Whitcher Wildlife Ltd.
Ecological Consultants.

MWC_1958s, ST JULIAN'S RIVER BRIDGE.

OS REF: ST 32083 90210

ECOLOGY SURVEY.

Ref No: 240708.

Date: 1st July 2024.

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1. INTRODUCTION.

1.1. Amco are planning to undertake bridge works located at St Julians River Bridge (BR-8 Span) at St. Julians, Newport, Ordnance Survey grid reference ST321903. The works will entail the use of rope access to carry out the installation of missing bolts and a surrounding survey to establish if any more are loose or sheared.

1.2. Whitcher Wildlife Ltd has been commissioned to carry out an ecology survey of the site to establish whether there are any issues that may affect the proposed works.

1.3. The site survey was carried out on the 1st July 2024. This report outlines the findings of that survey and makes appropriate recommendations.

1.4. Appendices I to III of this report provide additional information on specific species and are designed to assist the reader to understand the contents of this report.

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2. SURVEY METHODOLOGY.

2.1. Prior to visiting the site, the survey area was cross referenced to maps and aerial photographs to give a general idea of the habitats and potential issues within the area and to identify potential access and walking routes.

2.2. The survey area and immediate surrounding area was thoroughly searched for evidence of badger (*Meles meles*) activity by looking for the following signs in line with Harris S, Cresswell P and Jefferies D (1989). *Surveying Badgers*. Mammal Society: -

* Badger setts.
* Badger latrines or dung pits.
* Badger snuffle holes and evidence of foraging.
* Badger paths.
* Badger prints in areas of soft mud.
* Badger hairs caught on fencing.

2.3. The survey area was searched for watercourses and where found all watercourses within the survey area and for approximately 100m in each direction were thoroughly searched for evidence of water vole (*Arvicola amphibius*) activity by looking for the following signs, in line with Dean M, Strachen R, Gow D and Andres R (2016). *The Water Vole Mitigation Handbook (The Mammal Society Mitigation Guidance Series).* Eds Fiona Mathews and Paul Chanin. The mammal Society, London: -

* Water vole burrows.
* Water vole faeces and latrines.
* Water vole feeding stations.
* Water vole runs.
* Water vole prints in areas of soft mud.
* Water vole lawns.
* Predator field signs.

2.4. The survey area was searched for watercourses and where found and accessible all watercourses within the survey area and for approximately 50m in each direction were thoroughly searched for evidence of otter (*Lutra lutra*) activity by looking for the following signs in line with the P Chanin (2003). *Monitoring the Otter* and *Conserving Natura 2000 Rivers: Monitoring Series No10 Guidelines: -*

* Otter prints in soft mud.
* Otter spraints.
* Otter Holts.

2.5. The survey area was searched for watercourses and waterbodies.

2.6. The survey area was searched for trees and structures and where found these were checked for potential bat roosting sites in line with Collins, J. (ed.) (2023) *Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines (4th edition)* by looking for the following signs: -

* Holes, cracks or crevices.
* Bat Droppings.

2.7. The land immediately adjacent to the survey area was assessed for bat roosting potential and bat foraging potential. Connective routes and flight lines were also assessed whilst on site and using maps of the area.

2.8. The area within 500m of the survey site was cross referenced to maps to highlight all ponds close to the site. Where possible, all ponds identified were accessed using agreed access or public rights of way to assess the potential for great crested newts (*Triturus cristatus*) to be present.

2.9. The survey area was assessed for the potential for reptiles and suitable reptile habitats. Where applicable the area was also searched for the presence of reptiles.

2.10. Where appropriate, the habitat within and surrounding the survey area was searched for species such as hazel, oak, honeysuckle, bramble and other species which may provide potential habitat for hazel dormice (*Muscardinus avellanarius*). Field signs such as feeding remains and nests were also searched for where possible, in line with P Bright, P Morris and T Mitchell-Jones *The Dormouse Conservation Handbook 2nd Edition*.

