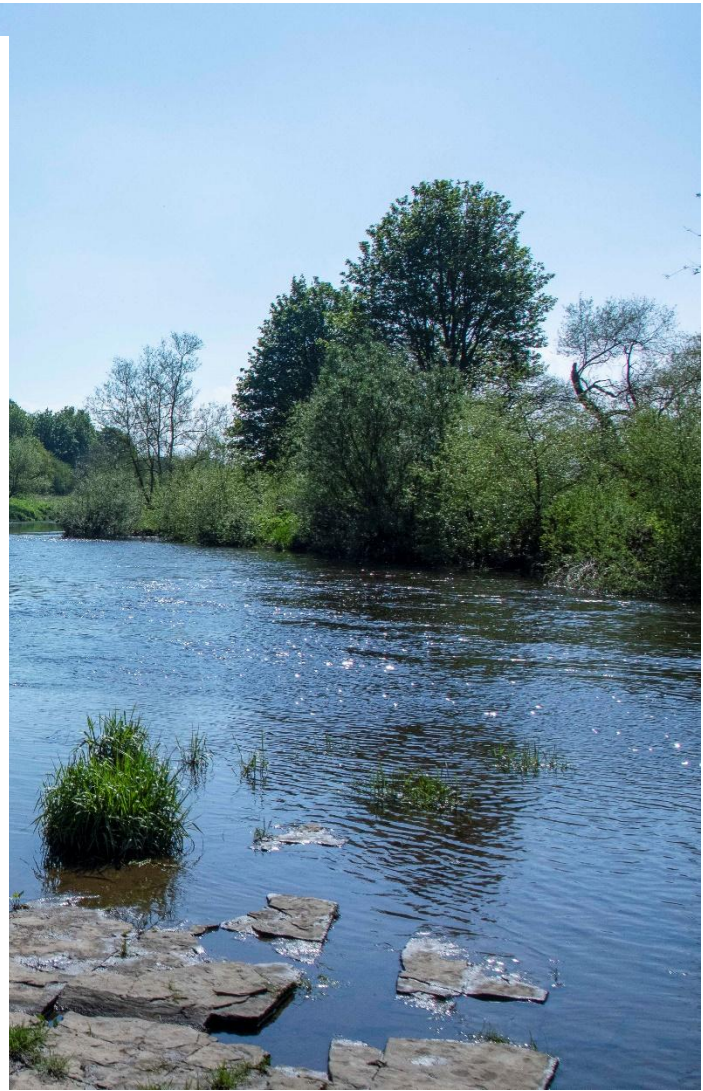


# Spring Otter Survey 2025



**JULY 23 2025**

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**The Otter Network**



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## Results and Report

### Summary of Results

The 12th Spring Otter Survey run by The North East Otter Network took place this year over the weekend of 26<sup>th</sup>/27th April after a year's break in 2024.

In contrast to the 2023 survey, which was the wettest in our short history, this year's survey took place in extremely dry conditions with water levels very low, to the point of being almost non-existent on some watercourses. This created a different set of challenges to those encountered in wet years with otter signs being hard to find on exposed, rocky river banks. It is also likely that otters will have stopped using some of the smaller tributaries due to the lack of water and food.

Below is a summary of details from the survey:

The survey covered the same area as in 2023 stretching from Stokesley in the south to Wallington and Ashington in the north and from the Allen Valleys in the west to the north sea coast.

Volunteer numbers were slightly down on 2023 but there were still 91 individuals or teams of volunteers out surveying over the weekend. Between them they covered 99 patches (with several volunteers covering more than one patch) containing 615 sites. This is slightly below average for the number of patches surveyed.

There were three sightings of otters by surveyors over the weekend, one on the Tees, one on the Derwent and one on Lumley Park Burn near its junction with the Wear. There were also four trail camera captures in various parts of the survey area.

Disappointingly, the number of active otter territories located was down on 2023 returning to the level found in 2022 at 35. Whether this dip in numbers is due to a reduction in the otter population or just an artefact of the extremely dry conditions it is not possible to say from one year's data. The number of active territories we find does vary from survey to survey as the table below this report clearly shows. At this point it is not a cause for concern, the time to worry will be if we start to see a consistent decline year on year.

