

Somerset Otter Group 2016 Survey

This year's 2 day spring survey saw 119 surveyors cover the main water bodies across Somerset. As in previous years 7 surveyors from Devon ensured Exmoor National Park was covered.

This year extra coverage was possible on the Brue catchment by the help of volunteers from the Somerset Wildlife Trust Reserves, the RSPB at Ham Wall and on the Parrett with support from the RSPB at Greylake, West Sedgemoor Reserves and the Wildfowl and Wetland Trust on the Steart Peninsular.

Some sites were affected by the Friday rain and one coastal site was flooded by the last of the high spring tides. However, elsewhere water levels were normal, to widespread relief, allowing the spraint collection for Cardiff University's genetic study on the Tone and Brue catchment.

Surveyors from the Tone and Brue catchment collected fresh spraint from both days in the hours following dawn.

Paul Hillary was lucky enough to have a sighting, but unfortunately the otter swam off before depositing a spraint.

Patricia Stainton offered her home on the upper Brue and Bob Bailey opened his house and fridge as a collection point for the rest of the Brue catchment spraints.

The final collection point for all spraints was at Stoford Manor. Elizabeth Williams' provided a room for Saranne Cessford to set up an office and meticulously record all the spraint collected. She arrived soon after 7am, after her own survey, and by 5pm the samples were handed over to the genetic student, Nia Thomas, who left for Cardiff University with all the spraints. It is a three year study, so it will be some time before the results become available.

We surveyed 139 patches, a total of 532 sites of which 304 were positive. 25 blanks, the highest ever, the average being 12 over the last 7 years . 57% of sites had some signs and of all the sites, 15% had fresh work on the second day. This is the lowest percentage of positive sites since the poor year of 2002 after foot and mouth.

An initial examination of results for this year reveals 56 otter ranges were located. Although lower than usual there is some reassurance by the breeding information that came from the event. Across the county, either noted during the survey or from recent camera footage, 7 separate records of cubs were sent in.

The ranges can be broken down across the catchments as: North Somerset Streams 6, Somerset Exe 5, Tone 11, South Coast 3, Parrett 13, Brue 11, North Axe 2 and Frome 5.

The Somerset Otter Group as usual was able to provide an excellent record of other species.

Surveyors found signs or sightings at the following number of sites: bittern - 2, cormorant - 1, crane - 1, dippers - 18, little egrets - 3, grey herons, grey wagtails - 5, hen harrier - 1, hobby - 1, kingfisher - 13, mandarin ducks - 2, mink - 3, moorhen - 1, red fox - 1, redstart - 1, roe deer - 1, sand martin - 1 and water voles - 3.

The date for next year's event is 22nd and 23rd April 2017

2016 results

Somerset Catchments	Patches	Sites	Positives	Hits	Near Miss	Blanks	Otters
Exmoor	13	47	35	3	9	1	5
N.Coast	13	59	39	4	4	0	6
Tone	31	121	67	12	4	5	11
S.Coast	4	11	9	3	0	1	3
Parrett	33	123	75	21	2	9	13
Cary	2	12	1	0	0	1	0
Brue	24	86	51	15	0	4	11
N.Axe	8	43	8	3	0	3	2
Frome	10	29	19	10	0	0	5
Stour	1	1	0	0	0	1	0
Totals	139	532	304	71	19	25	56

blank patches	25
otter located	56

2016. 2 DAY EVENT RESULTS

	Somerset
Total Sites	532
Sites Pos	304
% sites Pos	57%
Sites with hits	71
% sites with hits	13%
% positives with hits	23%

Somerset Catchments										
Exe	N.Coast	Tone	S.Coast	Parrett	Brue	N.Axe	Cary	Frome	Stour	
47	59	121	11	123	86	43	12	29	1	
35	39	67	9	75	51	8	1	19	0	
74%	66%	55%	81%	61%	59%	18%	8%	65%	0%	
3	4	12	3	21	15	3	0	10	0	
6%	7%	10%	27%	17%	17%	7%	0%	34%	0%	
8%	10%	18%	33%	28%	29%	37%	0%	52%	0%	

Hits	71
Near Misses	19

3	4	12	3	21	15	3	0	10	0
9	4	4	0	2	0	0	0	0	0

OTTERS LOCATED	56
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5	6	9	3	13	11	2	0	5	0
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Patches	139
Blank Patches	25

13	13	31	4	33	24	8	2	10	1
1	0	5	1	9	4	3	1	0	1