2.11. Where appropriate, the area within and surrounding the survey area was assessed for its potential to house habitat for red squirrels. Field signs of red squirrels were searched for at least every 50m, looking for any dreys, feeding signs or sightings of red squirrels.

2.12. All surveys were carried out in line with the Chartered Institute of Ecological and Environmental Management (CIEEM) survey standards and advice.

2.13. This survey was carried out by Kate Hunt MSc BSc (Hons) MCIEEM. Kate has worked as a consultant since 2006 carrying out array of different habitat and species surveys. Kate holds Natural Resources Wales and Natural England Survey Licences for Great Crested Newts, Bats and Hazel Dormice. She has successfully completed courses

run by the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM), to further her knowledge of protected species and plant identification.

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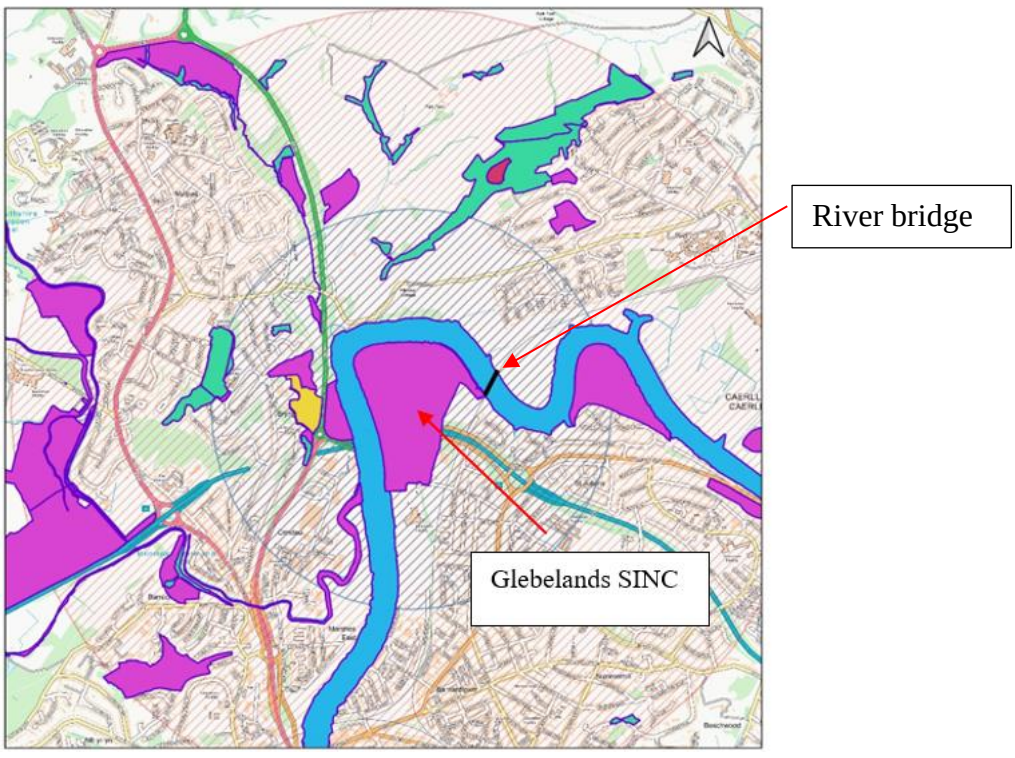
3. SURVEY RESULTS.

3.1. Data Search Results.

3.1.1. A data search was requested from South-East Wales Biodiversity Records Centre (SEWBReC) for records of protected species and designated sites within 2km of the survey area.

3.1.2. The data search returned two locations of statutory designated sites within 2km. River Usk Site Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) lie within the survey area

3.1.3. There are a number of non-statutory designated sites in 2km. These comprise twenty-six Wildlife Sites (SINCs), one Local Nature Reserve (LNR) and twenty-one ancient woodland sites. The closest is Glebelands SINC which is located to the south of the viaduct and includes the recreational area, woodland and scrub and shown in the map below.



