



What to do if you find a dead otter

Introduction

Otters are fully protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, Schedule 5. It is an offence to kill, injure, knowingly disturb an Otter, damage or obstruct an Otters place of rest (or holt).

Unfortunately many otters are killed accidentally, (i.e. in road accidents), by stress induced by pollution and habitat loss, as well as by natural causes. Otters are still barely recovering to Sussex after 30 years of absence. The loss of any animal is a blow for their recovery.

However, if collected, the corpses of dead otters can provide invaluable information about how the otter died, where it came from, whether it was breeding, its local environment and the diseases and pollutants it came into contact with.

If you find a dead otter, we would appreciate you letting us know. This information sheet tells you what to do if you find a dead otter.

I've found a dead otter, what next?

1. Is it an otter or a mink?

It is easy to confuse an otter with an American mink. It is important for us to know if there are mink in the area but we do not post mortem them. If you are unsure, check the picture below (otter is on the left, mink on the right), or look at our website www.sussexotters.org



2. Make a note of the time, date and location (preferably 6 Figure OS Grid Ref) you found the otter
3. Contact your local Otters and Rivers Officer, or Environment Agency Fisheries, Recreation and Biodiversity (FRB) officer. They are acquainted with procedures for the collection of corpses and are aware of the risk assessment and correct Health & Safety procedures.

For Sussex the contacts are:-

- Sussex Otters and Rivers Partnership, (01273) 497555,
- Environment Agency, 08708 506506.

What should I do with the otter corpse?

- A. **Attach tag** to otter's rear leg showing information in I (in permanent ink).
- B. **Ask your local otter officer to complete an otter corpse record sheet**, including as many details as possible about where you found the otter and in what state. Make 3 copies of the form, retain one for your records, send one copy to your local contact and attach one securely to the packaged otter, preferably in a waterproof A4 pocket.
- C. **In the mean time, try and preserve the body of the otter** by following the instructions below:-
 - i. Fold the otter's paws across its body, to prevent being scratched.
 - ii. Put otter in 2 heavy duty plastic bags & seal.
 - iii. The next stage depends on whether the otter corpse is fresh or old.

a) **If the otter corpse is less than 24 hours old**, (i.e. retains a bright, moist eye and does not smell), it should be couriered to a research station as a priority. Place in the fridge/cold store until transport arrives – **do not freeze** as this destroys tissues etc. which provide important information about otters.

b) **If the corpse is more than 24 hours old** it should be frozen and despatched to a research station when convenient. If no heavy duty plastic bags are available, wrap the corpse in newspaper, making sure that no fur is exposed to the cold, and seal in at least two plastic bin bags. If you don't want an otter in your freezer then SORP/Environment Agency should be able to help store the otter body!

D. When it is time to send the otter to the research station, place corpse in an insulated box (i.e. a cool box), thoroughly seal with parcel tape & label with 1) the delivery address and 2) senders or contact address

E. Confirm that someone will be there to receive the delivery (*If no one responds at the addresses below then please keep the otter in a freezer until someone can get back to you*).

Where do I send a dead otter?

If you live in the **South West or South**, please send all otters to the address (B) below.

If you live in the **Midlands, North East, North West or Thames Region**, please send all otters to the address (A) below.

(A) Field Centre

Llysdinam Field Centre,
Newbridge on Wye, Llandrindod Wells,
Powys. LD1 6NB
Telephone 01597 860308 or
e-mail goodwinjh@cf.ac.uk,

(B) Main Campus

Liz Chadwick,
Cardiff School of Biosciences,
c/o STORES* – Biomedical Sciences Building,
Museum Avenue, Cardiff. CF10 3US
Telephone 02920 874046 or
e-mail chadwickEA@cf.ac.uk.
The main point of contact is Liz Chadwick

However, anyone there should be able to help

* **PLEASE NOTE** At main campus all parcels go to a central stores office - staff there are less familiar with otter arrivals than at the field centre. Otters need to be marked clearly so that they are put in a freezer– please ensure that a 'freeze on arrival' label is prominent.

Further information about the project

Members of the public can find out more about the post mortem procedure and research at www.otterproject.cardiff.ac.uk

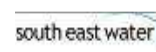


Otter © Tom Maddox

Feedback on otters received

Post mortem reports are saved as pdf files, and can easily be sent by email. If the finder address is recorded, they will be automatically sent a copy of the post mortem report. In addition, a report is sent to the EA and relevant local Wildlife Trust. You are welcome to forward emailed reports to other interested parties. It is also useful if you are able to contact your local Biodiversity Records Centre (www.sxbrc.org.uk) to register the time, date and grid reference of where the otter was found.

Sussex Otters & Rivers Project (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. SORP is a partnership between Sussex Wildlife Trust, South East Water, The Environment Agency and Southern Water Services.



Adapted from EA advice - 20/06/2007