

Let's start nice and simple... What are otters?

Otters are **MAMMALS** but what exactly does that mean?

Mammals are different from other animals because:

- They have fur
- They give birth to live young
- They feed their young milk
- They have warm blood



Can you name four other types of mammal?

1. 2. 3. 4.

Mustelids

So, now we know that otters are **mammals**. They belong to a special family of mammals called **MUSTELIDS**. There are many different types of mustelids around the world but here are a few:



Badgers



Weasels



Pine Martens

Land or Water?

Otters are special and rare as they are **semi-aquatic**. But what does that mean? It is a fancy way of saying that they live both on land and in water. Otters spend time swimming and fishing as well as running along the land. Life in these environments can be tough but luckily otters are perfectly adapted to breathe, use their senses, move quickly and keep warm on both land and in water!

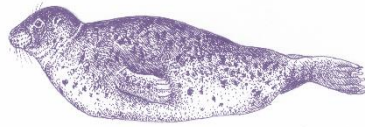


Otters – The basics

Look at the pictures below – **Can you name two things special about each of the animals which help them to live in water?**



Orca Whale



Seal



Otter

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.....

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.....

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So what makes an otter different and able to survive both on land and in water?

1. Some marine mammals, such as whales and seals, have a thick layer of fat called blubber to keep them warm. But for an otter, this would be too heavy and they wouldn't be able to move quickly on land. So, otters have two layers of fur. An outer layer which is waterproof and an inner layer that keeps them warm. An otter's fur is so important that every time they come out of salt water they must clean it in freshwater to keep it at its best!

Did you know?
Sea otters have the thickest fur of any animal in the world. They have 150,000 hairs per cm². That's like having 150,000 hairs in the area the size of your finger nail!

- 2. Otters have webbed feet to help them swim quicker and more efficiently in the water. It's like when we close our fingers to swim, but otters have that all the time!
- 3. Otters have a strong and large tail. This acts like a rudder when they are swimming and helps them steer.
- 4. Otters are very streamlined. This helps them move easily through water and on land.
- 5. An otter's ears, eyes and nose are all in line. This means that they can stay low in the water but are able to hear, see and smell everything.



Otters – Species

Otters have different names in different languages. For example ‘otter’ in Spanish is ‘nutria’ and French is ‘loutre’. The scientific name (in brackets) is used by everyone across the world so everyone knows exactly what you mean when you use it!



Did you know?
50,000 North American River Otters are killed each year by legal trapping in USA and Canada

There are **13** species of otter all around the world. They live across all continents apart from Australasia and Antarctica! To find out more about each species of otter check out IOSF’s interactive map at <http://www.otter.org/Public/OtterMap.aspx>



Otter Detective

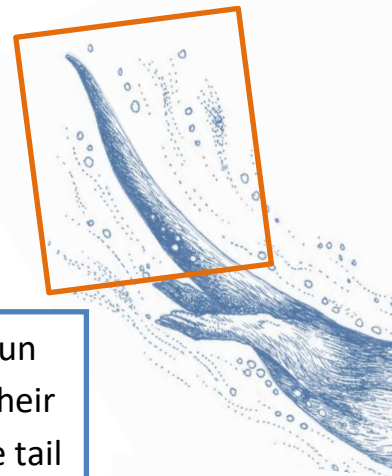
So you want to go looking for otters and otter signs. Let us help you before you get started!

Primary Signs are simple – you see an **otter**! But how easy is it to spot them? We will give you a few tips.



