

# The Applecross Trust



## Fact Sheet 4

### European Otter (*Lutra lutra*)

The Scottish otter population is regarded as one of the best in Europe, and they are quite frequently seen in Applecross. During the 1960's and 1970's the European otter declined throughout the industrialised part of its European range, probably due to pesticides and other chemicals accumulating in their food source. This trend has however now reversed in Britain as well as other countries bordering the Atlantic.



The otter is easily recognised by; its brown fur, often pale on the underside; its long slender body up to about 120cm long; its small ears; its long, thick tail of about 40cm and its webbed feet. In weight the male averages 10.1kg and the female 7.0kg.

Otters are semi aquatic mammals, equally at home in fresh and saltwater, although coast dwelling otters do require access to freshwater to clean the salt from their fur. The otter is a shy, solitary and mostly nocturnal animal often ranging over a large territory in search of food. They mark their territory by depositing spraints, with a notable sweet, musky smell in prominent spots, this also helps to keep neighbouring animals in social contact.

Otters may breed at any time of the year with the average litter being 2 to 3 cubs. The cubs are born in dens called holts which are often either part of a tree root system, a hole in a bank or a pile of rocks. The cubs are raised by their mothers, and often stay with them for up to a year.

The otter diet consists mainly of coarse fish although they will also enjoy eels, crabs, butterfish, octopus and squat lobsters as well as some water birds and in the spring time frogs.

The main threat to any local otters is probably from road death, they are also vulnerable to any pollution of their habitat or food supply.

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