



Otter (*Lutra Lutra*)

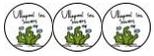


Otters are one of our top predators and also the UK's largest carnivore. Otters are well suited to life on the land and in water as they are excellent swimmers. They have webbed feet to help them glide through the water, dense fur to keep them warm because they don't have any body fat, this means when they are on land they can move quickly. They can close their ears when underwater to help them stay submerged for longer and have a very powerful tail to help them swim.

The otter belongs to the *Mustelid* family along with the badger, pine marten, stoat, weasel and the American mink.

Active and breeding throughout the year a female otter has her cubs in underground burrows known as Holts.





By 10 weeks of age the cubs are swimming in the water with their mum. Cubs usually stay with her for about a year gaining hunting and survival skills, but within 5 months they can fish for themselves. Their contact call is a “peep” whistle.

Otters mainly feed on fish, crustaceans, frogs, water birds and amphibians which they usually find in rivers, lochs or the coastal sea. They must eat up to 1.5kg of prey every day.



Otters are usually a light brown but look darker when in water. They have a very streamlined tail and webbed





feet. Their ears are small and they also have large whiskers which they use to feel the vibrations that fish or eels make as they swim through the water. Their eyes ears and nose are all in a line this means they can maintain all senses when underwater. Their eye sight is also quite poor

Length: 60-90cm plus tail of 45cm

Weight: 7-12kg

Average Lifespan: up to 10 years





Otters can stay under water for about 4 minutes. Special flaps close off the ears and nostrils which keeps the water out. When Otters are diving and swimming underwater they gradually let their breath out by leaving a clear chain of bubbles. Otters also like to keep their fur free of salt by using fresh water to keep it clean and fresh.

In fresh water otters are seen in the night but on the coast they are active night and day.

In Scotland Otters are usually found in coastal areas but can be found in other places such as rivers, fresh water and lochs.





Threats to otters:

Scotland's otters are most at risk from road accidents.

There are also other threats to them such as creel and eel fishing and mechanical Kelp dredging.

What to do if you find an injured ADULT otter:

The most important thing to do if you find an injured adult otter is not to approach it. An otter will rarely attack but will defend itself, especially if it is injured. An otter's natural reaction to danger is to run away but an injured otter may not be able to so and so may bite to defend itself. If you need to approach do so slowly and maintain a safe distance to ensure no negative reaction that could further harm the otter or yourself.

Steps to take:

- Always maintain a safe distance between yourself and the otter. This is very important for both. Never attempt to pick up or handle the otter.
- Observe from a distance and try to identify what problems the otter could have. For example, if it is near/beside a road there is a good possibility that it





has been hit by a car and therefore has injuries as a result of this.

- Contact the International Otter Survival Fund for further details on how you can help.

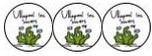
What to do if you find an otter CUB:

Once again, do not approach the otter if you can avoid it and if you have to, do so slowly as any young otter will be scared anyway so a fast approach may spook it further. Depending on age, young otters can also bite to defend themselves so if you are unsure **DO NOT APPROACH THE OTTER.**

Steps to take:

- As before, maintain a safe distance.
- If the cub is in no immediate danger monitor it for around 24 hours. Mothers leave their cubs while they go to feed and come back later to reunite with them. **DO NOT TOUCH THE OTTER** – if a mother otter smells interference from people it will likely abandon its cub for safety.
- If the cub is still in the same place and alone after 24 hours seek advice.





- If the cub is in immediate danger, for example by the side of the road, find a way to reduce the danger. If the weather conditions mean that the cub is in immediate danger seek advice.
- If you are at all unsure on the safety or what to do, then please contact the International Otter Survival Fund.



Contact numbers:

International Otter Survival Fund: 01471 822 487
7 Black Park, Broadford, Isle of Skye, IV49 9DE
www.otter.org



(Ullapool Sea Savers would like to thank Ben Yoxon at the International Otter Survival Fund for helping Poppy to write this file and providing the pictures.)

