

The European Eel

Factsheet 6

Elver Poaching

Environment Agency bailiffs have had their busiest season ever tackling a wave of illegal elver fishing on the River Parrett in Somerset.

Tempted by 'quick profits', a growing number of unscrupulous fishermen have been resorting to illegal methods to boost their catch. Between February 15 and May 20 2010, Environment Agency bailiffs reported 10 people and seized more than 50 illegal nets.

Over-sized nets give illegal fishermen an unfair advantage over their law-abiding counterparts, who are growing increasingly concerned at the number of 'rogue' netsmen flouting the law. Licensed elver fishermen are only permitted to use dip nets. These must be operated by hand and not fixed to the riverbank in any way.



A legal elver dip net.

A disturbing trend this year has been an unprecedented increase in the number of 'flow nets'. These huge nets are highly efficient and less selective than dip nets. Measuring up to 18 metres in length, these nets are tethered to the bank by strong ropes. They rely on the river current funnelling elvers and other fish into the wide opening and down to the smaller end, where they can be easily removed.

One net, recently seized on the tidal Parrett, contained 15 kilos of elver, worth approximately £3,000. The price of elvers can be as high as £500 a kilo. Such large catches are unsustainable and seriously threaten the survival of elvers that have suffered a massive drop in numbers in recent years.

Environment Agency bailiffs have been working closely with the police in their latest crackdown on illegal fishing on the River Parrett. The 10 individuals caught so far now face prosecution. Their equipment has been seized. See <http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/news/119357.aspx> for more information.



An illegal flow net, seized from the River Parrett.

More information

The latest international advice on eel stocks can be found at - <http://www.ices.dk/committe/acom/comwork/report/2009/2009/eel-eur.pdf>.

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