**Scotton Weir Removal, River Nidd**

A large-scale weir removal on North Yorkshire’s River Nidd will open up another 18km of river to migratory fish such as the salmon, sea trout and European eel. Including the Nidd’s tributaries, this is extended to 35km of rivers that removing the weir will potentially make available for salmon and sea trout spawning.

The weir removal project is led by river conservation charity the Wild Trout Trust and is funded by The European Open Rivers Programme – a grant giving organisation dedicated to restoring rivers.

Scotton Weir currently stands at the entrance to Nidd Gorge, a designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and the weir was originally built at the end of the 18th Century to power the nearby mill. At 75m wide and 4m high, it is thought to be the largest weir removal project so far in the UK.

The weir breached in the floods of 2019 and is to be removed safely now rather than left to disintegrate gradually over time, running the risk of causing bankside damage.

Removing Scotton Weir will benefit more than just migratory fish. All fish move up and down stream to some extent as part of their life cycles and the weir removal will help to restore natural processes to the river.

Restoring these natural processes will alter the flow and shape of the river, which in turn will change the nature of the river bed. This will provide varied habitats for invertebrates to colonise, which in turn will provide food for bird species, for instance. This is how restoring a river's natural processes can have an impact on wildlife around the river, as well as in the river and under the water itself.

Currently only 16% of rivers are rated as being in ‘Good’ condition by the Water Framework Directive and a significant cause for failure is man-made barriers interrupting a river’s flow, such as Scotton Weir on the Nidd. Recent research has shown that on average in Great Britain, there is at least one artificial barrier for every 1.5km of stream. In England, Scotland and Wales, only 1% of rivers are free from artificial barriers.

Across Europe as a whole there are in excess of 1 million artificial barriers, which collectively has what the European Open Rivers Programme describes as “a catastrophic impact on biodiversity.”

**Professor Jonathan Grey** is part-time professor in practice at Lancaster University and is project managing the Scotton Weir removal for the Wild Trout Trust.

**Prof Grey said:** “The weir has been impounding about 800m of channel for over 100 years, creating deep, sluggish water in a section of the Nidd gorge where the flow should be swift and shallow. Think of a river as a conveyor belt of sediment as well as water. Boulder, cobble and gravel that is vital to the health of the bed of the river has been trapped upstream of the weir, unable to resupply that which has been transported away downstream. So the physical habitat downstream has become simplified, dominated by large boulders.

“Then there is fish passage to consider. All fish have to move up and downstream during different stages of their life for a variety of reasons. The weir has made it nigh on impossible to move upstream, and much more difficult to move downstream, and then only under specific flow conditions, so populations have become fragmented or isolated.

“We should not focus on just the species that migrate from rivers to the oceans and back like salmon and eels. All fish species should be able to move up and down freely whenever they need, to feed, to breed, to avoid drought conditions or return after floods, or (unfortunately) to recolonise after things like pollution events.

“We cannot say for certain that salmon or sea trout get as far as Scotton Weir, but we do know from electric fishing surveys that small numbers of salmon parr have been recorded upstream of Hunsingore Weir. So, it is very likely because we have evidence that at least a few have bred somewhere in between these two major weirs. Modifications planned by the EA for Hunsingore Weir will allow more to pass and progress to Scotton, so our full removal of Scotton Weir means that much more of the Nidd system will be available to them.

“There are still more barriers further upstream, the next being at Birstwith 11km away, so there is still work to be done to restore the natural heritage of the river.

“We are aiming to reinstate the natural flow regime to the river by removing the barrier, so if the physical habitat (eg the gravel and cobble) is where it should be and in better condition, then the biology will respond and the ecology of the river and on the land alongside will be more resilient as a consequence. More riverflies does not just mean more fish - bats & birds benefit as well, and more fish means better feeding for their predators too.”

