

# SOUTH DOWNS NEWS

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SOUTH DOWNS  
NATIONAL PARK

## WORK AND PLAY IN YOUR NATIONAL PARK

This month:

- **New CEO for National Park** Find out about the new Chief Executive of the National Park Authority and what his goals and passions are as prepares to step into his new exciting role.
- **Discover the Downs** As the latest research shows anxiety is at a record high in children, we launch our new initiative to help less advantaged school pupils access nature.
- **Golf courses go greener!** Learn about our wonderful wildlife work with local golf clubs.
- **Competition!** Win tickets to one of the UK's finest restored gardens, all at the foot of the Downs.

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

## New Chief Executive for National Park Authority

**Siôn McGeever is to become the new Chief Executive at the South Downs National Park Authority from the end of November.**

Siôn brings 25 years of experience of working in environmental policy, international development and business. He most recently has been Deputy Director, Access, Landscapes, Peatlands and Soil at Defra, leading the team responsible for policy and funding for all of England's protected landscapes.

Siôn said: "I am incredibly proud and excited to take up the position of Chief Executive at the South Downs National Park Authority. Together we face huge challenges in the nature and climate crises. We must engage everyone, everywhere in tackling these. Protected Landscapes present a huge opportunity to do this, and none more so than the South Downs thanks to the strong partnership working, and deep passion, innovation and commitment of the staff and members, of the farmers, communities, volunteers,



businesses and all who love this National Park. I can't wait to be part of the journey to a more nature-rich, thriving South Downs National Park, loved and enjoyed by all."

Siôn is married with two teenage kids and has been living in the south east for the last nine years after returning from Tanzania. He has a lifelong love of the outdoors, is a keen outdoor swimmer and enjoys photographing wildlife and landscapes. He's been a regular visitor to the South Downs both through work and for pleasure.



Vanessa Rowlands, Chair of the Authority, said: "Following a rigorous selection process, the Authority were delighted to appoint Siôn as the new Chief Executive. His passion, knowledge and vision for the South Downs and National Park shone through. He brings

substantial experience of working with key partners across the National Parks landscape, and can now put his experience of overseeing the sector into delivering here in the South Downs. We look forward to working with him as he leads the National Park during this crucial and challenging time for nature, climate and people.

"I and the Authority Members would like to extend our thanks to Tim Slaney, who has skillfully and diligently led the Authority team during this interim period, and has continued to deliver on our innovative work. We are pleased to say that Tim will continue to lead the Authority as Interim Chief Executive until Siôn joins, and will then retake his key position as our Director of Planning on our Senior Leadership Team."

# Young people connect with nature in new project



**Hundreds of schoolchildren from across the South East will be able to enjoy the wonders of the South Downs National Park thanks to a major funding boost.**

The “**Discover the Downs**” initiative will get scores of children into the great outdoors, bringing exciting experiences to youngsters who don’t have easy access to National Parks.

Schools from across Hampshire and Sussex – with over 30 per cent of their pupils eligible for pupil premium funding – are now being invited to apply for fully-funded visits to the National Park.

Activities might include “discovery days” to develop a connection with nature, including learning about conservation, bushcraft, wild art and natural sciences, all within the breathtaking surrounds of the National Park. As the South Downs is one of only 22 International Dark Sky Reserves, children will have the opportunity to enjoy stargazing, learn about nocturnal wildlife and spend a night under the stars.

The National Park has also teamed up with The Sustainability Centre, near Petersfield, to offer fun residential stays for children, as well as Goodwood Education Trust, near Chichester, to offer farm visits.

The initiative, made possible by funding from Defra as part of Defra’s ongoing support for access to nature, will build on the success of **Generation Green**. The project, led by the Youth Hostel Association working with a range of partners including National Parks, supported schools as they recovered from the pandemic, connecting over 100,000 young people across the UK with nature and the environment.



Helping to deliver “Discover the Downs” for the National Park Authority will be experienced outdoor learning specialist Gina Mitchell.

