



**Canal &
River Trust**

Making life better by water

West Midlands review

2022/23



canalrivertrust.org.uk

Introduction from Regional Director & Regional Advisory Board Chair

A year for celebration and #GamesOn.

2022 was a busy year for our canals in the West Midlands. After years of planning the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games arrived in the region and what a celebration it was!

Our canals were featured as part of Games opening to a worldwide audience of over 1 billion people. Over 5 million people visited the region as part of the Games with many of these visiting a venue that was close to or next to one of our canals. Our colleagues and volunteers did a brilliant job showing off our wonderful canals by hosting activities, greeting visitors and being advocates of the Trust.

After years of hard work #GettingGamesReady, the two weeks of the Games really showcased our canals to the world and demonstrated that life really is better by water.

As part of our commitment to creating a greener Games we enhanced and promoted several active travel routes along our canals that encouraged visitors and local people to use our towpaths to access the Games venues.

Many of these green routes were along canal towpaths that have been awarded a Keep Britain Tidy Green Flag award cementing our commitment to creating green corridors in and around our towns and cities, a haven for people and wildlife.

These green routes were also ideal locations to plant our Great Canal Orchard – an ambitious

project to create a free community orchard along our canals from Wolverhampton to Worcester, through Birmingham. Planted thanks to support from the Government's Green Recovery Challenge Fund the orchard will provide free fruit to anyone visiting and living along our canals.

The Green Recovery Challenge Fund project is one of our successes this year with the project focusing on nature recovery and helping to boost numbers of declining wildlife on our canals. One of the elements of the project aims to reinstate hedgerows and establish rare heathlands to create much needed homes for animals and insects and boost the biodiversity of our canals. Creating a green legacy that will help protect nature for years to come.

It's refreshing to also see life starting to return to normal as we held our first lock open weekend along the canal in Kidderminster since before the pandemic struck. It was wonderful to be able to offer local people the chance to explore a drained canal lock and to chat with our colleagues and volunteers about how we maintain our canals.

The year hasn't been without its challenges. We, like many of you, are facing increasing pressures on our budgets due to the rise in the cost of living. This has meant we made difficult decisions on where we focus our valuable resources and where we spend the limited money available to us for protecting and preserving our canals.

We also face the challenges from climate change. Last year we had to close some of our canals due to water shortages. With our summers getting warmer and more people taking to boating demand for water is increasing. We need everyone to do their bit to help us conserve this precious resource.

We still face the ongoing challenges with litter and fly tipping along our canals with our teams spending £thousands this year removing other people's rubbish. We also had other unexpected costs to contend with such as the Landrover and two other cars that were dumped in the canal earlier this year. The operation to remove these alone from the Walsall area costs £10,000 with us having to cover most of this cost.

Our canals need many hands to look after them and by volunteering with us, or donating money to support our work you can help make a real difference. Whether you can spare a few minutes or a couple of days, from lock keeping to wildlife conservation, we have a wide variety of ways you can get involved.

You can find out more by visiting www.canalrivertrust.org.uk



Adnan Saif
Director West
Midlands



John Hudson OBE
Chair – West
Midlands Advisory
Board

A year in numbers

Over 5m people visited the West Midlands
as part of the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games

30,294

participants at
Let's activities
and Trust organised events

8,963

youths engaged
in participatory activities
and events

500 fruit

trees planted along
our towpaths as part of
our Great Canal Orchard

6 Green

Flags were awarded
along our regional canals

22 miles

of canals cleaned
as part of #PlasticsChallenge

£8 million

funding secured
for towpath improvements

181,680

volunteering
hours completed

25km

of towpath
improvements

5 locations

hosted the **Queen's
Baton Relay**
along our canals

>500

people came to
our open weekend
in Kidderminster

8 new

community pocket
orchards created along
our canals in Worcester and
Wolverhampton

1.25 miles

of the Montgomery
Canal in Shropshire was
re-opened to Crickheath

3 active travel routes

on the Revolution Walk in Birmingham,
the Worcester & Birmingham Canal and along the Coventry Canal

£29.5m

on maintaining
and preserving our
regional canals

Regional highlights



Birmingham & Solihull

We welcomed the Queen's Baton Relay to our canals in central Birmingham and Solihull. Hundreds of people lined the towpath to watch the baton make its way along our canals as it travelled by boat, canoe and dragon boat.

A new Brumbee sculpture has been installed along the New Mainline Canal in central Birmingham. The sculpture has been made from felled trees from along our canals and the wings have been made from recycled plastic. It's a home for solitary bees.

We've rebuilt the canal bank wall along the Walsall Canal at Birchills and strengthened its foundations. Using our team of brickwork apprentices, volunteers and colleagues we cleaned the existing bricks so that they could be reused within the rebuild.

Black Country

A project to open up and remove silt from Titford Pools in Oldbury came to a close with a fantastic family weekend of fun at this forgotten waterway gem.

Thanks to support from players of People's Postcode Lottery, a new piece of canal art has been installed by creative agency We are Culla along the Walsall Canal near Steep Bridge Way.

We took part in Walsall Council's Beat the Street initiative to get people off the sofa and enjoying some gentle exercise along our canals.

Our Kickstarter scheme helped to repair the towpath along the Staffordshire & Worcestershire Canal in Wolverhampton.

Coventry & Warwickshire

A 'hairy barge' made its way from Hatton Locks to the Coventry Basin as part of public art installation called Hand Earth Gesture Return. This formed part of the Coventry UK City of Culture celebrations.

We've installed new mooring rings and improved the towpath and canal bank along the Oxford Canal in Brinklow, Rugby to make it easier for both walkers, cyclists and boaters to access the canal.

Our regular Towpath Taskforce group in Coventry is now the largest and most successful volunteer group we have. The team are regularly out on the canal helping to keep it neat and tidy.

Shropshire

The Montgomery Canal at Crickheath reopened over 80 years since it closed. Thanks to the heroic efforts of volunteers from the Shropshire Union Canal Society with support from Canal & River Trust and funding from The National Lottery Heritage Fund.

The Ellesmere Yard team have been hosting a variety of community events to encourage local people and visitors to come and explore this unique heritage site and learn more about its history.

The towpath at Frankton Locks on the Llangollen Canal has been improved between Bridge 1W, Rowsons Bridge and Bridge 68, Pryce's Bridge making it safe for walkers whilst safeguarding homes for water voles.

Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire

The project to rebuild Hazelhurst Bridge on the Caldon Canal is underway and progressing well. The new bridge is due to open in August and is in keeping with the original design.

The Queen's Baton Relay took place on the hottest day of the year on the canal in Stoke-on-Trent. The baton travelled by boat to Harecastle Tunnel and was watched by local people and school pupils from the nearby high school.

We're continuing to work with Appetite, an art based organisation in Stoke-on-Trent, and held events along the canal and at Harecastle Tunnel to bring art based activities to local people.

