

2013 DWT County Durham Otter Survey

Summary of Results

The first DWT Otter Survey of County Durham took place on the weekend of the 27th/28th April 2013, many thanks and congratulations to all the volunteers who took part and helped to make this event a success.

The weather on the survey weekend was not particularly conducive to surveying for otters with heavy rain in many places across the County on the Friday night, showers through Saturday and even snow and hail in some upland areas. This was extremely unlucky as the previous and following weekends were dry. As a result, it is probably safe to conclude that our results are on the low side as some spraint and tracks will have been washed away or covered by rising water levels.

Nevertheless, more than 100 of you braved the conditions to survey 93 patches containing 517 sites. There were 7 empty patches (due to late drop-outs that could not be filled and non-returned forms) and there were also some large gaps on the eastern side of the County, particularly near the coast, where it was difficult to find volunteer surveyors. Many volunteers also recorded other species of birds and mammals encountered (tracks and/or visuals) and the results are shown in the table below the otter data.

Otters

Of the 517 sites 216 (42%) were positive for otter signs and a further 13 were recorded as having possible, but inconclusive, signs. There were 59 Day 2 'hits' (fresh signs) which is 27% of the total number of positive sites. However, many of these were within a single patch and have therefore been adjudicated as a single otter territory. There were also three patches with fresh positive signs on Day 1 but no new signs recorded on Day 2. These were sufficiently isolated from the nearest 'hit' territory to be classed as 'near misses' and adjudicated as a territory in which the otter was not found on the second day. It must be emphasised that all numbers calculated are for territories and not for individual animals. Many of the territories may be occupied by females with cubs rather than just a single otter.

Extrapolating from the number of Day 2 'hits' and 'near misses' to adjudicate the number of otter territories is a subjective exercise and not one that stands up to scientific scrutiny. However, it is better than anything else we have, or are likely to have without the investment

of tens of thousands of pounds for an extensive network of remote-capture cameras and the help of several hundred volunteers to place and monitor them.

The results laid out below give us a base from which to work in years to come and I hope that in spring 2014 you will want to participate again and that we will be able to increase the number of patches and refine the sites within them. In the meantime, I would encourage people to continue to look for otter signs on their patch periodically, both to keep their skills fresh and to refine the choice of sites for future surveys - and if you keep a record of what you find even better.

Otter data

Catchment	Patches	Sites	Positives (possibles)	Hits	Near miss	Otter territories
Tees	26	131	59 (4)	23	0	11
Tyne	16	93	35 (6)	6	1	5
Wear	50	287	122 (3)	30	2	10
Castle Eden Burn	1	6	0	0	0	0
Totals	93	517	216 (13)	59	3	26

Empty patches	7
Otter territories located	26
Reasonable suspicion/ near misses	3
Total adjudicated territories	29

By-catch of other species

	Species	Number
Birds	Dipper	8
	Blackcap	5
	Chiffchaff	2
	Common sandpiper	5
	Goosander	5
	Grey wagtail	2
	Greylag geese	20+
	Heron	6
	Kingfisher	3
	Oystercatcher	4
	Skylark	1
	Wheatear	1
	Willow warbler	1
Mammals	Badger (tracks)	4
	Brown hare	1
	Brown rat	2
	Deer (tracks)	8
	Roe deer (visual)	10
	Fox	7
	Mink	14
	Water vole (latrine)	1
	Stoat	1