

Thank you to everyone who has taken part in RIVERSEARCH this year whether it was as part of the annual otter survey, reporting sightings or sending in water shrew scats from the bait tube survey. For those of you who have yet to take part there are more training courses planned for Spring 2012 and for everyone, the chance to join a new team of hi-tech nocturnal surveyors called the NIGHTWATCH (see overleaf).

Essex Otter Survey 2011

Thank you to everyone who has taken part in the 2011 Essex Otter Survey so far. For those of you who were put off by the vigorous growth of vegetation over the summer (it can be a struggle to even find the river bank!) then October and November are the ideal months to get back out and have a look. I have enclosed a copy of the results so far so if there are any points that have not yet been covered or are listed as negative for otters please feel free to get back out there and have a look.

Remember that we can reimburse your travel expenses so if you need extra survey or claim forms please let me know. I can email them or send printouts, whichever is easier, and you can also email me your results if you find it easier than posting your form back.

Water shrew survey 2011

We have revised our methods for doing the water shrew survey after speaking to the main DNA lab analysing these sorts of remains. As many of you will have discovered, most of the food in the bait tube gets eaten but it now appears that this is often within the first 24 hours. After that the droppings can deteriorate, be washed away or disturbed by slugs and snails.

The recommendation now is that tubes are collected the day after being set as there is more chance of recovering a good number of intact scats. I have revised the survey guide to reflect these changes so if anyone wants a new water shrew survey sheet explaining how to take part, please contact me.

The results of the previous survey will be analysed this winter and the results published along with the Essex Otter Survey.



Young water shrew. Rob Parry

Training Days

These are aimed at new surveyors who want to take part in the 2012 surveys, or existing surveyors who feel they need a refresher. The cost is £15 although existing RIVERSEARCH surveyors can apply for one free course per year.

There is a choice of two dates for otter survey training, both on the River Stour at Dedham, on either Monday 5th March or Saturday 10th March. These start at 10am and finish about 1pm with an indoor training session at the Marlborough Head Hotel, Mill Lane, Dedham, CO7 6DH (within 200m of the main Dedham public car park) followed by a walk on the river to look for actual field signs.

The two choices for water vole survey courses, both at Essex Wildlife Trust's HQ, Abbots Hall Farm, Gt Wigborough, Colchester, CO5 7RZ, are either Monday 21st May or Saturday 26th May. These follow the same format as the otter courses starting at 10am with an indoor presentation before heading off to a nearby wetland to look for water vole field signs.

To book your place contact Claire Lewis by email clairel@essexwt.org.uk or phone 01621 862985.

The NIGHTWATCH

Not as sinister as it might sound, the NIGHTWATCH was trialled on the River Colne this summer using motion sensing infra-red video cameras installed under road bridges. By hooking them up to monitors inside mobile vehicular hides (otherwise known as cars) we were able to watch the nocturnal activities of a number of species including otters.

The trial was so successful that we would like to open up the opportunity for RIVERSEARCH volunteers to join the NIGHTWATCH in 2012. It can be quite a long night so coffee, tea and food is essential, but the rewards of seeing animals live on camera are well worth the wait. If you feel you have what it takes to survive a night on the river, get in touch and we'll send out a timetable of dates and locations in the spring newsletter.

Contacts

To book your place on the training days please contact Claire Lewis at clairel@essexwt.org.uk or 01621 862985. For any other enquiries about RIVERSEARCH, NIGHTWATCH or the Water for Wildlife Project please contact:-

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