

# RSPCA Wildlife Rehabilitation Protocol: Otters

RSPCA

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Photo: Young Otter being examined at West Hatch Wildlife Centre  
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## Protocol for the rehabilitation of Otters (*Lutra lutra*).

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*Note: highlighted sections of text are areas where further research is required.*

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## 1 Introduction

The RSPCA's Wildlife Centres and the Wildlife Department have prepared a series of husbandry protocols for the different species that are admitted to the Wildlife Centres.

The protocols have been produced by amalgamating the working practices from each centre into one document which has then been discussed at a workshop before being agreed by RSPCA staff. Any areas where agreement cannot be reached are then highlighted as areas for future research.

Where possible, an expert (from outside the RSPCA) on the behaviour and ecology of the species in question was invited to attend these workshops so they could offer advice and comment.

These protocols are based on the experience and knowledge of our wildlife centre staff and are supported by research demonstrating their success. They are subject to review and updates will be added as and when required. New protocols will also be added over time.

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## 2 Species information

### 2.1 Species or group of species covered by this protocol

Species: Eurasian Otter

Species: *Lutra lutra*

Order: Carnivora Family: Mustelidae.

### 2.2 Identification of species covered by this protocol

The otter is a mustelid, along with weasels, stoats, polecats and badgers. It has a long slender body with a powerful tapering tail, the total length being between 90 and 110 cm long (nose to tip of tail). Males are heavier than females, about 9 kg as opposed to 7 kg but are not much bigger in actual size. In comparison, American mink males weigh around 1.5 kg and average 60 cm long; females 800 g 50 cm long.; Its fur is chocolate brown in colour and is well adapted for an aquatic lifestyle, providing plenty of insulation. Another adaptation for aquatic living are the otters' feet, which are webbed for swimming, although the otter's tail provides most of the propulsion. One of the features of mustelids is that they possess scent glands for marking the most famous of which are those belonging to the skunk. These glands deposit a jelly like substance on the otter's droppings which are called spraints. This jelly gives the droppings its characteristic smell and can be found without excrement, produced when the otter has no solid material in its gut to expel. This is used to communicate with other otters.

Otters can breed at any time of year although there is some seasonality in some areas, e.g. Shetland, where the majority of cubs are born in May. Gestation is between 61 to 74 days and the cubs are born with sleek, silvery fur, blind and toothless, and are about 12 cm long. Litters vary in size between 1-5, although 2 to 3 is the usual number. Cubs are weaned between 10 and 14 weeks and start to swim at about this time. They are dependent on their mother for food and will stay with her until they are 10 to 12 months old. Otters communicate by using high-pitched squeaks and whistles and, while they are with her, the cubs will keep in contact with their mother by using these vocalisations. She will not breed during this time which means that a female otter will only have one litter a year, and probably less frequently than that. After this time, the cubs will disperse to find their own territories. As a result the rehabilitation of orphaned cubs can take up to 12 months. Male otters will become sexually mature during their second year, while females may not mature until their third year.

Otters are capable of exploiting any freshwater and marine habitats, such as rivers, streams, ponds, lakes, marshes and the sea, and they use tree roots, natural holes, burrows, rock cavities and man made structures as their dens or "holts". Otters living around the coasts of the UK, such as in Shetland or the West Coast of Scotland need to have access to freshwater to wash their fur because the salt crystals in sea water can cause the fur to degrade, which could result in hypothermia.

They eat predominantly fish, especially eels and salmonids, and are very skilled at hunting under-water but they will also take amphibians, mammals and birds. They are mostly nocturnal, but there are increasing numbers of witness reports of otters during the day while the activity of otters in coastal areas may be dictated by tides which could mean otters are seen at any time in these areas.

### 2.3 General information on species (or group) as relevant to care in captivity

- **A TAME OTTER IS A DEAD OTTER** – all otters in rehabilitation, particularly cubs, should have minimal contact with humans.
- Crepuscular/nocturnal in rural areas; more crepuscular and diurnal in urban areas
- Territorial
- High predator/prey response
- Highly agile



Fig 1: Otter cub admitted to Stapeley Grange about 10 weeks old

### 2.4 Importance of Environmental Enrichment

All wild animals have particular responses and behaviours which allow them to function in their natural environment. Some of these behaviours may be recent adaptations while others may have developed millennia ago, but all have evolved as responses to various stimuli in their environment. It is important to allow animals to express these behaviours when deprived of their natural environments in order to minimise stress. Minimising stress is an important factor in the care of any casualty, as increased stress will increase the time it takes to effect a cure.

