

## Otter Spraints

Otter are really quite common in Pembrokeshire – but that doesn't mean they are easy to see! Occasionally they can be spotted in the early morning at Westfield Pill, and recently a very bold individual has been seen regularly from the iron bridge over the Nevern at Newport. Sea anglers sometimes report seeing them swimming in the sea.

But we know they are there because of the traces they leave behind – in particular, spraints. Spraints are smears of faeces which otters leave in prominent places to let other otters know they are around. They are often placed on top of a rock or under a bridge – or any place really where another otter would be likely to spot them! A little band of volunteers has been collecting spraints over the last year – these have then been analysed to find out what our otters are eating. It seems that otter spraints collected along or near to the coast contain predominantly marine fish and other marine prey, which proves that our otters actually do spend time hunting and feeding in the sea, much like the otters on the west coast of Scotland.

I suppose you might think that collecting otter poo is a strange kind of thing to do in your spare time. Strangely, spraints do not smell bad at all – they often smell slightly perfumed – so scraping them into a polythene bag is not an unpleasant task. We did our collecting at St Brides, where we would regularly find spraints on the big stones where the stream runs on to the beach. And once you get your eye in, you see them all over the place – we have spotted them on the rocks in the middle of the small stream which goes past our house and on a rock in the middle of the footpath at Pickleridge Pools. And when you find a really fresh spraint, it is quite exciting to know that an otter was at that very spot only a few hours ago!

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