

SURVEY RESULTS 2025

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

Two-Day Survey 2026

Next years two-day event
will take place on:

28th & 29th March 2026

2025 was the fourth year of an earlier survey avoiding the vigorous bankside vegetation caused by warmer springs. Even so, some survey points were inaccessible due to flora growth, particularly along the Parrett catchment.



These coastal prints on the Brue catchment, were a fresh hit for the Sunday, with the tide helpfully cleaning the bank after the first day survey.



2025's survey was held at the start of April on a fine, dry weekend. River levels were very low to moderate or normal with the odd anomaly.

Surveyor numbers are still being worked on, but there was a great endeavour as usual, with a fantastic effort on Level's reserves by the Avalon Marshes organisations volunteers.

Beaver signs continue to be spotted around Frome, also now on the Brue catchment! Rachel Ison watched brook lampreys spawning on the coastal / Exe catchments. There was bankside evidence of meals of mussels on several sites. As well as signal crayfish in the Brue, Frome and Parrett catchments.

Mink were wide ranging, particularly on the Brue.

No signs of otter breeding were picked up although trail footage show Frome and Parrett have juvenile cubs.

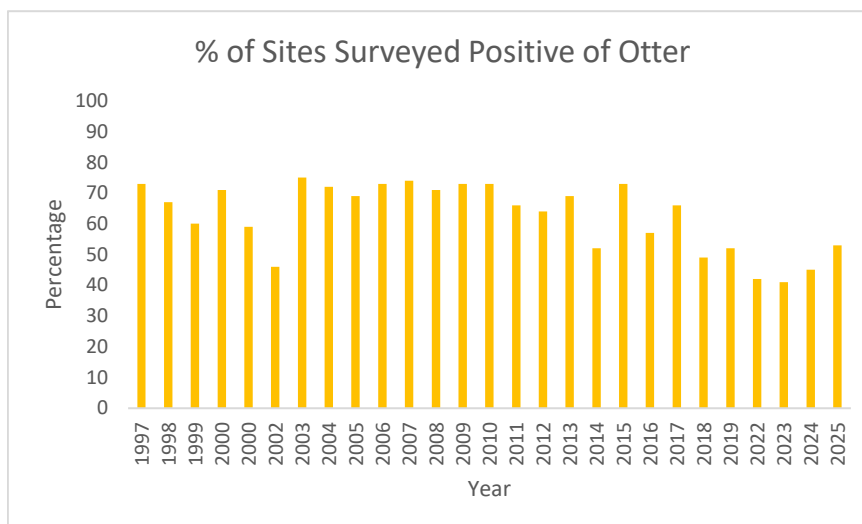
TWO DAY EVENT OTHER MAIN SPECIES

yr sp	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
2024	2	0	2	2	5	0	8	6	3
2025	0	0	3	1	7	3	11	2	3

Month	MAY	MAY	MAY	MAY	MAY	MAY	OCT	MAY	MAY	MAY	APR	MAY	MAY	APR	APR	APR	APR	APR	APR	APR	APR	APR	APR	APR	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	2024	2025		
							F&M																			C-19	C-19							
Patches				31								58	65	69	109	129	121	124	127	143	135	138	139	137	138	122					91	72	53	54
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	248	244
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	112	130	
% 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	45	53	
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	39	32		
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	3	6		
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	42	38		
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	32	25		
Adjudicated Ranges											54	50	45	45	65	62	69	69	67	67	56	66	56	66	56	56			39	34	33	32		
% Total sites with Hits			16	27	16	24	32		22	20	25	12	13	22	23	18	21	19	22	20	13	20	13	18	14	13			13	15	16	13		
% 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	25.9	29	25	27	23	27	29	25			31	36	34	25		
Blank Patches		5	1								4			5	6	10	8	8	15	9	22	10	25	20	30	26			23	22	12	1		
% Blank patches																	1.5	1.6	2.89	1.58	4.19	1.96	4.03	4.7	6.04	5								

Year	Percentage
1997	16
1998	27
1999	16
2000	24
2000	32
2002	22
2003	20
2004	25
2005	12
2006	13
2007	22
2008	23
2009	18
2010	21
2011	19
2012	15
2013	20
2014	13
2015	20
2016	13
2017	18
2018	14
2019	13
2022	13
2023	15
2024	16
2025	13

In 2025, 13% of sites had fresh signs on day two. This can be compared with previous years - 2004 had the highest of 25%. There graphs shows there is much variability across the years. Although 13% is the lowest number on the graph, it was also this low in 2006, 2024, 2016, 2019 and 2022, perhaps indicating natural population fluctuation or being caused by wider issues of water quality and prey abundance.

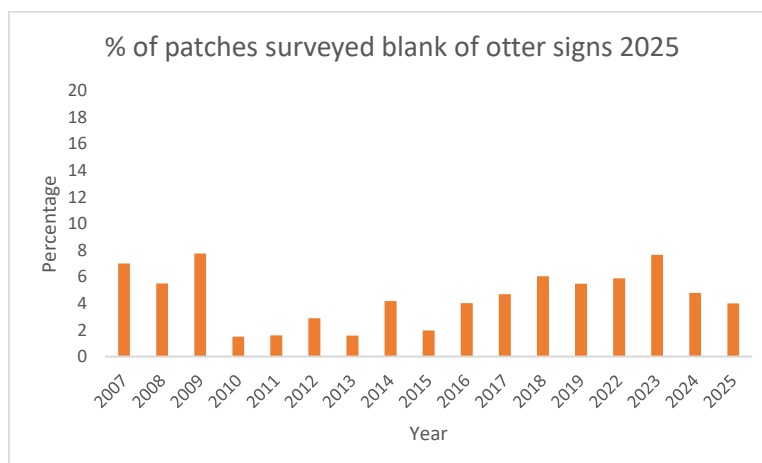


The graph above shows the percentage of sites surveyed with some sign of otter (positive). This includes all the Sunday 'hits' (fresh) and any other recent signs of otter, signs that are within approximately one month of age. Old spraints are discounted.

