



Tool Box Talk

Focus on Performance

Otters

Sust. 23

What?

Otters are large sleek mammals, with bodies (excluding tails) reaching up to 95cm long. They have brown fur on the tops of their bodies, with cream fur on their necks and bellies. They live alongside any sized watercourse, both in urban and rural areas. They use old rabbit burrows, holes in tree roots and pipes as shelters called holts; ledges may be used as resting places.

Otters are shy and may only be seen in the water (only nose and eyes will be seen), or detected by the presence of footprints or spraint (faeces).

Why?

Otters declined severely across Europe due to competition from non-native species (such as the North American mink which are slimmer with a darker coat) and increased levels of pesticide pollution. Otters are classified as a near threatened species and protected by legislation. This includes causing injury or death and damage or destruction of habitat. Prosecution can lead to fines of up to £5,000 and 6 months in prison. Work that requires the disturbance of otters requires a licence.

How?

- If otters are known to be within or adjacent to a work area, a licence for disturbance is required. Ensure you are familiar with all the requirements which may include exclusion zones, work on river banks or vegetation clearance under ecologist supervision.
- If you are unsure whether your work may affect otters, seek expert ecological advice.
- Stop work immediately and report any otters, signs of footprints or spraint, or discoveries of holts after works have started.

If the works are likely to disturb an otter or its habitat, a licence is needed from the relevant body:

- England: Natural England
- Scotland: Scottish Natural Heritage
- Wales: Countryside Council for Wales



Questions

1. What signs might indicate the presence of an otter?
2. What is the maximum fine per offence for disturbing an otter?
3. Where might you find an otter or its holt?

If you have any queries regarding the content of this tool box talk please contact your Sustainability Advisor or Line Manager.