

Case Study

Wildlife Cameras on the River Meon

Background

Thousands of lovers of the natural world have been inspired by nature programmes made by broadcasters like David Attenborough and Simon King including Springwatch, Big Cat Diary, Planet Earth and Blue Planet.

A team from the South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA), including Assistant Ranger Laura Deane, Research and Evidence Officer Adam Brown and members of the Volunteer Ranger Service, have set up several wildlife cameras at focal points along the River Meon.

The wildlife cameras, and the images that they capture provide real insight into riparian biodiversity, providing evidence that elusive and nocturnal species including protected species such as otter and water vole can be found on the river. This data also helps to inform management decisions about what can be done to enhance and maintain key species whilst achieving the South Downs National Park Partnership Management Plan outcomes.

The cameras are also an excellent way of engaging people by demonstrating what fantastic wildlife is within our local landscape.

SOUTH DOWNS
NATIONAL PARK

The presence of a lone water vole in an unexpected location would have gone unnoticed if it were not captured on film.



The project

The wildlife cameras were set up to support the work of the water vole reintroduction into the River Meon, initially focusing recording on latrine survey floats and mink rafts. It was soon realised that the mink rafts were visited by a whole array of wildlife including otter and a variety of bird and reptile species.

Returning otters, previously believed to have been extinct due to river pollution, habitat loss and hunting (Holmes 2014), are a key species indicator of improved water quality.

The charismatic and elusive otter captures the public's imagination; collaborating with the fisheries, landowners and other concerned partners we are working to maintain and enhance the otter population in the Meon.

The key to setting up wildlife cameras is to find a focal point of interest along the river, such as a mink raft.





A mother helps her cub onto the raft.



A male dog otter looks for scent marks within his territory.

The outcome

SOCIAL

Community engagement is key to the success of large landscape scale projects such as the water vole reintroduction on the River Meon, where the cameras have helped to retain enthusiasm by ‘tangibly’ capturing wildlife attracted to the river on film. The film footage provides crucial evidence that the project is ‘working,’ which also helps to attract the on-going support from local landowners, whom the project team meet on a regular basis, updating them on project progress and making sure that the rafts are in good working order.

ECOLOGICAL

The footage from the cameras provides accurate details of otter behavior which would otherwise never be seen, as well as providing the means to recognise individual otters. By analysing the data, we can deduce that otters are mostly crepuscular in their habits, being most active during dawn and dusk. Footage has also helped with the recording of the presence and behaviour of other notable species such as water rail, grass snake, badger and stoat; the data is entered into Living Record (an online database which feeds into the Hampshire Biological Records Centre).

COMMUNICATIONS

A great way of engaging with the public when talking about wildlife is to capture it on film. The footage captured has been used in social media, at community meetings and by the SDNPA Learning and Outreach Team with schools in the Meon Valley. It is also an excellent way of celebrating and sharing success of the Meon Valley Partnership and acknowledging contributions made by partners and stakeholders in conserving the river habitat.

Link to otter video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Orj8RdnSL_Y

The future

Retaining good relationships with landowners, who generously provide access to the river, is of key importance. The team will continue to provide regular project updates and practical support in maintaining the rafts; they will also seek to engage with other landowners not already involved with the project enabling an extension to the current area captured.

The team will continue to map out where key species are, creating an extensive database of species records, which will be entered into Living Record: www.livingrecord.net

For further information please contact;

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