As always it is important to emphasise that not everyone finds spraint or other signs and I know this can be disappointing. However, I must repeat that **not finding otter signs is just as important as finding them** as this gives us information about watercourses that otters are not using. For this reason, I would like to remind everyone once again that we need the data from **all the sites that are checked – even those where nothing is found**. Unfortunately, some people are still only sending in records for sites that are positive for signs, this makes comparing data across years very difficult. So, to everyone who took part but drew a blank please know that while you may feel you have not contributed much, **negative data really is just as important as positive data**. It tells us where otters are not active which helps to identify watercourses that do not provide adequate food resources or habitat or may have suffered pollution events, it also allows us to pick up on fluctuations in the otter population at a local level as well as across the whole survey area.

## Otter Data

Of the 615 sites checked 266 (43%) were positive for otter signs – this is about average compared with previous years. A further 21 sites had possible, but inconclusive, signs. There were 335 sites (54%) that were totally negative. This is again about average compared with previous years. There were 124 unsurveyed patches this year. However, some of these are in very hard to access areas so this number should not be taken as an indication that we are necessarily missing large parts of the survey area.

There were 61 Day 2 'hits' (fresh signs) with many, as you would expect, located in close proximity to one another in either the same or a neighbouring patch. In those cases they are adjudicated as belonging to a single territory. There were 3 sites/patches where fresh deposits were found on Day 1 but where nothing new was found on Day 2. These sites/patches were sufficiently isolated from the next nearest 'hit' to allow us to be confident that they were in a different territory and that we had just not looked in the right place on the Sunday to find fresh signs. These sites/patches have therefore been adjudicated as 'Near Miss' active territories. There were also 2 sites where fresh feeding remains were found on Sunday in an area where spraint had been seen on Saturday. These have been adjudicated as 'Reasonable Suspicion' otters.

As always, I have erred on the side of caution when allocating 'hits' to territories and have lumped fresh signs together into one active territory rather than splitting them into two where they are within a 7km stretch of watercourse. The total number of adjudicated active territories therefore was 35 – this is of course a minimum number as there are sure to be some that we missed.

For those unfamiliar with the way the data are analysed it is important to emphasise that we are counting active otter territories not individual animals (with the exception of visuals and trail cameras). It is likely therefore that at least some of the adjudicated territories will contain females with cubs meaning the number of actual otters will be greater than the number of territories. However, this really is the only way of getting any kind of numerical data when surveying for otters which are an elusive, wide-ranging, cryptic animal with no easily identifiable markings. The results are laid out in numerical form in the tables and maps that follow this report.

## Other Species

More than 130 other species of birds, mammals, amphibians, fish, insects and plants were recorded in addition to otter signs this year. Highlights included:

A Slow Worm seen in Weardale (I think this is a first for the survey).

Mammal sightings included 9 Roe Deer, 5 Brown Hares, 2 Foxes, 1 Grey Seal and 4 Common Seals.

There were 3 records of American Mink signs and 1 visual this year.

Notable bird sightings included 30 Dippers, 6 Kestrels, 3 Sparrowhawks, 2 Kingfishers, 1 Red Kite, 8 Avocets plus one Cuckoo was heard.

Maps and tables outlining the data are displayed on the following pages. The patches/territories located are broken down into operational catchments rather than the larger management catchment categories.

As always, a huge thank you to everyone who took part – we really could not do this without you.

If anyone would like to ask any questions, please contact me through the Otter Network at [otters.northeast@gmail.com](mailto:otters.northeast@gmail.com)

