

This document is a Simple Survey Method (SSM) used by HalpinRobbins as part of its general ecological and environmental working practices.

Description:

Simple survey method to be employed when projects and activities occur near water features with known or suspected European otter (*Lutra lutra*) presence.

Timing:

Survey work will be undertaken during daylight hours at any time of the year. Surveys will be dependent on weather and climatic conditions.

Technique:

Walk over assessment of the water feature banks up to 5m from the water's edge or 3m from the bank top, whichever is the greater.

The surveyor will walk the area looking for individuals and field signs; field signs include holts, slides, nest, tracks, prints and feeding signs.

Field signs are found through careful observation and movement of surface vegetation only. Each sign will be logged by type, location, condition and age for later interpretation to distinguish differences in habitat use and activity.

Where possible and safe to do so the area will be inspected from within the water feature. When unsafe to enter the water feature the surveyor will survey the bank tops.

Reason: The presence of European otter is determined by identifying field signs within and around the water feature and associated structures and habitats; some of these signs are only visible from within the water feature.

The location of any confirmed field sign will be logged. The survey log(s) and a map, illustrating the location of the signs, will be submitted as a record of the survey.

Survey logs will include:

Records:

- Observer;
- Date of Survey;
- Survey Start and End times;
- Weather conditions;
- Description of field sign observed;
- Description of survey location;
- Description of vegetative habitat(s);
- Map of survey location and field signs;
- Image of field signs.



Holts

Holts vary greatly from enlarged rabbit holes to cavities within tree roots and rock piles. They are often marked with spraints although natal holts, for rearing young, can have few revealing features.

Slides

Riverbank slides 200 mm wide, much wider with heavy use, up to 7.5 m long; often on flat ground, sometimes pitted with blurred prints where otter has given itself a push for momentum.

Nests (Couches)

These occur along water edges, crossover places and marshes, and are recognized by an area where the grasses or dirt have been flattened and raked or scratched into several small, twisted piles. Flattened areas may be up to 2 meters wide.

Field signs:

Faeces (Spraints)

Irregular, sometimes short, rounded segments, sometimes flattened masses, containing fish bones, scales, or crayfish parts; when fresh, often greenish and slimy. Most often found on banks of stream or pond, on logs, or on rocks in water.

Latrines

Often found on high points along the banks of streams, bays or along crossover trails between water bodies. The vegetation is usually flattened out, and the area may contain numerous piles of otter scat, often comprised of fish scales or crayfish parts.

Footprints

80 mm wide or more, about 100mm long; often show only heel pad and claws. Toes fan out widely, but webbing rarely prints, except in mud. Running stride 300–600 mm.

Survey combinations:

Where possible the survey will be combined with Water vole (*Arvicola amphibius*) surveys due to the species preference for similar habitats.

