



# Sustainable *Eel* Group

Newsletter September 2014



Hello and welcome to the third SEG Newsletter. We are planning to produce a newsletter twice a year in future, and to continue in the same spirit of 'eel blood'. We want to link up all those who really care for the future of the eel, not only in Europe but eventually across the world and so help all 19 species.

The story of the moment though, which I am sure you are aware of, is the continuing increase in recruitment for the European Eel. You may recall that the collapse in recruitment was used as a proxy for the state of the whole eel population - and was fundamental to the decision to protect the eel through the Eel Regulation (1100 / 2007).

Within this newsletter you will read a series of non-fishery reports from Mediterranean and Atlantic France plus West and East Coast British Isles and Ireland. There are also fishery reports that tell the same story of an increased recruitment - and in some cases dramatically so. Some headlines include:

- Tour du Valat in the Camargue Mediterranean lagoon of Vaccares reports a steady increase from its recent low of just 100k in 2004 to 4.5 million in 2014.
- Antoine Legault, the Eel Pass builder from Atlantic France, reports from their counter on Arzal Dam on the river Vilaine of a rise from the 2012 figure of 1.5m to a 2014 (to date) figure of 5.5m.
- Nicholas Michalet reports that the fishery in France which is managed through quotas experienced such dramatic numbers that the totals were met in just a few days with the fishery promptly closing.
- In the UK and Ireland there have been many reports of big improvements. The RSPB reported from a trap at the entrance to their Leighton Moss Nature reserve in the North West of the best year since records began. The lowest year was 2002 with just 5,000 elvers counted. 2013 had over 50,000 and 2014 over 100,000 elvers to date. In the East, the newly installed eel pass near Kings Lynn Aquatic Control Engineering (ACE) reported 50,000 elvers in the first three weeks of opening. ZSL on the Thames reported a dramatically strong early recruitment in their citizen science programme.



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## Staying in touch

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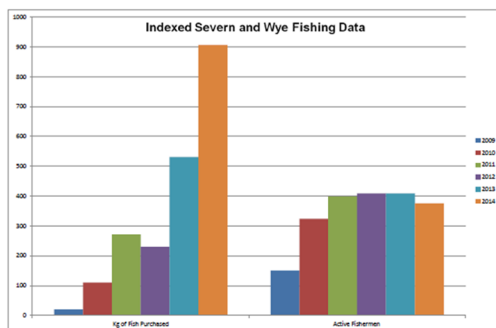
Email: [segpressooffice@gmail.com](mailto:segpressooffice@gmail.com)

## Chairman's Introduction continued

In Ireland Dennis Doherty, Robert Rosell and William O'Connor have all made reports of strong runs on the Shannon, the Erne and the Bann.

However one of the most reliable indicators that SEG is informed by is the fishery on the Rivers Severn and Wye (excluding the Parrett). In some ways it could be described as one vast sampling exercise.

There are some 400 licensed fishermen using common artisan hand net fishing techniques that are totally dependent on natural conditions. The lowest catch was



recorded in 2009, when some 1 million were landed. In 2014 over 30 million fish were caught and purchased meaning the 2014 level of recruitment was the same as 30 years ago, or the early 1980s.

SEG is still waiting for North Sea information and there are reports of strong recruitment in Holland and Denmark.

So what does this dramatically improving recruitment situation amount to, and will it continue? This is of course the question in all our minds.

The IUCN assessment that was published in June confirmed the 'critically endangered status' while also emphasising that the data used was up to 2013 and that the situation was 'borderline'. Would the decision have been different if 2014 data was included?

Predicting eel numbers remains elusive, with 'cause and effect' remaining very difficult to determine. Has the recent dramatic improvement been achieved through the European Eel Recovery Programme or is this just coincidence?

The next question on everyone's mind is what levels of recruitment, and over how many years, might constitute recovery?

No doubt that the answers to these questions will develop over the coming months and the 2015 season of recruitment will be starting shortly.

However as Dr Matt Gollock from ZSL has said, as Chairman of the IUCN listing process, it is ok to eat eel providing it has come through the SEG-approved sustainable supply chain.

It is now time for the supermarkets of Europe to get behind the recovery programme and to work with us.