Environmental enrichment is the term used to describe facilities that are provided for the animal which allow it to express these behaviours. A simple example is the provision of a variety of climbing branches for arboreal species, such as squirrels, or a suitable substrate for animals that dig. The aim is to try and fulfil three requirements of the animal:

- Biological functioning – the ability of the animal to function in its environment;



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- Coping – the ability of the animal to maintain itself in response to environmental challenge;
- How the animal feels about its environment.

Environmental enrichment can also play a role in how the animal is managed. For instance, when feeding animals that either hunt or scavenge, the food should be hidden, and challenges provided, so that the animal has to spend time finding and obtaining food, rather than just eating it out of a bowl. A variety of prey types is also important. The hedgehog has a varied diet, depending on location, habitat type and season. This should be reflected in the diet provided, especially with young animals who are learning about what is and is not good to eat.

Environmental enrichment can either be naturalistic or artificial. Either is acceptable, provided that the artificial allows the animal to express natural behaviours.



### 3 Pre-admission treatment.

This part of the protocol is to provide information for telephone queries regarding otters and otter rehabilitation, prior to receiving an otter at an RSPCA Wildlife Centre. There are two possible scenarios:

- A member of the public is reporting a sick/injured otter and wants further information as to what to do;
- Prior to admission, some animals may be held at a veterinary surgery or other facility. Some, if not all, of these facilities may request information on care of the animal, before they send it to an RSPCA centre.

Does the otter need to be admitted? Try to determine if the otter needs treatment or can it be treated on site?

**Otter cubs:** It is always best to check that orphaned cubs are really orphaned. Advice should be given to the finder of the animal to observe it for a period of time (ideally overnight) unless the animal is in immediate danger or showing obvious signs of distress. If the cub has been admitted and is reasonably healthy (i.e. not showing any obvious signs of abandonment) EVERY ATTEMPT should be made to return it where it was found. To do this the cubs should be taken back to the found location, left there and observed for some time from a distance.

#### 3.1 Where possible, information should be collected on the following:

- a) Extent of injuries, evidence of shock
- b) Age, body condition, any previous injuries
- c) Male or female? If the latter, is it lactating?
- d) Location animal was found (important to ensure it is returned to the same place)
- e) All records of previous treatment (if from another establishment)
- f) Weight where possible (can help to age the animal)

#### 3.2 Advice related to care, e.g. diet, provision of heat etc.

- Ensure similar diet to centre to avoid enteric problems
- Insist animal is isolated from domestic animals, especially canines. Remember otters have much better hearing and sense of smell than we do!
- Limit contact in very young weaned cubs
- Husbandry care. Provision of heat for neonates and seclusion for adults

#### 3.3 Advice related to the treatment of particular problems.

- Unfortunately, the majority of adult otters either die or are put to sleep. If an adult otter can be caught, it shows that there is something seriously wrong.

#### 3.4 Advice regarding the fitness of the animal for transport.

- Provide advice on suitable container for transport, Preferably not wire cat baskets
- If injured, Vet has checked condition prior to transfer



## 4 Health and Safety

### 4.1 Introduction

The RSPCA has developed the Wildlife Centre Protocols to provide guidance and advice on the keeping of certain species of wild animal for rehabilitation. Anybody who intends to treat sick, injured and/or orphaned wild animals must accept that there are risks in doing so. Some wild animals are potentially dangerous and may be capable of causing serious injury. Furthermore, all wild animals have the potential to carry parasites, disease and bacterial infections. Some of these may be passed to humans (zoonoses) or to other animals, either domestic or wild. Barrier nursing methods should be used to minimise the spread of these infections between animals.

### 4.2 Risk assessments

It is recommended that any establishment admitting otters should complete risk assessments for all areas.

This is a brief summary of some of the possible risks and suggested ways to reduce the effects.

It should be remembered at all times that wild otters can be aggressive and unpredictable, and therefore extreme caution should be taken when dealing with otters in any capacity.

Members of public are advised not to approach otters and to keep dogs etc away.

Otters can inflict a nasty bite with possibility of severe infection. Medical advice should be sought if bitten.

