



Get in touch with us and share your findings and sightings. We love otters too! So, we would be excited to answer any questions you might have.

Share with us your otter adventures:

-  @ForthRiversTrust
-  @ForthRiversT
-  Forth Rivers Trust
-  forthriverstrust

The Clubhouse, 106 Biggar Road Edinburgh EH10 7DU
 E: trust@forthriverstrust.org T: 0131 445 1527

Who are Forth Rivers Trust?

The Forth Rivers Trust aims to engage people with rivers and wildlife that live within the Forth catchment whilst conserving rivers and their important species for future generations. The Trust is involved with many projects ranging from full-scale restoration of rivers to engaging communities through organised events.

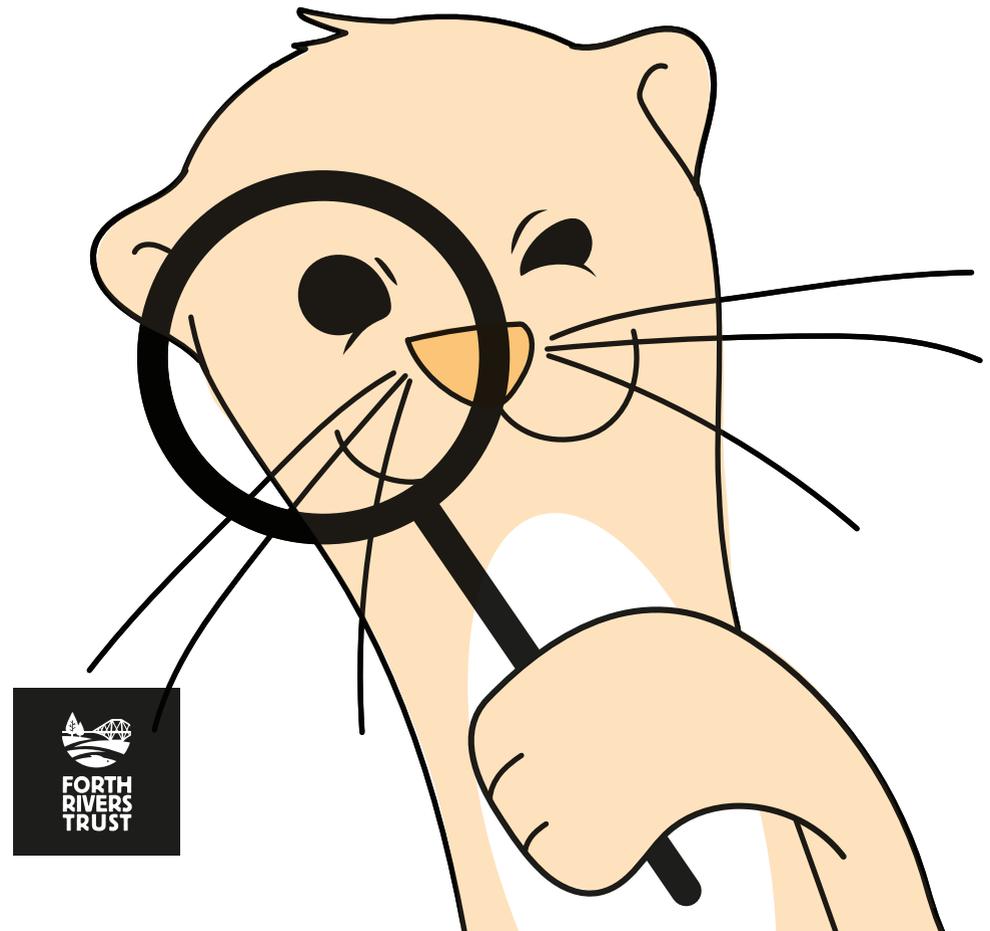


This booklet was made possible with funding from National Lottery Heritage Fund and those involved in the RiverLife: Almond & Avon project (2016-2021)

be an Otter detective

Age 5+

Learn to become a skilled otter spotter with this handy booklet.



How to use this booklet

Really you can just chance your luck at seeing an otter and sometimes when food supplies are plentiful, they will quite happily feed and play in plain sight. Work through the pages and try to locate these otter sightings along your river or stream.

