

The Somerset Eel Conference Red Brick Building - Glastonbury

Friday 5th July 2024

Doors open at 9am for a prompt 9.30am start - the day is scheduled to finish after the community eel release which is planned for 5.30pm

Ticket policy - pay what you can (suggested £20) because we believe eel knowledge should be accessible to all

Everyone is welcome to attend the conference - its suitable for all levels of eel knowledge

Many thanks to Shoal for sponsoring this all day event



A big welcome

It gives me such joy to warmly welcome you to our Somerset Eel Conference. I hope you find



the day packed with eel info but most of all I hope it's inspiring - a day where you can meet new 'eel' people and forge new friendships. Upon us now is a great opportunity to build on the current work in hand, and other matters relating to the recovery of the European eel across Somerset......and beyond.

Eel recovery issues and strategies can be complex, but by working together on common goals gives us the best chance to succeed and I'm sure by working collaboratively - we can achieve much.

I hope you are looking forward to the day - there is a varied programme to encourage a wide and diverse audience where everyone is welcome both academics and the general public. Please use the day to ask our experts questions to become better informed, to be able to shape your eel journey going forwards.

Thank you to our 15 speakers, the hospitality team at the Red Brick Building and thank you to YOU for coming along and being part of the big Somerset Eel Day.

Best wishes

Vanessa and the Team at SERP www.somerseteelrecoveryproject.co.uk

Programme



Andrew Kerr, of the Sustainable *Eel* Group (SEG)

Opening address

(10 minutes)

Andrew will welcome everyone to Glastonbury - the heart of the Somerset Levels and nestled close to the banks of the historic Brue River – he will set the highlevel context for the Programme.

He says, "What is so interesting about SERP, the Somerset Eel Recovery Project, is that for first time SEG and SERP have intentionally built a project up and outwards from the social theme of Brundtland – a sustainability model whereby a balance is sought and struck between the competing social, economic and environment".

Right at the heart of today's gathering are the eels in 60 tanks spread throughout the local classrooms of Somerset - reconnecting the somerset levels community to its lost relationship with the eel - a truly remarkable feat and a tribute to the outstanding teamwork of all those partner organisations and individuals who work and volunteer for this programme.

It is just so appropriate for Somerset, an ancient eel stronghold, to be the start point for rediscovering this lost relationship.

(5 minutes at the end of each talk will be put aside for questions unless the speaker announces anything different).



Dr. Willem Dekker

(25 minutes plus 5 for questions)

From pest to protected – an account of the development of protection policies for the European eel.

Stinking, slimy, mud-taste, and disastrous for your fish brood and crayfish. Over a century ago, the eel was not highly esteemed in Europe – and yet, this

ubiquitous species now has its own protection policies and restoration programmes. We tell the story of this major reversal.

All over Europe, the stock of the eel Anguilla anguilla (L.) has been in severe decline - for many decades, if not for centuries. Circumstantial evidence indicates that habitat loss and migration barriers expelled the eel from most of its up-river habitats over the 1800s, while fisheries expanded and modernised in larger, down-river areas in the early 1900s. Since 1960, however, further modernisation no longer compensated for the decline, and landings started to diminish. Eventually, from 1980 onwards, recruitment from the ocean fell rapidly. By 2007, European protection policies were adopted, and since 2011, the decline in recruits has for now been halted. Further protective action will be needed to recover the stock.

In this talk, I will elaborate on the characteristics of the eel and its fisheries, in historical times and now. What makes the eel so special, how did people exploit the eel, what troubled this relationship, and what made it so complicated to develop an adequate protection plan? Both the shared developments across Europe, and the particular developments in the UK will be shown.

Willem has been involved in eel research since 1984. Starting from a local perspective on the fisheries in Lake IJsselmeer (the Netherlands), he developed a pan-European view on the long-term population dynamics of the European eel stock, culminating in his 2004 PhD thesis: "Slipping through our hands; population dynamics of the European eel". He held the chair of the Eel Working Group, a joint group of the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea and the European Inland Fisheries Advisory Committee, from 1987 to 2006 - twenty years in which he shifted focus from fisheries advancements with a declining political interest, towards sustainable management of the stock. During those years, he had the leading position in raising public awareness for the deplorable state of the eel stock and developed a scientific basis for the design and development of the EU Eel Regulation establishing measures for the recovery of the stock of European eel. Following his retirement in 2022, his interests focus on the governance processes around the protection and management of the eel throughout Europe, and on historical and cultural aspects related to stock dynamics in historical times. He is Scientific advisor for the Sustainable Eel Group.



