

## Press release

### Otterly Amazing: Threatened mammals returning to River Cynon following funding.

The number of otters spotted in the river Cynon has increased following a £50K investment to clean up the river by the Pen y Cymoedd Wind Farm Community Fund.



The 'River for All' project being run by the South East Wales Rivers Trust is a three-year initiative aimed at improving and enhancing the biodiversity of the river Cynon. This has been actioned through three strands; training volunteers to restore and monitor the river, educating local school children and by engaging the local communities through a series of workshops and events around the river and its wildlife.

Gareth Edge, Project officer for "A River for All" said: *"Otters are a threatened species in the UK, with their numbers in recovery. The current state of our rivers is not helping as it is affecting their food chain and therefore their ability to survive. Before we started on the project, the river Cynon was in poor condition and the wildlife populations were in decline. There had only been a few sightings of otters in the past several years.*

*"The river was heavily polluted and full of rubbish, which caused the quality of the water to be very poor. This meant that small insects and wildlife that make up an essential part of the food web for larger fish and mammal populations simply couldn't survive.*

*“Thankfully, over the past two years, we have managed to start to improve the quality of the water and revive the river ecosystem, meaning that the larger mammals like otters are returning. In five years of working on the river I’d never seen an otter and then in the past 18 months I have seen at least five and they are being spotted by visitors on a regular basis.”*

Over the past two years, the project has trained more than 60 volunteers in a variety of different courses including river restoration, river fly monitoring and SmartRivers, analysing invertebrate life to species level with volunteers, as citizen scientists.

Gareth added: *“The volunteers have been a real godsend, without their input, we simply wouldn’t have managed to obtain as much information on the river as we needed.*

*“Although the project has achieved some success in restoring wildlife to the river, it is very much in recovery, and there are many stretches of the river that still require attention. Hopefully, with further research, we can identify pressure points on the river and drill down into the causes and impacts.”*

Gareth has also engaged more than 500 local school children since the project began, by educating them in the ecosystem of the river, water pollutants and what needs to be done to restore the river. The children have also been involved in an eel restoration project which has helped to restore them into the river food web.

Kate Breeze, Executive Director of Pen y Cymoedd said: *“The fund was set up to not only help support local businesses and organisations but also to help maintain and sustain our beautiful country. Habitat restoration is an important part of that and projects like ‘A River for All’ are crucial to helping us maintain a stable ecosystem here in Wales. It is also important to teach young people about how to tackle environmental problems and inspire them to act.”*

The Pen y Cymoedd Wind Farm Community Fund was established in 2017 by energy company Vattenfall and is designed to provide local individuals, groups, organisations, charities, and businesses in Upper Neath, Afan, Rhondda and Cynon Valleys with the opportunity to apply for funding to improve and grow a local service, product, project or activity.

Now in its fifth year, the fund has already catalysed a total of £20.1 million of community investment in the Welsh valleys, supporting more than 450 local projects and businesses in its first five years of operation.

Further information on the fund or to apply can be found here: [www.penycymoeddcic.cymru](http://www.penycymoeddcic.cymru)

Further information about Pen y Cymoedd Wind Farm can be found here: [www.vattenfall.co.uk/penycymoedd](http://www.vattenfall.co.uk/penycymoedd)