



PRESS RELEASE

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CHESHIRE OTTERS CAUGHT ON FILM

The longest-ever film footage of Cheshire's rare otters was shown on BBC's Northwest Tonight on Monday (17 May) evening.

Once almost extinct in Cheshire, otters have returned and colonised all of the county's large rivers in the past 30 years. This remarkable comeback is largely due to the increasingly good water quality in our rivers and the banning of pesticides, which affected otters significantly.

To record this conservation success story and encourage more people and landowners to take an interest in the health of their local wildlife, the Cheshire region Biodiversity Partnership (CrBP) set out to capture this elusive river mammal on camera, with help from amateur film-maker Ron Thomas.

"Otters mostly come out at night or early in the morning so it is rare to see them," said Sarah Bennett, CrBP Co-ordinator.

"Because otters have a territory of 20-40km, it is also incredibly difficult to film them, so it can be like trying to find a needle in a haystack.

"The fact that we managed to get this film footage is a landmark event for all the conservationists and landowners in Cheshire who have worked for many years to improve the health of the rivers and create ideal habitats for the otters to return to and live within."

Richard Gardner, Living Landscape Manager for Cheshire Wildlife Trust, which is a partner of the CrBP, was equally excited about the film: "This is truly a highlight of our work to make Cheshire's rivers and landscapes a better place for wildlife.

"We have for years been monitoring the wildlife on rivers – including otters and water voles – and often we come across signs that otters are there, such as footprints and spraints.

"However it has always been extremely difficult to see the creatures in the flesh and sightings are few and far between.

"This film footage now means everyone in Cheshire will be able to take a look at one of the wild otters living on their doorstep!"

If you missed the BBC's Northwest Tonight programme – which also contains filming from the landowners otter habitat training day run by CWT earlier in the year - you can view it online on BBC iPlayer. The CrBP film footage of the otter can be viewed on YouTube.

A special information sheet about otters can be found on www.cheshire-biodiversity.org.uk and if you would like to learn more about otter conservation, Cheshire Wildlife Trust is holding an Otter Ecology and Conservation Training Day on Saturday 7th August – to book a place see www.cheshirewildlifetrust.co.uk or call 01948 820728.

ENDS

NOTES TO EDITORS

1. IMAGES: Stills taken from the film (in Word file); plus 2 photos of otters by Darin Smith attached with this press release; larger versions of the photos available on request (sorry we are unable to produce larger versions of the stills – you are also welcome to take stills from the YouTube site – see below).
For more information and images please contact Sarah Bennett at CWT on 0777 333 4387.
2. The YouTube address for the otter footage is: <http://www.youtube.com/user/TheCrpbp>
3. Otters are an indicator of good water quality. As our water quality is getting better, the otters are able to find food within our waterways. Road casualties and pesticides are amongst a long list of factors that have contributed to the otters' demise over the years, and although Cheshire has a wealth of waterways, the otter population is still lower than would be expected. The species is currently listed in the International Union for the Conservation of Natures' (IUCN) Red Book as 'vulnerable to extinction'.
4. The Cheshire region Biodiversity Partnership was established in 1997 bringing together over 40 organisations, groups and individuals to work collectively towards a common vision of 'a Cheshire region richer in Wildlife by 2020'. This Partnership coordinates the Biodiversity Action Plans for the Cheshire region.
5. Cheshire Wildlife Trust is a charity that works to protect and enhance wildlife in the Cheshire region. As part of our role to safeguard our fragile natural heritage, we manage 45 nature reserves, which help to protect endangered species, rare plants, and threatened habitats. We are all about people taking action for wildlife at a local level.

As our natural environment including ponds, woodland, grasslands and peatlands is disappearing, and we have been losing our wildlife heritage to development, pollution and intensive farming, it is all the more important to preserve our unique local area and its wildlife to help maintain the balance of nature. Therefore we are taking on a broader role within the region in the light of the increasingly important environmental agenda.

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Cheshire Wildlife Trust – Creating a Living Landscape for Cheshire