

PHOTOCALL NOTICE

7 November 2022

'Rescue' of fish from the Kennet & Avon Canal ahead of upgrade works at Crofton Pumping Station

When: 10am, Thursday 10 November 2022
Where: Kennet & Avon Canal at Crofton, Wiltshire (parking available in the Crofton Beam Engines visitor car park, Crofton, Marlborough SN8 3DW)
What: Fish are being rescued ahead of the rare draining of a section of the Kennet & Avon Canal near Great Bedwyn in Wiltshire, part of an important £1.8 million project to upgrade the electric water pumping system at Crofton. Canal & River Trust project managers will be available for interviews.

The Canal & River Trust's project to replace the pumping system at Crofton, which ensures the charity can keep the summit of the Kennet & Avon Canal topped-up with water for boats, towpath users and wildlife, will be completed this winter.

The works, near Great Bedwyn in Wiltshire, started in September and will continue through to March 2023. Costing £1.8 million, the project will see the canal's 40-year-old pumps, pipes and electrics replaced with a modern, more efficient and reliable system.

To enable new pumping system to be installed, part of the canal will be temporarily drained. But first, a specialist team, using a technique call 'electrofishing', will rescue the thriving population of fish living there.

Charles Baker, the Canal & River Trust's senior project engineer, explains: "Crofton sits at the top of the eastern descent of the Kennet & Avon Canal. The pumping system at Crofton keeps the canal summit topped up with water, which is vital for boaters and wildlife, as well as the thousands of people who visit the canal towpath each year for the health and wellbeing.

"Originally, back in the 19th Century, the pumps were steam operated. However, the current pumps date back to the 1980's and are electric powered, and after 40 years of service, the pumping system has become unreliable and inefficient.

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“With the Kennet & Avon Canal more popular with people and boats than at any time in history, the new pumping system will increase efficiency and the amount of water that can be pumped into the canal to keep it topped up.

“To complete the works, we must drain a section of the canal, but first we’ll rescue the thriving population of fish living there. Draining a stretch of canal is a rare event, and we are expecting to collect hundreds of pounds of fish, including some very large and ecologically important specimens. The species we’ll rescue are likely to include roach, pike, bream, gudgeon and perch.

“To carry out the fish rescue, we employ specialist contractors who use electrofishing. This involves passing an electric current through the water to temporarily disengage the ability of the fish to swim. They can then be easily netted, placed in large containers of water where they can recover for a few minutes, before being rehomed in a nearby section of canal that isn’t being drained.”

To enable the works to be carried out, a six-mile stretch of the Kennet & Avon Canal, from Lock 52 (Heathy Close Lock) to Lock 65 (Burnt Mill Lock), has been closed to boats from 7 November 2022 until 17 March 2023. A diversion is also in place for the half-mile stretch of the towpath that is closed between Lock 58 and Lock 61 on the Crofton flight.

The pumps at Crofton supply water from Wilton Reservoir to the Kennet & Avon Canal. Soon after the canal first opened, the historic Crofton Pumping Station was built in 1807-9 to supply water to the highest point of the Kennet & Avon Canal. The pumps were steam powered and continued to operate until 1959. In the 1980’s, when the canal was restored, a new pumping station was installed powered by electric pumps. The steam-powered pumps housed in the historic Pumping Station building continue to be regularly operated by volunteers at public open days, when they continue to pump water to the summit level.

To find out more about the project, go to <https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/croftonpumps>

For more information on Canal & River Trust including how you can donate money or volunteer to support our work visit www.canalrivertrust.org.uk

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Notes to Editors

The Canal & River Trust cares for and brings to life 2,000 miles of canals and rivers across England & Wales. We believe waterways have the power to make a difference to people's lives and that spending time by water can make us all healthier and happier. By bringing communities together to make a difference to their local waterway, we are creating places and spaces that can be used and enjoyed by everyone, every day.

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