

DEVELOPMENT GRANT PRESS RELEASE

22nd October 2025

Thames Rivers Trust gains support from The National Lottery Heritage Fund for plans to save the critically endangered European eel through their Thames Catchment Community Eels Project.

Thames Rivers Trust has received initial support from The National Lottery Heritage Fund for their partnership project, the Thames Catchment Community Eels Project, it was announced today. Made possible thanks to National Lottery players, the project aims to address manmade barriers that prevent Critically Endangered European eel migrating up our rivers, carry out 3 types of citizen science surveying to collect important data on this keystone species fish and across the Thames the project will roll out extensive and innovative outdoor, hands-on river and eel community education and outreach.

Development funding of £460,748.00 has been awarded by the Heritage Fund to help Thames Rivers Trust progress their plans to apply for a full National Lottery grant of £2,718,150.00.

Rivers in the Thames catchment have an immense natural and cultural heritage, supporting iconic native species, including the one common and now critically endangered European eel but without this funding from the Heritage Fund this species which plays an essential role in a healthy river ecosystem could be lost from these rivers forever.

The project will enable extensive conservation work to take place at strategic sites restoring vital eel migration routes up our rivers enabling this fish that can grow to 1 metre in length to reach healthy habitats and increase support the species to thrive in our rivers, where they live for many years before undertaking an epic migration swimming down our rivers, out to sea and returning to the Sargasso Sea, where it is thought the eels spawn just once in their lifetime.

Volunteers, local groups, schools and the wider community will be able to take part in the project through events and citizen science training and surveying opportunities, allowing even more people to enjoy and learn about their local river and this special fish and play a part in the Thames catchment's natural heritage.

In the long-term, the project will improve the future for the European eel and build the skills and capacity of Thames Rivers Trust and their project partners, Action for the River Kennet, South East Rivers Trust, Thames21, Zoological Society of London, Thames Estuary Partnership, Medway, Swale Estuary Partnership and Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust; who together are delivering this environmental project at a scale no one organisation could bring to fruition alone.

Thames Rivers Trust CEO Miles Morgan said, 'We are thrilled to have received this initial game changing support from The National Lottery Heritage Fund. Thanks to National Lottery

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players we can now develop our plans, building on our earlier successful eel pilot project to work together for the benefit of the European eel, rivers and communities.'

Stuart McLeod, Director of London and South at The National Lottery Heritage Fund, said: "We're delighted to offer our initial support to Thames Rivers Trust in developing this ambitious project to protect the critically endangered European eel. Thanks to National Lottery players, this initiative will not only help restore vital habitats but also connect communities with the natural heritage on their doorstep. We look forward to working with the team to progress their plans to apply for their full National Lottery grant at a later date."

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Image of glass eels

Image of citizen science – counting elvers during the pilot project

Notes to the Editor: High resolution images available on request. For more information and interviews, please contact Anna Forbes TRT Administrator

Email info@thamesriverstrust.org.uk or telephone 07780381709.

About Thames Rivers Trust

TRT is a registered environmental charity dedicated to improving the River Thames and its tributaries for the benefit of people, biodiversity and the environment. We act as the Hub and focal point for the Thames catchment; and work with a wide range of partners including ENGOs, government agencies and private companies with the aim of delivering an integrated approach to the management of the Thames River Basin.

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About The National Lottery Heritage Fund

*Grant applications over £250,000 are assessed in two rounds. Thames Catchment Community Eels Project has initially been granted round one development funding of £460,748.

from The National Lottery Heritage Fund, allowing it to progress with its plans. Detailed proposals are then considered by the Heritage Fund at second round, where a final decision is made on the full funding award of £2,718,150.

Our vision is for heritage to be valued, cared for and sustained for everyone, now and in the future. That's why as the largest funder for the UK's heritage we are dedicated to supporting projects that connect people and communities to heritage, as set out in our strategic plan,



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[Heritage 2033](#). Heritage can be anything from the past that people value and want to pass on to future generations. We believe in the power of heritage to ignite the imagination, offer joy and inspiration, and to build pride in place and connection to the past.

Over the next 10 years, we aim to invest £3.6billion raised for good causes by National Lottery players to make a decisive difference for people, places and communities.

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