

Iconic Seven Sisters formally declared England's new National Nature Reserve

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Seven Sisters is one of the country's most treasured landscapes.

The iconic Seven Sisters have been formally declared England's newest National Nature Reserve today (Thursday 19th March), acknowledging the unique value of one of the nation's most loved landscapes.

The 1,500 hectare new National Nature Reserve is home to globally rare habitats, including chalk grasslands, heath and floodplain meadows, and wildlife such as the chalkhill blue butterfly, yellow hammer, skylark, and bee orchid. The area will now be better protected and restored for nature and people.

The landscape's extraordinary chalk geology - formed from the remains of tiny sea creatures compacted over millennia - forms a huge chalk dome that contains one of Britain's largest aquifers providing drinking water for nearby towns and invaluable clean freshwater for wildlife.

The Seven Sisters cliffs, sitting within the South Downs National Park, have long inspired both locals and visitors to our shores for centuries. The towering chalky cliffs and the Cuckmere - the river which cuts through the cliffs as it meanders down to the English Channel - have been immortalised in popular culture influencing poets, artists and Hollywood directors.

Rudyard Kipling wrote about the 'half-wild and wholly tame' landscape in his poem Sussex, while the cliffs more recently provided a backdrop to films including Atonement, Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire, Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves, and Wicked.

The Seven Sisters cliffs and coast attract up to a million visitors per year to Sussex. A key role of the National Nature Reserve partnership will be to promote access to the landscape, while managing visitor pressures so that it can continue to welcome and inspire visitors for many years to come.

Tony Juniper, chair of Natural England, said:

"This remarkable nature-rich landscape formed over millions of years and today is home to a vast array of wildlife including special plants, insects and birds. Deriving its unique character from the special chalk geology, this new nature reserve is not only beautiful and diverse, but also a source of the pure water used in many local homes and businesses.

"The Seven Sisters National Nature Reserve creates a bigger, better and more joined-up space for nature and paves the way for nature's protection and recovery across more than 1500 hectares in this iconic part of England."

Nature Minister Mary Creagh said:

"We have some iconic landscapes in England and few are more impressive than Seven Sisters. Beloved by millions of people, it is home to rare species like the chalkhill blue butterfly and the beautiful bee orchid.

"This landscape also supplies clean water for local people and shows why we need to protect our

most important places for nature, people and wildlife.”

Siôn McGeever, Chief Executive of the National Park Authority, said:

“It’s so exciting to be part of this new partnership to help protect and enhance this truly unique area of the South Downs National Park.

“Chalk and water are a central part of the South Downs and they are vital for both nature and people. I’m looking forward to seeing what we can achieve together to create a lasting legacy of cleaner water, more biodiversity, better soils and local communities inspired and empowered to care for this incredible landscape.”

The creation of the Seven Sisters National Nature Reserve (NNR) marks a significant halfway milestone in the King’s Series of National Nature Reserves. With the support of His Majesty King Charles III, Natural England will leave a lasting public legacy for people, science and nature by creating or extending 25 National Nature Reserves by 2028. Seven Sisters is the 13th new National Nature Reserve in the Series.

The 13 National Nature Reserves declared so far within the King’s Series now cover an area of 17,000 hectares or 65 square miles, equivalent to twice the size of the city of Brighton. Around 1.4 million people live within 5km of a King’s Series NNR, bringing benefits for health, wellbeing, education and the local economy to communities around the country.

Reversing the historic declines in nature and moving toward ecological recovery requires bigger, better and more joined up areas for nature to thrive – the driving purpose of the King’s Series of National Nature Reserves.

The Seven Sisters National Nature Reserve will be managed by a partnership of eight bodies, including Natural England, Forestry England, the National Trust, Sussex Wildlife Trust, South Downs National Park Authority, South East Water, Eastbourne Borough Council and Seaford Town Council, working together to facilitate nature recovery and the public’s enjoyment of the landscape.

NOTES TO EDITORS

- Seven Sisters becomes the 13th National Nature Reserve in the King’s Series – marking the halfway point towards our target of 25 new or expanded NNRs by 2028 – led by Natural England
- Further quotes are available upon request.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/iconic-seven-sisters-formally-declared-englands-new-national-nature-reserve>