

ABSTRACT

POPULATION TREND FOR OTTERS (*Lutra lutra*) IN SWEDEN DURING 1970-2000

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The Eurasian otter (*Lutra lutra*) was earlier common in all parts of Sweden. During the 1960s-1980s however the population decreased dramatically despite the fact that hunting was banned in 1968. Surveys during the 1980s revealed that otters occurred in isolated groups mainly in northern Sweden but were very rare in the south. Large areas in south-western Sweden were empty of otters, including well-known otter localities in the southernmost part, where intensive otter studies were done in the 1960s. No otters were found along the Swedish coasts. A similar decrease was seen in large parts of Western Europe, although not in the north eastern parts. The areas that still held widespread otter populations were largely found in the extreme west, to the east and in the far north of Europe.

Many reasons for the decline of the European otter population were discussed, including physical habitat destruction. The present paper discusses the population decline in relation to habitat changes.

Since the beginning of the 1970s otters found dead in Sweden are sent to the Swedish Museum of Natural History in accordance with the Swedish game law. This gives an opportunity to study changes in spatial distribution and relative numbers of otters found dead during the three decades. More than two hundred and twenty specimens were used to indicate temporal and geographical changes in the otter populations from 1968 to 2000. The present distribution as well as the increasing numbers of dead animals found during the last decade strongly indicates a population recovery.