

EUROPEAN OTTER *LUTRA LUTRA LUTRA* SPECIES ACTION PLAN

1. INTRODUCTION

The European otter *Lutra lutra lutra* is a UKBAP priority species which suffered a dramatic decline in the 1960s³⁹.

Relevant Legislation/Species Status	
priority (P) or species of conservation concern (S)	P
EC Habitats Directive	Annex IIa, IVa
Conservation Regs 1994	Sch. 2
Berne Convention 1982	App. II
Bonn Convention 1979	-
CI TES 1975	Annex A
WCA 1981	Sch. 5, 6



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2. CURRENT STATUS

2.1 UK and Wales

Otters utilise all wetland habitats, including rivers and streams, lakes and ponds, but also ditches, marshes, reedbeds, swamps and wet woodland alongside watercourses. They feed mainly on fish but will also take amphibians and crustaceans, and occasionally small birds and mammals. Generally nocturnal, they require dense cover for lying-up during the day and for breeding, normally provided by tree root cavities, riverbank burrows, scrub or tall waterside vegetation.

The otter population decline in the 1960s was attributed mainly to the use of organochloride pesticides, such as DDT in agriculture, but they are also affected by hunting and habitat fragmentation. The decline in south Wales probably occurred during the period of industrialisation in which many rivers were polluted, destroying the food supply. National surveys have indicated a gradual general recovery since the late 1980s, and in recent years repeated surveys carried out by the Vincent Wildlife Trust have demonstrated that otters are generally widespread throughout Wales. There are good populations in the North and South, and since the last national survey there is evidence of a spread into the South Wales Valleys.

2.2 Caerphilly County Borough

The otter is known to be present in the county borough, but the exact distribution has not yet been identified. The 1991 Vincent Wildlife Trust otter survey found positive signs of otters on the Rhymney and Bargoed-Rhymney rivers, and the lower reaches of the Ebbw. Other surveys have found signs on the Nant Bargoed, and most rivers in the area probably now support otters. Lying-up or rest sites are quite widespread but no breeding sites have been confirmed. Two artificial holts were built on the Sirhowy to help the re-colonisation of otters in this area.

2.3 Links with Habitats

- **Wetlands** (rivers, streams, ponds, reedbeds, swamps, lakes and reservoirs)
- *Deciduous Woodlands* (wet woodland)
- *Species-rich Grasslands* (rhos pasture)
- Dense scrub

3. CURRENT FACTORS AFFECTING THE SPECIES

- Lack of prey due to poor water quality and poor habitat.
- Riparian habitat loss due to development along the river corridors and grazing pressure.
- Incidental deaths, mainly road traffic accidents.
- Disturbance due to development close to rivers and wetlands.
- Pollution of watercourses, both physical and chemical.

4. CURRENT ACTION

- 4.1 The Wildlife Trust's Welsh Water Otters and Rivers Project was launched in April 2000, and is based with the Glamorgan Wildlife Trust in the South Wales area. An advisory leaflet for landowners was produced in 2000.
- 4.2 The Environment Agency published an *Otters and Rivers Handbook* in December 1999.
- 4.3 Actions for otters are included in the Environment Agency LEAPs¹⁵ and the Agency considers impacts on otters when dealing with applications for work in or adjacent to rivers.
- 4.4 Road traffic accident black spots have been identified in Wales.
- 4.5 Highways Agency has produced guidance on mitigation work for otters in new road and bridge construction works.
- 4.6 Rehabilitation facilities for injured or orphaned otters are available locally.
- 4.7 Keep Wales Tidy runs educational programmes for its river care groups (Clean Rivers Project) including otter survey and otter holt construction training days.

5. OBJECTIVES AND TARGETS

5.1 UK Objectives and Targets

- 5.1.1 Maintain and expand existing otter populations.
- 5.1.2 By 2010, restore breeding otters to all catchments and coastal areas where they have been recorded since 1960.

5.2 Caerphilly Objectives and Targets

- 5.2.1 Clarify the current status and distribution of the European otter in Caerphilly County Borough. (Target: 2004)

- 5.2.2 Protect existing populations and encourage natural recolonisation through appropriate management, restoration and re-creation of suitable habitats, in particular breeding sites. (Target: 2008 and ongoing)
- 5.2.3 Reduce the threat of road traffic accidents in the county borough. (Target: 2005 and ongoing)

6. ACTION AND KEY PARTNERS

Action	Key Partners		Year to be complete or in place by:								
	Lead	Partners	2003	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
6.1 Policy and Legislation											
6.1.1 Ensure the UDP and LEAPs contain policies and actions to protect otters and their habitats.	CCBC	CCW EA	✓								✓
6.1.2 Seek to designate important breeding sites as SIN C, SSSI or LNR.	CCBC	CCW	✓								✓
6.2 Site Safeguard and Management											
6.2.1 Identify important areas of otter habitat/breeding sites and safeguard through management agreements.	CCBC	EA CCW GWT GLWT	✓								
6.2.2 Ensure that all new road/bridge construction/other developments do not have adverse effects on otters.	CCBC	CCW EA	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
6.2.3 Seek to improve or create otter habitat as opportunities arise.	EA	KWT CCBC CCW	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
6.3 Species Management and Protection											
6.3.1 Facilitate mitigation to safeguard otters on roads, e.g. underpasses.	CCBC	CCW NAW	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
6.3.2 Continue to require otter surveys and mitigation for planning applications.	CCBC	CCW EA	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
6.3.3 Continue to implement wildlife legislation.	Gwent Police	CCW	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
6.4 Advisory											
6.4.1 Provide advice on otter conservation and habitat management to landowners, developers, anglers, fisheries and farmers.	EA	CCBC CCW KWT VWT		✓							
6.5 Future Research and Monitoring											
6.5.1 Undertake surveys to monitor the distribution of otters.	EA	CCW VWT KWT GWT GLWT		✓			✓			✓	
6.5.2 Continue to provide training for river care groups, and other interested groups and individuals.	KWT	EA	✓		✓		✓		✓		✓
6.5.3 Support the setting up of a local record centre for South Wales, and seek to establish an otter database with information on distribution, nature and condition of breeding sites.	CBP	(EA CCW)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
6.6 Communications and Publicity											
6.6.1 Raise public awareness of otters and the importance of reporting sightings/road kills.	CBP	-	✓			✓			✓		