

Otter - Dwrgi - *Lutra lutra*

Otters were once very common throughout Britain, and some people hunted them for 'sport'. During the 1960s, Otters became extinct in many areas because of the harmful chemicals which were used as pesticides and herbicides on farmland. These chemicals also badly affected other wildlife including birds of prey.

When the chemicals were banned, it took many years for nature to recover, but eventually otters started to appear on rivers again.

Otters are protected by law, and it is illegal to kill, injure, capture or disturb them, or damage or disturb their den, which is called a holt.

Male Otters are called dogs, and females are called bitches.

Otters eat fish, frogs, and other aquatic animals, and one of their favourite foods is eels.

If you look on riverside rocks or under bridges, you may find the Otters' droppings, which are called spraints. They smell sweet and musky - some people think they smell like jasmine tea! The Otter leaves its spraints so that other Otters will know it is living there. Be careful near water, and don't climb on rocks by the river unless there is an adult with you.

Otters share their habitat (the place where they live) with Mink and Water Voles. Sadly, the Water Vole has become extinct in many areas, partly due to the American Mink which eats them. Now that Otters are returning to our rivers, in some areas the Mink is becoming less common, so the return of the Otter may help the Water Vole to survive.

The Welsh name for the Otter means 'water dog'.



Otters have now returned to the rivers, lakes and streams of North Wales, and their tracks and signs can be found quite easily (if you know what to look for).

If you would like to try to see otters, please contact Wildlife & Countryside Services, as we organise wildlife watching activities and expeditions.

Check out the web site for more details of the services available, at www.wildlifeservices.co.uk.