

GOLDEN VALLEY EEL PROJECT UPDATE - January 2019

Our eel project summary is as follows:

With the financial backing of our sponsors we have :

- 1 - saved from export and restocked to West Herefordshire waters well over a quarter of a million critically-endangered juvenile eels since the conception of the project in 2012.** (All done with necessary legal consents and in strict adherence to stocking guidelines)
- 2 - Monitored the resulting increase in numbers of eels in our rivers.** (Eel numbers have risen by at least fifteen times on their pre-project levels of near-zero, as shown by bi-annual Environment Agency electro-fishing surveys and two fish rescues conducted in 2011 and 2017 when the River Dore dried up near Peterchurch. In 2011 there were no eels among the many fish rescued, whereas in 2017 they were well into double figures.
- 3 - Raised awareness of the plight of eels in our locality and further afield by regular articles in the Golden Valley News, Hereford Times, Ross Gazette, and numerous national news circulations.**
- 4 - Lobbied against the export trade, leading the national campaign, lobbying members of Parliament and personally delivering a 2000 signature petition (including the signatures of numerous nationally and internationally recognised fisheries and conservation professionals) to Number 10, Downing Street.**
- 5 - Monitored and recorded the continuing downward trajectory of River Wye catchment eel stocks, obtaining historic fish trap data and current elver catch records of key individuals.**

In this time the River Wye elver juvenile (elver) eel fishery has continued to harvest the rapidly disappearing stock from our rivers, supported by high prices available. The crash in numbers is catastrophic. Where tonnes were regularly recorded in one nights' fishing, elvers are now being weighed-in in grammes. Where thousands of elver fishermen once fished in the peak of the "gold rush" there remain under fifty in the local syndicate, and many of these no longer fish.

The following information is summarised from a paragraph in the Financial Times article titled "Europe's Disappearing Eels".

An individual is described as Britain's glass eel entrepreneur. setting up his company in Gloucester decades ago to buy the elvers and export them across the world, reportedly winning a Queen's Award for doing so. This company has been reported as controlling pretty much the entire British elver trade. The company owner Peter ***** blames loss of habitat as the prime factor in the eel's decline. **"His catches peaked in 1979 at 100 tonnes of glass eels"**, (approximating to a staggering 400 million elvers removed from our rivers in one year).¹

¹ <https://www.ft.com/content/6acb1e-3588-11df-963f-00144feabdc0>, accessed 30/01/2019

Aims for 2019

1- We will continue to campaign for a total precautionary ban of elver exports while stocks remain so shockingly low. We believe that a naturally-incoming River Severn and Wye elver has only one natural home - the waters of the Severn and Wye rivers basin, and none should be exported abroad.

2 - We will join hands with any other individuals and groups with the same principal objective, saving any eels for restocking where we can in the process.

3 - We will flag-up the response received last year from government as a result of our petition.

