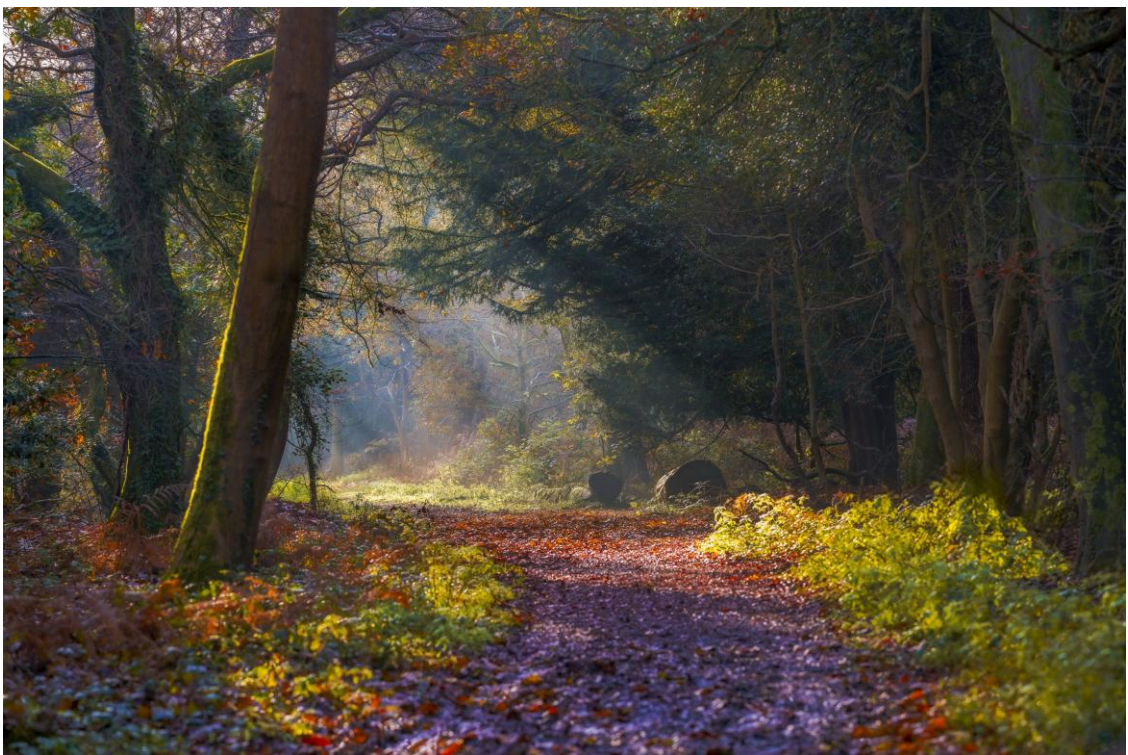


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Stunning September in the South Downs

Welcome to the [September 2026](#) newsletter for the South Downs National Park. Crunchy leaves underfoot, radiant colours, crimson sunsets, trees bejewelled with berries, nuts and seeds, cool breezes and that unmistakeable earthy smell of autumn – there's something so special about September! This month we're celebrating the amazing history of the region and sharing ideas for days-out as part of the Heritage Open Day season.

You can also find out about a bird that is bouncing (or rather flying!) back from the brink in the National Park - the iconic turtle dove!

There are just a few weeks left to get your entries in for our photo competition for the chance to win £250, so do get out into the National Park and start taking those pictures! September and October are great as the “golden hour” for photography is much more manageable! 😊

We’re also giving away a wonderful prize in our competition for a tour and tasting at the incredible **Rathfinny Wine Estate**. Read on to find out more!

[Click here to read a PDF version of South Downs News](#)



Discover amazing heritage of South Downs!

Amongst the lumps and bumps in the ground and historic buildings of the South Downs are stories spanning many thousands of years.

Did you know humans have used the South Downs Way, which runs along the chalk ridge, for roughly 5,000 to 8,000 years, making it an ancient route of travel?

Across those millennia, great civilisations and eras have come and gone, including the Romans, Normans, Tudors, Victorians and many more.

All have left their mark on the landscape, towns and villages and today there are countless historical destinations to explore and learn more.

Heritage Open Days in September are a great opportunity to learn more about this incredible region – without breaking the bank as many of the experiences are free! We're sharing a selection of some fabulous days-out on offer for the festival, which runs between 11 and 20 September. [Find out more here.](#)



New pledge to protect history of area

Increasing opportunities for people to connect with history and championing the role of heritage in nature recovery are among the goals of a new nationwide pledge.

National Parks across the UK have joined forces with leading heritage and environmental bodies to protect, explain and bring to life the nation's historic environment. [Learn more here](#).



The splendour of autumn

September and October are particularly lovely months in the National Park and, after a scorcher of a summer, most of us will appreciate some cooler, rainier days with some autumn mists, muddier tracks and stunning sunsets.

Due to the intense heatwaves and drought, the National Park is not alone in experiencing a “false autumn”, with many crunchy leaves already on the ground and trees putting on a show of brown and orange hues.

We’re sharing restoring activities to really appreciate the magic of this time of the year in the National Park. [Learn more here!](#)

Beautiful bird is making a comeback

The **turtle dove** is prospering in Hampshire as part of an inspiring re-introduction project.

[Learn more here.](#)



Serpent Trail update

Ranger Dominic Sunderland gives a quick update on what’s been happening on the trail this summer. If you fancy checking out the trail visit [here](#). Autumn is a great time to explore it!

