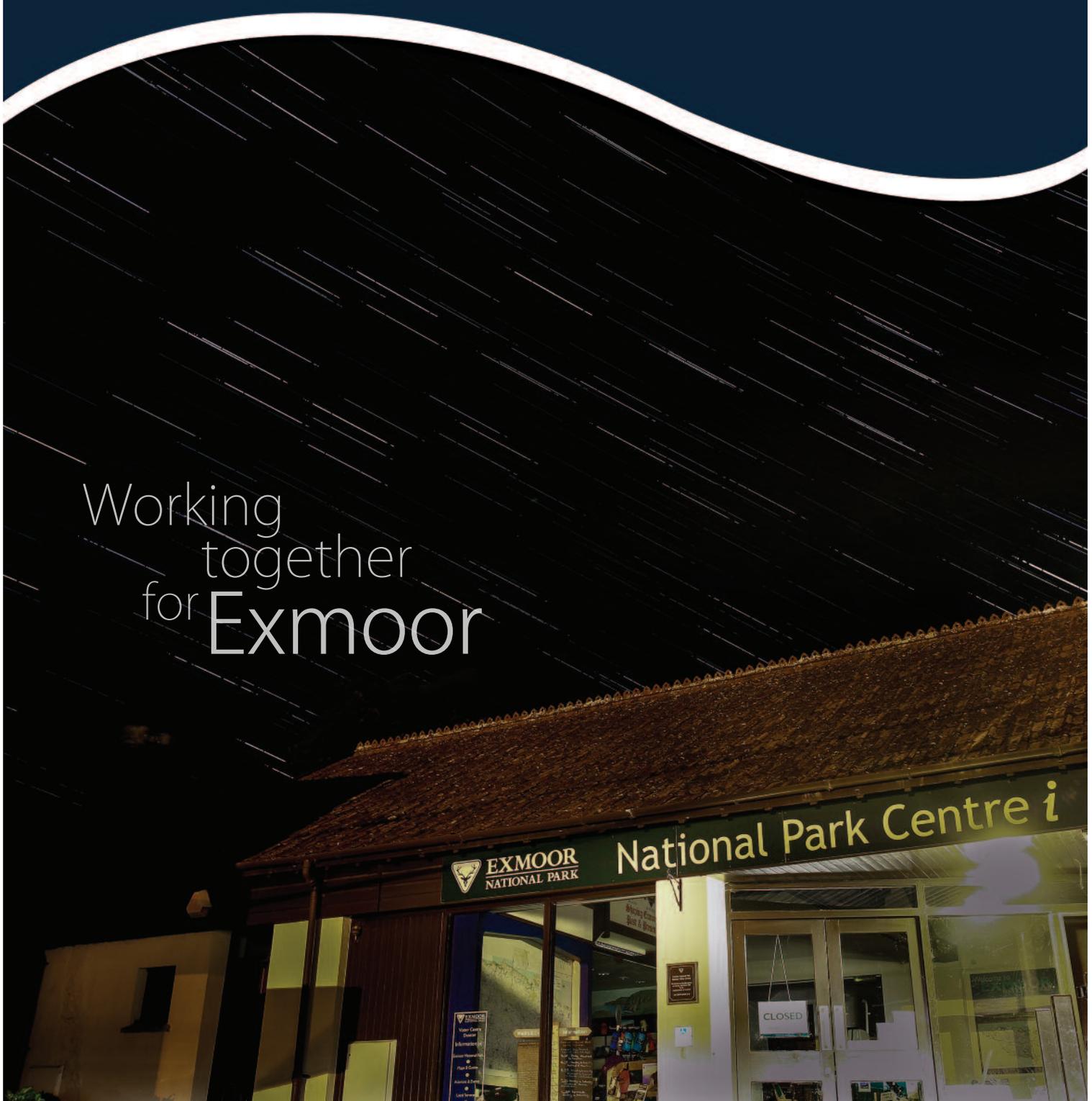


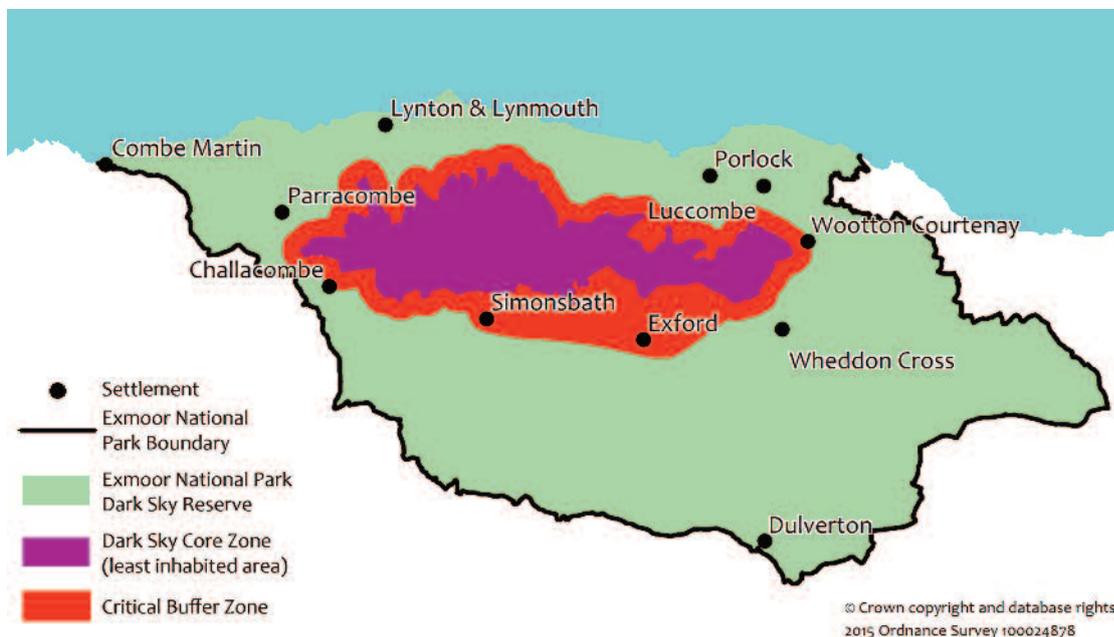
Exmoor National Park IDSA Dark Sky Places Annual Report October 2014-2015

Working
together
for **Exmoor**



INTRODUCTION

Exmoor Dark Sky Reserve was designated by the International Dark Skies Association in 2011. The core area covers some 83 square kilometres from Brockwell Farm near Wootton Courtenay in the east, to Challacombe Common in the west. It is a landscape of heather and grass moors, virtually all of which is Open Access land. There are only two occupied buildings are within the Core Area - Blackpitts bungalow and the Pinkery Education Centre, both owned by the National Park Authority.



This core area is surrounded by a buffer area of 98 square kilometres of mainly farmed landscape, which includes a number of small settlements; Simonsbath, Exford, Luccombe and Wootton Courtenay.

The reserve sits within the protected landscape of Exmoor National Park, designated in 1954 in order to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of Exmoor and to promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of its special qualities by the public. It is administered by the National Park Authority from its offices in Dulverton.

Dark night skies have been identified as one of the special qualities of the National Park and continue to be protected and promoted by the Authority, along with many of its residents.

CURRENT INFORMATION FOR THE SITE

IDA contacts

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CELEBRATING DARK SKIES

Around two million people a year visit the National Park. We do not have figures on visits to the reserve – there is no gate or entrance fee, but the information below gives a flavour of the types of events that have taken place over the last year in celebration of the reserve.

We have continued to work with the local artistic and cultural community to celebrate and explore our Dark Skies and have supported and funded some really exciting work.