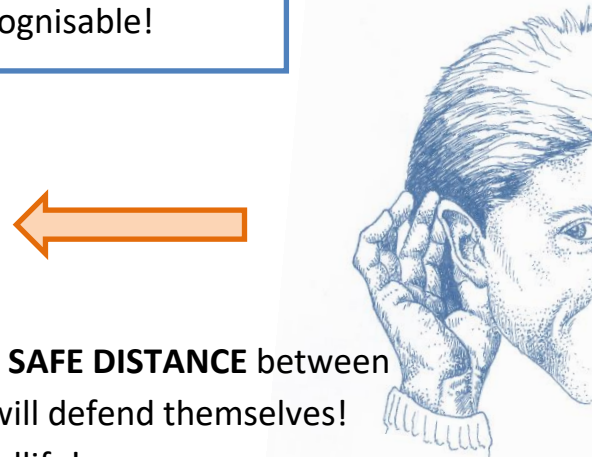
LOOK – An otter's eyes, ears and nose are all in line. That means that they can stay very low in the water but can still see, hear and smell you. When otters are in the water all you can see is a small part of their head and, if you are lucky, their tail too!

TAILS – When an otter goes under water its tail is the last thing you see. This makes it easier to tell the difference between otters and seals



BACK – When otters run they have a 'hump' in their back. The hump and the tail make them instantly recognisable!

LISTEN – When otters have young they often let out a sharp "peep" noise to communicate.



It is very important when you are watching otters to keep a **SAFE DISTANCE** between them and you. Never get too close to wild animals as they will defend themselves! Always remember that you **DO NOT** want to disturb any wildlife!



Otter Detective

Secondary signs are a little easier to find and can help tell you whether you have otters living nearby. Let's have a look at some secondary signs.



SPRAINT

Otter poo is called **spraint**. Spraint is often filled with fish bones and crab. It is usually dark and quite often makes the grass grow very green. If you see a green tuft of grass standing out from the rest, check it out, you may have found some spraint! Otter spraint acts as a fertiliser for the grass and helps it grow!

Otters will use spraint to mark their territories and important places. Always think spraint when looking for other signs, such as holts and freshwater pools

HOLTS

An otter's home is called a holt. They like to have a few holts and other resting places called **lie-ups** along their home range. Look for spraint! If you think you have found a holt it is important not to disturb it so please leave it alone.



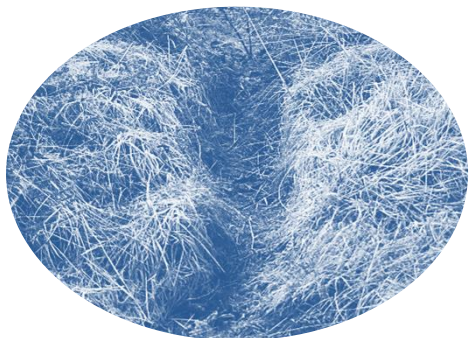
FOOTPRINTS

Otter paw prints have **5 toes** and **webbed feet**.



FRESHWATER POOLS

You already know how special otter fur is. They need it to keep nice and warm so they have to look after it. After an otter has been in salt water it must clean its fur in freshwater. They mark their washing pools with spraint.



OTTER RUNS

When otters run through grass they create a tunnel and have their usual spraint markers along them. You can often 'join the dots' from spraint points along runs.