Gina said: “As the school term begins, we’re incredibly excited to be starting this

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initiative to help children discover the South Downs, many of whom will be visiting this amazing landscape for the very first time.

“We’re keen for schools to apply as soon as possible as there’s a limited time window for this funding to be spent and there’s also limited availability, so do not delay your application!”

“We want to work with teachers to develop action-packed school trips or residential stays that give children the most rewarding experiences and complement their current studies.”

A wide body of research has shown that connecting with nature and learning outdoors can benefit children’s mental and physical health, including



assisting brain development, increasing attainment, supporting social skills, and reducing anxiety. A recent **report** showed that more than 500 children a day are being referred to NHS mental health services for anxiety.

Amanda Elmes, Learning, Outreach and Volunteer Lead for the National Park, said: “Children are the future custodians of everything around us, including precious wildlife and the countryside. It’s so important that each and every one of them can experience a National Park.

“There’s compelling evidence of a growing disconnect between young people and the natural environment and National Parks offer a tremendous learning space to address this problem. Anxiety is at record levels in children, so projects like this are more important than ever.

“The sad truth is that not all children have access to green space and that’s why initiatives like this are so vital. Being curious about the natural world is a life-long skill that all children should have the opportunity to develop.”

“Discover the Downs” continues the South Downs National Park’s ongoing commitment to young people. Since the National Park was created in 2010, more than 40,000 young people have been able to access learning opportunities in the great outdoors thanks to various grant schemes from the National Park Authority and South Downs National Park Trust.

Any school interested in organising a Discovery Day can contact Gina at [learning@southdowns.gov.uk](mailto:learning@southdowns.gov.uk)

Schools interested in residential stays at The Sustainability Centre can contact the Centre directly at [education@sustainability-centre.org](mailto:education@sustainability-centre.org)

Schools interested in farm visits at Goodwood Education Trust can contact the Trust directly at [get@goodwood.com](mailto:get@goodwood.com)

To find out more about Discover the Downs, visit this [webpage](#).



## Rare moth is recorded at Sussex downland site



Ringed Border Moth © Michael Blencowe



**Ranger Angela Ward writes about a recent community event that uncovered one of the rarest insect species in the UK.**

As part of this year's Graffham Down Trust annual picnic and butterfly walk, **Michael Blencowe**, Fiona Scully (from Butterfly Conservation) and I set up two moth light traps in Bowley's Field. The warm, overcast conditions overnight were perfect for attracting moths to the traps.

But at 4:45am the following morning Michael stood over the traps at the first light of day, completely overwhelmed by the number of moths that had been attracted to the mercury vapour bulbs. There were hundreds of them. Fiona and I joined him as they carefully collected the moths in pots, noting down each species' name in preparation for the picnic.

This whole process took a few hours and, by the end, there was a list of over 100 moth species – a really good haul. Amongst them were some of our most impressive moths. The Privet hawk-moth (Britain's biggest moth), the pink elephant-hawkmoth, the shining burnished brass, the stick-mimic buff-tip and the gorgeous leopard moth.



There were also ruby tigers (*pictured left*), rosy footmen, festoons, purple thorns, July highflyers, coronets, snouts and spectacles. Graffham Down is one of the best places in

Sussex for moths and many rarities have been found here. Michael was excited to record some nationally rare species such as olive crescent, scallop shell, plain golden-Y, *Anania verbascalis* and the beautiful *Palpita vitrealis*.

But Michael was amazed at what was waiting under the last eggbox – a ringed border. This is a mega-rarity which has never been seen in West Sussex before and was only the fourth ever record for Sussex.

It's fantastic that Graffham Down is home to so many rare species and the diversity of moths in the moth traps is a reflection of the wide variety of habitats that can be found on this very special reserve.

## Dogs with backpacks do their bit for nature



**Local dogs in Lewes have been 'acting like wolves' to help reseed native wildflowers at a nature reserve.**

Before wolves became extinct in the UK around 1760, they roamed large areas, typically covering 20km or more each night. As they did so they carried wildflower and grass seeds in their fur, often depositing them many miles away to establish new colonies of plants.

