



The Amazing European Eel

Some 'Eely' interesting history...

Historically eels made up half of the total freshwater fish **biomass** in Europe, in fact in **medieval** England eels were used as currency. In Saxon times the Isle of Ely is said to have paid Peterborough 80,000 eels to buy the stones that were then used to build Ely Cathedral.

The city of Ely (translated over time from the Isle of Elys) is so called because, as the highest point in the Cambridgeshire fens and before the fens were drained, it used to be surrounded by marshland full of eels and could only be accessed by boat.

Sadly, now eel numbers have crashed, possibly due to a number of factors including mass **smuggling** of glass eels to Asia, **climate change**, habitat loss, **predation**, disease, **parasites** and man-made barriers.



Choose one of the issues or threats affecting the European Eel, do some research and write an illustrated newspaper article about how we can help.

Man-made barriers



The presence of **weirs**, **sluices** and **hydro-electric dams** block the eels' upstream migration and can prevent them from completing their life cycle.



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How can we help?

One of the main issues for eels is the man-made barriers which block their migratory routes. Conservation charities like the Rivers Trust are working closely with the Environment Agency to remove barriers but, where this is not possible, we can install Eel Passes over/alongside weirs, dams or sluices which enable the eels and other fish to pass upstream.

One type of fish pass involves heavy-duty bristle brushes – these can be installed alongside weirs or sluices and simulate wet grass, allowing the eels to slowly wriggle through to make their way upstream.



Another option is to create a rock ramp like this one at Aubourn, near Lincoln. Rocks and boulders of varying sizes are installed into the river to create a gently sloping river ramp up to and over the weir so that fish can simply swim up and over, using the rocks as a stairway.



See if you can find out how many man-made barriers are in the River Witham as it runs through Grantham and what they were used for. Make a poster or a decorated timeline to show them all.



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River Water Quality

Rivers are not only important **habitat** for eels and all the other creatures and plants that live in and around them, they are also very important for storage of fresh water – a precious **resource** necessary for all life on earth.

Rivers help to drain away surface water to prevent flooding and they provide water for farmers to **irrigate** their crops. They carry water and **nutrients** around the earth as well as playing a vital part in the **water cycle**.



Sadly, our rivers are often **polluted** with chemicals as well as litter. You can help by making sure you always put your litter in the bin or take it home with you, and by thinking about reducing the amount of plastic you use – perhaps take a refillable bottle for water or juice instead of buying drinks and have fruit for a snack– no plastic and better for you too 😊



With help from an adult, collect up some ‘safe’ litter and use it to make a collage showing the river and its wildlife. See the worksheet for more ideas.



This Litter Monster created by Eden Rivers Trust community project might give you some ideas.



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Litter Collage Project Worksheet



Using 'safe' litter you can find at home or on a local litter pick (carefully supervised by an adult) make a collage of a river or stream.

Will your river flow out to the sea or perhaps join another river?

Who might live in or alongside your river?

- Think about different plants, birds, fish, **mammals**, **amphibians** and **invertebrates**.
- You could include eels at different stages of their life cycle on your collage – think about where in the river they might be at each stage.

Will your river have any weirs or other man-made barriers?

You can even include polluted areas (e.g. run-off from roads, chemical spills, discarded litter etc.) Do you think there will be living plants and creatures in that area of the collage?

Perhaps you can work together with your family to create your collage.

