

SOUTH DOWNS DARK SKIES FESTIVAL

THURS 12–SUN 22 FEBRUARY 2026



SOUTH DOWNS
NATIONAL PARK



Great Bear © Emily Summers-Mileman

CELEBRATING 10 YEARS AS AN
INTERNATIONAL DARK SKY RESERVE



WHAT'S ON?

Dark skies are one of the most amazing things about the South Downs National Park. It's incredible to have this haven for stargazing in the busy south-east, giving easy access for all to enjoy connecting with the dark, star-filled universe around us. To celebrate our 10th anniversary join 11 days of exploring the dark skies of the South Downs and the nocturnal wildlife that lives here. You can:

- ★ Discover the National Park through night walks and meet local astronomy groups.
- ★ Join star parties at Seven Sisters and Queen Elizabeth Country Parks, Amberley Museum, Alice Holt Forest and on Brighton seafront.
- ★ Discover our new family-friendly Dark Skies Explorer Trail to listen to the story of the Great Bear.
- ★ Find out about nocturnal wildlife and learn about biofluorescence (things that shine under UV light!).
- ★ Listen to stories of the stars above us.
- ★ Explore our 'Embrace the Darkness' podcast, all about nocturnal wildlife, and take part in some recording.
- ★ Scan the QR code to check out our new Dark Skies Hub to view prize-winning astrophotography and details of extra festival events.
- ★ Explore our 10 Dark Sky Discovery sites through short films before visiting in-person.

Please note that all in person events are subject to cancellation at short notice due to weather conditions. Please check southdowns.gov.uk/DarkSkiesFestival2026 and social media on the day.



THURSDAY FEB 12

Embrace the Darkness Podcast

Kick start the Festival with the launch of the second season of our podcast series! Join our Queen of Darkness, Elinor, as she chats with guests about their experiences of darkness and nocturnal wildlife in the South Downs National Park and beyond. We'll be recording more podcast action at Amberley Museum on Wednesday 18 February – come along and get involved. [Listen to the podcast here.](#)

17:45-19:15 and 19:45-21:15

Biofluorescent Night Walks

WHERE: Seven Sisters Country Park
(booking required)

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Discover a hidden world of glowing life that surrounds us all, yet very few of us have ever seen. One of nature's best-kept secrets – delve into the world of biofluorescence with David Atthowe from Reveal Nature.

This guided walk (2 miles maximum) is suitable for anyone aged 8 years and above, all children must be accompanied by an adult.

Please note we will not cancel the event due to rain, only if there are dangerously high winds so please come prepared. Rainfall and water greatly enhance the experience, making for ideal conditions for a biofluorescent night walk.

Please only book one session. Small donation welcome.

17:45 [Book here.](#)

19:45 [Book here.](#)



WHAT'S ON?

FRIDAY FEB 13

18:00 10th Anniversary
Celebration Event

WHERE: South Downs Centre,
Midhurst
(booking required)

Join us for a special evening celebrating 10 years of being designated an International Dark Sky Reserve. Learn about our journey to becoming an IDS Reserve and what the future might bring.

Includes the book launch of *Nightfaring: A Journey into the Dark* by travel author and DarkSky International editor Megan Eaves-Egenes. [Book here](#).

19:00 Dark Skies Walk

WHERE: Bignor
(booking required)

Join Pied a Terre Adventures on a gentle night-time adventure walk. Led by an experienced, qualified local guide, you'll explore some of the darkest and most beautiful spots in the National Park. Don't miss this unique night-time adventure! Suitable for age 10+ [Book here](#).

19:00 Stargazing Party

WHERE: RSPB Pulborough Brooks
(booking required)

Experience this lovely RSPB nature reserve by night at a Stargazing party! Telescopes and binoculars will be set up (weather permitting) and there will be hot drinks available! [Book here](#).

Follow our social channels to
enjoy extra Festival content...

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SATURDAY FEB 14

18:00-20:30

Dark Skies Explorer Event

WHERE: Seven Sisters Country
Park (no booking required)

