



2024 Partners



ARUP

AtkinsRéalis

The River Restoration Centre (RRC) awards the UK River Prize to celebrate the achievements of those individuals and organisations working to restore our rivers and catchments, recognising the benefits to society of having a healthy natural environment.

2024 UK River Prize winners

Ullswater catchment
wins Catchment-scale
Award

River Rom wins
Project-scale Award

This year's two winners are:

'Ullswater Catchment Restoration' winning the *Catchment-scale Award* and receiving the Nigel Holmes Trophy.

Lead applicant: **National Trust**

Partners: Ullswater Catchment Management Community Interest Company, Environment Agency & Natural England ; and

'Rewilding the Rom' winning the *Project-scale Award* and receiving the RRC Trophy.

Lead applicant: **Thames21**

Partners: London Barking & Dagenham Council, Environment Agency, Essex & Suffolk Water, Havering Council, Havering Wildlife Project, Kusuma Trust UK, Roding, Beam & Ingrebourne Catchment Partnership, Mayor of London, Thames Chase Trust, Fondazione Edmund Mach, cbec

The announcement was made at the annual UK River Prize Awards dinner which was held at Venue Cymru, Llandudno, North Wales, on 24th April 2024. The UK River Prize is hosted and awarded by the River Restoration Centre (RRC) at the annual River Restoration Network Conference. The Award Partners are RRC, Arup and AtkinsRéalis.

This year's impressive entries were judged by a panel of industry experts, including Martin Janes, Pam Nolan, Ann Skinner and Roger Owen.

The Catchment-scale Award and the Project-scale Award reflect the different scales at which river restoration is undertaken.

'Ullswater Catchment Restoration' picked up the Catchment-scale Award for its 10 of years delivering over 280 projects at farm-scale, up to large-scale strategic river and floodplain restoration. This includes over 13km of river restoration, 46ha of water storage, 12km of hedgerow creation, 497ha of wood pasture restoration and 249ha of peat and wetland restoration. Much of the restoration impetus to address historic modifications of the rural landscape was the loss of biodiversity and the impact of storm Desmond in 2015, with the aims to improve flood resilience and the natural environment.

'Rewilding the Rom' won the Project-scale Award for its work to restore natural functioning to the densely urbanised river in Romford, Greater London. In doing so, it has increased the river's resilience to the compounding effects of climate change. This includes providing greater flood storage benefitting downstream communities, improving the Local Nature Reserve's habitat to support biodiversity, improving water quality, and connecting communities to their river environment. This was a true partnership project at all stages, from the project funding sources, the delivery partners, those monitoring the change and benefits and the local communities, and citizen scientists getting involved.

The winners were closely contested by the runners-up which were the Upper Witham Restoration project, led by Environment Agency, and the Riverland Porlock Vale Streams, led by National Trust.

Project Films

Short 5 minute films featuring the winning projects and the runner-up are available to view on the River Restoration Centre's website <https://www.therrc.co.uk/2024-uk-river-prize>

Martin Janes (the River Restoration Centre's Managing Director) presented both winning projects with their trophies, at the evening celebration. The 'Ullswater Catchment Restoration' team was awarded the Nigel Holmes Trophy, named after a hugely influential and passionate river restoration and conservation advocate. Thames21 and their partners in 'Rewilding the Rom', won the RRC Trophy created by Anne Lewis, a river geomorphologist and glass artist, based in Pembrokeshire.



About the UK River Prize Winners

Ullswater, Cumbria – Ullswater Catchment Restoration

Catchment-scale Award & Nigel Holmes Trophy
Lead applicant: National Trust

Ullswater is one of the most iconic destinations in the Lake District, attracting millions of visitors every year and home to thriving rural communities. However, decades of agricultural intensification and land use change have resulted in highly modified rivers and declining biodiversity. The Ullswater catchment restoration project seeks to reverse this decline in habitat and natural processes through working with landowners and local communities to foster change at a catchment scale.





2024 WINNER ULLSWATER, CUMBRIA



2024 UK River Prize Partners:



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The project area includes the headwaters systems, tributaries, rivers, and catchment land draining into Ullswater. These systems have been historically modified to improve the valley bottom areas for farming, with straightening, deepening, embanking, revetments, and width rationalisation a common sight. Hidden alterations to the functioning of the system are also present with underdrainage significantly impacting on the natural hydrology. The consequence of such high levels of modification combined with a changing climate has increased the flood risk to local communities. This is coupled with frequent seasonal drying of main river systems during periods of reduced rainfall. Valley floor modification is significant, and the combined effect of all changes has been to severely degrade the wet environment with consequent losses of biodiversity.

In response the Ullswater catchment Partnership has been working to deliver management initiatives and physical interventions for 10 years. The partners have delivered 282 projects, including over 13km of river restoration, 46ha of water storage, 12km of hedgerow creation, 497ha of wood pasture restoration and 249ha of peat and wetland restoration. A key large-scale achievement has been the river and valley bottom naturalisation work which stretches from the bottom of Kirkstone Pass to Ullswater and includes large areas of the Brothers Water SSSI and the River Eden and tributaries SSSI.

Numerous farm scale initiatives have been carried out across the catchment with the partnership carrying out restoration across a total area of 843ha. The interventions across the catchment include:

- River restoration through de-culverting, embankment removal, small barrier removal, stage 0 interventions, and re-meandering over 13.7km
- Pond creation and offline water storage totalling 46ha
- Hedgerow creation and restoration and riparian corridor restoration over 16km
- Wood pasture creation and restoration across 497ha
- Peat and wetland restoration over 249ha

The project outputs are monitored through several approaches including repeat freshwater and terrestrial ecological surveying, soil nutrient, organic matter and carbon sequestration analysis, sediment storage analysis, hydrological monitoring of large interventions, fish surveying and redd counting and citizen science monitoring initiatives.

