

Male great crested newt with smooth newt Photo Dave Kilbey

Amphibians and reptiles living in the River Nene in the East of England are celebrating today after the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) backed a project to conserve their habitats.

Froglife, a wildlife conservation charity, has received a grant of £472,400 from HLF for its River Nene Dragon Finder project. Over the next four and a half years, people who live alongside the river will be brought together to work on improving, restoring and creating over 150 habitat sites for local wildlife.

A recent assessment of European species carried out by the IUCN (International Union of Conservation of Nature) found that 59% of amphibians and 42% of reptile species are in decline. The main threat is habitat loss and disease and for instance, over the last 50 years one third of the ponds in the UK have disappeared.

Along the River Nene, locals and visitors will be able to take part in habitat management and species identification and monitoring. A varied programme of events and activities will be held including Dragon Trail Fun Days, Dragon Boat Festivals, Dragon Boat Tours and opportunities to swim with the Dragons in local pools. A wildlife themed tapestry or ‘mapestry’ will be created accompanied by a leaflet providing information on local wildlife sites and the species that can be spotted at them.

Kathy Wormald, Froglife CEO, said: “We are very grateful to Heritage Lottery Fund for this grant. It will provide Froglife with an excellent opportunity to inspire local communities in the East of England about amphibians and reptiles and their

intriguing lives, whilst also introducing people to the many local green spaces on our doorsteps that can be enjoyed by all. We'll be hosting some exceptionally creative activities alongside much needed habitat creation and restoration work. The project will also provide employment opportunities in the region through offering two traineeships who will be trained in public engagement and wildlife conservation."

Running through the counties of Northamptonshire, Huntingdonshire, Cambridgeshire and Lincolnshire, the River Nene and the Nene Valley is rich in natural and cultural heritage. It's important not just for the species that inhabit the river, but also for the people who enjoy it recreationally and the large number of businesses who make their living from visitors to this beautiful region.

Drew Bennellick, Head of Landscape and Natural Heritage at HLF, said: "The recent dramatic decline in the UK's reptile and amphibian habitats clearly needs to be addressed. We loved the Froglife Trust's creative solution to this environmental problem. It will give everyone connected to the River Nene - from local farmers to walkers and cyclists – the chance to get involved and learn more about wildlife conservation. The project has the potential to make a real difference in the area and we'll be watching how it progresses with great interest."

Froglife have run successful similar schemes in London and Scotland, also funded by HLF. Since starting in London in October 2012 the project has worked on 11 wildlife sites and has run 136 public events. The project started in Scotland in January 2014 and so far this year it has worked on four wildlife sites and has run 19 public events.

Notes to editors

- There will be a full events diary on the Froglife website once the project is launched in January 2015.
- Through downloading the Froglife App and submitting any sightings of amphibians and reptiles residents in the East of England can get involved immediately and do not have to wait until January. Find out more at Froglife's Dragon finder page.

About Froglife

Froglife is a national wildlife charity committed to the conservation of amphibians and reptiles – frogs, toads, newts, snakes and lizards – and saving the habitat that they depend on. Central to our ethos is to involve as many people as possible into being able to take positive, practical action to save our wildlife.

Further information

Froglife: Kathy Wormald on 01733 602 102, email: Kathy.Wormald@froglife.org.

HLF press office: Tom Williams on 020 7591 6056 or email: tom.williams@hlf.org.uk.