

Otter *Lutra lutra*

Background

The European otter (*Lutra lutra*) is widely recognised as an emblem for nature conservation in the UK because it is a top predator and an important biological indicator of the health of our rivers and wetlands. Monitoring the status of the otter therefore gives us a valuable measure of the state of our water and wetland ecosystems. In Wales as in much of the UK, it is a largely nocturnal animal and is rarely observed in the wild. The otter suffered serious declines throughout most of its European range, and by the mid 1970s the UK otter population had been



reduced to such an extent that it only survived in Scotland, parts of Wales and south-west England. The baseline survey undertaken during 1977-78 found signs at 208 sites from a total of 1018 giving a percentage positive of 20%. In 2009-10, signs of otters were recorded at 996 sites out of a national total of 1108 giving the percentage of positive sites as **90%**. The results of this fifth national survey show a continued trend of recovery for the otter with some individual catchments attaining full capacity for the species.

Status in Wales

Range Widespread 996/1108 (90%) survey sites positive in 2010
 Population *tbc*

Threats

(as identified in the 2008 BAP reporting)

- Accidental mortality: Fisheries by catch – entanglement/drowning
 fyke nets and lobster creels
- Accidental mortality: Road kills
- Pollution – freshwater Industrial / commercial

Status

Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), Schedule 5
 The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010, Schedule 2
 EC Habitats & Species Directive, Annex II and IV

Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, s42 Species of principal importance for the conservation of biological diversity in Wales
 UK Biodiversity Action Plan priority species

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Wales BAP targets

Set in 2005 at UK level and adopted as Welsh target in 2009.

Targets to be reviewed in 2014

Code	Target type	Target	Units	2005 (baseline)	2010	2015	2020	2025
LIT1	Range	Maintain the current distribution of the otter throughout Wales	Occupied 10 km squares	205	205	205	205	205
LIT2	Population size	Expand the distribution of otters to achieve 85% occupancy of 10km squares by 2015.	Occupied 10 km squares	205	225	235	245	255

Actions

Code	Action Type	Action	Action lead	Ecosystem Groups	Delivery Agents
LIA1	Habitat Creation/ Restoration	Work towards meeting water quality objectives on all rivers across Wales so they can support healthy fish stocks. This can be achieved through implementation of the Water Framework Directive.	NRW (Rob Strachan)	Freshwater	NRW; Freshwater Ecosystem Group; WTW
LIA2	Habitat Creation/ Restoration	Ensure that riparian habitat has sufficient bankside vegetation and undisturbed terrestrial cover to provide resting and breeding sites for otters.	NRW (Rob Strachan)	Freshwater	LBAPs; NRW; WTW
LIA3	Survey and Monitoring	Ensure a national long-term monitoring system is in place with sufficient power to detect population or distribution changes at an agreed level. Survey of SACs where otter is a feature of interest to ensure favourable conservation status	NRW (Rob Strachan)		NRW; LBAPs;
LIA4	Communication - advisory	Promote advice about preventing anthropogenic otter mortalities, including conflicts with fishing interests. Continue collation of RTA data and PORMs* assessments and subsequent remedial action.	NRW (Rob Strachan)	Freshwater	NRW; LBAPs; ROSG
LIA5	Research	Maintain an otter health surveillance system through a programme of post-mortem work.	NRW (Rob Strachan)		NRW; Cardiff University; LBAPs
LIA6	Research	Support and encourage the	NRW (Rob		NRW;

		development of methods for assessing otter abundance, including work on social structure and behaviour.	Strachan)		Cardiff/ Swansea Universities
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Code	Date	Milestone	Progress
LI M1	By 2010	Carryout full survey of all National Survey sites for the fifth national survey of Wales	Completed.
LI M2	By 2015	Establish an assessment of all SACs where otters are a feature of interest to ensure favourable conservation status	Currently underway by NRW
LIM3	By 2015	Facilitate range expansion across priority habitats within WFD catchments, Living Landscapes and Futurescapes initiatives	Currently underway (NRW, WTW, RSPB)
LI M4	By 2012-15	Establish network of reporting and collecting otters killed on roads for post mortem and analysis by the Cardiff University Otter Project	Currently underway by NRW, Trunk road agency, IBAPs etc..
LI M5	By 2012-15	Identify priority hotspots where otters are killed on roads for remediation at the local authority level	Currently underway by CUOP, Trunk road agency, IBAPs etc..

Actions implementation

LBAP areas where action is required (shaded yellow)



References and further information

Habitats Directive Article 17 report: <http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/pdf/Article17/FCS2007-S1355-Final.pdf>