

Sussex Otters & Rivers Project (SORP)

Part of Water for Wildlife UK

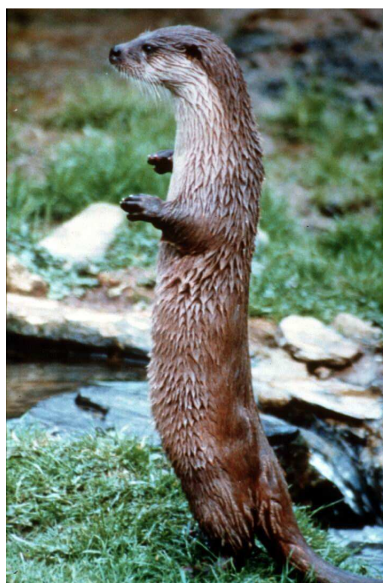


How to help Wetland Wildlife at home!

You don't have to be out in the rivers, up to your elbows in mud to be actively helping wetland wildlife. Following just a few of these 'armchair' conservation tips can help hugely.

Did you know, that a bath uses 80 litres of water but showers only use 30; a sprinkler uses 1000 litres of water an hour!; Washing your car with a hose uses 30 x more water than with a bucket; and it takes a lot more water than you think to make consumer goods. Roughly 400 000 litres of water to make a car and approximately 185 litres to make a bag of crisps! (www.waterfootprint.org.uk)

Many of us don't value water as much as we would value petrol, or electricity, and yet water is fundamental to all life on earth. Even our bodies are made up of around 60% water. There are simple ways that you can conserve water at home, which use less water and which therefore helps to protect wetlands, as well as some of the rare wetland wildlife like otters and water voles which rely on it.



The otter relies on wetlands for its survival

Be water-wise at home

1. Get a hippo in your toilet! – It can save up to 3 litres of water per flush and up to 2000 litres per year. You can email flushsavers@southernwater.co.uk or call 0800 027 6152 for free advice on how to use less water every time you flush your loo. Alternatively put a filled water bottle or a brick in your cistern to displace water.
2. Get metered – Water metering works out exactly how much water you are using, and makes you more aware of your water usage. Chances are you'll save money by getting a meter installed.
3. Grey matters – Don't throw away your old bathwater, washing up water, and other waste water. Pour it on your garden or lawn, or re-use it for washing the car!
4. Use a washing up bowl – it takes approximately half as much water as the sink, and a lot less water than if you wash up with the tap running.

5. Only boil as much as you need for your cuppa – this will save you electricity and means you get your cuppa quicker too!
6. Put a full load in your washing machine or dishwasher – washing machines are one of the largest water users in the home.
7. Take a shower instead of a bath.
8. Don't be a drip – It's a fiddle, but fix dripping taps and you could save 30 litres + a day!
9. Turn the tap off when you clean your teeth – you could save up to 15,000 litres of water a year!
10. Wash the car with a bucket not a hose.
11. Use 'wetland friendly' detergents such as Ecover to reduce the number of harmful chemicals being released into the environment and affecting our wildlife.
12. If its yellow, let it mellow! – If its brown, flush it down! Leave urine in the toilet without flushing to save water.
13. Make sure that gutters and downpipes are in good condition so your water harvest is efficient
14. Grow your own organic food. Food makes the single biggest impact on our environment. Home grown food is not only more tasty than mass produced food, it also doesn't require transport to get to your house – one of the other big ways which uses large amounts of water and energy.

Be water wise in the garden

- Don't mow your lawn too short. Leaving grass longer helps to capture the morning dew – so in a way it is self watering!
- Build a pond - Ponds are one of the single best things for attracting wildlife to your garden, and are an invaluable 'oasis' for wetland wildlife.
- No ifs or butts – Install a water butt. Rainwater is free and is better for your plants than chlorine treated tapwater.
- Mulch it! Most composts or mulches help to hold water in the soil and around plant roots where it is most needed. You can buy garden mulch and compost, but better still, make your own compost. That way you are recycling and reducing your waste (and therefore indirectly your water usage), providing a haven for wildlife such as hedgehogs, and also providing good food for your plants.
- Water your garden in the evening. That way, plants have the whole night to absorb the water you have just put on the soil. If you water plants during the day, then chances are the sun will evaporate all the water before plants have a chance to absorb it.
- Group vegetables by their water needs. Cauliflower, salad onions, peas, potatoes, runner beans and tomatoes need most water. Asparagus and beetroot are among the most drought tolerant.



