



**Thames**  
rivers trust

## **Eel Appeal – A new citizen science project needs you!      12<sup>th</sup> July 2021**

A brand-new citizen science project is being developed and piloted in the Thames catchment and it is looking for volunteers to make it a success!

ObstacEELS is the citizen science part of a new environmental project, Thames Catchment Community Eels Project and is being led by Thames Rivers Trust (TRT).

The project is training volunteers from communities near the Rivers Mole, Pang, Upper Brent, Ravensbourne, Middle and Lower Kennet to work in teams along the riverbanks to identify and map obstacles to eel migration, using a specially modified app.

The first training workshops have happened and Eel Force volunteer teams are now out walking riverbanks together and logging details using a newly created ObstacEELS methodology. More training days are coming up and the project is looking to recruit more ObstacEELS volunteers.

Training is free and ongoing support and guidance will be provided. If you would like to get involved and get out with likeminded individuals on the riverbanks of any of the five rivers that are being targeted within the project, do get in touch – details at the end.

Thames Catchment Community Eels project is a partnership, TRT are working with Action for the River Kennet (ARK), South East Rivers Trust (SERT) and Thames21 (T21) to aid the long-term survival of the European eel. Zoological Society of London (ZSL) and Thames Estuary Partnership (TEP) are collaborating on the project, bringing in their expertise. Data from the project will feed into Thames Estuary Partnership's Fish Migration Roadmap and the Environment Agency's Thames Basin Eel Management Plan.

The data collected this summer by small groups of trained ObstacEELS volunteers will help shape future practical projects to open up fish passage for the critically endangered European eel. Mapping will show where to prioritise focus for the best wins for eels, however improving rivers for eels will also improve rivers for other wildlife species too.

This could be removal of a barrier or a series of barriers or installation of eel passes.

Eels spend the majority of their lives in our freshwater rivers, yet start life thousands of kilometres away in the Sargasso Sea. When young eels reach our rivers, huge numbers of obstacles, such as weirs and sluices prevent them from continuing that migration and being able to disperse upstream to reach healthy river habitats. Eels need connectivity to find places to hide and plentiful food sources to successfully grow and mature.

The project is also raising the profile of this unusual and in the past common fish, through a range of free community outreach activities, encouraging communities to connect with local nature.

Free guided eel riverbank walks and talks are happening now and throughout the summer. These are an opportunity for a leisurely stroll along the riverbank to discover more about eels, the wider wildlife and the local river.

Eel talks are taking place throughout the year and the project is looking for local groups who would like a presentation.

'The European eel is a huge part of the Thames and its tributaries and is a really interesting fish, but is facing a range of challenges. We are very pleased to give local communities along five rivers in the Thames catchment a range of opportunities to engage with and get enjoyment from their rivers.', said TRT Chairman Dave Wardle. Local schools are receiving Eel Classroom Workshops and Eel Assemblies, these are fun, educational and free. Children discover the amazing eel lifecycle, what makes a healthy river habitat and how important their local river is.

The project also has meant an increase in eel monitoring and is contributing to ZSL's Monitoring Programme. An eel pass on the Ember is being monitored by newly trained SERT volunteers, identifying the number and size of eels using the pass. The data will allow trends to be assessed.

This project is funded by the government's Green Recovery Challenge Fund. The fund is being delivered by The National Lottery Heritage Fund in partnership with Natural England and the Environment Agency.

For more information about Thames Catchment Community Eels Project email: [info@thamesriverstrust.org.uk](mailto:info@thamesriverstrust.org.uk) website: [www.thamesriverstrust.org.uk](http://www.thamesriverstrust.org.uk)

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Top image: Glass eel (a young European eel). Image by Jack Perks.

Second image: Volunteers training to use ObstacEELS method to assess barriers to eel migration on our rivers.



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To the Editor: High resolution images attached to the email.  
For more information about Thames Rivers Trust and the Thames Catchment Community Eels Project please contact Anna Forbes TRT TCCEP Project Manager

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