

'Otterly' Amazing!



Do you think you'll ever spot an otter?

Once upon a time that would have been difficult, but, you are more likely to spot an otter today in the UK than ever before!

The European otter can be found in rivers and wetlands across the whole of the UK. It wasn't that long ago, though, that the otter was at risk of extinction in this country.

Up until the early 1990s, many of our rivers were polluted with agricultural (farm) chemicals, but since these chemicals were banned, the water quality has increased. Great news for our otters and many other aquatic and semi-aquatic species!

In the UK, we're lucky to live with the European Otter (it's scientific name is 'Lutra lutra!').

In parts of the UK (Wales & Scotland) the otter is classed as vulnerable. In England, it is listed as 'least concern'.

Thankfully, the European otter is protected in the UK under the Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981. Globally, the European otter is 'near threatened'



Let's dive right into some 'otterly' brilliant facts...



- There are seven species of otter living in the UK. Each one looks slightly different, but generally, they are long-bodied, short-legged and thickly furred.
- Otters are semi-aquatic, so they are used to living on both land and in water. Their thick fur helps to keep them warm and they have webbed feet to help them swim. They can even close their ears and nose underwater!
- Its sensitive whiskers around its snout help the otter locate prey and they eat mainly fish as well as insects, worms and a small amount of vegetation.
- Although there are otters all over the country, they are mostly active at dusk and at night, so they can still be quite difficult to spot! They tend to stay on land during the day, but when it gets dark, they'll spend several hours foraging in water, looking for food.
- If you can't spot an otter, there's a great chance of at least spotting its tracks! On the sides of a river, you can sometimes see five-clawed footprints in the dirt where otters have hauled themselves in and out of the water.
- Otters also use their droppings (called 'spraints') to mark their territory (eeewww!) so be sure to watch where you step!
- They live in holes in river banks called 'holts' and each one will have a few different entrances to protect against flooding... very clever!
- Saving the best for last... otters are very playful and have been seen to slide down snow drifts or mud banks on their bellies!

Well, there is actually another 'otterly' brilliant fact we wanted to share with you. It's specific to sea otters, which you tend to find in the North Pacific Ocean, but we just had to tell you... they will hold hands while they are sleeping in the water to stop them from drifting apart! If that's not friendship, we don't know what is!