

TOOLBOX TALK

No 27

OTTERS

WHAT?

The European otter is part of the same family as badgers, weasels, stoats, pine marten and mink (*Mustelidae*). It is listed in the International Union for the Conservation of Natures' (IUCN) Red Book as 'vulnerable to extinction'. The number of otters in Britain is not known, but they are on the increase in some areas.

WHY?

Otters have no main predator. They are at the top of the food chain and are predators themselves, hunting fish, small mammals and birds. The main threat to otters is from humans, through the destruction of their habitat, from pesticides running off from farmland and polluting watercourses, and from being run over by vehicles while crossing roads and paths. Like many other animals they are protected under the Wildlife & countryside Act 1981 (As Amended)



NOTES:

Habitat

The otter's main habitat is along the sea shore and the banks of rivers, lakes and streams. They are territorial and their territories cover 1 - 3 km along the sea shore and 5 - 20 km along freshwater rivers and lakes. Otters do not migrate and live in their territories all year round.

Breeding

Males (dogs) and females (bitches) first breed when they reach 2 years old. There is no breeding 'season', although in some areas breeding has been seen to take place in spring. It depends on the availability of food and habitat. In the wild, an average of 1 - 2 young are born in each litter.

Development

In the wild, an average of 1 - 2 young survive to adulthood. Males and females become independent when they reach 18 months.

Diet

Otter's main food is small fish and crabs, but they are carnivores and will eat almost anything that is easy to catch, including birds on both the water and the shore, small mammals and larger fish such as dogfish.

Threats

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Identification

Otters are about the size of a small dog. Their coat is mainly brown, with a lighter brown bib. They have small ears and eyes on a flattish head. Otters run with a lolling gait on land, and hold their long thick tapering tail off the ground. They swim very flat on the water surface and when they dive their long tail flips over and can be seen clearly. Otters have a high-pitched squeak when calling to other otters and a whickering, loud angry chatter when threatening.

DO

DON'T



Stop work and inform site manager if evidence of otters found on site



Threaten or harm the otters in any way

