



THE OTTER NETWORK 2022 SPRING OTTER SURVEY



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2022

Results and report

Spring Otter Survey

RESULTS AND REPORT

SUMMARY OF RESULTS

The 2022 Spring Otter Survey run by The North East Otter Network took place over the weekend of 23rd/24th April. This year's Survey was the first since 2019 unaffected by Covid-19 restrictions and it was especially good to be able to run in-person field training events again.

Unfortunately however, the calendar was against us this year as Easter was very late meaning a large number of regular volunteers were unavailable due to holidays and family engagements. As a result, volunteer numbers were down, as were the number of patches covered. This was despite several dedicated volunteers taking on extra patches to try and help with coverage. A huge thank you to them.

Once again it had been an extremely dry early spring and river levels were generally reported to be very low across the whole survey area. The weather over the survey weekend itself was fine and dry across the whole region making looking under bridges for otter signs easier but finding tracks in hard baked mud and silt almost impossible.

A summary of details from the survey. Over the weekend 94 volunteers, or teams of volunteers, managed to survey 107 patches containing 677 sites. There were two trail camera captures of otters on the Saturday/Sunday and another on the Friday before. There were no reported sightings over the weekend itself this year. The number of active otter territories identified was down considerably on last year at 36. While this may well be the result of the reduced number of patches covered, it is also possible that it is an indication that something is going on in the otter population. We cannot draw any conclusions based on one year's data however, so we must hope that volunteer numbers return to previous levels next year and we are able to get a better idea of the state of the area's otter population. This is why continued monitoring is so important.

Of course, not everyone finds lots of spraint or other signs and I know this can be disappointing. I have to emphasise once again that **not** finding otter signs is just as important as finding them as this tells us that otters are not using those areas. For this reason, we request that everyone records **all** the sites they check – even those where nothing is found. Some people are still only sending in records for sites that are positive for signs which makes comparing data across years very difficult.

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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 have suffered pollution events, and this 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 677 sites checked 338 (50%) were positive for otter signs – this is well down on last year but, given the reduced number of patches surveyed, not alarmingly so. A further 10 sites had possible but inconclusive signs. There were 330 sites (49%) which were totally negative (as per my comments above this obviously only includes those negative sites that were reported). There were a large number of empty patches this year (102) due to the reasons outlined previously, although we did manage to fill in some of the gaps in the east and southeast of the survey area that were apparent last year so coverage was more evenly, if thinly, spread.

There were 73 Day 2 'hits' (fresh signs) and as usual, many of these 'hits' were located close together in the same or neighbouring patches and so have been adjudicated as belonging to a single territory. There were also 4 sites/patches where fresh deposits were found on Day 1 but where nothing new was discovered on Day 2. These sites/patches were sufficiently isolated from the next nearest 'hit' to allow us to be reasonably confident that we were just not looking in the right place on the Sunday. The 4 sites/patches in question have therefore been adjudicated as 'Near Miss' active otter territories. There was one trail camera capture on the Friday before the survey in a patch where there were no 'hits', so this was adjudicated as a 'Reasonable Suspicion' otter.

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 where they are within a 7km stretch of watercourse rather than splitting them into two.

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. 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.

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You will see in the results table that the number of estimated active territories this year is 36. This is well down on both last year and 2019 - which is when we expanded the survey area – but more than the Covid-19 affected survey in 2020. It is also of course a minimum number.

Other species

Over 150 species of birds, mammals, amphibians, fish, insects and plants were recorded in addition to otter signs this year.

Possibly the most notable sighting was of an adder in Weardale; there were also sightings of 13 Roe Deer (one unfortunately dead), 10 Buzzards, 7 Kingfishers, 4 Brown Hares, 2 Red Kites and one Stoat. There were 9 reports of Mink signs (scat/tracks) but no visuals this year.

