



**Rose Energy Project: Survey for Eurasian Otter *Lutra lutra* activity along a 200m section of the Glenavy River, County Antrim**

**By:**



**April 2008**

## 1.0 REPORT AUTHOR

MARENCO was commissioned to undertake a terrestrial ecology assessment of land proposed for a bio-mass fuelled power plant development at land off Ballyvannon Road, near Glenavy, County Antrim.

In April 2008, MARENCO commissioned ECOLOGICAL MANAGEMENT GROUP to assist in a survey for Eurasian otters (*Lutra lutra*) along the Glenavy River where it is proposed that a waste water outlet pipe from the proposed power station would access the river.

Ecological Management Group is a multi-disciplinary environmental consultancy, specialising in environmental surveys and scientific research. Highly relevant to the current project, Ecological Management Group has many years experience in mammalian surveying and ecological research, including Eurasian otters (*Lutra lutra*) and Eurasian badgers (*Meles meles*). Staff members are licensed by the Environment and Heritage Service to carry out surveys and provide mitigation expertise with reference to protected wildlife species

## CONTENTS

<b>1.0</b>	<b>REPORT AUTHOR</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2.0</b>	<b>PROTECTED SPECIES AND LEGISLATION</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>3.0</b>	<b>METHODOLOGY</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>4.0</b>	<b>SURVEY FINDINGS</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>5.0</b>	<b>CONCLUSION</b>	<b>7</b>

## 2.0 PROTECTED SPECIES AND LEGISLATION

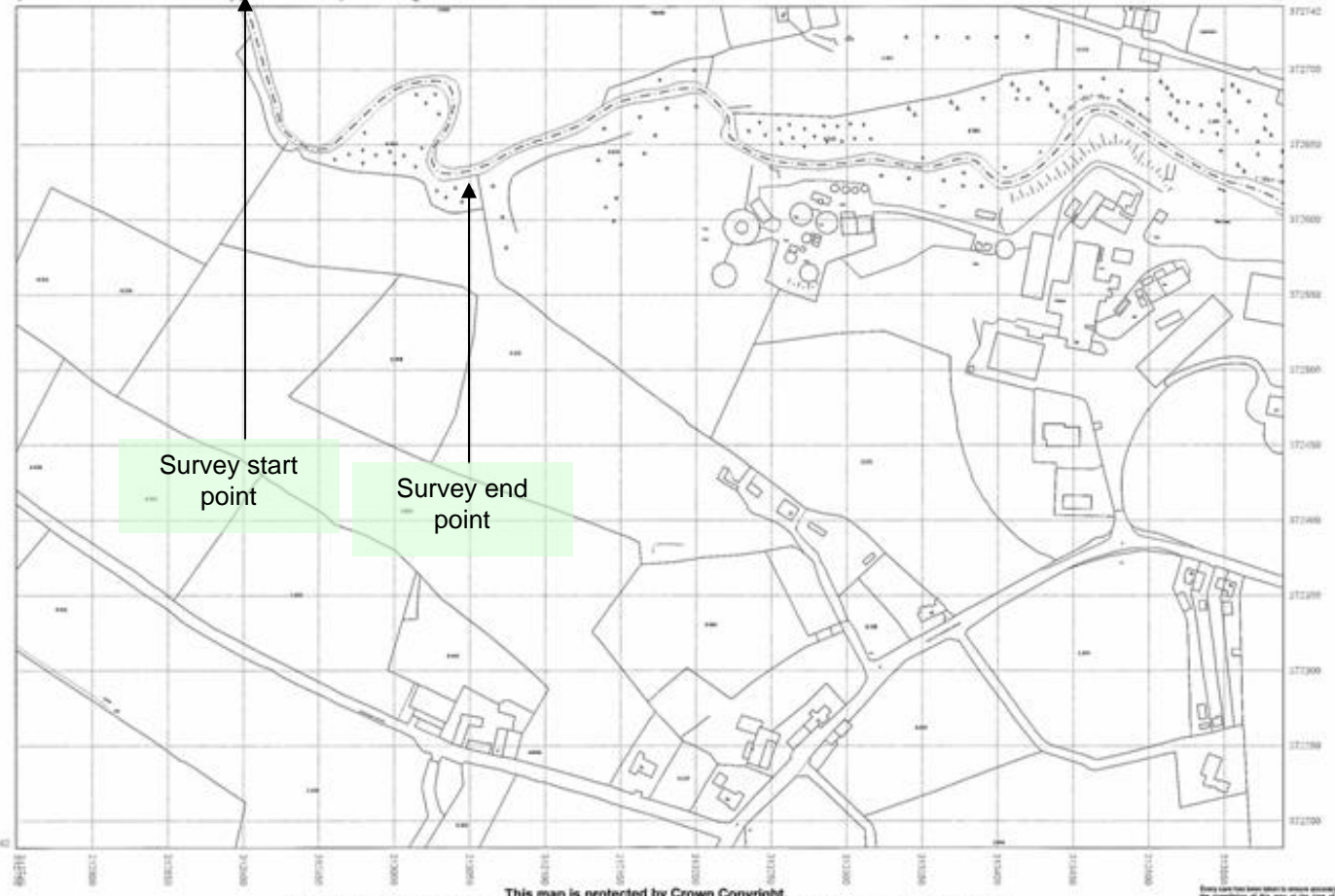
- 2.1 In Northern Ireland various species of flora and fauna are protected under the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985. Animal species listed under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife (NI) Order 1985 include Eurasian badger (*Meles meles*).
- 2.2 Under Article 10 of the Wildlife (NI) Order 1985, refuges including badger setts, wild bird breeding sites and nests, are protected. Thus, where development proposals of any kind may potentially impact upon such refuges in terms of disturbance, concealment, damage or access; it is necessary to establish exact refuge status. This allows appropriate action to be considered in relation to the proposed scheme and the protected species concerned.
- 2.3 Until relatively recently otters were protected under Schedule 5 of the same Order, which provided full legal protection to otters and their refuges (i.e. holts). The Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc.) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2007 have overtaken from the Wildlife Order in terms of the protection of European Protected Species (EPS), which includes otters, and provide strict protection for species of European importance. Otters are also protected under Annex II and IV of the Habitats Directive (1992).
- 2.2 Where development proposals of any kind may potentially impact upon otter distribution, abundance and refuges in terms of disturbance, concealment, damage or access it is necessary to undertake a survey that determines otter activity and establishes exact refuge status. This allows appropriate action to be considered in relation to the proposed scheme and the protected species concerned.

