



PRESS RELEASE

10 November

Rare find of endangered eels as Worcestershire reservoir is drained of water

More than 500 critically endangered eels have been discovered at Upper Bittell Reservoir this week, as engineers drained the site of water ahead of major repair works.

The Canal & River Trust – the charity that cares for the region’s waterways – together with a team of fish experts, made the unusual find as the equivalent of more than 12 million baths of water were drained from the reservoir.

Eels, while not uncommon on Britain’s waterways, are rarely found in such high numbers. The European eels’ population has declined by over 90% since the 1970s and the species is now classed as ‘critically endangered’. According to the International Union for Conservation of Nature this puts it at greater risk of extinction than the giant panda.

Carl Nicholls, Canal & River Trust fisheries manager, explains: “It’s an unbelievable find really. Repairing Bittell Reservoir is a huge job and we’ve spent a few weeks rehoming tens of thousands of fish to other waterways. Just as the final few inches of water were draining out, we made this discovery. In 20 years working with fish I’ve never seen or heard of this many eels in one place before. In most fish rescues like this we might come across one or two, a couple of dozen maximum, but this was unreal.

“The project at Upper Bittell Reservoir is a good example of the work we are doing as a charity to keep West Midlands’ canals, and their ecosystems, thriving.”

Each eel was removed by hand and rehomed in the local Worcester & Birmingham Canal. All eels start their lives in the Sargasso Sea, 3,000 miles away, before using ocean currents to journey to the estuaries, rivers and water courses of Europe, such as the Worcester & Birmingham Canal, which provide ideal habitat for them to mature and grow. The eels live inland for around two decades before returning to the Sargasso.

This winter the Canal & River Trust is investing over £1million to repair sections of Upper Bittell Reservoir, including valves and piping which feed the local canal network. It is part

Canal & River Trust, Station House, 500 Elder Gate, Milton Keynes, MK91BB

T: 0203 204 4514 E: press.office@canalrivertrust.org.uk W: www.canalrivertrust.org.uk Twitter: [@CanalRiverTrust](https://twitter.com/CanalRiverTrust)

Patron: H.R.H. The Prince of Wales. Canal & River Trust is a charitable company limited by guarantee, registered in England and Wales with company number 7807276 and registered charity number 1146792, registered office address: First Floor North, Station House, 500 Elder Gate, Milton Keynes MK9 1BB

of the charity's programme of works across the country to restore and improve the nation's historic 200-year old network of canals and rivers.

For more information about the Canal & River Trust, including how you can volunteer or donate, visit canalrivertrust.org.uk

Ends

Notes to editors

For more media information contact joe.coggins@canalrivertrust.org.uk 020 3204 4410

The Canal & River Trust is the guardian of 2,000 miles of historic waterways across England and Wales, caring for the nation's third largest collection of listed structures, as well as museums, archives, and hundreds of important wildlife sites.

We believe that *living waterways transform places and enrich lives* and our role is to make sure there is always a place on your doorstep where you can escape the pressures of everyday life, stretch your legs and simply feel closer to nature.

www.canalrivertrust.org.uk @CanalRiverTrust @crtcomms