



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

500th Dead Otter Found in Somerset

Somerset, UK, 25th May 2016

A dead otter cub found on the banks of the Broughton Brook, a tributary of the river Tone, on Tuesday 24th May was the 500th dead otter recorded in Somerset since the turn of the millennium. The body was found by Stephen Hembery, with Somerset Otter Group volunteers, Sue Sherry, Lucy Mead, and Anne Jones. The cub seems to have been killed either by a dog, or possibly by another otter and then dogs were attracted to the body. This was the 10th dead otter recorded in Somerset in 2016.

Otter deaths are recorded by the Somerset Otter Group. The 500 recorded deaths include: the vast majority were killed on the county's roads but 11 were killed by dogs and 2 were shot. Of the 254 that have had post mortem done, 30% had bite wounds, mostly as a result of fighting between otters. Numbers found dead annually have varied from 23 to 44 in 2006, with an average of 32.6 being recorded per year.

Dead otters provide an important source of knowledge of the species and the state of the rivers; recovered otter bodies are currently sent to Cardiff University Otter Project for post-mortem analysis. Prior to 2007, Somerset sent the otters to wildlife vet Vic Simpson for post mortem, the bile fluke *Pseudamphistomum truncatum* was first found in the UK in an otter from the Somerset levels in 2004, with the potential to infect humans this finding has implications for human health.

"The figure of 500 dead otters sounds like a problem and there are actions that can be taken to reduce this. But, the overall good news is that there are once again otters throughout Somerset which shows that the county's rivers are relatively healthy and this fantastic animal has come back from the brink of extinction" commented Dr Rob Williams, chair of the Somerset Otter Group.

The Otter population in the UK crashed in the 1960s, principally as a result of the use of organochlorine pesticides, and remained very low until the 1990s. The population has recovered in recent years and otters are once again found in every county of England. There are now estimated to be at least 70 adult otters in Somerset, having increased from less than 10 in the 1980s.

Anyone finding a dead otter should report it to the Environment Agency on 03708 506506.

The Somerset Otter Group collates information on otters in Somerset, monitors their populations and provides advice on otter conservation. For more information about the Somerset Otter Group : www.somersetottergroup.org.uk

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