

## Introduction

Not only do charismatic bird and animal species like swallows and wildebeest migrate, but so do key fish species, such as the critically endangered European Eel (*Anguilla anguilla*). Eels are very mysterious fish with a complicated life cycle. They are believed to start life as eggs in the Sargasso Sea, near Bermuda. They make their way across the Atlantic as eggs and then larvae, turning into glass eels then elvers. They finally end up in European rivers and wetlands, where they will live as an adult for up to 20 years! When they are ready to reproduce, they then make the 4,000 mile journey back to the Sargasso Sea but this journey is a mystery as no adults have ever been found in transit (see our eel life cycle section for more details)!

The Severn is one of the most important rivers in Britain for migratory fish and until recently, European eels were abundant here. However, their numbers have fallen dramatically over the last 30 – 40 years, with the numbers of glass eels returning to the UK having decreased by 95% since the 1980's! In the past, the lower Severn Vale Waterscape would have provided a large area of high quality and well-connected habitat for migratory fish. However, due to low-lying land reclamation and flood control measures, many areas are now no longer available to them. These problems are made worse by artificial barriers such as weirs and mills which block access to key tributaries of the Severn including the River Frome.

In 2017, funds were granted by The European Agricultural Fund, Natural England and the Environment agency to a partnership of local organisations to address access and habitat quality issues for migratory fish in the Severn Vale. These educational resources are part of that project and aim to engage primary schools in the secret life of their local rivers. This pack will focus on the river Frome and use Arundel Mill Pond in Stroud as a case study for the wider river. The river Frome is accessible by foot or a short car journey from twenty schools along its course and provides a perfect opportunity to cover many different aspects of the primary curriculum. So please join us in exploring our local river and use this pack as a way of dipping your toes into an undiscovered, watery world...

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