

7.12 OTTER AND BADGER SURVEY

Introduction

- 7.12.1 Otters are one of the primary features for the Usk SAC designation. Otters are known to occur along the whole length of the river, including the section through urban Newport.
- 7.12.2 A SEWBReC data search confirmed several past records of Otters from the wider area, but none from within the site. The closest record refers to a sighting of an Otter in 1996 at ST316894, from the river immediately adjacent to the site, in the vicinity of the drainage outfall. There are two records of footprints and spraint under the M4 motorway bridge approximately 500m north from the site boundary, in 2000 and 2001. There are also two records from under the town railway bridge approximately 500m south from the site boundary, in 2000 and 2001. The 2000 observation was of spraint on the east bank and footprints on both banks. The 2001 record was of footprints on the castle side. There was also an unconfirmed live-sighting of an Otter just north of the railway bridge in 2007. Several other SEWBReC records of Otters were obtained from further than 500m from the site boundary. These include signs of the river Usk at the Glebelands railway bridge further upstream, and from the Crindau Pill which joins the west side of the Usk.
- 7.12.3 Newport City Council commissioned a study of Otter habitat in urban Newport in 2006, which included the current study area¹. This study assessed the river habitat between the M4 Bridge and the Cardiff to London Railway Bridge as generally poor for Otters, but with a few good habitats including reedbed, bramble and tussocky grassland at Crindau Pill. It noted that both banks of the river in this section are subject to considerable dog walking which would be expected to impact possible use by otters. No holts or other resting places were confirmed, but the study concluded that some must be present, and Crindau Pill offered the best opportunities, as well as several old upturned boats. The Herbert Road site was described as waste ground and scrub with possible resting places.

Survey method

- 7.12.4 The survey for Otters and Badgers was undertaken during on 25 February 2013. Winter is an ideal season for this type of survey because it is possible to make a close examination of dense bramble areas at a time of year when they support few leaves and there is no danger of disturbing nesting birds. Data collected during this survey was supplemented with observations made during other survey work between November 2012 and July 2013. The study focussed on the application area, but was extended northwards along the river-bank as far as the M4 bridge to search for signs of Otters between the northern site boundary and the new Glan Usk school. A broad search of the riverside scrub north of the M4 motorway was also included, to check for signs of Otters and Badgers in the wider area.
- 7.12.5 The survey involved a careful search of all potentially suitable habitat for signs of Otters and Badgers. Signs of Otters typically include spraints, footprints, feeding remains and resting sites. Signs of Badgers typically include setts, footprints, hair, tracks, bedding and feeding signs. Signs of other mammals found during the survey were also noted. There had been no rain or particularly high tides for more than 10 days prior to the February survey, so no recent Otter signs above the high tide-line would have been washed away. The surveyors did not enter deep water or deep mud for safety reasons. Areas of dense scrub were

¹ Just Mammals (2006). Newport Urban Otter Habitat. A survey for Otter habitat along the River Usk in the City of Newport. Report to Newport City Council.

generally surveyed from the outer edges and occasional transect lines, but any mammal runs were followed if they could feasibly have been made by Otters or Badgers. Mammal signs and potential habitat were recorded onto a field map as they were seen.

Survey findings

7.12.6 The survey findings are presented in Figure 7.12.1, on an aerial photograph background. This is supported by target note descriptions of potentially suitable habitats and features for Otters and Badgers in Table 7.12.1. The locations in the figure should only be considered approximate because they have been plotted by eye and several refer to general areas rather than specific points.

Table 7.12.1. Otter and Badger survey target notes.

Target Note	Description
1	Pond. A new pond in the school grounds (viewed through fence). This was not examined closely, but has the potential to support fish or amphibians. The fence surrounding it appears Otter-proof, and the presence of dogs is likely to deter Otters from venturing far from the river in this area.
2	Scrub and reeds. The banks of the river in this area support abundant reeds, and the upper parts support a mix of dense Bramble and Blackthorn scrub, with local Knotweed. This has the potential to provide resting habitat for Otters, but is unlikely to be used due to high levels of disturbance by dogs. Several burrows were investigated in this area, but all appeared to have been made by Rabbits.
3	Scrub and reeds. A mix of reeds and scrub, similar to TN2. This has limited potential to provide resting habitat for Otters, but is heavily disturbed by dogs and people. All of the burrows that were investigated in this area appeared to have been made by Rabbits.
4	A shallow ditch between the school and allotments. It supports patchy scrub and tall ruderal plants. The water quality appears poor. The probability of it being used by Otters or Badgers was considered negligible.
5	Riverbank and moorings. A muddy section of bank with several small boats and moorings. Several large logs are present that would potentially provide good sprinting sites for Otters, but no signs were found. The upper bank appears heavily disturbed by people (apparently the bank is used as a source of timber for firewood).
6	Ditch and reeds (Lottery's Reen). A narrow ditch with dense reeds and brambles growing beside it. There are several accumulations of litter and the water quality appears poor. There were no field-signs suggesting use by Otters or Badgers. Several runs were present that were attributed to Rabbits, and Brown Rat footprints were found.
7	Culvert. The culvert beneath the access road is largely screened by Bramble and Ivy and could potentially provide a relatively quiet lying up or sprinting site for Otters, but no signs of them were found. There were many footprints in the mud at the edge of the channel, indicating its use by Fox and Brown Rat, as well as several different dogs.
8	Outfall. The outfall from the ditch at TN6 discharges from an open pipe (although it appears to have had a tidal flap on it in the past). There appears

