

ONGAR WILDLIFE SOCIETY

Otters by Darren Tansley

The talk at the OWLS meeting about Otters was given by Darren Tansley, who at one time, worked for Greenpeace in the Norfolk area and is currently working for the Essex Wildlife Trust as a Water for Wildlife Officer.

Otters are sometimes confused with Minks. It is illegal to trap, harm, disturb or kill otters. Although the population decreased dramatically over thirty years ago, the species are now protected. Otters can be up to 4 feet long and weigh 15 - 20 lbs, whereas Mink are tiny at 2lbs.

There are different species of otter - for example, river otters and sea otters (North America), 4 species in Latin America & Asia, but only one type in GB and Europe which are the largest.

Otters are very elusive and nocturnal and can be traced by their footprints, tracks and their droppings! Otters have a 'five toe' footprint, compared to the 'diamond' footprint of a fox.

Otters are powerful swimmers and have great webbed claws.

After eating, their deposits can be used again for tracking purposes, similar to the Mink. Otters live in holts and couches which are usually in tree roots and hollows under water. They climb trees and can be found in unusual places or just curl up in vegetation.

A continuing problem for otters, like other animals which roam around roads, is that there is an increased number being killed by cars on busy roads. More males are killed and there were more deaths last year than ever before. Otters continue to thrive throughout the counties. Some die in unlicensed crayfish nets and some die in the winter because of the longer darker periods. The difficulty that otters have, is that they do not like swimming in an enclosed space or near to a culvert, preferring to cross a busy road.

As with most animals, there are surveys, analyses and statistics relating to otters, but no one really knows how many otters there are in Essex - maybe 100?

Bob Jenkins