3.1.4. Numerous species records were returned within 2km. To summarise the records provided, nine records of badger were returned; the closest is approximately 150m from survey area.

3.1.5. The data search returned forty-nine records of otter and four records of water vole within the 2km search radius. The closest otter records (3) were located directly underneath the viaduct to the southern arches.

3.1.6. Numerous bat records were returned. The closest were for Soprano pipistrelle 500m from the site.

3.1.7. The data search returned records for four species of amphibian: four records for Great Crested Newt (GCN) located over 1.5km away; one record for Palmate newt, twenty-five for common frog and five for common toad.

3.1.8. The data search returned records for three species of reptile: fourteen records of slow worm, one record for adder and three for grass snake.

3.1.9. The data search returned records for birds including ten records for Snipe, three for Red kite, five for Kingfisher, nine for Lapwing and nine for Barn owl. None of these were located within 500m of the survey area.

3.1.10. Numerous hedgehog records were returned. The closest was approximately 100m from the site.

3.1.11. The data search results can be provided to the client on request but should not be placed in the public domain.

3.2. The Surveyed Area.

3.2.1. St Julian's River bridge is an 8-span viaduct carrying two lines of the HNL1 over the River Usk. Four spans (spans 2 to 5) are of metallic construction which are supported by three cast iron piers whilst the remaining spans (spans 1 and 6 to 8) are of masonry arch construction. The river is tidal at this point with mudflats exposed during the falling and rising tide. The wider landscape is semi-urban with the city of Newport to the south, recreational playing fields, pastoral land and residential. A model railway club is located to the southwest.

3.2.2. The map overleaf shows the location of the work area, identified by the red marker (Amco 2024).

3.3. Description of Habitats.

3.3.1. Appendix III of this report contains an annotated map marked up with the varying habitats that are cross referenced to target notes in the report. The primary habitats on and adjacent to the site are: -

- u1e – Built linear feature
- w1g – Other woodland, broadleaved
- g3c – Other neutral grassland
- h3 – Dense scrub
- f2e – Reedbeds
- t2a – Coastal saltmarsh
- t2d – Intertidal mudflats
- r2 – Rivers and streams

3.3.2***. u1e – Built linear feature.***
Secondary Code: 802 Railway

3.3.2.1. Situated atop the survey area is the HNL1 railway line, including rails, ballast and lineside equipment.

3.3.3. ***w1g - Other woodland, broadleaved.***
Secondary codes: 81 Ruderal/ephemeral

3.3.3.1. Broadleaved woodland is located to the south between the survey area and recreational ground. Tall ruderal vegetation, including frequent stands of Japanese Knotweed (*Reynoutria japonica*) (Target note 1) are present within the woodland and bordering the access track and footpath. Species include sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*), ash *(Fraxinus excelsior)* hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna),* bramble (*Rubus fruticosus*), silver birch (*Betula pendula)* willow (*Salix sp*p.) and hogweed (*Heracleum sphondylium)*. A recently laid stone access track runs through part of the woodland.

Broadleaved woodland to west of survey area and Japanese knotweed in foreground

3.4***. g3c Other neutral grassland***

Secondary codes: 81 Ruderal/ephemeral, 510 Bare ground

3.3.4.1. To the southwest of the structure lies an area of other neutral grassland with areas of bare and disturbed ground. Species include smooth hawksbeard (*Crepis capillaris*), sow thistle (*Sonchus sp),* spear thistle *(Cirsium vulgare)* curled dock (*Rumex crispus),* ragwort (*Jacobaea vulgaris*), white clover (*Trifolium repens)* and meadow grass (*Poa annua*).

3.3.5. ***h3 Dense scrub***

Secondary code: 10 Scattered scrub.

3.3.5.1. Dense bramble scrub was present to the southeast of the structure along the wire fenceline. In addition, patches of further dense and scattered bramble scrub were present within the adjacent woodland.

