

## European Otter Action Plan

### Introduction and Vision Statement

The European otter (*Lutra lutra*) is one of Britain's largest carnivores. Otters are largely nocturnal and live along rivers but will also utilise canals, ditches, marshes, lakes and adjacent scrub and wetland areas. They will also use estuaries and coastal areas but they require access to fresh water to maintain their fur in good condition. Their home range is dependent on habitat quality and food supply, and can be up to 40 km on rivers.



Otters favour rivers with good bankside cover; scrub such as hawthorn, blackthorn and bramble providing excellent lying-up sites during the daylight hours. Reed and sedge beds are also important for lying-up, and as feeding and breeding sites. The root systems of mature riverside trees such as ash, oak and sycamore provide cavities suitable for use as holts. Deciduous woodland is often used by otters, even when located some distance from the river, but accessible via small streams and ditches. Alder and willow carr are particularly important. Lakes, ponds, ox-bows and other wetland areas are extremely important for breeding otters, as they support amphibian populations, which are an important food source at a time of year when most otters have their cubs.

Their diet is varied, and includes fish, amphibians, crustaceans, birds and small mammals.

In Wales strong otter populations exist in south-west and mid Wales, but they are still weak in south-east and north-west Wales. Otters were considered widespread throughout the UK up until the 1950s when they underwent a rapid decline through to the 1970s. This has been mainly attributed to the use of organochlorine pesticides, exacerbated by hunting and habitat fragmentation. Recent surveys have shown a significant recovery in the number and range of otters in England and Wales. In some parts of Wales and south-western England otter numbers along rivers may now be close to their breeding capacity. Today road traffic accidents are one of the principal causes of death and populations may be limited by a lack of suitable isolated breeding sites and a lack of prey species, especially freshwater eel.

Otters are widely distributed throughout the county, this area representing a stronghold for the species. They are known to be present on all the rivers in Carmarthenshire – including the Teifi, Tywi, Taf, Loughor and Gwendraeth catchments. Breeding sites tend to be located on the tributaries, or areas of off-river habitat such as scrub, old ox-bows, etc. Both headwater catchments and the coast and estuaries provide passage routes for dispersing juveniles into adjacent river catchments. Otters have been observed on the Tywi within the limits of Carmarthen town, and similarly on the River Lliedi in Llanelli.

Conservation of otters in the long-term requires a landscape-scale approach involving many different partners. The vision for otters is a county that has enough suitable

habitat to ensure free movement throughout its range, with adequate breeding sites and reduction in the number of road deaths in the county.

**Action Plan Objectives**

**OTT1SP** Undertake action, including riparian habitat management to help increase the population and range of otters

**OTT2DCM** To gather data on the distribution and status of otters in Carmarthenshire

**OTT3RA** To raise awareness of the importance of otters in Carmarthenshire and provide advice on habitat management.

**OTT4POL** To ensure that surveys are undertaken to inform decision making/planning of any plan or project that has the potential to affect otters

**Actions**

<b>CODE</b>	<b>TEXT</b>	<b>START/ END DATE</b>	<b>CONTA CS (lead in bold)</b>	<b>Action goal</b>	<b>Key partners</b>	<b>Funding</b>	<b>Priority L,M,H</b>	<b>Report Jan–Dec 2010</b>	<b>Report Jan–Dec 2010</b>
<b>OTT1SP1</b>	Draw up mitigation design for otter RTC blackspot (ORMS) sites for installation (subject to obtaining funding)	2010–2014	CCC	At least 5 schemes designed	EAW Streetscene Consultant Landowners	✓	H	Reports for six sites in Carms completed (A40, A48, A477, B4310 [x2], B4302 - one scheme to be completed by end March 2011 – at Glan Thames (B4310).	
<b>OTT1SP2</b>	Produce an engineering appraisal for mitigation work at Commissioner’s Bridge (SN411055)	2010–2014	CCC	One appraisal produced	Consultant	✓		Scheme for otter pass produced previously. This has been retrieved to inform future funding applications.	
<b>OTT1SP3</b>	Identify critical areas of otter habitat, especially breeding sites and consider designation as SINC	2010–2014	CCW	Map produced	EAW CCC WWBIC, CRT		H	Not started	
<b>OTT1SP4</b>	Install holts at suitable sites within the county through EAW projects	2010–2014	EAW	x holts installed	Landowners		L	Not started.	
<b>OTT1SP5</b>	Install dry culverts/ledges at suitable sites within the county through CCC/Highways projects	2010–2014	CCC	2 holts installed	Landowners		M	Report produced identifying 6 sites: SN309171; SN483 176; SN634339; SN660386; SN 641269	Ledge at Glan Thames SN 641269 installed.
<b>OTT1SP6</b>	Through TAYO project install holts at suitable sites	2010–2011	TAYO	x holts installed	Landowners	✓	H	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An otter holt has been installed at Gelli Aur Campus together with a camera to monitor otter movements</li> <li>• Two land owners have pledged to install otter holts but were unable to do so before the completion of the project. They still intend to do this in the future.</li> <li>• A further otter monitoring camera has been installed on the river Sawdde near Rhydysaint as part of the Llangadog School Community Grant. It has</li> </ul>	