Worcestershire

We planted three community pocket orchards along Worcestershire's canals – including one at Tibberton, Diglis and Alvechurch. Once established they will provide free fruit for the local community and boaters.

We held our first in person lock open weekend since 2019 along the canal at Kidderminster with local people given the opportunity to explore a drained canal lock and learn more about how we care for and protect our canals.

In Alvechurch we have installed a new access ramp down to the canal to allow full access to the canal towpath, moorings and the local hire boat company.

Our strategic projects

2022/23 has been an amazing year for the Canal & River Trust in the West Midlands. From the Commonwealth Games in Birmingham to the successes of our community programmes, the waterways have touched lives in the region, nationally and internationally.

A Commonwealth showcase

After years of planning, the end of July saw the arrival of the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games, bringing with them beautiful weather and five million visitors to the region.

In the months leading up to the Games, the canal network was a hive of activity with new wayfinding signs installed, bridges repainted, and weeds, litter and

graffiti removed. Our corporate partners, GL Events, the official overlay sponsor for the Games, helped with improvements to the canals, taking part in several volunteer days.

We created active travel routes along towpaths between many of the Games locations, and the Revolution Walk in Birmingham, the Worcester & Birmingham Canal and

the Coventry Canal were included in the official games travel planners.

The canals looked their very best for their global audience, and we received wonderful feedback from our many visitors. Our volunteers did a great job of showing off our wonderful waterways, hosting activities, greeting visitors and advocating for the work of the Trust.





Games legacy

The Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games may be over, but our work continues.

Over the 11 days, 1.5 million tickets to sporting events sold with five million visitors coming to the city and the region making the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games the most successful ever.

Our iconic canals helped transport people around the vibrant sporting venues and allowing them to ditch the car and explore the city on bike and foot helping to make these the greenest ever Games.

Having the Games on our canals helped demonstrate to local people that these wonderful green spaces are within walking distance of their homes and workplaces and what they can offer. From fun days out on the water and along the towpath, to boat parades, sporting activities, community led events and volunteering.

It's the diverse nature of our canals that we want to promote and build upon to show to local people that our canals are there for everyone to enjoy. Our canals

and rivers are the perfect places to boost your mood and improve your physical and mental health. Even in busy towns and cities, they provide special spaces where you can relax, recharge, and get your body moving.

Queen's Baton Relay

The Queen's Commonwealth Baton Relay touched five locations on our canals. It arrived on the Trent & Mersey Canal at Kidsgrove on 18th July before being carried around the region's canals by six baton bearers. It travelled along the Main Line Canal from Galton Bridge in Smethwick, was pulled by a horse along the Grand Union Canal at Catherine de Barnes, walked up the towpath at Knowle Locks and, finally, took pride of place at the boat parade in Birmingham.

Our colleagues Ian Lane and Elizabeth Thomson were nominated as baton bearers in honour of the work they do at the Trust. Ian's route was at the Pingles Stadium in Nuneaton and Lizzy's at Lightwood Park in Sandwell.



Birmingham 2022 Festival

The Birmingham 2022 Festival was part of the Commonwealth Games programme, celebrating the culture and history of Birmingham's diverse communities. We were part of the overall festival and to get everyone in the mood, we hosted several festival events, delivered alongside our partners – British Canoeing, Inspire Activity, Inland Waterways Association, Birmingham Canal Navigations Society and Nowka Bais — including:

- Paddle to the Heart: over 100 canoeists paddled into the city centre in brightly coloured canoes.
- A boat parade with over 70 boats along the city's canals.
- Canal community games events in Birmingham and Smethwick with taster sessions on offer including bell boating, Let's Fish, canoeing, dance workshops and explorer activities.
- The Nowka Bais boat race at Edgbaston reservoir: we took part in the race across the reservoir in a traditional Bangladeshi dragon boat.
- Birmingham's Key to the City: 15,000 keys were given to members of the public, which enabled over 50,000 people to explore 21 private and intriguing places and spaces around Birmingham and Solihull, including many on our canal network.
- The Queen's Platinum walkway in Birmingham includes 20 points of special significance and is part of a network of 100 walkways in the principal towns and cities of all Commonwealth nations and territories. Stretching 13 miles, the route is a celebration of The Queen's Platinum Jubilee and takes a circular path around the city - nearly half of which is along Birmingham's canals.



The people's canals

The Community Roots programme, funded by players of People's Postcode Lottery, is now in its third year in the West Midlands. It's enabled us to put dedicated resources and people into some of our target areas, including Sandwell, Walsall and Coventry, to grow community engagement and local ownership.

As the name implies, Community Roots helps local people improve their local waterway from the ground up. We ask people what needs improving, why they don't visit their local canal, what the problems are with litter, fly-tipping or graffiti, and any issues with safety or access to the canal. We engage local boating, walking, cycling and fishing groups to help get people down to the water. We establish canal adoption groups and encourage people to join our towpath task forces. The objective is to create something valuable and sustainable.

Gen 22

We were also part of the Gen22 programme which aims to provide career and employability boosting opportunities for young people aged 16 to 24 across the region who might otherwise struggle to be given a chance.



We were one of the flagship providers with 100 young people taking part in volunteering activities along our canals. The team spend over 600 hours on a range of activities including learning practical canal maintenance skills as well as working on projects to help boost nature and create green spaces along our towpaths.

Paying it back

Our partnership with the Ministry of Justice's Community Payback programme goes from strength to strength and is proving a great help to our operations colleagues. Work on the Wolverhampton Lock Flight means we have now been able to take it out of the mowing schedule — it's kept clean and tidy by our Community Payback colleagues.

Together with local volunteers, they installed totem poles, mooring rings and cobbles at Perry Barr Top Lock to extend the 14 day moorings in readiness for the Commonwealth Games. Community Payback teams have also improved the Northbrook Street access in Birmingham City Centre and installed access steps at Spouthouse embankment to allow safer monitoring and inspection.

**Our partnership
with the Ministry of
Justice's Community
Payback programme
goes from strength
to strength**

Awards, events and celebration

16 more miles of Green Flag canals

More stretches of the West Midlands canal network have achieved Green Flag status this year, joining the 18 miles already accredited. The new sections are:

- Tame Valley Canal from Perry Barr Top Lock in Birmingham to Ocker Hill in Sandwell
- Wolverhampton Lock Flight on the Birmingham Old Main Line Canal
- Walsall Canal from the Top Lock to the town basin
- Worcester & Birmingham Canal and a short section of the new main line from Birmingham City Centre to Selly Oak
- Grand Union Canal in Leamington Spa from Bridge 39 to Bridge 44
- Trent & Mersey Canal from Trentham to Stone.

The award, presented by Keep Britain Tidy, is an environmental management benchmark and recognises the huge improvements made to these sections of the waterway.

Open weekend in Kidderminster

February saw our first open weekend since Covid in Kidderminster, giving over 500 people the chance to explore a drained lock. The two-day event also incorporated a volunteer welcome session and a VIP event, with children from a local school invited to take a tour of the lock.

