


[Mulkear Catchment](#)
[What is Mulkear LIFE?](#)
[Conservation & Education](#)
[EU LIFE & LIFE at 20](#)
[Reports & Resources](#)
[News & Multimedia](#)
[Contact Information](#)


Recent News

News & Multimedia

24/06/13

Catchment Wide Electrofishing Survey Completed - June 2013

18/06/13

4th Year Environmental Education Programme Completed

10/06/13

Annual Otter Survey Conducted in Near Perfect Conditions

29/05/13

MulkearLIFE host Teagasc advisors on field trip

25/05/13

A Great 24 Hours Supporting BioBlitz 2013

23/05/13

The Secret Life of the Shannon on RTE 1 TV

20/05/13

MulkearLIFE to Support BioBlitz 2013 This Week-End - 24/25 May 2013

08/05/13

Fisheries Awareness Week, Inagh River, Co. Clare - Sat 18 May 2013

03/05/13

MulkearLIFE Welcomes Slovenian Visitors

03/05/13

Busy week with school field trips to Annacotty weir

29/04/13

Highly successful IUCN European Otter Workshop

22/01/13

Mulkear Conservation Volunteers: 2013 Schedule of Outings

[More News](#)

Highly successful IUCN European Otter Workshop 29/04/13

MulkearLIFE was thrilled with the success of the IUCN European Otter Workshop in Kinsale, Co. Cork. The two-day event was a wonderful opportunity for MulkearLIFE to present its work and, more importantly, to network and liaise with others on the national and international stage. The event brought together leading otter experts to discuss a range of issues related to the study, management and conservation of the European otter (*Lutra lutra*). Some delegates have been working with otters for decades.



Some of the delegates at the European Otter Workshop (Image: Andrew Harrington)

Delegates were drawn from a large number of countries, with the largest contingents from Ireland and the UK. Other countries represented included Sweden, Norway, Germany, France, Netherlands, Luxemburg, Portugal, Austria, Italy, Slovenia, Romania and the Czech Republic. Delegates were also drawn from Israel and Georgia.



The workshop was an excellent networking event (Image: Kieran Murphy)

Of the many highlights over the two days, the presentation by David O'Neill from the MISE Project at the Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT) was exceptional. The presentation focused on new non-invasive approaches to monitor mammals, especially extremely elusive species like European Otter. He noted the growing importance of a suite of DNA-based assays to monitor otter populations using a non-invasive DNA source (spraints). He noted that WIT and the MISE Project had developed novel species-specific real-time polymerase chain reaction (qPCR) assays using probes which enable species and sex identification from otter spraints. MulkearLIFE hopes to utilise the skills gained by the Waterford Institute of Technology in the coming months to undertake collaborative work on otters in the Mulkear catchment.

Get your local school involved



David O'Neill, outlined the importance of otter DNA profiling (Image: Kieran Murphy)

Other highlights included the presentation given by Gill Weyman of the Cork Branch of the Irish Wildlife Trust on the use of volunteers in urban otter survey work. She noted that while the use by otters of Irish urban waterways is well known, it is unclear if these otters are resident in such urban areas. She outlined work undertaken in Cork city over the past number of years where otter spraints were collected and DNA extracted for species verification, sex allocation and individual identification. She noted that the survey work and study has demonstrated the usefulness of volunteers and that the findings are being disseminated into the wider Cork community to encourage locals to play an active role in sustaining their local urban otter population.



The otter is one of Ireland's most elusive mammals (Image: John Murphy)

International presentations were exceptional and varied. Highlights included the presentation given by Paul Chanin, on the implications of otter populations on local fish farms, and the presentation by Lauren Harrington on the potential of acoustic deterrents to reduce otter predation on fresh water fish fisheries. There were also excellent case study presentations on the status of otter populations in Romania and in Georgia and the potential impact of hydropower plants on otter habitat. Stimulating presentations were also made on otter friendly fyke-nets and on-going research work in terms of fyke-net design in Germany and exciting ongoing work in Cardiff University on analysis of otter road kill.



MulkearLIFE's work for European Otter outlined to delegates (Image: Ruairi Ó Conchúir)

MulkearLIFE's presentation outlined the work of the project and the practical conservation measures which have been undertaken over the past three years. It focused on project's work to improve water quality and enhance food resources through major in-stream enhancement works on the Mulkear, Bilboa, Newport & Clare-Annagh rivers. The project's work on controlling invasive species was also outlined to the workshop attendees. It was noted that the need for such work was related in part to extensive past drainage works which has impacted on riparian biodiversity.



Otter holt installation, Newport River, Jan 2012 (Image: Ruairí Ó Conchúir)

The project's direct work on otter conservation, including catchment wide survey work, installation of artificial otter holts and the creation of habitat, was outlined. The exceptional role played by the Mulkear Conservation Volunteers, our project partners and the NPWS in our work with otters was fully acknowledged.



MulkearLIFE's work for European Otter (& Sea Lamprey) outlined (Image: Brian Hegarty)

Aside from specialists in otter research and volunteers undertaking otter surveys and practical conservation work, the IUCN event was also attended by a number of sister LIFE projects working directly with European otter. This included Gérard Schmidt who headed up a transnational LIFE project to support otter populations in Luxembourg and Belgium. Their work was similar in many respects to the work being undertaken presently by MulkearLIFE.



G rard Schmidt – joint LIFE project in Luxembourg & Belgium (Image: Kieran Murphy)

Two other sister LIFE projects of note were the IRD Duhallow LIFE project who presented on their work with otter and a LIFE Communication project from Slovenia. Marjana Honigsfeld Adamic outlined the public awareness work which they have been engaged in across Slovenia as part of their LIFE project.

**Marjana Honigsfeld Adamic, Lutra LIFE project, Slovenia (Image: Kieran Murphy)**

If otters could talk, they would say "A Big Thank You" to all who gathered in Kinsale to help progress their conservation status in Europe and further afield. MulkearLIFE would like to express its deep gratitude to the MISE Project in the Waterford Institute of Technology, and to Catherine O' Reilly and Denise O' Meara in particular, and to all on the organising committee of the European Otter Workshop and the IUCN Otter Specialist Group for affording MulkearLIFE the opportunity to present at this important event. It was truly a wonderful few days of sharing and networking for all.



If otters could talk – they'd thank the organisers of the European Otter Workshop

[Back to News](#)

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