

Action	Potential Deliverers								Meets
	Lead	Partners	1999	2000	2001	2002	2005	2010	Obj. No.
Policy and Legislation Set up an Otter Working Group.	SNH, NGOs		.						1, 2, 3
Review take-up of relevant options of agri-environment schemes locally and monitor results. Review similar schemes in Europe and compare with local findings.	SNH (Otter Working Group)	SOAEFD, SAC, FWAG, farmers	.	.					1
Produce best practice outline for an agri-environment prescription for otter to present to SOAEFD.	SNH (Otter Working Group)	SOAEFD, SAC, SNH, FWAG		.					1
Ensure actions for otter from Solway Firth Strategy are implemented.	SEP		.	.	.	.	.	.	1
Site and Species Safeguard and Management Review current research on otter road mortality and produce digest of best practice. Monitor effectiveness of existing otter mitigation measures in Dumfries and Galloway.	SODD-NRD (Otter Working Group)	SNH, DGC	.	.	.	.	.	.	2
Use existing information from Britain and Europe to produce guide to best practice management for otter.	VWT (Otter Working Group)	SNH		.					1
Advisory Advise landowners and managers about requirements for otter conservation such as river bank management and provision of artificial holts.	SAC, FWAG, SNH		.	.	.	.	.	.	1, 2, 3
Research and Monitoring Maintain watching brief on current national and international research and inform partners of progress in understanding of otter ecology, particularly where it may be usefully applied in Dumfries and Galloway.	VWT (Otter Working Group)	WGFT, RSPB, SNH, WWT	.	.	.	.	.	.	1, 2
Re-survey National Otter Survey Sites and analyse results to monitor impact of acidity.	SNH (Otter Working Group)		.			.			1
Carry out actions from Solway Firth Strategy to examine impacts of fishing practices on otters.	SEP		.	.	.	.	.	.	1, 2
Monitor otter populations of key catchments.	Catchment Management Groups (Otter Working Group)	SNH	.	.	.	.	.	.	1
Communications and Publicity Publicise availability of fyke net guards.	VWT	SNH	.	.	.	.	.	.	1, 2, 3
Publicise availability of advice for otter conservation.	SNH	VWT, SOAEFD	.	.	.	.	.	.	1, 3
Publicise the existence of otter mortality databases.	VWT	SNH, DGC, Police, NGOs	.	.	.	.	.	.	2, 3
Liaise with protection officers/specialists in related fields. Hold seminars on common problems/issues.	Police WLO	RSPB, VWT, SWT, BASC, SSPCA	.	.	.	.	.	.	1, 2, 3
Organise awareness programmes and seminars on otter issues for relevant interest groups.	(Otter Working Group)	VWT, SNH, SOAEFD, FWAG, WWT, SWT	.	.	.	.	.	.	3
Plan Monitoring Monitor and review this plan.	LBAP Steering Group		.	.	.	.	.	.	All

OTTER



Species Profile

Common Name:

Otter

Scientific Name:

Lutra lutra

UK Biodiversity Status:

Priority Species

UK Lead Partners:

Environment Agency and The Wildlife Trusts (represented in Scotland by Scottish Wildlife Trust)

Dumfries and Galloway Status:

Local Priority Species

Relevant Habitat Action Plans:

Rivers and Streams, Standing Open Water, Mesotrophic Lochs, Fen, Carr, Marsh, Swamp and Reedbed, Estuaries, Inlets and Enclosed Bays, Seashore

Statutory Protection:

Special protection under Annex II and IV of the EC Habitats Directive, Appendix II of the Bern Convention and Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981

Dumfries and Galloway LOCAL SPECIES ACTION PLAN

Objectives

MAIN OBJECTIVE

Objective 1

Maintain the Dumfries and Galloway otter population at its current healthy level.

Target:

Ensure no net loss during the lifetime of this plan.

WORK OBJECTIVES

Objective 2

Reduce road mortality in the region.

Target:

Reduce annual mortality by 50% by 2005.