3.3.6. ***f2e – reedbeds***

3.3.6.1. A strip of reedbed is present to the southwest edge of the river bank between the river and the woodland and dominated by common reed (*Phragmites australis).*

3.3.7. ***t2a – coastal saltmarsh***

3.3.7.1. A strip of patchy saltmarsh is present along the upper extent of the intertidal zone to the northern bank.

3.3.8. ***t2d – intertidal mudflats***

3.3.8.1. Exposed mudflats are present on both sides of the structure/ within the river channel.

3.3.9***. r2 – Rivers and streams***

3.3.9.1. The River Usk flows through the survey area beneath the viaduct. The river is tidal, wide and fast flowing with mudflats on either side.

3.4. Survey Results.

3.4.1. There was no field evidence of badgers or badger setts within the surveyed area.

3.4.2. The River Usk flows beneath the viaduct. The River Usk and its tributaries are known to support otter and otter is a qualifying feature of the River Usk SAC designated site. The habitats bordering the river channel (grassland, reedbeds and saltmarsh) are likely to be utilised by commuting otter for commuting and shelter. No otter holts were noted within the vicinity of the site, although a full otter survey was not undertaken due to the lack of safe access beneath the bridge and mudflats due to the soft mud and the survey was undertaken between high and low tide with some mudflats subsequently covered. No evidence of recent otter activity was noted from the bank within the

exposed mud beneath the second arch to the southern side. However, due to the tidal nature of the river such prints would be temporary. The river is unsuitable for water vole and crayfish at the location of the survey area.

3.4.3. No trees or buildings are present on site with potential for roosting bats.

3.4.3.1. The steel deck of the viaduct was assessed as having negligible potential to support roosting bats in line with the Bat Conservation Trust Good Practice Guidelines. The brick and stone arches and piers visible from the southern side appeared to be in good condition with no obvious potential roosting features for bats.

3.4.3.2. A comprehensive survey could not be carried out during this daytime survey for foraging and commuting bats although the railway and river corridors provide moderate potential for the species.

3.4.4. No ponds are present on or within 500m of the site. The watercourse is unsuitable for GCN. Four records for GCN were returned from the desk study located over 1.5km from the survey area.

3.4.5. The railway often provides a good corridor for reptiles, due to the availability of basking, refugia, and foraging habitat.

3.4.6. There are no records of hazel dormouse within 2km of the survey area. The habitat within the works area in unsuitable for hazel dormouse. Therefore, it is unlikely that hazel dormice are present.

3.4.7. There is potential for nesting birds within the scrub and woodland habitats close to the structure. The underside of the bridge could be used by birds such as pigeons; none were seen at the time of survey. Several species of gull and waders were noted including oystercatcher, black headed gull, common gull and black tailed godwit. The birds were present on the mudflats on the northern side of the river to the west of the viaduct. No vegetation removal will be required to facilitate the works.

3.4.8. The surveyed area is outside of the known UK range for red squirrel.

3.4.9. Schedule 9 invasive, non-native plant species were identified within the surveyed area. Dense stands of Japanese knotweed are present along the access track leading to the structure from the recreational ground. These stands lie outside of the structure

boundary and worksite. The closest stand to the worksite is shown in the photograph below.

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4. EVALUATION OF FINDINGS.

4.1. The River Usk SAC and SSSI lie within the survey area. The survey area also lies adjacent to a non-statutory wildlife site (Glebelands SINC). The works are limited to the structure using rope access and are therefore unlikely to have an impact on any of the designated sites. However, a separate shadow HRA document maybe required due to the proximity of the SAC, to assess the potential impacts on the designated site.

4.2. The habitat within the works footprint is predominantly grassland with bare ground and some scattered scrub. A strip of reedbed lies on the western bank and a strip of saltmarsh to the northern bank, both beyond the structure. Mudflats are present within the survey area. The habitats will be unaffected by the works and no negative long term impacts on habitats will result from the works.

4.3. There were no badger setts or field signs identified within the surveyed area therefore there will be no impact on badgers.

