

# Otters

## Ecology

Since becoming a legally protected species and with significant improvements in the condition of UK water courses numbers of otters within the UK have increased to an extent where they are now found on the majority of rivers and water courses within the UK.

Otters occupy fairly extensive territories with males occupying as much as 35 km of linear habitat along a river, with this territory often overlapping several females. Otters are active all year round and can potentially breed throughout the year.



## Legislation

Otter are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017. Consequently, it is an offence to intentionally or recklessly kill or injure an otter or disturb an otter whilst it is occupying a resting place or breeding site, or damage or destroy a resting place or breeding site.

## Survey effort required

As part of any planning application submission the likely presence of any otters needs to be assessed and if necessary further survey work undertaken to confirm the presence or absence of otters. Where otters are considered to be present then appropriate avoidance or mitigation measures will need to be designed into the proposed development scheme and submitted as part of the planning application.

To ensure that Local Planning Authority and the relevant competent authority can successfully determine either a planning application or a licence application it is important that sufficient survey data is gathered. The following is the typical process for undertaking otter surveys.



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**Presence/ absence survey**- The banks of the section of water course which will be affected by works and an appropriate buffer along the water course is walked by an experienced ecologist who searches for evidence of otters including spraints, feeding remains and footprints. Potential breeding sites within the roots and stumps of riverside trees are also inspected for evidence of otters. Camera traps may also be used to confirm presence or determine if otters are breeding.



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