Local MP Mark Garnier and his wife also came along, tweeting afterwards: "It was great to see the work of the @CanalRiverTrust in the heart of Kidderminster. Thanks to their team for keeping a 250-year-old asset running smoothly."



Lighting up the imagination

This year we have again been working in partnership with Appetite, an arts organisation that works on projects for and with the people in Stoke-on-Trent and Newcastle-under-Lyme.

An inspiring programme of arts and culture culminated in March with Down the Rabbit Hole, a spectacular illumination of the entrance to

Harecastle Tunnel, partly designed by local residents and children. Story, projection and sound artists Illuminos explored ideas connected to Harecastle Tunnel and worked with Kings School students to create a stunning projection, bringing to life the magical creatures the children had imagined might live in the tunnel.



The Monty is open for business again

Around 80 years since the Montgomery Canal closed for navigation, and half a century since the start of the restoration campaign, June 2nd 2023 saw the first official narrowboat navigate the newly reopened 1.5-mile section between Maesbury and Crickheath Basin.

It was a historic moment in the volunteer-led project, supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, and means that 21 miles of the Montgomery Canal, from the Llangollen Canal at Frankton Locks to Crickheath Basin, are now once again navigable for boating.

The canal officially closed in 1944 following a serious breach near Frankton Locks and, at a time of dwindling freight traffic, closure was seen as preferable to repair. Following decades of decline, restoration work started with the 'Big Dig' in Welshpool in 1969. Since then, volunteer organisations have been working to reopen the entire 35 miles of canal from the Llangollen Canal via Llanymynech and Welshpool to Newtown, Powys.

169 volunteers have spent many hundreds of hours restoring the canal. All 35 miles of towpath are now accessible and 60% of the canal has now reopened

for boating. The canal around Welshpool is restored but this is not yet connected to the rest of the canal system.

Our brilliant volunteers have worked tirelessly to restore this latest section of the Montgomery Canal from a derelict channel to a wonderful canal that boaters, walkers, and cyclists can now use. There is still plenty of work to do, and volunteers are starting on the next phase of the restoration from Crickheath Basin to Schoolhouse Bridge, as well as the restoration of the canal in Wales which is being funded to the tune of £14 million by the Levelling Up Fund.



Picnic time for teddy bears

Fradley Junction was transformed in August by a brilliant teddy bears picnic trail, a brand new event for the location. Held over five days, the picnic trail proved a very popular draw with humans and teddies alike, with 338 people taking part and 85 activity sheets completed. Over £100 was raised from the event.

Titford Pools renovation complete

A two-year £2.7 million renovation project at Titford Pools in Oldbury was completed in February, turning this previously neglected spot into a haven for wildlife, boaters and local people.

Hidden away under the M5 motorway along the Titford Canal, the pools were originally constructed as a small reservoir in the 1770's to feed the canal. The renovation project involved removing overgrown bushes and shrubs and dredging the pools to remove 21 tonnes of silt to open up the pools and allow boats to once again navigate into this wonderful nature reserve.

We also planted a community orchard and installed a new footpath and signage.

Proud to support Pride

Several people from the Trust's West Midlands team along with national colleagues took part in Birmingham Pride at the end of September. A great time was had by all, with the Trust showing our commitment to and support for diversity and equality.

A hairy journey

Moving a massive giant ear of corn along the canal network from Hatton Locks to Coventry Basin isn't something our heritage working boat volunteers do on a daily basis.

Nevertheless, in 2022, heritage boat Scorpio transported the sculpture from Hatton, where it was harvested, to Coventry Canal Basin, where it was used in the construction of a public art installation called Hand Earth Gesture Return, created by Pangea Sculptures Centre as part of the Coventry City of Culture celebrations. The Hairy Barge, as it was called, took four days to travel the distance.

The sculpture referenced the local growing and harvesting of Pangea's Atle spring wheat at Hatton Farm and marked the return of straw/thatch to Coventry, previously burnt away in the Blitz. Moving it by barge connected the rural and urban Warwickshire contexts. Once arrived in Coventry, the straw was to be transformed over the subsequent four months, with the help of local people, to form part of the culminating Hand Earth Gesture Return public art installation at the Coventry Canal Basin in July.

In all, the journey (including getting the boat from Birmingham and back) took two weeks of boating over 115 miles of canal, dealing with 120 locks on the way.



Major award for invasive species project

We were delighted to win the prestigious Chartered Institute of Ecology & Environmental Management NGO Impact Award 2022 for our Canal & River Invasive Species Eradication Project (CRISEP) 2021 – 2025. This is an international award that champions the great work and projects being delivered across the sector.

With funding from Severn Trent's Great Big Nature Boost Scheme, the £600,000 project is the largest invasive species eradication project on UK inland waterways. It covers a significant geographical area, spanning the entirety of the Midlands across Severn Trent's supply area, and is targeting the removal of Floating Pennywort, Japanese Knotweed, Giant Hogweed and Water Fern (Azolla), all of which can harm biodiversity on the waterways by out-competing native species and damaging the functionality of ecosystems.

In just one year of the four-year project, we successfully treated a total of 200km of waterway, including:

- targeted treatment in over 300 land-based invasive species sites
- mechanical removal of floating pennywort in five of our West Midlands waterways, spanning 11km of canal
- bio-controlled release of azolla weevils across 10 km of waterways in the West Midlands.



Investing in our waterways

Lottery funding secures future of canal bridge

Funding from players of People's Postcode Lottery means we've been able to replace **Black Cock Bridge** on the Daw End Branch Canal in Walsall Wood — one of the most rural of the Birmingham canal navigations.

Built in 1880, the road bridge is named after the nearby pub and needed a complete refurbishment after sections became unsafe due to severe corrosion. Sections of the steel work on the bridge, the concrete road deck, the steel and timber parapets and wooden

bearings supporting the bridge were rotten and beyond the point of repair. Historic subsidence means the bridge had been 'jacked' up at least twice before, by at least seven courses of brickwork, although probably not since the 1920s.

The existing steel structure was demolished and replaced with a new arched bridge. The brick abutments and cast-iron rope guides were saved and reused in the construction of the new bridge deck.



Towpath improvements

A project to improve a section of the **Llangollen Canal towpath** means it can be used all year round. The project involved much-needed repairs to the towpath and wash walls along the Llangollen Canal at Frankton Junction to create a level pothole free, green route.

Our business supporters, Balfour Beatty and Veolia, pulled out all the stops and transformed a mile-long section of towpath the **Shropshire Union Canal at Brewood** in Staffordshire. The path was becoming unstable with an uneven surface, poor drainage, excessive leaf fall and dangerous access points. 50 volunteers from Balfour Beatty spent eight weeks resurfacing the towpath to make it suitable for all year round use. Veolia Environmental Trust donated £45,000 to the project and paid for materials and machinery to ensure the work could be completed. The support we had from these local organisations has been amazing. They got stuck in and delivered a fantastic new towpath that will benefit everyone who uses the canal.