[Andrew Kerr, Chairman SEG](#)



*Elvermen heading out to the River Severn at sunset*

## EMERGENCY RESTOCKING 2014: MORE THAN 90 MILLION EELS RELOCATED

A massive migration of glass eels to Europe has given SEG and other organisations the opportunity to launch an extensive emergency relocation exercise and to tell the extraordinary story of the eel's return.

### UK West Coast: River Severn and River Parrett

It was a terrific season on the Parrett and Severn—the best since the early 1980s. In April the glass eel collectors and the elver fishermen and women launched an initiative to catch 1 million elvers in one night. In the end 1.2 million were collected on that night, and over a 3 day period 2.05 million were donated to SEG for relocation. We made sure that the UK and international media were made aware of the sheer volumes of the catches and the overall return to abundance of the elvers, and for more than a month we hosted journalists and documentary makers on the riverbank. The help and support from the local elvermen and women and the glass eel collectors was fantastic – and the public were left in no doubt about the extraordinary scenes that were again being witnessed.

SEG's remit also includes political liaison, and we hosted two special events with high profile UK politicians helping us restock elvers in river systems. Lord de Mauley, Environment Minister, and Zac Goldsmith MP both joined SEG's restocking initiatives to raise awareness of the issues of barriers to migratory pathways as part of World Fish Migration Day.



*Zac Goldsmith MP helping SEG restock the Thames*

### UK East Coast: St Germans

An exceptionally early arrival of large numbers of elvers and eels has been recorded at the new Wiggenhall St Germans Pumping Station elver pass near Kings Lynn.

10,000 glass eels were recorded in the first three days of April, and during the first three weeks of April nearly 50,000 elvers made their way through the pass. This is an exceptional quantity for so early in the elver migration period from April to October.

A new elver pass has been installed at the new Wiggenhall St Germans Pumping Station, the second largest in Europe, to allow the young eels to migrate into the waterways of the Middle Level catchment.

The catchment covers 70,000 hectares of the Cambridgeshire and West Norfolk fens between the Nene Washes near Peterborough and the Ouse Washes from Earith to Downham Market.



*Elvers using the eel pass to travel upriver*

## UK South Coast: Hampshire & Dorset

### Every storm cloud has a silver lining

Silver eels have been running in spectacular quantities in 2012 and 2013. The Hampshire Avon recorded near record levels in 2012 with weights matching and sometimes exceeding the 'pristine' years of the late eighties.

The Dorset Stour experienced severe summer flooding in that year and the autumn migration was almost non-existent (we assume the silvers ran early) but came into its own in 2013 with a solid migration of nearly a tonne on the eel staging at Longham; which compares favourably with the 1.25 tonnes averages from 25 years ago.

Flooding during winter 2013-2014 stopped the surveys in mid-December, seemingly before the silvers had run on the Avon which, from experience, was destined to be a 'light' year anyway, as this river has a biennial pattern to its eel runs.

Our eel surveys and scientific projects are generously supported by Sembcorp Bournemouth Water, an invaluable partner and an important and valued

backer for eel research and management. 2014 has seen the recommencement of detailed population surveys on both rivers and after less than four weeks the initial results suggest between 65% and 75% of commercial catch records taken between 1980 and 1995. If substantiated; which is backed up by the 2012 and 2013 surveys; it would appear that these southern river systems have healthy and developing populations from an all time low between 2005-10.

As an ex-commercial eel fisherman I have catch data for many local rivers and harbours from 1979 onwards and a lot of raw data from surveys conducted on behalf of the Environment Agency over the last four years. The alarming decline of our eels is seen clearly from these records but, just as clearly, their revival!



Roger Castle

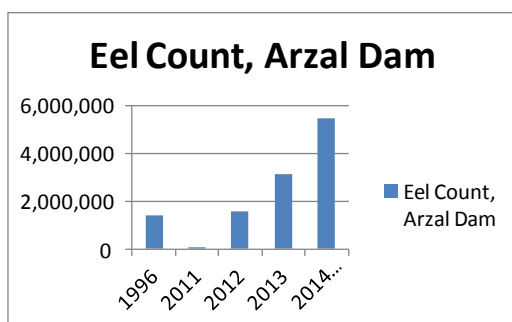
## Ireland: Rivers Erne and Shannon

The 2014 elver run for the Shannon saw 354kg of elvers caught in total. The Erne catch was 532.91kg (up to 28/7/14). Although the Erne has shown an improvement, these remain a long way off the historic catches (despite the improvements in trapping facilities). *Dennis Doherty of ESB (Electricity Supply Board)*

Dr William O'Connor, head of the European Eel Consultancy, has highlighted problems accurately recording eel recruitment on these rivers, with some eel traps in need of upgrade, and others not operating full-time.