Hannah Strode

(20 minutes plus 5 for questions)

"Eels in the Classroom 2024" Children and Elvers in Symbiosis

Hannah, the Project Co-ordinator for SERP's 2024 Eels in the Classroom project, will share the adventures and wonder of bringing 57 tanks of elvers into classrooms across



Somerset. From Porlock to Frome, from SEND specialist provision to nurseries to secondary classrooms, our 2024 project has had a huge reach and when complete will have shared the majesty, mystery and magic of the European Eel with approximately 2,000 students.

Hear all about the challenges and delight of bringing the project into reality and capture some of the magic of young people in their wonder at the natural world.

She has a background in Anthrozoology, studying the ways communities and NGOs interact with endangered species. She has also worked as a Key Stage Two teacher and Forest School leader here in Somerset and is excited to bring this background in education to Eels in the Classroom, sharing the eel's story with as many Somerset students as possible. Whenever she can, Hannah is out exploring - mostly hiking and wild swimming (the colder the better!).

Mike Baltzer

(20 minutes plus 5 for questions)

The 1000 Fishes Initiative: global action for 1000 of the world's most endangered fishes

Mike Baltzer is the Executive Director of SHOAL, a global

partnership committed to ending the crisis for freshwater species. Mike has over 30 years of experience leading large scale conservation programmes in Africa, Asia and Europe including leading WWF's Global Tiger Initiative for nine years.

Shoal

In 2019, Mike founded and now leads the SHOAL partnership. In April 2024 SHOAL launched possibly one of the world's most ambitious species-based conservation actions ever – to raise action for 1000 endangered fish species by 2035.

The 1000 Fishes initiative in innovative in its approach of leveraging the capacity and resources of international organisations to support local partners on the frontline of freshwater habitat conservation. His talk will introduce you to some of the fascinating fish species, some incredible local partners and one or two stories of success.

Refreshment break for 15 minutes

Julia Manning

(20 minutes plus 5 minutes for questions)

The decline of eels

Julia is an Artist Printmaker based in Somerset. An RE and elected member of Society of Wildlife Artists (SWLA)

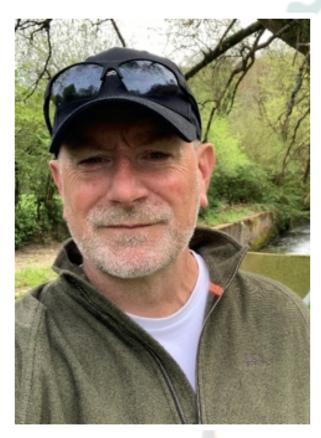
Her talk describes how she came to make this project based around the unbelievable life of eels. Having lived close to the River Parrett in the early 80s Julia knew a bit about eels and the elver fishing that went



on, but had no idea of the amazing story and history of this fish.

"Due to a chance meeting with Andy Don, a Fellow of the Institute of Fisheries Management, a font of knowledge about fish, and his specialism: eels. He mentored me, feeding me the latest scientific information and the reasons why they have dramatically declined over the last forty years. I read all I could about them and started to look with new vision at my local environment of the Somerset Levels, the rivers heading out into the estuary of Bridgwater Bay and the Bristol Channel to create a series of 12 large relief prints".

To find out more visit: www.juliamanning.co.uk



Andy Don

(25 minutes plus 5 for questions)

Eels in the Azores: Trapping, Tagging and Tracking

The European Eel is Critically Endangered, so it is important that we solve the mystery surrounding their complete life cycle to support efforts to protect the spawning area of this iconic species.

Migrating eels are driven to travel vast distances by an innate desire to spawn. The research that Andy is still involved with, used satellite tags mounted on silver eels in the hope that they would reach their spawning grounds. Better evidence of this aspect will provide agencies and conservationists with the clues needed to protect this fascinating species...'

Andy has worked in Fisheries teams in the Environment Agency and its predecessors for more than 30 years. During that time both his local and National roles have found him observing, appreciating, protecting and trying to understand the confounding animals that are the freshwater eels.

