

Species information

Here is some information about the creatures you can choose from. Have a read through and see which appeals to you, then carry out your own research, to find some images to inspire your artwork.

Adonis blue

This beautiful butterfly is one of the iconic species of the South Downs, often seen flying low over chalk downland in the east of the National Park. Although at first glance blue butterflies can look similar, once seen the brilliant azure blue of a male adonis is unmistakable. The male upperwings are iridescent blue with black and white margins, while the female's are mostly brown, with orange sub-marginal spots. Like all blue butterflies, their caterpillars are tended by ants which guard them from predators in return for sugary sweet droplets of honeydew produced by glands on the caterpillar's body.

Barn owl

Usually seen at dusk or after dark, the barn owl's heart shaped face, buff back and wings and white underparts are easily recognisable. While it sometimes nests in tree holes, it also nests in barns and other buildings - often in nest boxes installed to help conserve this iconic species. Its main diet is small mammals.

Emperor dragonfly

This large dragonfly flies from June to August. The male's abdomen is sky blue, with a dark line running along the top. It is very active and hunts over open water. To regulate their temperature on hot days dragonflies will perform a handstand, raising the tip of their abdomen to the sun to minimise their exposure to solar rays. This acrobatic display is known as 'obelisking'.

Hare

Larger than a rabbit, and with longer legs, the hare has longer black-tipped ears. The males sometimes box in spring. Hares are less common than they used to be, partly because of changes in land use.

Natterjack toad

The natterjack toad's body has a conspicuous yellow stripe down the back. This rare creature breeds in seasonal ponds on sandy heaths within the South Downs National Park, and is most active at night, when the males can be very vocal. Unlike common toads, whose spawn is arranged in double lines of eggs, natterjack toad spawn forms single lines. Male natterjack calls can be heard from up to a mile away!

Otter

Otters, members of the weasel family, are semiaquatic mammals, noted for their playful behaviour. Their lithe, slender bodies, have long flattened tails and webbed feet to help them to move elegantly through water. These shy creatures have been observed in the rivers Rother and Meon.

<https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/otter-returns-to-upper-rother-river/>

Potter flower bee *Anthophora retusa*

The solitary potter flower bee can be found tucked away on Seaford Head in the eastern Downs, where the iconic white chalky cliffs provide an ideal home for this burrowing bee. After emerging from their nests in April, they can be found darting between flowers, often with their extremely long tongues extended as they approach. They are particularly fond of ground ivy! The females are hairy, black bees with red spines on their hind legs. The males are ginger in colour and have yellow markings on the face. They were once widely distributed throughout southern England but they are

now endangered and can only be found at a handful of sites. The population inhabiting Seaford Head is one of the species' most important.

Red kite

Once nearly extinct in the UK, the red kite can now be seen in the South Downs National Park, due partly to reintroduction programmes and legal protection. With long, bowed wings and forked tail, it soars effortlessly in the skies. Red kites can be seen throughout the National Park, but look out for this amazing bird of prey taking advantage of updrafts created by the steep slopes of the Downs.

Sand lizard

These very rare lizards are sometimes found on South Downs National Park heathland. In April, male sand lizards develop dazzling green patterns on their flanks – an irresistible lure for females who wiggle their tails to woo their suitor. <https://www.facebook.com/sdnpa/videos/510076462771964/>

Water vole

A Water Vole is a rodent (a mammal with large incisors used for gnawing or nibbling) usually found along riverbanks, and known as 'Ratty' from the character in the lovely Wind in the Willows stories. They are different to mice and rats as water voles have rounder noses, small ears and a furry tail. The South Downs National Park Authority, and partners, have recently reintroduced water voles along the length of the River Meon. A good place to see them is at Titchfield Haven National Nature Reserve.