

Swimming against the tide: major UK wildlife project to help save rare fish

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Tewkesbury school visit

An ambitious scheme to re-open the River Severn and its major tributary for fish and wildlife has been awarded £10.8million by The National Lottery Heritage Fund

Unlocking the Severn will reconnect local communities with the lost natural, cultural and industrial heritage of this magical river. It will also help secure the long-term future of many of the UK's declining and protected fish species, including the now threatened twaite and allis shad - a species favoured in the court of Henry III, once abundant and famed all across Europe for its taste and quality.

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Tom Tew, The Heritage Fund Trustee

The Heritage Fund Trustee, Tom Tew, said: “Unlocking the Severn will save a wonderful, but endangered, migratory fish and hugely benefit the River Severn’s wider environmental health. This project will decisively return over 200km of spawning habitat to the shad enabling them to run up the river in May, as they used to in Medieval times, in their tens of thousands. We know that people care deeply about the natural world around them. We are pleased to be using National Lottery money to solve an enduring problem on the UK’s longest river.”



Shad release into the river. Credit: Jack Perks Wildlife Media

Largest project of its kind

The £19.4m project, the largest of its kind ever attempted in Europe, was developed as part of a three-year collaborative partnership between the Severn Rivers Trust, the Canal & River Trust, the Environment Agency and Natural England. It will re-open the UK's longest river to all fish species, many of which became extinct in the upper reaches following the installation of weirs required to power the Industrial Revolution in the 1800s.

Spawning grounds

The work will substantially increase access to the critical spawning grounds fish require to complete their complex and fascinating lifecycles. It will also benefit other critically declining species such as salmon and the European eel – all species on which the communities along the banks of the River Severn were historically built.