He is a Fellow of the Institute of Fisheries Management and uses the Institute as a forum to raise awareness of eel research and management.

Emily Ostler

(15 minutes plus 5 for questions)

Eels: Lessons on Shapeshifting

Climate change, covid 19, wars upon wars. The world keeps falling out from underneath me — or is that merely a product of being in my mid-20s? Not-so-naive, suddenly a bit jaded?



It could be my mid-20's, but I don't think so. The Sixth Extinction is not a normal lot to be given as a young person. I've looked many places for footholds, for answers, and — staggeringly — it was the eels who emerged as the teachers I needed. These unassuming, serpentine weavers of the waters taught me how to shapeshift, and to shapeshift, and to shapeshift, again and again and again, to meet uncertainties as they unfold and to forge a future from within them. The catastrophes of this moment have not gone away, but I have learned a few things from the eels — hopeful things — and I want to share some of those with you. It is an honour to be returning to Somerset, one year later, to share some of these learnings with you. Thank you for showing me the eels in this home of yours, across the ocean from mine.

Emily Ostler is an environmental advocate and writer from Utah. She holds a master's degree from Harvard Divinity School, where she researched the spiritual dimensions of human relationships with nature. She has worked on conservation projects around the world, centring issues such as sacred land protection, sustainable agriculture, and environmental education. A descendent of immigrants from Europe, Emily spent the beginning half of 2023 in a self-crafted pilgrimage of her heritage, especially as it pertains to the waters. On this journey, she worked with eel conservationists, elver men, and others involved in finding long-term solutions for the European eel. She is currently completing a book about this journey, focusing on the role of eels in it.

Break for lunch for 40 minutes



Dr Laura Weldon

(20 minutes plus 5 for questions)

The detection and monitoring of low abundance European eel (Anguilla anguilla) populations in inland freshwater locations using environmental DNA.

Laura is a molecular ecologist and recent founder of The eDNA Consultancy.

I support organisations who monitor biodiversity by analysing environmental DNA (or eDNA) for the highly specific and sensitive detection of rare organisms.

Whilst eDNA can be collected from a range of habitats my main research focus has been monitoring freshwater systems for eel and my current project on the Somerset Levels is for Somerset Wildlife Trust.

I'll give a broad introduction to eDNA and describe how sampling and analysing eDNA can offer an additional tool for conservation organisations, such as demonstrating the effect of habitat restoration on low abundance populations. I'll present previous data from eel eDNA surveys on the Avalon marshes and at Steart Marshes and citizen science eDNA data collected in Somerset and describe how this will all contribute to the present wider study.

Special Eel Conference testing kits available – please ask Laura for more information. Kits can be picked up on the day (please see below).

Jane Brookhouse

(20 minutes plus 5 for questions)

Somerset Wildlife Trust (SWT) The Adapting the Levels Landscape Recovery Project. SWT will be carrying out some work on eels in the Brue Valley over the next few months and are going to update the conference on progress made to date.



Somerset Wildlife Trust

Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs





Landscape Recovery

Dan Britton – regenerative farmer

(15 minutes plus 5 for questions)

Water Meadows - an ecological renaissance of regenerative ecosystems, supporting eel recovery.

Dan Britton farms at Plotgate Community Farm here in the Brue Valley, the Vale of Avalon, developing a model for



community-based regenerative agriculture and has recently discovered the wonders of water meadows.

Plotgate Community Farm was designed as a direct response to the environmental crisis. Providing low-impact veg boxes to the local community. Exploring ideas of true sustainability, building community capacity to be resilient. The opportunity arose to buy a wet bit of contiguous ground, seeing the potential of addressing our primary inputs, clean water and fertility and expanding a diverse ecosystem, we bought it!

The Water Meadow, we discovered is a wonder of antiquity, restored would offer multiple benefits. Diverse habitats and species, increased yields, fertility harvesting, soil carbon enrichment, water remediation, nutrient and silt capture, flood management, resilient water supply, amenity, reconnection, working with nature and realising our place in history.

So why don't we use them?

Dan will endeavour to find out. Restoring this water meadow within a community farm offers potential for finance, participation, education and an adventure exploring regenerative ecosystems on a catchment scale.

We hope to foster a spirit of co-operation with all parties that have interest to find the best outcome. That will certainly include eels.

