

SURVEY RESULTS 2017

Somerset Otter Group, summary of the James Williams Survey, 2 day Event.

Two-Day event 2018

Next years two-day event will take place on:

28th and 29th April 2018

Jo Pearse has been working hard training new surveyors this year, but as ever we rely on regular stalwarts to commit each year, so please put the dates in your diary.

Two-Day event 2017

Many thanks for all your efforts with the 2017 survey. The summary is a little later this year. The last few results were received in July and the typing, scoring and mapping of all the results takes a considerable time.

Continuing thanks to the Somerset Environmental Records Centre. Sue Simpson coordinated our exchange of data to fit with the 2 day event, and Tony Price very kindly assisted with digitally mapping the survey sites. This enabled the coverage map.



This year's survey took place on 22nd and 23rd April 2017, at the end of a long period of low water and low rainfall. Little significant rainfall for several weeks before the event will have affected the otter evidence found, and will have increased the number of older spraints detected.

- You looked at 138 patches, a total of 496 sites, of which 326 (66%) were positive. 70% being an average.
- There were 89 Hits, fresh work day 2.
- 18% of total sites surveyed and 27% of positive sites had fresh spraint day 2.
- There were 21 near misses, assumed fresh day 1, and not detected on that patch on day 2.
- There were 22 blank patches, devoid of any otter signs.
- 66 Otter ranges detected;

9 on the River Exe, 7 on the coastal streams, 13 on the River Tone, 15 on the River Parrett, 10 on the River Brue, 2 on the River Axe (N), 3 on the South Coast (Yarty, Culm and Otter), 6 on the River Frome, 1 on the River Cale.

MONTH	APR	APR	APR	APR	APR	APR	APR	APR
YEAR	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Patches	121	124	127	143	135	138	139	137
Total sites	521	477	519	564	524	510	531	496
Sites Positive	380	318	331	390	273	372	304	326
% Sites Positive	73	66	64	69	52	73	57	66
Hits	109	91	76	114	68	102	71	89
Near Misses	30	16	26	22	18	25	19	21
Total scores	139	107	102	136	86	127	90	109
located	66	66	55	64	47	66	50	66
Adjudicated ranges	69	69	67	67	56	66	56	66
%Total Sites with Hits	21	19	15	20	13	20	13	18
% Pos. Sites with Hits	28.6	28.6	22.9	29	25	27	23	27
Blank Patches	8	8	15	9	22	10	25	21

Coordinators

This year there was a slightly lower turnout of 90 people, but the catchment coordinators worked to fill gaps and maintain good coverage: Martin McNeill for the Exe, Jillie Leonard for the Coastal streams, Mel Keating and Lucy Mead for the Tone, Phillippa Fortescue for the Axe (South), Andrew Baines for the Parrett, Jo Pearce for the Brue and Axe (North), and Tony House for the Frome.

Ongoing Research

Fresh spraint was collected again this year for the Cardiff University DNA research.

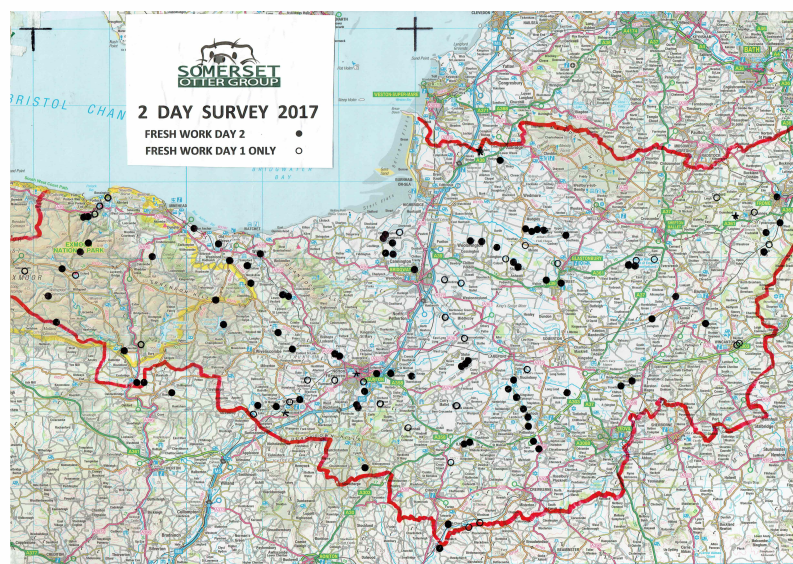
25 samples from the Tone and 20 from the Brue to add to ongoing collections. Rob Williams now has a dedicated freezer to receive the samples.

Exmoor National Park

The Devon side of Exmoor National Park was surveyed again to co-ordinate with the Somerset survey. Although only one fresh was found on day 2, at Challacombe, the number of assumed fresh on the Saturday indicates 5 otter ranges were found.

