



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

Press Release

10th June 2013

Annual Otter Survey Conducted in Near Perfect Conditions

The fourth annual catchment wide rapid assessment survey of otter (*Lutra lutra*) took place on Friday and Saturday of last week (7th and 8th June 2013) in near perfect surveying conditions. A prolonged period of dry weather in the preceding 10 days meant that rivers were in low flow and evidence of otter was more prevalent than the 2012 survey.

Almost 100 sites were included in the comprehensive survey which covered the entire catchment of 650sq Km covering counties Limerick, North Tipperary and South Tipperary.

The work was undertaken by a total of eight teams over the two days, with a minimum of two and up to three per team. Teams were comprised of MulkearLIFE staff, colleagues from Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) and twelve members of the Mulkear Conservation Volunteers. Many of the volunteers had participated in previous rapid assessment surveys for otter in 2010, 2011 and 2012 and are now experienced surveyors.

The two-day survey was preceded by a training workshop on the Wednesday 5th June which provided in-house and field based training in otter survey methodology and identification for MCV members and IFI staff. The workshop also served as a useful refresher course for those who had surveyed previously.

The training also focused on the methodology regarding the collection of otter spraint which was undertaken this year for the first time.

This is MulkearLIFE's fourth annual rapid assessment survey for otter. MulkearLIFE's annual survey is amongst the most comprehensive otter survey work undertaken anywhere in Ireland on a catchment basis.

For the first time this year, otter spraints were collected. These will be used in DNA analysis work which will greatly assist in giving an estimate of the national adult otter population and a better understanding of the otter usage of sites and extent of individual territory.

The full results of the survey will be available over the next number of weeks and will help guide MulkearLIFE's work with otter. In particular, the survey findings will help with the continuation of the project's work in terms of the placement of artificial otter holts and the creation of habitat for otter.

A Big Thank You to all who helped in the survey and especially to our colleagues in IFI and to 12 members of the Mulkear Conservation Volunteers, who not only attended the otter training workshop, but who gave so generously of their time on Friday and Saturday. We especially thank the new MCV members who joined us this year.

Once all sites are verified a summary of the survey findings will be posted.

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.mulkearlife.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.

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