

## CARMARTHENSHIRE LBAP EUROPEAN OTTER ACTION PLAN

### Introduction

The European otter (*Lutra lutra*, Dyfrgi) is one of Britain's largest carnivores. Otters are largely nocturnal and live along rivers but will also utilise canals, ditches, marshes, lakes and adjacent scrub and wetland areas. They will also use estuaries and coastal areas but they require access to fresh water to maintain their fur in good condition. Their home range is dependent on habitat quality and food supply, and can be up to 40 km on rivers.



Otters favour rivers with good bankside cover; scrub such as hawthorn, blackthorn and bramble providing excellent lying-up sites during the daylight hours. Reed and sedge beds are also important for lying-up, and as feeding and breeding sites. The root systems of mature riverside trees such as ash, oak and sycamore provide cavities suitable for use as holts. Deciduous woodland is often used by otters, even when located some distance from the river, but accessible via small streams and ditches. Alder and willow carr are particularly important. Lakes, ponds, ox-bows and other wetland areas are extremely important for breeding otters, as they support amphibian populations, which are an important food source at a time of year when most otters have their cubs.

Their diet is varied, and includes fish, amphibians, crustaceans, birds and small mammals.

In Wales strong otter populations exist in south-west and mid Wales, but they are still weak in south-east and north-west Wales. Otters were considered widespread throughout the UK up until the 1950s when they underwent a rapid decline through to the 1970s. This has been mainly attributed to the use of organochlorine pesticides, exacerbated by hunting and habitat fragmentation. Recent surveys have shown a significant recovery in the number and range of otters in England and Wales. In some parts of Wales and south-western England otter numbers along rivers may now be close to their breeding capacity. Today road traffic accidents are one of the principal causes of death and populations may be limited by a lack of suitable isolated breeding sites and a lack of prey species, especially freshwater eel.

Otters are widely distributed throughout the county, this area representing a stronghold for the species. They are known to be present on all the rivers in Carmarthenshire – including the Teifi, Tywi, Taf, Loughor and Gwendraeth catchments. Breeding sites tend to be located on the tributaries, or areas of off-river habitat such as scrub, old ox-bows, etc. Both headwater catchments and the coast and estuaries provide passage routes for dispersing juveniles into adjacent river catchments. Otters have been observed on the Tywi within the limits of Carmarthen town, and similarly on the River Lliedi in Llanelli.

The local planning authority requires that surveys are undertaken to inform the planning/decision making/ of any plan/project that has the potential to affect otters as part of their statutory/policy responsibilities.

## **Vision statement and objectives**

Conservation of otters in the long-term requires a landscape-scale approach involving many different partners. The vision for otters is a county that has enough suitable habitat to ensure free movement throughout its range, with adequate breeding sites and reduction in the number of road deaths in the county. Any action undertaken would seek to meet one or more of the following objectives:

- OTT1** Undertake action, including riparian habitat management to help increase the population size and range of otters
- OTT2** To gather data on the distribution and status of otters in Carmarthenshire
- OTT3** To raise awareness of otters in Carmarthenshire and provide advice on habitat management

**Summary of action achieved by LBAP Partners (for more information contact the biodiversity officer – [Biodiversity@carmarthenshire.gov.uk](mailto:Biodiversity@carmarthenshire.gov.uk)) or visit the national Biodiversity Action Reporting System - <http://ukbars.defra.gov.uk>:**

### **2010–12**

- Mitigation plans drawn up for 6 road traffic accident blackspots in county – CCC OTT1
- Tywi Afon yr Oesoedd Project - otter holt installed at one site in Tywi valley OTT1
- Otter ledge installed in culvert at one site through highways maintenance work - CCC OTT1
- Otter holt installed at Kidwelly - RSPB OTT1
- Dinefwr park - otter holt installed - NT OTT1
- Survey of NBGW for otters - NBGW OTT2
- Otter road casualties taken to NRW for autopsy by Cardiff University - CCC/NRW OTT2
- Otter surveys required where suitable habitat occurs in planning applications - CCC OTT1

### **2013**

- Otter holt installed at Morfa Berwig water vole site OTT1
- Otter holt created as part of Landscape and Biodiversity RDP-funded scheme OTT1
- Otter surveys required where suitable habitat occurs in planning applications - CCC OTT1
- Otter road casualties taken to NRW for autopsy by Cardiff University - CCC/NRW OTT2

### **2014**

- Otter warning signs erected at Kidwelly – CCC OTT3
- Training for vols on spraint ID and survey OTT2

### **2015**

- Training for CCC officers on otters – CCC OTT3
- Investigative work at Commissioner’s Bridge, Kidwelly for otter mitigation OTT1
- Otter surveys required where suitable habitat occurs in planning applications - CCC OTT1
- Otter road casualties taken to NRW for autopsy by Cardiff University - CCC/NRW OTT2