Dr Vivien Kent – The Otter Network



Maps, Tables & Charts

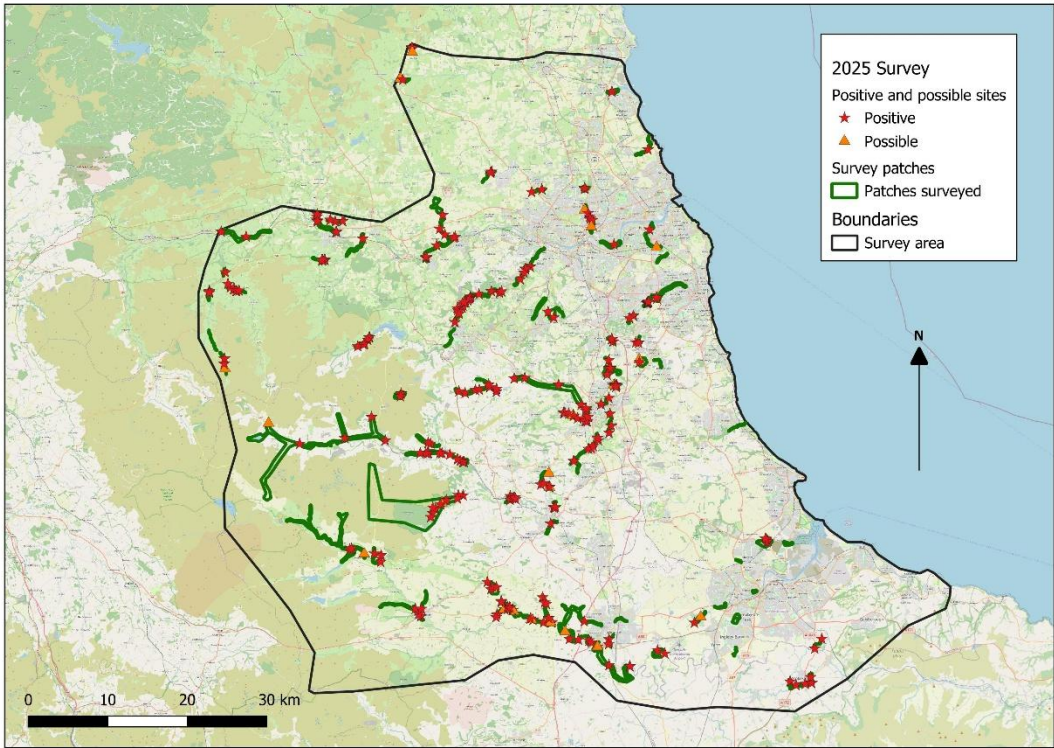


Figure 1. Map showing surveyed patches and all positive and possible sites

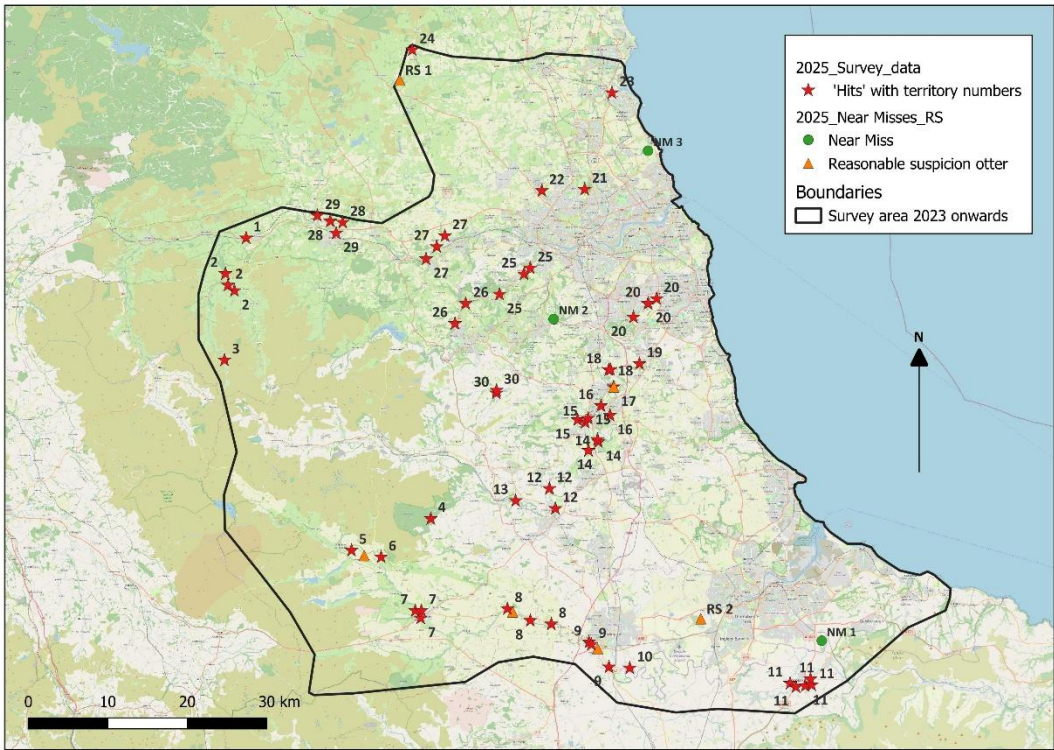


Figure 2. Map showing Day 2 'hits' with adjudicated territory numbers, 'near miss (NM)' territories and 'reasonable suspicion' (RS)' otters.