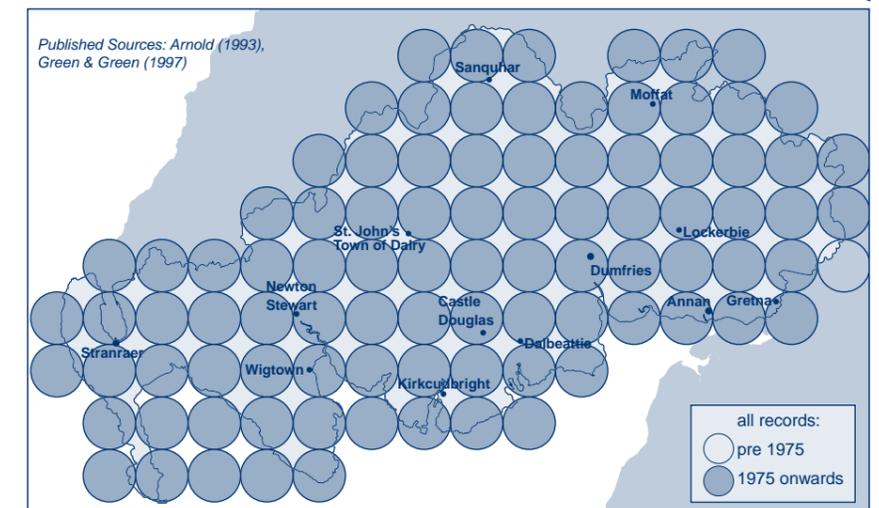
Objective 3

Promote education and awareness of the status and needs of otters amongst all groups whose activities may have an adverse effect on the species and improve communication between those working in fields related to otter conservation.

Target:

Set up Otter Working Group to run awareness programme and facilitate communication by 2000.

Current Status



The Eurasian otter's world range extends from Ireland to Japan, taking in Europe, North Africa, the former Soviet States and the Middle and Far East. In the 1960s and 1970s the otter declined throughout the industrialised part of its European

range and became extinct in some countries. Since then the strong recovery in Britain has been mirrored elsewhere, especially in countries bordering the Atlantic.

Scotland's otters did not suffer the drastic declines seen in much of western Europe in the 1960s and 1970s and today this population is regarded as one of the best in Europe. In three Scottish otter surveys carried out since 1977 Dumfries and Galloway has consistently had a high level of site occupancy, rising from 82% in 1977-99 to 87% in 1984-5 and 97% in 1991-4. In the 1990s the otter is ubiquitous in Dumfries and Galloway as in Shetland or the Western Isles, which have traditionally been regarded as the best populations in Scotland. This population is especially important because of Dumfries and Galloway's proximity to depleted stocks in the north of England.



Ecology and Management

Fish form a very large part of the otters diet. In Dumfries and Galloway the animals hunt along the rocky coastal margins of the Solway where they catch food such as crabs and squat lobsters. Food requirements are high in proportion to body size because of the energetic demands of aquatic hunting with a small body mass and a low fat content.

Home ranges are large, especially on freshwater. Males tend to occupy larger ranges than females so that each male home range overlaps those of several females. All types of aquatic and semi-aquatic habitat are explored by otters and they can range widely between them, often travelling over land.

Breeding is non seasonal, but recent work based on seventy-six births in Dumfries and Galloway suggests small peaks in May and September. The one to four cubs remain in the holt (the term used for the otters place of shelter) for about two months and then travel around the female's home range with her. The male plays no part in rearing the young. Cubs are weaned at three months but remain dependent on their mother for up to a year. Adults become sexually mature at two years, but life expectancy is short; animals surviving their first year live only three years on average, although survival up to 15 years is potentially achievable. Late sexual maturity, small litter size, a long period of dependency and a short life expectancy combine to make reproductive success critical.

Holts may be above or below ground, in earth, rock, man-made cavities, or dense vegetation. Each otter uses a large number of holts, which may be exclusive or shared. Male otters can tolerate some human disturbance, but breeding holts are usually both secure and remote. The otter is largely a solitary animal and the social system allows a partitioning of resources without direct interaction between individuals. This is achieved by the otter's habit of depositing spraints (droppings) at well used traditional or conspicuous sites to mark territory.