When wetlands dry out, the endangered water vole often disappears © Dave Green

Upgrade your appliances

- A. Install a Low-flow shower head instead of a power shower. The shower performance is just as good but water is atomised/aerated so that less water is used
- B. Upgrade your loo – You can buy cheap, variable flush levers which fit a normal toilet and which help use less water
- C. Get a new loo! - Dual flush toilets and ultra low flush models are available and use less water
- D. Tap into savings – Water brakes, flow restrictors, automatic shut-off systems and spray fittings on taps are all ways to reduce your water use
- E. Efficient washers – If you buy a new washing machine or dishwasher, then check that it is one of the more water efficient models. Using less water won't necessarily mean less clean clothes or dishes, in fact many of the water efficient washers work better than ones which use more water.



Reedbeds are nature's water purifiers

Think bigger

- Install a Domestic Rainwater Harvesting system. Your whole house can be supplied by rainwater harvested off your roof. www.cat.org.uk
- Make a compost toilet ! – Its literally a hole in the ground but uses little or no water and (if you can stomach it!) makes great compost. Seek specialist advice from your local Environment Agency/Council before digging one.
- Use SUDS - Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems are simple but effective ways to build whilst minimising your impact on the environment. SUDS include permeable paving slabs, soakaways to filter pollution and silt from run off water etc. (See www.environment-agency.gov.uk – Sustainable Drainage Systems).
- Think about contraceptive options other than the oestrogen pill! – Globally, and in the UK, the incidence of aquatic-dependent species showing the effects of persistent hormones in the environment are increasing. The occurrence of 'dual sex' fish in a number of European rivers has been attributed to exposure to estrogenic chemicals present in Sewage Treatment Work (STW's) effluents. Polar bears are also showing signs of feminisation, and Inuit children are increasingly being born female due to the presence of hormone altering chemicals in their environment
- Built a Reedbed Sewage Treatment System. Reedbeds are one of the most efficient filters of pollution and sewage. However it is important to build them properly so that they work correctly. Consult your local Environment Agency for advice and consent to create one and see www.cat.org.uk for ideas.
- Pee on the compost heap! It improves your compost, reduces energy and water used in treating sewage water and saves 6.5 litres per non- flush!
- Calculate your water footprint and then see if you can reduce it at - www.waterfootprint.org/?page=cal/waterfootprintcalculator_indv_ext

How does this help Wildlife?

In Sussex, over 65% of our water is extracted from underground water sources called groundwater aquifers, most of the rest is taken from our rivers. Most of our aquifers and river water in Sussex are either at capacity or in water 'deficit' because we have so many 'high water usage' people living in Sussex. New houses are still being built however. Only by conserving the water resources we have right now, can we reduce how much water we are taking from our environment, so that the wetlands that most of us and our wetland wildlife relies on can survive to keep helping us all.

Remember - it helps you too!

Savings on hot water could significantly reduce your energy bills. Saving water can significantly reduce your water bills, and saving water means that you get the pleasure of seeing more wildlife in your garden and in the countryside. But it is a reciprocal relationship. If we help re-create more wetlands, then more water can filter through the ground and into aquifers and rivers, helping humans as well as wildlife.



Building a pond can attract a huge range of fascinating wildlife to your garden

Contacts:-

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www.sussexotters.org

Environment Agency

08708 506506

Ask for your local FRB team, or for Land Drainage Consent

Web Links

www.cat.org.uk

www.waterfootprint.org

www.rainharvesting.co.uk

www.waterwise.org.uk

www.environment-agency.gov.uk

References

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SORP promotes the sustainable management of Sussex rivers and the restoration of wetland habitats for people and wildlife, and in particular the Otter, Water vole and Black poplar tree. The Sussex Otter and Rivers Project (SORP) is a partnership between Sussex Wildlife Trust, South East Water, Environment Agency and Southern Water Services

