



# THE NATIONAL TRUST

## INFORMATION SHEET

### MANAGING RISK – European Protected Species European otter *Lutra lutra*

#### Status and distribution

UK	Native, formerly widespread throughout the UK; populations remain in south-west England, central and southern Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Localised; increasing. Priority Species in the UKBAP. Protected Species under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and CroW Act 2000.
EU	Annex II & IV Habitats & Species Directive, Appendix II Bern Convention, Appendix 1 CITES.
IUCN	Vulnerable. (European sub-species also listed as globally threatened).

Formerly widespread throughout the UK, the otter underwent a rapid decline in numbers from the 1950s to 1970s and was effectively lost from midland and south-eastern counties of England by the 1980s. Populations remain in Wales, south-west England and much of Scotland, where sea loch and coastal colonies comprise one of the largest populations in Europe. There is also a significant population of otters in Northern Ireland. The decline now appears to have halted and sightings are being reported in former habitats.

Otters may be found on coasts and estuaries and in fresh water habitats such as rivers, marshes, streams, ditches and lakes. Within home ranges, which may include woodlands and wetlands adjacent to water courses, as well as the water itself, otters maintain holts (or dens). These take a variety of forms including cavities in the roots of bankside trees, piles of logs or flood debris, drains and caves. Otters also have a number of resting sites, (sometimes called couches or hovers) above ground. These may occur in reedbeds or scrub, particularly bramble and blackthorn.

#### Presence within NT properties

In the last decade otters have been recorded from NT properties in Cornwall, Devon, Cumbria, Lancashire, Northumbria, West Sussex, Somerset, Staffordshire, Down Fermanagh, Gwynedd and Powys (Cirencester Recorder database, 2002).

#### Threats and Risks

There is a chance of encountering resident or transient otters whilst undertaking works on NT land. Any works that may disturb otters must only proceed under licence or with advice from the Statutory Nature Conservation Organisation (EN, CCW, EHS). Not only must the Trust abide by the law, but as partner to the UKBAP, it should also

ensure that it maintains all otter populations occurring on its land. Maintenance of existing populations is a target within the UK action plan for the otter.

Examples of works likely to affect otters and their habitat and which may require safeguards such as licensing:

- Removal or remedial works to waterside trees, in particular trees which are used as resting sites or holts.
- Works in wet woodland adjacent to waterways.
- Removal of waterside scrub.
- Hedgerow works in the vicinity of watercourses (otters will use the base of thick hedgerows as resting sites).
- Cutting of bankside vegetation (thus removing cover).
- Draining and/or dredging of stream/river channels or lakes.
- Straightening or altering channel morphology.
- Removal of long-term flood debris or waterside log piles.
- Use of \*fyke nets without appropriate otter guards.

#### **References and further information**

DEFRA (2002). *European Protected Species Guidance Note. (WLF 11 (5/02)).*

DEFRA, Bristol. [www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/regulat/forms/cons\\_man/wlf11.htm](http://www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/regulat/forms/cons_man/wlf11.htm)

Macdonald, David W. & Tattersall, Fran (2001). *Britain's Mammals: The Challenge for Conservation.* Peoples Trust for Endangered Species, London.

National Rivers Authority (1993). *Otters and River Habitat Management.*

*Conservation Technical Handbook No. 3.* National Rivers Authority, Bristol.

Action Plan for Otter (*Lutra lutra*): [www.ukbap.org.uk](http://www.ukbap.org.uk)

#### **Otter at river bank**



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\* Fyke nets: Cone shaped nets used to catch eels.