



2011 Somerset Otter Group Website News posts

2DAY EVENT; Summary of results: Posted 27.06.2011.

477 sites on 124 patches were 66% positive(318); they produced 91 hits and 16 near misses(Saturday only); adjudication made this 62 separate otter ranges, to which we can add another 7 otters known about, but not registered during the survey, principally because of the very high tide. This gives a final estimate of the county's population at 69. Regrettably, we omitted some areas, of course. We probably lost another 4 or so . Only 8 patches were without otter evidence.

Recording. 01.08.2011.

Agni Arampoglou from the Somerset environmental records centre (SERC), has completed an electronic recording form on which to enter your survey results.

By transferring to an electronic copy the data can be automatically entered into their records. This saves hours of work manually re-typing the forms we have been posting in, is quick, and saves us postage. There may well be some glitches and Agni is happy to assist with any problems you might highlight.

Please start using the forms for your next survey results and submit them monthly. This new system will remove the delay in monitoring our results, allow greater analysis and give your surveys even more purpose. The form is designed for the computer system it is going into, it is not designed for printing, so you may find it easier to keep your own copies and records electronically.

Otter Conference News. Posted 10.09.2011

The work of the Somerset Otter Group made a strong impression at the 12th international Otter Conference held at the University of Pavia, near Milan, Italy, at the beginning of September. Delegates were amazed at the extent and the thoroughness of our 2Day Events, as portrayed in a poster display; "you have more active surveyors than the whole of Germany". Lucy Mead's analysis of the dead otter data was taken away for perusal by a small sub-committee charged with setting up a coherent system for recording otter deaths, ; they decided to base it on our formula. All the copies of the Research Papers were snapped up.

We raised extra funds and sponsored the fares of two of the researchers we work with from the Cardiff Otter Project, and assisted a Nepalese biologist to attend. Ellie Sherrard-Smith gave an excellent presentation on the Bile Fluke, and Sarah Paul disclosed the findings of the genetic research into sub-populations, both of which were relevant to one of the underlying themes of the meeting, that all is not yet well with water dependent mammals. Otters are declining in many areas, not all of them at the far

side of the globe. Ongoing problems of an unknown nature are reducing the Shetland Islands' otters. Ireland is down by about 30%. About half the otters tested in Britain had Diclofenac in their fur; that is the medicine that killed all the vultures in India. The Swedish Health Service sponsors their research into otter breeding and reproductive organs, as it is worried about the effect of chemicals in the water supply on Swedish mothers.

Another theme was conflict with otters as fish predators, something the SOG has been involved in for a while, so we were able to contribute strong experience on that too.

But the main message was the great value of the data base you have built up over the years, and the importance of keeping these studies going.

You Tube Video Posted 5.10.2011

Last year Wessex Water used their Watermark award to give the Somerset Otter group £1000 towards fluke research. They made a short film which includes an interview with James Williams and Eleanor Sherrard-Smith together with footage of otter group members at last years meeting in Wellington.

This is available for viewing on, 'You Tube'. The link to access it is below, if the link does not work, it can be accessed by going to 'You Tube', and searching for Somerset Otter Group, Wessex water.

<http://youtu.be/hFuEdUbsIE> It is worth taking a few minutes to find and watch.

New survey forms work well and have saved time for serc. Posted 23.10.2011

Agni has provided further guidance to help reduce the amount of editing she undertakes, and provide a standard format for the computer. Her original guidance notes are available on the excel form, accessed by a tab on the bottom left of the form.

1. The first line on the form shows an example of how the form should be filled in, an important aid when getting the right format for dates and grid references etc. However this example needs to be deleted before sending in the form. If not it will generate many identical entries on the computer.

2. The grid reference needs to be typed in exactly as on the example, no gaps and no slashes.
e.g ST123123

3. The date needs to be the same format as in the example with the use of a / e.g. 01/01/2012

4. Do not leave any empty cells or rows on the spreadsheet and avoid ditto marks, the computer cannot read a ditto mark or guess at what should be in the spaces. This means repeating your name, site, date, otter etc in each cell.

5. Number box.

Sometimes the number gets omitted when an A/J is recorded, but the computer needs a number in the box. Avoid '&' and '+'. just use a comma ',' e.g. 1F,2R If sites are surveyed without a result enter 0.

6. If sites are not visited enter N/S in the date column.

Lastly, and most important of all these, records that have been sent in the previous month must not be sent again. Start a clean sheet for each survey result sent in. However multiple dates can be entered all on the same form.

New Year Message Posted 2.1.2012

Happy New year, everyone. Do you, like me, get the impression that 2011 was a bad year for otters? The total of recorded deaths, 42, was the second highest ever; if you add in the 2 otters seen very sick, but never found, the total of 44 equals 2006, the "known" disaster year. Although the percentage of hits at the 2Day Event was bang on the average (28.6% : average 29.5%), my results for my daily checking at the Otter Loo were disappointing, 14.6% against an average of 21.7%. Remember, that average includes the 2 very low years of 2002 and 2006, so the average of more usual years would be 24%. Coincidentally??. rainfall is also down by one-third, 21 inches against the average of 29.3. The next driest year was 2006, 23 inches. I wonder if Blue-green Algae have any effect; the EA put up warning notices in both those dry years, alerting dog owners to the potentially poisonous effect. Otters spend a lot of time grooming, but cannot read the warnings.

We shall have to look carefully at the results of this year's 2Day Event, on 14th & 15th April.

Meanwhile, please send in your monthly surveys electronically, direct to SERC. And include mink and polecats; I have 53 records for polecat in 2010, and 62 in 2011. But only 15 notes about mink; ironically, the only place they still prosper seems to be in the bird reserves on the peat moors where they trapped over 30 on the mink rafts..

With thanks for all you did for the otters in 2011, **James**