Dark Starry Skies Project

Dark Starry Skies was an arts led project to engage Exmoor residents and visitors to Exmoor with the National Park's Dark Sky Reserve status. The project facilitated the participation of over 1000 people through artist-led workshops, school and community events; raising awareness of Exmoor as a Dark Skies reserve and creating, with the participants, a range of art works and resources. The project featured pop-up storytelling cafes, the creation of a community film, a touring exhibition and an archive of Dark Skies stories and reflections. Community events and family activities have been successfully held at Lynmouth Pavilion and Dulverton by Starlight. The project was led by local artist and storyteller Frances Harrison.

One of the outputs for this project was this film "In Starlight"

https://www.youtube.com/watch?t=2&v=QX8D_82hn2E



Exmoor Dark Skies Book (Seb Jay)

Published in 2014 (with funding from our Partnership Fund), we have continued to promote and sell this book through our National Park Centres.

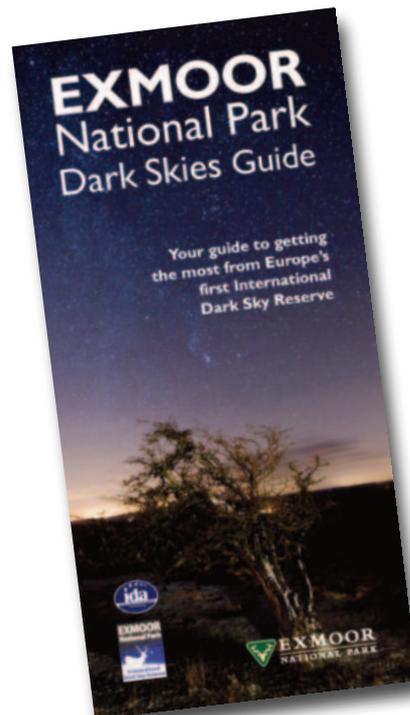
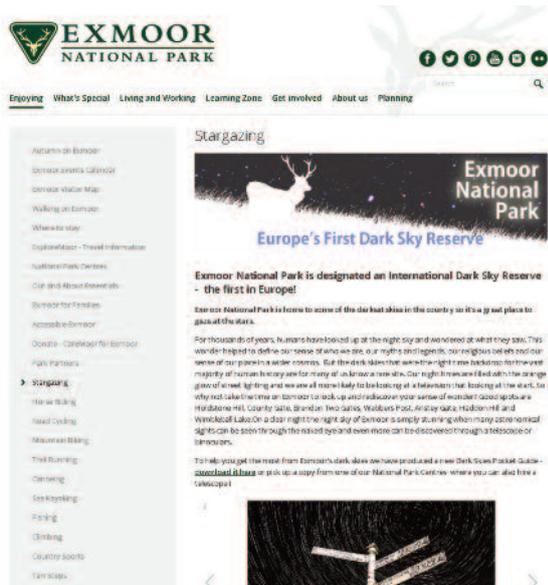
Website

Our newly developed website includes a developing “Stargazing” section which has seen over 4,000 page views since we re-launched the site in June 2015.

<http://www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk/enjoying/stargazing>



This page also includes links to our “Dark Skies Pocket Guide”, the printed version of which has proved very popular and already into its 3rd print run (over 40,000 copies).



Telescope Hire

We have continued to work with the private sector to support innovative ways of raising awareness and enjoyment of our Dark Sky status. This includes hiring out telescopes from our National Park Centres and "Dark Sky Experiences".

<http://www.darkskytelescopehire.co.uk/exmoor-dark-sky-experience/>

All three National Park Centres have seen a growing number of telescope hires over the last year, and we expect this trend to continue as awareness grows about their availability.



Events

In the last year several hundred people have enjoyed organised events that celebrate Exmoor's dark skies. Some have been led by us such as "Dunkery by Moonlight" and others by partners such as National Trust's "Big Midsummer Night's Adventure" or Dunster Yarn Market Hotel's "Stargazing for Beginners" weekend.

Through our online events calendar we actively promote and publicise those events that offer engagement with dark skies. In 2015 these have included Moonlight Walks, overnight camping adventures and illustrated talks.