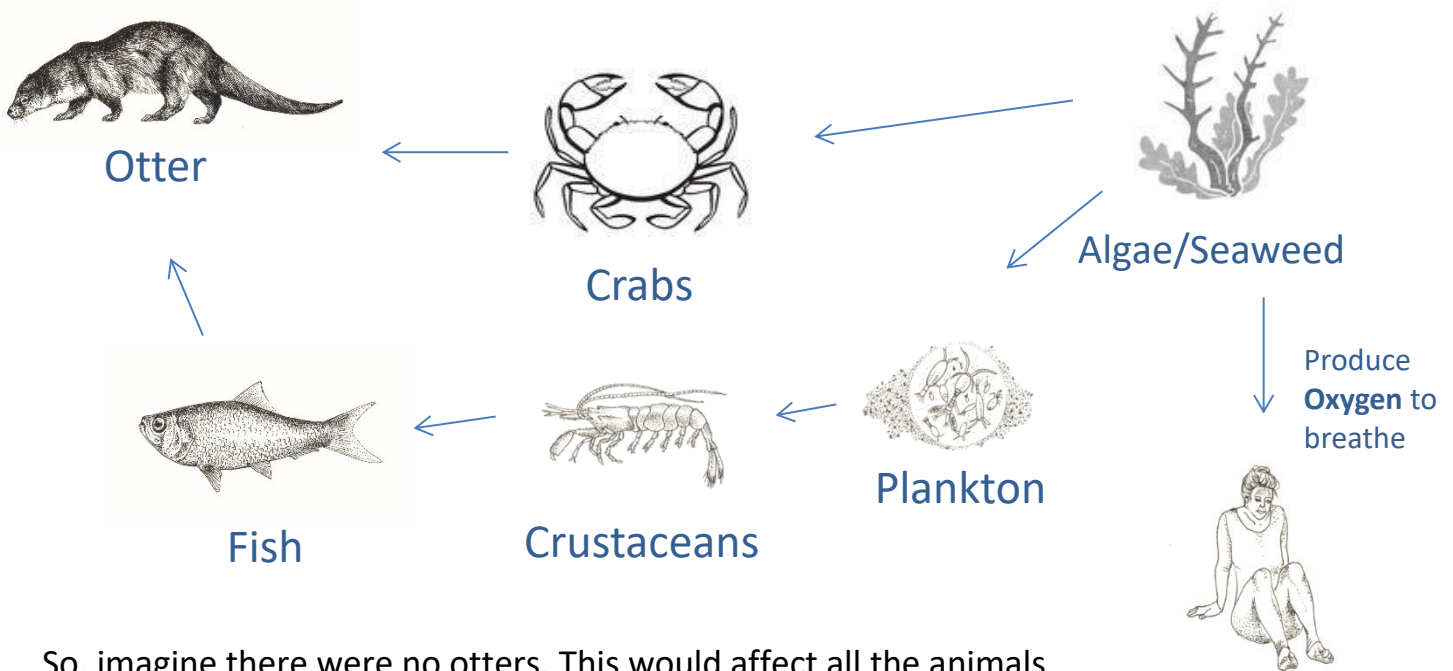


Why are otters special?

Otters are carnivores that occupy the top of the **food chain**. All animals are linked by what is called the food chain. Everything in the food chain eats and gains energy from something below it. The food chains are linked to form a food web.

Think what you had for dinner last night, what does that eat? Can you make a food chain with you at the top? Use the Eurasian otter's food web below for some guidance.

Shall we look at the **Eurasian otter's** role in the food web? The arrows show what eats what.



So, imagine there were no otters. This would affect all the animals below it in the food chain. Otters maintain a very important balance that is important for all species!

If pollution, such as plastic, enters the water and the otters didn't eat it, would this still be bad for otters? **YES** – For example, if plankton ate a tiny piece of plastic, then the crustaceans ate the plankton, fish ate the crustacean then the **OTTER** ate the fish – the plastic is now in the otter. As crustaceans eat a lot of plankton and fish eat a lot of crustaceans, this can mean the otter gets a lot of plastic. This is the same for people – because we eat fish too!

Did you know?
70-80% of the world's
oxygen comes from
seaweed and algae!



Why are otters special?

HABITATS

Otters live in a variety of habitats and need a healthy environment. As otters live in the water **AND** on land they need it to be clean and unpolluted in both.

If you can see an otter it means the environment in both water and land is clean and there is a lot of prey! That's great for all species, including us!

DESIGN

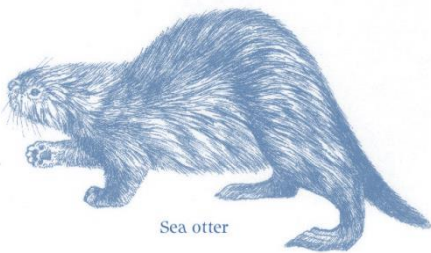
Each species of otter has evolved and adapted to suit its habitat and what it eats. Let's look at three examples.



Eurasian otters have sharp teeth and claws to catch and hold their food. This means that they are able to catch slippery prey.