Hazards	Control measures	Level of risk
Bites and scratches	Gloves and graspers to be used when restraining Crush cages used to administer anaesthetic	Low
Zoonotic diseases	Gloves should be worn when handling Treatment areas must be cleaned thoroughly after examination	Low
Parasites	Gloves should be worn when handling	Low

Table 2: Potential hazards and measures that can be taken to reduce the risk from these hazards.



## 5 On Admission.

### 5.1 Information should be collected on the following when admitting the animal:

- a) Extent of injuries, evidence of shock
- b) Body condition, any previous injuries
- c) Estimate age
- d) Male or female? If the latter, is it lactating?
- e) Location animal was found (important to ensure it is returned to the same place)
- f) All records of previous treatment (if from another establishment)
- g) Weight

### 5.2 Triage – to treat or not to treat.

Options for the animal are: euthanasia, treatment or immediate return to the wild. The considerations listed below will help to guide this decision.

#### 5.2.1 Assessment relevant to the condition of the animal

Adult otters are much harder to rehabilitate than cubs. An otter will often only allow itself to be captured if it is in great distress and too weak to escape. An otter rehabilitation centre in Scotland found that most road injured animals found alive were females, while males were more often the victims of attacks, usually inflicted by other otters. This centre had 75% mortality for injured adult otters, compared with 27% for juveniles. It should also be noted that animals that have started to eat and recover will attempt to escape and so could injure themselves further. As a result, only adults with minor injuries are worth persevering with, as survival in care, as well as in the wild after release, will be severely compromised by injury.

Euthanase if any of the following are apparent on initial examination:

- In 'extremis' (dying at that moment)
- Old compound fractures
- Fractures at a joint
- Loss of a limb or an eye
- Fractured skull
- Obvious fractured spine
- Exposed viscera
- Any obvious diagnosable disease, e.g. Lepto.
- Adults - any problem that requires more than four to six weeks intensive veterinary treatment.
- Adults - Where there is no information as to where the animal came from.

Immediate Release

- Misadventure / trapped otters with no significant injuries
- Cubs displaying no obvious signs of abandonment



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### 5.2.2 Assessment relevant to the centre and the management of the animals

- Availability of vet for full examination of casualty
- Space available for injured adults and orphaned cubs now
- Release site availability and location
- Otters that are transferred out to another centre (e.g. New Forest) should be recorded on the database as TRANSFERRED.
  - If the animal dies while in care, this should be noted in the comments box on the Results page, but the result should stay the same. This is because the database records what happens to the animals in our care.
  - If the otter is to be released, then it should be re-entered onto the database under a new admission number, but a note should be made in the comments field stating that the otter had originally been admitted with number (xxx).
  - It should be admitted as a transfer from the New Forest, with the admission reason FOR RELEASE.
  - This should happen even if the otter is not actually admitted to the Centre, but taken straight to the release site.

### 5.3 Treatment on admission (see flowchart).

If animal is to be treated move onto fluid therapy.

If any of the following apparent proceed to vet exam:

- Puncture or scratch wounds.
- Any fracture, swelling or bruising.
- Emaciated
- Collapsed
- In shock
- Very Weak