4.4. The site is suitable for otter and the works could impact on this species commuting through the site.

4.5. The site is unsuitable for water vole and crayfish, therefore the works will not impact upon these species.

4.6. There are no trees or buildings with potential to support roosting bats, therefore no impacts on bats roosting in trees or buildings will result from the works.

4.6.1. The structure was assessed as having negligible potential to support roosting bats and no impacts on roosting bats in structures are therefore likely to occur as a result of the works.

4.6.2. The rail corridor provides foraging and commuting habitat for bats within the surveyed area. However, the works will require no significant or large scale removal or fragmentation of this habitat. Therefore, the works will not impact upon foraging and commuting bats.

4.7. No ponds are present on or within 500m of the site and the watercourse is unsuitable for GCN. Four records of GCN were received from the data search, over

1.5km away. It is therefore very unlikely that for GCN to be present within the survey area or be affected by the works.

4.8. There is potential for nesting birds within the survey area and the bridge could be used by nesting pigeons. The nesting bird season extends from March to August inclusive. The River Usk and the surrounding habitat is used by foraging birds such as oystercatcher and various species of gulls. The watercourse will be unaffected by the works and no vegetation removal is required. The works will be limited to the structure and any noise or disturbance will be short term and temporary, therefore no significant impacts on birds using the watercourse and its surroundings is likely to result. However there is the potential for nesting feral pigeons within the structure and for impacts to result on nesting birds from the works.

4.9. The railway often provides a good corridor for reptiles due to the availability of basking, refugia, and foraging habitat. No vegetation removal is required and no impacts on nesting birds will result.

4.10. There are no records of hazel dormouse within 2km of the survey area and habitats within the worksite are unsuitable. Therefore, it is highly unlikely that hazel dormice are present within the survey area or will be impacted as a result of the proposed works.

4.11. The surveyed area was outside of the known UK range for red squirrel. Therefore, the works will not impact upon this species.

4.12. Large stands of Japanese knotweed are located along the access track to the south. This species is spread via small pieces of node, stem and rhizomes. The stands are located outside of the works area, and the proposed works would not spread this species further.

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5. RECOMMENDATIONS.

5.1 It is recommended that a separate shadow HRA document is prepared to assess the potential impacts on the SAC. It is recommended that the works are carried out in line with any mitigation measures proposed in that document.

5.2. As the works will partly be taking place within the River Usk SSSI, it is recommended that Network Rail are contacted to determine whether a site management strategy is in place to cover the works. If this is not in place, assent may be required from Natural Resources Wales prior to works beginning. This can take up to 30 working days, therefore the application should be submitted well in advance of the works commencing.

5.3. The River Usk SAC/SSSI lies within the survey area. No adverse impacts are anticipated on these designated sites. It is recommended works near the watercourse are conducted in line with industry standard best practice. This will avoid the risk of polluting the watercourse through chemical contamination or substrate run off. This includes:

- Any chemicals required will be stored offsite to prevent leakages;
- Spill kits present on site to deal with any leakage of fuel, or chemicals;

5.4. The structure has been assessed as having negligible potential for roosting bats. If in the unlikely event a bat is discovered, works must stop and Whitcher Wildlife contacted for advice.

5.5. As feral pigeons are known to nest throughout the year, a nesting bird check will be required prior to the works commencing. In the event that an active bird nest is identified; either during the check or at any point during the works, then works should immediately cease and the ecologist contacted. The ecologist will advise on a suitable buffer to be established around the nest, within which no works must take place until it is confirmed by the ecologist that all young have fledged, and the nest is no longer active.

5.6. If night-time working is required, all artificial lighting should be directed up and away from the river corridor to avoid lighting spill throughout the proposed works to avoid impacts on any commuting and foraging otter or bats (should the works be undertaken within the bat active period May-October as a guide). No equipment should

be left on site that may risk entanglement by an otter. Should an otter be encountered on site, works should pause and the otter allowed to vacate the site undisturbed.

