Some Highlights of SDNPA Work – October 2015

On The Ground

- Volunteers and staff joined forces with a local community conservation group to manage an area of woodland in the Meon Valley Trail in Hampshire. The wood will be made into benches for the area.
- Volunteers began chalk heath restoration work at Levin Down (a Site of Special Scientific Interest) in Singleton, West Sussex.
- Cattle grazing was reintroduced in Treyford to restore grassland for Duke of Burgundy butterflies.
- 100 Dormouse Box were checked as part of the Binsted (a Site of Nature Conservation Interest) monitoring scheme.
- Several dormice nests were found at a new monitoring site near Alfriston where dormouse boxes were erected earlier this year.
- Birch and pine trees were cleared on ten heathland sites in the National Park.
- Staff worked with the Arun River Rother Trust and Arun Rother Connections to carry out a River Fly Monitoring training session – those trained will put their newly learnt skills to work helping to assess the state of the River Rother river fly population.
- The boardwalk on the River Rother Walk was lengthened to improve the walking experience.
- Work on the Rampion Windfarm project is now well underway and staff have been monitoring that works comply with the discharges consents, the project has already unearthed two archaeological finds along the route.
- Volunteers and staff assisted in clearing Tumuli near Bishopstone following a request from Historic England.
- Chalk grassland seed was sown at France Bottom in East Sussex as part of the Kew trials.
- Staff began scrub clearance at Mary Farm in East Sussex to restore an area of chalk grassland.
- Staff met with partners to discuss the ongoing farmland bird work including the early results from this year's survey work and specific plans for two species that have suffered steep declines; turtle dove and lapwing.

People and Places

Learning and Outreach

- Staff led two conservation tasks for Cornfield School, a secondary school for boys who have social, emotional and/or behavioural difficulties.
- Ten people attended a guided walk as part of the Steyning Food and Drink Festival
- Over 30 people attended two heart smart walks led by staff in the National Park.
- Staff joined forces with the National Trust to lead a number of walkers on the 64 mile Serpent Trail over three consecutive weekends.

Sustainable Travel and Access

- Staff met with West Sussex County Council to develop the County's future Walking and Cycling Strategy and route/scheme prioritisation.
- Local Access Forum Members visited the Centurion Way Cycle Ambition scheme. Contractors are still on site with completion due at the end of November.
- Staff met with the South Downs Society to review the Easy Access Survey and Miles without Stiles work.

Living Landscapes

Biodiversity

- The National Trust-led EU Life+ bid was submitted and focuses on woodlands in the West Sussex part of the South Downs which are managed to support Bechstein's and Barbastelle bats. The partnership includes the Sussex Wildlife Trust, RSPB and Natural England and the overall value of the bid is about £2.9m of which the EU would contribute 60 per cent. The net cash contribution from SDNPA would be just under £34,000 spread over five years, with support in kind from staff and volunteers.

Landscapes

- At the Design Review Panel AGM it was agreed that the Panel is evolving in line with the National Park and its positive contributions are not only supporting the Development Management team but are helping to shape liveable places and uphold the first purpose of the National Park. New panel vice-chairs were elected for 2016.

Planning and Sustainable Futures

Planning Policy

- The consultation on the South Downs Local Plan: Preferred Options completed on 28 October.
- The Examiner's report has been received on the Fernhurst Neighbourhood Plan with the recommendation that, subject to a number of modifications, it should proceed to referendum.
- The referendum date for the Petersfield Plan has been set for 19 November.
- The examination into the Clapham Neighbourhood Plan began.

Communications and Engagement

Media

- Wide press coverage was received for news about the welcome return of the silver-spotted skipper butterfly as part of the Eastern Downs project, supported by Veolia, to improve chalk grassland for blue butterflies.
- Wide coverage was received for Defra's recruitment announcement for new Members.
- Our top tweet of the month – using Space Week to promote our Dark Skies work – reached a great audience.
- On 26 October we supported National Parks England's Taste National Parks campaign. This was a great opportunity to promote the great produce from across the South Downs and the new South Downs Food Portal.
- We celebrated National Poetry Day with 'The Spirit of the Downs' poem by Arthur Beckett.
- For Halloween we revealed tales of ghosts, fairies and magical creatures in the South Downs as part of the new folklore map of Sussex and the South Downs.

Events

- The Operations Team ran a successful National Parks Farm Liaison Officer Meeting, attended by the majority of UK National Park Authorities.
- In October we attended the Big Nature in the Biosphere event at the Brighton Centre, Plumpton Community Apple Pressing Day, Blackmoor Apple Day, Arundel Orchard Open Day and the Weald & Downland Careers Forum.

Publications

- The newly designed Arundel walks leaflet was published – this includes two circular walks starting from Arundel train station.
- Eight top views from buses in the South Downs were promoted through the website – these link to the new Public Transport Guide which can be picked up from various visitor centres and accommodation providers across the South Downs, as well as from our event stands and the South Downs Centre in Midhurst.

Interpretation

- A new interpretative panel was installed in the car and coach park in the village of Alfriston. This has been developed with the Parish and updates an old panel, including information on the National Park, the local area and complete with the National Park shared identity.
- Staff met with Ditchling Museum to look at partnership projects for next year's 100th anniversary of Johnston Sans of London Underground typeface by Edward Johnston.

Visitor Exhibition in South Downs Centre

- We have now switched to weekday opening only for the winter season. In October we had 331 visitors to the exhibition.