

Otter impacts on Stillwater Fisheries

Four key issues

Fish stocks

Otter trapping

Environment and access

Biodiversity losses from predation



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On behalf of the Carp Society



The impact of otters on fish stocks (1)

ALL species can be heavily predated but carp losses up to 2014;

The Big Picture” (most referenced document in the UK)
Yorkshire alone lost £2.7M of carp in four years. That’s £2.7M
Large fish cannot be replaced
Lost jobs and livelihoods
Similar losses from around the country



“The Big Picture 2” updates losses, in Cornwall alone;
Of 95 fisheries predated, 19 closed, 15 have fenced their waters

Also details many other fish stocks damaged by otters

- upwards of 40% of all pike now damaged
- ditto tench
- silver fish stocks taken



The impact of otters on fish stocks (2)



Late 90's most anglers did not accept scale of losses from otters
Now 90% of anglers have seen waters suffer badly

Presentations to DEFRA in 2001, 2002 and 2003, when we pleaded unsuccessfully for fisheries protection funding



Otter trapping (1)

Otter trapping from fenced fisheries

NOT the panacea one would hope for;

Take Lonsdale Angling Club;

- **five days' notice of intention to trap**
- **2 weeks to trap the otter**
- **If had been an adult not a juvenile then the large, valuable fish would have been decimated**

Quote from the club: *'The time taken to trap the otter would have been unacceptable to club members if carp were being lost.'*

If an animal can't be trapped in very short order then the process is meaningless



Otter trapping (2)

Also NE have it seems stalled the recruitment and training of more otter trappers too

Unresolved- what do we do too about fisheries that can't be fenced?

**Unresolved-keeping and release of otters without permits-legally binding permits MUST be introduced
Highly irresponsible and contentious!**



The Environment

Environment highlighted by DEFRA that this should be available to everyone, enjoyable resource for leisure and exercise.

NE responsible for delivery of some of Defra's public service agreements too (e.g. reversing the long-term decline in the number of farmland birds by 2020 and improving public access to the countryside).

So RSPB have 28 sites enclosed in fences

Anglers have well in excess of 1000 attractive waters now surrounded with fences

Both will inevitably grow considerably

Diminishes natural environment

Denies access to water for many animals

How does ever increasing otter fencing fit with widening access to the Countryside? One animal does all this? Is this really proportional?



The impact of otters on all Water Habitats, and Biodiversity (1)

The impact of otters on all Water Habitats, and Biodiversity

We're bringing out *The Big Picture 2* soon, a couple of extracts;

- Fish Farming, Tim Small also covered today
- Birds as otter food;
 - Declining numbers of swans on many waters
 - Nesting water birds generally predated

RSPB fenced 28 reserves protecting breeding waders

Lapwing productivity up hugely

RSPB ambiguously describes fences as “predator fences”

Protection against foxes, mustelids* (such as stoats, weasels and badgers), hedgehogs and rodents plus domestic and feral cats, American mink, brown rats and grey squirrels.

Fences “coincidentally” identical to otter fences *Otters are mustelids, but significantly they do not name otters (too controversial?)

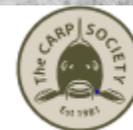


The impact of otters on all Water Habitats, and Biodiversity (2)

Then, recent RSPB book “Otters” by Nicola Chester advise diet includes

- Birds generally
- Preferred food is eels
- Spawning frogs and toads
- Water birds feature highly in summer
- Ducks sitting on eggs or moulting feathers easy target
- Ducklings and young birds
- Recent studies of Otter spraints, eels made up 80% of the fish eaten by otters

Fish stocks are predated heavily-
already fully covered



The impact of otters on all Water Habitats, and Biodiversity (3)

European eel: Protected and critically endangered
Eels currently at 5% of their population level of 25 years ago
Historically all books advised otter's favourite diet was eels,
as does RSPB Nicola Chester



Otter BAPS conveniently told us this definitely wasn't the case when we drew this to their attention

Salmon too are under threat from otters (accept I'm straying from still-waters!)

Then according to the 2016 report The State of Nature covering biodiversity tables for 218 countries, the UK is ranked 189th

Half of our freshwater wildlife species are in decline. Furthermore 13% are at risk of extinction



The impact of otters on all Water Habitats, and Biodiversity (3)

Fencing, all at a cost of circa £9 a metre, cost per water £10,000 to £60,000. All at the behest of single species management.

It is unfortunate that Otter BAPS Group did not provide a Risk Assessment on the impact of otters on the wider environment to EA, NE, and DEFRA



Summary



So fence costs £20M+ to date

Fish losses enormous-Yorkshire alone £2.7M up till 2014

Reduced rural amenity of fish stocks

Diminishing biodiversity, serious loss of bird life etc.

Action needed now to protect biodiversity of waterscapes. Precautionary principles should apply before too late

All highlights the dangers of taking the narrow view of single species management in isolation

So we would ask, is the “pedestal” status of otters not disproportionate to the cost?