## 3.0 METHODOLOGY

- 3.1 On 10<sup>th</sup> April 2008, two ecologists from Ecological Management Group surveyed the Glenavy River along with a senior MARENCO ecologist. The proposed position for the outlet into the river was identified by the MARENCO ecologist, and a 200m section of the river was surveyed (100m either side of the proposed pipe location) to determine otter activity (Figure 1).

**ACEmap™ Online** Scale 1:2500 Plan No. 14501SW  
Printed: 30/01/2008 Customer Ref.  
This map relates to the following address or grid reference  
lands at, **BALLYVANNON ROAD, GLENAVY, BT29 4QJ**

CROWN  
COPYRIGHT



© Crown Copyright 2007  
Licence / Permit No.

This map is protected by Crown Copyright.  
You must not copy this map or any part of this map unless you hold a valid copyright licence or have our permission.  
Permission is normally given in the form of a copyright permit. Phone Copyright Licensing 02890 255722 E-mail copyright@osni.gov.uk  
Plot I.D. 178598

Users who have been granted access authority  
the completion of this map at the time of  
publication. The Ordnance Survey of Northern  
Ireland cannot, however, accept responsibility  
for errors or omissions and where such are  
brought to our attention, the authorities of any  
third party, in particular, are responsible, and we  
accept no liability.

