# Boom-boat electrofishing records more than 10,000 fish on non-tidal Thames as heat leaves other rivers struggling



The Environment Agency has been carrying out intensive fish surveys along the non‑tidal Thames this summer, deploying a specialised “boom” boat that uses a pulsed electric field to temporarily stun and capture fish for study. The work, conducted between Iffley Lock in Oxford and Teddington Lock in London, is part of the agency’s long‑running programme of standardised fisheries monitoring designed to assess species composition and river health. According to the Environment Agency, the vessel — nicknamed the Thames Trout — is fitted with the largest front‑mounted underwater electrodes in its fleet to cover wide swathes of the channel more efficiently.

Speaking to the Oxford Mail, Jonathan Baxter, team leader at the Environment Agency, described the method and its timing: the electric field gently disrupts a fish’s nervous system so officers can net individuals at dusk, when the river is quieter and many species move nearer the surface. Captured fish are put into aerated holding tanks to recover, then identified, measured and released. The agency’s own guidance and blogposts emphasise that when conducted by trained crews this form of electrofishing is designed to minimise harm while producing repeatable scientific data on age, weight and species make‑up.

The surveys have produced substantial sample numbers. The agency said that in the 2024 survey between Iffley and Benson more than 6,200 fish were caught, and that teams have recorded in excess of 10,000 fish in surveys this year — results the Environment Agency interprets as showing an abundance of healthy fish in surveyed stretches. Industry research supports the value of combining boom‑boat electrofishing with hydroacoustic methods on large, managed lowland rivers: peer‑reviewed work by Environment Agency scientists and collaborators concludes that complementary techniques provide robust time‑series data that can detect long‑term spatial and temporal trends, while also noting limitations around detectability and survey design.

Nevertheless, the agency’s broader operational record this summer underlines that impacts from heat and low flows are a real and uneven threat. In July 2025 fisheries teams used electrofishing techniques to rescue roughly 50 brown trout from a stressed stretch of the River Lambourn, moving fish to deeper reaches after low water levels and high temperatures left them vulnerable. The Lambourn operation — described in an Environment Agency press release — illustrates how dry spells can force reactive conservation measures even as monitoring work on the Thames so far shows resilience in that system. The agency itself cautioned anglers that some species may need longer to recover after extreme heat, urging care when handling catches.

The Thames monitoring effort sits within a decades‑long surveillance programme. Environment Agency summaries from previous surveys have recorded a wide variety of species, including freshwater and marine juveniles in tidal reaches, and volunteers and partner organisations have long contributed to data collection. Scientific assessments underline the importance of continued, standardised monitoring to inform management of abstraction, transfers and climate‑linked temperature change — and to identify barriers to migration for species such as eel and sea trout.

There is also a public‑facing element to the work: rod licence revenue helps fund sustainable fisheries management. Anglers aged 13 and over are required to hold a licence to fish for salmon, trout, eel or freshwater species; junior (13–16) licences are available and one‑day, eight‑day and annual licences can be purchased through official channels. The Environment Agency’s fisheries enforcement officers support compliance with national and local byelaws, working with clubs, the Angling Trust and police to protect stocks and habitats.

Taken together, the surveys illustrate both the strengths and the limits of contemporary river management: standardised electrofishing and hydroacoustic monitoring deliver the detailed data managers need to detect trends and guide action, yet recent local rescues show that extreme weather and low flows can still produce acute conservation challenges. According to the Environment Agency, maintaining and extending evidence‑based monitoring is essential if river managers are to spot emerging problems early and tailor interventions to protect fish populations and the people who enjoy angling on the Thames.