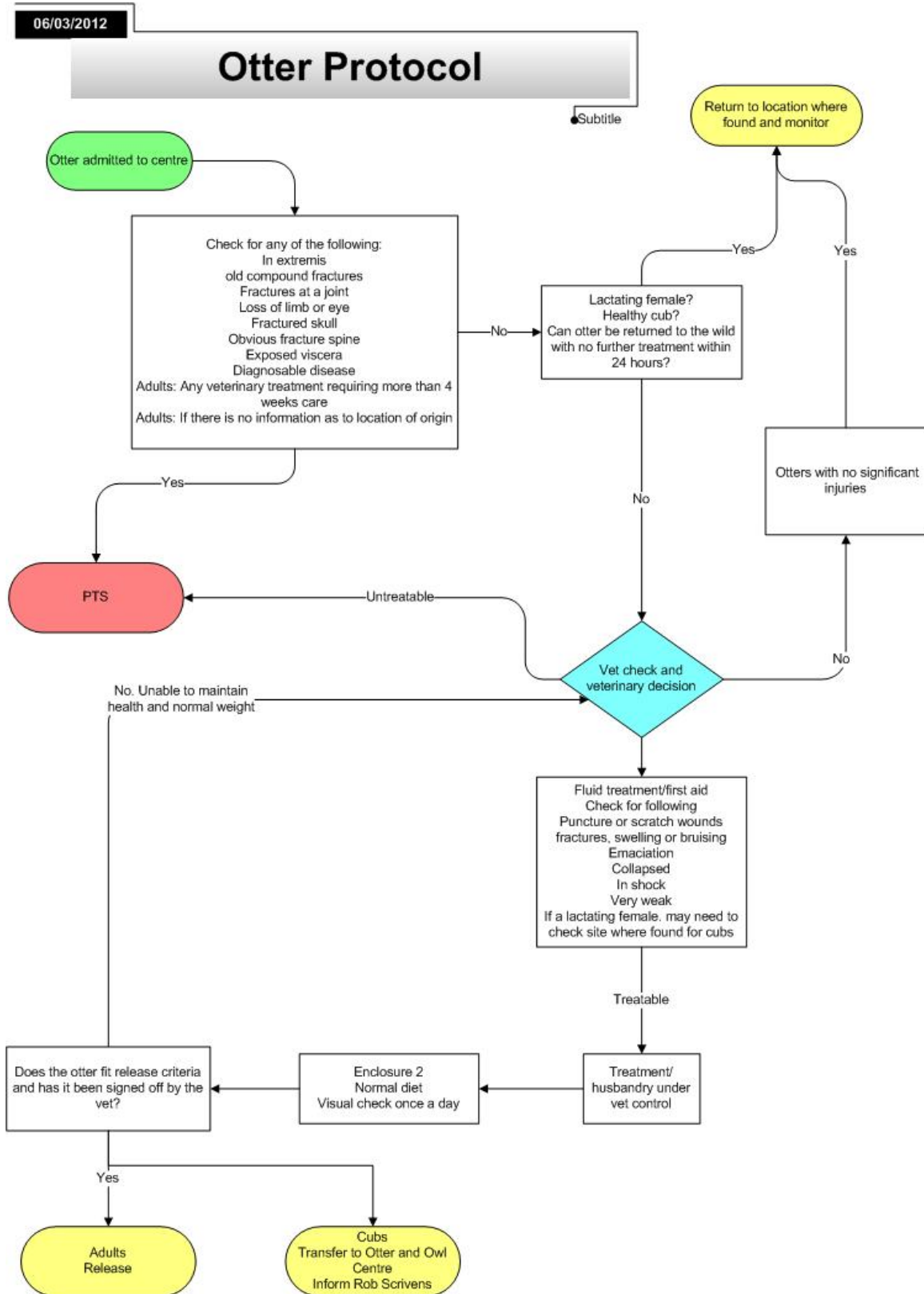
If none of the above:

Adults: Move to enclosure 2 and keep in isolation during treatment. Otters should be ID chipped before release.

Cubs: Move to enclosure 2 and keep in isolation during treatment. Contact Otter and Owl Centre to discuss transfer. Otter cubs should be ID chipped before being transferred.

Details of all otter cubs transferred to the Otter and Owl Centre should be passed to Rob Scrivens at Stapeley Grange Wildlife Centre robert.scrivens@rspca.org.uk

## 5.4 Flow chart



## 6 Accommodation

The need for **Environmental Enrichment** should be considered and identified wherever possible for each of the following sections.

**Adult otters** should not be mixed, but keeping them in isolation could cause stress and so enrichment should be provided to alleviate this.

**Otter cubs** should be mixed once they have been through quarantine. Cubs should be of similar ages and from similar areas (counties) so that they can be released together.

The use of CCTV equipment is recommended for monitoring the animal to see how it adapts to captivity.

### 6.1 Housing

The progression from *Enclosure 1* to *Enclosure 2* to *Enclosure 3* represents the movement of an animal through the Centre as its condition improves/changes. Not all of the housing categories will be relevant for this species.

#### 6.1.1 Enclosure 1 (intensive care)

**Enclosure:** Isolation cubicle, approx. 2m x 1.5m or 2.7m x 2m. Ideally has external run attached, with door between the two areas. Outside run, approx. 7.5m x 1.5m x 2m. Concrete blocks to height of 1m then weldmesh for remaining walls and roof. Floor should be hollow honeycomb blocks, filled with earth, laid over concrete. The otter should be able to move between the cubicle and run at all times (unless there are times when they to be contained). Adult otters should also be provided with a bathing pool.

**Substrate:** Depends on injury/problem. Soft bedding e.g. blankets, towels and newspaper. Dirty bedding removed daily, whole pen cleaned once a week.

