Canal & River Trust
Making life better by water

PRESS RELEASE

18 June 2026

NATIONAL BOAT COUNT 2026

Canal & River Trust's annual National Boat Count, carried out throughout March, has recorded that boat numbers on the charity's waterways dipped slightly by 2.1% while licence evasion remained constant.

Following the trend of the last ten years, numbers of boats without home moorings continued to increase, rising 3.6% to 8,825.

Across the country, London and South East saw overall boat numbers fall by 9.7% while the North West recorded a 2.4% increase. All other regions saw changes of less than 2% either way.

Nationally, licence evasion stands at 11.8%, compared with 11.7% last year, marking the first clear slowdown in the upward trend seen in recent years. However, evasion levels remain significantly higher than the Trust would like, and ongoing cost-of-living pressures mean there is a risk that rates could increase again.

In response, the Trust is reviewing its enforcement processes and increasing its focus on early support and intervention to help prevent boaters falling into difficulties. This includes strengthening links to organisations who can provide financial and other support and improving communication with boaters who may be at risk of becoming unlicensed. The Trust's welfare team is the first port of call for boaters in need of support and has helped with 1,676 cases between April 2025 and May 2026.

Matthew Aymes, national licensing manager at Canal & River Trust, said: "Given the direction we've seen over recent years, we hope this represents the first step towards stabilising evasion rates. However, the numbers of unlicensed boats remain far higher than we want them to be.

"We're very conscious that the cost of living remains high and we're continuing to support those who are struggling. The best things boaters can do is get in touch if they're facing difficulties and we'll do everything we can to get them the support they need. We want to resolve issues early before people slip into evasion.

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"As a charity, the income from boat licences is important to help fund essential work such as maintaining locks, safeguarding the reservoirs that feed the canals, fixing leaks and carrying out the everyday tasks that make navigation possible. Thank you to everyone who plays their part in helping us care for this incredible canal network."

In the last financial year, 98 boats were removed from the network that were abandoned and/or unlicensed. This year, the Trust has committed to identifying all known sunken boats and developing a prioritised plan to remove them, starting with the higher risk cases and those that can be removed quickly.

The National Boat Count is a physical sighting of boats carried out by the Trust's towpath teams.

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Notes to Editors

Area	Evasion 2026	2025 boat numbers where CRT licences are required	2026 boat numbers where CRT licences are required	Year-on-year % change in boat numbers	2026 all boat numbers (inc private marinas etc)
East Midlands	9.3%	5295	5344	0.9%	6030
London & South East	23%	6962	6284	-9.7%	6356
North West	9.5%	5976	6117	2.4%	6205
Wales & South West	8.7%	3694	3636	-1.6%	4374
West Midlands	6.9%	7801	7666	-1.7%	8403
Yorkshire & NE	13.1%	3352	3329	-0.7%	3374
	11.8%	33080	32376	-2.1%	34742

Following the National Boat Count in March 2025, the Trust carried out a second count in September. This highlighted that there had been an error in the way the worksheet was pulling the data, with some numbers excluded. The actual evasion figure in March was 11.7%, while in September this had risen to 14.1%.