



DESCRIPTION AND HABITAT

The Otter (*Lutra lutra*) is easily recognised by its brown fur; often pale on the underside; long slender body; small ears; long thick tail and webbed feet.

The Otter varies in weight depending on sex. The male averages 10.1kg and the female 7.0kg. The head/body length is about 60-120cm and the tail about 40-45cm.

Otters are secretive, semi-aquatic mammals who are equally at home in fresh and saltwater. Coast-living Otters need fresh water to clean salt from its fur; otherwise it will lose its ability to keep warm.

Otters can travel over large areas, in Scottish rivers males may have average linear territories of 39km and females 16-22km long. Otters mark their territory by depositing faeces (known as spaints, with a characteristic sweet musky odour) in prominent places around their ranges which, serve to mark their territorial range and help neighbouring animals keep in social contact.

Life Cycle:- Otters may breed at any time of year, and in Argyll & Bute there are slight peaks in births in May and September.

The average litter consists of two to three cubs who are born in dens called holts which can vary from a tree root system, a hole in a bank, or a pile of rocks.

The female raises the cubs herself with no help from the male.

About ten weeks elapse before the cubs venture out of the holt with their mother and they remain with her for up to a year learning the skill of hunting and survival.

Feeding:- Fish are the Otters most important food. Their diet consists of mainly coarse fish, eels and salmonids. Coastal Otters will feed on bottom-living species such as butterfish, crabs, octopus and squat lobsters. They may take water birds such as coots, moorhens and ducks. In Spring, frogs are an important food source.

CURRENT STATUS

During the 1960's and 1970's the Eurasian Otter declined throughout the industrialised part of its European range. This was probably due to the Otter accumulating pesticides and other chemicals which become concentrated in their prey. This trend has now reversed in Britain and in other countries bordering the Atlantic.

The Scottish population is regarded as one of the best in Europe.

The convoluted, rocky shallow coastlines of Argyll & Bute suit Otters very well as do the many undisturbed lochs and rivers.

UK BIODIVERSITY STATUS

The Otter is on the UK Biodiversity long list of globally threatened and declining species.

STATUTORY PROTECTION

The otter is listed on:

- Appendix I of Cites.
- Appendix II of the Bern Convention.
- Annex II and IV of the habitats Directive.

It is protected under:-

- Schedule 5 of the WCA 1981.
- Schedule 2 of the Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc) Regulations, 1994 (Regulation 38).

The European Sub-species is also listed as globally threatened on the IUCM/WCMC RDL.

FACTORS AFFECTING THE SPECIES IN ARGYLL & BUTE

- Threats:-** Road deaths.
Coastal, loch and riverside development in key feeding or breeding areas.
Pollution – chemicals, oil spills and acidification of rivers and lochs.
Seepage or contamination by sheep dip.
Accidental drowning of young Otters in fyke nets and creels.
- Impacts:-** Decline in numbers of Otters.
Loss of Habitat.

OBJECTIVES AND TARGETS

1	Maintain the Otter population in Argyll & Bute at its current level.
2	Ensure no net loss of the species during the life span of this plan – see Action 2
3	Reduce road mortality in Argyll & Bute.
4	Raise awareness about the Otter to interest groups.

CURRENT MANAGEMENT

- The JNCC has prepared a Framework for Otter Conservation in the UK 1995-2000.
- FE promote sensitive woodland management and expansion to favour Otters ,through preparation and implementation of their Forest and Water Guidelines.
- Current Agri-Environment schemes, i.e., ESA's , Organic Aid, CPS, RSS. that promote the management of water courses will benefit the Otter.

ACTION FOR BIODIVERSITY

1	Survey key sites regularly extend this to other known sites every 5 years.
2	Identify the accident black spots for Otter mortality and put in place measures to reduce this i.e. underpasses, reflectors, etc., see Trunk Road LBAP for further information.
3	Publish information on the Otters to raise public awareness about their requirements and where to report mortalities.
4	Advise on deterring Otters for those fish farming and stocked lochs interests.

Partners involved include SNH, SAC, FWAG, SEERAD, A&BC and LBAP.