Alexander Barty

(15 minutes plus 5 for questions)

Forgotten Spaces

Much has been made in popular literature of how, less than two hundred years ago, England's inland waterways



teemed with eel. The contrast with the present condition is an inspired literary device, exposing latent changes in the age of the Anthropocene. And yet it is without exception a narrative of loss, reflecting the absence not only of a functioning freshwater ecosystem, but of the culture on which it came to depend.

This lecture pays credence to nuance, exposing traces of historic human-eel relations in our inherited context. Productive readings of space and place will offer solace in a world of rapid socio-economic change.

Alexander became involved with the Sustainable Eel Group in 2020, at which point he was conducting a survey of Meare Fish House for the University of Oxford. He initially worked on the Nikkei memory capture project, collecting, collating, and interpreting oral histories from elver men, eel fishermen, and artists inspired by the European eel. Over time, he migrated towards a communications role, deploying his experience copywriting for architecture and heritage conservation purposes. His upcoming PhD thesis considers how cultural output shaped the trajectory of water engineering policy in England's inland fishing communities.

Refreshment break for 15 minutes

Abigail Mackay

(20 minutes plus 5 for questions)

Identifying the presence of Anguilla anguilla in the Somerset levels using eDNA



The European eel is a critically endangered fish that migrates from marine spawning sites to spend its juvenile years in European freshwater and brackish waters. Traditionally the Somerset Levels supported an abundant eel population, but recent drastic population declines are thought to have resulted, in part, from a lack of good quality freshwater habitat. In September 2023, WWT carried out environmental DNA (eDNA) surveys along the River Axe, River Parrett, and Huntspill River which included samples taken from tributaries and connected ditch networks.

Habitat surveys were completed, and water chemistry was measured at each sample point. This study provides a baseline for the presence of eels in the Somerset Levels and direction for future research into the use of inland freshwater habitats by eel.

Abi Mackay, researcher in the Wetland Bioscience team at WWT



Simon Phelps (10 minutes plus 5 for questions). An overview of the Somerset eel working group

As part of Simon's wider nature recovery work Simon chairs the Somerset eel working group.

In his short talk he will introduce the work of the group and explain why he feels there is a lot to be hopeful about when it comes to eels in Somerset! **Simon is a Senior Adviser working for Natural England**. He has two main areas of responsibility in his role, firstly project managing the Somerset Coast, Levels and Moors Nature Recovery Project, and secondly supporting Somerset Council in developing their Local Nature Recovery Strategy.





Sustainable *Eel* Group

Andrew Kerr (20 minutes plus 5 for questions)

Combatting eel trafficking the largest wildlife crime of a living creature on the planet.

Andrew founded SEG 15 years ago with the purpose of accelerating the eels' recovery throughout its natural range (Europe and beyond) a project that would likely take a century....'recovery will not be in my lifetime', he and other eel leaders so often say.

To date SEG has concentrated its work on supporting river and wetland restoration and then reinventing the eel commercial sector using the **SEG Standard for responsible use**.

Andrew will also describe and reveal the story of how SEG has played a crucial role in combatting eel trafficking, the largest wildlife crime of a living creature on the planet.

Andrew has always enjoyed a passion for the natural world and has been very active in governance roles with the Wildlife Trusts before taking up the eel cause. He ran his own management consultancy business for 25 years and held leadership roles in both the Army and Clarks Shoes.

Professor Mark Everard

(25 minutes plus 5 minutes for questions)

Wetlands and the needs of fish

The diverse needs of different fishes, including eels, and how these are met by wetlands and the wider ecological needs and how these have been hampered by landscape conversion, drawing on examples of salmonids, burbot and eels.



Professor Mark Everard is an author, scientist and broadcaster with extensive involvement in the worlds of environment and sustainability, angling and music.

Mark's books and other publications and his frequent TV, radio and other media contributions span these topics and others besides, all forming part of his personal mission to contribute to cleaner waters for all in a sustainable world.

Professor Mark Everard PhD, BSc (Hons 1), MConv, FLS, CEnv, CSci, FIEnvSc.

Director, Pundamilia Ltd - Visiting Professor, Bournemouth University - Associate Professor of Ecosystem Services, UWE.

Geoff Carss

(20 minutes plus 5 minutes for questions)

Somerset Eel Recovery Project (SERP)



Geoff will bring us all up to date with the

SERP journey so far – share some film footage from Verity White and outline some of our forward plans.

