Canal & River Trust

PRESS RELEASE

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CANAL & RIVER TRUST AND SALFORD UNIVERSITY JOIN FORCES ON TRAIL-BLAZING ENVIRONMENTAL DNA WILDLIFE HABITAT PROJECT

Fish rescue as Huddersfield Narrow Canal drained for £185,000 lock refurbishment project

MEDIA INVITATION

Event: Fish rescue as the Huddersfield Narrow Canal is drained to enable replacement of lock gates. This will also facilitate ground-breaking environmental DNA test of fish species in the water.
Trust ecologist Tom King and Salford University researcher Dr Allan McDevitt available for interview.
Time: Thursday 18 January 2018, 11am
Place: Lock 12, Huddersfield Narrow Canal at Mossley. Park and meet near old mill on main road, **Postcode OL5 9QA.** It is around a 300m walk to the canal.
Contact: Lynn Pegler, Canal & River Trust Press Office, 07783 686246

The Canal & River Trust charity and University of Salford have joined forces on a ground-breaking project to test the quality of wildlife habitats and biodiversity of the Huddersfield Narrow Canal.

The environment project, funded by players of People's Postcode Lottery, is concentrated on a five mile section of the canal between Ashton-under-Lyne and Oldham, which is designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

The Trust, which manages 2,000 miles of canals and 63 SSSIs, wants to assess the quality and quantity of the fish stocks so it can take measures to improve the wider health of aquatic plants and animals in the canal at this protected site.

Staff and research students from the University of Salford's School of Environment & Life Sciences are employing cutting-edge science to test water samples using environmental DNA (eDNA) profiling. This should allow them to detect all the species of fish, crustaceans

and semi-aquatic mammals present in the canal at a particular spot by taking a simple water sample.

The first stage of the survey was carried out before Christmas while the canal was in water and this second phase is timed to coincide with a fish rescue being carried out by MEM Fisheries.

This is in support of a separate £185,000 lock refurbishment project, when water around three locks on the canal will be drained to enable vital repair work to be carried out to the lock chambers. A total of five pairs of oak lock gates at Locks 12, 15 and 25, near Mossley, are being replaced, in addition to other repairs to the lock chamber walls.

MEM Fisheries staff will be physically collecting, counting and measuring the fish and this information will then be compared to the non-invasive water sample environmental DNA tests being carried out by Salford University researchers.

Tom King, ecologist with the Canal & River Trust, said: “We believe people who spend time by our canals are healthier and happier. Getting closer to nature and wildlife is one of the reasons people visit.

“By linking up with University of Salford on this eDNA survey, we’re hoping to get an accurate audit of fish which support all sorts of other wildlife including herons, kingfishers and even otters. The project could have far reaching benefits for everyone involved in managing water spaces.”

Dr Chiara Benvenuto and Dr Allan McDevitt, lecturers at the University of Salford, are leading on the project. Dr McDevitt added: “This environmental DNA testing technique has been around for a few years but elements of it are still being refined. This is why we are so pleased to be working with the Canal & River Trust on a real project with tangible outcomes for the health of the canal.

“If we succeed in not only accurately identifying all species of fish, crustaceans and semi-aquatic mammals that are present by taking a simple non-invasive water sample, but also to quantify abundances, it will be a great break-through for aquatic conservation.”

Data from the fish surveys will be analysed and assessed by the University of Salford and a final report produced by research students towards the end of the academic year.

This initiative on the Huddersfield Narrow Canal is part of the Canal & River Trust’s wider 12 month project, *Making Special Places for Nature*, funded by a £350,000 award from players of People’s Postcode Lottery. The project involves improving vulnerable wildlife waterway habitats across 10 key sites totalling 400 hectares – a combined area greater than the City of London.

The project spans reservoirs and canals in Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire, Greater Manchester, Shropshire, Worcestershire, Staffordshire, Berkshire and mid Wales, and will benefit water shrews, voles, otters, bats, dragonflies and other rare fauna and flora.

For more information about donating or volunteering with the Canal & River Trust charity, check out the website www.canalrivertrust.org.uk or ring 0303 040 4040.

ENDS

For further media requests please contact:

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Notes to editors:

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

The Huddersfield Narrow Canal is one of three trans-Pennine canals and runs for just under 20 miles from Ashton-Under-Lyne to Huddersfield. It was reopened to boaters in 2001 after a major restoration and includes the Standedge Tunnel Visitor Centre.