Now, in a unique project that's the first of its kind in the UK, local dog walkers have been asked by staff at the Railway Land Wildlife Trust in Lewes to 'walk in the shadow of wolves'. Walkers on the nature reserve have been picking up specially-designed backpacks which they attach to their dogs.

As the dogs walk through carefully selected areas of the reserve the holes in the packs allow seeds to be deposited randomly.

Because the dogs cover more ground than people and visit areas that are hard to reach, the wildflower seeds are spread more widely across the landscape and germination is likely to be more effective.

Project Manager Dylan Walker: "This has been such a joyous experience. Local dog walkers have been so helpful and positive about the project. They've helped to protect and enhance our nature reserve."



Dog owner Cressida Murray: "I signed up for the project because it sounded like such a good fit. I was asked to place a harness on my chocolate Cocker Spaniel called Bertie and he ran around spreading seeds like

wolves used to do many years ago.

"It's such a great project to involve our local community and I thoroughly enjoyed being part of it."

The project has been funded by **Ouse Valley Climate Action** and trialled on a small area of degraded woodland which previously had no ground vegetation.

Following the success of the trial, it's hoped that it can be rolled out more widely in the local area next year.

## Discover the amazing heritage of National Park



**Whether it's Iron Age forts, Norman castles, historic mills, Second World War defences, Viking burial mounds, or grand stately homes, the South Downs is a landscape oozing with history.**

The incredible cultural heritage was one of the reasons for the designation of the National Park in 2010, and it's the job of the National Park Authority to help conserve and enhance this heritage.

September is a good time to discover more about the heritage and culture of the South Downs as a number of venues open their doors for Heritage Open Days.

And the best part about it...it's FREE!

The open days are part of a range of free experiences taking place across England and organised by thousands of volunteers.

Anooshka Rawden, Cultural Heritage Lead for the National Park, said: "This is your chance to see hidden places and try out new experiences, so do get out and make the most of it if you can!"

Some of the free open days and experiences include (please note some require pre-booking):



### **Arundel Museum, 14 September**

This year marks 60 years since the Museum first opened underneath the Town Hall. Now, in the purpose-built Museum, enjoy seeing displays charting the

history of Arundel. [Find out more.](#)

### **Fernhurst Fernace Open Weekend, 14 and 15 September**

This Wealden Blast Furnace site has recently been conserved and there will be guided tours to explain what happened, when ship's cannon were made here and why the conservation project was required. There are many other attractions including a demonstration of how to load and fire a musket as well as pole lathe wood turning, beam hewing from a round tree trunk, wool spinning and much more. [Find out more.](#)

### **Guided tours of Petworth House (pictured left), 14 and 15 September**

Inspired by Baroque palaces of Europe, the 17th-century Petworth House displays one of the finest art collections in the care of the National Trust. See the state rooms featuring paintings and sculpture, including artwork by Van Dyck, Turner, Reynolds and Gainsborough.

Outside, the Pleasure Garden features formal borders, woodland walks, and architectural features, such as the Ionic Rotunda. The 700-acre Deer Park, which was transformed in the 1750s and early 1760s by the landscape architect Lancelot 'Capability' Brown, is home to ancient trees and fallow deer. [Learn more.](#)

### **Coultershaw Heritage Site, Petworth 14 and 15 September**

Come and marvel at the inspiring engineering of the historic beam pump, waterwheel and water fountain before admiring the 21st century state-of-the-art water turbine making renewable energy.

