

Press release: Environment Agency's efforts see Norfolk's eel population boosted

Increased numbers of eels have been observed at a Norwich fish pass, as well as sightings further upstream on the River Tud, the first to be found in that location for nearly 40 years.

Jez Wood, a specialist at the Environment Agency, said:

Last month 2 small eels were found on a routine fish survey on the Tud, a tributary of the Wensum.

Two doesn't sound like many, but these are the only small eels we've found on this stretch for years, and only the fifth and sixth of this size found in the Wensum catchment since 1973.

Whilst this does not herald the recovery of the species as a whole, it does show the positive benefit of eel passes at barriers to migration and the monitoring programme at the Environment Agency.

The global eel population has dropped dramatically over the past 40 years, with numbers down by as much as 95%. Whilst there are thought to be many reasons for this decline, barriers to upstream migration are one that we can do something about.

These barriers reduce access to freshwater habitat in which many eels prefer to live while they mature, before migrating back across the Atlantic to the Sargasso Sea where they spawn and die.

In Norfolk barriers include tidal sluices, weirs and mills. Eel passes are helping the Environment Agency ensure the population can be restored and stabilised.

The status of the European eel is still regarded as "critical" and the Environment Agency is creating passes at several key obstruction locations on Norfolk Rivers, such as New Mills Yard, in Norwich.

Eel numbers are monitored by the Environment Agency at various tidal structures and also in fish monitoring surveys on the rivers. Since the New Mills pass was installed in 2009, the number of eels have ranged from the hundreds to a record 34,000 in 2016.

These are not new eels fresh from the Sargasso, but older eels which have spent time in the Broads for maybe 2 or 3 years before attempting to migrate upstream.

Whilst it's not known why the numbers of eels fluctuate so greatly, the general increase in numbers and the findings upstream are positive signs for the health of our rivers.

Factfile: Lifecycle of eels

Much is still unknown about the lifecycle of the European eel.

It is catadromous, which means it spends most of its time in freshwater but returns to sea to breed.

The larval stage of the eel, called Leptocephala, migrate across the Atlantic drifting on the Gulf Stream before metamorphosing into the glass eel stage 7 centimetres when they enter continental waters around September.

They reach the estuaries in the UK from October/November in the South West and spread over the rest of Britain over the next few months, though don't tend to actively migrate upstream until the spring.

Glass eels start passing tidal structures in April and through the summer and gradually become pigmented elvers.

The urge to migrate upstream is not consistent – not all glass eels migrate past the tidal barriers in the first year. Some elvers stay in the estuary never entering the rivers, some stay in the estuary and enter the river in subsequent years.

Those that do enter the rivers can migrate upstream for several years, moving during the warmer months so the downstream reaches tend to be dominated by younger age-classes whilst upstream areas can contain only old/large individuals, predominately female.

Growth rates vary, but females reach between 45 and 85cm 10 to 12 years post-metamorphosis and males between 30 and 45cm 6 to 10 years post-metamorphosis.

At this point physical changes occur, and they change from yellow eels to silver eels and they start the downstream migration in late summer and autumn and return to the Sargasso where it is believed that they spawn and die, though this behaviour has never been witnessed.

[Press release: Fines issued after waste illegally used for flood defence](#)

A waste company, 1 of its directors and a tenant farmer involved in the illegal deposit of waste on protected land in an Essex village have been ordered to pay a total of £19,430.

Chelmsford Magistrates' Court heard that 3,920 tonnes of inert waste was deposited on land at Little Hayes Farm, Stow Maries, breaching a waste exemption. The work was also carried out without a flood defence consent or permission from Natural England. The area is within an environmentally sensitive area which benefits from protection as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), a Special Protection Area, a Special Area of Conservation and RAMSAR site.

Chelmsford Magistrates' Court heard that the site did not comply with the U1 exemption which only allows 1,000 tonnes of soil and stones to be used for construction purposes. Almost 4 times this amount was deposited onto the land between 15 April and 8 May 2015, before the activity was stopped by Natural England and the Environment Agency.

On Thursday 3 August, 2017 Simon Hollington pleaded guilty to knowingly causing the illegal deposit. T J Cottis Transport Limited and Jedd Cottis (a director of the company) both pleaded guilty to depositing the waste without an environmental permit and failing to comply with duty of care requirements.

Mrs Miriam Tordoff, prosecuting for the Environment Agency, told the court the waste was deposited there in an attempt to strengthen the existing flood defence at this location. The material used was construction and demolition waste from development sites and T J Cottis Transport Ltd.'s own permitted waste treatment facility. The waste consisted of mainly soil and stones but also included concrete, brick, plastic, glass, wood and plasterboard. It was not suitable for the construction of flood defences.

