mobile moth trap and make notes of the different species we find!

Huge moth is spotted



Volunteers were amazed when they discovered the UK's largest resident species of moth while doing a litter-pick.

The privet hawk-moth, which has a large wingspan of up to 12cm, was spotted at Benfield Local Nature Reserve, near Hove.

While the privet moth is a common species, Sally Wadsworth, Chair of Benfield Wildlife and Conservation Group, said they are not spotted often.

The private hawk-moth is often identified by its pink and black striped abdomen and flies between the months of June and July.

They are known as the "gentle giants" of the moth world and feed on the nectar of night-scented flowers such as honeysuckle and jasmine.

Sally said: "My volunteer team were amazed to find this beautiful moth on our reserve – they are so striking and very large. I think it had just hatched out.

"We were also treated to two common lizards who popped up onto their hawthorn tree stump to have a bit of a sunbathe."



Benfield Wildlife and Conservation Group is a dedicated group of volunteers who look after the 29-acre Benfield Hill LNR, the first designated nature reserve in Brighton and Hove, on behalf of the council.

The team can be found every week in the winter removing invasive scrub from the rare chalk grassland habitat. In the spring and summer the volunteers do reserve tidy-ups, as well as a range of walks and surveys.

Each month their numbers are boosted by volunteers from the Stanmer Eastern Team from the South Downs National Park Authority.

This enables the team to ensure that the reserve continues to be pristine chalk grassland with myriads of orchids in spring and summer and a host of chalk grassland indicator species, such as the adonis blue and the chalkhill blue butterfly.



Win a deluxe flask!



With temperatures on the rise again, hydration is absolutely key!

Wherever you are in the South Downs, a Hydro Flask is the perfect way to keep your drinks cool and keep you refreshed for your activities.

The durable stainless steel flask keeps liquids cold for 24 hours. If you prefer a cup of tea, it keeps liquids hot for 12 hours!

We've got three light-weight Hydro Flasks to give away to lucky readers of the newsletter.

People signing up to the newsletter during July will be automatically entered into the draw to win a flask. Those who are already signed up can email "Hydro Flask" to newsletter@southdowns.gov.uk before midnight on 31 July.

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

Wildfire risk is high 🔥

Phew, it's hot out there!

We all love to cool off when it's this balmy, but for nature, it's not always that easy and intense dry spells significantly increase the chance of wildfires as the landscape becomes parched. Just three years ago, there were two devastating fires at Longmoor and Broxhead Common – burning for five days and destroying 16 hectares of beautiful heathland.

Here are a few tips to prevent a wildfire:

- **Please opt for a picnic rather than a barbecue.** Disposable barbecues, or any kind of barbecue, should never be lit in open countryside.
- **Cigarettes should never be discarded in the countryside as a single smouldering cigarette butt can reach temperatures of 700C and quickly start a wildfire.**
- **Take litter home with you and clear away bottles and glasses, including broken glass to avoid magnifying the sun.**

At the first sign of smoke, or if you see a fire, please call 999 immediately and retreat to a safe distance.

Things to do in the South Downs this July

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/



Lewes Castle on a summer's day



- The UK's Festival of Archaeology, organised by the Council for British Archaeology, takes place from 18 July to 2 August. The theme this year is "Archaeology and nature" and there are a host of events across the region. In Petersfield, Liss Archaeology will be carrying out new explorations on exciting sites in Petersfield - some on land owned by the Town Council and some in private gardens in the historic areas of the town. As part of the Festival for Archaeology come along to **High Meadows Recreation ground** on 18 and 19 July from 11am to 4 pm to see what they've found and take part in family-friendly activities. On 29 July, at **Lewes Castle**, you can meet Finds Liaison Officers to learn about their role, The Treasure Act and the Portable Antiquities Scheme. Bring your finds for them to look at, ask questions and learn about some of the artefacts they have seen and processed.
- A world-class arts festival comes to the National Park from 16 July to 1 August. The Petworth Summer Festival will be a vibrant, multi-genre celebration featuring classical music, jazz, comedy, and world music. Among the highlights will be The Truffle Valley Boys, a family fun day, Paul Merton and Suki Webster's Improv Show and The Rheingan Sisters. **Check out the full programme here** and book a ticket.
- This Summer holiday why not explore the lesser-known side of Petersfield Heath with a wild Treasure Hunt! The **"Schools Out Wild Wander"**, on 28 July, is a great way to connect with nature and see more about the hidden treasures of Petersfield Heath. Suitable for all ages, wandering at a gentle pace with frequent stops. The walk will start and finish at the Plump Duck cafe.
- Coming up on 7 August is a special **"Sunset Walk"** from Amberley. A friendly local guide will lead you along scenic trails to breathtaking viewpoints. Enjoy open skies, rolling hills, peaceful valleys, and 360° views of Sussex villages, landmarks, and the sparkling coastline!