Daylight cycle if available, if not fluorescent lights and available natural light.

Heat-lamp can be used if required.

Drinking water available, presented in a way that cannot be tipped or contaminated

**Environmental Enrichment:** Uprturned dog bed as refuge (several available for cubs) or box (600mm x 600 mm) may be used to assist in capture and treatment. If injury permits, other enrichment can be included such as tyres, pipes, toys, logs and stumps. A rock or concrete block can be provided for the otter to spraint on.

**When to move:** When treatment is complete.

#### 6.1.2 Enclosure 2 (less intensive monitoring)

**Adults:** as enclosure 1.

**Cubs:**

**Enclosure:** Large outdoor paddock (min 15m by 15m) with a suitable building or large box for housing. If using a box, this can double as a transport box when releasing the otter (figs 4 to 7, page 16). The fence should be chain link or weldmesh with holes of less than 2 inches and should be dug down 0.5 m and back into the paddock 1m. The fence should also have a galvanised steel overhang into the paddock of 0.5m. The paddock should include a variety of objects to stimulate play and other behaviours. The otters should also be provided with a bathing pool.

**Substrate:** Grass.

Drinking water available, presented in a way that cannot be tipped or contaminated



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**Environmental Enrichment:** Uprturned dog bed as refuge (several available for cubs) or box (600 x 600) (see pictures in annex 2) may be used to assist in capture and treatment. If injury permits, other enrichment can be included such as tyres, pipes, toys, logs and stumps.

**When to move:** When the cub is ready for release. This depends on when it was admitted, as most cubs will be released in the spring or summer when they are a year old:

- **Cubs born between January and August can be released the following year e.g. born in August 2009, released August – September 2010**
- **Cubs born between September and December can be released the year after that, e.g. born October 2009, released April 2011**

The RSPCA does not have its own facilities for the long term rearing of cubs. The Society therefore uses the facilities at the New Forest Otter and Owl Centre.

Carol Heap or  
New Forest Otter, Owl and Wildlife Park  
Deerleap Lane  
Longdown  
Marchwood  
Southampton  
Hampshire SO40 4UH  
Tel: 02380 292408  
Fax: 02380 293367

### 6.1.3 Enclosure 3 (for release)

**Adults:** Not required.

**Cubs:** should always be soft released. More details are provided in 8.4

**Enclosure:** Large outdoor paddock (min 15m by 15m) with a transport box (as in 6.1.2) (and where possible, an artificial holt) for housing. The fence should be electric netting with holes of less than 2 inches. A second fence of heavy duty plastic windbreak should be installed outside the electric fencing with a 5 cm gap. Then a fence comprising of two electric wires should be installed inside the main fence and set approximately 10 cm above the ground. The paddock should include a variety of objects to stimulate play and other behaviours. The otters should also be provided with a bathing pool.

**Substrate:** Grass.

Drinking water available, presented in a way that cannot be tipped or contaminated

**When to move:** After two to three weeks.



## 7 Food & feeding

Every effort should be made to mimic the animal’s natural food as closely as possible. If this is not possible, a semi-natural diet should be proposed. Artificial alternatives are not recommended, but should be listed for emergency use.

Where juvenile and adult diets differ, this should be clearly detailed.

### 7.1.1 Food in the wild

Adults

- Fish particularly eels and salmonids, but a wide variety is taken.
- Invertebrates such as crayfish, crabs, mussels and other shellfish.

Young

- Mother’s milk to weaning. Then food provided by parent.
- Fish particularly eels and salmonids, but a wide variety is taken.
- Invertebrates such as crayfish, crabs, mussels and other shellfish.

7.1.2 Captive diet		
Age/condition	Types/brands of food	Frequency
Adult if eating normally:	Two whole trout a bowl of drinking water	1 x day
Adult if not eating:	Encourage eating with flaked white fish, whole chicks, AD diet	2x day
Unweaned cubs	Bottle feeds with Esbilac every 2-3 hours depending on age/size between 10/20% body weight.	
Cubs up to weaning	Trout mixed with Esbilac in small quantities	2-3 x day
Weaned cubs	As adult, whole chicks provided as well	

### 7.1.3 Environmental enrichment



### 8 Release procedures.

#### 8.1 General information.

All the otters are given a health check prior to going to the release site to check the animal is in good health and is displaying natural behaviour. If the animal has been under treatment by the vet, then the vet may have to sign the animal off. The otter should be weighed before release, where possible.