[Learn more here.](#)

### **Beachy Head Downland Trail: Victorian Rambles 12 and 13 September**

In 1849 the railways arrived in Eastbourne. This crucial new travel link established the town as the eastern gateway to the South Downs. Join a guided walk around 'Victorian' Beachy Head to discover what the area would have looked like towards the end of the 19th century and hear about some of the people we might have met wandering through the Downland. [Learn more](#)

### **Walk and Talk the Chalk - Seaford Head and Cuckmere Valley - 15 September**

Join guide Helen Browning-Smith to take in the fascinating history, geology, flora and fauna of Seaford Head, Hope Gap and the Cuckmere Valley. [Learn more.](#)

### **Coastguard Cottage, 14 and 15 September**

Come and have a look inside one of the most famous cottages in England, meet a descendant of the last Coastguard, and see artwork inspired by this very special place. [Learn more](#)

### **Winchester City Mill, 14 and 15 September**



Winchester City Mill has stood at the heart of the historic city of Winchester, the capital of King Alfred's Wessex, since at least Saxon times. With a history of over 1,000

years, Winchester City Mill is one of the oldest watermills in the UK. Inside, you'll discover more about the mill's long and fascinating history. [Learn more.](#)

### **Researching Early Black History - A talk in Winchester by Cheryl Butler, 15 September**

The talk will look at the challenges in researching early black history and examine in detail three cases studies: Zoe Loanda, and a ship rescue; Jacque Francis, a 16th century diver and Black John, a 15th century carpenter. [Learn more.](#)



# Putting nature recovery on par in golf courses



## Golf clubs across the South Downs National Park and beyond are coming together to help fight biodiversity loss.

With golf courses covering 2 per cent of England and a significant number of clubs in the South Downs, there's tremendous potential for courses to become havens for wildlife, particularly bees and butterflies, as well as golfers.

A network of golf clubs has now been formed, with greenkeepers and club managers from across the region coming together to share knowledge and practical support.

Fourteen golf clubs from across Sussex recently took part in a seminar at Pyecombe Golf Club, near Brighton, which is now one of the best courses in the UK for chalk grassland flowers and butterflies.

It comes after the group's inaugural meeting was held last year at Lewes Golf Club, which is also leading the way with biodiversity restoration on its course.

The meetings have included live demonstrations on new grassland management techniques that can help wildlife, expert advice on conservation measures and details of funding available to clubs taking action for nature.

The initiative is being co-ordinated by Sussex-based charity, the Southwood Foundation, working with the South Downs National Park Authority and a range of partners, including RSPB, England Golf, the Weald to Waves initiative, Buglife and the South Downs Trust.



Caroline Croft, Operations Manager for the Southwood Foundation, said: "There is an

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impressive number of golf clubs in Sussex doing really great work for nature recovery.

"We were struck that clubs were taking these nature restoration measures in relative isolation from each other and thought it could be useful to bring greenkeepers and club management together to share knowledge, ideas and best practice."

And Caroline added: "Extending the roughs where possible is one really impactful step they can take. Clubs doing this are seeing significant increases in pollinators, such as butterflies without impeding the game, in fact enhancing the experience for players."



"It's also about saving resources for clubs, working with nature to control pests instead of using expensive chemicals, for instance, being able to reduce water use, or spending less time and fuel on cutting back the roughs – so it's a win-win for nature and people which makes it really exciting!"

Pyecombe and Lewes have been working with rangers from the South Downs National Park to develop a more wildlife-friendly mowing regime.

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.

Tim Brewster, Course Manager at Lewes Golf Club, which received a grant from the South Downs National Park to buy a "cut and collect" mowing machine, said: "After the first year, I have started to notice a larger amount of yellow rattle spreading to different areas of the course, which already looks to start thinning out the areas, which is great for golfers to find their ball but also a positive for wildflowers."

"The saving we have made are huge, we have cut down the time to complete this work to a month and a half. So that's nearly cut the time in half, so saved lots of money on diesel and man hours. An increase of birds of prey has been noticed, with more kestrels, red kites, and buzzards. We continue to see the peregrine falcons that are nesting on the cliff, hunting, and playing on the fairways."

Last year an ecological survey at Pyecombe Golf Club discovered 34 species of butterfly, including rare species such as the Adonis blue, brown hairstreak and grizzled skipper.

To find out more about the group contact Caroline Croft at [caroline.croft@southwoodfoundation.org](mailto:caroline.croft@southwoodfoundation.org).

