

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.somersetiversauthority.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.

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 News!Otter early 2024.

Two Day Survey 2023 - other species reported

	bittern	cuckoo	dipper	g.wagtail	kingfisher	l. 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 Tatham 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.

