



Celebrate the dark

The days are getting shorter and the clocks will soon go forward: a good time to look at the dark hours anew.

We are fortunate to have the South Downs National Park on our doorstep, which was given International Dark Sky Reserve status in 2016. This was partly to honour local resident Sir Patrick Moore, but also to preserve the dark skies we enjoy. Dark Sky Reserves are places where the darkness of the night sky is relatively free from interference of artificial light. But even here, we can see the light from the Covid testing station or when Brighton are playing at home. Locally, this is summed up by the SDNP : "We think our star-studded skies overhead are as valuable as our beautiful rolling landscapes and, with properly dark skies in the South East of England under threat, this is a statement that the skies of the South Downs are worth protecting." The SDNP celebrate this dark sky status every February with 2 weeks of star parties, talks and family fun.

On a global scale, dark and starry skies are a threatened treasure. But why are they important? They have been around since the dawn of time. The night is the natural time for rest and recuperation for humans and many other creatures we share the planet with. Light pollution denies us the opportunity to experience an important part of our natural and cultural heritage: the majesty of the night sky.

Dark skies threatened. Between 1993 and 2000 light pollution across England increased by 24%. 90% of the UK population is now denied a view of the milky way, something that has fired the imagination throughout the ages.

Light pollution is also wasteful, to the tune of over £1 billion per annum in the UK, with streetlights alone wasting over £100 million. Given the current climate crisis, and on the eve of COP26 this is nonsensical.

Poorly designed lighting can affect the foraging, mating, and migratory behaviours of a wide range of nocturnal wildlife. Bats can become disorientated by artificial lighting. Insects are killed by collisions with hot bulbs or are more easily predated. Thousands of migrating birds are killed each year in collisions with unnecessarily illuminated buildings.

Human health can suffer too: sleep disorders, obesity, depression, diabetes, and an increase in the growth of cancer cells can all be linked to light pollution. Even the safety argument falls short. Poorly designed or positioned lighting can actually make a place more unsafe!

The good news is that there are organisations working to preserve and promote dark skies. The International Dark Skies Association is a global body working to end light pollution. Local organisations like the CPRE, SDNP, High Weald AONB, work with local authorities to promote best practice for outdoor lighting and improve lighting policy, as well as encouraging a greater appreciation of our dark skies amongst local communities and helping them do what they can to conserve this special experience. They can also offer advice, and keep a close eye on devastating over-building in our locality.

More good news - we can all help

- Only use light when you need it and only use as much as you need for that purpose
- Install lighting only where necessary and always direct it towards the ground
- Turn off lights when you don't need them
- Use fully shielded fixtures around your home and encourage their use at your workplace and elsewhere
- Use energy saving features such as timers, dimmers, and motion sensors in all outdoor lighting, and avoid using inefficient high wattage light sources
- Always remember to draw your curtains or blinds at night to prevent intrusive light unnecessarily spilling out of your home
- Use long wavelength light to minimize impact Promote the use of intelligent and effective outdoor lighting in your community, e.g. at Plumpton station
- Educate your friends and neighbours about the economic, environmental and security benefits of good outdoor lighting.
- Campaign against any unnecessary large-scale building of unaffordable housing

Look at Dan Oakley's (SDNP) fantastic guide.

[https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Towards-A-Dark-Sky-Standard -VI. 1.pdf](https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Towards-A-Dark-Sky-Standard-VI.1.pdf)