Maps and tables outlining the data are displayed on the following pages. I have once again broken the patches/territories located down into operational catchments rather than the larger management catchment categories. When we started this survey in 2013 nearly all our patches were in the Wear and Tees catchments, but our expansion in recent years means that it now makes more sense to break the results down into smaller 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

Dr Vivien Kent – The Otter Network

Maps, Tables & Charts

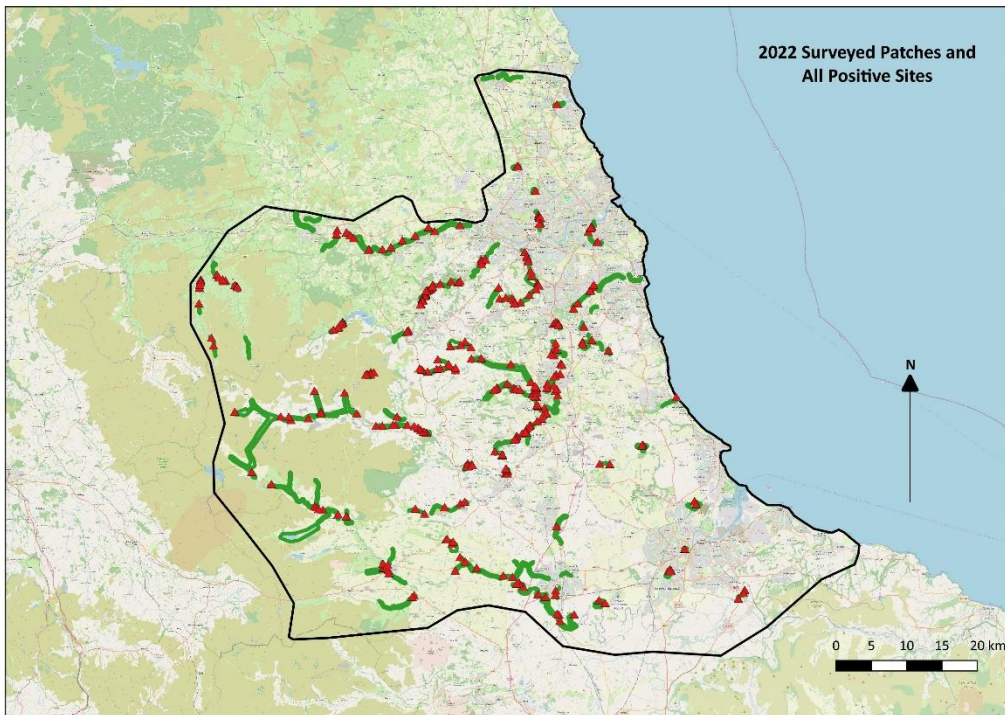


Figure 1. Map showing surveyed patches and all positive sites in 2022 survey

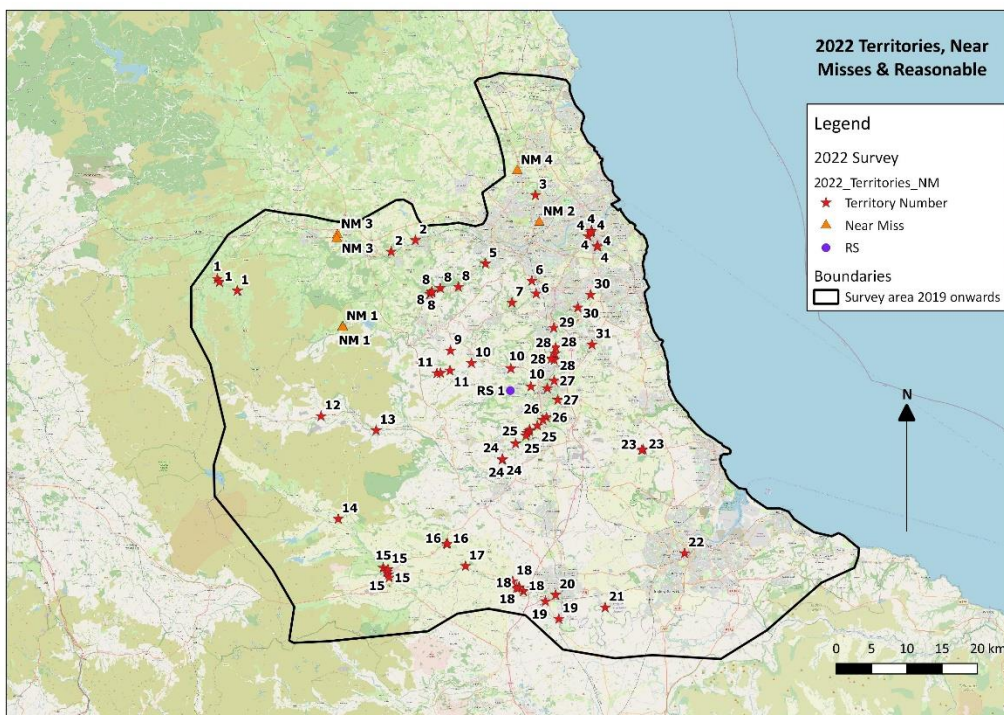


Figure 2. Map showing Day 2 'hits' with adjudicated territory numbers, 'near miss (NM)' territories and 'reasonable suspicion (RS)' otters.

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Table 1. 2022 Otter survey data

Catchment	Patches	Sites	Negative sites	Positives (possibles)	Hits	NM & RS	Territories
Allen	7	38	18	19(1)	3	0	1
Blyth Estuary	1	6	5	1	0	0	0
Browney	7	61	12	45(2)	8	1	3
Derwent Tyne	8	53	8	44(1)	6	1	2
Gaunless	3	30	19	11	0	0	0
North Tyne	1	4	4	0	0	0	0
Seaham Peterlee Coast	1	12	11	1	0	0	0
