

Initiative launched as eel numbers plummet

An initiative to help preserve the critically endangered European Eel has been launched by the Forth Rivers Trust (FRT) as numbers plummet, and business are being asked to contribute cash.

The Forgotten Fish Project aims to conserve a species that was once an important part of the UK's freshwater ecosystems, communities and cultures.

However, eel (picture by Anders Asp) numbers at Scottish and UK coastlines are down more than 95 per cent since the 1980s and the project looks to improve the understanding and management of eel recruitment.

There are four main objectives, teaching traditional, cost-effective eel conservation methods, raising awareness of eels' importance to entire aquatic ecosystems, collecting information on the distribution of eels and protecting and improving the eel population/habitat.

The migrating fish spawns in the Sargasso Sea, around 4,000 miles from Britain in the North Atlantic before traveling to European waters.

They can live for decades in freshwater before going back to the Sargasso to spawn but pollution, river barriers such as dams, weirs and sluice gates, introduced disease, overfishing, climate change and a loss of habitat are hitting numbers hard.

Jack Wootton, founder of the project, said: "The eel cares little for borders or lines on a map. This means that a collective effort is needed to protect this species.

"Due to financial limitations, geographically standardised

practices are not always possible or necessary. The methods we use in the project give affordable options for groups, communities, trusts, governments, etc to better understand and help this forgotten fish.

“Now even though the UK is not a part of Europe any more, the eel still very much is. As things currently stand, we are still adhering to the recovery plan set out by the European Commission and each member state has its Eel Management Plan. Methods such as these should be added to the toolbox, making conservation more accessible for all.”

FRT are looking for businesses and organisations to fund this project and anybody interested can contact Mr Wootton on j.wootton@forthriverstrust.org, visit the website at www.forthriverstrust.org/project/the-forgotten-fish-project/ or download our funding document [here](#).

More information can be found at www.forthriverstrust.org and you can connect on social media at Facebook.com/ForthRiversTrust, and [@ForthRiversT](https://twitter.com/ForthRiversT).