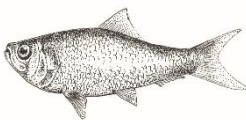


Asian small-clawed otters use their 'fingers' to feel for and catch their food. They can reach into holes to grab their prey



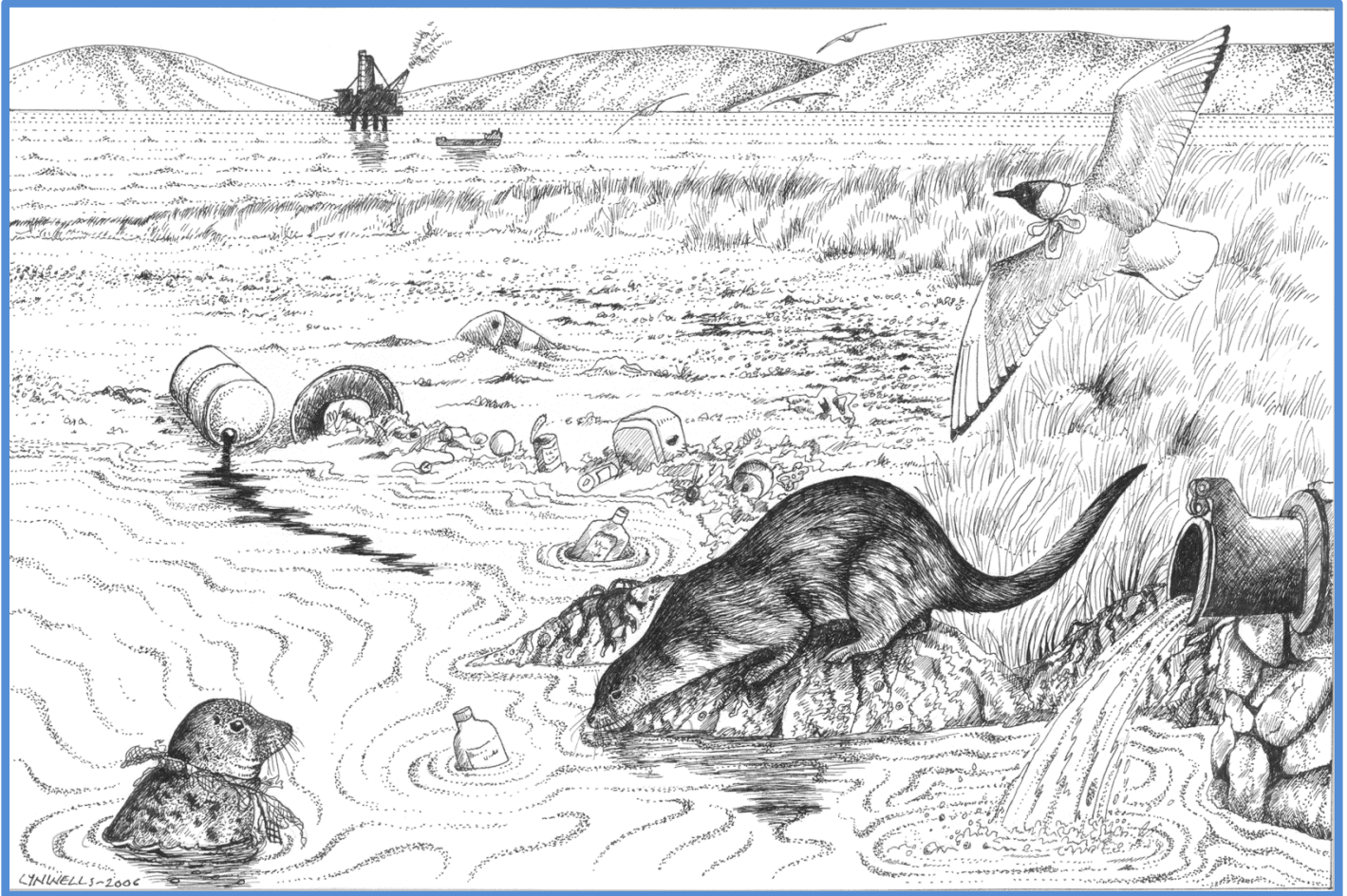
Sea otters spend most of their lives at sea and have big paws to help them swim. This helps them to hold their food and crack open its hard shell on its favourite stone.

