

## Worcestershire Wildlife Trust, Malvern Group

### Otters

By Dr Daniel Allen

Daniel gave an extremely informative and thought-provoking talk on otters. There are 13 otter species and his particular interest is the relationship between man and the otter which differs markedly around the world. Some communities have discovered that otters can attract tourists to their country while others use tethered otters to help them to catch fish. Traditionally, otters have been valued for their skins and sensitive education is required if this activity is to be reduced.

Daniel's talk concentrated mainly on the one UK species, the British Eurasian otter. He described how our attitudes to the otter have changed over the years. They had traditionally been seen as vermin and there was much organised otter hunting between 1830 and 1880. This led to the animal being raised for the hunt. Undoubtedly, this kept otter numbers up until the 1960s when the hunting community observed that, probably because of river pollution, numbers were depleted and there was a call to protect them. It was not until 1978 that the otter was designated a protected species in the UK, following which conservation and river clean-up measures have pulled them back from the brink of extinction. Unfortunately, there are now many instances of otters raiding garden ponds and some of the angling fraternity would like otter numbers to be controlled.

Determining the number of otters in the UK is extremely difficult. They are rarely seen and one has to rely on "signs" such as scat, fish remains or road kill. Between 1979 and 2010 the number of these signs has increased but because otters can travel 50 – 60 km, even over land, it is difficult to relate signs to individuals without DNA testing. It is estimated that there are around 7000 otters in Scotland and 3000 in England & Wales.

The next meeting is on September 5th at 7.30 pm at the Lyttleton Rooms, Church St Malvern when Howard Drury will talk about *The Wildlife Garden*.