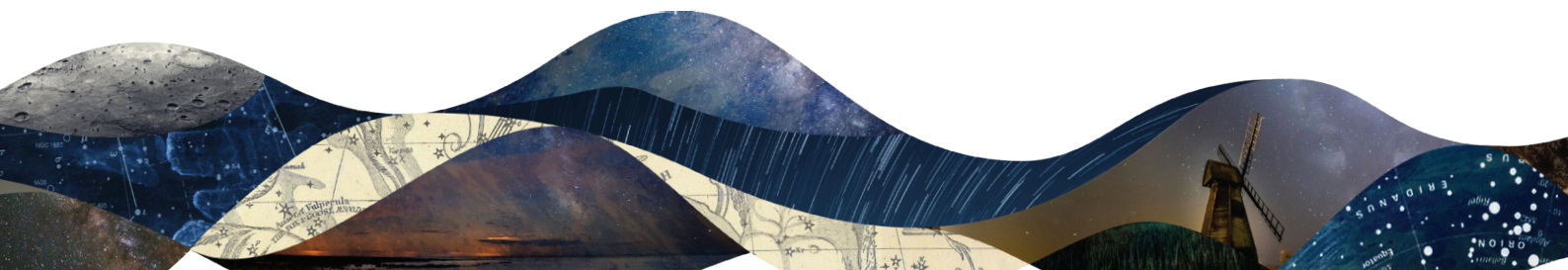
Come and explore the dark skies above us with Sussex Sidewalk Astronomers and our new Dark Skies Explorer Trail. Follow Great Bear along this short, accessible trail to discover some of the constellations and stories in our sky, includes an audio trail.

Chris Woodcock of Sussex Sidewalk Astronomers will be giving a 'Tour of the Universe' and Astrophotographer Abby Moule will be talking about inspirational astrophotography. You can also enjoy virtual reality, games and award-winning astrophotography.

You can also enjoy the visitor centre and grab a special deal hot drink and snack. An event for the whole family. Car parking charges apply.

[More info here](#).

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WHAT'S ON?

SUNDAY FEB 15

18:00 Embrace the Night Walk

WHERE: Cocking
(booking required)

Led by Rural Strides, join this small group nighttime walk which will be a slow, sensory experience exploring the landscape through sight, sound, smell and touch. [Book here](#).

TUESDAY FEB 17

18:00-20:30

Dark Skies Explorer Event

WHERE: Alice Holt
(no booking required)

Join us for stargazing (weather permitting), meeting the owls, award-winning astrophotography, exploring the night skies with our VR headsets and our new Dark Skies Explorer Trail.

Follow the Great Bear along a short, accessible, audio trail to discover some of the constellations and stories found in our night sky – fun for all the family!

You can also enjoy hot drinks and a limited food menu from the cafe. Car parking charges apply.

[More info here](#).

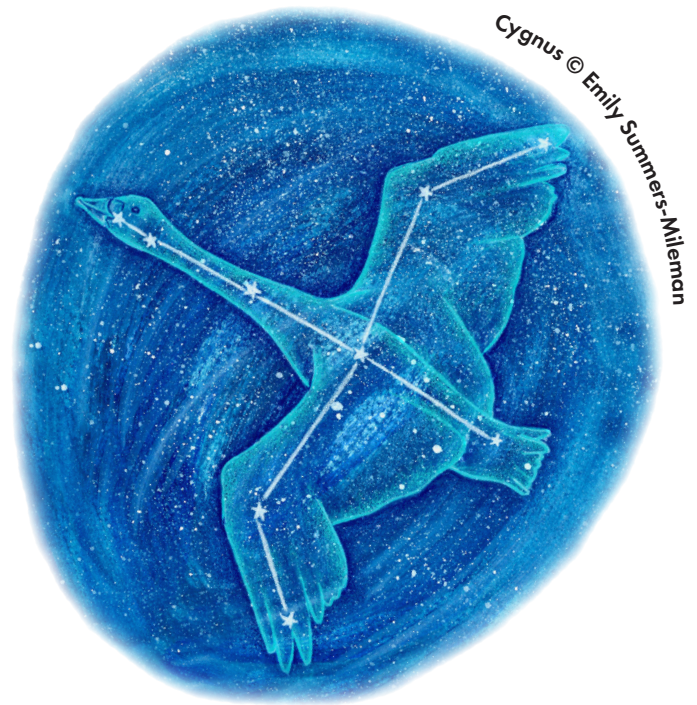
18:30 Alice Holt Night Walk
(booking required)

Discover hidden wonders of the night on this gentle 45-minute stroll (no more than 3kms) led by South Downs National Park staff.

We'll bring UV torches to look for biofluorescent beasts and keep an eye and ear out for nocturnal wildlife in the woods.

[Book here](#).

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18:30 Twinkle, Twinkle Night Walk
WHERE: Old Winchester Hill
(booking required)