Geoff is the founder and CEO of Wilder Sensing and Ethos Wilder. Growing up in Botswana and Northumberland he really enjoyed getting close to nature.

After obtaining multiple degrees in Geology, Geoff started a successful career as a Technologist, Entrepreneur and Environmental Advocate. He also served on the Board of Directors in a number of technology startups, and as trustee for the Bristol Avon Rivers Trust.

After observing the continued decline of biodiversity in the UK and around the world, Geoff started the Wilder Sensing project in order to bring the latest technologies to the environmental debate. His vision is to enable a more evidence based approach to addressing our environmental challenges.

Closing conference address – Andrew Kerr

Eel Release at Clyse Hole

Eel release – Andrew Kerr

There will be a 15 minute walk from the venue. Crossing the road at the traffic lights on Street Road and then taking the footpath following the historic Mill Stream to Clyse Hole, an area that has an unnavigable weir (for the eels to navigate upstream) on the River Brue. We will release (with necessary permissions) above this weir and on the Northside of the Brue - this will be a community event, and anyone can come along to witness this special release.

The Brue has had an interesting life, steeped in history, a greatly re-engineered water body and in parts canalised to greater assist the drainage of the Levels and Moors. It is alleged Christianity arrived via the Axe and Brue rivers and along its old course many old Christian enclosures stand – one in particular that had a deep cultural relationship with eels in the way it paid its rent - 7,000 eels a year - sent to the Abbey in Glastonbury....how times have changed.

The eels will be released gently into the river using a thatched shute/s and the river blessing will be held at this time.

It's a very atmospheric spot – take care some of the ground is uneven - please wear suitable footwear and remember we are walking beside rivers and streams that are deep. Please keep any children on the walk accompanied at all times. There are no gates or styles to cross.

