

STARGAZING & SUSTAINABILITY AT ST GILES

The ground you have trudged over to peg down your home for the weekend is nestled within the undulating fields and forests of Cranborne Chase – a 380-square-mile National Landscape (or Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, in old money). The surrounding area is an assortment of ancient woodlands, rolling grasslands, downland hillsides, and internationally rare chalk rivers – 85% of which you can find only in southern and eastern England. So unspoilt are the natural surroundings that, in 2019, Cranborne Chase became the country's first National Landscape designated as an International Dark Sky Reserve for its exceptional visibility on starry nights.

More specifically, you're now a guest on St Giles Estate, which covers some 5,500 acres of this protected English countryside. The

land you'll call home at We Out Here is under environmental stewardship, with the owners working year-round to safeguard it and its natural residents. As such, you're cohabiting with hundreds of different species of flora and fauna – many of which are endangered and in need of protection.

Throughout the year, the estate houses 608 flowering plant species, 120 lichen species, 47 moss species, 424 moth species, 209 beetle species, 44 butterfly species, 103 bird species, 36 mammal species, and 13 damselfly and dragonfly species. A rare female white-tailed eagle is often spotted roaming the skies above your head; greater horseshoe bats hang from the rafters of the estate's listed buildings; and dozens of ancient trees provide dappled shade and homes for an abundance of wildlife across the site – as they have done for centuries. Out of the hundreds of species observed here, one-fifth are protected, rare, and/or threatened and are shielded by various legislation.

Since moving here in 2023, protecting and celebrating the site has become an utmost priority, refreshing our efforts to make the festival as sustainable and low-impact as possible for the local environment. This means safeguarding its landscape, habitats, and biodiversity to develop an ecological legacy – making us and our community an active voice for positive change within the industry.

Close cooperation with the estate and its in-house ecologist has been vital in developing an ecology management policy. A key element of this has been controlling the light emitted from the site to reduce

disruption to local wildlife and protect the starry nights above. You may have noticed the colourful hats fitted on our lighting – 2,800 cones have been attached to 9km of festoon lights – all by hand! Thanks to these efforts, the festival has officially achieved 'Dark Sky Friendly' accreditation.

"It was a pleasure to work with the We Out Here team on reducing their lighting presence. We had regular online meetings during which we discussed how the lighting needs of the festival could meet the requirements of an International Dark Sky Reserve, which, in summary, is light that shines only where and when it is needed and is of a quality that is sympathetic to the needs of wildlife," says Steve Tonkin, Cranborne Chase's Dark Skies adviser.

We've also aimed to become an industry leader in waste and recycling. The stark reality of the festival industry is that some 23,500 tonnes of waste are sent to landfill every year. This equates to roughly 68% of the waste created at UK festivals, even though much of it could be recycled. However, through the prevention of waste generation, repurposing, reusing, and recycling items from the site, We Out Here is proud to have sent ZERO waste to landfill in 2023.

Our close work with the non-profit A Greener Future (AGF) has set us well on this path. As an organisation, it helps events like ours become more sustainable and reduce their environmental impact. After We Out Here 2023, the festival was certified as an overall 'Improver' by AGF, demonstrating "a passionate drive for a greener event with a focus on best practice going forwards."

The final key element here is you, our festivalgoers. Without you taking home your tents, properly disposing of your rubbish, using the toilets provided, and celebrating this idyllic space that we call home, We Out Here would not be a sustainable operation. Your actions while here can contribute to protecting the estate and Cranborne Chase's delicate ecosystem, ensuring the festival can continue for future attendees.

So, as you pass your afternoons down by the wild swimming river, look out for more information on the local flora and fauna via our wildlife signage. And when the sun sets on your day of dancing, don't forget to look up!