



## 2. FACTORS AFFECTING THIS SPECIES IN GWYNEDD<sup>9</sup>

- General declines in fish populations as a result of over-fishing, pollution and river management.
- Drainage of wetlands, which removes amphibian food resource and potential breeding sites.
- A lack of resting sites and a continued loss of suitable tree and scrub cover for these sites, exacerbated by overgrazing and inappropriate bankside management.
- The presence of small, scattered populations which cannot sustain losses resulting from road casualties, drowning during floods and pollution.
- Multiple road mortality sites, especially where breeding individuals are killed.
- Pollution of watercourses, including diffuse agricultural runoff of insecticides, nitrates, farm wastes, point source pollution including sewage discharge, air pollution leading to acidification of catchments.
- Disturbance by recreational users of river corridors.
- Potentially - accidental drowning in lobster pots.

## 3. ASSOCIATED GWYNEDD SAPS / HAPS

Wet woodland, Transport corridors, Mudflats, Coastal and floodplain grazing marsh, Coastal saltmarsh, Lakes, ponds and ditches, Wetlands, River corridors

Water vole, Lampreys, Salmonids, Freshwater pearl mussel

## 4. CURRENT ACTION IN GWYNEDD

### 4.1 Site and habitat protection

- Otters are a feature of the Pen Llŷn a'r Sarnau marine candidate SAC. They may also occur in terrestrial or coastal areas of Gwynedd identified as potential Wildlife Sites, or designated as LNR, SSSI, NNR, candidate SAC or SPA. Otters are present as a qualifying feature (although not the primary reason for site selection) within Afon Eden - Cors Goch Trawsfynydd and Afon Gwyrfai Llyn Cwellyn candidate SACs.
- Where EIA's are required for proposed developments (e.g. for road building schemes), these should include surveys for protected species including otters. Where found to be present mitigation measures may be required. Environment Agency Wales also undertakes otter surveys as part of EIA assessments for all internal works.

### 4.2 Management and programmes of action

- Through North West Wales Riparian Mammals Group a riparian mammals project is being undertaken jointly between Gwynedd Council, Environment Agency Wales, Snowdonia National Park Authority, Menter Môn and North Wales Wildlife Trust which will include habitat enhancement work. The Gwynedd pilot area is the Glaslyn catchment, where work commenced in Spring 2003, and there is the potential for expansion of the project into further catchments in future.
- Environment Agency Wales Plans cover certain areas of Gwynedd and include management prescriptions / actions which will benefit otters as well as other riparian and wetland species and habitats.

<sup>9</sup> See also associated HAPs for more general factors affecting this species habitats

- Habitat creation and management schemes (for example creating log piles and artificial holts, and fencing out stretches of river corridor) have proved successful in many river catchments, often funded through agri-environmental grant schemes, e.g. Tir Gofal. The Afon Dwyryd Otter partnership has carried out a programme of holt installation along the Afon Dwyryd. Artificial holts may also be constructed by Environment Agency Wales Flood Defence section as part of their work programme. EAW also carry out habitat improvement works as part of the Gwynedd Sustainable Angling Initiative Objective 1 project.
- The UK wide Water for Wildlife project (formerly Otters and Rivers Project), is run by the Wildlife Trusts, and aims to carry out conservation work with local communities in riverside and wetland habitats. There is currently a Wales manager, who will be joined in the near future by a North Wales project officer.
- A Welsh Roads and Otters Steering Group has been set up, which aims to limit accidental killing or injury of otters on roads. Representation is from Welsh Assembly Government, Local authorities, Environment Agency Wales, Countryside Council for Wales, Water for Wildlife, University of Wales, and Police Wildlife Liaison. A number of accident hot spots have been identified in Gwynedd and work has commenced (February 2003) on reducing the risk to otters at some of these sites.
- A training day on Roads and Otters and other wildlife was held in North Wales in June 2002.
- The otter is one of the species eligible for funding from Countryside Council for Wales Species Challenge Fund.

