Some Highlights of SDNPA Work – March 2015

On The Ground

- Mapping of the entire South Downs National Park for 'sky quality' was completed. This work has produced the highest resolution mapping of observed dark skies taken with a Sky Quality Monitor anywhere in the world. Over 20,000 recordings were made, with support from volunteers and local astronomy groups.
- Over 500 trees, donated by the Woodland Trust, were planted by 40 children from the College Army Cadet force as part of a new WWI memorial woodland at Seaford College.
- Over 600m of hedge was laid across the National Park.
- Five barn owl boxes were installed.
- 400 metres of hedge was planted across the Wealden Heath area by rangers and volunteers.
- 50 new Dormice boxes were installed in Binstead woods and a volunteer programme set up to monitor them.
- The following work was completed on the Meon Valley Trail: scrub clearance, tree felling, South Downs Way path restoration, West Meon platform clearance, mud and debris clearance between West Meon and Wickham and ditch digging between Bere Farm and Wickham. Also along the Trail ramps were widened, five flights of steps were replaced, 40 metres of post and rail fencing were erected at Droxford and half the required abutment of fencing was installed.
- Working with rangers, volunteers spent eight days carrying out coppice management, 35 days clearing scrub and ten days of hedgelaying and planting across the National Park.
- Grazing animals were re-introduced and a new fence line cleared at Steyning Combe SNCI, West Sussex.
- Volunteers carried out tranquility mapping throughout the National Park.
- Winter scrub clearance was completed at Amberley Mount and Sullington Hill SSSI, West Sussex.
- The Veolia Brighton Blues butterfly bank was seeded using species rich chalk grassland mix and additional species were collected by volunteers from Mill Hill LNR.
- Work flailing brambles was completed at Farm Hill SNCI, West Sussex.
- Six volunteers involved in seed collecting tasks in partnership with the Millenium Seed Bank, visited the seed bank to see how the seeds are processed – so far we have collected over 30,000 seeds.
- Rangers attended a Conservation Grazing Conference organised by Natural England.
- 53 volunteers and landowners/managers were trained to complete monthly monitoring of riverfly at Warnford.
- Volunteers received training in water safety and water vole survey techniques looking at suitable habitat for voles and the field signs they leave. Both will be used to complete this year's monitoring on the River Meon.

In March the South Downs Volunteer Ranger Service's volunteers carried out 78 practical, promotional and training tasks across the National Park giving a total of 460 days of volunteer support overall.

People and Places

Learning and Outreach

- 100 people including teachers and outdoor learning providers attended the third annual Our South Downs teachers' conference at the South Downs Centre, Midhurst. The conference included 11 outdoor learning workshops, three key-note speakers and over 30 outdoor learning providers showcasing their work.
- Staff taught over 200 children about the history of farming within the National Park through the Field Farm project and Midhurst Rother College Travel and Tourism students about rural tourism in the South Downs.
- Pupils at Firle Primary School and Stedham Primary had a Dark Night Skies session at school after dark.
- Final work experience sessions for students from Treloar School were hosted at the South Downs Centre – all three students gave great feedback stating that they had really benefited from their time with the teams.
- The Our South Downs Annual Schools Art Exhibition, based on the built environment of the South Downs National Park, opened with a private view at the Towner Gallery, Eastbourne (closes 31 May, free entry).
- The South Downs National Park Geotour launched with a meet and greet event for local geocachers. This is the first Geotour in the UK and South Downs National Park geocoins have been designed as prizes for completion of the Geotour. To find out more visit www.southdowns.gov.uk/geocaching

Living Landscapes

Biodiversity

- 20 partners attended a monitoring and evaluation workshop for the 'Nature Improvement Area' project, which collected a range of useful information to inform project evaluation and planning of future projects.
- Presentations on the Heathlands Reunited Project were given to over 250 people at the National Heathland Conference.

Heathlands Reunited

- 26 delegates attended a workshop in Liphook about biomass fuel from heathland. Speakers included Matthew Woodcock from the Forestry Commission and an afternoon of site visits included walks around Iron Hill, Stanley Common and Highfield School, which has a new wood chip boiler using material from local woodland.

Planning and Sustainable Futures

- Strava, a San Francisco based company, were appointed to track user activity across the National Park for one year. This data will help establish journey trends along key leisure routes and from public transport hubs, identify popular quiet lanes ('green routes'), understand commuter journey patterns to and from the South Downs and identify popular cycle rides and destinations to inform promotional materials and infrastructure. All the above will in turn support the development of cycling and access strategies for the National Park.

Research

- The SDNPA Research Strategy, Research Brochure and Action Plan were shared with partners and academics.
- Staff met with Amanda Brace at National Parks England to discuss linking up on research, data and evidence projects.

Communications and Engagement

Website

The new South Downs National Park website was launched. This new site provides information for residents and visitors to learn about the special qualities of the National Park and discover how they can sustainably explore all that the South Downs has to offer. It also gives key information about planning in the National Park and the work of the National Park Authority.

Media

Good coverage was achieved in West Sussex press for a story about the discovery of grenade ring pulls during scrub clearance work near Washington. SDNPA Ranger Tom Parry commented on the thrill of uncovering evidence of the past of the South Downs, while Deputy Chair Norman Dingemans recalled an incident when Steyning was mistakenly hit by mortar shells fired by Canadian troops training on the Downs during the Second World War.

Events

- We attended two events on Saturday 7 March – the outdoor Big Parks project launch at Peacehaven and the indoor Lewes Water Fair. Both events provided great engagement opportunities with different visitor profiles.

Visitor Exhibition in South Downs Centre

- This month, 416 people visited the South Downs Centre exhibition area – there have been a total of 3450 visitors since May 2014.