Mr Hollington employed T J Cottis to deliver waste to land at Little Hayes Farm, Stow Maries. The company paid Mr Hollington £4,800 to deposit the waste. The company accepted that they saved £24,000 in landfill charges by depositing the waste on Mr Hollington's land.

Mrs Tordoff explained that following the Environment Agency's request to remove the waste Mr Hollington had now applied for an environmental permit to do this. The waste is expected to be removed later this year.

After the hearing Environment Agency enforcement team leader Lesley Robertson said:

This case highlights to landowners that risk taking is not acceptable, whether it is a risk that concerns human health or the environment. Owning a piece of land means accepting a responsibility to the surrounding area and all that resides there, be it business, homes or wildlife.

If you want to operate under a waste exemption you must register that exemption with the Environment Agency. Each registration lasts 3 years and will then expire unless you re-register. Each exemption has specific limits and conditions you need to operate within. If you don't, you will not be exempt from needing a permit and may face enforcement action.

Registering an exemption does not remove the need to apply for other permits or permissions. For example, you may need planning permission for your waste operation. You can find out more on the GOV.UK website at environmental permits.

This prosecution follows extensive work with Natural England.

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[Press release: Flood defences put to the test in Northwich](#)

A selection of temporary and permanent flood barriers, which would be deployed in emergencies, have been put to the test in Northwich.

100 metres of demountable defences were erected and 14 flood gates were closed as part of a live training exercise by the Environment Agency throughout the town centre on Thursday 20th July.

The exercise is the first time the full set of defences, which can be deployed within three hours, have been tested since the launch of the new Northwich flood alleviation scheme last month.

Over the course of the exercise, Environment Agency teams installed and took down demountable defences to practice their emergency plan for the town and ensured the rapid deployment of the additional flood barriers were in good working order.

The operation gave the agency workers valuable experience on the deployment of the equipment and significantly tested its response to future flooding.

Flood Manager at the Environment Agency, Christian Wilcox said:

The £7 million Northwich flood alleviation scheme reduces the flood risk to around 400 homes and businesses throughout the town. Therefore, it was fantastic to see the full set of demountable defences brought into effective action for the first time.

This was a major test of our operational equipment and allowed us to train up the teams who will work on deploying these defences.

Part of the flooding that Northwich has previously experienced has come directly from the River Dane and we were pleased to see that our road closure at Dane Bridge, during the test of the defences, worked extremely well and would provide a good level of signage and a viable alternative route when we need to deploy the defences in earnest.

Overall, it was great to see our practical strategies for flood protection put into action, via our joint working with the Cheshire West and Chester Council who organised the road closure. I hope such collaborative emergency response plans will give reassurance to residents in Northwich but, it is important to remember that we can never fully protect against flooding.

Residents should always prepare in advance for this by going online at www.gov.uk and signing up for free flood warnings. Alternatively, they can telephone the Environment Agency Floodline on 0845 988 1188 and find out what they can do to protect themselves and their property when flooding hits.

[Press release: Schoolkids spruce up flood defences in Westy, Warrington](#)

Flood defences in Warrington have been brought to life thanks to a group of budding Picassos from Cardinal Newman Catholic High School in Westy.

Year 7 pupils, aged between 11 and 12, were challenged by the Environment Agency to put their brush skills to the test and design images of wildlife to decorate walls that make up part of a new flood alleviation scheme.

The designs will face the pavement and be visible to passers-by along Mersey Walk in Westy.

They form part of a £34 million flood risk management scheme throughout Warrington which aims to reduce the risk of flooding to both people and property. The new flood walls are a major aspect of the defences and will cover a total of 7.2km by the time the scheme is completed in autumn 2017.

To spruce up the solid concrete of the walls, pupils took inspiration from some of the local species that live along the River Mersey including fish, amphibians and mammals such as mallards.

The regal kingfisher has also been a key feature with the colourful bird taking pride of place in an earlier phase of the scheme along Knutsford Road.

Speaking about the colourful artwork, Chris Stone of the Environment Agency said:

These lovely features will bring a little of the Mersey wildlife to the new defences, which will provide much greater protection from the risk of flooding to about 2,000 homes and businesses in the Warrington area.

It's our priority to do everything we can to protect people from flooding. We are spending more than £2.5 billion to build flood schemes around the country, which will better protect 300,000 homes by 2021.

The River Mersey Warrington Flood Risk Management Scheme, which is now in its final phase, will enhance flood defence infrastructure, blend in with the local natural and built environment and most importantly, provide best protection to people and property in the town of Warrington. We are grateful to all the pupils from Cardinal Newman Catholic High School who got involved. Their fantastic artwork has really helped us add another point of interest to this very important project.