### 4.3 Survey, research and monitoring

- The riparian mammals project (see 4.2 above) will include surveys for otters, water vole and mink.
- A national Otter Survey of Wales was first carried out in 1977/ 78, and continues approximately every six to seven years, organised by Vincent Wildlife Trust. The most recent survey took place in 2002 (data not yet available).
- Training on otter signs, habitat identification and otter habitat management has been arranged for staff of key organisations including Snowdonia National Park Authority, Countryside Council for Wales, Environment Agency Wales, Gwynedd Council, National Trust and Forestry Commission.
- Road casualty data is collated by local authorities, Environment Agency and Water for Wildlife and included within the Otter Road Mortality Database administered by Welsh Roads and Otters Steering Group. It is proposed that this database will be circulated among key organisations.
- Otter corpses are collected and sent for post-mortem analysis by University of Wales, Cardiff.
- Afon Dwyryd Otter Partnership undertake regular surveys with volunteers of Afon Dwyryd, Afon Mawddach and Afon Glaslyn. Volunteers are trained in surveying, habitat mapping, sexing, aging and reproductive status of road casualties. During October 2002 the group organised a volunteer survey of otter usage of coastal sites on the Llŷn Peninsula.
- Afon Dwyryd Otter Partnership has been collaborating with University of Wales, Swansea on research into otter diet.
- During 2002 otter surveys were carried out monthly along Afon Aber by volunteers and staff of Gwynedd Council, Snowdonia National Park Authority and Countryside Council for Wales plus others. The second phase of this project is to involve genetic analysis of the otter population.

## 5. ACTION PLAN OBJECTIVES

1. To establish the current status and distribution of otters in Gwynedd.
2. To protect, maintain and enhance existing otter populations and related habitats.
3. To reduce the accidental death of otters on roads and in rivers
4. To use the otter as a flagship species to raise awareness of the importance of appropriate management of its associated habitats

## 6. PROPOSED ACTIONS

Code	Action	Partner(s) <sup>h</sup>
<b>Policy and legislation</b>		
1	Use planning conditions to ensure developments in sensitive locations are compatible with otter conservation, especially those to be carried out in riverside locations or involving works to bridges or culverts TARGET/TIMESCALE: Ongoing	<b>GC</b> , Relevant partners
2	Include conservation actions for otters within all relevant EAW plans to be published in the future TARGET/TIMESCALE: Ongoing	EAW
<b>Species / habitat management and protection</b>		
3	Ensure that all road improvement schemes and ongoing road maintenance programmes have little or no negative impact on otter survival by ensuring best practice and use of relevant mitigation measures TARGET/TIMESCALE: Ongoing	<b>GC</b>
4	Identify existing otter road casualty "blackspots" from the Otter Road Mortality Database. Draw up and implement an action programme, integrated with <i>GC</i> annual highways and structures maintenance programmes, to include County roads and Trunk roads, to implement appropriate measures for minimising the risk of otter road deaths at these sites (e.g. otter ledges, underpasses) TARGET/TIMESCALE: Draw up 5 year action plan, by 2005	<b>GC</b>
5	Continue and expand the riparian mammals project currently underway by sourcing additional grant aid, as part of a biodiversity grant scheme, which would include grants for appropriate management of otter habitats TARGET/TIMESCALE: By 2005	<b>GC</b> , Relevant partners
6	As part of riparian mammals project, target management appropriate for otters to the Dwyfor/Dwyfach, Desach, Glaslyn, Soch, Llifon, Llyfni and Ogwen catchments, taking into account the needs of associated LBAP species and habitats, in particular the water vole TARGET/TIMESCALE: Ongoing	<b>GC</b> , <b>CCW</b> , EAW
7	Ensure that the potential presence and management requirements of otters are considered within any relevant management plans or grant schemes (e.g. NWMPs, WGS, Tir Gofal, ESA) by liaison (including consultation and provision of comments) between key organisations including EAW TARGET/TIMESCALE: Ongoing	<b>EAW</b> , <b>CCW</b> , <b>DEPC</b> , <b>FC</b> , <b>GC</b>