Skerne	5	18	10	8	3	0	2
South Tyne	1	5	2	3	0	1	0
Tees *	23	120	66	52(2)	18	0	8
Tyne *	17	98	49	48(1)	11	2	4
Wansbeck	2	7	7	0	0	0	0
Wear *	35	223	116	106(1)	24	0	11
Totals *	111	677	329	338(8)	73	5	31

*Several patches cover more than one catchment area.

Table 2. 2022 Summary

Empty patches	102
Active otter territories located	31
Reasonable suspicion/near misses	5
Total Adjudicated active territories	36

Table 3. All surveys summary

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Patches	93	100	112	119	115	94	123	87	124	107
Total sites	517	588	608	644	629	516	681	456	751	677
Sites positive	216	212	260	281	272	224	281	259	398	338
% sites positive	42	36	42	44	43	43	41	57	53	50
% sites negative	56	60	53	53	54	53	56	41	46	49
Hits	59	67	56	78	70	55	82	48	90	73
Located active territories	26	29	27	30	32	24	39	20	34	31
NM/RS	3	6	9	5	6	5	8	11	11	5
Adjudicated active territories	29	35	36	35	37	29	47	31	45	36
Adjudicated active territories old survey area (VC 66)							40			

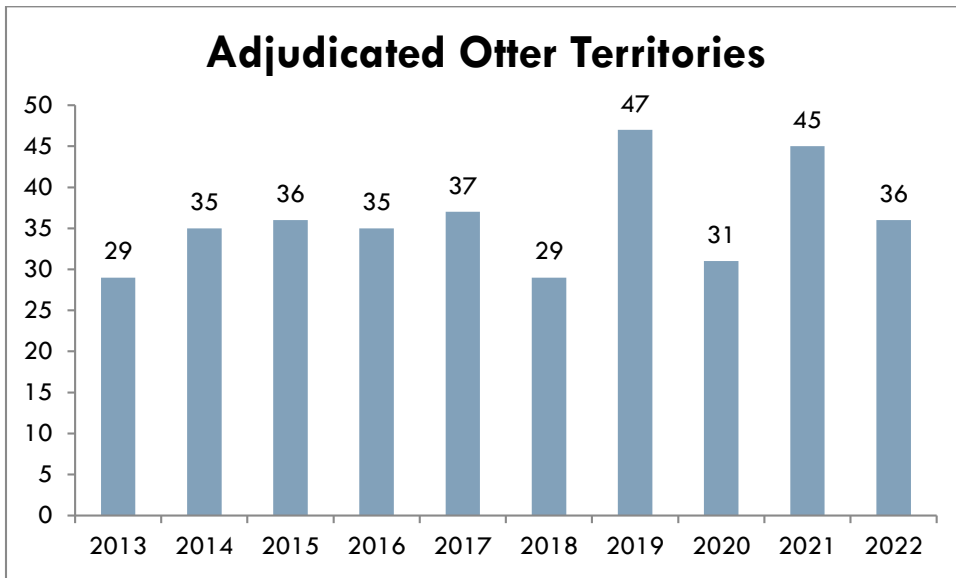


Figure 3. Adjudicated active otter territories in ten annual surveys.
 From 2019 the survey was conducted over a larger area than previous years
 The 2020 survey was severely curtailed by Covid-19 restrictions