## France: Arzal Dam, Vilaine River

After a very low level of recruitment in 2011, the count of glass eels and elvers increased, and



the last two years have been the best since 1996 (2014 partial count).

Our eel ladder is managed by EPTB Vilaine.  
*Antoine Legault*



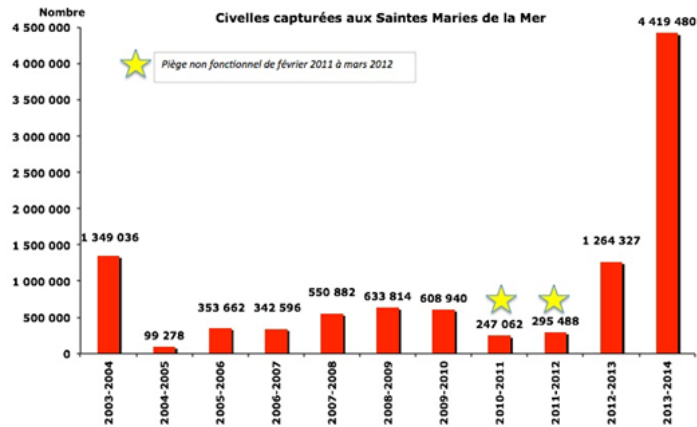


## France: Tour du Valat, Vaccares Lagoon

Our trap consists of a ramp made of artificial brushes which is connected to a catch tub. The whole device is powered by an hydraulic pump. The results show that glass eels recruitment tends to strongly increase in the last 2 years and maybe the last 4 years (in 2011 the trap didn't work during the whole migration period. As a consequence, 2010-2011 and 2011-2012 values are surely underestimated).

The trap is located in a site called "Grau de la Fourcade" and is directly connected to the Mediterranean sea.

*Results of Glass Eel monitoring*



## Holland: New restocking record

In 2014 no less than 8.5 million glass eels and elvers were released into the Dutch environment: more than the total amount in the previous four years together. The majority of the restocking was conducted within the framework of the official Dutch recovery program. Besides that, several restocking projects were carried out by the industry and professional fishermen.

The biggest part of the restocked eel was made possible by the Dutch Ministry of Economical Affairs, under the restriction of the Dutch operational program "Perspective for sustainable fisheries". These restocking projects were co-financed by the European Fisheries Fund and DUPAN's Sustainable Eel Fund.



*Eel with the logo of the Sustainable Eel Fund, which contributes to restocking projects and scientific research in The Netherlands.*



*Elvers about to be restocked*

*Absolute record: over 8 million elvers and glass eels were restocked in Dutch waters in 2014*



## Sweden

### Eel restocking in south-west Sweden

The Kullaberg Nature Reserve is situated at the tip of a peninsula in south-west Sweden, just north of Helsingborg, and was the location for the latest phase of the restocking programme financed by the Swedish government and the EU as part of the Swedish Eel Management Plan.

Daniel Åberg (site manager) invited people to help with the restocking of 40 000 young eels in the brackish water around the nature reserve. About 100 enthusiastic volunteers of all ages responded and gathered at the rallying point. This was a car park about 500 metres from the restocking site where the volunteers collected the young eels in frigidite boxes and carried them the final few 100 metres to their new home at the end of a journey of around 7000 kilometres.



*Volunteers helping relocate the eels*

Curt Gelin (Scandinavian Silver Eel) talked about the life cycle of the eel, why we needed to restock and the tremendous increase in glass eel recruitment over the last few years. He also answered many questions from the crowd who were unaware of



*Underwater photo showing how well chosen the restocking site is for eels* *Picture: Kullaberg Nature Reserve*

the tremendous increase in glass eel recruitment or the measures taken to help the eel.

Then, before the young restockers became too restless, it was time for groups of people to take a box of young eels and restock them in the brackish waters surrounding the nature reserve. Here, the eels will stay for around 15 years before attempting to migrate back to the Sargasso Sea. Recent studies have shown that naturally recruited and restocked eels from the west coast of Sweden follow the same migration route north of Scotland to reach the Atlantic Ocean before travelling south back towards the Sargasso Sea.

