Somerset, UK July 2023

SURVEY RESULTS 2023

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

Two-Day Survey 2024

Next years two-day event will take place on:

30th & 31st March 2024

2023 was the second year of an earlier survey due to warmer springs and the resulting surge in bank side vegetation. We will keep the change monitored for effectiveness.

Weather conditions

The spring weather conditions are becoming more unpredictable in Somerset with both prolonged time without rain and periods of intense rainfall.

The Somerset Rivers Authority and the Environment Agency have planned work for anti flood measures across many rivers in Somerset.

It is thought flooding can impact otters negatively, separating mothers from cubs and altering food supply. More information on SRA's planned work can be found here:

https://www.somersetriversau thority.org.uk/



The Two Day Survey took place on the 8th and 9th of April 2023. A quick rearrangement was needed following downpours before the original the planned date. Unfortunately, this meant some surveyors were unavailable for the new weekend, reassuringly the survey was conducted safely. Usefully with the rivers so high the previous weekend, most spraints identified were less the a week old, helping with the final adjudication.

High rainfall can effect the catchments river levels differently. Some sites were still affected by the high water levels.

Surveyor numbers were still a little low. Some surveyors had moved out of the county, some retired and there was some natural drop off. We are working on filling those gaps for 2024.

Thanks so much for all your efforts, both past and present. Although low surveyor numbers will effect the eventual results, we are still able to see a picture of distribution across the county and to see the percentage of positive sites surveyed in comparison to previous years.

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Surveyor numbers

New surveyors are needed across all catchments. Please contact Jo Pearse on sogjopearse@gmail.com if you are or know of anyone interested in monitoring their local population.

Exmoor National Park

The Devon side of Exmoor National Park was surveyed As usual to co-ordinate with the Somerset survey.

Cubs

Every year we hope for new reports of breeding. The two days survey greatly adds to our understanding of cub distribution across the county. Sometimes a best guess has to be arrived at for the relationship of reports of two grown otters together. As cubs stay with their mother for so long (up to 18 months) it can appear to be two unrelated adults.

This year, following the survey, four more records have been added to the annual count, from the Tone, Brue and Frome catchments. It is never too late to add reports and the list is added to throughout the year. A final tally will be given for 2023 in the NewslOtter early 2024.

Two Day Survey 2023 - other species reported

	bittern	cuckoo	dipper	g.wagtail	kingfisher	I. egret	mink	w. vole	beaver	
2015	2	0	16	5	5	2	14	4		
2016	2	0	18	5	5	1	3	3		
2017	0	0	15	7	7	4	0	0		
2018	1	2	14	4	4	4	4	2		
2019	0	1	15	3	3	0	7	0		
2022	2	1	7	15	10	3	11	3	2	
2023	0	0	5	4	8	2	9	1	4	

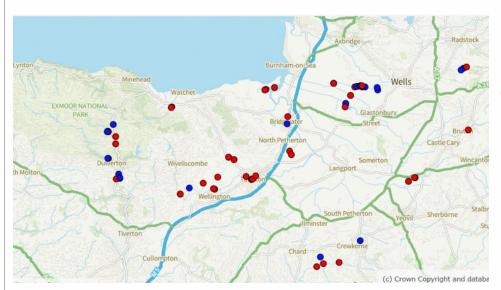
2023 other species recorded show mixed results. For the second year we have beaver signs in the county, but water vole and dippers reports are down. Kingfishers were seen on all the catchments apart from the Exe and coast. Mink were across the catchments, apart from surprisingly the Frome catchment (although we know they are there).

Other points of interest

- Thanks to other reports we had coming in that have helped to fill some gaps, such as Tinner Tinksy on Tealham and Tadham moor who luckily saw a brief glimpse of an otter and a separate report of two juvenile otters seen in a similar area.
- Social media also provided some information, please do share any Somerset otter reports from other media to the Somerset Otter Group facebook page as it can provide supplementary information.
- Lucy Pendrick on the Tone watched wren nest building under a bridge and found a lovely milky spraint (and a breeding record added to SOG's database) as well as frog remains.
- Rob Williams on the Tone saw his first swallow of the year and Paul Hending watched sand martins.
- Shelley Saltman saw a sandpiper on the Parrett catchment.
- Jo Pearse on the Brue was serenaded by skylarks along coastal sites.
- Daniela Scott saw a goosander amongst other birds whilst surveying on the Frome.

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Two Day Survey Map 2023



2023 Results Key

- Day 1 fresh spraint
- Day 2 fresh spraint

Two Day Data 1995 - 2022

Month	MAY	MAY	MAY	MAY	MAY	MAY	ост	MAY	MAY	MAY	APR	MAY	MAY	APR	APR	APR	APR	APR	APR	APR	APR	APR	APR							
Year	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
								F&M													spate						C-19	C-19		
Patches				31								58	65	69	109	129	121	124	127	143	135	138	139	137	138	122			91	72
Total Sites			114	145	166	174	132		121	126	275	239	271	309	428	520	521	477	519	564	524	510	531	496	496	473			388	287
Sites Positive			84	98	100	124	78		56	96	198	169	197	227	306	381	380	318	331	390	273	372	304	326	243	249			161	118
% Sites Positive			73	67	60	71	59		46	75	72	69	73	74	71	73	73	66	64	69	52	73	57	66	49	52			42	41
Hits	9	11	18	39	26	42	42		27	26	71	30	35	68	99	95	109	91	76	114	68	102	71	89	71	63			51	43
Near Misses	8		7	11	17	11				14	7	8	6	11	16	17	30	16	26	22	18	25	19	21	19	8			9	8
Total Scores	17	11	25	50	43	53			27	40	78	38	41	79	115	114	139	107	102	136	86	127	90	110	90	71			60	51
Located	15	16	25	32	37	34			21	30	54	39	32	44	54	59	66	66	55	64	47	66	50	66	56	56			38	32
Adjudicated Ranges											54	50	45	45	65	62	69	69	67	67	56	66	56	66	56	56			39	34
% Total sites with Hits			16	27	16	24	32		22	20	25	12	13	22	23	18	21	19	15	20	13	20	13	18	14	13			13	15
% Positive Sites with Hits			21.4	39.7	26	33.8	53.8		48.2	27	35.8	17.7	17.7	29.9	32.3	24.9	28.6	28.6	22.9	29	25	27	23	27	29	25			31	36
Blank Patches		5	1								4			5	6	10	8	8	15	9	22	10	25	20	30	26			23	22

During this years survey, 72 patches were covered, fewer than last year and much lower than peak coverage in 2013 (143 patches covered). The adjudicated ranges came in at 32, unsurprisingly lower than previous years and influenced in part by lower surveyors.

287 sites were checked and 118 were positive (recent otter activity) and 43 sites (hits) had fresh work on the Sunday. The percentages give us an indication of changes. 41% of sites had some recent otter signs. Comparing this with the survey 10 years ago (2013) 69% of sites were positive, indicating a possible decline.

In this years 2023 survey 15% had fresh signs on the Sunday (otter activity on the Saturday to Sunday) compared to 20% of sites in 2013 also suggestive of a decline.

The survey shows the importance of continual otter monitoring.