Golf clubs in the National Park, or on the urban fringes of the National Park, that are interested in applying for funding for nature recovery can visit <https://southdownstrust.org.uk/grants/> or email [grants@southdowns.gov.uk](mailto:grants@southdowns.gov.uk)

## How do students connect to Downs?



**Students from the University of Brighton and East Sussex College Group have been researching how to open up the South Downs to younger generations, with a little help from technology.**

Young people and creative professionals carried out research to explore how teenagers interact with the world around them, through technology, with the hope of gaining insights that will encourage urban communities to interact with the South Downs.

A series of interactive workshops, including archaeological walks and creative exploration at Butts Brow, gave the participants the opportunity to explore and reflect on their own digital use, sense of belonging, responsibility for and attachment to the Downs.

The research culminated in an exhibition, called “Connected Downs”, at The Mint House, Pevensey, that showcased interviews, recordings and artwork.

Mark Wells, from the University of Brighton, said: “Themes and ideas elicited from the research included how the participants could develop an attachment to a space through exploring the archaeology and human stories from the past.

“This helped to form a sense of belonging which could then encourage people to feel a community responsibility and take care of the space. Whilst considering this sense of belonging, participants considered what barriers there might be for groups accessing The Downs. The younger participants were particularly keen to explore digital examples – an app for bird identification was a particular hit.”

The project was supported by the Lewes Railway Land Wildlife Trust and was part of the wider Changing Chalk scheme, of which the National Park Authority is a partner. The initiative aims to reverse the decline of fragile chalk grassland and connect local communities with the amazing chalk landscape on their doorstep.

### GRANTS OPPORTUNITY

As part of Changing Chalk, community groups and local charities from Shoreham to Eastbourne can now apply for grants to fund initiatives that will help to restore habitats, bring local histories to life, and provide new experiences in the outdoors. **The deadline is 13 October. [Learn more here](#)**

## SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY Wildlife success at new wetland



**Six hectares of much-needed wetland for wildlife has been created following the realignment of a rare chalk stream.**

The restoration of the Cockshut Stream, near Lewes, has seen the area quickly become an oasis for nature, with herons, kingfishers, egret and snipe among the many birds to be found, while toads, sticklebacks, eels and newts can be spotted in the ponds.

Grass snakes are using the reedy ditches and many species of dragonfly have been seen this summer in the meadow and riverbanks.

Councillor Emily O'Brien, Cabinet Member for Climate, Nature and Food Systems at Lewes District Council, said: “Whether you want to spot wildlife or immerse yourself in beautiful and tranquil surroundings, the Cockshut Stream Restoration Project is quickly becoming a popular location for people living locally and those from further afield.



“This new wetland is great news for the environment - improving biodiversity, helping with flood management and carbon storage, and enabling the stream to flow alongside native plants.”

“I want to thank our partners at the Ouse and Adur Rivers Trust, Lewes Railway Land Wildlife Trust, South Downs National Park Authority, Veolia Environmental Trust and Chris Butler Archaeological Services for all their amazing support and expertise in the delivery of this incredible partnership project.



Cath Jackson, who helps to lead nature restoration in the National Park, said: “Water is absolutely key for our nature recovery goals and I’m pleased to see this area thriving with wildlife and also becoming a real haven for people wanting to connect with nature.”



## Meet the National Park's community climate champion!



**While this summer has seen some very mixed conditions on the south coast of England, meteorologists say that 2024 is the warmest on the planet ever recorded.**

There's no doubt that our climate is becoming more unpredictable and taking positive climate action through nature-based solutions remains one of the National Park's key priorities.

This month we chat with Sara Osman, the National Park's new Climate Officer.

### **Why is climate change happening?**

To quote the Met Office, which provides clear and simple information around climate change: "Climate change is the long-term shift in average weather patterns across the world. Since the mid-1800s, humans have contributed to the release of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases into the air. This causes global temperatures to rise, resulting in long-term changes to the climate." Unfortunately, we are continuously adding more gases into the atmosphere and they last there for many years. This is leading to what is known as the 'greenhouse effect', by trapping more heat in the atmosphere which effects the earth's processes to maintain steady, predictable global temperatures.

