

CARMARTHENSHIRE LOCAL BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN

OTTER/ LUTRA LUTRA



Otters are found on all watercourses in the county



Conservation objectives:

- Maintain and expand existing otter populations in Carmarthenshire.

What you can do to help:

- Report all signs of otter to the county mammal recorder n.matthew@ccw.gov.uk

Further information:

www.mammal.org.uk/otter
www.carmarthenshire.gov.uk

The skin of an otter was said to have magical properties and be an antidote to fever and smallpox



Ecology

The otter is a largely nocturnal mammal that lives along rivers and streams with good bankside vegetation, which provides resting sites during the day. The root systems of riverside trees are also used as holts where they have their young. Otters will also use canals, ditches, marshes, reed beds, lakes and adjacent scrub for resting, feeding and breeding. Coastal areas are also used but otters need access to fresh water to maintain their fur in good condition. Males have large territories and deposit faeces (known as spraints, with a sweet musky odour) in prominent places to let other otters know that the territory is already occupied. Females with cubs live in a smaller territory within the male's territory.

Their diet includes fish, amphibians, birds and small mammals.

Distribution in Carmarthenshire

Populations crashed during the 1950–1970s due to increased use of pesticides and habitat loss but otters are now widespread throughout the county and known to be present on the Teifi, Tywi, Taf and Gwendraeth river catchments. They have even been observed on the Tywi within the limits of Carmarthen town.

Legal status

The otter receives legal protection under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and the Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc) Regulations 1994. This makes it illegal to kill, disturb, injure, capture or possess an otter and to damage or destroy its resting place.

What are the threats?

- * Loss of wetland habitat, scrub and riverside woodland – important as breeding and resting sites.
- * Incidental deaths, primarily by road traffic accidents.
- * Pollution of watercourses, affecting the otter as it eats contaminated eels and fish.
- * Lack of prey species, especially freshwater eel.

What is being done locally

- * Otter surveys are being carried out on rivers in the county.
- * Otter holts and habitat enhancement have been included in mitigation proposals for major schemes in the county, e.g. the Carmarthen bypass.
- * Otter ledges or passes are included in new bridges
- * The Environment Agency has identified blackspots where road deaths occur and work is being carried out to help the otters at these sites.

Where you can look for signs of otters

Look for signs (such as their spraints) along any watercourse in the county.