Table 1. 2025 Otter survey data

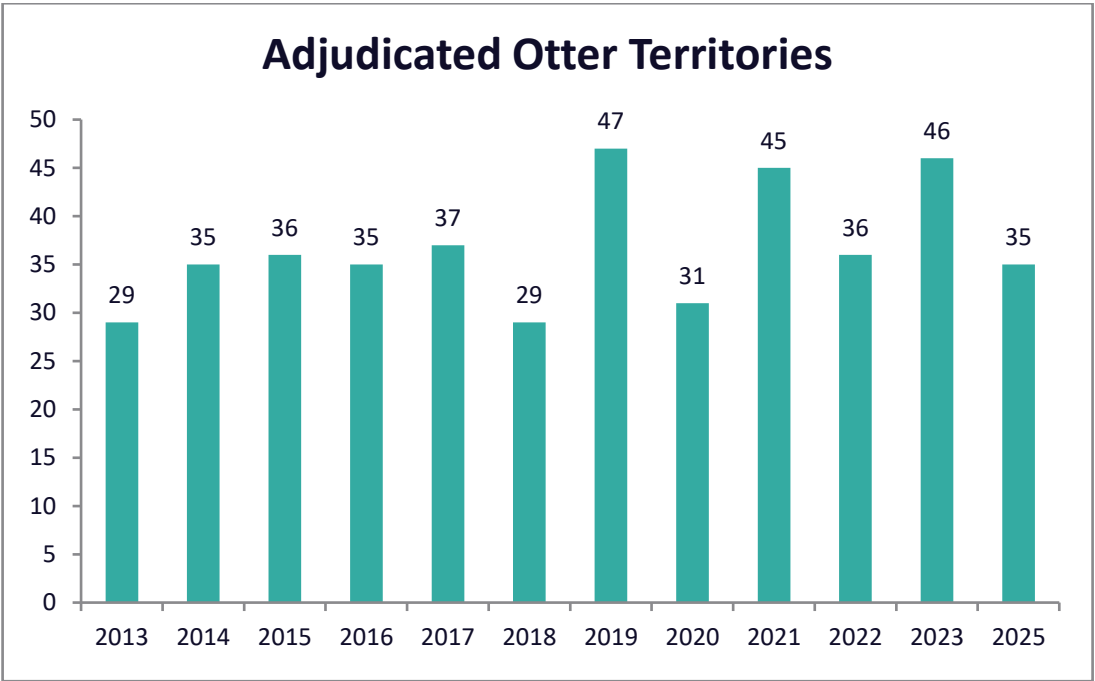
Catchment	Patches	Sites	Negative sites	Positives (possibles)	Hits	NM & RS	Territories
Allen	6	39	25	13(1)	4	0	2
Blyth	1	5	4	1	0	1	0
Blyth Estuary	1	6	5	1	1	0	1
Browney	5	31	3	27(1)	6	0	2
Derwent Tyne	8	46	15	31	5	0	2
Gaunless	2	10	6	4	1	0	0
Leven	2	14	9	5	5	0	1
North Tyne *	1	4	0	4	1	0	0
Seaham Peterlee Coast	1	5	5	0	0	0	0
Skerne	2	12	10	2	0	0	0
South Tyne	1	5	3	2	1	0	1
Tees *	24	147	87	51(8)	12	2	6
Tyne *	17	98	62	33(3)	8	0	5
Wansbeck	2	13	6	4(3)	1	1	1
Wear	28	180	95	80(5)	16	1	9
<b>Totals *</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>615</b>	<b>335</b>	<b>266(21)</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>30</b>
* Several patches cover more than one catchment area							

