



“Restoration of the Lower Shannon SAC (Mulkear River) for Sea Lamprey, Atlantic Salmon and the European Otter”

Press Release

1st February 2012

Conservation Volunteers Install Otter Holt

On Saturday morning last, a wet muggy day even by Irish standards, a party of almost twenty members of the Mulkear Conservation Volunteers gathered to install the fifth artificial otter holt installed to date in the Mulkear catchment. The work took place away from the main channel of the river on a small side stream at a surveyed site of strategic importance on the Newport River.

The work being undertaken by MulkearLIFE and the Mulkear Conservation Volunteers is designed to reverse the decline in the otter population in the Lower Shannon Special Area of Conservation. It is focused on the creation of additional habitat, improving food supply and the installation of artificial otter holts. The habitat improvement work has to date focused primarily on sites where habitat has been lost or significantly degraded.

MulkearLIFE, with the support of Mulkear Conservation Volunteer members, IFI and NPWS colleagues, has undertaken extensive survey work throughout the entire Mulkear Catchment in June 2010 and June 2011. The surveys covered 86 sites covering some 650 square kilometres of the catchment across counties Limerick and North and South Tipperary. These surveys, coupled with an intensive six-month natal otter holt survey, has helped inform sites for the installation of artificial otter holts. The installation of artificial otter holts, made of recycled plastic, are designed to help increase the otter population throughout the catchment. There has been a dramatic decline in the otter population throughout Western Europe in the second half of the last century. The decline in Ireland has been significantly less. A national survey in 1980/81 showed otters present in 88% of survey sites, this had declined to 75% in the 1991 survey and had declined yet again to approximately 70% of sites surveyed in the 2005 national survey. According to the National Parks and Wildlife Service, a project partner in MulkearLIFE, the national otter population is now approximately 12,000.

The otter is one of Ireland's most elusive mammals and is very rarely seen. It is usual that all one gets to see is a flash of brown followed by the sound of a splash into the water, as otters are at home in their watery world. They are extremely well adapted to their water world, are excellent swimmers, have large lungs and can stay under water for several minutes. On the surface they swim low in the water, with only their front head visible above water. Otters eat a wide variety of food and essentially will consume what's on offer. They feed mainly on fish (salmon, trout, sea lamprey, eels and crayfish) and small mammals (frogs). In the Mulkear catchment, MulkearLIFE, an EU funded LIFE+ project, is undertaking river restoration work to enhance the population of Atlantic Salmon and Sea Lamprey and Otters. Thus, as is usual in the case in nature, all species are interdependent and mutually supporting and reliant on good quality habitat and food supply.

The Mulkear catchment has been subjected to drainage works for well over one hundred years, the first major scheme having taken place in 1874. These works have had a very considerable impact on riparian vegetation and riverbanks with a concurrent negative impact on otter habitat. In Ireland otters are fully protected under the 1976 Wildlife Act. It is an offence for anyone to hunt, disturb or intentionally kill an otter. It is one of the qualifying species of interest in the designation of the Lower Shannon as a Special Area of Conservation. The animal is also protected under the EU Habitats Directive, the 20th Anniversary of which will be marked by MulkearLIFE in May 2012. The Habitats

Directive obliges Ireland to ensure that the conservation status of the otter, and other species and habitats in designated Special Areas of Conservation, are protected and enhanced.

MulkearLIFE has to date installed five otter holts and approximately five more will be installed at strategically important survey sites throughout the catchment over the next number of weeks. A Big Thank You to all Mulkear Conservation Volunteer members who gave up their Saturday morning to lend their support for this important work and to those who helped make an additional otter holt away from the river for installation at a future date.

The first talk as part of MulkearLIFE's series of Four Illustrated Talks (four Mondays in February) will take place this Monday (6th February) and will focus on the project's work with otters.

Notes for Editors

1. High Resolution Digital Images are available to accompany this Press Release.
2. Interviews can be arranged with the Project Manager by using the contact details below.
3. MulkearLIFE is a new €1.75 million European Commission funded LIFE Nature project working on the restoration of the Lower Shannon Special Area of Conservation (with a focus on the Mulkear River catchment) for Atlantic Salmon, Sea Lamprey and European Otter. Further details may be viewed on the project website www.mulkearlifeproject.com
4. Inland Fisheries Ireland (Limerick) is lead partner together with the OPW and Limerick County Council. Additional funding support comes from National Parks and Wildlife Service. Other supporters include Teagasc, IFA, ICMSA, and local angling groups.
5. The project is one of the first and most important integrated catchment management projects in Ireland. It is a flagship EU LIFE Nature project –covering some 650 sq km which contain a variety of habitats and protected species. Much of the area is designated as a Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) under the EU Habitats Directive and forms part of the Natura 2000 Network.

Issued by:

Ruairí Ó Conchúir, Project Manager – MulkearLIFE
Inland Fisheries Ireland (Limerick Office)
Ashbourne Business Park, Dock Road, Limerick
Tel: 061 300 238 / Fax: 061 300 308 / Mob: 087 062 5582
E-mail: info@mulkearlifeproject.com
Web: www.mulkearlifeproject.com / www.inlandfisheries.ie