5.7. It is recommended that any vehicles or equipment movement is kept away from the Japanese knotweed stands to minimise the risk of spreading the plant. Should vehicular movements be required in this area, a 7m buffer zone should be maintained and clearly demarcated around the Japanese knotweed stand to minimise the risk of spread of the plant and biosecurity measures should be implemented whilst on site. A toolbox talk on Japanese knotweed has been appended to this report.

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Prepared by:	
Kate Hunt MSc MCIEEM	Date: 4th July 2024.

Checked by:	
Ruth Georgiou. BSc, MCIEEM.	Date: 7th July 2024.

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Appendix I. REPTILE INFORMATION.

Ecology

There are five main species of reptile that reside in the UK; Common or Viviparous Lizard (*Lacerta vivipara*); Sand Lizard (*Lacerta agilis*); Slow Worm *(Anguis fragilis*); Grass Snake (*Natrix natrix*) and Adder (*Vipera berus*). The Adder is the only native species that is venomous although this is rarely harmful to humans.

Reptiles occupy a wide range of habitats including woodland, marshes, heathland, moors, sand dunes, hedgerows and bogs. Sand Lizards are confined to moorland and coastal sand dunes where they lay their eggs in the warm sand. The range of the Sand Lizard in the UK is therefore very limited. Slow Worms can be found in a wide variety of habitats throughout Britain and is the most likely reptile to be found in urban and suburban environments.

Maintaining the right body temperature is vital to reptiles' survival. In the morning, they find a warm basking site to heat up their bodies, then later they may move back into the shade because they do not sweat and have to be careful not to overheat. During hot summers, Adders will try to move to damper, cooler sites.

Over winter reptiles will hibernate in burrows or under longs where they are protected from the cold and predators, emerging from February onwards as the weather warms up.

Reptiles generally begin to mate April to May with young born in late July to September. The Common Lizard gives birth to live young, hence the term viviparous, meaning live bearing.

Surveys

Reptile surveys involve the searching of refuge such as logs and stones for any animal sheltering below. Artificial refuge may be laid out on site for the purpose of reptile surveys.

Legislation

Reptiles are protected under Appendix II (sand lizards) and Appendix III (common lizard, slow worms, smooth snake, grass snake and adders) of the BERN Convention (1982), partially protected under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981), Annex IV of the Habitats Directive and are all listed under section 41 of the Natural Environment and Communities Act (2006) making them a species of principal importance.

This makes it an offence to disturb any reptile while it is occupying a structure or place it uses for shelter or protection or to obstruct access to such a place.

Appendix II. OTTER INFORMATION.

Ecology

Otters are nocturnal, are active all year around and live by undisturbed waters where there is plenty of cover; mostly by freshwater lakes, rivers and small streams as well as some coasts.

Fish are the otter's main source of food, especially eels and they therefore rely on good fish populations. They also eat amphibians and the occasional birds and small mammals.

An otter may use over 40km of river and needs many resting places throughout this range. A female otter will give birth to 1 to 3 cubs in a natal holt which is often away from the main river and must be completely undisturbed.