Wolverhampton Kickstarters worked hard in all weathers to complete access and towpath work on the **Staffordshire & Worcestershire Canal**, helping restore a once-muddy and potentially dangerous towpath back to its original foundations, exposing the original brickwork and levelling off the vegetation to help surface run-off, and widening the towpath to improve accessibility.

They're the business

Our corporate supporters contribute so much to our work around the region. We never underestimate the contribution made by staff rolling up their sleeves, getting their hands dirty and mucking in with our projects.

Here are some of their interventions so far this year and plans for the future:

- **Ceva Logistics** are adopting a stretch of the southern Walsall Canal and we're keen to see what they achieve. The work and enhancements they have planned for 2023 will support our future bid for Green Flag status (the north section was awarded Green Flag status in 2022).
- Birmingham's first large corporate meet-up this year was with the **Aston Villa Foundation**, one of our key partnerships, which has adopted the canal in the Tame Valley Perry Barr area. We discussed managing the winter vegetation on 80 metres around the Brookvale Street access in preparation for spring planting and were joined by staff from departments including wellbeing, education and outreach. It was great to be able to tell them about our Birmingham canals and their need for ongoing support.
- Our renovation work at Titford Pools was given a huge boost in the summer with employees from **Siemens** working for several days on enhancing an additional 350m of towpath, plus fishing pegs and ancillary environmental improvements. Siemens provided people, equipment and resources for materials.
- **Balfour Beatty** provided six people for four days a week for eight weeks to support our work at Brewood — a significant contribution from an amazing supporter.
- Similarly, **Ernest Young** has given us 150 hours of corporate volunteering in the Wolverhampton area. It was impressive to see such a large group working alongside the local operations team and volunteer leader on the flight. They cleared a load of rubbish, cut back and cleared vegetation and planted some new fruit trees, as well as some brilliant work on dead hedging.
- We've been working with the Central Rail Systems Alliance, an alliance between Network Rail, Balfour Beatty, Atkins and TSO, who have volunteered four days a week to work with our rapid response teams. The group have been helping us with stoppage and lock repairs, carrying out improvements to our operational bases, delivering towpath improvement works, and responding to emergency repairs.

We are developing the corporate volunteer offer to deliver much more tangible, high impact benefits beyond standalone 'days out' which will result in meaningful interventions with truly transformational results. We have made significant progress with two high profile organisations regarding corporate volunteering projects in the area — watch this space!

We never underestimate the contribution made by staff rolling up their sleeves, getting their hands dirty and mucking in with our projects.



Towns fund improvements

Our income forecast is currently around £8 million thanks to the Enterprise team working well with our local authority partners on Towns Deal Programmes (Bloxwich, Kidsgrove and Smethwick) and substantial investment from the Levelling Up fund for Trevor Basin and the restoration of the Montgomery Canal.

Work to resurface 7km of towpath on the Dudley No2 Canal and the Old Mainline Canal has been funded by £2.3 million from the Rowley Regis Towns Fund, and £2.4 million has been secured through Walsall & Bloxwich Towns Fund for towpath and accessibility works on the Wyrley & Essington, Walsall and Rushall Canals. The work began in February and was scheduled to last six months.

Lapal canal restoration

The Lapal branch of Dudley Canal No.2 was built in the 1790s to bypass Birmingham and take coal from the Dudley area to London, connecting with the Worcester & Birmingham Canal at Selly Oak. The winding hole has been restored under the guidance of the Lapal Canal Trust who are aiming to restore the link between Hawne Basin and Selly Oak to its former glory.

The work took place between February and July 2022 and involved digging out a new winding basin at Selly Oak to enable boats to turn off the Worcester & Birmingham Canal on to the Lapal Branch Canal. The main canal was kept open throughout the works.





Junction house restoration

Kings Norton Junction House is a Grade II listed property undergoing a full restoration. In December we ordered a feasibility study to assess the house's viability as a leisure destination. There was a lot of potential for this location, although its present value was limited given its location and lack of access for vehicles.

There was a lot of potential for this location, although its present value was limited given its location and lack of access for vehicles.

A presentation was made to the Council in April outlining the vision for the house, the local development and the proposed access to both through the adjacent park. The Council is considering the proposals and, if granted, the access road will give us the opportunity to generate a greater income for rental, retail or sale of the property.

Kickstarters update

Young people on our Kickstarters placements have made an invaluable contribution to the work of the Trust, with many of them staying on as apprentices and forging a career on the waterways.

Our Walsall team of Kickstarters met Dr Helen Paterson, CEO of Walsall Council, to show off all the great work they've been doing caring for the Walsall Canal. The group has been together for six months and has carried out a variety of heritage repairs and construction tasks, from masonry, bricklaying and carpentry, to canal bank protection and towpath resurfacing, as well as getting the canal ready for Green Flag judging and the Commonwealth Games.

On their own initiative, the Walsall Kickstarters designed some 'Colleague at Work' signs which have now been produced for the Walsall Lock Flight.

The Wolverhampton Kickstart group provided great support to the local team working towards our successful Green Flag bid

on the Wolverhampton 21 Lock Flight. They helped by clearing vegetation, painting the locks and bollards, cleaning up fly tipping, collecting litter and planting new trees.

The team enjoyed a wonderful 'thank you' day at Icknield Port in Birmingham, organised to recognise their hard work supporting the emergency works taking place on the Tame Valley Canal. It also provided the group with an opportunity to see a new patch of the canal network and meet some new colleagues and volunteers from the Birmingham team. They also took part in a waterborne litter pick into Birmingham, saw some of the first trees planted as part of the linear orchard project, looked around a heritage working boat and visited the Roundhouse Birmingham.

Both Wolverhampton and Walsall Kickstart teams helped local operations teams clear up the Bradley Canal Arm in the wake of antisocial behaviour and continual fly tipping.

Community engagement

Community Roots highlights

Our flagship Community Roots programme goes from strength to strength with activities across our two key areas — Sandwell and Walsall, and Coventry. Highlights include:

Sandwell and Walsall

- ‘**Let’s Celebrate**’ events celebrating cultural diversity and the beauty of the canals on people’s doorsteps.
- ‘**Let’s Fish**’ events resulting in a community member achieving a Level One qualification in coaching for the project, and a top 50 place for an autistic boy who had entered the national ‘Let’s Fish’ competition.
- An amazing piece of canal art — replacing graffiti and antisocial ‘tagging’ — created as part of the national **Street Art Trail**.
- Three **community canal adoptions** and regular work with five community groups that have taken ownership of the canal and maintain it on a regular basis.
- An enjoyable community fun day by the Tame Valley Canal at **Friar Park** in Sandwell, including a bouncy castle, magic shows, colouring and model making, face painting and henna tattoos.
- A **community canal clean** at Ridgacre, Sandwell was run in partnership with Sandwell Litter Watch. We blitzed the area with 15 volunteers and collected around 30 bags of rubbish.