What 3 words: ///warms.canal.restores



Eel release location with a superb view of the Tor



Dr. Laura Weldon The eDNA Consultancy



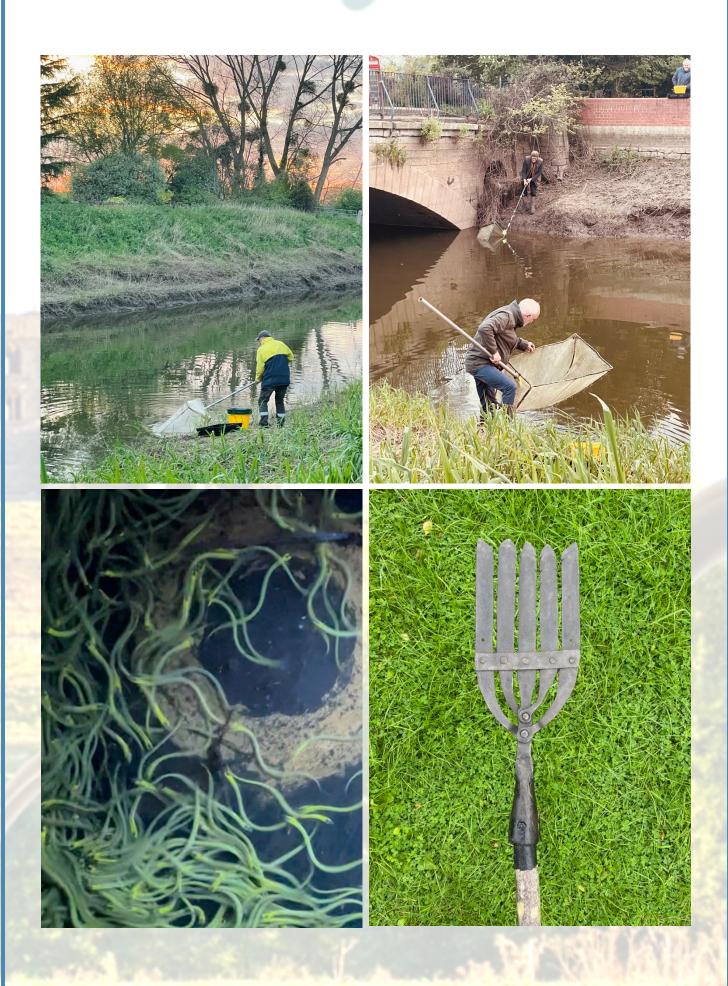
The Somerset Eel Conference

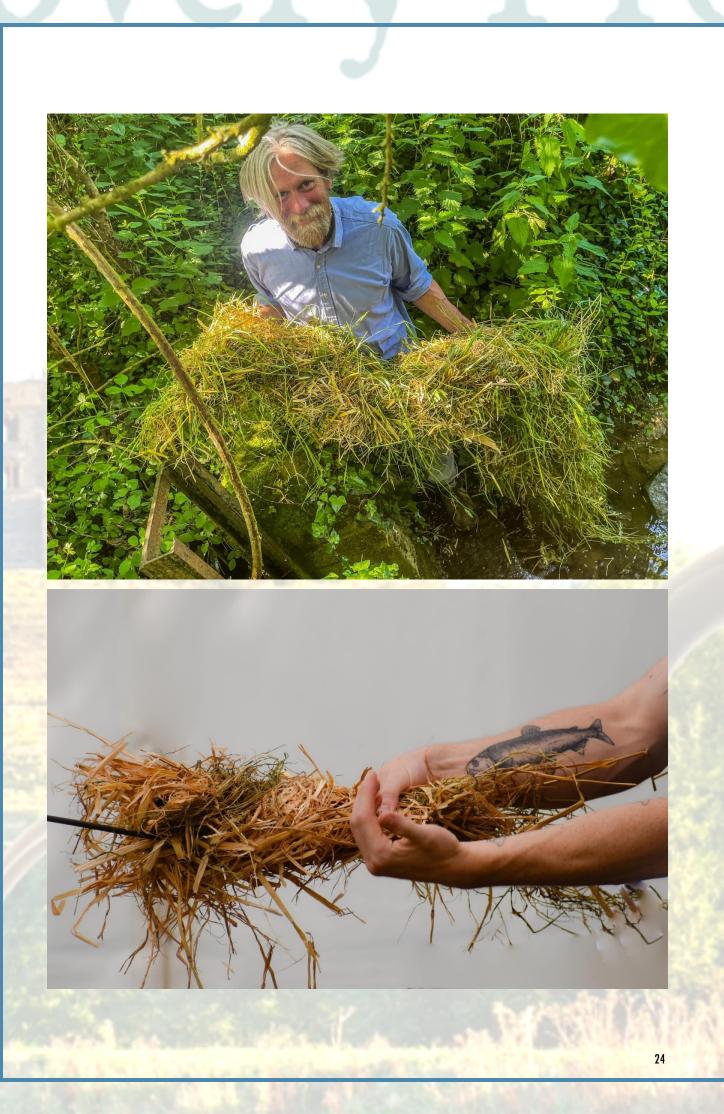
Conference launch - special eDNA offer for Eel Conference attenders (20% discount for kits sold on the day) £128 for survey level and £80 for citizen science detection (including the analyses)

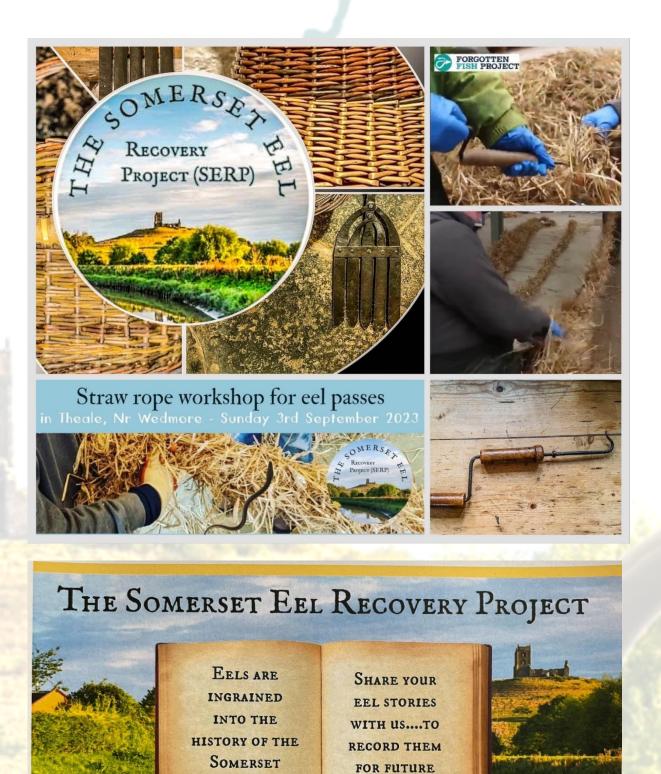
A conference promotion











"Share your eel stories with us to record them for future generations..."

