

Wild Night Out on the South Downs is a huge success raising funds for Endangered Elephants

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Hampshire based animal conservationist, fundraiser and adventurer Holly Budge is thrilled with the success of Wild Night Out on the South Downs, a recent event she organised aimed at getting people to experience the countryside's green spaces, wildlife and all that the natural world has to offer.

The event raised £520 for Holly's How Many Elephants charity, which works to create awareness of the declining numbers of African elephants, killed by poachers for the ivory trade. If current levels of poaching continue, in just seven years there will be no elephants left in the wild.

With only a third of British children spending more than an hour outside every day, the event aimed to encourage exploring and living close to nature. In an age where more people are becoming inactive and technology is a central part of life from an early age (children spend an average of 6 hours a day in front of a screen), it is more important than ever to get outside.

"It was a glorious afternoon, night and morning" commented Holly. Everyone was buzzing that they had camped out and thoroughly enjoyed it. It was also nice that there was no cell reception so the temptation for a little glimpse at Facebook or the guilt of not replying to an email was completely removed. **Bliss!**

Sixty people attended the event including families and individuals from across the county, as well as from further afield gathered at Holden Farm on the South Downs Way and pitched up their tents in a wild camping spot, gathered logs for the fire pit in preparation for the camp fire talk by Holly's on her many

adventures, elephant conservation, story telling and music later in the evening.

A number of the participants had hiked 5 miles from Alresford to the camping site, with a welcomed half way pit stop at the Tichbourne Arms.

"One story that stood out was a dad and his three year old son, who had travelled down from Wimbledon and then got on the 'Watercress Line' steam train at Alton to Alresford. They then made the five mile walk to the campsite. This story warmed my heart as they had had a completely brilliant adventure on their own before even arriving at the event!" said Holly.

Participants of the event also learnt about bushcraft, birdwatching and local conservation.

School Teacher Helena Marshall, also escaped from the big city to enjoy the Wild Night Out experience and commented:

"As someone who works in London, I often find myself inside whether it's in work, in the gym or in a taxi! Wild Night Out was an absolutely essential reminder of how incredibly easy it is to drive 60 minutes, with a 2 second pop up tent in tow, and be in the most beautiful of rural settings surrounded by nature. Barn owls, wheat, bats and bugs all playing a part..... of a great Wild Night Out! Now all I need to work out is how to pop down my tent! Singing by campfire, roasting marshmallows and embracing the wilderness is great for the soul."

Tracy Moore also enthusiastic about the experience and commented:

"Impressed by the How Many Elephants Exhibition, our girls were incredibly keen to get behind the event with Holly. It was a great adventure walking through the beautiful countryside and ending up around the campfire learning more about Holly's endeavours. We hope to be back next year."

Holly is planning to run the event again next year as she is committed to encouraging children, and young people especially, to ditch the screen and experience real life, fresh air and adventure in a spectacular setting. Holly commented: "I feel passionate about inspiring others to daydream, meander, run, climb and jump into their own adventures in the great outdoors. I love hiking and camping on the South Downs, this was my training ground for climbing Everest, running up the hills with a weighted pack. It is so important in the crazy busy world we live in to take time out to relax, breathe and simply be in nature. This event raised funds for my charity 'How Many Elephants', which is about preserving, appreciating and celebrating wildlife and nature."

Research from Natural England shows that one in nine children in England have not been to a natural environment in the past 12 months. Fresh air has incredible health benefits and can help reset the body clock to sleep better as well as provide a great source of exercise.

Wild Night Out is the brainchild of Belinda Kirk, founder of Explorers Connect and one of the leaders of the Adventure Revolution. Belinda and the Explorers Connect community understand firsthand the impact that adventure can have on people's lives.