

A Quick Guide to Finding & Identifying Otter Spraint

Finding Otter Spraint:

Otter spraint will be found near a water source, with other signs of otters likely visible in the area. For example, you might see otter tracks, an otter run (shown below), or otter holt (hole) nearby.

“Spraint is often deposited on prominent features near water, these often include, rocks, fallen trees, bridge supports and storm drains. Here the deposits act as scent markers to other otters and are used to define territories. Given their vicinity to water, spraints are prone to washing away during bouts of bad weather thus it should not always be assumed that the absence of samples indicates a lack of otters in an area.” (Craft 2016)



Figure 1: An otter 'run', image credit to Tim Ellis.

While on a walk see if you can spot a typical otter “run” across pasture (this photo is actually from the Wensum near the Low Road between Drayton and Hellesdon).

Follow the run to find the spraint pile at the river end of it. Well used piles usually have a big patch of dead grass etc around them - they stand out.

You might see other signs of otters nearby, including otter tracks. Otter prints have 5 toes and claw marks and webbing may also be present. The prints of adults range between 5-7cm.



Figure 2: Otter tracks, image credit to (Craft 2016)

Identifying Otter Spraint:

Once you have found what you believe to be otter spraint, look for the following signs to confirm that the faeces is indeed from an otter. Otter spraint:

- Contains large and visible pieces of undigested prey remains, “with fish bones and scales usefully the most prominent...an array of other items may also be visible including the bones of amphibians, fur, [and] feather fragments” (Craft 2016).
- If fresh, will be “bound together with a tarry black mucus although as time progresses and the spraint dries [will take] on a much paler, almost grey colouration and a more crumbly texture” (Craft 2016).
- Does not smell unpleasant. Its smell has been described as “sweet...between lavender and fresh fish” (Craft 2016).

Other signs:

- Spraint usually has a rounded shape, rather than being tapered.
- Spraint may be found covered with ‘otter jelly’, a clear mucous.



References

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Craft, Ian. 2016. 'Otter Spraint Identification', Total Ecology, Accessed 24/1/2023.

<https://www.totalecology.com/blog/otter-spraint-identification/#:~:text=Spraint%20is%20often%20deposited%20on,are%20used%20to%20define%20territories.>

Figure 3: Otter spraint, image credit to Tim Ellis.