



Canal &
River Trust

PRESS RELEASE

Issued: 4 August 2017

RARE PLANT RETURNED TO GREATER MANCHESTER CANAL AFTER REMARKABLE RESCUE

MEDIA INVITATION

Event: Staff and volunteers from the Canal & River Trust charity will return the rare Royal Fern to the Huddersfield Narrow Canal for the first time in 25 years, following a remarkable rescue. The only surviving specimen has been kept alive by ecologist Dr Bob Gough in a plant pot in his back yard since 1992. This is part of the Trust's canal habitat improvement project *Making Special Places for Nature*. Interviews available.

Time: Wednesday 9 August 2017, 11am

Place: Near Winterford Footbridge, Huddersfield Narrow Canal, Mossley Park at Border Mill Fold, Mossley, OL5 9GD.

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***Making Special Places for Nature* - 400 hectares of important canal habitat improved on 10 SSSI sites across UK**

The Canal & River Trust charity will restore the rare plant Royal Fern to the Huddersfield Narrow Canal this month after a remarkable rescue, as part of a canal habitat improvement project *Making Special Places for Nature*.

The plant, believed to be the Huddersfield Narrow Canal's only surviving Royal Fern specimen, was saved in 1992 when the canal was undergoing major restoration work by Huddersfield Canal Society in preparation for its reopening in 2001. Canal Society ecologist Dr Bob Gough noticed the Royal Fern had been discarded during the excavation works and managed to scoop up the plant from the water.

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He took it home to his terraced house in Failsworth and has carefully nurtured it in a black plastic plant pot in his back yard for the last 25 years. A few weeks ago Tom King, ecologist with the Canal & River Trust charity, which now cares for the Huddersfield Narrow Canal, heard about the rare Royal Fern and invited Dr Gough to return the plant to its natural home.



Tom said: “Dr Bob Gough has done an amazing job to keep alive this Royal Fern in a plant pot in his back yard for 25 years. It was only a chance conversation that led me to even know about its existence.

“There are currently no other known examples of Royal Ferns on the Huddersfield Narrow Canal. Six miles of the canal are protected as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) so it is fantastic to return one of the original plants back to the canal bank.

“Royal Ferns like damp, humid, conditions so we are constructing a special bankside planter to give it the best chance to establish a new colony in Mossley.

“We are pleased to be joined by volunteers to help with the job and are looking for more volunteers to assist us in a wide range of tasks towards improving the fragile biodiversity on this special canal.”

Dr Bob Gough said: “I am so pleased to be able to return this Royal Fern back where it should be – by the canal. It’s a very graceful plant and I sincerely hopes it manages to take root in its new home.

“Keeping it alive in a simple plant pot through more than two decades of summer droughts and cold snowy winters has been a labour of love. There were several moments when I thought I might have lost it but each time the plant has recovered and it’s currently thriving. It will be wonderful to see it by water again.”



The re-planting of the Royal Fern, *Osmundia regalis*, is part of the Canal & River Trust’s wider 12 month project, *Making Special Places for Nature*, funded by a £350,000 award from players of the People’s Postcode Lottery. This involves improving vulnerable wildlife waterway habitats across 10 key sites totalling 400 hectares – a combined area greater than the City of London.

The project spans reservoirs and canals in Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire, Greater Manchester, Shropshire, Worcestershire, Staffordshire, Berkshire and mid Wales, and will benefit water shrews, voles, otters, bats, dragonflies and other rare fauna and flora.

The Trust, which cares for 2,000 miles of canals and 63 SSSIs (Sites of Special Scientific Interest), is appealing to volunteers to join it in this mammoth task and hopes to encourage many residents, particularly young people, to roll up their sleeves and get involved in improving their own local nature reserve.

Tasks involve a wide range of habitat protection work including bank restoration, shade removal and improvements in water quality. The project will also assess the health and

populations of various rare species including the shy water shrew, which was last subject to a national survey more than a decade ago.

Canal & River Trust national ecologist Stuart Moodie said: “The Eurasian water shrew and white clawed crayfish are among a wide range of indigenous species which need an extra helping hand. Their natural habitats are threatened by run off from agricultural fertilisers and invasive plants and animals. Increasing the growth of aquatic plants helps encourage insects and invertebrates which in turn promotes healthy populations of fish and small mammals. Biodiversity is the key to a flourishing waterway.

“Getting local people involved in managing these reserves is a key priority. We would appeal to anyone who wants to get in touch with nature and play an important role in conserving their local area to contact us. This is a genuine chance to make a real difference.”

To get involved in volunteering on the Huddersfield Narrow Canal, please contact James Wynn, volunteer coordinator with the Canal & River Trust, email james.wynn@canalrivertrust.org.uk or phone 07786 661614. www.canalrivertrust.org.uk

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For further media requests please contact:

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Notes to editors:

The Canal & River Trust is the guardian of 2,000 miles of historic waterways across England and Wales, caring for the nation’s third largest collection of listed structures, as well as museums, archives, and hundreds of important wildlife sites. We believe that *living waterways transform places and enrich lives* and our role is to make sure there is always a place on your doorstep where you can escape the pressures of everyday life, stretch your legs and simply feel closer to nature. www.canalrivertrust.org.uk / @CanalRiverTrust / @crtcomms

The Huddersfield Narrow Canal is one of three trans-Pennine canals and runs for just under 20 miles from Ashton-Under-Lyne to Huddersfield. It was reopened to boaters in 2001 after a major restoration and includes the Standedge Tunnel Visitor Centre.