Friends of Castle Lake

R E P O R T

Green Foundation Ireland,
along with Friends of Castle Lake,
invite you to an in-person evening talk

Let's Get R-Eel
A Talk About Eels

Venue: **Bailieborough Library**

Market House, Bailieborough, County Cavan, A82 RH73

Thursday 16 May 2024 – 19:00

Let's Get R-Eel
A Talk About Eels

THEME

The European eel is classified as critically endangered in the **International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species**. European eels spawn in the Sargasso Sea, and after hatching as larval eels, they drift on the Gulf Stream ocean current until they reach the Atlantic coasts of Europe and transform into glass eels. Sadly, the number of young eels reaching our waters has declined over the past 30 years and amounts to as little as 8% of what was present during the 1970s.

ABOUT OUR SPEAKER

Rob Cruikshanks

Rob is a member of the **National Eel Monitoring Programme** with Inland Fisheries Ireland. This programme, which began in 2009 to monitor the population of European eel in Ireland's rivers, lakes and estuaries, was created in response to European legislation that required member states to develop an eel management plan and to establish measures for eel stock recovery.

While measures to promote eel stock recovery included the suspension of commercial eel fishing, overfishing was not the only reason for their decline. Other factors include water pollution, habitat loss, climate change, barriers to migration, parasites and diseases. The Eel Monitoring Programme monitors eel stocks and examines the potential causes for their decline.

ABOUT OUR FACILITATOR

Donna Mullen

Chair of Green Foundation Ireland, Donna is a farmer, consultant ecologist, and director of Wildlife Surveys Ireland, with an award-winning farm, awards and placements which include the RDS Sustainable Enterprise Award, the EU Rural Inspiration Award, and the Ellison Award.

ABOUT OUR TALK

Donna Mullen welcomed everyone to our talk and introduced **Rob Cruickshanks**, who began by telling us about the eel, which is a critically endangered species – more endangered than the panda, but it gets a lot less attention. In fact, to our shame, people in Europe still fish for and eat eels, and a glass eel is more expensive than gold. Thankfully Ireland has banned the fishing of eels and has put in place conservation measures. Ireland doesn't do restocking of waterways with captive-bred eels, because of issues with biosecurity – diseases and parasites can easily be transported this way. But our **National Eel Monitoring Programme** monitors eel stocks and examines the potential causes for their decline.

Ireland's eel management plan assists in allowing migration from inland waterways back to the sea where they spawn. To help eels navigate weirs such as Ardnacrusha in County Clare, young migrating silver eels are caught on one side and released on the other side of the dam.

In addition to human made barriers, other problems for eels include natural predation as well as overfishing (which has in the past selected the bigger females to catch, and reduced the number of females spawning).

Parasites are becoming an increasing problem, affecting their swim bladders. This doesn't affect the eels in waterways but, when they go to sea, they need their swim bladders to help them wriggle up and down, deep into the water. At this point, too many parasites can kill them.

Overfishing is a problem and, because the eels migrate so far, it is difficult to police the entire ocean. Poor water quality and pollution can be a problem, and Rob spoke about the high phosphate levels found in Castle Lake in Bailieborough. The dead eel which was found there was probably a teenage female.

Rob had plenty of ideas on what we could do as citizen scientists to monitor eels, and suggested that we all get involved with the **DCU Water Bioblitz**.

We had so many questions for Rob afterwards – it was a fascinating talk. Many thanks to Rob, Bailieborough Library, and Friends of Castle Lake for their help with this event.

*You can **see photos of our event here**.*

Green Foundation Ireland

17 May 2024