<sup>h</sup> Lead partner for this action is indicated by bold typeface, see section 7.2 for explanation of abbreviations

<b>Advisory</b>		
8	Provide advice and training on otter conservation issues to development control officers, highways engineers, staff of EAW, FC and CC and promote future training events organised by ROSG. TARGET/TIMESCALE: To be set, Ongoing	<i>GC, CC, CCW, EAW, FC</i>
9	Provide advice on otters and habitat management, and reduction of accidental drowning of otters in crustacean traps and of accidental mortalities within mink traps, to fishermen, angling clubs, landowners and land managers TARGET/TIMESCALE: Ongoing	Water for Wildlife, <i>GC</i>
<b>Survey, research and monitoring</b>		
10	Organise regular surveys for otter presence and breeding within Gwynedd, including within coastal and estuarine habitats, and in partnership with local groups and volunteers including local angling societies and River Care groups and those carrying out similar surveys in Snowdonia National Park and adjacent areas. Ensure that surveys are integrated within any Welsh / UK survey programmes TARGET/TIMESCALE: To be set, Ongoing	<i>GC, Afon Aber Otter project, Afon Dwyryd Otter Partnership, KWT, Water for Wildlife</i>
11	In conjunction with Snowdonia National Park Authority LBAP, carry out research to identify limiting factors to otter expansion within Gwynedd, particularly in relation to upland lakes e.g. around Blaenau Ffestiniog. TARGET/TIMESCALE: To be set	<i>Afon Dwyryd Otter Partnership, Afon Aber Otter Project, CCW, CEH, EAW, GC, UWB, Water for Wildlife</i>
<b>Communications and publicity</b>		
12	Encourage the recording of otter sightings by the general public, to be passed to Water for Wildlife for collation, through submission of occasional press releases to local newspapers TARGET/TIMESCALE: Ongoing	<i>GC, EAW, Water for Wildlife</i>
13	Raise public awareness of this species and its associated habitats through publishing articles in relevant publications and giving talks to relevant groups (e.g. publications and local meetings of farming unions, angling associations, River Care groups) TARGET/TIMESCALE: Ongoing	<i>GC, CCW, EAW, FWAG Cymru, KWT</i>

## 7 PARTNERS & OPPORTUNITIES

### 7.1 Overall Lead Partner for SAP

Environment Agency Wales (EAW)

### 7.2 Key partners

Afon Aber Otter Project

Afon Dwyryd Otter Partnership

Centre for Ecology and Hydrology (CEH)

Coed Cymru (CC)

Countryside Council for Wales (CCW)

Department for Environment, Planning and Countryside (Welsh Assembly Government) (DEPC)

Forestry Commission (FC)

Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group Cymru (FWAG Cymru)

Gwynedd Council (GC)

Keep Wales Tidy (KWT)

University of Wales Bangor (UWB)

Water for Wildlife

## 7.3 Opportunities

Volunteers, students, anglers, local otter partnerships / groups, farming unions, landowners and managers, Clean Rivers Project groups

## 8 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Principal Author: Jane Stott

Consultation: Robert Greig (Anglesey Otter Project), Geoff Liles (The Otter Consultancy), Chris Hall (Afon Dwyryd Otter Partnership), Dave Thorpe (EAW), Jill Jackson (GC), Carri Lane (EAW), Alan Pritchard (SNPA)

Line drawings: English Nature

## 9. Abbreviations

BAP: Biodiversity Action Plan, EIA: Environmental Impact Assessment, ESA: Environmentally Sensitive Area, HAP: Habitat Action Plan, JNCC: Joint Nature Conservation Committee, LBAP: Local Biodiversity Action Plan, LNR: Local Nature Reserve, NNR: National Nature Reserve, NWMP: Native Woodland Management Plan, ROSG: Roads and Otters Steering Group, SAC: Special Area of Conservation, SAP: Species Action Plan, SNPA: Snowdonia National Park Authority, SPA: Special Protection Area, SSSI: Site of Special Scientific Interest, WGS: Woodland Grant Scheme

Version 1, 2004