**Figure 1.** Extent of the Glenavy River surveyed for activity of Eurasian otter *Lutra lutra*.

#### 4.0 SURVEY FINDINGS

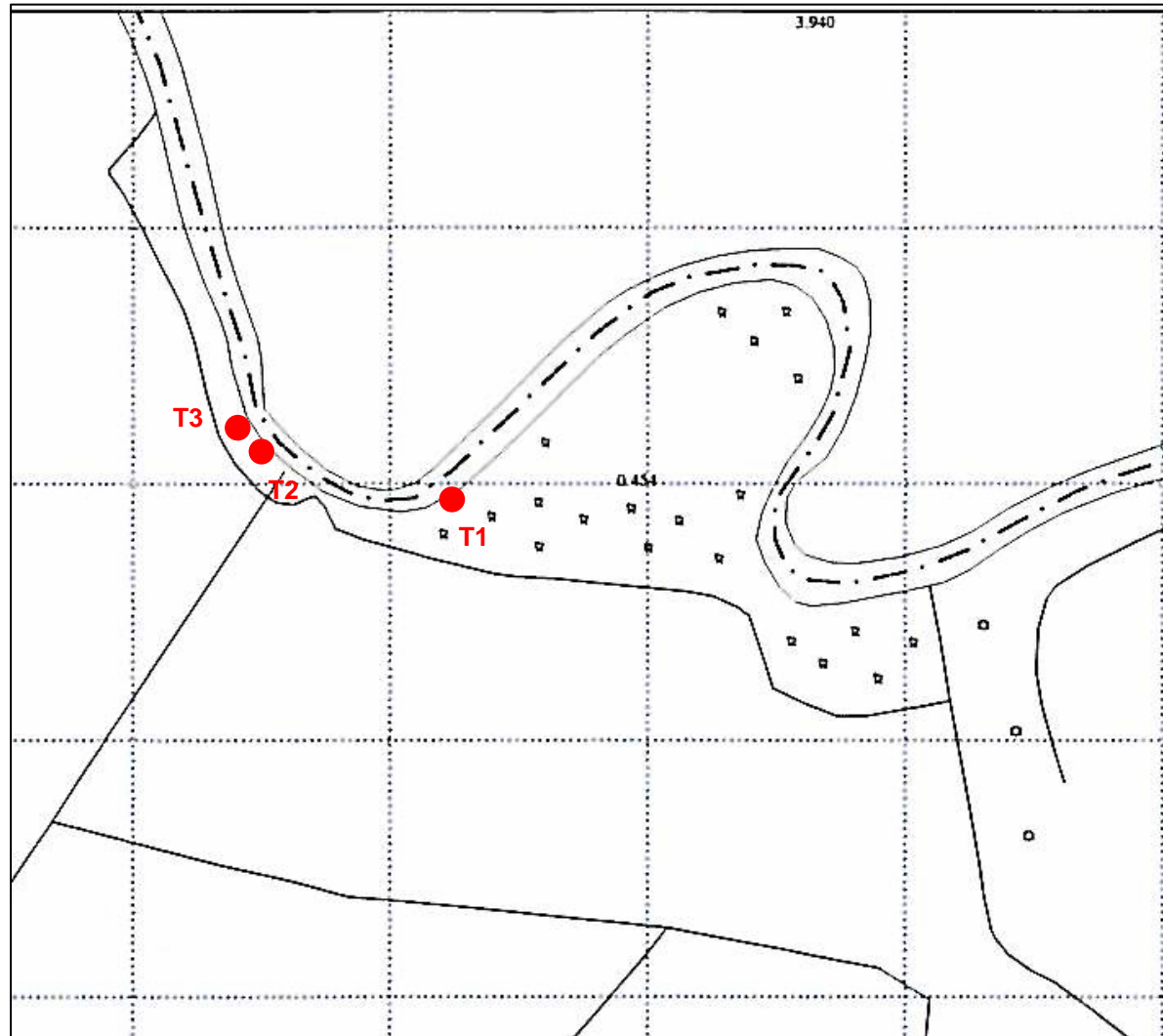
- 4.1 The area surveyed demonstrated a high level of otter activity in the form of fresh spraint (otter droppings), slides and holts.
- 4.2 Eight spraints were found during the survey, four of which were very fresh. Two spraints were found on boulders in the river; five were found in a couch area under a cavity formed by erosion under tree roots (Plates 1 & 2), and one spraint was found at the entrance to an otter holt (T3, Figure 2).



**Plate 1.** A large cavity in the river bank formed by erosion under tree roots, which acted as a couch area for otters, with an otter slide into the river (Grid Ref: IJ 12939 72658 ± 6m)



**Plate 2.** Fresh otter spraint on boulder between couch in Plate 1 and slide to river (right of boulder)



**Figure 2.** Target notes on the stretch of river survey (as per Figure 1). Target Notes: **T1** – Badger sett; **T2** – Potential otter holt / badger sett; **T3** – Otter holt with two entrances

- 4.3 A single entrance Eurasian badger *Meles meles* sett was detected along the river bank (Grid Ref: IJ 12966 72647 ± 6m) (Plate 3; **T1**, Figure 2). This burrow represents an outlier sett, and although there were no signs of activity at the sett during the current survey, it was deemed to have been in use within the last year.



