

Dead Otters in 2016

17 Dead Otters were recorded across the county in 2016. All but two recovered for autopsy and all should be transferred to Cardiff University by the end of January. This is a particularly low number, the annual average being about 30. Particularly unusual, is that nine of them are not road deaths. The average is 2 non-road deaths per year. This also means the number of recorded road deaths is very low at 8 for the year. It will be interesting and important to see if this was an anomaly or a sign of something else going on.

In May, the 500th dead otter recorded (since 2000) was a small cub found, predated in mud heavily trampled with dog prints, on a tributary of the Tone by Stephen Hembery and Sue Sherry.

Much of what we know about otters in Somerset has come from dead otters and with so many being sent for autopsy and samples being stored they provide a valuable resource for future studies as well. So please do make sure to report and collect them! There are certainly otters we are not getting told about, how many, and if this has impacted more heavily on the records for this year is frustratingly unknown. No dead otters were recorded in October and November, perhaps due to dry months?

In January, 2015's dead otters were taken to Cardiff University and Annette Beardsley transferred one being held in a vet's freezer in Yeovil. Tony House and Phil Dampier kindly moved the freezer, previously housed at Natural England in Shapwick, to Secret World, who generously agreed to rehouse it for us. We now have 3 freezers at RSPCA West Hatch, Secret World and at Rob's house in Wellington.

Also in January, great efforts by our neighbours in North Somerset recovered a dead otter someone had taken from the Levels illegally for taxidermy to Bristol. Thanks to the Environment Agency and to the North Somerset Otter Group it was recovered and sent for autopsy. Thanks to Claire Shellis for retrieving and freezing it and to Gill Brown for transporting it to Cardiff.

In May, a dead cub was found on Exmoor away from roads, it was frozen by the finder and collected by Jilly Leonard.

In August, Michelle Werrett recovered a dead cub from the sprainting stone in her garden. It had chest injuries. She said, *'About an hour to half-an-hour before dawn I thought I heard a fox killing a pheasant, but what sounded like biggish wings fluttering rapidly in thick bush could well have been a small body being shaken in shallow water. It was finished with a brief strangled squawk, like the first note of a cock pheasant's trumpet cut off abruptly.'*

To those of you not mentioned here who have contributed to the reporting and collection of dead otters this year and in past years, many thanks. Please do make sure to report any dead otters to us as soon as they are found and please also make sure any interested friends and contacts you have also know how to report a dead otter. So much of what we know comes from the dead otters and we need to make sure we are recording as many of the deaths as we can and recovering as many bodies as possible. Dead Otters should be reported to: Environment Agency: 03708 506506
Jo Pearse: 07855 773697