



# Otter

## Local Biodiversity Action Plan

Species English Name(Scientific name)

OTTER (LUTRA LUTRA)



## Ecology

### Appearance

The otter is a long slender bodied mammal with brown fur, which is quite often pale on the under-side. The head to body length can be up to 120cm. The tail makes up approximately a third of the body length. Otters have small ears and webbed feet. To compensate for the lack of a fat layer they have a double layer of fur to trap air and keep them warm in the water. The average weight for males is 10.1kg, and around 7kg for females.

### Habitat

Otters may inhabit any unpolluted body of freshwater, including lakes, streams, rivers, and ponds, as long as there is good supply of food. Otters may also live along the coast, in salt water, but require regular access to freshwater to clean their fur.

### Food

An otter's diet mainly consists of fish but can also include birds, insects, frogs, crustaceans and sometimes small mammals.



## Current status

The otter is listed on Annexes II and V of the EC Habitats Directive (EC/92/43), Annexe II of the Bern Convention and Appendix I of CITES and is classified by the IUCN as 'vulnerable'. The otter is also listed under two schedules of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 Schedules 5 & 6.

The otter is short-listed on the UK Steering Group Report, Volume 1 (1995) and as such the report contains a costed Biodiversity Action Plan for the otter. A national Otter BAP Steering Group has been set up which meets regularly and is led by a partnership between the Wildlife Trusts and the Environment Agency.

The fourth National Otter Survey of England was conducted between January 2000 and February 2002. The results of this survey were published in 2003 and show that otters are becoming more widespread in the rivers of England. The survey found positive signs of otters at 55% more sites than in the 1994 survey. In fact, in every one of the 12 regions and catchments areas surveyed, there was an increase in the number of sites where the signs of otters were detected, representing a 527% increase since 1979.

The scale of the increase varies from area to area and at the time of this national survey, otters still only occupied one third of the areas that could support a population. The survey has shown that in favourable conditions, such as cleaner rivers and waterways, greater fish stocks, sympathetic wetland and riverside management and the creation of new bankside habitat, a healthy breeding population can recolonise large areas relatively quickly.

Joining up populations via the network of waterways is going to be crucial to the future increase of otter populations. The key areas are river catchments in North Shropshire, South Cheshire and the Lower Severn as they provide links from strong populations in Wales to areas where colonisation has been slow in the past.

So why is there concern about otters in the Cheshire region? As indicated by the results of the fourth national survey, otters have shown a dramatic recovery in some areas of the country. This is a great conservation success story, however the Cheshire otters have not shown the same increase in numbers. They are here but with the wealth of waterways and water bodies in the county, the population is still lower than would be expected.

## Threats

\* Lack of suitable lying up sites such as hollows in large riverside tree roots, scrub patches, reedbeds etc



- \* Loss of wetlands within the floodplain
- \* Lack of large undisturbed areas suitable for breeding
- \* Lack of sustainable fish stocks limiting food availability to otters
- \* Accidental mortality, e.g. road casualties
- \* Non-installation of otter guards on eel fyke nets
- \* Direct effect of contaminants, e.g. PCBs and heavy metals

## How are we helping to conserve otters in the Cheshire region?

The Cheshire Otter Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP) Group meet quarterly. The group is made up of representatives from the Environment Agency, Cheshire Wildlife Trust, Natural England, Countryside Council for Wales, Cheshire West and Chester Council, East Cheshire Council, The Mersey Basin Campaign, Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group, British Association of Shooting and Conservation, Chester Zoo, rECOrd, United Utilities, British Waterways.

The group meets to discuss projects relating to otters in Cheshire and promote joint working. Many practical projects are facilitated by the group, including otter holt building and bankside improvements. One of the main drivers for improvement to otter habitat is the Environmental Stewardship Scheme, providing funding to landowners for habitat improvements for otters.

## Objectives, targets and actions

The objectives, targets and actions to help conserve Otters in the Cheshire region can be found on the [Biodiversity Action Reporting System \(BARS\)](#) along with full details of our progress so far.

## How to find out more about otters

IUCN Red List of threatened species - International [www.iucnredlist.org](http://www.iucnredlist.org)

UK BAP for Otters - [www.ukbap.org.uk/UKPlans.aspx?ID=428](http://www.ukbap.org.uk/UKPlans.aspx?ID=428)

Staffordshire Biodiversity Action Plan: [www.sbap.org.uk](http://www.sbap.org.uk)

Environment Agency Website [www.environment-agency.gov.uk](http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk)

Vale Royal Borough Council Otter Species Recording card

Know Your Otter Card, produced by the Cheshire region Biodiversity Partnership including help from the Environment Agency and Chester Zoo

Otter Video Monitoring Project



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### How can you get involved?

To help us with our conservation work for the Otter we need your help. If you think you have seen an otter or mink, or signs of these animals, such as footprints or droppings, please fill out our online form and press 'Submit' to send it back to the Otter LBAP coordinator. The data will be sent to the local biological records centre, rECOrd. Don't worry if you can't complete the questions fully. All information is useful.

### Contact details

Cheshire Mammal Group [website](#)

### References and Glossary

BASC British Association of Shooting and Conservation

CCC Cheshire County Council

CrBAP Cheshire Region Biodiversity Action Plan

CWT Cheshire Wildlife Trust

EA Environment Agency

FWAG Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group

LBAP Local Biodiversity Action Plan

MBC Macclesfield Borough Council

NE Natural England

VRBC Vale Royal Borough Council

