



Canal &
River Trust

PRESS RELEASE

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CANAL & RIVER TRUST WADES IN TO REMOVE EUROPEAN CATFISH FROM EARLSWOOD LAKES

Dozens of non-native catfish which have been illegally dumped in a West Midlands beauty spot are being removed as part of a major maintenance project by the Canal & River Trust.

With water levels in the lakes low from a busy summer of boating the charity, which cares for 2,000 miles of waterways in England & Wales, is taking the opportunity to remove up to 40 Wels Catfish from Earlswood Lakes as well as carrying out important underwater valve works. The valves are used to feed water into the area's canals enabling boats to visit.

It's not known exactly how the catfish, which can eventually grow over 2m in length, came to be in the lakes but left unchecked they can harm native wildlife, eating fish, birds and even ducks. It's illegal to keep the catfish, which are more commonly found in southern or eastern Europe, in an open waterway system so the Trust is taking action to remove them.

Earlswood Lakes is made up of three pools, two of which are used to feed water into the North Stratford Canal. The lakes also connect to the River Blythe, which is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest. The Trust is gradually lowering the remaining water in the lakes in order to replace a valve connecting two of the lakes. The valve enables water to be moved between the lakes and feed the adjacent North Stratford Canal.

With water levels being lowered the Trust is also taking the opportunity to remove the catfish and is working with the Catfish Conservation group to find them new homes.

The operation will see specialist teams using two techniques. The main technique is known as seine netting involving the laying of a long net in a semi-circle. When the water level gets very low, a technique called electrofishing is used, which involves using an electrical current to temporarily stop the fish from swimming so that they float to the surface. They're then scooped up using handnets and transferred to large bins filled with fresh water. The fish aren't harmed, and can then be moved to an unaffected area elsewhere on the site.

The operation is set to begin towards the end of November and last until the end of January.

Canal & River Trust, Ground Floor, Aqua House, 20 Lionel Street, Birmingham, B3 1AQ

T 0203 204 4514 E press.office@canalrivertrust.org.uk W www.canalrivertrust.org.uk Twitter [@CanalRiverTrust](https://twitter.com/CanalRiverTrust)

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John Ellis, national fisheries and angling manager for the Canal & River Trust said; "The illegal dumping of the catfish at Earlswood represents a threat to the adjacent Site of Special Scientific Interest on the River Blythe.

"While it's good that we've been able to tie the catfish removal in with the important valve works taking place at Earlswood it's really frustrating that, as a charity, we're faced with picking up the tab. It's really disheartening to our staff, volunteers and all those that donate money to support our work that we have to put resources in to removing these fish that someone else has introduced.

"We'd encourage people to show a bit more respect for their local waterways and for the other people that enjoy Earlswood Lakes."

While the works are taking place the Trust is also moving some of the larger carp from the lakes to other Canal & River Trust waters.

John Ellis explains; "We fully understand that moving the carp might not be popular with some people but we have to do what is right for the fish, the lakes and the local community.

"Many of the fish are getting quite old – up to 20 years in some cases – and it's important that we look after their welfare. By moving them to less intensely fished and pressured waters the fish can continue to live well in to old age.

"We also want to re-establish Earlswood as one of the best carp match fisheries in the West Midlands, as it was in the 1990s and 2000s. Over time the fish have grown large and are now too big for match fishing but these works will enable us to make Engine Pool a really high quality small carp and bream fishery once more."

To find out more about the work of the Canal & River Trust, and how you can support it, go to www.canalrivertrust.org.uk.

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For media requests please contact:

Stephen Hardy, communications manager, Canal & River Trust

T: 01636 675703 M: 07920 077190 E: stephen.hardy@canalrivertrust.org.uk

Notes to editors:

The Canal & River Trust is the guardian of 2,000 miles of historic waterways across England and Wales, caring for the nation's third largest collection of listed structures, as well as museums, archives, and hundreds of important wildlife sites.

We believe that living waterways transform places and enrich lives and our role is to make sure there is always a place on your doorstep where you can escape the pressures of everyday life, stretch your legs and simply feel closer to nature.

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