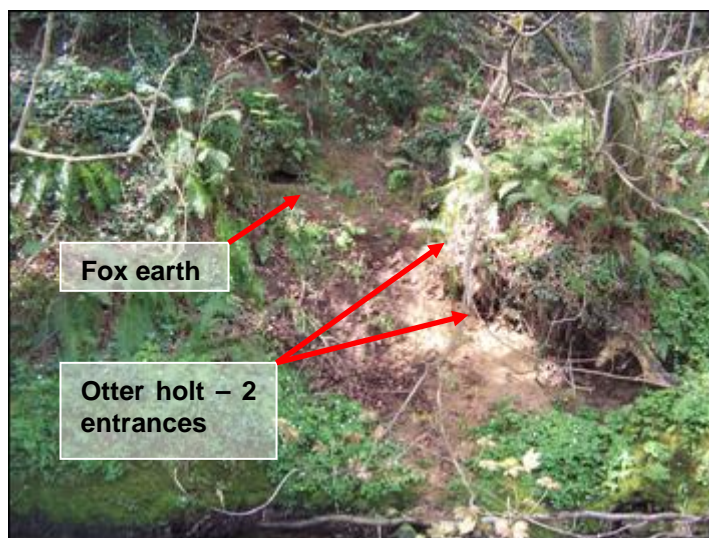
**Plate 3.** A Eurasian badger outlier sett

- 4.4 A large burrow was noted in the river bank (Grid Ref: IJ 12935 72660 ± 6m) (Plate 4). It was not possible to access this burrow for close inspection due to the precipitous nature of the river bank both above and below the burrow. Mammalian pads were noted along the bank accessing the burrow, which suggested that mammals as large as otter or badger may have access to this burrow. Due to the proximity of this burrow to both a badger sett (**T1**, Figure 2) and an active otter holt (**T3**, Figure 2), it is deemed prudent as a precaution to classify this burrow as a potential refuge for protected species.



**Plate 4.** Burrow inaccessible without climbing equipment (T2, Figure 2). Potential otter holt / badger sett.

- 4.5 A large otter holt was located in the steep bank at Grid Ref: IJ 12928 72675 ± 6m. This holt (Plate 5; T3, Figure 2) consisted of two entrances, with fresh spraint just outside the first entrance – suggesting that this holt is currently occupied by otter. The second burrow bifurcated; leading in one direction to the first entrance, and in the other direction leading deeper into the bank.
- 4.6 A third burrow entrance higher up the bank (Plate 5) from the active holt, had a strong scent of fox *Vulpes vulpes*. This burrow was deemed to be currently in use by fox.



**Plate 5.** Active otter holt with 2 entrances (T3, Figure 2), and a fox earth

## 5.0 CONCLUSION

- 5.1 As stated in section 2 of this report, badger setts and otter holts are legally protected structures. During the current survey, an outlier badger sett, an active otter holt, and a third burrow, which was potentially a protected species refuge were found.
- 5.2 Despite the badger sett being deemed as inactive at the time of survey, this refuge is still protected under legislation. The ecology of the Eurasian badger is such that an outlier sett may be used sporadically by badgers. The high level of badger activity noted in the surrounding fields (in the form of well-worn pads, snuffle-holes, foraging disturbance, and other nearby setts (as per MARENCO's wider ecological survey findings for the area), suggest that the outlier sett in question, lies within an occupied badger territory, and therefore could be used by badgers at any time.
- 5.3 The active nature of the otter holt and the high intensity of spraint marking on the stretch of river surveyed, suggests that the holt **T3** is in current use by a resident otter. The high intensity of marking may suggest that this may be a breeding holt.
- 5.4 It is important that the laying of the proposed outlet pipe does not impact upon the badger sett, the otter holt, or the third burrow which lies in between. It is therefore recommended that the pipeline is laid at a distance no less than 30 metres to the east of the badger sett in order to comply with legislation. In relation to the otter holt, it is currently uncertain what distance specifications and exclusion zones are relevant to otters under the terms of the Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc.) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2007. It is likely to depend on the status of the individual holt (i.e. breeding) and clarification is being sought from the Wildlife Officer of the Environment and Heritage Service. It may be necessary to apply for a licence relating to potential disturbance of the otter holt during any works, including pipe laying operations, which occur within proximity to the otter holt and further clarification on this matter should be sought from the Wildlife Officer.
- 5.5 The stretch of river surveyed offers good and mature riverside habitat and cover for otters and other wildlife. It is suggested that pipeline laying disturbs as little of the mature riverside vegetation as possible.