Target Note	Description
	to be a more or less continuous flow of water through it and it was not considered likely to be attractive to Otters.
9	Dense scrub. A strip of young Birch and Bramble on raised ground could feasibly offer a dry location for Badgers or Otters. However, no signs of them were found. The area is subject to disturbance by dogs and people.
10	Dense scrub. Developing scrub habitat, similar to TN9, but on wetter ground. This has been subject to local disturbance by ground investigations and is surrounded by dog-walking paths. It was not considered likely to be used by Otters or Badgers.
11	Upturned boat and reeds. Disused boats could potentially be used as cover by Otters, but at the time of the survey this boat was completely embedded in the mud on all sides, and therefore inaccessible to Otters. The adjoining reedy banks are also unlikely to be used as Otter resting sites due to high levels of disturbance by dogs and people. Harvesting of logs from the upper bank for firewood appears to take place along most of this section.
12	Moorings. A floating jetty appears to have potential as a sprainting site, but examination using binoculars did not indicate any use by Otters. The covered parts of the bank are probably too exposed to be used as resting sites, and footprints in the mud suggest high levels of disturbance by dogs and people.
13	Ditch with scrub. This is a relatively quiet part of the site, but showed no signs of use by Otters or Badgers. There were several Rabbit runs in the upper part of the adjacent slope.
14	Sloping bank. A dry bramble covered bank offers cover for wildlife. However, it is close to a well-used dog-walking path and subject to high levels of disturbance. Most of the paths that were investigated appeared to be made by dogs.
15	Sloping bank. A dry bramble covered bank, similar to TN14 but even more heavily disturbed by dogs, and with no signs of use by Otters or Badgers.
16	Sloping bank. A continuation of the bank described in TN14, with no signs of use by Otters or Badgers.
17	Riverbank. Muddy banks with patchy reeds in the upper parts. A few small sections of the upper bank show signs of being undercut, creating small overhangs that could provide resting sites for Otters. However, the whole of this section is subject to high levels of activity by dogs and people, so the probability of it being used by Otters is considered negligible.
18	Scrub-covered bank. A bank with tussocky grass and dense Bramble. There were no signs of use by mammals other than dogs. The bank is situated between two roads and almost certainly too disturbed to provide any significant cover for Badgers or Otters.
19	Riverbank. Muddy banks with patchy reeds in the upper parts. There are various items of tipped refuse that might offer cover or sprainting points, but there were no signs of use by Otters. This location is particularly heavily disturbed by people and dogs and very unlikely to be used by resting Otters.

- 7.12.7 The riverbank beside the site was regularly checked for signs of Otters through the spring, especially during the bird surveys, but none were found. The bank was accessed by dogs and people throughout the study period. The riverside scrub between the north of the site and the M4 bridge was much less disturbed, especially after late May when dense growth of Common Reed and Japanese Knotweed made access more difficult for people and dogs. It is feasible that Otters could use this northern area during the summer, when the vegetation is at its most dense, but there were no signs of their presence during any of the surveys.
- 7.12.8 Observations in the wider Glebelands SINC confirmed that most of the area comprises mown recreation ground, with no cover for Otters or Badgers except at the banks of the Usk and an area of scrub-woodland at its north-east side. The margins of the playing fields are used by large numbers of dog walkers, but the disturbance by dogs appears to be much reduced in the north and west of the area. The scrub and woodland along the north and west sides of the Glebelands SINC appears to have reasonably high potential value to provide undisturbed resting sites for Otters, although no signs of them was noted during the survey. A Badger sett was found in dense scrub. Due to its urban location, this sett is likely to be at high risk of unlawful disturbance, so its precise location is not disclosed in this report. However, details have been passed to CCW and Newport City Council.

Discussion

- 7.12.9 The Herbert Road site currently has limited potential to provide undisturbed resting sites for Otters due to the very high level of disturbance by people and dogs. The habitat on the adjacent saltmarsh fringe on the upper banks of the Usk is also subject to disturbance by dogs and people and unlikely to be used. Otters undoubtedly pass the site regularly, but it is likely that they would mainly use the river or lower bank as they pass by. The presence of so many people and dogs is likely to be an effective deterrent to them entering the proposed development area. In the absence of any undisturbed cover, the probability of there being a regularly used resting or breeding site within the proposed site is negligible. The areas of riverside scrub to the north and on the opposite side of the river have much denser cover, with less potential for disturbance by dogs, and these are much more likely to be used as resting sites.
- 7.12.10 The potential habitat quality for Badgers within the site is poor, particularly because of the amount of uncontrolled access by people and dogs. There were no signs of Badger activity within the proposed development area, and the probability of a sett being present is considered negligible.

Figure 7.12.1. Otter and Badger survey observations

