



PRESS RELEASE

9 May

SCIENTISTS ON RIVER SEVERN COUNT ENDANGERED FISH SPECIES AS PART OF MULTI-MILLION POUND PROJECT

- **FILMING-INTERVIEW-PHOTO OPPORTUNITY:** Tuesday, 14 May at Back Of Avon car park, Tewkesbury GL20 5DU

Scientists on the River Severn have recorded the year's first sighting of one of Britain's rarest fish, as a vital research phase of the *Unlocking the Severn* project gets underway in Worcestershire this May.

The research examines the lifecycle of the twaite shad, which each spring begin the migration to their natural spawning ground of the Severn's upper reaches, only to be prevented by man-made structures such as weirs. Over the next four weeks teams will be stationed at Upper Lode near Tewkesbury counting the number of twaite shad who make it over the weir before being halted at the larger Diglis Weir in Worcester. The information gathered will be vital for *Unlocking the Severn* which aims to restore the shads' access to 158 miles of the River Severn, the nation's longest river, north of Worcester by providing fish passes at a series of weirs that currently the fish cannot swim over or around.

The £19.7 million project is one of the largest of its kind ever attempted in Europe and includes £10.8 million of funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) – using National Lottery players' money – and £6 million from the European Union LIFE programme. *Unlocking the Severn* is being run by the Canal & River Trust, Severn Rivers Trust, Environment Agency and Natural England.

In order to learn more about the remaining small population of shad, particularly the conditions they need to prosper, the teams together with volunteers will spend time watching and counting twaite shad swimming over Upper Lode weir. A suite of remote monitoring techniques enable monitoring all day, every day. This includes cameras,

counter plates triggered when a shad passes upstream, as well as the use of an acoustic beam giving an image similar to the ultrasound of a baby in the womb.

Acoustic tracking tags fixed to over 80 shad will also show how they migrate up the river, what habitats they use, and how barriers delay them. This is all crucial to understanding how to create the best access routes for the fish.

Environment Agency Fisheries Monitoring Specialist, Charles Crundwell said: “Last year our results suggested we had at least 7,000 twaite shad migrate beyond Tewkesbury to reproduce in the lower reaches of the river Severn. This is a tiny fraction of the documented run before the navigation weirs were constructed in the 19th Century but is an encouraging number to re-establish the fish to their historic spawning grounds once the project completes.

“The twaite shad, is now a rare fish, only breeding in four rivers in the UK, but our work on the *Unlocking the Severn* project will both protect and increase the number of twaite shad returning but also open up the river for all fish species. This will benefit wildlife, communities, tourists and anglers.”

Jason Leach, Canal & River Trust programme director, says: “This project has been in the waiting for centuries. Hundreds of years ago shad were a staple food in the court of Henry III, but they became extinct in the upper reaches of the Severn following the installation of the locks and weirs that powered the Industrial Revolution in the 1700s. **We’ve now reached a crucial stage in our work to bring them back. The scientists and volunteers researching the journey of the shad will give us the insight we need into the potential population so we can help them return to their natural spawning ground.”**

Unlocking the Severn has already seen enhancements completed on Powick Weir on the River Teme. Engineering work is underway at Diglis and Bevere weirs, with a further two weirs at Holt and Lincomb to be completed over the next three years.

In addition, *Unlocking the Severn* has ambitious heritage, education and science programmes that aim to reconnect eight million people with the River. This includes working with community groups, over 6000 school children, and creating opportunities for hundreds of volunteers. The project aims to have the knock-on effect of attracting more visitors to the region and boosting the local tourist economy. Recreational fishing on the River Severn currently contributes £13.5million per year to the local economy, and it is hoped that the project will boost this by a further £4million.

For more information about *Unlocking the Severn* visit

http://severnrivertrust.com/projects_categories/unlocking-the-severn/



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Notes to editors:

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

About the partners:

The Canal & River Trust cares for and brings to life 2,000 miles of canals and rivers across England & Wales. We believe waterways have the power to make a difference to people's lives and that spending time by water can make us all healthier and happier. By bringing communities together to make a difference to their local waterway, we are creating places and spaces that can be used and enjoyed by everyone, every day.

www.canalrivertrust.org.uk

The **Severn Rivers Trust** is an independent environmental charity established to secure the preservation, protection, development and improvement of the rivers, streams, watercourses and water bodies in the Severn catchment, and to advance the education of the public in the management of water and the wider environment.

Our vision is to have living, working landscapes that deliver employment, food and amenity without impacting on rivers and biodiversity, and without the need for heavy regulation and supervision.

www.severnriverstrust.com / SevernRiversTrust / @SevernRivers

The **Environment Agency** protect and improve the environment and make it a better place for people and wildlife. We reduce the risks to people and properties from flooding; make sure there is enough water for people and wildlife; protect and improve air, land and water quality and apply the environmental standards within which industry can operate.

www.gov.uk/environment-agency @EnvAgencyMids / @EnvAgency

Natural England is the government's adviser for the natural environment in England, helping to protect England's natural heritage and landscapes for people to enjoy and for the services they provide.

www.gov.uk/government/organisations/natural-england / @NaturalEngland

Thanks to National Lottery players, the **National Lottery Heritage Fund** invests money to help people across the UK explore, enjoy and protect the heritage they care about - from the archaeology under our feet to the historic parks and buildings we love, from precious memories and collections to rare wildlife. www.hlf.org.uk. Follow us on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#) and use #NationalLottery.



LIFE is the EU's financial instrument supporting environmental, nature conservation and climate action projects throughout the EU. Since 1992, LIFE has co-financed some 4306 projects. For the 2014-2020 funding period, LIFE will contribute approximately €3.4 billion to the protection of the environment and climate.

<https://ec.europa.eu/easme/en/life-programme> @LIFEprogramme

More about *Unlocking the Severn for People and Wildlife*:

As part of the cultural and educational elements of the project an exciting new learning space is being developed on Diglis lock island in Worcester which will breathe life into a disused heritage building. Thousands of school children and visitors will be able to come to the site to see one of the huge fish passes in action and learn about industry and conservation on the river.

Work experience placements and specialist apprenticeships will provide young people with a flavour of jobs in conservation and build skills for their future careers. An interactive exhibition all about the project will be touring Gloucestershire Worcestershire and Shropshire, culminating in a spectacular finale festival in 2021 that will bring together schools, volunteers, engineers, scientists, historians and artists to showcase and celebrate the River Severn.

The project will need an army of citizen scientists to help collect data for the large-scale research to survey and monitor river wildlife. Not only this, enthusiastic nature lovers and culture-buffs can get involved by becoming education volunteers inspiring school children with site tours and hands-on learning to help them explore the river.

Volunteers will also be trained to research the river's history by exploring fascinating archives – photographs, paintings, maps, diaries and objects – as well as interviewing people who remember the river. Practical taskforce days along the riverbank will offer people the chance to get involved by planting trees, controlling invasive species and collecting litter – they will spend time out in beautiful river environments and meeting new people while making improvements for wildlife at the same time.

www.UnlockingtheSevern.co.uk @SevernUnlocked

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