Local accommodation providers are using the Dark Sky designation as a marketing tool - for example the "Stargazing for Beginners Weekend" which was a success in 2015 and will run again in 2016.

http://www.yarnmarkethotel.co.uk/stargazing_break

<http://www.exmoor-cottages.com/facilities-for-guests-of-west-withy-farm-exmoor/stargazing>

PRESS & PUBLICITY

The Lunar Eclipse

In September 2015 the BBC Breakfast team filmed the lunar eclipse on Exmoor - they chose Exmoor because it was Europe's first Dark Sky Reserve. This was aired several times over breakfast news on BBC, along with interviews with ENPA's Dan James, an astronomer and Nigel Way of the Luttrell Arms in Dunster.

"Since being designated the first International Dark Sky Reserve in Europe the awareness of Exmoor's dark skies has increased considerably from something that most people didn't think about to being a valuable extra for local tourism providers to offer, particularly in the quieter and darker months of winter.

The award winning 15th century hotel, the Luttrell Arms, in the medieval village of Dunster arranges special star gazing evenings and other hotels and B&Bs now mention stargazing as being a free, family activity when encouraging visitors to stay with them. Our National Park Centres and some hotels also offer telescope hire.

http://www.luttrellarms.co.uk/location/location_detail/category/specialist-breaks

<http://www.eventusmagazine.com/magazine/the-dark-skies/>

It has been noticeable that when another area is awarded a Dark Sky designation, National Parks that already have one are often mentioned so there is a regular trickle of awareness raising in the media. This also happens when there's a special astronomical event such the Perseids meteor shower, and 'blue' and 'red' moons to see. The fact that the BBC seem obsessed with stargazing also helps! In fact the BBC Breakfast programme (1.5 million views) was filming in Dunster yesterday morning and interviewed Dan James, our Sustainable Economy Manager about Exmoor's Dark Sky designation and how it had not only raised awareness of this precious resource but has also helped to increase tourism."

Clare O'Connor
External Relations Manager

LIGHTING CONTROL THROUGH DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT

Exmoor National Park Authority is the Planning Authority for the National Park which gives it control over most development in the area.

Over recent years we have been developing the new Local Plan For Exmoor. This document sets the policies for development in the National Park and the control of lighting has been highlighted. The new Plan's policy on lighting is set out below. This will reinforce the Dark Sky Reserve status of the National Park by applying discrete criteria to the Dark Sky Reserve core area, the buffer zone, and the remaining area of the National Park.

Publication Draft Local Plan (June 2015)

CE-S2 PROTECTING EXMOOR'S DARK NIGHT SKY

1. The tranquillity and dark sky experience of the National Park, and its status as an International Dark Sky Reserve, will be maintained and improved.
2. Development proposals should seek to reduce light spillage and eliminate all unnecessary forms of artificial outdoor lighting in the National Park by ensuring that:
 - a) The Dark Sky Core Zone is protected from permanent illumination.
 - b) External lighting within the Dark Sky Critical Buffer Zone is strictly controlled.
 - c) Good lighting management and design is applied throughout the National Park to avoid unacceptable adverse impacts on:
 - i) the visual character of the landscape, seascape, and historic built environment;
 - ii) wildlife and habitats; and
 - iii) local visual amenity and safety.

Development proposals that involve external lighting, outside the Dark Sky Core Zone, will only be permitted where it can be demonstrated that they are required for safety, security or community reasons and where the details minimise light spillage; having regard to the Lighting Management Plan guidance.

No objections were received in relation to this policy, it can therefore be given weight as a material consideration in the determination of future planning applications received, until the Local Plan is formally adopted as the Development Plan for Exmoor National Park (end 2016). The Lighting Management Plan is specifically identified in the Local Plan to assist applicants with submitting lighting compliant applications.