Coventry

- Activity geared up in April and May with volunteers carrying out the usual maintenance tasks, opening the welcome stations, managing the canal and hosting the last few **City of Culture** events.
- Coventry Mercia Lions organised a clean-up in the canal basin before the Ego Theatre company came on site to begin building the **Pirate Festival** set.
- **Towpath task force volunteers** actively maintained the paths, repairing fencing and cleaning up unwanted graffiti. At Hawkesbury Junction they carried out planting and gardening and cleared litter.
- Some of our Towpath Task Force volunteers were involved in the build of **Sanctuary**, a major event taking place adjacent to the canal at Bedworth Miners Park.
- The **Big Clean** were very active clearing litter all along the Coventry Canal, running several clean up events and collecting 78 bags of litter along with bulky waste like trolleys and chairs.
- **Good Gym** is continuing regular litter picks and **Mercia Canoe Club** carries out regular floating litter patrols.
- **British Organisation for People of Asian-origin** and Lions regularly water the new Canal Basin garden.



Towpath Taskforce

Towpath taskforces have been keeping busy across the region, helping with planned preventative maintenance alongside our colleagues, and clearing steps and access points.

The Coventry Canal taskforce is one of the largest in the area with new recruits drawn through the Community Roots Facebook page and from people who attended an event or visited the canal. Working with the Green Growth Recovery Fund community workers, we have also recruited a large group of new volunteers to work on the pollinator corridors planned for the Coventry Canal, including seeding several sites with wildflowers to help create a pollination corridor along the canal.

International Women's Day

Once again the team were out promoting Women on Water with events in the region for International Women's Day in March. A **Lets' Paddle** event at Harecastle Tunnel attracted 60 attendees, despite a covering of snow, and 23 people signed up to a **Rose and Castle traditional canal art workshop** at Delph Stables. A third event using the Heritage Working Boats had to be cancelled due to bad weather.



Women's annual boating regatta

In October the we ran a Women's Regatta with Nowka Bais at Star City, Birmingham. The event was a huge success, with 10 teams entering — six women's teams and four children's teams — all fundraising for charity. The women's teams had all been training at our Let's Paddle sessions throughout the summer and autumn in preparation for the event.

Hasina, the founder of 'Team Holtimate Warriors' (Holte School teachers) summed up the feelings of many when she said that "Some ladies on the team haven't competed and felt so alive since school days. They really enjoyed the sport and it's so good to hear that they are ready for more."



Let's activities

Let's Walk

Let's Walk activities happen on amazing canals, but in some of the most deprived areas of the region. They have been very successfully established in Birmingham and we're looking to communities to take on the sessions as we develop the offer in the Black Country.

- **Let's Walk Tame Valley:** numbers are steady at around 14 per session
- **Let's Walk with a Doctor:** the group now has up to 15 participants and we're looking to make the activity sustainable and scalable elsewhere.
- **Let's Walk Nechells POD:** growing to eight participants on average per session
- Two **Health Walks** in partnership with Brushstrokes in Smethwick Galton Valley Canal: despite the cold weather, 16 participants attended and enjoyed the walk.
- A new walk has been developed with **Aston University**. 10 people turned out for the first date which we hope will be a success with students.
- **Ageing Better in Birmingham walks:** in partnership with Groundwork and the Ageing Better in Birmingham project, we delivered three 'history walk and talk' events around the canals of Birmingham, with a total of 22 participants.

Let's Paddle

- **Let's Paddle taster events** attracted approximately 100 participants
- **Let's Kayak at Icknield Port Loop:** working with young people from the area, we have delivered a number of Kayak taster sessions with almost 100 participants.
- **Let's Paddle Wolverhampton:** a summer-long programme of Let's Paddle sessions took place at Wolverhampton canoe club.
- **Let's Paddle bell boating and kayaking in Walsall:** Three bell boating and kayaking sessions were organised in Walsall Canal Basin for the first time and were a huge success, with a total of 150 participants
- **Let's Paddle canoe sessions** were organised in partnership with Middleport Matters along the Trent & Mersey Canal in Middleport and in Stoke. Over 1,000 people were able to enjoy being out on the water
- **Let's Paddle with OSCAR Birmingham:** carers spent a wonderful morning bell boating on the Tame Valley Canal
- **Let's Paddle kayaking sessions in Smethwick:** four kayaking sessions in Galton Valley attracted around 100 participants from different backgrounds and communities, who all enjoyed the sessions.

Let's Cycle

- The community hub at **Perry Barr** has a number of bikes available for regular cycling activities, run in partnership with New Hope Global and Birmingham Asian Resource Centre
- As part of a series of activities, two Let's Cycle sessions were organised in **Walsall** from Pleck Park to Walsall Canal Basin and back, with a total of 15 participants.

Let's Boat

The team in Birmingham has been taking community groups out for boat trips. The groups are already engaged through other activities, and this was a new way for them to experience the canals. 169 took part in a trip and were able to see the canals from the viewpoint of the water.

Let's Go Wild

We've been successful in securing funding from Severn Trent's **Boost for Biodiversity** campaign for our 'Let's Go Wild' project at Ellesmere Yard on the Llangollen Canal in Shropshire. Around £10,000 of funding will deliver reedbed creation, grassland enhancement and hedgerow management for two years, as part of an ongoing project at the Yard to engage the local community.



Let's Fish

Grants totalling over £15,000 have been secured to underpin the Let's Fish programme in the West Midlands, from organisations including West Midlands Police, Staffordshire Police, Sport England and several local charitable trusts.

- We took part in **The Big One** show organised by Angling Times at Stoneleigh Park. The Let's Fish team welcomed hundreds of angling customers to our stall, ran fishing based activities for children and made numerous industry and press contacts. The West Midlands is now a stronghold for Let's Fish, with events across the region.
- 38 Let's Fish events were on offer as part of **Staffordshire Space**, a summer activities project run by Staffordshire Police. Any young person from the area could book on, with specific sessions held in partnership with Staffordshire Youth Offending Service.
- In partnership with **Agenda 21**, we ran a series of Let's Fish sessions in Walsall, aiming to get participants ready for the regional Let's Fish competition in Walsall later in the summer.
- 288 people took part in a national celebration of young people and fishing. We also hosted the Global Communities Celebration with 160 young people representing a total of 16 communities, including 13 from overseas.

Let's Celebrate

- **Tipton Community Fun Day:** in partnership with Tipton Community Association, we organised a community fun day in Tipton, with a bouncy castle, children's entertainment, bell boat and face painting. The event was a huge success with around 300 people coming along.
- **Smethwick Fun Day:** together with Community Connect Foundation, we held a community fun day at Galton Valley Canal, which included a performance by the ME dance company as well as activities like kayaking, bell boating, face painting and a BBQ. Altogether 250 people from the local community attend the event.
- 57 people came to our **Let's Celebrate World Bee Day** event
- **Let's Celebrate the Queen's Platinum Jubilee:** in partnership with Sandwell Irish Community Association, we organised a Queen's Platinum Jubilee celebration event in Langley Park, near the Titford Canal. The event was a massive success, with Let's Move and Let's Fish activities on the day and around 400 people attending.

