



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

Press Release

29th April 2013

Highly successful IUCN European Otter Workshop

MulkearLIFE was thrilled with the success of the IUCN European Otter Workshop in Kinsale, Co. Cork. The two-day event was a wonderful opportunity for MulkearLIFE to present its work and, more importantly, to network and liaise with others on the national and international stage. The event brought together leading otter experts to discuss a range of issues related to the study, management and conservation of the European otter (*Lutra lutra*). Some delegates have been working with otters for decades.

Delegates were drawn from a large number of countries, with the largest contingents from Ireland and the UK. Other counties represented included Sweden, Norway, Germany, France, Netherlands, Luxemburg, Portugal, Austria, Italy, Slovenia, Romania and the Czech Republic. Delegates were also drawn from Israel and Georgia.

Of the many highlights over the two days, the presentation by David O Neill from the MISE Project at the Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT) was exceptional. The presentation focused on new non-invasive approaches to monitor mammals, especially extremely elusive species like European Otter. He noted the growing importance of a suite of DNA-based assays to monitor otter populations using a non-invasive DNA source (spraints). He noted that WIT and the MISE Project had developed novel species-specific real-time polymerase chain reaction (qPCR) assays using probes which enable species and sex identification from otter spraints. MulkearLIFE hopes to utilise the skills gained by the Waterford Institute of Technology in the coming months to undertake collaborative work on otters in the Mulkear catchment.

Other highlights included the presentation given by Gill Weyman of the Cork Branch of the Irish Wildlife Trust on the use of volunteers in urban otter survey work. She noted that while the use by otters of Irish urban waterways is well known, it is unclear if these otters are resident in such urban areas. She outlined work undertaken in Cork city over the past number of years where otter spraints were collected and DNA extracted for species verification, sex allocation and individual identification. She noted that the survey work and study has demonstrated the usefulness of volunteers and that the findings are being disseminated into the wider Cork community to encourage locals to play an active role in sustaining their local urban otter population.

International presentations were exceptional and varied. Highlights included the presentation given by Paul Chanin, on the implications of otter populations on local fish farms, and the presentation by Lauren Harrington on the potential of acoustic deterrents to reduce otter predation on fresh water fish fisheries. There were also excellent case study presentations on the status of otter populations in Romania and in Georgia and the potential impact of hydropower plants on otter habitat. Stimulating presentations were also made on otter friendly fyke-nets and on-going research work in terms of fyke-net design in Germany and exciting ongoing work in Cardiff University on analysis of otter road kill.

MulkearLIFE's presentation outlined the work of the project and the practical conservation measures which have been undertaken over the past three years. It focused on project's work to improve water quality and enhance food resources through major in-stream enhancement works on the Mulkear, Bilboa, Newport & Clare-Annagh rivers. The

project's work on controlling invasive species was also outlined to the workshop attendees. It was noted that the need for such work was related in part to extensive past drainage works which has impacted on riparian biodiversity.

The project's direct work on otter conservation, including catchment wide survey work, installation of artificial otter holts and the creation of habitat, was outlined. The exceptional role played by the Mulkear Conservation Volunteers, our project partners and the NPWS in our work with otters was fully acknowledged.

Aside from specialists in otter research and volunteers undertaking otter surveys and practical conservation work, the IUCN event was also attended by a number of sister LIFE projects working directly with European otter. This included Gérard Schmidt who headed up a transnational LIFE project to support otter populations in Luxembourg and Belgium. Their work was similar in many respects to the work being undertaken presently by MulkearLIFE.

Two other sister LIFE projects of note were the IRD Duhallow LIFE project who presented on their work with otter and a LIFE Communication project from Slovenia. Marjana Honigsfeld Adamic outlined the public awareness work which they have been engaged in across Slovenia as part of their LIFE project.

If otters could talk, they would say "A Big Thank You" to all who gathered in Kinsale to help progress their conservation status in Europe and further afield. MulkearLIFE would like to express its deep gratitude to the MISE Project in the Waterford Institute of Technology, and to Catherine O' Reilly and Denise O' Meara in particular, and to all on the organising committee of the European Otter Workshop and the IUCN Otter Specialist Group for affording MulkearLIFE the opportunity to present at this important event. It was truly a wonderful few days of sharing and networking for all.

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.

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