

6th National Otter Survey of England – Volunteer Surveys

CALL FOR VOLUNTEERS

Background

The otter is the top freshwater predator in the UK and its status is a key indicator of the health of our waterways. The first national otter survey was initiated in 1977-1979, responding to concerns about the species' decline. Four further otter surveys, the last one being in 2009-10, have since charted the recovery of otters from near extinction. The main objective of the current survey is to assess whether the trajectory of recovery has continued. It is particularly timely in the light of the potential declines recorded by the recent sixth national otter survey of Wales.

In each of the National Otter Surveys, alternate 50km grid cells of England have been monitored by professional ecologists. However, this provides coverage of only around half of England, and therefore recent surveys have also included volunteer surveillance of the remaining grid cells. The method used by volunteers is simpler than that applied by professional surveyors, but nevertheless has provided robust data on the distribution of otters in England.

CAN YOU HELP WITH THIS SURVEY?

What will I need to do?

Getting ready:

1. Choose 1 (or more) 10 km grid cells to survey. The maps (found at the bottom of this document) show the locations and names of the grid cells that need to be surveyed.
2. Complete the short registration form for each grid cell you want to survey [here](#). If someone else has already chosen that square, we will get in touch and ask whether you could survey an alternative square.
3. Select 10 spots to survey within the grid cell. These should be on rivers, streams, canals, ponds, lakes, ditches or estuaries. Coastal locations (other than estuaries) are not included in this project for consistency with the previous National Otter Surveys. You can use your prior knowledge or existing information to help choose where to go. Good locations are often under bridges or places with obvious sprainting sites, such as large rocks.

Doing your surveys:

1. Do a spot-check of your chosen sites any time between now and the end of January 2023.
2. Make a note of the grid reference of the site, and record any signs of otters, mink or beavers you encounter (print out the record form below to take with you).
3. It is best to conduct your survey in a dry period. Do not survey after spells of heavy rain when water levels are high and signs of otters are likely to have been washed away.
4. Please read and follow our guidance on Health and Safety. We advise all surveyors to work in pairs. This is not only safer but also more fun. Please note that surveyors are neither expected nor encouraged to enter water.
4. The main aim of the survey is simply to establish whether otters are present within each 10km grid cell. You can therefore, if you wish, stop surveying as soon as you find a site that is positive. If you have found no otter signs after 10 spot checks, please report that this grid square was negative. Negative results are very important as they highlight areas where otters are absent or uncommon.



Saving
Britain's
Wildlife

Telling us what you found:

Enter the information for each site by following this [link](#).

If you decide to survey a very large number of sites, please let us know and we can arrange submission via a spreadsheet (email info@themammalsociety.org).

Do I need to be experienced in surveying for otters?

Because of the need to collect robust data, this project is designed to be conducted by experienced surveyors. If you are not confident in your ability to identify signs of otters, please get in touch with your local mammal group who may be able to put you in touch with someone experienced that you could work with. You can also contact the otter survey manager, Andrew Crawford on 07768735748, who will try to link you with a more experienced surveyor.

How do I be sure that what I have seen is from an otter/mink/beaver?

Our free app Mammal Mapper includes lots of photographs of field signs. We have also put together an additional guide to beaver signs, which can be found [here](#). Please submit photographs so that your records can be verified. You can do this when you enter your results on our online form.

What should I do if I am surveying in an area with few potential locations for surveys (e.g. because the grid square only covers a small peninsula)?

In these cases, please contact the survey manager for advice on how many points to survey.

The area where I live doesn't have any survey squares, can I still help?

The survey squares shown on the map are our priority areas since these have not been covered by professional surveyors so would otherwise be 'blank spots'. If you are able to travel to one of the priority areas to survey that would be great. However, information from elsewhere is always welcome (there are many miles of rivers in England, and only a small fraction can be covered by the professional surveys!). We are also always interested in camera trap footage that demonstrates the presence of otters.

What should I do about reporting signs of mammals other than otters, mink and beavers?

We always appreciate records of any mammal species. These can be reported using our free Mammal Mapper app which can be downloaded to your phone from the App Store or Google Play. Once downloaded, click on 'report a sighting'. Please do not enter your sightings of beavers, otter and mink using the app, as this will duplicate the records you have submitted using the special survey form.

Who is running this



**Saving
Britain's
Wildlife**

study?

The 6th Otter Survey of England is jointly funded by The Environment Agency and Natural England with additional support from United Utilities, Yorkshire Water and Southern Water. It is being managed by the Mammal Society.

A printable recording form and relevant health and safety documents can be downloaded from the website:

www.mammal.org.uk/national-otter-survey/

Links can also be found below:

[Recording Form](#)

[Otter Survey Health and Safety Document](#)

[Working Near Water Safety Document](#)

[Otter Survey Risk Assessment](#)

[Letter to Landowners](#)

[Printable Vehicle Card](#)

Maps

Go to the survey webpage: [National Otter Survey – The Mammal Society](#) to find maps outlining grids of where surveying is needed. Shaded grids have been allocated and clear grids still need surveying. These maps are regularly updated.



**Saving
Britain's
Wildlife**