Biodiversity Context

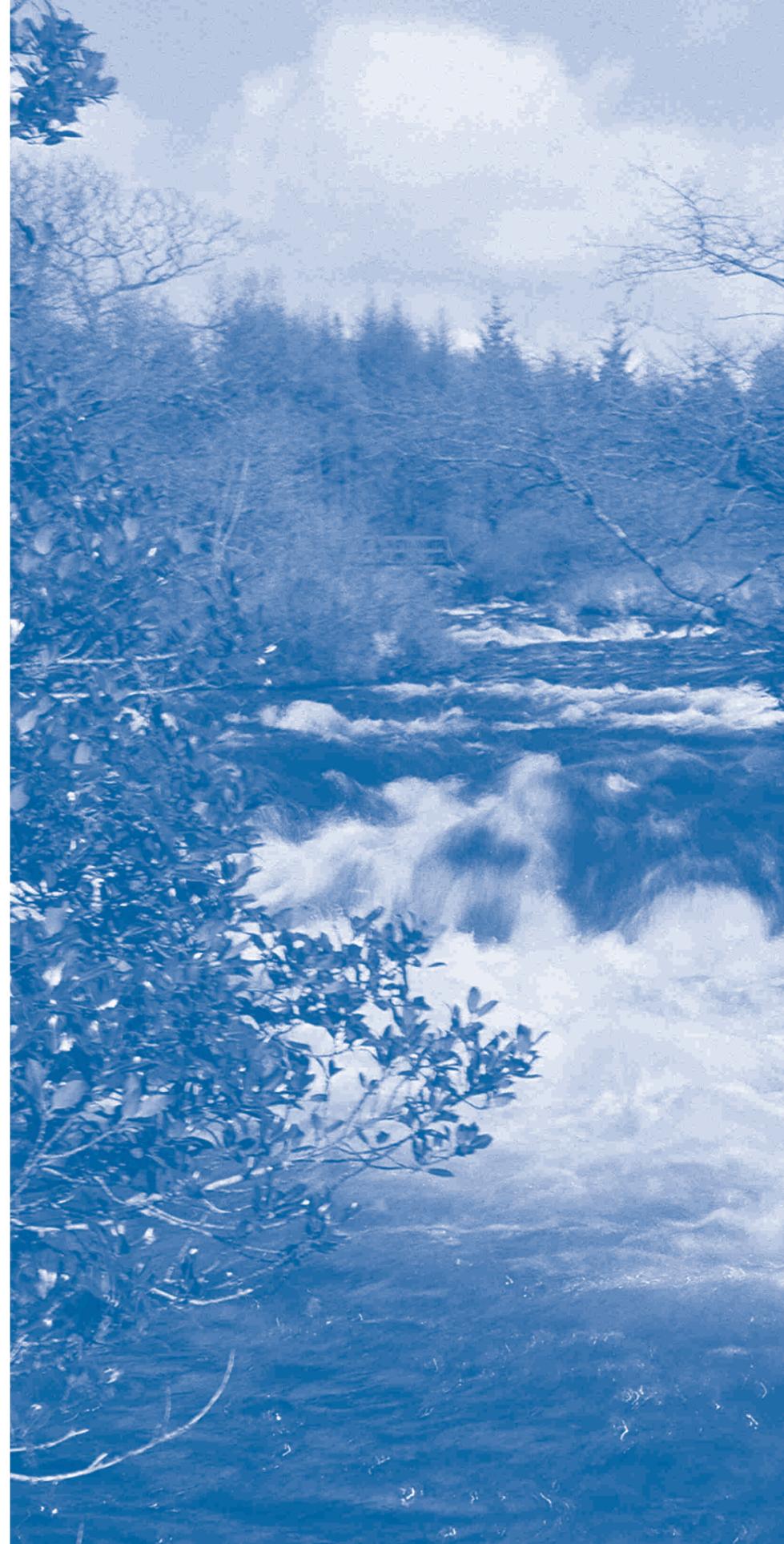
The UK Action Plan for otter has the following objectives:

- Maintain and expand existing otter populations.
- Restore breeding otters to all catchments and coastal areas where they have been recorded since 1960, by 2010.



Current Factors Causing Loss or Decline

As most otters die before reaching their potential life span, a knowledge of factors causing death is important in managing populations. Gross pollution is small scale and localised in Dumfries and Galloway and the region has fortunately not been exposed to high levels of toxins from industry and agriculture.



River habitat for otters

Radiation may significantly affect otters in Dumfries and Galloway, with elevated levels found following Chernobyl, as well as high background levels. Toxicity from algal blooms on some lowland lochs has also been recorded. However, the main pollution threat in Dumfries and Galloway is from acid rain which has severe effects on food availability and largely comes from sources outside the region and outside local control. Locally the effects have been exacerbated by planting of conifers on poorly buffered acid soils such that rivers to the west in Galloway are far more affected than those in Dumfriesshire.

Other factors causing mortality in the population include ensnaring in creels, fyke nets, discarded fishing gear, traps or snares set for other species, and killing in road accidents. The latter is the major non-natural cause of death killing an estimated 20% of the adult population annually. The A75 has the worst record in Scotland, killing around 50 animals per year, although this may reflect a bias in observer effort.

There have been conflicts of interest at trout farms and other fishing enterprises where otters have been killed in snares.

Opportunities and Current Action



The Scottish population is the most intensively studied in the world and several studies have been carried out or are ongoing in Dumfries and Galloway.

Dumfries and Galloway offers a diverse range of suitable sites for otters, so that positive management action such as building artificial holts is not necessary. Management of river banks, under Countryside Premium or Environmentally Sensitive Area Schemes, fish enhancement projects and restricting human access to one bank only are likely to be beneficial.

Work with the Vincent Wildlife Trust, the Scottish Office Roads Directorate and Dumfries and Galloway Council has resulted in improved passage under the A75 at two otter black spots. Underpasses and fencing have also been included on road re-alignments and extensions. A detailed survey of the A75 is in process.

Adoption of the Forest and Water Guidelines should eventually reduce some of the adverse effects of afforestation.

Although deaths in fyke nets are not now a serious local problem, net guards are available free of charge from the Vincent Wildlife Trust, and advice on otter deterrents for fish farms is available.

The Solway Firth Strategy contains actions to examine impacts of commercial fishing on otters.

References

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Action Plan drafted by Rosemary Green.
Photographs by SNH and Richard Mearns.