We also helped to restock a local river, Vegeå, with 30,000 juvenile eels.

In total this year, we have relocated 3 million young eels in Sweden and 147,000 in Finland.

*Richard Fordham, Scandinavian Silver Eel*



## Spain: Ebro River

Here are pictures of the elver restocking on World Fish Migration Day on the Ebro river. We have sold or donated around 1.5 million elvers for relocation this year (Spain, France, Italy and Poland are the main destinations).

We released around 100,000 more into the Albufera lake at the end of August.

*Rodolfo Barrera*



## Italy

We managed to stock about 70kg of elvers in South Tuscany and Ombrone water basin.

*Photo: Armando Piccinini*



## Thank you!

SEG is hugely grateful to everyone who has helped us with the emergency eel relocation exercise this year. We couldn't have done it without you.



## Research News

### Italy: University of Bologna

Another step forward has been made at the Aquaculture laboratory of the University of Bologna. The Department located in Cesenatico started a new induction cycle on wild females in November 2013 after a cooperation agreement among other departments and another Italian University.

The Genetics were followed by a group from the Marine Biology Department; the Physiology, Anatomy and Histopathology studies were carried out by the Department of Veterinary Sciences while a group from the University of Padua was involved in a sperm quality evaluation test.

As in previous years the spawning season has produced viable eggs and larvae. The challenge was

to make the tiny animals survive longer by testing different kinds of food and improving the protocols. The results were positive: a reduction in the reproduction time and a better quality in terms of eggs and larvae (eg. less deformities) has led the small eels to increase their survival from 15 to 21 days.

The next step is linked to the decision to join European and non-European projects where different competencies and approaches could meet to fulfil the goal to protect the European eel and unveil the secrets of its life cycle.



*Fertilised eggs a few days before hatching*

### Holland: Scientific report on sustainable eel fisheries and eel farming released

In July, Michael Mannaart, managing director of the Dutch department of the Coastal Marine Union (EUCC – Kust & Zee) received the first copy of the report: 'Balance Calculations'. Alex Koelewijn, chairman of DUPAN, handed it to him. The report describes how Dutch eel fisheries and eel farming can be carried out in a sustainable way. Scientific research, carried out in co-operation with Wageningen University, has pointed out that it is possible to neutralise the eel sector's impact on nature, restore the eel population and establish a sustainable eel fishery.

Michael Mannaart stated that a sustainable eel sector is realistic: "By taking the right measurements, the eel population can be enlarged and kept in balance. EUCC is a messenger of the people-planet-profit philosophy.

Working together with the eel sector is the key to accelerate the restoration of the eel population and give the eel a sustainable future."

*"There is only one future for the European eel industry, that is the sustainable one."*

The research-program shows that neutralising the impact of the sector is possible, both practically and financially. The numbers show that eel farmers can compensate the intake of glass eels by restocking projects with glass eels, elvers, and catch and release projects with silver eels. Fishermen are able to conduct area-specific eel management on the live stock, in order to keep the population in balance with the fisheries. Restocking and area-specific eel management will enlarge the eel population in the Netherlands swiftly.

Alex Koelewijn emphasized that co-operation between stakeholders is crucial. "We are very pleased with the constructive partnership that we have with EUCC. It would be very welcome if other NGOs like WWF, and also water boards and local and regional authorities would join forces to help the eel in the best way possible. Together we could really speed up the eel's recovery. There is only one future for the European eel industry, that is the sustainable one."



*Alex Koelewijn (l) DUPAN handing over the report to Michael Mannaart EUCC (Kust & Zee)*



## Eels in the news

The latest IUCN listing on *Anguilla Anguilla* in June prompted a lot of debate and commentary.

The website Fish2Fork published some of the more detailed articles, including an interview with the Chair of the IUCN Anguillid Specialist Sub-Group Dr Matthew Gollock.

Dr Gollock discussed the 'borderline' IUCN panel decision, his support for the Sustainable Eel Standard and the importance of sustainable fisheries.

We have chosen and reproduced some of the key quotes below, and highly recommend that all our supporters with eel blood read the [full Fish2Fork article here](#). (It's worth remembering that the IUCN decision was reached in 2013, before the 2014 season data was available.)