								been proposed that an otter holt should also be installed at a later date.		
<b>OTT1SP7</b>	Through CRT project install holts at suitable sites	2010–2014	CRT	x holts installed	Landowners	✓	M	1 planned for summer 2011.		
<b>OTT2DCM1</b>	Continue monitoring for otter Road Traffic Casualties (RTC) to identify road 'black spots' or Otter Road Mortality Sites (ORMS) on Council adopted roads and trunk roads in Carmarthenshire	2010–2014	EAW	Annual report produced	CCC WTSWW		H	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ongoing through the year. Several new records of RTAs for Carmarthenshire this year.</li> <li>• Potential blackspot on A40 near St Clears.</li> </ul>		
<b>OTT2DCM2</b>	Outside already surveyed SAC catchment areas identify sites for otter survey and within areas with no identified potential breeding sites assess potential for habitat enhancement and map	2010–ongoing	EAW	List of sites			H	Not started		
<b>OTT2DCM3</b>	Collate all current survey data/reports for otter in the county	2010–ongoing	WWBIC	GIS layer produced	EAW CCW		H			
<b>OTT2DCM4</b>	Survey of otter use of NBGW by otters (SN521183)	2010-2012	NBGW	One survey undertaken	CCW EAW WTSWW	✓		Set up night camera to try to photograph otter. Monthly otter monitoring begun in January 2011.		
<b>OTT3RA1</b>	Distribute the EAW/WT advice leaflet to all fisheries in Carmarthenshire on how to humanely deter otters from foraging on fish stocks	2010–2014	EAW/WT	Write to all identified fisheries in county			H	Not started. Dan Foreman at Swansea Uni was doing something very similar.		
<b>OTT3RA2</b>	Provide information and advice on otter conservation and habitat management to key groups including landowners, river users and developers.	2010–2014	EAW	On-line information available	CCC CCW WTSWW		H	Ongoing as part of day job and general consultations. Example of this would be the battle to retain a buffer strip on the Amman adjacent to the new Tesco store. Otters are active in this area.		
<b>OTT3RA3</b>	Raise public awareness of otters and the importance of and how to report otter sightings (including spraint) and RTC	2010–2014	EAW	PR Newsletter item	CCC WTSWW		H	No specific actions.		
<b>OTT1POL1</b>	Form a Carmarthenshire Group, working with everyone to input into Roads and Otters Steering Group	2010–2014	WTSWW	Group formed	EAW CCC CCW		M/H	Not started		
<b>OTT1POL2</b>	Require an otter survey, together with	2010–	CCC	100% all	Developers	Developer	H	Applications with surveys/		

	suitable mitigation/compensation/enhancement for all <u>development proposals</u> affecting, or potentially affecting, otters and their habitats.	2014		appropriate applications	Applicants	pays		or where surveys have been requested: 8 Commented on 3 applications in 2010 requesting mitigation/compensation. Protection and advisories for potential sites requested for 14 sites. No mechanism est. whether mitigation carried out.		
<b>OTT1POL3</b>	Identify otter conservation, including the maintenance/creation of suitable bankside cover, water quality issues, artificial holt sites, etc, as a key objective in any <u>operations undertaken by the council</u> affecting rivers, canals, suitable lakes and any other habitats likely to be used by otters.	2010–2014	CCC	100% all appropriate projects	Flood Defence Streetscene Highways	✓	H	No report for 2010		
<b>OTT1POL4</b>	Ensure that work on all <u>roads</u> , which cross watercourses or affects other habitat that may be used by otters, incorporate suitable otter mitigation	2010–2014	CCC	100% all appropriate road schemes	TRA EAW CCW	Developer pays		No report for 2010		