



Title: Waterford City Otter Survey Training, 11th December 2011

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Figure 1: Ballinakill salt marsh, adjacent to the King’s Channel of the River Suir, Waterford City. Photo: Denise O’Meara.



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The Waterford City otter survey training day was organised by the MISE team in conjunction with the Waterford branch of the Irish Wildlife Trust, who publicised the event in the Waterford Today local newspaper and informed their members. The aim of the training day was to estimate the level of local interest in the city in wildlife surveying, to forge links with the IWT and to identify volunteers for a Waterford City otter survey.



Figure 2: MISE staff and volunteers examining an otter slide at Ballinakill salt marsh, Waterford City. Photo: Denise O'Meara.

The event began at 11 am at the car ferry to Waterford Castle at Ballinakill, where we quickly briefed volunteers on the aims of the training session, before moving off the road onto the salt marsh area to the north, which borders the King's Channel section of the River Suir (Fig. 1). Once there, Andrew Harrington (who led the training session), gave a brief overview of the MISE project and some basic information about otter ecology and the known distribution of otters in Co. Waterford.

Attendees were subsequently briefed about the main field signs to look out for that would indicate the presence of otters including spraints, feeding signs, couches, slides, footprints and holts. We examined the salt marsh for these signs and found numerous tracks in the grass, slides into the water (Fig. 2), a clear couch site in the grass and various sprainting sites (Fig. 3). We searched along the mud banks next the river and found some footprints, but these were not distinct enough to be clearly identified as otter. Therefore, the attendees were shown how to identify a wide range of otter signs and what kind of places to find them, which will give them a good basic knowledge of otter surveying for the future. Some attendees said they had previously seen otters, including in Waterford City, did not know how to recognise signs of otters.



Fig. 3: Otter spraints found at Ballinakill by volunteers. Photo: Denise O'Meara.

This training session was very successful, as 26 people attended (excluding MISE staff), most of them from the local area, although some came from Cork and Dublin. After the training session we met with people who had attended and were interested in volunteering to survey for otters in different parts of the city and surrounding areas. A winter otter survey was organised following this event and a separate report will follow.

Acknowledgements:

We would particularly like to thank the committee of the Waterford Branch of the Irish Wildlife Trust for helping us to organise and publicise this event. We also like to thank all the members of the IWT and other volunteers for attending this event.