#### 8.2 Release site selection.

In agreement with the Biodiversity Steering Group, (including the Environment Agency and the Wildlife Trusts), the RSPCA has agreed that where possible otters will be released back into the catchments from whence they originally came. They in return have offered us their expertise and local knowledge to identify areas that could be used for possible release sites. This can begin as soon as the animal has been admitted. It is essential to know the area where the otter cub was found and if either the Wildlife Trust or EA have any possible contacts that may be willing to help. If you have local contacts, then use them, otherwise contact the Wildlife Dept at HQ who may be able to find out who is available to help. The following criteria for the selection of a release site are for orphaned otters only; adult animals should be released as close as possible to the point of collection.

On visiting a site you need to consider the following:

- Food supply. Fish availability, what species, numbers. Avoid areas within 2 km of fish farms and specialist fisheries if possible.
- River. The site does not need to be next to a river or stream, but it does need to be close by, with no barriers, such as roads or paths, between the pen and the river.
- A pool of water or pond. This is to provide the otter with bathing opportunities while it is in the release pen and so needs to be within the pen's fence. If this is not possible a scrape can be dug to provide a bathing pool.
- Shelter and shade from sun and rain. The box used to transport the otter should remain on site until the pen is dismantled.
- Safety from roads. It is almost impossible to avoid roads completely, but avoid major roads and railway lines.

**Once a site has been identified, the Biodiversity team at your local Environment Agency office should be informed of the release and its location.**

#### 8.3 Adults and sub-adults.

If an adult otter is to be treated then it is important to try and release the animal as quickly as possible. Otters are very territorial and an otter could lose its territory within a matter of days. After treatment, release the animal as close to the point of collection as possible. If the point of collection is a busy road, then try to release the otter on the nearest water course but away from the road itself.

No pen should be required for releasing an adult otter. Carry the animal to the site in a suitable cage or box and if possible, allow some time for the otter to settle before opening the door. Retreat quietly and leave the box overnight, if possible. The otter can then make its own way in its own time.



Figs 2 and 3: Adult otter being released

### 8.4 Orphans.

The release of orphaned otter cubs entered into the RSPCA system will be the responsibility of the RSPCA. The RSPCA is willing to take responsibility for releasing cubs brought into care by other means. The RSPCA has accepted this responsibility as requested by the Otter Biodiversity Steering Group. The RSPCA will always endeavour to liaise with local groups such as the Environment Agency and The Wildlife Trusts to inform them of the situation and how it is progressing. These notes are provided for those who may wish to help in the location of a possible release site.

The RSPCA has an agreement for the release of the otter cubs as pairs. The cubs are reared as a pair so that they can socialise with another otter of a similar age. However if the cubs were from different areas, they would be separated at release. The RSPCA argued that this was detrimental to welfare and could compromise the release, as it had been noticed that when otter cubs could be released in pairs, they usually settled down in the release pen without difficulty. Therefore, where possible, otters will be released as a pair. Ideally the pair will be from the same region (i.e. a cub from Devon could be released with a cub from Somerset, but not from Norfolk) and if it is a male/female pair, they will be released into the catchment that the female originated from.

Once a site has been found, it needs to be prepared. The RSPCA currently uses a release procedure that requires the construction of a pen using electric rabbit fencing. However other groups have used large wire cages for such releases. These cages are much smaller in area and the otters are in them for a shorter time, but they do have the advantage of being quick to assemble and prepare.

To prepare a pen with electric fencing, the area where the fence is to be installed needs to be cleared of vegetation. This is to prevent the fence from shorting and to remove possible escape routes over the fence and expose possible escape routes under it. Ideally the fence should be on even ground as hollows or banks may provide gaps for the otter to escape through. The fence used is rabbit netting with 2" spacing. A single strand wire may also be needed within that netting, set about 2 inches above the ground.

The pen should have a pool within it. If this is not available, then a small pond or scrape will need to be prepared. Alternatively an old bath is suitable. A rough size of 2m by 1m and 50 cm deep will be sufficient and will probably require a plastic liner in order to retain water. There should also be some cover within the pen. Natural vegetation is best, but if the vegetation is not sufficient, some cover in the form of logs or cut vegetation from



nearby, will need to be provided. Cut tree branches, still in leaf, will provide good cover. Some cover will also need to be used to prevent the food from being eaten by birds.