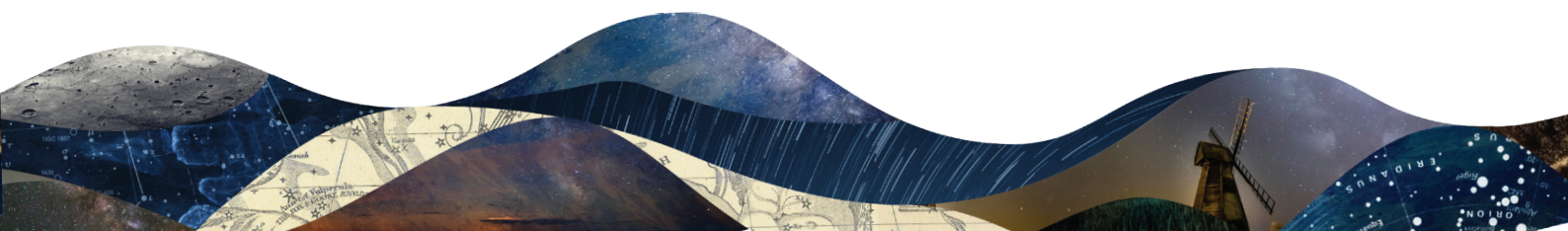
Celebrate the beauty of darkness with a slow, sensory walk to an Iron Age Hill fort, exploring the landscape through sight, sound, smell and touch. This walk is led by Rural Strides, aimed at children of primary school age and their families. [Book here](#).

17:00 & 19:30 Night Sky Live
WHERE: Winchester Science Centre
(booking required)

Have you ever looked up into the sky at night and wondered what you're seeing? Well now you don't have to! Begin your Night Sky Live adventure in the Planetarium. Learn the skills you'll need to identify what's above us before following the stargazing host outside into the South Downs National Park to spot stars, constellations and planets.

17:00 (family) [Book here](#).

19:30 (adults) [Book here](#).



WHAT'S ON?

WEDNESDAY FEB 18

18:30-21:00

Dark Skies Explorer Event

WHERE: Amberley Museum
(booking required - reduced cost to enter museum)

Bring all the family for stargazing (weather permitting) with volunteers from the South Downs Planetarium, dark skies storytelling, virtual reality headsets, games and more.

Follow the Great Bear along our new Dark Skies Explorer Trail - a short, accessible route to discover the constellations and stories in our night skies. We will be recording our 'Embrace the Darkness' podcast with the opportunity for you to get involved!

Astrophotographer Abby Moule will be giving a talk and answering questions throughout the evening. There will be short guided walks along the Nature Trail to look out for nocturnal wildlife. Hot drinks and snacks will be available at the café. **Book here.**

If this event is canceled due to bad weather, the back-up date is Friday 20th February - check our website and socials.

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THURSDAY FEB 19

18:00-20:30

Dark Skies Explorer Event

WHERE: Queen Elizabeth Country Park (QECF)
(no booking required)

Bring all the family for stargazing (weather permitting), bat-themed crafts, meet the owls, the Hampshire Bat Group, virtual reality headsets and dark skies storytelling and games.

Discover some of the constellations and stories from our night skies with our new Dark Skies Explorer Trail where you'll follow the Great Bear along a short, accessible audio trail. The café will be serving hot drinks and snacks. Car parking charges apply. **More info here.**

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17:00-20:30 Introduction to photographing the night sky

WHERE: QECF
(booking required)

Discover how to take a brilliant night-time photo at this practical workshop with astrophotographer Abby Moule. Limited to 8 people. For more details and a list of equipment to bring **book here.**

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19:00 Night Walk

WHERE: QECF
(booking required)

Join us for a guided night walk around QECF. Look for biofluorescent beasts with UV torches and keep an eye and ear out for nocturnal wildlife on this 1-hr gentle stroll of no more than 3km around the woodland. **Book here.**

19:00 Embrace the Night Walk

WHERE: Petworth
(booking required)

Enjoy a slow, sensory, small group walk exploring the landscape through sight, sound, smell and touch. **Book here.**



WHAT'S ON?

 SOUTH DOWNS
NATIONAL PARK

19:00 Dark Skies Walk

WHERE: Birling Gap
(booking required)

Join Pied A Terre Adventures on a gentle, unique night-time adventure walk. Led by an experienced, qualified local guide, you'll explore some of the darkest and most beautiful spots in the South Downs National Park. [Book here](#).

SATURDAY FEB 21

17:30-20:30 **Star Party**

WHERE: Brighton Seafront
(no booking required)

Join SDNPA and Brighton Astro in front of the Brighton i360 for a stargazing party (weather dependent). [More info here](#).

18:30 Dark Skies Flight

WHERE: Brighton i360
(booking required)

Enjoy a special 45-minute pod journey including a talk by 'Dark Skies' Dan Oakley on 'A beginners guide to the night sky' and an opportunity to experience the skies above the South Downs through VR headsets. [Book here](#).

SUNDAY FEB 22

Other Events

For the most up-to-date listing of Dark Skies Festival events, visit: [Dark Skies Hub](#).

Our local planetariums have many amazing shows and events also happening across the week, visit:

South Downs Planetarium and Science Centre
Observatory Science Centre, Herstmonceux

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SUNDAY FEB 22

'People's Choice'

Astrophotography gallery opens

Winning entries to the South Downs first Astrophotography Competition will be shown throughout the festival. [View entries here](#).



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