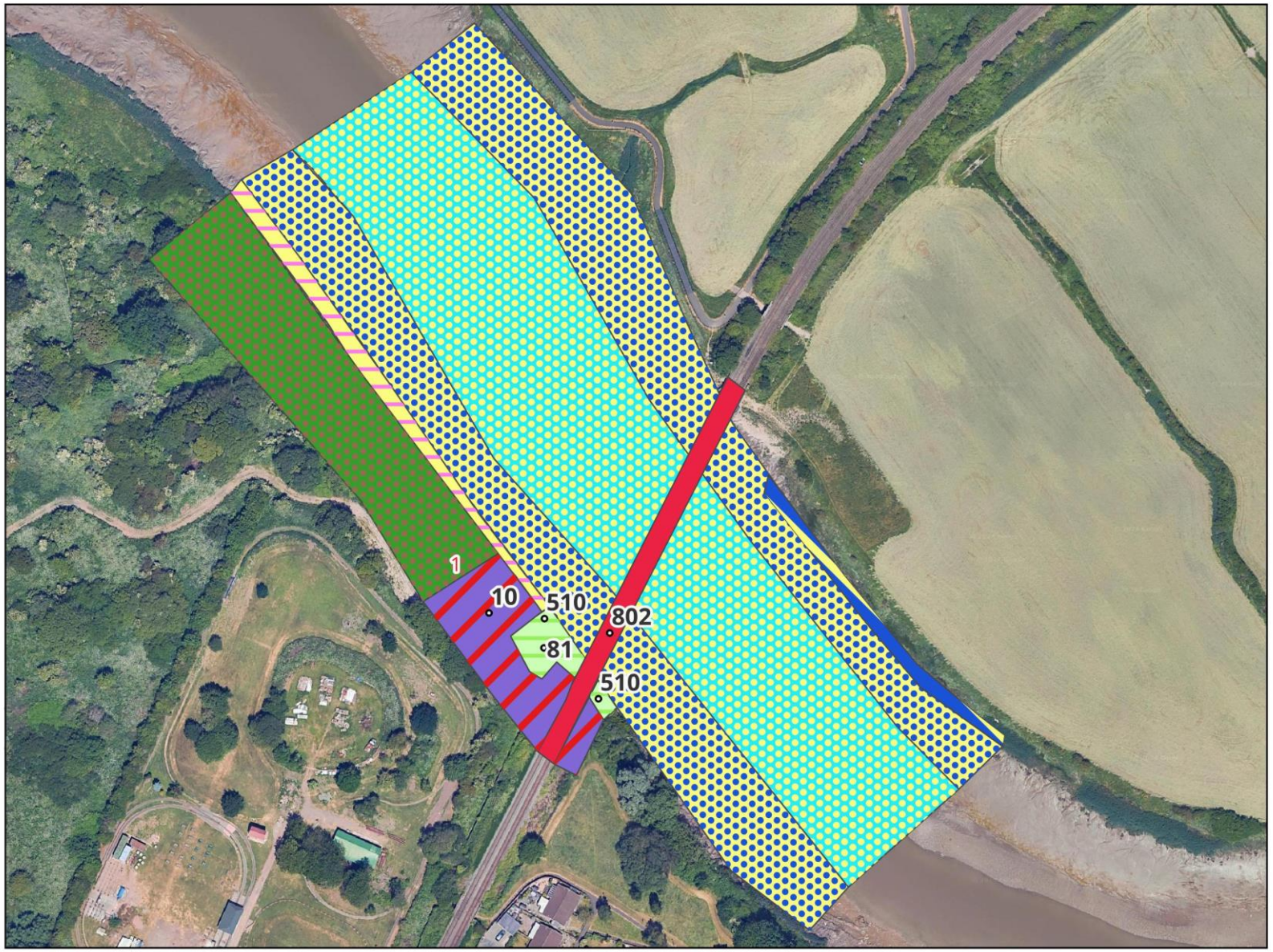
Surveys

Generally, the only evidence seen of the otter is its faeces or 'spraint', which are deposited along a watercourse in prominent positions. Surveys will look for the presence of these spraints, along with any tracks or potential holts or other resting places which may be used by otters.

Legislation

Otters are protected under Appendix II of the BERN Convention Act (1981), partly covered by Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981), Schedule 6 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981), Annex II and IV of the Habitats Directive, Annex II of the Conservation and Habitats Regulations (2010), Appendix I of the CRoW Act (2000) and are listed under section 41 of the Natural Environment and Communities Act (2006) making them a species of principal importance. Otters are considered to be 'Near Threatened' by the IUCN Red list.

This makes it an offence to disturb any animal while it is occupying a structure or place it uses for shelter or protection or to obstruct access to such a place.