The ideal pen has a small pool and is well sheltered and well vegetated. A 1 metre path can then be cut through the vegetation for the fence. One good example is a reed bed that was used for an otter release in Norfolk.

The otter should be transferred to the site in its original nest box. Fish (usually trout) should be provided at dusk, usually three fish per otter. When feeding, remove any uneaten fish remains before leaving the fresh fish. The otter should remain in the pen for at least two weeks. Check the fence for signs of escape. Unfortunately, providing cover for the otter can make it difficult to determine if the otter is still present, but providing such cover discourages them from escaping. One way of knowing if the otter is still present is if the fish is being eaten overnight. Usually released otters will not eat on the first night while settling in.

When it is time to release, turn off the electric fence and open a small gap in the fence. This should also be done if you suspect the otter has escaped. Do not dismantle the fence straight away as this may cause too much disturbance and may drive the otter away. Fish should be provided after the fence has been opened, until it is no longer being taken.

The RSPCA has an agreement with the Otter Biodiversity Steering Group not to involve the press or any other media in otter releases. This is to avoid possible tensions between otter conservation groups and the fishing community as otter releases are a sensitive subject.

Figs 4 to 7: Otter transport and nest box (see 6.1.2)





### 9 Areas for research

As highlighted in text above:

What are the effects of keeping otters in isolation? Suggestion: to examine behavioural differences between otters kept isolated for different periods of time and different treatments and post release survival.

Need for soft release?

### 10 References

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Otters. Predation and Populations. Hans Kruuk. Oxford University Press.

Otters. Ecology, behaviour and conservation. Hans Kruuk. Oxford University Press



## 11 Ageing otter cubs

The following is a guide to help determine the age of a cub when it arrives.

New born cubs:

- (a) Have fine mouse grey velvety fur.
- (b) Are blind and toothless.
- (c) The cub should be about 15cm in length and will squeak loudly!
- (d) Cubs should weigh between 100–150 grams.

It is unlikely that a cub will be found at this age, but it may occur.

Age in days	Total Length cm	Weight g (kg)
New born	20	100-150 (0.1-0.15)
20	30-35	400 (0.4)
40	45-50	900-1000 (0.9-1)
60	55-60	1500 (1.5)
80	65	2100 (2.1)
100	70	2500-2700 (2.5-2.7)

Table 2. Approximate weights of cubs at different ages.

(From Heggberget. Age determination of Eurasian otter cubs, and Reuther, Development of weight and length of Eurasian otter cubs.)

At 30-35 days (4-5 wks) of age their eyes should open and should weigh between 700-800 grams.

At 50 days (7 wks) of age the cub should be eating solid food but will still suckle up to 70 days. Cubs are weaned from 10 to 12 weeks, but this is variable, especially with cubs taken into care. When weaned, the cubs should be fed on trout or white fish, such as cod. Oily fish, such as mackerel, should be avoided, or fed sparingly.

At 40 days (6 wks) of age the cub should weigh around 1 kilo and be around 1.5 kilos at 60 days. (see table 1) However, the animal is likely to be underweight when you receive it as dehydration and starvation will quickly reduce the weight of the cub. Therefore body condition must also be assessed if using weight to determine age. Two cubs found lost weight dramatically during the first day they were found, with one cub dropping from 210g to 190g and the other from 240g to 170g.

At 8-10 weeks cubs will first start to venture away from their dens.

This tends to be the age that most cubs are found. If possible, leave the cub under observation (from a distance) for a period of time to see if the mother returns to find it.

At 3 months, 4 months at the latest, cubs should be in an outside enclosure and ideally mixed with other cubs of a similar age. From then on it is **HANDS OFF!**

Otters reared singly in close contact with humans are unsocialised for LIFE with wild otters and can become a danger not only to themselves, but also to other wild otters and humans.