53% of sites were positive of otters this year. A higher figure than the lows on 46% in 2002 and 41% in 2023.

The highest percentage was in 2003 when 79% of sites were positive. From 2003 to 2015 percentages were mostly between 65% and 75%. When combined with the lower percentage of hits from day 2, this could indicate a lowering of population across the county and demonstrates the importance of regular and consistent monitoring.

The increase in positive sites from last years percentage hopefully is a trend of increase but could also show fewer otters ranger more over a longer period.



The graph above shows the number of patches surveyed that had no otter signs as a percentage of sites surveyed. In 2025, 4% of whole patches were blank of any otter sign.

It is difficult to make firm conclusions but the recording work undertaken by surveyors continues to be the most effective way to obtain a county wide picture, identifying trends over time.

NEWSLOTTER

Other Somerset Otter News.

Wildlife on the ramp



A shame that one of the first users should be a mink!



The camera picked up this fox, although he decided to bypass the ramp and just jump up. Perhaps he was hoping to surprise the other user videoed - a rabbit!

It is great the ramp is being utilised by other wildlife. Hopefully the more natural smells and scents will encourage the otter to investigate.

Environment Agency Improvement Works

In 2022, the Environment Agency started major improvement works to Dunball Wharf, upgrading the sluice to better manage flood risk.

The area had become an otter death hotspot with multi laned, fast moving traffic interfering with the otters passage between the King Sedgemoor Drain and the Parrett estuary.

The Somerset Otter Group chair, Rob Williams and the Environment Agency worked at incorporating wildlife ramps so that otters could enter the Parrett or the Drain at the sluice without risking the road crossing. The ramp has a simple design - a float attached to the bottom of the ramp, allowing it to rise and fall with the water levels.



The local otter group surveyor, Dylan Thomas, knows the area well and with the Environment Agency, installed his cameras at the wharf to see how the ramp is utilised. The cameras have been in situ since April, with some adjustments to the position. No otter success yet, but hopefully before the winter and dusk at rush hour, the otters will make use of ramp.

Tonal - Audio Art Project

In January 2025, SOG was invited to be part of Tonal , Sounds of the River Tone, by Feral Practice.

Sound artist, Fiona MacDonald and SOG's Jo Pearce took a stroll along the Bridgwater and Taunton Canal on a lovely, calm winter morning to talk about otters.



The project 'will poetically and factually explore the ecology, history and structure of the river, the lives of its creaturely inhabitants and visitors, and how it connects to people locally.'

Fresh spraint was found and a long otter path from the canal to nearby ryhnes.

SOG's Chair, Rob Williams also conversed with Fiona who spoke to a diverse selection of people, all with a connection to the River Tone or river conservation.

Check out the website for some very interesting conversations.

<https://tonal-uk.com/>

<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/tonal-rivers-beyond-sewage/id1831009555>

Trail Camera Insights

Trail cameras can pick up interesting wildlife interactions and surprising behaviours.

Dylan Thomas has shared some interesting wildlife footage. The fox below was picked up investigating a known holt and on a previous video was shown being chased off by the resident otter.

Below we see the fox carrying a young animal in its mouth. It is maddeningly difficult to make out the detail, but a tail can clearly be shown. It could be this fox got lucky and took an unguarded otter cub.



The image above is not otter related at all, but certainly surprising. These two deer were filmed emerging from the estuary, shaking water from their coats. It appeared they had just swum across the Parrett estuary!

Dead otters 2024

25 Somerset dead otters were reported in the previous full year, 2024. Of those, 10 were collected for Cardiff University's post mortem project and most taken to the university by Rob Williams.

Road mortality was the most common cause. Four were viewed on the deadly M5. And a small cub was found in a busy Bridgwater area and later euthanised by vets due to a broken neck. Sadly another cub was found on an Avalon Marshes reserve.

5 otters were reported from the Tone catchment, 1 from the South Axe, 4 from the Parrett, 10 from the Brue and 5 from Frome. Frustratingly, many had been removed before collection, sometimes within an hour of being reported. Thank you to the collectors, not only does it provide carcasses for Cardiff University it gives us detailed information on the otters of Somerset.

Breeding

There were 10 records of breeding otters in the previous full year, 2024. 1 from the Tone catchment, 1 from the South Axe, 1 from the Parrett and 7 from the Brue and North Axe. If you have any more information on cubs, please inform Jo Pearse - successful breeding can be an indicator of health.

Bridies Field and Mound Biobitz



The Somerset Wildlife Trust's Alicia Hallatt did a splendid job of organising a bioblitz event at Brides Field and Brides Mound on 3 May 2025. The fields are beside the River Brue, but due to the engineering of the river it is not easy for the otter to leave and access the river system. The Somerset Otter Group led a survey along the bank and river, but no evidence of otter was found during the walk. This will provide a baseline for a future bioblitz.

Thank you!

Many thanks and appreciation to all Somerset Otter Group surveyors and friends.

Many thanks to Secret World and RSPCA West Hatch for storing dead otters.