GENERATIONS

LEVELS AND WE

ARE IN DANGER OF LOOSING OUR CONNECTIONS



Report your sighting to our EEL HOTLINE

Things to include in your email: Grid reference - Time - Date - Quantity - Weather - Size - Conditions at the location ie at a barrier - Anything else vanessa@somerseteelrecoveryproject.co.uk

EEL CAFÉ





DROP IN - COME & TALK EELS

SECOND FRIDAY OF EVERY MONTH 10.30-11.30AM

General information

www.redbrickbuilding.co.uk

A little bit about our conference space

- Community
- Arts
- Education
- Enterprise

benefit society.

The Red Brick Building is an innovative communityowned social enterprise registered as a community

In 2009 local people saved the former Morlands Factory buildings from



demolition as an asset for the community. Since then, they have raised close to $\pounds 1$ million ($\pounds 830,000$ for the restoration) through community shares, grants and local investment from individuals to restore two of the three derelict buildings. These have been turned into a vibrant community space for all ages providing a place to meet, work, train and relax - but there's still more to do!

RBB offers

Affordable hot-desk space; workspaces for social enterprises and small businesses; artisan workshops; a youth club for 11-16yrs; a community garden and spaces hosting a variety of events including regular live music, classes, workshops and exhibitions.

RBB hosts

A weekly homeless drop-in, regular classes including yoga, and Pilates.

Art and wellbeing. We also have a range of volunteering opportunities and provide training, skill sharing and networking.

Join us

We are working towards financial sustainability and generating income - wherever possible, we haven't reached that stage yet.

We need people who value what we're doing to support us financially. We'd also love to hear from anyone who has an interest in transforming Building C from a derelict building (which is currently ongoing) into another exciting, creative and unique space for local people.

If you can help, please become a shareholder or contact RBB to make a donation.

There are toilets off the main restaurant and also upstairs via the entrance lobby – these can be accessed before restaurant doors open at 9.30am..

Lunchboxes you bring – please don't eat these in the Tannery Garden or restaurant as this is a separate business, you might find some space in the nearby community garden found off the car park or alternatively in the conference space. Drinks can be purchased from the bar.

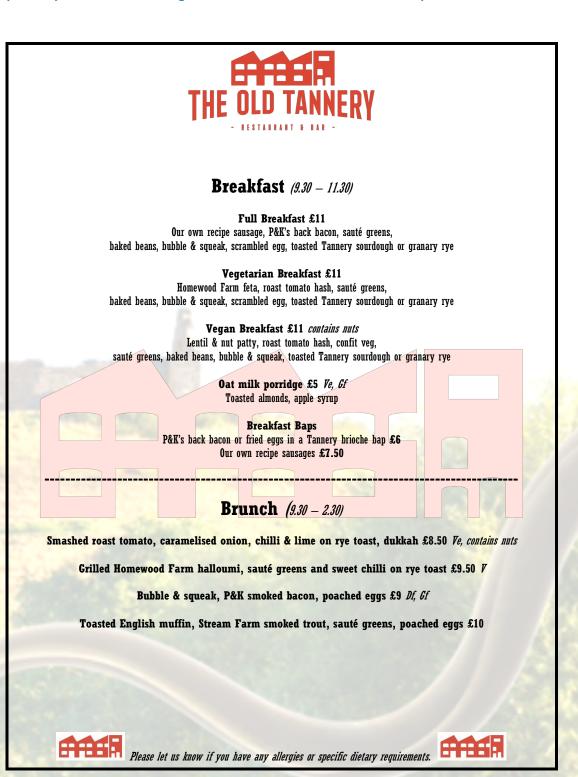
Eating at RBB on the conference day

Tea/coffee and biscuits will be served during both the morning and the afternoon break.

It's advisable to bring a packed lunch or...