Welcome stations

Our Welcome Stations at Coventry, Hawkesbury Junction and Perry Barr, and the visitor centre at Cambrian Wharf all provided a great welcome for Birmingham 2022 **Commonwealth Games** visitors. These customer facing facilities are vital to engaging with people walking by. We saw a 152% increase in footfall at our Perry Barr welcome centre — the closest to the Alexandra Stadium, a 65% uplift in visitors to our Cambrian Wharf welcome centre in central Birmingham, and a 14% increase at Leamington Spa.

Volunteers worked hard to get Hawkesbury welcome station Games-ready, stripping out old furniture and clutter and redecorating before a contractor refit.

Fradley Junction and Harecastle Tunnel visitor centres were closed for the winter on a high with their popular **Potion Prowl** and **Scarecastle** Halloween events, and several Christmas events took place at Perry Barr, Delph Stables and at Fradley. Improvement works continued over the winter, with access and storage improvements agreed at Perry Barr.

Retail is now operating at five sites. Over £8000 was made at Fradley, and nearly £3000 at Cambrian House; although delivering on the potential at Wolverhampton and Stratford remains a challenge, as does securing enough volunteers to offer the hours we'd like at Cambrian, Perry Barr, Hawkesbury and Coventry Basin.



Local leads are working with the Destinations Development Manager at eight welcome stations in the region — Cambrian House/Toll House, Harecastle, Coventry, Hawkesbury, Hatton, Stourport, Fradley and Perry Barr. Improvements in visitor welcome at those locations are important in delivering the objectives of the Destinations Development Strategy.

Whilst working across the region, the key focus will be at Cambrian House where the visitor offer is being moved to the Toll House and Cambrian remaining open to boaters only for licences/keys etc. We are recruiting corporate volunteers to refurbish the Toll House and turn it into a Trust showcase which will be included as a new stop on one of the Birmingham Roundhouse's walking tours.

Volunteer numbers 2022-23

- **1120** active volunteers
- **92** partner groups
- **181,680** volunteering hours
- Around **40** Lead Volunteers
- **22** Volunteer CAATs Assessors
- **30** lock flights with volunteer lock keepers
- **30,294** participants at Let's Activities and Trust organised events

Heritage boats

Our heritage boat volunteers were active throughout the Birmingham 2022 **Commonwealth Games** regularly taking media and VIPs for a trip along the canal. They're always a huge draw to visitors intrigued in seeing how boat people lived and worked during the Industrial Revolution.

All four boats — Scorpio, Leo, Swift and Nansen — attended the Commonwealth Boat Parade in Birmingham in June, and we continued to support the Birmingham Roundhouse project with seven days completed during July.



The boats were also out and about in **Birmingham Heritage Week**, with community groups enjoying a trip exploring Birmingham Mainline Canal. They were given exclusive access to our yard at Icknield Port to see the site has been used since the mid-19th century. Groups also attended a poetry workshop trip with Canal Laureate Roy McFarlane, where they were encouraged to write about how they felt around water and what the canals meant to them.

A big thank you to the mechanical and engineering team and heritage boat volunteers who repaired 'our' 'Swift' boat in good time for the events of the summer.

Skills and learning

Our new **school visit location** in Walsall has proved a great success. It started with a school visit as part of Walsall's Festival of Words on 9th June, where Canal Laureate Roy McFarlane captured the children's imagination with his poetry, inspiring them to write their own poems and short stories.

Bernice from Croft Primary School wrote a winning poem, which was uploaded onto the Poetry Society website.

We had a stand at the **National Apprenticeship and Education Event** at Millennium Point in Birmingham, where we engaged with around 200 people. Students enjoyed a 'Build a Bug Hotel' activity, which was used as a springboard for discussions about the importance of a variety of habitats to help wildlife thrive on our waterways.

We have once again linked with the **Newman Brothers' Coffin Works Museum** in Birmingham — just a couple of locks down from our Cambrian welcome station — to promote and support educational offers to primary schools. We're also designing a joint offer for local schools with **Wildside Activity Centre** in Wolverhampton.

After a great summer term, we had a healthy number of schools arranging **waterside visits** in the autumn. Outdoor visits were booked at Etruria, Coventry Basin, Birmingham and Stourport up until 1 December: a little chilly, but thoroughly enjoyable for both volunteers and schools. In the winter the outdoor visits were replaced with in-school winter outreach and virtual workshops.



Water Safety events

As the summer heatwave arrived, the temptation increased to jump into canals to cool down. Ensuring the message about water safety was spread widely was even more important in the 30 degree-plus heat, and we delivered water safety sessions throughout the season in a number of ways: virtually, in schools, at events and through partnerships. 5101 schools and families logged on to watch our water safety workshop video.

Our team of Explorers volunteers delivered eight sessions to local families and Ukrainian refugee families staying in the region.

This was a great opportunity to teach both children and parents how to stay safe near their local waterways and what to do in the event of an emergency.

Our education team has been busy this year, delivering water safety assemblies and workshops to school children. In March 2023 alone, we delivered to nearly 3,000 children via school assemblies, online learning and events.

Raising our profile

The Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games presented a brilliant opportunity to raise awareness of the Canal & River Trust, and we've also enjoyed media coverage of several projects, including our Invasive Species work and citizen science projects. Brand awareness sits at 67%, a slight improvement with last year.

The power of Countryfile

Around 100 people had already signed up for our Vole Patrol citizen science project surveying water vole numbers, and another 25 joined in after the project featured on BBC Countryfile at the end of June. Presenter Ellie Harrison spoke to our ecologist Chloe Walker about the water vole recovery project and how we're working to improve habitats for these furry animals across the region.

Flying the Trust flag during the Commonwealth Games

With key Commonwealth Games venues being so close to the canal network in Birmingham and Coventry, we did all we could to make sure the Trust was noticeable and recognisable to visitors.

There were restrictions on how much branding we could use around the Games, but colleagues and volunteers simply wearing

Trust branding was an easy and effective way to make an impact. With the sea of blue Trust T-shirts, our giant deck chair, feather flags, new signage and wayfinding signs, work boats, our floating museum and our friendly Well-B mascot, you'd have been hard pressed to miss us!

Visitors to Perry Barr would have noticed our Commonwealth themed lock socks. The 'Flight of Flags' was a great way to celebrate the Games nations and add some fun colours to our locks.

The canals were included in the Games opening ceremony, playing to a worldwide audience of over one billion. We featured in a lot of media coverage of the Games, appearing on BBC Breakfast, ITV Central and BBC Radio Scotland. One of the highlights was BBC Breakfast presenter Mike Bushell interviewing Team England gymnast, Joe Fraser aboard one of our heritage boats, chatting about gold medal wins and his love for his home city.