### **What is the impact of climate change?**

Evidence has shown that the high levels of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere are the leading cause of increasing global air and ocean temperatures. Since the Industrial Revolution, the **average temperature of the planet has risen by around 1°C**, and in 2023 global temperatures exceeded 1.5°C above pre-industrial times. This may not sound like much, but the impacts are enormous. Areas around the world that were typically covered by ice all year round are now seeing unprecedented areas without ice. This melting ice is leading to increase in sea level, which, for some areas of the world, is causing more flooding of coastal areas. We are also seeing greater wave height which means when

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there are storms, we get more coastal damage due to the bigger waves. The warming seas and sea level rise lead to a change in weather patterns around the world, as more water is evaporated from the warmer seas, and form larger clouds and bigger, more intense storms.

Here in the UK, climate projections show that we should expect to see:

- warmer and wetter winters
- hotter and drier summers
- more frequent and intense weather extremes.

This has an impact on the biodiversity of plants and animals and insects. Changing annual temperature affects the breeding cycle for animals and insects, and heat stress and flooding effects the plants that provide food for those animals and insects. Other impacts from climate change include health, food production, travel and transport.

### **What is the National Park doing in terms of climate action?**

We're committed to addressing the climate and nature emergencies by reaching 'Net Zero', both in how we run our organisation and also how we can influence emissions produced across the national park, from homes, businesses and transport etc. You can read more about what we mean by 'net zero' on our [website](#)

We have developed a Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan to explain our commitments and how we aim to reach 'net zero'. This includes actions to work with local authorities across the National Park area, actions to deliver climate action through the planning system and actions to work with local communities to deliver climate action. Two key projects we have supported recently are Petersfield Climate Action Network, which ran a SuperHomes project to improve home energy efficiency, and Winchester Action on Climate Change, which supported 16 communities in the Winchester district to run events and activities that tackle climate change in their local areas.

### **Why is climate action important?**

If global temperatures continue to exceed 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, and edges towards 2°C increase, we will reach what are called 'tipping points' where it is difficult to reverse the impacts of climate change.

How we travel, how we heat our homes, what we buy and what we eat can all have an impact on climate change. By joining together with others in our community we can have an even bigger impact. From learning more about climate change, what the impacts are and what we can do to make a difference... to creating solutions in our communities, from car sharing to setting up repair cafes.

Coming together to deliver climate action locally will make the difference that we need to ensure the next generation inherit a more sustainable world.

**Later this autumn we'll be announcing some key initiatives on how local communities can get involved in climate action, so watch this space!**

## Embrace autumn with five senses!



**As the leaves turn golden and the air becomes crisp, autumn is the perfect time to experience the South Downs National Park through all five senses.**

This season, let nature's splendour envelop you in a multi-sensory adventure that deepens your connection to the landscape.

### Sight

Visit Alice Holt (*right*) or Friston Forest to watch the treescape of the South Downs transform into a vivid tapestry of reds, oranges, and yellows as autumn takes hold.



For early risers, trek to the top of Butser Hill or Firle Beacon to absorb the beauty of the misty mornings, where the dew glistens on spider webs, and the low sun casts long shadows, adding depth to the already stunning vistas.

### Sound

Listen to the crunch of leaves beneath your feet as you wander the woodland paths. The rustling of the trees in the breeze and the distant call of migrating birds create a peaceful soundtrack to your journey.

Take a wander along one of the National Park's globally important chalk streams, such as the River Meon, and listen to the gentle flow of the water. If you happen to hear a soft splash, it might be a water vole!

### Smell

The earthy aroma of damp leaves and rich soil is unmistakable in autumn.

Autumn is also a busy season for conservation, when teams descend onto heaths to remove invasive scots pine and beat back the fast-growing gorse.

As you walk through the forests, take in the subtle fragrances of moss, fungi and the last wildflowers of the year.