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## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/25375628.river-thames-fish-surveys-carried-using-electric-boat/?ref=rss), [[2]](https://environmentagency.blog.gov.uk/2015/10/29/electrofishing-to-assess-a-rivers-health/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/25375628.river-thames-fish-surveys-carried-using-electric-boat/?ref=rss), [[2]](https://environmentagency.blog.gov.uk/2015/10/29/electrofishing-to-assess-a-rivers-health/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/25375628.river-thames-fish-surveys-carried-using-electric-boat/?ref=rss), [[5]](https://www.mdpi.com/2073-4441/13/20/2932)
* Paragraph 4 – [[7]](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/lam-bourn-again-second-chance-for-hundreds-of-berkshire-fish), [[1]](https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/25375628.river-thames-fish-surveys-carried-using-electric-boat/?ref=rss)
* Paragraph 5 – [[6]](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/fish-survey-reveals-huge-variety-in-river-thames), [[5]](https://www.mdpi.com/2073-4441/13/20/2932)
* Paragraph 6 – [[3]](https://www.gov.uk/fishing-licences/buy-a-fishing-licence), [[4]](https://www.gov.uk/freshwater-rod-fishing-rules), [[1]](https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/25375628.river-thames-fish-surveys-carried-using-electric-boat/?ref=rss)
* Paragraph 7 – [[5]](https://www.mdpi.com/2073-4441/13/20/2932), [[7]](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/lam-bourn-again-second-chance-for-hundreds-of-berkshire-fish), [[1]](https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/25375628.river-thames-fish-surveys-carried-using-electric-boat/?ref=rss)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/25375628.river-thames-fish-surveys-carried-using-electric-boat/?ref=rss> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://environmentagency.blog.gov.uk/2015/10/29/electrofishing-to-assess-a-rivers-health/> - An Environment Agency blog describes how fisheries teams use electrofishing to monitor river health. A mild electric field temporarily immobilises fish, allowing officers to net them, place specimens into holding tanks to recover, take measurements and scale samples, and then release them unharmed. Surveys run between spring and autumn, often at night when fish are more active, and are used to collect long-term, standardised data on age, weight and species composition. Hydroacoustic surveys complement electrofishing on larger or tidal waters. The post emphasises minimal harm, scientific value of repeat surveys, and their role in meeting environmental standards and informing management.
3. <https://www.gov.uk/fishing-licences/buy-a-fishing-licence> - The GOV.UK rod fishing licence page explains when and how to buy licences for England and Wales. It states licences are required to fish for salmon, trout, freshwater fish, smelt or eel with a rod and line, and that children under 13 do not need a licence while juniors aged 13–16 can get free junior licences. Licences may be bought online for one day, eight days or twelve months, and fees and rod limits are detailed. The page lists the Environment Agency fishing licence telephone service and opening hours, explains refund and delivery expectations, and directs users to relevant byelaws.
4. <https://www.gov.uk/freshwater-rod-fishing-rules> - This GOV.UK guidance outlines national freshwater rod fishing rules for England and Wales. It explains anglers must follow national and local byelaws to protect fish stocks and habitats, that a rod licence is required for freshwater species from age 13 upwards, and that additional permissions from landowners are needed for private waters. The guidance details close seasons, tackle restrictions and regional variations, and warns of penalties for non‑compliance. It highlights how byelaws aim to make fisheries sustainable and directs readers to local byelaws and enforcement contacts. The page frames rules as essential for conservation and management.
5. <https://www.mdpi.com/2073-4441/13/20/2932> - A peer‑reviewed article in Water evaluates hydroacoustic and electric‑fishing data to assess long‑term spatial and temporal fish population changes in the River Thames. Authored by Environment Agency scientists and collaborators, the paper demonstrates how standardised hydroacoustic surveys, supported by supplementary boom‑boat electrofishing, provide robust time‑series data for large, managed lowland rivers where destructive sampling is unsuitable. The study discusses detectability limits, survey design and analytical approaches, and recommends combined methods to track trends, inform fisheries management, and assess impacts of abstraction, transfers, and climate‑linked temperature changes. The conclusions support continued, standardised monitoring to guide evidence‑based river management and policy decisions.
6. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/fish-survey-reveals-huge-variety-in-river-thames> - A 2015 Environment Agency press release summarises fisheries surveys on the tidal River Thames, reporting a wide variety of species including dace, smelt, common bream and marine juveniles such as sea bass and flounder. Teams surveyed eight locations between Gravesend and Richmond using netting and identified seventeen species, highlighting long‑running monitoring since the 1960s that informs river health assessments. The release notes the value of volunteers from ZSL and other partners in collecting data, and explains this information helps protect species such as European eel, identifying barriers to migration. The report stresses the surveys’ role in informing conservation and management.
7. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/lam-bourn-again-second-chance-for-hundreds-of-berkshire-fish> - A July 2025 Environment Agency press release describes fisheries officers rescuing about 50 brown trout from the River Lambourn after low water levels and heatwaves left fish stranded. Teams used electrofishing methods to locate and net the fish, moved them into oxygenated tanks, and rehomed them in deeper downstream reaches. The release explains officers will monitor the trout to ensure adjustment and highlights how dry spells and heat can stress river life. It underscores the Agency’s operational work to protect wildlife, explains the cause as reduced rainfall and high temperatures, and provides contact details for media and further information online.