

Brecknock Wildlife Trust (redacted report)

Lion House, Bethel Square,
Brecon,
Powys,

Otter Survey

Executive Summary

- There are signs of otters at Talybont Reservoir
- There may only be one or two ranging over the reservoir and its tributaries
- No evidence of breeding holts was found at this time
- Feeding remains of frogs and toads show this to be an important food source at this time of year.
- The redacted end of the reservoir had the densest distribution of spraint.
- Measures should be made to reduce disturbance at the redacted by installing a lockable barrier redacted.
- Other conservation measures could include fencing and/or planting scrub/ hedge plants to make some of the copses and patches of scrub more secure for resting otters.
- Felling on the redacted should be done in a way to preserve some cover for otters or mitigate by creating resting places with brash and logs.



Otter by Amy Lewis

Introduction

Brecknock Wildlife Trust was commissioned by Friends of Talybont Reservoir to do an otter survey. The aim was to gain an insight into areas important to otters and identify any habitat improvements that could be made.

Survey Team Experience

Teg Jones is an ex- Environment Agency Wales Biodiversity Team Leader with much experience of otter surveys mainly on rivers. Beverley Lewis has had training and some survey experience of otter surveying. Stephanie Coates has previous experience of finding otter signs as has Ben Rees. Other volunteers were new to the task and assisted in writing notes and recording position.

Survey Methodology

The shoreline was followed and signs of otters mapped and noted. GPS units were used when they were functioning to aid this. We surveyed in teams of 2-3 for Health and Safety and to aid note taking and navigation.

Site Description

Talybont reservoir is a 3.5km long artificial lake of moderately nutrient poor water and a mostly narrow marginal zone. The reservoir was stocked with fish historically.

Survey Constraints

It was only possible survey after a period of dry weather as rainfall washes an away sign, timing was also constrained by surveyor availability. Otters can be surveyed at all times of year and there is no definite breeding season. Ideally the reservoir would be lower so that the surveyor can walk along the "beach" to look for signs but this was not possible. Some parts of the bank were inaccessible due to scrub. Survey at other times of year may give clues as to where they are breeding and other prey eaten.

Survey Results

Excel Spreadsheet attached at end. redacted

Maps of Otter signs: redacted

Discussion and conclusion

While it is difficult to estimate numbers of otters from number of spraint it highlights areas most used by otters at this time- the southern end.

Many spraints (droppings) were found and their position recorded.

At this time feeding remains consisted of numerous frog and toad parts.

A few rest areas (otter couch) were identified but no breeding sites were positively identified.

Many potential rest areas were identified including areas of tussock sedge at redacted of the reservoir.

Bramble and scrub areas on both sides of the reservoir could also be used as resting places.

The redacted side of the reservoir is most undisturbed and resting places may be used for breeding here.

There are also small pockets of old hazel coppice with bluebell dominated native ground flora.

The redacted also may have possible places for otter breeding where trees fall.

Where the larch is being cleared this may remove some resting/breeding sites.

On the redacted side of the reservoir there is more public access and disturbance by people and dogs as well as a road which can be busy at weekends.

Recommendations

Brash left over from clearance and felling could be piled up together with some trees to make rest sites and mitigate for this.

There are some opportunities for improving / creating rest sites on the redacted side, this could be strategically planned so that there are evenly spaced refuges for an otter travelling down the reservoir.

The copses could be hedged or under planted with shade tolerant holly to improve cover.

Areas of scrub could be fenced off and allowed to become thicker with no grazing; this includes an area of scrub at the redacted end of the reservoir both.

At the redacted end the redacted could be a site used by otters and should be managed a bit at a time and cover replaced by alternative species if it is removed, (possible if becomes infected with Phytophthora).

Measures should be put in place to better deter Camping as this is a key area for the otters. This could be done by locking the field gate and attaching a piece to increase its height.

References

Mammals of Britain. Their Tracks and Signs, (1979), Lawrence & Brown.

Thank you also to Teg Jones and Bev Lewis for their advice. Anna Georgiou (BIS) for Mapinfo help. And the other volunteers who came out and surveyed: Owen Lawrence, Ben Rees, Liza Ross and Teg Jones.

Reported by S.Coates, Conservation Officer 25/04/2014