**Dr Marie Taylor is the Operations Director for the Yorkshire Dales Rivers Trust**, which hosts the Dales to Vales Rivers Network (DVRN). The DVRN is a catchment partnership which brings together local people, communities, organisations and businesses to make decisions on managing the rivers, becks and lakes in the Swale, Ure, Nidd, Ouse and Wharfe catchments.

**Dr Taylor said:**

“It is always exciting to see easing or removal of man-made obstacles in our rivers, allowing previously isolated populations of aquatic species including fish to migrate more freely, restoring more natural habitats and opening up new areas of river for migratory species such as the endangered European eel.

“This project is a great example of partnership working between landowners, experts from the Wild Trout Trust and government bodies, which will deliver benefits to angling groups along the River Nidd as well as wider benefits to nature gained from improving the connectivity of one of Yorkshire’s iconic rivers.”

**NOTES FOR EDITORS**

1) The project is led by river conservation charity the Wild Trout Trust

The Wild Trout Trust works to inspire and help everyone to protect wild trout and their habitat.

<https://www.wildtrout.org/>

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2) Existing barrier databases underestimate stream fragmentation by at least 68%. There is at least one artificial barrier every 1.5 km of stream in Great Britain. Only 3.3% of the total river network of Great Britain is fully connected. Only 1% of the rivers in England, Scotland and Wales are free of artificial barriers.

From: ‘A comprehensive assessment of stream fragmentation in Great Britain’

<https://amber.international/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Jones_etal_2019.pdf>

3) Open Rivers Programme

The European Open Rivers Programme is a Dutch grant giving foundation funded by Arcadia – a charitable fund of Lisbet Rausing and Peter Baldwin. The foundation aims to restore endangered European rivers by supporting interventions that lead to the removal of small dams and the restoration of river flow and biodiversity, and furthermore to do all that is related or conducive to the above.

Arcadia supports charities and scholarly institutions that preserve cultural heritage and the environment. Arcadia also supports projects that promote open access, and all of its awards are granted on the condition that any materials produced are made available for free online. Since 2002, Arcadia has awarded more than $910 million to projects around the world.

<https://openrivers.eu/>

4) Yorkshire Dales Rivers Trust

The Yorkshire Dales Rivers Trust was established in 2004 as a Registered Charity, working to enhance and protect the rivers of the Yorkshire Dales for the benefit of everyone. By working in partnership with landowners, businesses, land managers and the public, we aim to care for the rivers, streams and catchments of the Swale, Ure, Nidd, Wharfe and Ouse as sources of pure water, as habitats for aquatic and other wildlife, and as havens of quiet recreation for anglers and everyone to enjoy. We engage with schools and communities to inform children and the wider public, to ensure a better understanding, care and appreciation of our rivers and associated habitats.

Dales to Vale Rivers Network

The Dales to Vale Rivers Network is a catchment partnership which brings together local people, communities, organisations and businesses to make decisions on managing the rivers, becks and lakes in the Swale, Ure, Nidd, Ouse and Wharfe catchments. Our Vision is Healthy Rivers, Abundant Wildlife, valued by Communities.

<https://www.ydrt.org.uk/dales-to-vales-river-network/>

The Catchment Based Approach (CaBA) is a community-led approach that engages people and groups from across society to help improve our precious water environments.

<https://catchmentbasedapproach.org/>

The DVRN is one of over 100+ catchment partnerships across England and Wales. Since the partnership was formed in 2013, we have held over 14 partnership meetings to talk with local people about their rivers, gather evidence and information and to develop catchment management plans for each river. We have worked with more than 50 partnership organisations, have 29 active projects and ideas for more.

The DVRN is hosted by the Yorkshire Dales Rivers Trust (YDRT) and our work is directed by our Project Board, comprising YDRT, Yorkshire Wildlife Trust, Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority, Nidderdale AONB, Environment Agency, Natural England, Forestry Commission, Farming for Wildlife Partnership, Wild Trout Trust, Woodland Trust, National Trust and North Yorkshire County Council.

<https://www.ydrt.org.uk/>

ENDS

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