

Otters

Protected Species
Guidance Note: 2014

Survey Season Calendar

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec

Optimal
 Sub-optimal
 Inappropriate



Why Survey?

Otter surveys are often completed in conjunction with water vole surveys, due to both favouring a similar riparian habitat type. Once common throughout the British Isles their numbers declined rapidly from the 1960s onwards. The findings of recent national monitoring surveys are showing an increase in otter numbers, with them now found in all counties of England. Threats to otters continue to grow, with increased numbers of road casualties reported and decreased habitat quality.

Without surveys being undertaken to identify their presence, new developments and regeneration projects can cause both direct and indirect disturbance to otter breeding, resting and feeding habitats.

SERVICES

- Otter habitat surveys
- Otter monitoring surveys
- Mitigation design
- Artificial holt construction

Methodology

Otter surveys can be undertaken throughout the year. Otters are predominantly nocturnal mammals that favour undisturbed areas. As a result, survey methods largely rely on finding evidence in the form of droppings (known as spraints), footprints, holts, tracks and feeding remains. The survey section is walked during daylight hours, with any evidence observed annotated on a plan with a GPS reading. Surveying from within the channel (where safe and practical, using waders or kayak) can also be a useful method. The survey aims to identify if any holts are present, their status (active or inactive), and if otters are regularly using the surveyed river section.

Surveys to determine if otters are present within a wider catchment area follow the standard national monitoring methodology. This involves surveying in and around 10 bridges within a fixed grid square. Evidence of otters is often found under bridges, where they seek shelter out of the water to feed and also mark their territory on the fixed structures.

Mitigation

Otters are fully protected under British law and any development which affects otter habitat can require a European Protected Species Licence, including any invasive survey techniques. If otter holts are identified, a survey to determine if they are being used for breeding is normally required. The favoured approach is to prevent any disturbance to otters and their key habitat during any development works. Based on sound survey results, appropriate mitigation measures, including protection, habitat enhancement and creation of new artificial holts can be recommended and implemented.



Otter photos kindly provided by
Dr Hans Kruuk