



Allt Daraich, Loch Striven, Argyll
Otter survey
September 2018



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

An otter survey was undertaken in 2018 for a proposed landing stage and storage platform for timber transportation on the west shore of Loch Striven.

Evidence of otter activity at the site and along the shore was found and the proposed development is therefore in the home-range of one or more otters. No structures were found that suggested resting behaviour by otters in the site boundary and to 50 m, but an area of concentrated otter evidence, included habitually used paths was found to the north of the site. Although no licenses are recommended based on the survey, precautionary measures are recommended prior to and during construction to avoid potential harm to otter moving through the site.

Pine marten evidence was also found, but no structures were found suggesting den sites.

1. INTRODUCTION

The following otter survey was commissioned by Tilhill Forestry to determine if any derogation licenses or mitigation is required for the construction of a storage area, landing area and short access track on the west shore of Loch Striven.

2. METHODS

The survey comprised the standard approach to finding field evidence such as spraints (droppings), footprints, paths, resting up sites (couches and holts), sign heaps (scraped piles of sand or silt, topped with spraint) which reflects the methodology in Chanin (2003)¹.

The survey included approximately 200m along the shore to the north and south of the proposed works. It also included a search of terrestrial habitat. No signs of otter were found in the woodland and the survey extended inland to a steep rocky rise almost parallel with the road. This was searched for structures that could be used for resting and signs that otter may be traveling further inland. As no field evidence was found, the survey did not extend further due to the improbability of finding further field evidence and also due to difficult terrain.

A Phase 1 habitat survey was undertaken to contextualize comments on habitat.

This survey coverage was considered appropriate for finding regular resting and breeding sites given the scale of the works.

Access was good through most of the survey area although dense bracken and/or scrub was surveyed by checking for otter paths entering such habitat. The survey was undertaken at low tide to facilitate access along the shore however the intertidal area was not surveyed as it would only contain very recent evidence which would unlikely pertain to resting sites.

All evidence of otter signs were recorded with a Garmin Glo GPS and georeferenced relocation photographs were taken to supplement the notes.

The survey was undertaken on 3rd September 2018 by two ecologists.

¹ Chanin P (2003) Monitoring the Otter, *Lutra lutra*. Conserving Natura 2000 Rivers Monitoring Series No 10. English Nature, Peterborough.

3. RESULTS

3.1 Evidence of otter

Spraint was present as expected in addition to otter paths and a grooming area. No substrate was present to register footprints.

Field evidence is summarised in figure 1 and Table 1.

Figure 1. Location of site (red solid line), new access track (blue solid line), extent of survey (red dashed line) and field evidence notes. Note that site boundary is approximate.



Table 1: Evidence of otter and pine marten

OS Grid ref	Label on Fig.1	Notes
NS0762167558	1. Food remains	Old predated sea urchin
NS0761775537	2. High density of field evidence	Large habitually used spraint site by stream including fresh spraints. Compacted area forming depression/form which could be a rolling pitch or could be used for resting. Small fresh water pool suitable for bathing adjacent. Several otter paths locally. Rocky overhang with multiple spraints beneath it but water trickling down/through it so likely used for bathing and too wet for resting. See Photos 1, 2, 3.
NS0761375435	3. Spraint	At mouth of small burn

NS0757475366	4. Pine marten scats	Five pine marten scats, some containing blackberry seeds.
NS0759175326	5. Spraint	Single recent spraint on rock at mouth of burn
NS0760975155	6. Spraint	Single recent spraint on rock at mouth of burn
NS0761275142	7. Spraint	Old spraint at margin of grass and rock. Habitat more structurally diverse with birch and gorse scrub on low rocky outcrops.

3.2 Pine marten

The sheep pens are clothed in bramble which was covered in blackberries. It is assumed that the pine marten are feeding here, making use of the seasonal glut.

3.3 Habitat

The habitat was considered particularly good for otter with a sections of shore being shallow, covered with seaweed and rocky with thickets of bracken and scrub as well as tussocky purple moor grass which are all good cover for resting. Fresh water streams were frequent offering areas for bathing/grooming. See Figure 2 for habitat local to the proposed site.

Figure 2. Phase 1 habitats in the vicinity of the site



4. DISCUSSION

No resting sites were indicated in the survey area and no structures were found that could indicate significance such as breeding or cub rearing. Therefore a license to disturb is not appropriate as licenses pertain to their actual places of rest (including breeding sites). However, otters in particular use many “one off” resting sites which cannot be identified from field evidence. The site is clearly part of one or more otter’s home range and otter will pass through on a regular basis. Likewise, the site is within one or more pine martens home range.

Construction activities therefore need to be mindful of this and take measures to avoid potential harm to otter and pine marten. The following recommendations should be implemented by the construction staff:

- A preconstruction walk-over survey is recommended to ensure that signs of habitual resting are not indicated on the site or to 50 m.
- There should be a watching brief when the vegetation is cleared. Work should stop if an otter/pine marten is seen exiting the works area and subsequent checks should be made to determine if a license is necessary.
- To avoid entrapment of otters and other mammals, no trenches or open pits should be left overnight, these should be covered or a means of escape provided such as a sturdy plank at a shallow angle to act as a ramp.
- A walk-over should be undertaken at the commencement of each day to check for resting otters.
- Toolbox talks/information should be provided to all contractors on site to make it compulsory to cease works and report to the site foreman if an otter is seen. The foreman should contact an ecologist and stop works in the area if concerned.

5. PHOTOS

Photo 1. Overview of area with densest field evidence



Photo 2. Hidden run/bathing area under ledge which is trickling with water



Photo 3. Likely grooming area/rolling pitch



APPENDIX 1. Relevant legislation

Source: SNH website

Otter

Otters and their resting sites are afforded full protection in Scotland by the Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 1994 (as amended). This means that it is an offence to deliberately or recklessly:

- capture, injure or kill a wild otter;
- harass a wild otter or group of otters;
- to disturb a wild otter in any structure or place it uses for shelter or protection;
- to disturb a wild otter while it is rearing or otherwise caring for its young;
- to obstruct access to a resting site or to otherwise deny the animal use of this;
- to disturb such a wild otter in a manner that is, or in circumstances which are, likely to significantly affect the local distribution or abundance of that species;
- to disturb a wild otter in a manner that is, or in circumstances which are, likely to impair its ability to survive, breed or reproduce, or rear or otherwise care for its young.

Licenses may be applied for to facilitate works that would otherwise be an offence. These are issued by Scottish Natural Heritage.

Pine marten

Pine marten are protected by inclusion on Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) as amended.

It is an offence to intentionally or recklessly:

- kill, injure or take a pine marten
- damage, destroy or obstruct access to a nest or den – i.e. any structure or place which such an animal uses for shelter or protection
- disturb such an animal when it is occupying a nest or den for shelter or protection (except when this is inside a dwelling house)
- Possession, sale and transport offences are ones of strict liability (they don't require intention or recklessness).

It is also an offence to knowingly cause or permit any of the above acts to be carried out.

Licenses may be applied for to facilitate works that would otherwise be an offence. These are issued by Scottish Natural Heritage.