In 2014/15 there were no applications within the Dark Sky Reserve core area. Within the critical buffer zone, 25 applications were approved. Of these only 10 applications involved the erection of new development which may require external lighting; seven of which had a lighting condition attached to ensure that any "external lighting shall be installed on the building hereby approved unless details have first been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The external lighting shall thereafter be installed and operated fully in accordance with the approved scheme". The seven applications included storage buildings, agricultural buildings and biomass boiler buildings.

Annual Monitoring Report Year	Number of lighting conditions attached to planning permissions within the National Park (Policy LNC2*)
2005/06	14
2006/07	17
2007/08	18
2008/09	34
2009/10	23
2010/11	59
2011/12	57
2012/13	55
2013/14	54
2014/15	53

SKY QUALITY DATA

Summary of annual survey data, collected by Dr David Brabban TMDAS

		Memorial Stone	Kinsford Gate	Winsford Hill	Halse Farm	Prayway Head	Brendon Two Gates	Robbers Bridge	Porlock Common	Porlock Post	Heath Pout Cross	Haddon Hill Car Park	Observing Dates
2009	high	21.41	21.45	21.46	21.67	21.80	21.78		21.50		21.63	21.66	March - May
	low	21.08			21.07	21.28							
2010	high	21.41		(21.42)			21.31	21.50	21.46	21.35	21.47	21.49	March
	low	21.21							21.36		21.20		
2011		21.40	mist	21.39	21.49	21.47	21.53	21.49	21.46	21.52	21.49	21.53	April 3_4
		21.45	21.47	21.44	21.43	21.48	21.49	21.43	21.36	21.43	21.39	21.44	April 28_9
2012		21.30	21.25	21.53		21.49	21.51	21.42	21.36	21.40	21.33	21.35	March_25
2013		21.40	21.38		21.49	21.34	21.47	21.44	21.45	21.51	21.49	21.50	April_5
2014													
2015		21.20	21.40		21.55	21.50	21.50			21.50	21.53	21.58	April_22

Notes

2014 No data collected (poor weather at the wrong times)

2015 Some interference from moon (small), especially at Memorial Stone & Kinsford Gate

The annual survey data indicates that there have been no significant changes since the Dark Sky Reserve was designated in 2011.



ACTIVITIES WHICH MAY HAVE IMPACTED ON THE RESERVE

During the May Bank Holiday weekend a 3 day music event took place at a farm site within the National Park. The farm was located to the west of Brendon, within the western section of the National Park. The festival, which was modest and attended by approximately 1,000 people, did not require planning permission because of the ability to occupy open land for temporary uses for short periods under national legislation. Nevertheless the event did need a Licence from the District Council. The National Park Authority did raise concerns to the Licence applications, including concerns with the lighting impact in relation to the Dark Skies and impact on the tranquillity of the area. The Head of Planning and Sustainable Development attended the Safety Advisory Group Meeting, before the Licence was considered, to ensure that the lighting and other issues were raised. The Event Organiser accepted and acknowledged the importance of the Exmoor Dark Sky Reserve status and agreed that amendments to the lighting within the event tents would be made to reduce light spill from the site.



FUNDING

The National Park Authority has made substantial funding available to businesses and communities through its Partnership Fund over recent years.

<http://www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk/living-and-working/grants-and-funding/partnership-fund>

Funding is available to support projects which further National Park purposes.

In 2013, "Dark Starry Skies" was awarded £7,600 towards a £15,340 project to deliver a series of public engagement activities to raise awareness of the Dark Sky Reserve status - although awarded in 2013 this ran until March 2015 (see page 1).

This year a bid has been received for a new project working with local schools to develop a curriculum resource for learning about the Dark Sky Reserve – this is targeted at specifically delivering the educational aspect of the Reserve conditions.

CONCLUSIONS

2014/15 has been another successful year for the Exmoor Dark Sky Reserve, building on our events programme and formulating additional policy to protect our night time skies. Looking forward, we will improve our monitoring of the Reserve and look for new ways to engage local people in celebrating and protecting our wonderful dark skies in 2016.



