

Press release: Over 300 volunteer bailiffs help fight against illegal fishing

From Cornwall to Cumbria, an army of dedicated anglers is helping the fight against illegal fishing and fish theft. They are the recruits of the Angling Trust and Environment Agency's Voluntary Bailiff Service (VBS) who act as the "eyes and ears" on riverbanks and lakes, reporting suspicious incidents and providing crucial information to the Environment Agency and the police.

VBS began as a pilot project in the South East in 2012 following a formal partnership between the Environment Agency and the Angling Trust. It was rolled out across the country in spring 2015 and, following inductions last autumn, proudly boasts more than 300 volunteers.

Bailiffs are unpaid and rigorously vetted before they are selected. Successful candidates receive an intensive training course on what is expected of them from enforcement professionals, including the Angling Trust, the Environment Agency and the Head of the UK National Wildlife Crime Unit.

Volunteers are trained on fisheries enforcement law, signs of illegal fishing and how to record information in a way that could be used as evidence. First-hand learning includes attending joint patrols with the police and Environment Agency.

Volunteers recently gained valuable experience when they joined police and Environment Agency Fisheries Enforcement Officers on a joint patrol of the River Severn and at a number of stillwaters. Even at a relatively quiet period of the year they found reports of illegal fishing.

It's not just rod licence offenders that are being reported either. On other patrols people have been cautioned by the police for going equipped for poaching, motoring offences and possessing drugs and weapons.

Dilip Sarkar MBE, the Angling Trust's National Enforcement Manager, said:

All of our volunteers are valued and we now have the sound foundation to move forward, increase engagement and provide more practical training. We have come a very long way, since the formal partnership and although we still have far to go, this activity is already making a difference.

Graeme Storey, National Fisheries Manager at the Environment Agency, said:

All money raised through rod licence sales is used to protect and improve fish stocks and fisheries benefiting anglers. The Voluntary

Bailiff Service is our latest move to tackle illegal fishing and to protect that revenue. The vast majority of anglers who fish legally deserve to see those who flout the law brought to account but to that criminal minority our message is clear: we won't hesitate to take action.

The Angling Trust and Environment Agency are appealing for more anglers to join the VBS. Induction and training days are being run this spring and anyone interested in joining the VBS should email karen.sarkar@anglingtrust.net