Political visits

We're grateful that our elected representatives continue to support and give publicity to our initiatives around the region. This year's visits include:

- **Staffordshire Moorlands MP Karen Bradley** visited our £2 million project to rebuild the historic Grade II listed Hazelhurst Bridge on the mainline of the Caldon Canal, near Endon in Staffordshire
- **Eddie Hughes MP (Walsall North)** meeting Kickstarter trainees at Walsall Top Lock. He chatted to the trainees and spent about an hour walking along the flight
- **Rt Hon Sir Gavin Williamson CBE, MP** for South Staffordshire learning about our towpath restoration project at Brewood and walking along the newly refurbished towpath
- **Mark Garnier MP for Wyre Forest** came to our open weekend on the canal in Kidderminster. He explored the drained lock and chatted with colleagues and volunteers
- We met with **Stoke MP Jo Gideon** to showcase our work and discuss local opportunities. We also took the opportunity to raise our recently acquired Green Flag at Etruria
- Three local MPs enjoying a heritage boat ride during the Commonwealth Games. We were delighted to welcome **Harriet Baldwin MP** (West Worcestershire), **Suzanne Webb MP** (Stourbridge) and **Gary Sambrook MP** (Birmingham Northfield).



Gardeners' World masterclass

BBC Gardeners' World presenter Arit Anderson spent a day with Wild in Birmingham volunteers and colleagues to give them a masterclass in urban horticulture and planting designs. Arit is a big advocate for community gardening and biodiversity and had previously covered the work of the volunteers back in 2018. We gained a lot of knowledge from her, as well as content for our social media channels.



8,044

Social Media –
Our regional Twitter Account,
@CRTWestMidlands has reached
8044 followers.

Issues



Hazelhurst Bridge rebuild update

The year-long £2 million project to rebuild the historic Grade II Listed Hazelhurst Bridge on the mainline of the Caldon Canal in Staffordshire is nearing completion.

The bridge was fatally damaged in March 2020 following the draining of the canal upstream for repairs to Hazelhurst Bottom Lock. It is being recreated in the spirit of the former structure, matching its location, form, scale and character, including using many of the original stone copings.

The canal was reopened to boaters at Easter and the towpath is expected to be back open in mid July. The project has been enabled by an award from the Postcode Earth Trust, thanks to funds raised by players of People's Postcode Lottery.

Towpath closure on New Main Line Canal

We've had to temporarily close a section of towpath between Stewart Aqueduct and Spon Lane on the New Main Line Canal in Smethwick after a survey highlighted that an adjacent building wall was in danger of collapse and falling onto the towpath.

The towpath has been closed for a year and we are in conversation with the building owners and Sandwell Council to ensure a thorough investigation and plan for repairs is carried out as soon as possible however we still don't have a date for when these repairs will take place. Until we have an update on how the building wall will be made safe the towpath will remain closed. For safety the boating visitor moorings are also suspended on this stretch.

Pollution incidents

Grand Union Canal, Catherine-de-Barnes

Members of the public reported ongoing intermittent pollution into the Grand Union Canal at the rear of Lugtrout Lane, Catherine-de-Barnes, described as having a 'green tinge' and a detectable smell from the canal towpath. Possible causes were outflows from sewage treatment plants or septic tanks; or field run-off which might contain organic rich material such as animal manure.

Droitwich Canal

What appeared to be contaminated discharge was spotted entering the Droitwich Canal from a surface water drain which is supposed to discharge only clean rain water. Severn Trent traced the problem back to a property which had connected its grey (sink) water to the surface water drain.

Caldon Sewage Pumping Plant

Suspected sewage pollution on the Caldon Canal was confirmed as being from a Severn Trent sewage pumping station in the vicinity. The pollution had dissipated by the time their engineers arrived on site, but the local team will continue to monitor the area in the event of a recurrence of the problem at this location.

Hatton

Quick thinking by the local team at Hatton averted a potentially serious pollution incident when an accidental spillage at Hatton Dry Dock caused bitumen-based paint to enter the canal. The team soaked up some of the paint with absorbent pads and were able to scoop out the remainder as it was so thickly concentrated on the surface of the water. We hope that we can encourage the proprietor of Hatton Dry Dock to update their procedures to avoid any similar incidents in the future.

Birmingham & Warwick Junction Canal

One of volunteer groups reported that a neighbouring skip company on the Birmingham & Warwick Junction Canal was creating dust pollution, with plumes of dust settling on the towpath and the surface of the canal. The Environment Agency was notified with the result that the company improved their screening at the site and are using a sprinkler system to suppress the dust.

Water shortages

The hot summer of 2022 led to low water levels in many reservoirs, leading to the closure of the Caldon Canal and parts of the Trent & Mersey Canal from Lock 40 to Lock 29 (the Cheshire Flight in the Northwest was closed, too). This action was unprecedented in recent decades.

The opening hours of Harecastle Tunnel were reduced and timed restrictions were imposed at Hillmorton Locks on the North Oxford Canal and at Marston Doles, with Locks 15 and 16 closed between 4pm and 9am. At Atherstone on the Coventry Canal, overnight restrictions were in place between Locks 1 and 5.

Taking this action early on in the boating season meant that we were able to manage our water resources effectively, keeping 99% of the network open whilst also protecting our canals and the wildlife that live along them.



Vandalism

- In May the **Wolverhampton Lock Flight** was subject to vandalism when offenders broke into the Hovel building at lock 15, took paint and threw it on the lock landings and towpath. Thanks to local volunteers and Kickstarters, the damage was quickly dealt with.
- The flight was vandalised for the fourth time in December with the loss of 1.5 miles of water which flooded the road and caused a number of road drains to block. It took 30 hours to recover and restore the water in the flight to be able to reopen for our boaters.
- A car was dumped in the canal in **Tipton Factory Locks** in November which required a huge effort to remove and ensure the lock was safe for use again. We managed to get the car out safely on the same day, with everyone from different teams working together as one.
- A stolen car was driven into the **Grand Union canal** near Richmond Road in Olton in December and removed safely with no reports of pollution as a consequence.
- Damage to the copings on **Barnes Meadow Bridge** on the Walsall Canal has led to the introduction of a temporary concrete cap by the local team before permanent repairs are carried out.
- Vehicles striking bridges are all too common across the network, and **Otherton Lane Bridge** on the Staffordshire & Worcestershire Canal is no exception. It has been in the wars before, with partial rebuilds. The bridge is not listed but it is within a conservation area. Despite taking a few knocks over the years, it has managed to maintain a harmonious blend of historic and new bricks.

Fire along canal in Wolverhampton

Following a serious factory fire in Wolverhampton in December, the Birmingham Main Line was closed between Horsleyfields Junction and Bilston Road. This is a popular section of canal for boating and walking and cycling so closing this busy waterway was a challenge.

Part of the external wall was in a dangerous state and the towpath

was covered in debris, with some bricks and building material entering the canal. Although oxygen levels within the water were low during the fire, they recovered and no wildlife was affected. The extent of the damage to the building and debris in the canal and on the towpath meant that the canal was not reopened until March.