### **Proposed future action**

- On-site training for CCC officers re otters and bridges/culverts – CCC OTT3

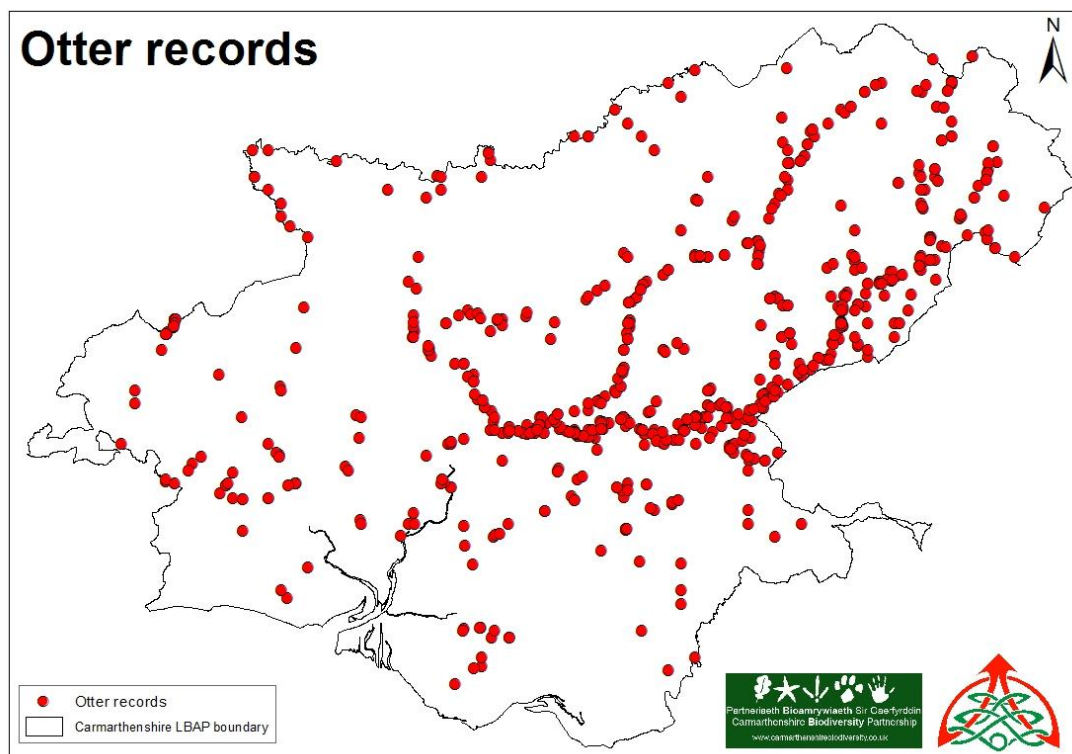
### Useful links:

- BBC Nature wildlife - [otter](#)
- The Mammal Society - [otter](#)
- The Wildlife Trust – [otter](#)

### Legislation

The otter is strictly protected under the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010. The deliberate capturing, disturbing, injuring and killing of otter is prohibited, as is damaging or destroying their breeding sites and resting places (note that this is a simplified summary of the legislation).

*The otter features in an ancient shamanic Welsh tale. The sorceress Ceridwen left young Gwion to guard her cauldron, but he tasted the draught by accident and gained knowledge of all things. He transformed into a hare to escape her wrath, but she pursued him as a hound. When he plunged into the river as a salmon, Ceridwen became an otter to continue her pursuit. Gwion was eventually reborn as the great bard, Taliesin.*





Partneriaeth **Bioamrywiaeth** Sir Gaerfyrddin  
Carmarthenshire **Biodiversity** Partnership

[www.carmarthenshirebiodiversity.co.uk](http://www.carmarthenshirebiodiversity.co.uk)

The [Carmarthenshire Biodiversity Partnership](#) (CBP) is made up of the following organisations: [Carmarthenshire County Council](#) (CCC), [Wildlife Trust of South and West Wales](#) (WTSWW), [Natural Resources Wales](#) (NRW), [RSPB](#), [Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust](#) (WWT), [Carmarthenshire Bird Club](#) (CBC), [National Botanic Gardens Wales](#) (NBGW), [Butterfly Conservation](#) (BC), [Carmarthenshire Rivers Trust](#) (CRT), [National Trust](#) (NT), [Botanical Society of the British Isles](#) (BSBI), [Llanelli Naturalists](#) (LN), [Bat Conservation Trust](#) (BCT), [West Wales Biodiversity Information Centre](#) (WWBIC), [Amphibian and Reptile Conservation](#) (ARC), [Woodland Trust](#) (WT)