Suitable for ages 5+ and needs a minimum of an hour of walking and searching.

Top tips for spotting

-  Otters have very good sense of sight, smell and hearing, so you need to be quiet and stay out of sight and downwind of them.
-  They are most active at night, so have the best chance of seeing them at dawn and dusk.
-  Find a field sign (e.g. a poo or fish remains) and sit in a suitable location and wait, patiently!
-  If it pops its head out of the water, only move once it has dived back down below the water. Sit back and enjoy.

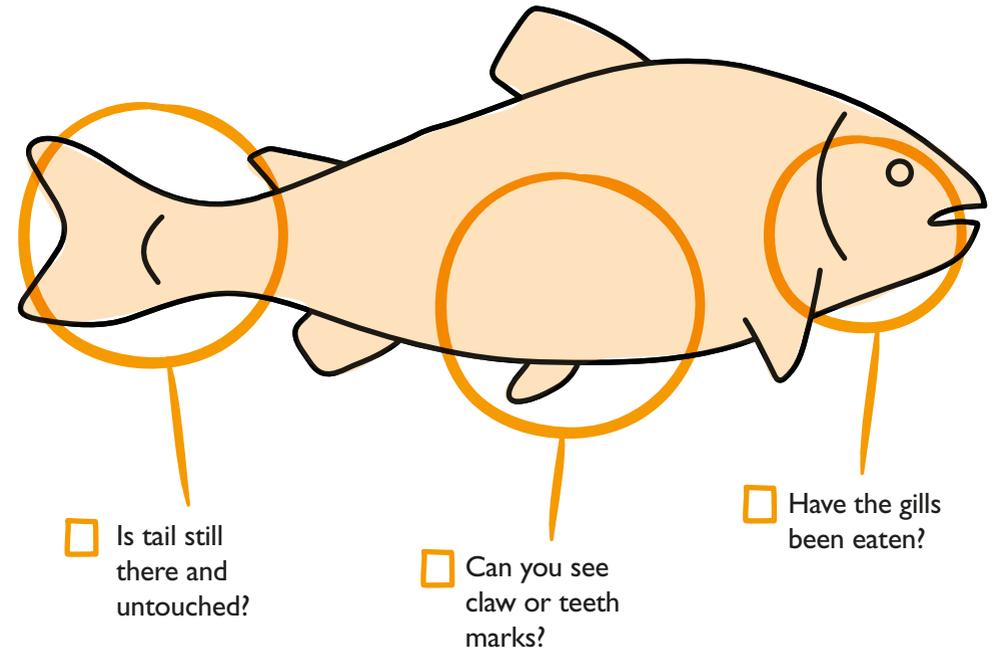
Staying safe next to the river

-  Ensure that you are accompanied by an adult
-  Stay away from the water's edge
-  Disinfectant hand wipes or sanitiser
-  Let someone know your location and what time you are expected back
-  Carry a phone or a whistle to call for help if needed
-  Wear appropriate clothing and footwear, keeping you warm, dry, silent, and camouflaged
-  Otters are a protected species and it is an offence to kill, injure, trap or disturb them or their homes, so stay back and admire them at a distance.

Otter Meals

Otters are impressive hunters and are a top predator or 'apex'. They hunt mainly at night when fish are less active. At the coast, there is a more types of prey, so they also hunt in the afternoon.

Was this fish eaten by an otter?



How they hunt

Otters have a very good sense of smell, hearing and eyesight. They communicate with whistles, twittering noises and spitting sounds, you might be able to hear this at night in a quiet place. So keep listening!

Otter Homes

What type of home?

Otters use several different resting sites, these are:

A 'lie-up': Flattened vegetation on a riverbank used for a nap

A 'couch': Vegetation pulled together to make a comfortable bed.

A 'holt': A hole in the riverbank that leads to an underground burrow.

A 'water-slide': a muddy or flattened vegetation chute into the river.

A 'path': Are of parted vegetation along the riverbanks.

Have you found a holt?