Other Species Selected Records

	Species	No of Records*
Birds	Avocet	1
	Barnacle Goose	1
	Blackbird	9
	Blackcap	15
	Blue Tit	6
	Bullfinch	3
	Buzzard	9
	Chaffinch	10
	Chiffchaff	17
	Coal Tit	2
	Common Sandpiper	9
	Common Tern	1
	Cormorant	7
	Cuckoo	1
	Curlew	11
	Dipper	37
	Dunlin	1
	Duncock	2
	Gadwall	2
	Garden Warbler	1
	Goldcrest	3
	Golden Plover	1
	Goldfinch	7
	Goosander	19
	Great Crested Grebe	1
	Great-Spotted Woodpecker	7
	Great Tit	9
	Green Woodpecker	1
	Grey Heron	23
	Grey Wagtail	25
	Greylag Goose	11
	Herring Gull	2
	House Martin	1
	House Sparrow	2
	Jackdaw	3
	Jay	4

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	Kestrel	6
	Kingfisher	8
	Lapwing	7
	Lesser Black-backed Gull	2
	Linnet	2
	Little Egret	3
	Little Grebe	1
	Long-tailed Tit	4
	Mandarin Duck	4
	Marsh/Willow Tit	1
	Meadow Pipit	1
	Mistle Thrush	1
	Mute Swan	15
	Nuthatch	3
	Oystercatcher	12
	Pied Wagtail	5
	Red Grouse	2
	Red Kite	2
	Red-legged Partridge	1
	Redshank	1
	Reed Bunting	2
	Ringed Plover	1
	Robin	6
	Rook	1
	Sand Martin	7
	Sedge Warbler	1
	Shelduck	2
	Shoveler	1
	Skylark	3
	Song Thrush	4
	Sparrowhawk	2
	Stock Dove	2
	Swallow	6
	Swift	1
	Tawny Owl	1
	Teal	1
	Treecreeper	5
	Tufted Duck	2

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	Wheatear	2
	Wigeon	1
	Willow Warbler	9
	Wren	17
	Yellowhammer	3
Mammals	Badger (tracks/setts/latrine)	1
	Brown Hare	5
	Brown Rat	1
	Deer (tracks/latrine)	17
	Grey Squirrel (visual)	3
	Mink (tracks/scat)	9
	Rabbit (visual)	9
	Red Fox (tracks/scat)	2
	Red Fox (visual/trail cam)	2
	Roe Deer (visual)	13
	Stoat (visual)	1
	Water Vole (tracks/latrine)	2
Fish	Brown Trout	3
	Bullhead	2
	Catfish	1
	Fry	1
	Stone Loach	1
Amphibians	Toad (spawn)	2
Reptiles	Adder	1
Insects	Banded Demoiselle	1
	Bee-fly	1
	Buff-tailed Bumblebee	1
	Comma butterfly	2
	Green-veined White butterfly	2
	Large White Butterfly	1
	Orange Tip butterfly	14
	Peacock butterfly	9
	River Fly	1
	Small Tortoiseshell butterfly	4
	Small White butterfly	1
	Speckled Wood butterfly	3
	St Mark's Fly	1
Plant	Alternate-leaved Golden Saxifrage	1

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	American Skunk Cabbage	1
	Bluebell	4
	Butterbur	1
	Common Toothwort	1
	Cowslip	3
	Forget-me-not	1
	Kingcup	1
	Lesser Celandine	1
	Moschatel	2
	Primrose	2
	Ramsons	2
	Red Campion	1
	Wild Violet	1
	Wood Anemone	2
	Wood Sorrel	2
	Wood Stitchwort	1
* Number of records not number of individuals		