

# River Dour Partnership

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## The River's Eels.

Something drastic is happening to our eels! Not just ours, but across Europe.

The eel might not be as charismatic as the Giant Panda and Polar Bear; however, the once-abundant eel is now classified alongside them as critically endangered on the International Union for Conservation of Nature Red List of Threatened Species, and at risk of extinction.

The number of juvenile eels reaching European coasts has crashed since 1980 to just 1-5% of their pre-1980 levels.

The eel reproduces only once from around age 20 years (although eels can live to 100 years), so restoration is expected to take several of the eel generations.

This drastic situation is thought to be due to a combination of factors.

- Man-made
  - > Obstructions (overcome the Dour's obstructions), weirs. Eel passes have been introduced.
  - > Illegal fishing
  - > An introduced parasite which affects their swim bladders.
- Climate change
  - > Warming seas and altering ocean currents, in particular the Gulf Stream which affects their migratory route to and from the Sargasso Sea, their spawning waters 6,000 km (3,700 miles) from our chalk stream. Named after the mats of free-floating sargassum, a common seaweed, this area provides shelter and habitat.

From the Sargasso, eels take around three

years to reach UK waters. And thus, the cycle rotates.

So... rejoice if you see one of our eels for you are favoured.



*River Dour at Buckland Bridge*

## River Clean Ups have re-commenced.

No guesses allowed as to what the main category in our sacks of litter collections is. Yes! PLASTIC. Did you know that the birth of this evil was benign, even altruistic: The rising numbers of the Victorian middle class demanded many an adornment made from elephant ivory, such as piano keys, umbrella hands and billiard balls. Consequently, ivory became a scarce resource.

In 1863, a newspaper advertisement set up the challenge for replacement of billiard ball ivory. Before the end of that century, our fate was set with the invention of celluloid.

Jumping forward to the 1980s, the 'Western World' began to use more resources than the earth could replenish – consumerism

was now rampant:

- our throw-away society was ravenous.
- our hunger for single use plastic was endless.
- manufacturers created life-limited items feeding this hunger to continually replace and adorn.

Plastics begin life as Nurdles, resin pellets the size of lentils, melted, moulded, and manufactured into a rainbow of colours and shapes.

As a discarded item tossed away into our rivers, it degrades as it travels downstream and into the sea where it is tumbled and turned and trashed until often returning to its Nurdle state. These micro plastics, with their greater exposed surface area attract banned toxins and those which we are perpetually washing down our drains. These Nurdles are ingested by sea life causing infertility, stunted growth, and immune deficiency:

- from plankton, the very bedrock of sea life, which become trapped in a tangle of synthetic microfibres.
- to the microscopic arrow worm which die after ingesting a single fibre entirely blocking its gut.

- to the single mussel, filtering up to 20 litres of sea water a day.
- to the largest fish feeding on all sea life, thus ingesting those microplastics.
- to human consumption.
- to being absorbed into our biology, interfering with organ function, growth, and development.
- to being passed on into the placenta and a mother's milk.

We need a culture of Pride of Place; a return to a circular system of creating goods: re-use, repair, recycle; company buy-back schemes, particularly e-waste with its heavy toxic burden. No more one-way Take-Make-Waste squandering our planet's resources.

Further to the weir passes, Affinity Water and South East Rivers Trust are looking at the viability of installing a fish pass at Halfords Weir soon. This will help trout naturally spread their genes throughout the river making the species more robust. As you know smaller gene pools make fish more prone to illness, disease and less likely to spawn successfully. Currently, the weir is much too high for them to swim up.



*The Dour running down to Charlton Green*



*River Dour Charlton Green Pond*