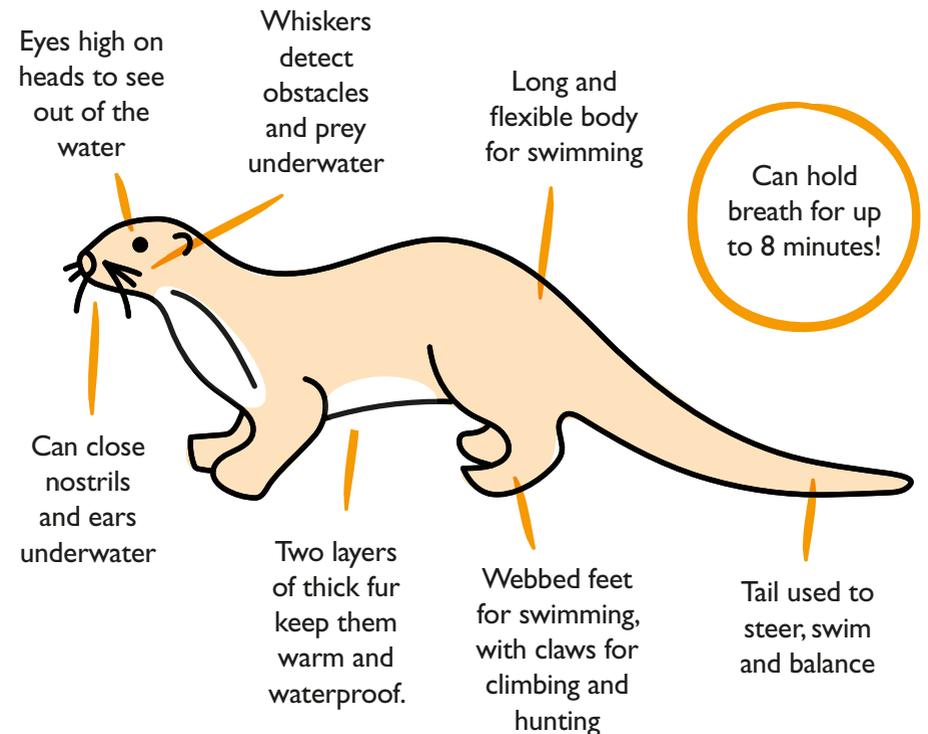
- The entrance looks like a hole in the bank? - twice the size of a rabbit hole.
- A tunnel through vegetation or rock outcrop?
- Under a fallen tree, or exposed tree roots, or buried pipe?
- Several spraints outside?

Make some notes about the evidence of activity that you have found...

All about Otters

Join us in the hunt for the beautiful, yet elusive otter. These shy, water-loving mammals can often be seen hunting in rivers, wetlands and along the coast.

Otter skills



Size: Otters are the size of a large cat, with brown fur, a broad snout and a pale throat and chest. The male 'dogs' are bigger than the female.

Length: 90-130cm

Weight: 6-8kg

Average lifespan: 5-10 years

Otter Footprints

Draw where you found you prints on the riverbank.

Extra: It is possible to make a plaster cast of these prints, get in touch and we will tell you how.

Why look for footprints?

 Found in soft mud and sand on the water's edge and under bridges.

 Prints confirm an otter's presence in the area.

 Small prints indicate that a female with pups' lives near.

Draw the print you found!

Otter Poop!

Ewww! Why look at their poo?

 Scientists call otter poop, spraints.

 Otters are territorial and they use their spraints to communicate with each other.

 They leave them in key places like prominent rocks, the riverbank or ledges to say to other otters "Hey! I live here!"

 Spraints carry chemical signals that either say "Go away!" or "I'm single and looking to mingle".

 Big spraints are likely by a female.

 Male otters ration their spraints to spread around their territory.

 Though you might find lots of poos, this doesn't mean that there's lots of otters. It may be one very territorial otter!

Is it a spraint?

Is it black and slimy? Or turning grey, as it dries.

Shaped like a blunt sausage?

Size of your little finger? Or a splat on a rock?

Can you see tiny fishbones and scales sticky out?

Does it smell musky, fishy or like jasmine tea?

Sketch a wee map of where you found the spraint!