Which prey do you think each of these otters eat?



This otter be fun!

Now it is your turn! Play some games and learn more about otters and the environment!



Pollution is something that affects all species. Have a look at the picture and circle any things that you think could harm animals, such as otters!

Use the space below to write down why some of these things may harm animals:



SPOTTED NECKED OTTER NEOTROPICAL OTTER HAIRY NOSED OTTER SOUTHERN RIVER OTTER MARINE OTTER AFRICAN CLAWLESS OTTER SMOOTH COATED OTTER GIANT OTTER CONGO CLAWLESS OTTER EURASIAN OTTER ASIAN SMALL-CLAWED OTTER NORTH AMERICAN RIVER OTTER SEA OTTER

Otter Species - Search

Can you find all the species of otter in this Wordsearch?

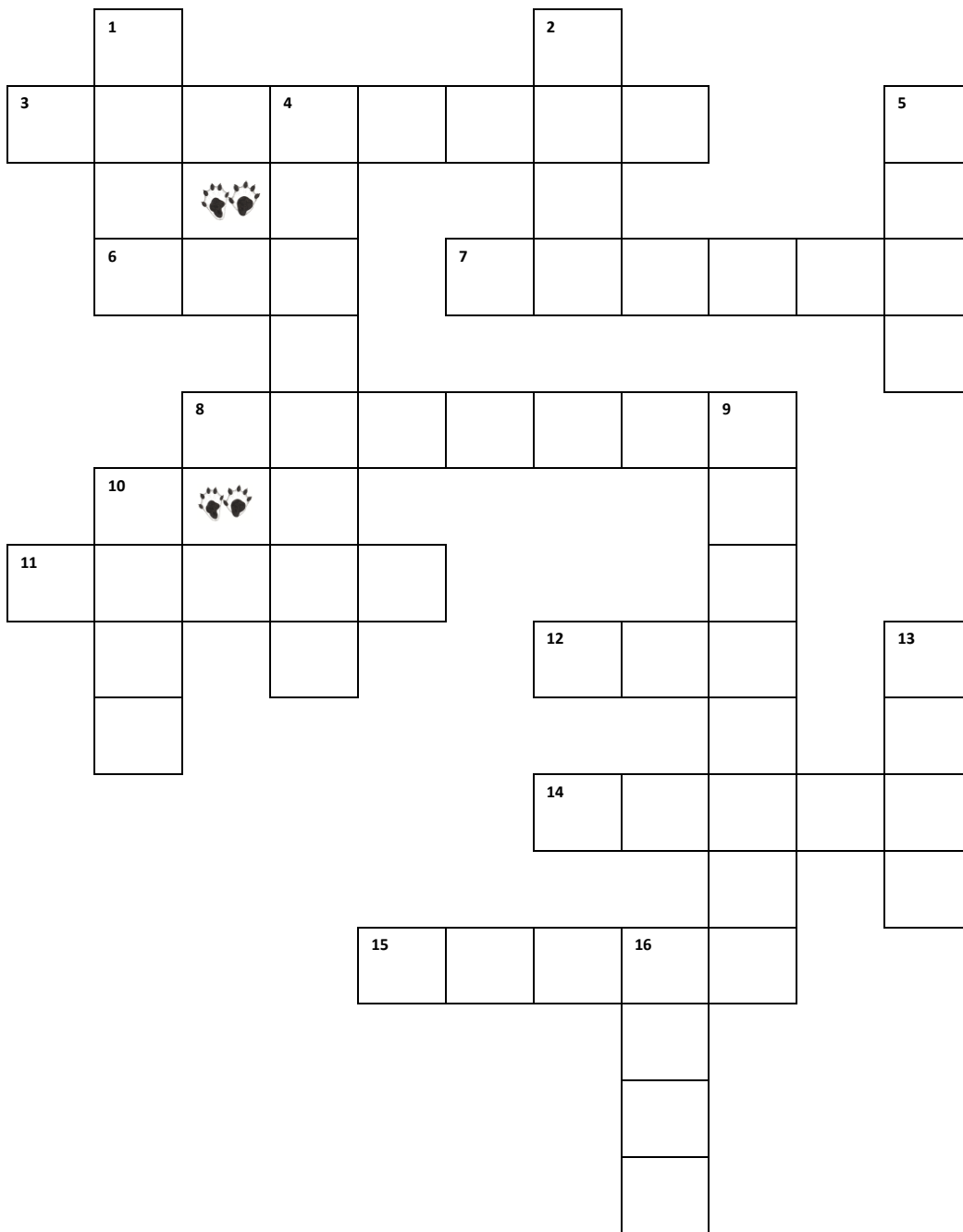
TIP: If you cannot remember all the species names use the Otter Species page to help.

