UK WILD OTTER TRUST

Spraint Fact Sheet

Otter spraint with fish scales

Older, drier spraint

Fresh spraint, with urine

Anal jelly

Old spraint, and new with crayfish

Fresh spraint

Otters mark their territory frequently, though in some cases, such as females with very young cubs in holts, tend to mark less or not at all.

Spraints are easy to recognise due to their shape, size, contents, colour and location.

They appear as a unity of fish scales and bones, kept together by a pasty liquid that usually stains the substrate on which the spraint is left by the otter. Length is variable but the diameter is usually around 2 cm and the shape is cylindrical. Normally, spraint is not very consistent and breaks apart easily when dry, going from a darker, green colour (or strong orange, if the otter ate crayfish) to light grey and white as it gets older. It will contain fish scales and bones (as chewing is not a perfected technique in otters), fragments of molluscs, crustaceans and insects among other undigested elements.

The smell is diagnostic, as it doesn't appear as a typical "unpleasant" smell but presents a strong fishy smell, different from any other carnivore. If spraint is observed on a sandy substrate, it is usually accompanied by urine: in males it will be separate from the spraint, in females urine will be on and around the spraint. Sometimes, anal jelly/ gel will be deposited – this is basically the pasty liquid of spraint without any undigested elements.

Spraints are left on any evident environmental object that attracts our attention, both on the banks and in the water (logs, rocks, trash etc) and just as often is left on roads, bridges, damn walls etc.

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