

Pearls in Peril

West Cumbria Rivers Trust

River Ehen, Cumbria

Issue 1: Feb. 2014

Securing the future of the freshwater pearl mussels in Great Britain

Freshwater pearl mussels (*Margaritifera margaritifera*) are critically endangered and internationally protected.

Freshwater pearl mussel (FWPM) populations are declining dramatically across their whole range and are in serious threat within Great Britain. They have been affected by multiple issues, primarily wildlife crime, habitat degradation and declining water quality.

'**Pearls in Peril**' is a LIFE+ project, co-funded by 22 organisations across Great Britain along with European funding. It will run from 2012 to 2016. This partnership will act to safeguard the future of important FWPM populations at key Natura 2000 sites in Scotland, England and Wales.

The River Ehen in Cumbria is one of the key sites, as it is home to the largest viable population of FWPM left in England.

However, the population is an ageing one and is declining and urgent action is required to prevent their extinction.

West Cumbria Rivers Trust (WCRT) is responsible for delivering the Project in England, along with partner organisation, the Environment Agency. Support is also provided by, United Utilities, Lake District National Park, Natural England, National Trust and the Forestry Commission.



Electrofishing in the River Ehen

There are many issues affecting the survival of the River Ehen mussels. One of the major issues is excess silt entering the watercourse, covering the bed

Summary

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Internationally Protected and Critically Endangered

They are one of the longest lived invertebrates known – they can live for over 100 years!

They each filter several litres of water daily, keeping our rivers clean and supporting the survival of other wildlife.

The River Ehen is home to the largest viable population left in England.

But...they are declining, meaning the river is also in decline.

Urgent action is needed to improve the conditions of the river and to prevent their extinction!

in material and smothering the mussels. Mussels need clean, well oxygenated gravel beds to survive.

Poor water quality is another major issue and this has been affected by pollution from various sources, such as, nutrient run off from surrounding land, faulty septic tanks, land and road drains to name but a few.

The survival of mussels is also linked to that of the Atlantic salmon. Mussel larvae, known as glochidia, are released by female mussels into the water in the summer. The glochidia drift in the current and attach to young salmon (this is called encystment and there is no harm to the salmon). Here they grow until the following spring, when they drop off on to clean river sands

and gravel and begin maturing.

WCRT along with its project partners has produced a management plan for the River Ehen and will now be working to implement this plan. A range of projects will take place on the River Ehen and its catchment area to ensure that England's most important population of FWPMs is given every opportunity to survive.

WCRT will work with landowners and managers to implement actions that will benefit FWPM through agri-environment schemes, the stabilisation of riverbanks where appropriate, the planting of riparian woodlands, wetland restoration and creation. In addition, a plan to encyst the resident wild salmon population

with glochidia will be undertaken along with a programme of awareness raising, education and community events.

For further information contact Diane O'Leary, Pearls in Peril LIFE+GB Project Officer at the WCRT on (017687) 44347 or visit www.westcumbriarivertrust.org

Check out - Mo the Mussel on Twitter:

<https://twitter.com/MoTheMussel>

and more about the project on the River Ehen:

<https://twitter.com/WestCumbriaRT>