[Find out more here.](#)

Ponies help boost biodiversity at reserve

A herd of Exmoor ponies have been helping to improve biodiversity at a nature reserve in the National Park.

Earlier this summer, 800 metres of fencing was installed at Mill Hill Local Nature Reserve, near Shoreham, to create a dedicated grazing area to help restore the special chalk grassland landscape. [Learn more here.](#)



Win tour and tasting at stunning vineyard



After 11 weeks with almost no meaningful rainfall, the rain that arrived in late August was a welcome relief to vineyards across the National Park.

At Rathfinny, the vines have remained healthy throughout the dry spell thanks in large part to the estate's chalk soils, which act as a natural reservoir and gradually release water when it is needed. Harvest is set to be the earliest ever, with Pinot Noir Précoce picked on 2 and 3 September, beating last year's record of 8 September. The full harvest will commence in earnest from 14 September, subject to weather conditions.

Rathfinny Wine Estate crafts vintage Sussex Sparkling wines on a perfect single-site vineyard in East Sussex.

Founded in 2010 by Mark and Sarah Driver, the family-run estate sits in the Cradle Valley in the rolling South Downs National Park, just three miles from the sea near the iconic Seven Sisters cliffs.

The south-facing chalk slope is planted with the classic sparkling grape varieties: Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and Pinot Meunier.

One of the UK's most coastal vineyards, Rathfinny produces fresh, characterful English Sparkling wines that are served in some of the world's finest hotels, restaurants and bars.

Sustainability has been at the heart of Rathfinny since it was founded. Over a third of the Estate's land has been returned to nature, with concrete steps taken across the business to reduce its environmental footprint. Although sustainability has always been in the Rathfinny DNA, their continued commitment was recognised in 2023 when Rathfinny became the world's first single-site sparkling wine producer to achieve B Corp certification.

Sussex Sparkling achieved Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) status in June 2022, becoming the first English region to earn this distinction. The PDO mark assures consumers worldwide of the exceptional quality and authentic provenance of wines from Sussex with Sussex Sparkling on the label.

In addition to producing Sussex Sparkling, Rathfinny Wine Estate has become a much-loved destination for wine tourism, where visitors can stay, dine, tour, taste and shop, all in one beautiful South Downs setting.

Competition

Win a sumptuous Winter Tour & Tasting at Rathfinny Wine Estate for two people! **All new subscribers to Rathfinny's newsletter, or South Downs News, until midnight on 30 September will be entered into the prize draw.** Good luck to everyone who enters!

T&Cs:

- All competition entrants and beneficiaries redeeming the prizes must be 18 and over and must be signed up to the Rathfinny Wine Estate & South Downs National Park newsletters.
- Prize includes a Winter Tour & Tasting for two guests.
- The prize is non-transferable, non-refundable and cannot be exchanged for cash or any alternative.
- Dates: Must be redeemed between 28th October 2026 – 29th April 2027
- Times: Fridays 12.00pm or Saturdays 10.30am, 1.00pm, 3.00pm, subject to availability
- Amendments & Cancellations: Booking dates can be rearranged up to 7 days in advance.

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You can [visit Rathfinny](#) throughout winter and spring for a Sussex wine tour. Learn how a typical year of growing grapes and wine production progresses. Among the highlights are a visit to the RIBA-nominated winery to learn the process and care involved in making high-quality wines, followed by an exclusive visit to the bottling building. You will have a unique chance to witness

the full winemaking process from grape to glass on this single-site estate. All tours conclude with a tasting of Rathfinny Sussex Sparkling wines.



Coming up this September



Cowdray Ruins in a September mist

- Head to Warren Hill dew pond on Saturday 12 September for a two-hour creative writing workshop with award-winning writer and artist Alinah Azadeh (*pictured below*). The **“Up From Paradise” session** is being run by Towner Eastbourne.
- “A Greener Screen” at Chichester Cinema returns this month until the middle of October with an exciting line-up of environmental films, local organisations, children’s workshops and talks. The programme will explore some of the biggest environmental challenges facing the planet, while shining a light on the people and projects working to protect and restore the natural world much closer to home. For the full programme and tickets, visit **<https://chichestercinema.org/>**
- The **“Adder Dash”** will take place on 19 September from The Old Racecourse in Lewes. A 13 km run through the rolling hills and woods of the National Park, all event profits will be donated to the South Downs National Park Trust and the Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Trust, helping support conservation projects and ongoing maintenance of the landscape.

- An exhibition called “Working Lewes” begins on 11 September with 80 illuminated lightboxes located in windows around Lewes.

This evocative collection of lightboxes tells the stories of Lewes residents at work over a period of 100 years, offering an intimate glimpse into their working lives, and the town's resilient community spirit.

Established in 1855, Edward Reeves Photography, in High Street, Lewes, is believed to be the world's oldest continuously operating photographic studio. From glass plates to digital files, its archive of nearly a million images and corresponding paperwork is a unique record of daily life in and around Lewes, and of the history of commercial photographic practice. **Find out more here.**

- Coming up next month, we'll be in full Spooky South Downs mode! Stansted Park, near Rowlands Castle, will be hosting a **special outdoor cinema screening** of the 1993 Halloween classic *Hocus Pocus* on 3 October. Gather your friends, get comfy, and prepare for a wickedly fun evening of laughs, magic, and Halloween nostalgia! If you're looking for something scarier, the 80s classic *Lost Boys* will be **screened on 2 October** at Stansted.



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