### Taste



Visit local markets to savour seasonal produce like freshly harvested apples, pears, and pumpkins. Sit down for a proper pub lunch with a pint of award-winning beer or a glass of wine from one of the National Park's globally-renowned wineries. Take the opportunity to enjoy a warm cup of spiced cider or indulge in a hearty stew made from locally-sourced ingredients.

Or just enjoy a nice cup of warming tea while wrapped up and admiring the views. Enjoy!

## Win a day-out at West Dean!



**Nestled at the foot of the South Downs, West Dean Gardens is one of the greatest restored gardens open to the public today.**

Though West Dean is mentioned in the Domesday book as a hunting ground, Richard Lewknor built the first significant house in the 1620s, next to the medieval village church. In 1738, Sir John Peachey acquired the West Dean estate.

It was then inherited by Sir James Peachey, a courtier and confidant of King George III, who made him Lord Selsey in 1794. A peerage required a grander house, so in the early 19th century architect James Wyatt designed a suite of grand rooms and tall towers to give West Dean the appearance of a castle, thereby creating one of the largest flint-faced buildings in the country.

Today visitors can explore the restored walled garden, working Victorian Glasshouses, 300ft pergola, and a spring garden with flint bridges. The circular 2½ mile arboretum walk, set in 50



acres of beautiful parkland, offers stunning views of the South Downs and a route passing the grave of Edward James, a poet who inherited the house and was a famous supporter of the surrealist art movement.

West Dean, near Chichester, also runs a year-round programme of creative short courses offering you the opportunity to learn a new skill in beautiful inspirational surroundings. There is a **bumper line-up of short courses this autumn**, covering everything from autumnal botanical painting to tips on growing apples.

The National Park has teamed up with West Dean to offer two Garden Escape vouchers, with each voucher covering garden entry for two people and a cream tea. The voucher can be used for single use up until September 2025.

People signing up to the newsletter during September will be automatically entered into the draw. Those who are already signed up can email "St Roche's Arboretum" to **newsletter@southdowns.gov.uk** before midnight on 30 September.

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



## Things to do in the South Downs this September

Please follow the links as booking may be necessary. Find these and more events across the National Park and submit your own events at [southdowns.gov.uk/events/](https://southdowns.gov.uk/events/)



- Visit Charleston, in Firle, on 14 September for the [Bloomsbury Queer Festival](#). The festival celebrates contemporary queer culture and includes a feast of queer art, writing, drag, fashion, poetry, clubbing, and protest.
- This September, local residents in the Lewes district are throwing open their doors so you can visit and see what changes they have made to their homes to make them more energy efficient. The open house tours take place over the weekend of 14/15 and 22/22. [Find out more here.](#)
- Become a conservation volunteer for the day and bring the whole family! Help us look after Seven Sisters Country Park, take part in a nature walk and beach clean on 21 September. [Reserve a spot here.](#)
- Head to Gilbert White's House, Selborne, on 18 September for an [autumn harvest](#). The Kitchen garden crops will be being harvested, cleaned and stored ready for use by the venue and you'll be able to ask questions on all aspects of traditional vegetable growing.
- Join our team on 22 September for a taste of conservation volunteering at St Catherine's Hill, near Winchester, with scrub clearance to support wildflower and butterfly habitats. [Reserve a spot here.](#)
- We've got two free archaeology walks coming up, but be quick if interested as tickets are going quickly! Led by James Sainsbury, Curator of Archaeology at Worthing Museum, this will be a chance to learn more about the deep time of this landscape, and the legacies left by the people who have lived and died here over thousands of years. A walk takes place at [Amberley Wildbrooks](#) on 28 September and at [Highdown Hill](#) on 5 October.
- Coming up on 6 October, take part in a creative session at Seven Sisters Visitor Centre at Exceat. The free session will help you learn the art of podcasting in the great outdoors! Connect with nature and discover tips from seasoned writers while listening to the captivating "We Hear You Now" audio series. [Book a place here.](#)

### Pic credits

P2 – Rich Howorth; P5 Jonny Watt; P4 top left National Trust; P6 heron Melissa O'Halloran; P6 kingfisher D Middleton; P8 right West Dean Gardens