Wildlife habitat improvements



Green Recovery Challenge Fund projects

The £2.6million Green Recovery Challenge Fund came to an end in May. It was invaluable, enabling us to deliver events and activities in schools and community settings, including planting, citizen science training, bat walks, education on bees and pollinators, and wildlife walks.

Pollinators

The Pollinator Pals citizen science pollinator surveys were launched at the start of May 2022, covering the seven urban sites and seven Sites of Scientific Interest on the Green Recovery Challenge Fund. Thanks to our volunteers, we were able to expand the survey

area across the West Midlands area. Results of the pollinator surveys have been analysed and will provide baseline data to gauge the success of the Green Growth Recovery Project enhancements and inform future works.

Orchard planting

A large orchard has been created at Tibberton, next to the Worcester & Birmingham Canal, with crabapple, cherry, plum, purging buckthorn and blackthorn hedging planted by the Worcester volunteer Group. The orchard hosted the annual survey of the Brown Hair Streak butterfly, which lays its eggs over winter on new growth blackthorn.

Working with local canal society volunteers in Alvechurch, we cleared a 600m area to plant 16 mixed fruit trees in The Great Canal Orchard, a pocket orchard along the stretch by Bridge 60 on the Worcester & Birmingham Canal.

Working with students from Selly Oak School, we've created an enhanced community garden at Bournville Winter Moorings, transforming wasted land into a thriving mini nature reserve alongside the canal, restoring a valuable habitat and increasing its ecological value.

Students have been at the forefront of ideas for the area, which includes a dead hedge to support invertebrate and bird populations, a wildflower meadow to provide larval and nectar food plants for pollinators and support soil invertebrates, a bug hotel to support invertebrates (including pollinators), and a sensory garden to provide further breeding and feeding habitats.

Green Recovery Challenge Fund



Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs

The National Lottery Heritage Fund

Environment Agency



Sites of Special Scientific Interest

Brewin's Canal Cutting Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is located on the Dudley No.2 Canal, a site that is now internationally recognised as part of a UNESCO Global Geopark. It features exposed geological layers from 418 to 318 million years ago, discovered when a canal tunnel was cut through the rock and later collapsed, leaving an open cutting.

The Green Recovery Challenge Fund has funded the careful conservation maintenance of the site, involving the removal of saplings that hide the features from the public's interest, as well as providing an important habitat for plants, such as wood sage, and invertebrates.

A pathway was cleared of wildlife at Fens Pools for the creation of four new ponds as part of a landscape partnership to connect sites across Dudley and South Staffordshire. The ponds feature amphibians and will encourage the high levels of biodiversity associated with small ponds free from fish.

The Anglesey Branch Canal is part of the Chasewater SSSI, and the Green Recovery Challenge Fund enabled us to carry out much-needed recovery of the rare heathland habitat. Felling common birch saplings allows the rare heathland plants to recover and sequester the carbon whilst greatly increasing biodiversity, including rare and vulnerable pollinators.

The final SSSI in the Green Recovery Challenge Fund was the Cannock Extension Canal, where an innovative approach is being used to collect silt and form canal banks with aquatic plants stabilising the silt. A section of grassland was cleared to form a bee bank and heathland creation, connecting it to the heathland site bordering the towpath.

Water vole habitat improvements

2022's Vole Patrol saw over 440 completions of the online form and over 400 hours of volunteer's time recorded. At least two new water vole sites were found and verified. We are setting up the survey so it can be easily repeated in an automated online survey.

Water vole habitat improvement plans have been produced for Galton Valley, Coventry and Wolverhampton, with Vole Patrol citizen science surveys launched.

30m of linear coir rolls were installed along the concrete wall outside the Malt House pub in Birmingham, and a distinct vole-friendly 'pond' created at the end of Gas Street Basin by installing coir in a ring and including a wooden board to protect from accidental pollution events.

Work started on the a stretch of the Coventry Canal to install 65m of coir rolls, providing stepping stones of habitat where the canal is devoid of marginal vegetation and there are no records of water voles.

The Wildside Activity Centre volunteers are installing stepping stones of coir rolls in Wolverhampton along the Staffordshire & Worcestershire Canal, providing enhanced habitat and connectivity for water vole along with a 'greener' solution to wash holes.

In addition, the Hatton volunteer group is installing 50m of coir rolls in Leamington Spa.

Otter survey

Over 80 online surveys were completed by volunteers for Otter Spotters in September. Two batches of otter spraint samples have been sent off to the laboratory for DNA analysis.



Credit: Jack Perks

Bat and moth nights

The Green Recovery Challenge Fund ecologists organised and ran bat and moth nights throughout August, with two events at six different locations — three urban and three SSSIs — with the aim of comparing species diversity between these sites. Two surveys were run in one evening: a National Bat Monitoring Programme waterway survey, and a moth species abundance count, resulting in a total of 24 surveys in one month. They will contribute to national recording schemes at the Bat Conservation Trust and Butterfly Conservation, as well as our own nature recovery scheme.



Aston nature reserve

Throughout the winter and early spring of 2022, colleagues and volunteers carried out habitat maintenance work at the Aston Nature Reserve near the Montgomery Canal in Shropshire. This included cutting back areas of reed bed lining the margins of one of the lakes to allow rare plants, invertebrates and other wildlife to flourish. Left unchecked, the reedbed would encroach into the open water and the dying vegetation would reduce water quality.

Funding from Scottish Power through Shropshire Wildlife Trust has also enabled tree and scrub coppicing to reduce shading at the nature reserve and the nearby Rednal Basin. The reed and woody material has been left in piles on the banks to provide a habitat for invertebrates, amphibians and reptiles.

CRISEP update

The second year of our award-winning our Invasive Species Eradication Project (CRISEP) has seen the Trust and its partners deliver major improvements across the network.

We have been working in partnership with CABI UK on a new biological control for Floating Pennywort which involves releasing the weevil *Listronotus Elongatus* to eat through the plant and lay eggs.

In the first trial of its kind, the weevil has been released at four sites across the network including two on the Worcester & Birmingham and Wyrley & Essington canals.

Progress is monitored over the course of a year, including overwintering assessments and lab analysis. So far there is evidence of leaf damage and successful breeding.

Toad count at Fens Pools

The newly-created ponds at Fens Pools have resulted in the discovery of 25 smooth newts and numerous toad tadpoles in box trap surveys by members of the Friends of Fens Pools. This is a great indicator of success for two of the SSSI-designated priority species.

During early April 2022, 150 toads were counted over two nights by the volunteers. This represented a significant decline from when the site was first designated in the 1980's, when toads numbered thousands. The common toad is now a species of priority conservation concern.

Working in partnership with:



With support from:





Canal & River Trust

Making life better by water

Thanks to all our partners & supporters

It is impossible to list all the statutory and voluntary organisations, community and partner groups, corporate supporters, funders and individuals who work with us to deliver projects and activities and to maintain and care for our waterways. But our thanks go to all of you that have supported us over the past two years, and we look forward to working with you in the future.

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