Table 2. 2025 Summary

Empty patches	124
<b>Otter territories located</b>	<b>30</b>
Reasonable suspicion/near misses	5
<b>Total Adjudicated territories</b>	<b>35</b>

Table 3. All surveys summary

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2025
<b>Patches</b>	93	100	112	119	115	94	123	87	124	107	106	99
<b>Total sites</b>	517	588	608	644	629	516	681	456	751	677	618	615
<b>Sites positive</b>	216	212	260	281	272	224	282	259	398	338	214	266
<b>% sites positive</b>	42	36	42	44	43	43	41	57	53	50	35	43
<b>% sites negative</b>	56	60	53	53	54	53	56	41	46	49	62	54
<b>Hits</b>	59	67	56	78	70	55	83	48	90	73	67	61
<b>Active territories</b>	26	29	27	30	32	24	39	20	34	31	37	30
<b>NM/RS</b>	3	6	9	5	6	5	8	11	11	5	9	5
<b>Adjudicated territories</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>35</b>



*Figure 3. Adjudicated active otter territories in 12 annual surveys. From 2019 the survey has been conducted over a larger area than previously. The 2020 survey was severely curtailed by Covid-19 restrictions. No survey took place in 2024.*

## Other Species Selected Records

	Species	No of Records*
Birds	Avocet	1
	Barn Owl	1
	Blackbird	19
	Blackcap	15
	Blue Tit	7
	Bullfinch	2
	Buzzard	5
	Chaffinch	12
	Chiffchaff	21
	Coal Tit	2
	Common Sandpiper	10
	Common Whitethroat	4
	Cormorant	3
	Cuckoo	1
	Curlew	4
	Dipper	21
	Dunnock	2
	Gadwall	1
	Garden Warbler	1
	Garganey	1
	Goldcrest	2
	Goldfinch	5
	Goosander	5
	Grasshopper Warbler	2
	Great-Spotted Woodpecker	6
	Great Tit	12
	Green Woodpecker	2
	Greenfinch	2
	Grey Heron	11
	Grey Partridge	1
	Grey Wagtail	10
	Greylag Goose	6



	Herring Gull	6
	House Martin	1
	Jackdaw	5
	Jay	2
	Kestrel	6
	Kingfisher	2
	Lapwing	6
	Lesser Black-backed Gull	1
	Little Egret	2
	Long-tailed Tit	3
	Mallard	30
	Mandarin Duck	5
	Meadow Pipit	1
	Mistle Thrush	3
	Mute Swan	4
	Nuthatch	2
	Oystercatcher	13
	Pied Flycatcher	1
	Pied Wagtail	4
	Redshank	2
	Red Kite	1
	Redstart	1
	Ring-necked Parakeet	1
	Robin	12
	Sand Martin	5
	Scaup	1
	Sedge Warbler	2
	Shelduck	3
	Shoveler	1
	Skylark	8
	Song Thrush	4
	Sparrowhawk	3
	Stock Dove	1
	Swallow	5

	Teal	1
	Tufted Duck	1
	Wigeon	1
	Willow Warbler	15
	Wood Warbler	1
	Wren	18
	Yellowhammer	3
Mammals	Brown Hare	5
	Brown Long-eared Bat	1
	Common Seal	4
	Deer (tracks/latrine)	10
	Grey Seal	1
	Grey Squirrel	3
	Mink (tracks/scat)	3
	Mink Visual	1
	Rabbit	5
	Red Fox (visual)	2
	Roe Deer (visual)	7
Fish	Brown Trout	1
	Minnow	2
Amphibians	Common Frog	1
	Toad	2
Reptiles	Slow Worm	1
Insects	Comma	1
	Green-veined White	1
	Large White	5
	Orange-tip	8
	Peacock	3
	Small White	4
	Speckled Wood	5
	Red-tailed Bumblebee	1
	Tawny Mining Bee	1
Plants	Cuckoo Flower	1
	English Bluebell	1

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	Ground Ivy	1
	Jack-by-the-Hedge	1
	Leopardsbane	1
	Lesser Celandine	1
	Marsh Marigold	1
	Moschatel	1
	Sweet Cicely	1
	Toothwort	1
	White Dead-nettle	1
	Wild Garlic (in flower)	1
	Wood Anemone	1
	Wood Forget-me-not	1
* Number of records not number of individuals		