About the UK River Prize Winners

River Rom, Greater London – Rewilding the Rom

Project-scale Award & the RRC Trophy

Lead applicant: Thames21

The River Rom, south of Roneo Corner, is heavily degraded. Straightening has resulted in the river losing much of the natural flow and habitat diversity that is needed to support rich biodiversity. It has also resulted in the loss of much of the river's connectivity to its floodplain. This means the Rom lacks many of the associated wetland habitats that would slow the speed of destructive floodwaters and support the area's biodiversity.





2024 WINNER RIVER ROM, GREATER LONDON



2024 UK River Prize Partners:



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The Rewilding the Rom project presented a rare opportunity to restore natural functioning to an urban river in London and in doing so, increase the rivers resilience to the compounding effects of climate change. Project aims are broadly fourfold; providing both offline and online flood storage, increasing resilience of downstream communities; diversifying the Chase Local Nature Reserves (LNR) habitat to support biodiversity; improving water quality of the Rom; and connecting communities to their river and environment. By providing these multiple benefits, this project demonstrates measures to address the biodiversity crisis are often closely intertwined with improving local communities' resilience to climate change.

In 2021, Land of the Fanns Partnership Scheme funding facilitated the excavation of two seasonal wetlands (scrapes) on the Havering Side of the River Rom, in Grenfell Park to protect flood-prone properties downstream of the site. While the primary purpose of the scrapes is flood protection, they also provide habitats for flora and fauna. Flood modelling has been completed, showing that the scrapes, along with the other interventions, contribute to a reduction in flood risk to several downstream properties and the locally important Maylands Health Centre which currently serves 10% of Havering's population.

Subsequently, eleven large wood deflectors have been installed in the River Rom, and a tributary has been realigned with the goal of diversifying the flow within the channel. By restoring sedimentary processes, different habitats are created to support fish spawning, invertebrates and other riverine species. Visual inspections of the deflectors indicate that they are generating new erosional and depositional features.

In 2022, Thames21 began work on the opposite bank at the Chase LNR. These works involved breaching a large flood embankment in three locations, behind which three interconnected wetland scrapes have been excavated. In high flows, the river now floods into this newly connected area of floodplain, creating an area of species-rich seasonal wetland. BEPERP, who are monitoring the Rom as part of their project, have found improvements in biological indicators already.



the River Restoration Centre
Working to restore and enhance our rivers

Hosted and awarded by RRC

Quotes from the UK River Prize Partners

"This year's river prize entries covered a fascinating range of projects, and the judging panel are always excited to read about the progress being made to restore the natural function and landscape from small streams to big catchments. As always, it was difficult choosing the finalists. All four are great examples of excellent projects really pushing new approaches and showing bold ambition to restore natural processes to achieve ecosystem recovery. This year's finalists are located across England, from the South-west, London, Lincolnshire, and the Lake District. Each of the four finalists have achieved amazing results through the dedication and hard work of the many partners and communities involved."

Martin Janes, UK River Prize judge



"It is a real privilege to be a judge for the UK River Prize, as we get the opportunity to read about the fantastic and varied projects the river restoration community is undertaking across the UK. It was particularly difficult to decide between the projects this year. Hard work, agile partnerships and dedication over many years are really paying dividends and yielding vital evidence of effectiveness and multiple benefits. The commitment of partners and communities restoring rivers in challenging environments also shone through in this year's finalists. All four demonstrate tenacity, being in it for the long haul, with excellent partnerships that diversify the aims, skills and funding opportunities involved. Keep them coming...next year it could be you!"

Ann Skinner, UK River Prize judge

"I always look forward to judging applications for the UK River Prize. It's such a positive and uplifting experience learning about some of the excellent projects delivering multiple benefits across the river restoration community in the UK. This year was no exception! The success of so many of these projects is down to the hard work, commitment and enthusiasm of all the partners and the different skills and benefits they bring at every stage. This year I was particularly impressed by the long-term vision and commitment of project leads and partners and their collaborative working to deliver a healthier natural environment in both urban and rural settings. All four finalists should rightly celebrate their achievements to improve the natural functioning of our rivers and catchments, to supporting nature's recovery and for the benefits they have delivered to society as a result. Congratulations to all involved in this year's finalist projects."

Pam Nolan, UK River Prize judge

"AtkinsRéalis is proud to partner the 2024 UK River Prize. Our commitment to improving the water environment goes back many years and we are delighted to be able to support this prestigious event that recognises the delivery of outstanding contributions to river restoration. Congratulations to all the finalists your nominations are well deserved."

Dr Kevin Skinner, Associate Director, Environment, AtkinsRéalis



"Restoration of the UK's rivers is critical to our nation's nature recovery efforts. We are proud to continue to support the UK River Prize as a means of encouraging good practice and to celebrate projects that contribute to maintaining and improving the health of our rivers."

Will McBain, Director, Arup



Note to editors

The River Restoration Centre

The RRC is an independent, UK-wide, not-for-profit company that champions the natural and societal benefits of restoring river systems. We support river restoration by collating project information and evidence, developing best practice and sharing this knowledge throughout the river and catchment management community.

Physical modification of rivers is a key pressure in the UK and the main reason why rivers are failing to achieve good ecological status. We actively promote the re-establishment of natural processes, features and biodiversity in river systems, and support the need for 'space for water' to allow reconnection of river channels with their floodplains and wetlands.

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Further information is available at <http://www.therrc.co.uk/uk-river-prize>