A	C	H	T	Y	A	A	E	F	T	Y	U	I	O	H	N	N	S	X	N
C	S	M	O	O	T	H	C	O	A	T	E	D	S	A	I	I	P	O	O
P	O	Q	A	W	O	O	C	Q	W	E	E	L	K	K	J	I	O	Y	R
T	U	Y	U	R	I	O	A	F	K	I	U	Y	T	R	E	W	T	Q	T
A	T	E	R	T	I	G	Q	E	C	T	T	A	R	A	D	A	T	C	H
E	H	A	I	R	Y	N	O	S	E	D	M	T	A	E	T	E	E	T	A
D	E	T	A	S	C	M	E	A	Q	Z	O	T	W	V	T	C	D	R	M
D	R	G	D	S	A	H	S	E	U	T	R	A	A	C	Y	A	N	A	E
R	N	E	O	T	R	O	P	I	C	A	L	E	E	O	M	C	E	E	R
G	R	M	S	A	R	E	I	O	P	C	A	U	E	N	H	A	C	T	I
H	I	N	C	V	C	U	E	A	T	L	C	R	S	G	O	H	K	Y	C
J	V	B	A	C	Y	O	E	R	T	L	A	A	T	O	O	J	E	U	A
K	E	V	N	M	R	S	O	T	J	N	S	N	A	C	T	K	D	O	N
A	R	C	M	Y	Y	H	S	A	R	M	I	A	Y	L	A	A	S	O	R
S	I	X	P	T	S	A	R	A	C	L	N	I	Y	A	S	S	A	V	I
C	U	Z	A	N	Q	E	S	A	R	Y	E	S	R	W	C	V	I	B	V
V	G	I	A	N	T	P	O	I	U	T	D	A	E	L	A	A	I	N	E
V	Y	I	W	Q	A	S	S	A	A	R	A	R	A	E	E	L	I	M	R
A	S	X	E	A	A	I	O	R	T	E	A	U	C	S	E	A	V	Z	A
A	F	R	I	C	A	N	C	L	A	W	L	E	S	S	F	T	Y	E	R

Can you remember all the scientific names – write them below:



SPOTTED NECKED OTTER NEOTROPICAL OTTER HAIRY NOSED OTTER SOUTHERN RIVER OTTER MARINE OTTER AFRICAN CLAWLESS OTTER SMOOTH COATED OTTER GIANT OTTER CONGO CLAWLESS OTTER EURASIAN OTTER ASIAN SMALL-CLAWED OTTER NORTH AMERICAN RIVER OTTER SEA OTTER



ACROSS

3. Otters belong to this family
6. --- otters have the densest fur of any animal
7. Part of the otter's family
8. Name for otter poo
11. Largest otter: ----- otter
12. The reason for much otter hunting. They have two layers of this – one for heat, one to keep it waterproof
14. Otters are an indicator of a ----- environment
15. What colour are otters predominantly?

DOWN

1. Young otters
2. How many toes does an otter have?
4. 50,000 North American river otters die from this a year
5. An otter's home
9. How many species of otter are there?
10. Otters favourite food
13. Otters are semi-aquatic – meaning they live in water and on ----?
16. Fur keeps them ----?