Last year's 2016 survey produced concerning results out of step with the previous 14 years of surveys, a lowest 57% of sites positive and a highest 25 blank patches. Blank patches are patches surveyed and no otter evidence at all found. These results could have been affected by some rainfall prior to the event in 2016, but the rainfall was not excessive, unlike the rained off results of 2014, it should not have affected all sites within a patch, so is not the full answer.

This year we recorded another high 20 blank patches. The average, using all 2 day records as a measure, before last year was 8 blank patches. 20 Blank patches this year after such a long dry period when older spraints would be detected is worrying, although lack of padding evidence in dry mud may have contributed.



This year's results could be compared with those of 2012. That year the survey also took place at the end of a period of dry weather. 64% of sites were positive with unusually high 15 blank patches.

An extract from James Williams's summary in 2012 is relevant to repeat.

"Obviously this affected the amount of otter evidence. It increased the amount of old spraints found on the first day, but made useful mud for padding hard to find. However I think it also altered the otter's behaviour, and made them more elusive. The number of hits was below average, 76 against an average of 90, and the number of 'near misses', that is, otters present on day one but not present on day 2, was up, 26 against 19. Several people found their otters high up in minor tributaries, which is what one expects in summer which is more usually when the rivers are low, so that may account for them being harder to find this time."

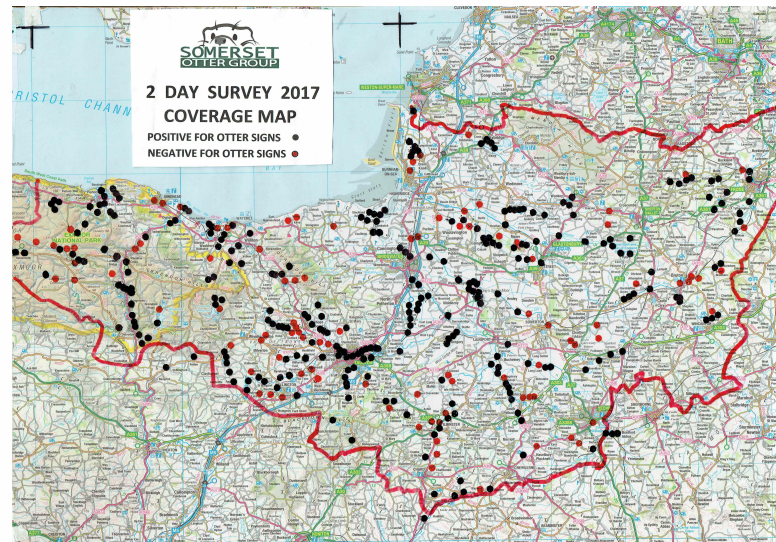
Dead Otter records

Dead otter reporting is an important part to the Somerset Otter Groups work, and is always interesting to examine alongside the surveys. The low survey results found during the 2 day survey in 2016 were accompanied by a very low record of dead otters, just 17, the lowest recorded since 1999, the average being about 30.

One cause could be competing reporting methods and information about the dead otters no longer reaching the Somerset Otter Group or the Environment Agency, with whom we share data. So please spread the word as far as possible that dead otters in Somerset need to be reported to the Environment Agency or the Somerset Otter Group.

Cub Data

Alongside the importance of the 2 day Survey is the recording of cubs and evidence of breeding. Please ensure any sightings are reported to Jo Pearce. These reports help reassure when other indicators raise concerns.



There is more to do on the data we have. The blank patches and negative sites need further examination and comparison, they are as important as the positive results, so a consolation to all those who trekked out for the weekend and didn't find the reward of a spraint for their efforts.

One thing is certain everyone's effort adds data through the years building on the much studied Somerset Otter. Still more questions than answers, but all valuable, unique data.

Don't forget to put next years dates in your diary, and Thank You. The coverage map above also illustrates your hard work, each dot, red or black, is a site visited. Quite an achievement in one weekend of coordinated effort, and some of you have been doing it for the full 22 annual events!

2017, 2 DAY EVENT RESULTS		Somerset Catchments									
	Somerset	Exe	coast str	Tone	S.Coast	Parrett	Brue	N.Axe	Cary	Frome	Stour
Total Sites	496	50	67	110	11	106	72	35	9	31	5
Sites Pos	326	36	46	75	9	69	49	14	2	22	4
% sites Pos	66%	72%	68%	68%	81%	65%	68%	40%	22%	71%	80%
Sites with hits	89	7	15	13	3	23	22	1	0	5	0
% sites with hits	18%	14%	22%	12%	27%	22%	30%	20%	0%	16%	0%
% positives with hits	27%	19%	32%	17%	33%	33%	45%	7%	0%	23%	0%
Hits	89	7	15	13	3	23	22	1	0	5	0
Near Misses	21	3	0	7	1	4	1	1	0	3	1
OTTERS LOCATED	66	9	7	13	3	15	10	2	0	6	1
Patches	138	15	17	34	4	29	18	6	2	12	1
Blank Patches	22	2	2	6	0	7	2	1	1	1	0