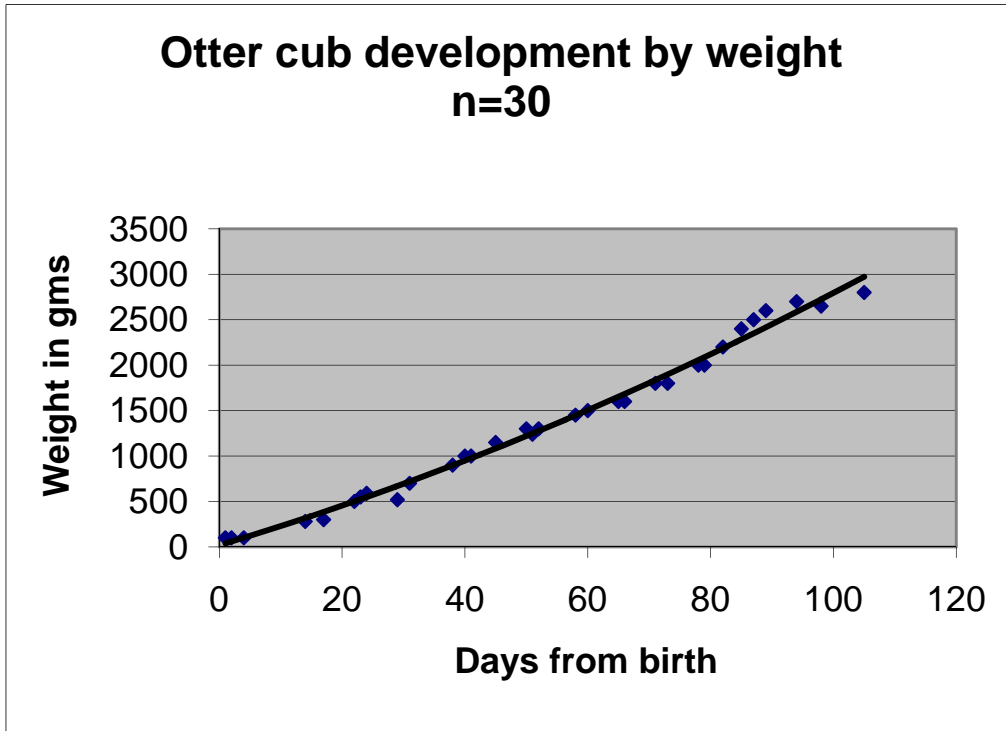


Figure 8. Increase in weight shown by captive reared otter cubs. From Reuther, Development of weight and length of Eurasian otter cubs.

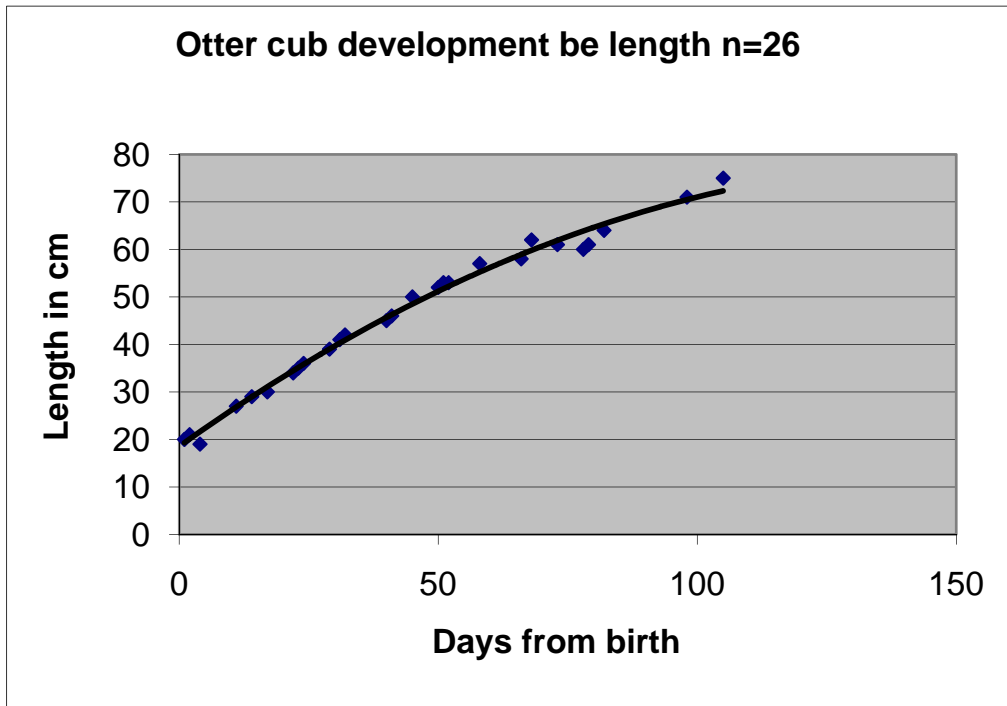


Figure 9. Increase in length shown by captive reared otter cubs. From Reuther, Development of weight and length of Eurasian otter cubs.