TIP: All the answers are in this pack – you just have to read!



International Otter Survival Fund (IOSF) is dedicated to the protection and conservation of all 13 species of otter across the world! To date we have been involved in projects in **over 60** different countries and we have many activities:

THE OTTER HOSPITAL – IOSF has cared for over 200 injured and orphaned otters, as well as other wild animals. Most casualties are orphaned otters which arrive as small cubs which we care for until they are ready for release. Otter cubs stay with their mothers for 12-15 months and therefore must stay until the same age with IOSF. Rearing one otter cub costs around £1,600!



IOSF is often approached from across the world for our expert advice on rearing otters. We have helped in various countries including Iraq, Democratic Republic of Congo and Guyana.

EDUCATION – One major problem for otters across the world is **lack of awareness**. We visit schools and offer talks to raise awareness of the species. We have also created otter identification cards that have been translated into various languages.

Our large network of otter workers and volunteers help educate across the world.

TRAINING – In addition to lack of awareness, not enough research work is being done on otters globally. We hold otter conservation workshops training local scientists and government officials in techniques for otter conservation. We have held 6 International Workshops including Africa's first ever otter conservation workshop in Tanzania and 5 in Asia. These training workshops have resulted in continental otter networks set up to help people work together and relay information through the countries and across each continent.

RESEARCH – IOSF conducts research both here in the UK and abroad.

We monitor otter populations on the Isle of Skye on a yearly basis, including diet and populations, so we can quickly recognise any drop in numbers.

We also send dead otters to Cardiff University for post-mortems. This can help us to know how long otters are living in the wild, cause of death and any pollutants that may be in the environment. Using this information we can act upon any problems!

We aid and conduct research across the world. Again, our large network of otter workers and volunteers helps us continue research. For example, in 1998 hairy-nosed otters were believed to be extinct! In 1999, a single cub was found in Southern Thailand. IOSF acted upon this information and populations have since been found across South-East Asia.

REDUCING THE TRADE - Be it legal or illegal otters are being hunted and this must stop! Otters are usually hunted for their fur and for pets and both aspects are causing major problems to otters! In some local areas they are now extinct. IOSF is passionate about reducing this trade, both the illegal trade and legal trapping in USA and Canada.



How you can help?

Otters face a number of problems: Pollution, hunting, human interference and many more. Use this page to learn how you can help the environment and otters.

1. Use reusable water bottles. A **MILLION** plastic bottles are bought worldwide every **MINUTE!** Use reusable water bottles and fill from the tap. This way less plastic enters our environment!
2. **PICK UP THREE** – A new worldwide campaign has begun to get plastics out of our countryside. Every time people go for a walk, they take 3 pieces of plastic home and put them in the bin. If everyone does it we can make a big impact.
3. **TURN OFF TAPS** – Don't leave taps running. For example, when you are brushing your teeth! The world doesn't have an endless supply of clean water.
4. **TURN OFF LIGHTS** – Save energy! We use a lot of energy on a day to day basis and by simply turning off lights when they are not needed you can help the environment.
5. **OTTER CUB/INJURED OTTER** - If you see a baby otter what should you do? Firstly, never pick it up! Sometimes a mother may leave her cub to go and feed and she won't come back if you have held it. Plus, they can bite. Tell an adult and they can keep an eye on it and, if unsure, always phone IOSF on (+44) 01471 822 487

SPREAD THE WORD

Otters need your voice! One of the major factors that affect otters across the world is through **lack of awareness**.

Otters can't talk – so we need to talk for them! Use all the information you have learned and tell your friends, family and everyone you know about otters, otter conservation and what IOSF is achieving.

TEAM OTTER

Keep an eye on IOSF's page dedicated to children. Here you can get updates, competitions, games and quizzes. www.loveotters.org

IOSF

Help the work of IOSF! There are loads of great and fun ideas on our website which tell you how you can help! www.otter.org



Answers

Can you name four other types of mammal?

This could be any number of answers – Dog, Cat, Elephant, Whales, Dolphin, Cow, Sheep, Pig, Tiger, Lion, Fox – there are many answers. If you are unsure ask an adult!