Dr Matthew Gollock, of the Zoological Society of London and one of the leading authorities on eels, said: "The massive decline in recruitment and the knock-on effects of this was and continues to be our great concern. We felt it

was too soon to list it as endangered.

"However, if the recruitment continues to increase over the next five years, if management measures are put in place, I think there would be a good argument to change the listing to endangered."

....

In its listing the assessment team wrote of the European eel: "There was general agreement that the situation had improved, albeit slightly, for this species both as far as recruitment and implementation of management measures was concerned. As such it is imperative to highlight that this listing is borderline."

....

Despite uncertainties about restocking programmes, Dr Gollock supports the Sustainable Eel Group's sustainable standard.

The Standard is designed to provide a means by which eel can be caught, fattened up in farms and then sold on to restaurants and other food markets without damaging the fish's survival prospects. At least 40 per cent of catches under the standard are used for restocking programmes.

....

The International Council for the Exploration of the Sea, the scientific body which advises European governments on fish stocks, advises against all man-made causes of eel deaths. The Marine Conservation Society, basing its views on the scientific advice, has placed European eel on its list of fish to avoid. Fish2fork follows the guidance and urges restaurants to avoid serving the fish.

Dr Gollock, however, believes the [Sustainable Eel] Standard is a pragmatic measure that recognises the fishery, which extends across much of Europe, will not be shut down.

"The fishery isn't going to go away, therefore I think if there's going to be exploitation it should be done as sustainably as it can be," he said. "If there's going to be exploitation and consumption, which at present there is, let's do it as best we can."

"Stopping just fishing isn't representative of the threats. In the UK dams and other barriers are a reasonably big problem. The fishery is pretty small. Across Europe, there are people who are part of the industry who seem more committed [to save the eel] than some of the NGOs and governments."

"Knocking the fishery on the head – unless we were to do that in concert with other measures - wouldn't seem a very fair solution. I don't think it would solve the problem either."



### Jellied eels: back on the menu?

When Channel 4's Food Unwrapped programme wanted to investigate the growth in jellied eel sales in the UK in August, presenter Kate Quilton met SEG to find out more about the eel.



She met members of the River Parrett and Tone Sustainable Elver Fishery and heard about the issues facing elvers heading into the UK's waterways. SEG explained the importance of sustainability along the supply chain. She also visited a jellied eel factory and found out that the jellied eels on sale in supermarkets were sourced from New Zealand, with no certificate of sustainability.

Find out more about the [Sustainable Eel Standard](#) and why it's so important to the recovery of eel stocks worldwide.

## Eels in the news—round up

This year the eel has really caught the attention of the media, and news about eel numbers reaching the UK in particular has been widely reported.

It all started with this [Independent on Sunday article](#) where SEG announced plans to relocate more than 1 million eels. Thanks to the hard work and support of the elvermen and glass eel collectors we were able to double that target and catch 2.05 million fish

The story built with lots of local newspaper and radio coverage, as well as articles online.

April saw appearances for SEG Chairman Andrew Kerr on Radio 4's Today Programme, BBC & ITV Breakfast News programmes as well as coverage in Irish newspapers

Major features appeared in the national press, including this [Guardian article](#) and a full page and editorial leader in the [Daily Telegraph](#).

The increase in eel numbers arriving was a highlight in a June episode of the BBC's flagship [Springwatch](#) programme. The presenter visited the River



*Counting the catch*

Severn during the elvering season, and also looked at the work being done by SEG and others throughout Europe to help the eel's recovery. Thanks to our partners the Seven Rivers Trust and the Environment Agency, and the River Severn elvermen for their help.



*Filming Springwatch for the BBC*

Work on restocking the eels back into rivers began in May and SEG was joined in the UK by some high-profile helpers, including Zac Goldsmith MP and Environment Minister Lord de Mauley. SEG also joined the National Trust and Shrewsbury school for releases. Lots of great opportunities to tell the second part of the story, and get people involved with eels.

We are now very active on Twitter and Facebook, so please follow us for all the latest news and send us your updates so we can include everything that is happening.

**Twitter:** @EelGroup

**Facebook:** [www.facebook.com/sustainableeelgroup](http://www.facebook.com/sustainableeelgroup)



*Lord de Mauley helps release 10,000 elvers into the R. Coln*