



OTTER *Lutra lutra*

Introduction

This action plan covers all known, and potential, otter populations within Bristol.

The otter *Lutra lutra* is found in watercourses, associated waterbodies and, in some instances, coastal habitats. It is of considerable nature conservation concern having undergone a rapid decline in numbers, and a severe contraction in distribution, between the early 1950s and late 1980s.

However since the early 1990s numbers have steadily increased and distribution expanded. The main cause of the otter's decline was aquatic pollution, although degradation of bankside habitat and direct persecution were also important factors. The otter is a UK BAP priority species.

Bristol is on the northern and western edge of stable otter populations centred on the North Somerset Levels and Moors and the Bristol Avon catchment. Resurgent otter populations are also present in South Gloucestershire. There are very few records of otter within Bristol although records appear to have been increasing over the past decade.

Otter populations remain susceptible to accidental death (through eg road accidents), poor water quality (reducing potential for prey species), disturbance, and degradation of habitat.

There has previously been no concerted action on otters within Bristol. Although, incidental records of the species have been made by various organisations and individuals.

This document has strong links with, and a number of cross-over points with regard to, the Rivers and Rhines Habitat Action Plan.

Current Status

Within the boundaries of the City of Bristol there have been recent records of otter from the River Frome (spraints recorded from 2004 onwards) and from the River Trym at Henbury (road casualty, early 2007). The status of the population on the Frome is unknown: it may represent a breeding female with resultant offspring and a territorial male, or may just be a territorial male. The Trym otter was a sub adult female and given the paucity of the Trym catchment, in terms of undisturbed otter habitat and feeding opportunities, it is likely that this watercourse was part of a much larger territory used by this animal.

There are also unconfirmed records of otter from the tidal River Avon close to the city centre and from the Floating Harbour area.

It is not known whether otters on the Avon below the city centre are part of a coastal population centred on the North Somerset / South Glos levels or whether they are part of the wider Bristol Avon catchment population recorded upstream of the city centre. Neither is it known to what degree, if any, the Frome population interacts with, or is part of, the Bristol Avon population.

The UK otter status remains tenuous, despite significant levels of population recovery/range expansion, due to the small population size and significant mortality largely through road deaths / disease. Increased public pressure along watercourses also reduces availability of undisturbed resting and breeding sites.

The otter receives legislative protection under the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (Schedule 5), Countryside & Rights of Way Act 2000, CITES (Appendix I), Bern Convention (Appendix II), Habitats Directive (Annexes II & IV) and Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc.) Regulations 1994 (Schedule 2 Regulation 38).

Current Threats

- I Disease

- I Road accidents

- I Development: loss of habitat and increased disturbance

- I Disturbance from increased levels of leisure activity

- I Pollution and poor water quality

- I Lack of full awareness amongst key players

- I Direct persecution

Objective 1: Establish and monitor extent and range of otter population within Bristol

Target:

- I The Avon running through Bristol city centre, the Floating Harbour and Feeder Canal, to be systematically surveyed, where safe to do so, for otter field signs
- I The Avon downstream of Cumberland Basin as well as all major streams and rhines to be monitored for otter field signs at least once every two months. This to include city centre watercourses and the Floating Harbour if evidence of otter activity established here (see Objective 2)
- I All otter corpses within the Bristol City area to be recovered and forwarded for post-mortem analysis

Objective 2: Maintain and enhance existing otter populations

Target:

- Continued and increased presence of otter population on River Frome
- Regular otter population on lower Avon and tributaries
- All development works to avoid destruction or damage to existing watercourses and bankside habitat and provide adequate compensation/mitigation for losses
- Ensure Internal Drainage Board works at Avonmouth are sympathetic to otter habitat requirements

Objective 3: Raise awareness of Bristol's otter population

Target:

- All key players (landowners, managers and user bodies) to be aware of the existence of an otter population within Bristol City boundary and of current best practice guidance
- Raise public awareness of otters and encourage local communities to appreciate, care for and monitor local watercourses

OTTER SPECIES ACTIONS	OBJECTIVE	DATE	IMPLEMENTORS
Undertake definitive survey on all watercourses and waterbodies within Bristol	1	2009	BCC, AWT, BLRP, BAOG, AFP
Monitor all watercourses and waterbodies (especially where otter activity proven) at least once every two months	1	2010 – 2013	BCC, AWT, BLRP, BAOG, EA, AFP
Collect all otter corpses for post-mortem analysis, where practical	1	2009 – 2013	All
Protect and enhance existing otter populations and habitat through planning process	2	2009 – 2013	BCC, AWT
Ensure management of Avonmouth rhines and ponds is sympathetic to otter habitat requirements wherever possible	1	2009 – 2013	IDB, BCC, AWT
Develop and implement programme of awareness raising, to include training for planners, guidance for land managers and information for community groups	3	2010 – ongoing	BCC, EA, AWT, BLRP
Encourage local communities to appreciate and care for local watercourses and take part in otter monitoring surveys	3	2009 – 2013	BLRP, AWT, BCC, AFP