Can you name two things special about each of the animals which help them to live in water?

Orca Whale – Large Tail, Blubber Layer, Stream-Lined, Blow Hole to help them breathe, Sonar to communicate

Seal – Flippers, Blubber, Steam-Lined

Otter – Webbed Feet, Strong Tail, Warm Fur, Steam-Lined

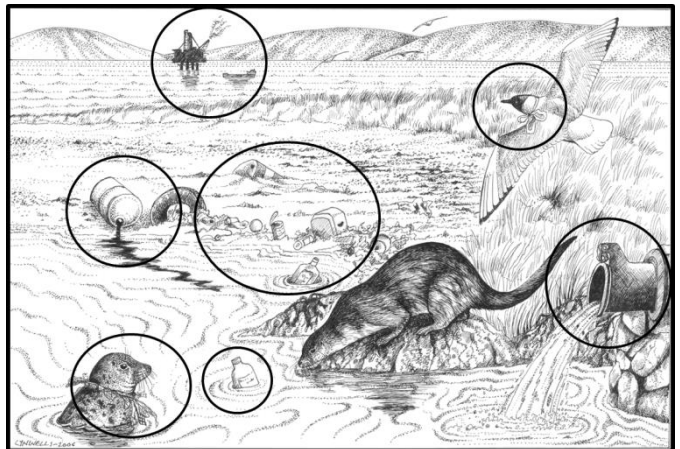
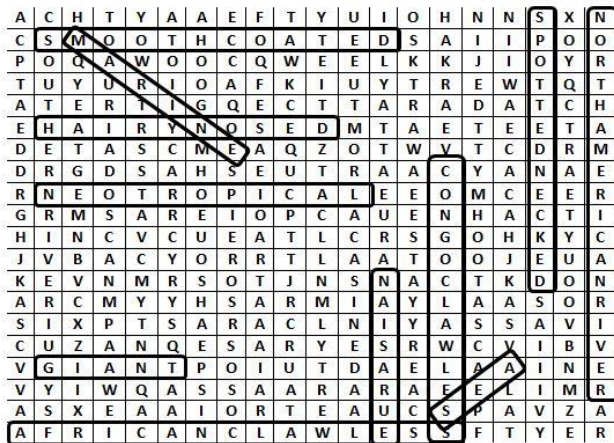
Which prey do you think each of these otters eat?

Fish – Eurasian Otter; Crab – Asian Small-Clawed Otter; Shell – Sea Otter

Why pollution could hurt animals?

1. Oil Rig/Tanker/Drum could result in oil spill. Oil is very harmful to all animals.
2. Waste Pipe could be toxic. This would poison drinking water, clean water for cleaning fur and also kill fish, meaning animals such as otters would have no food.
3. Plastic around animal's necks. Could cause cuts and suffocation resulting in injury or death.
4. Litter – eaten/poison environment/get caught on animals
5. Plastic bottles could contain chemicals that would harm animals

WordSearch



Crossword

ACROSS

3. MUSTELID 6. SEA 7. WEASEL 8. SPRAINT 11. GIANT 12. FUR 14. CLEAN 15. BROWN

DOWN

1. CUBS or PUPS 2. FIVE 4. TRAPPING 5. HOLT 9. THIRTEEN 10. FISH 13. LAND 16. WARM



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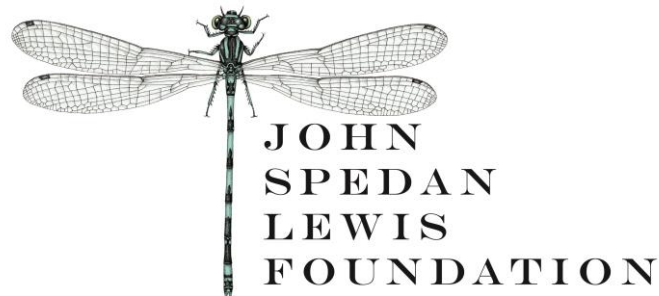
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