Some Highlights of SDNPA Work – May 2015

On The Ground

- In support of the Take the Lead campaign which promotes responsible dog walking, rangers carried out 12 patrols at dog walking 'hot spots' to hand out information and talk to dog owners.
- Working with 19 different farmers, Rangers and volunteers carried out four barn owl box checking days and installed five new boxes.
- Mink monitoring on the Upper Rother began and a mink raft was installed on the River Itchen. Post release survey latrine floats installed on the River Meon to monitor the dispersing water voles have found a few water vole signs, as well as some signs of mice and lots of otter spraint.
- Rangers led a field trip for Natural England Licensing Officers on the water vole reintroduction project.
- Rangers and volunteers carried out work restoring a fantastic Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland in Froxfield, creating a glade with wildflowers, bringing insect, bird and mammal life back into the wood.
- Species monitoring work in May included farmland bird surveys, dormouse monitoring and great crested newt surveys as part of the Ouse Estuary project.
- Rangers led species identification walks for visitors at the National Trust at the Birling Gap Bioblitz.
- Major South Downs Way signage improvements were carried out in Queen Elizabeth Country Park to finalise the official route for the national trail through the Country Park.
- Following improvements to Ditchling Beacon car park by the National Trust, staff and volunteers used locally collected seed and plug plants grown at Brighton & Hove nurseries, to seed the verges of the car park and Cooksbridge road. Volunteers also plug planted a butterfly bank in the area created by the Veolia Brighton Blues project.
- Volunteers completed their first Himalayan Balsam removal task this year, as well as botanical surveying, chalk grassland management, woodland management, path maintenance work and 16 task days installing, improving and removing fencing and gateposts across the National Park.
- Rangers and volunteers helped National Trust staff make sweet chestnut shingles on a building near Black Down and spent two days assisting with restoring dry-stone walls near Woolbeding.

In April the South Downs Volunteer Ranger Service's volunteers carried out 80 practical, promotional and training tasks across the National Park giving a total of 435 days of volunteer support overall.

People and Places

Learning and Outreach

- Staff supported the South Pond Group by working with local Midhurst Schools to plant water plants as part of the ongoing improvement work at South Pond in Midhurst, West Sussex.
- Caches on the Geotour have earned 163 favourite points since launch in March 2015, a particular favourite is the 20 mile marker on the South Downs Way (outside the Sustainability Centre in Hampshire).
- Staff worked with the Havant Open Duke of Edinburgh Group to introduce the South Downs National Park and responsible access as part of their required expedition preparation.
- 60 Year 5s at Anstey Junior School in Alton were taught about the South Downs National Park as part of their whole school environment week.
- Staff supported the opening of the second Our Place annual schools art exhibition at Worthing Museum and Art Gallery.
- Staff worked with Dunhurst Primary School to set the context for their South Downs Experience at the Sustainability Centre in East Meon, Hampshire.

Sustainable Travel and Access

- A new footpath from Hamsey School to Beechwood Hall was created as part of the Local Sustainable Transport Fund project.

Living Landscapes

Ecoservices Model

- Working with the Sussex Biological Records Service we successfully mapped areas of capacity, demand and service flows for the Ecosystems Services provided by the National Park, such as carbon sequestration, climate regulation, pollination, water regulation and access/recreation. This information will feed into the evidence base for our projects and the Local Plan.

Planning Policy

- Public hearings for the Petersfield Neighbourhood Plan took place at the Festival Hall in Petersfield.
- A draft version of the Preferred Options Local Plan was published on the National Park website. This document contains a full suite of policies dealing with issues ranging from landscape and dark night skies to housing.

Communications and Engagement

Publications

- We produced a South Downs Volunteer Ranger Service leaflet.
- The updated guide to the Serpent Trail long distance path was printed – this booklet is available for purchase from the South Downs Centre (£3).

Events

- During May we attended Plumpton College Open Day, Medieval Midhurst, the South Downs Green Fair (Sustainability Centre), Brinsbury Show and Country Fayre, Bignor Fete, Sussex Community Rail Partnership Blackfriars event and Lewes Hike and Bike Festival launch.
- At the Community Rail in the City event at Blackfriars Station we engaged with more than 900 commuters, talking to them about the South Downs National Park and handing out 600 samples of South Downs apple juice and wine supplied by local producers.
- The Lewes Hike and Bike Festival was partly sponsored by the Local Sustainable Transport Fund and included a ride which went straight through the middle of the South Downs marquee.

Interpretation/shared identity

- A new interpretation panel at the Chalk Pit Inn giving visitors the history of the old funicular railway and an overview of the chalk and lime industry in the Ouse valley was unveiled.
- We continued to work with a wide range of partners on shared identity including an interpretation panel with the Butterfly Conservation and partners at Bentley Station Meadow.

Media

- We worked with the Rampion team to respond to media enquiries and gave an interview to BBC Sussex explaining how the mitigation and monitoring funding would be spent.
- One of our Eastern Downs rangers gave an interview to BBC South East Today as part of their coverage of the Bioblitz at Birling Gap.
- We launched four 'Take the Lead' films on social media getting a very positive response with more than 1,000 people interacting with the posts on Facebook and more than 100 likes and shares on Twitter. Our Director of Operations gave an interview to Breeze FM.

Website

- In May we had 62,000 visits to the website, an increase of nearly 50% since the launch of the new site.

Visitor Exhibition in South Downs Centre

- This month, 433 people visited the South Downs Centre exhibition area – there have been a total of 4,455 visitors since May 2014.