



Mammals in a Sustainable Environment

Cheekpoint otter survey

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On Saturday the 11th of February the MISE Project, in conjunction with the Cheekpoint and Faithlegg Development Group (CFDG), held a joint event at Cheekpoint, Co. Waterford. The main aim of this event was to introduce wildlife enthusiasts in the local community to otterlife surveying and to carry out a small-scale survey of the salt marshes on the River Suir next to the village of Cheekpoint. The event was attended by about 25 people from the local area.



Discussing how to find otter signs at Faithlegg salt marsh, Co. Waterford.



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After a brief talk at the local scout hall in Cheekpoint, we descended to the salt marshes along the River Suir to the west of the village. The River Suir is designated as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC), an area protected by EU law as being for the habitats present in the area (e.g. salt marshes) which are under threat across Europe. It is also protected for its populations of salmon, lampreys and otters (which are also vulnerable across Europe), among other wildlife. Several of the locals said they had regularly seen a family of otters in the area and the author had recently seen a pair of otters feeding nearby, so it was decided that this salt marsh could potentially have recent signs of otters.



Searching for otter footprints and spraints along the River Suir.

We crossed to an old sea wall at low tide and immediately found otter footprints in the intertidal mud. Just above the tide line at prominent places we also found several sprainting sites, where the otters had been leaving droppings as territory markers. We collected several spraints for potential DNA analysis later at WIT. As we continued further along the sea wall, we continued to find tracks and droppings, evidence that otters appear to be travelling through the area regularly.

Although we did not actually see any otters on the day as they are ever elusive, it was clear that they are living in the area and making regular use of the salt marshes as feeding grounds. This came as a surprise to many people and after this very enjoyable day we hope the people of Cheekpoint keep their eyes peeled for their local otters!