Habitats

- g3c - other neutral grassland
- w1g - other woodland -broadleaved
- h3 - dense scrub
- f2e - reedbeds
- u1e - built linear features
- r2 - rivers and streams
- t2a - coastal saltmarsh
- t2d - intertidal mudflats
- TargetNotes

SecondaryCodes
10 Scattered scrub
81 Ruderal
510 Bare ground
802 Railway

0 100 200 m

Site: MWC 1958s St. Julian's River

Reference:240708

Date: 04.07.2024

Produced by: Kate Hunt

Toolbox Talk: Otters

Whitcher Wildlife Ltd

Ecological Consultants

Once found throughout Britain, most of our otter populations crashed in the 1960's due to poisoning from agricultural pesticides, which drained into our river systems. Although this threat has passed and otter numbers are slowly beginning to recover, they are still subject to a number of serious pressures.

Identification

Otters have short legs with a flat broad head and small ears. The body fur is mid brown and is paler underneath. The tail is long and sleek. They are large with an adult male reaching 1.2m from nose to tail and weighing about 10kg.

Generally the only evidence seen of the otter is its faeces or 'spraint', which are deposited along a watercourse in prominent positions or footprints along the bank of the watercourse.

Habitat

Otters live by undisturbed waters where there is plenty of cover, mostly by freshwater lakes, rivers and quiet small streams as well as some coasts.

Fish are the otter's main source of food, especially eels and they therefore rely on good fish populations. They also eat amphibians and the occasional bird and small mammal.

An otter may use over 40km of river and needs many resting places throughout this range. A female otter will give birth to 1 to 3 cubs in a natal holt, which is often away from the main river and must be completely undisturbed.

Legislation

The otter is listed on Appendix 1 of CITES, Appendix II of the Bern Convention and Annexes II and IV of the Habitats Directive. It is protected under Schedule 5 of the WCA 1981 and Schedule 2 of the Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc.) Regulations, 1994 (Regulation 38). The European sub-species is also listed as globally threatened on the IUCN/WCMC RDL.

39.—(1) It is an offence-
(a) deliberately to capture or kill an otter;
(b) deliberately to disturb an otter;
(c) to damage or destroy a breeding site or resting place of an otter.

If an otter holt is identified during works, stop all works and contact Whitcher Wildlife Ltd directly on 01226 753271 or at info@whitcher-wildlife.co.uk

Toolbox Talk: Japanese Knotweed

Japanese Knotweed is a large hollow stemmed herbaceous perennial plant that is native to eastern Asia. The plant was originally imported into the UK as an ornamental plant and has since been included onto the list of Schedule 9 invasive non-native plants due to its highly invasive growth.

Identification: Japanese Knotweed.

Japanese Knotweed is a hollow stemmed plant that is very changeable throughout the seasons with new shoots in the spring, full grown flowering plants in during late summer and dead stems during the winter.

The shoots of the plant are speckled purple and it forms large dense stands to 3 metres in height with creamy white flowers in the late summer.

Identification: Giant Knotweed and Hybrid Knotweed.

Giant Knotweed and Hybrid Knotweed are very similar plants to Japanese Knotweed with the predominant difference being leaf shape and the size of the plant. Giant Knotweed can grow to 4 or 5m in height

Legislation

Under section 14 and Part II of Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 it is an offence for it to be planted or otherwise caused to grow in the wild.

Habitat and Spreading

Japanese Knotweed is diverse and will grow in most situations eventually shutting out the light and killing off the surrounding species of plant.

The plant is a highly invasive fast-growing plant species that can grow up to 10cm per day. It can grow from any part of the crown, stem or rhizomes (underground shoots) spread to another area with a new plant potentially growing in within 10 days although rhizome segments can lay dormant for up to twenty years before developing into a plant.

The rhizomes and roots systems of the plant can spread for up to 7m from the plant to a depth of 2m.

Japanese Knotweed re-growth can cause damage with new shoots being capable of growing through tarmac or concrete and the potential for the plant to cause extensive damage to structures.

If Japanese knotweed is identified during works, stop all works and contact Whitcher Wildlife Ltd directly on 01226 753271 or at info@whitcher-wildlife.co.uk