



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

Press Release

7th January 2013

Good News On Otters in the Mulkear Catchment

The European Otter, one of MulkearLIFE’s target species, is an extremely elusive creature. Rarely seen by the general public and indeed rarely seen during MulkearLIFE’s own catchment wide otter survey work. The good news is that it would appear that they are expanding their range and moving into new areas in the Mulkear catchment. Reports submitted to MulkearLIFE, coupled with the Project’s own field work, indicate an expansion of territory and the use of sites which have not seen otters previously or which have not seen otters for a great many decades.

The otter is native to Ireland and is considered one of Ireland’s oldest mammals. Accounts of otter dating back to the last ice age, about 10,500 years ago, have been recorded. Unfortunately, there has been an extremely dramatic decline in the otter population throughout Europe in the second half of the 20th Century with the species almost wiped out in several mainland European countries. Even in Ireland, which has long been considered a population stronghold, otters are not as widespread as was the case formerly. While the decline in Ireland was significantly less, habitat loss over the past fifty years has had a very negative impact on the species. The national total population, according to the National Parks and Wildlife Service, is approximately 12,000. MulkearLIFE’s work over the past three years has been designed to halt the decline in the otter population. As reported previously, MulkearLIFE’s work is targeted at improving otter habitat and food supply.

The otter is a territorial animal. The good news is that otters have now been seen by the MulkearLIFE Team in the parts of the catchment, including the Upper Mulkear, where they have not been seen before. This good news has been supported and expanded upon over this past week-end with a report forwarded to MulkearLIFE by Mr. Jack Ryan. He noted that locals in the Pallasgreen / Emly area were extremely surprised to see two otters in a local stream, which to the best of their knowledge, didn’t have otters for at least 50 years. This stream is on the border of the Mulkear Catchment and is extremely good news. It is not clear if these sightings are a direct result of the work of MulkearLIFE. A range of factors could be at play. These factors could include less source pollution, less human disturbance, enhanced food supply, climatic factors, a recent reduction in the mink population in the catchment or simply the elusive and adaptive otter expanding its territory owing to enhanced levels of breeding success. MulkearLIFE looks forward with great anticipation to a dry Spring and Summer and undertaking the next full catchment wide otter survey in June 2013. In the meantime, if members of the public would like to report any otter sightings in the catchment please forward same to the Project at the following e-mail address info@mulkearlifecom.com.

Finally, an important element of the work of MulkearLIFE is the strategic placement of artificial otter holts. These have been installed at sites where the occurrence of otter has been shown to be low (in otter survey work) or where otter habitat is particularly poor (in habitat survey work). Such installations have also taken place at sites where MulkearLIFE has undertaken significant instream rehabilitation works to enhance fish populations. The next outing of the Mulkear Conservation Volunteers (MCV), and the first MCV outing of 2013, will be focused on otters. It will include the installation of an artificial otter holt, manufactured out of recycled plastic, and habitat works on site. This outing will take place on Saturday 26th January 2013. Full details of this outing will be posted in due course on this website.

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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