

# European Otter

*Lutra lutra*

**EcoRecord**

the ecological database  
for Birmingham and the Black Country

Species Fact Sheet



Photo © Bernard Landgraf

## Ecology

**Otters are one of the UK's top predators and feed mainly on fish but also waterbirds, amphibians and crustaceans.**

Their excellent swimming ability and prominent whiskers help them to locate and catch prey, even in murky water and their webbed feet and broad tails make the Otter very well adapted to a semi-aquatic lifestyle.

Otters are territorial and range over considerable lengths of watercourse, regularly marking their presence in prominent places with characteristic strongly-scented droppings or 'spraints'. This makes it relatively easy to determine the presence of otters even when direct observation of the animals is difficult.

Males may travel over a considerable distance while seeking to establish a territory, and the first sign of otters returning to an area are often wandering males that become road casualties.

Otters typically have one or occasionally two litters of around half a dozen pups which can be born at any time of the year in a nest or 'holt' which may be underground, in old tree roots or even just dense vegetation. After about 10 weeks the cubs will venture out of the holt.

Pesticides concentrated in the food chain, poor habitat quality, and possibly hunting, reduced otter numbers during much of the 20th century but since the 1990s and the withdrawal from use of organo-chlorine pesticides there has been a major improvement in the species fortunes. Otters have now returned to the Midlands and much of lowland England, aided by extensive conservation effort with the emphasis on improving the water and habitat quality of rivers and streams.

## Habitat

Otters favour rivers and canals with healthy fish populations and good bankside cover. The size of the watercourse is not as important as clean water and good habitat quality.

## B&BC Distribution and Status

**B&BC Status: Uncommon**



The first confirmed modern Otter record in B&BC was in 2000 when a spraint was found along the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal, Wolverhampton. Since then records suggest that there is now otter activity along a number of canals and rivers across Birmingham and the Black Country.