"We are very lucky to have The Old Tannery

adjacent to the event space – so, if you fancy having lunch in the restaurant please book a table in advance – please make sure you order your food well in advance" If you would like to order anything to eat on the day you need to reserve a table and order well in advance. Ordering on the day may not be an option if the kitchen is busy.



If you would like to order anything to eat on the day you need to reserve a table and order well in advance. Ordering on the day may not be an option if the kitchen is busy.



Check out The Old Tanner website for more information www.theoldtanneryglastonbury.co.uk

Ring reservations: 01458 440558

Getting here

(and other useful bits of info)

To retain your seat on the conference day please arrive on time – we expect this event to sell out – there may be some capacity to join us on the day without having purchased a ticket in advance. If you have purchased a ticket, please plan and arrive in good time. Bought a ticket you no longer want? Let us know in good time so we can find a new home for it.

Venue postcode: BA6 9FT

There is full disabled access – if you have extra needs please get in touch and ask for help: vanessa@somerseteelrecoveryproject.co.uk

There are renovation works going in Building C next door – but it shouldn't affect us.

Wifi code: This will be made available upon arrival.

Plenty of space for bikes and if you are coming on foot bravo!

Parking is available but is limited to about 50 cars – we have been given a **temporary exemption** for needing a parking permit as there will be so many of us - please try and car share where possible and arrive early.

Access on the day will be from the fire escape doors – look for the signs - you can access this via the disabled ramp.

Nearest train stations are:

Burnham & Highbridge

Taxis - 07544 111002 & 01278 794545

Castle Cary

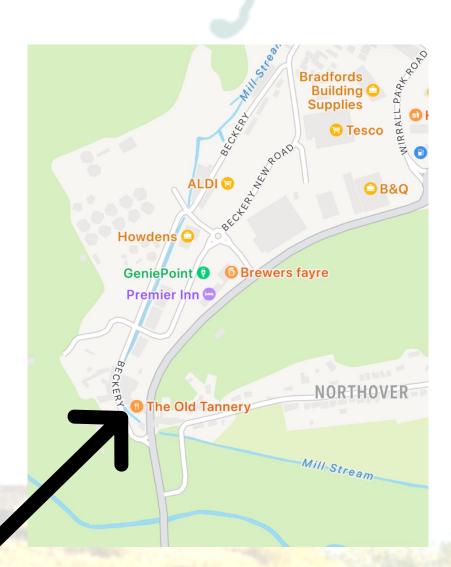
Taxis - 07563 612 473 & 07711 572 038

There is a bus stop outside of RBB – numerous services plus Mendip Explorer 376

Electric car charging – closest one is at Brewers Fayre at Beckery – Genie point – to use this charger you must give your car number plate at reception to avoid a fine.

Morrisons on the Glastonbury Road – fast charger is available. Instavolt available at McDonalds, there are car chargers available in Clarks Village Carparks – also see Zap map online.

Glastonbury High Street can offer you a fresh bakery and wholefood store.



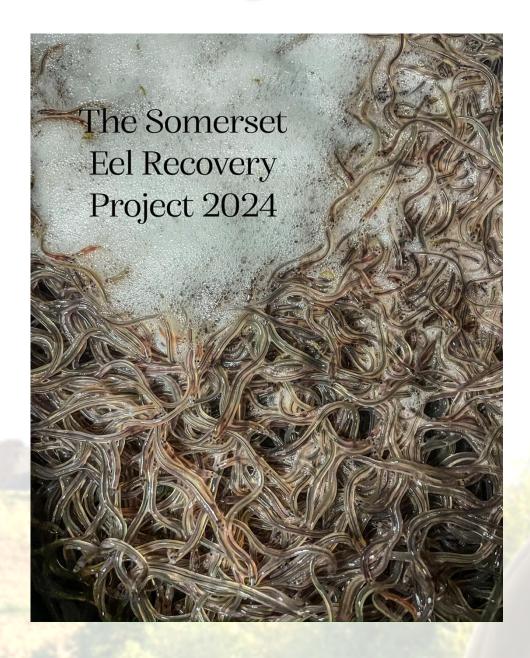
The Red Brick building

What 3 words for the venue: ///automatic.vowing.satellite

Nearest hospital – Glastonbury Minor Injury

Nearest Chemist - Boots in Street

Notes:



www.somerseteelrecoveryproject.co.uk

Should you wish to support us by making a financial donation to further our work, you can use the code below – many thanks

