**Investigating Seasonality of Otter Breeding in Britain, Using Newspaper Articles, Camera Trap Footage and Photograph Data.**

My name is Kirsten Oliver, and I am a postgraduate student at Edinburgh Napier University working with researchers at the university’s Centre for Conservation & Restoration Science and Findlay Ecology Services to investigate breeding seasonality in European otters *Lutra lutra*. Our ultimate aim is to improve our understanding of this vulnerable species and contribute to a robust evidence-base for survey and conservation efforts, and we are trying to obtain information from a wide array of sources across the UK. We would very much appreciate your help on this.

The project will be investigating European Otter (*Lutra, lutra*) breeding seasonality in the UK and the influencing factors. Previous studies conducted in Europe have noted seasonality peaks based on prey availability (Kruuk et al 1987 and Bajo, 1996), however Otters are thought to breed all year round in the UK (Chadwick & Sherad-Smith 2010), although this observation has previously been based on roadkill carcasses or sightings. I aim to look at seasonality trends through a collection of mass data, including photographs, camera trap footage and newspaper articles on a national scale.

I am looking for participants to take part in my research and if you agree I would appreciate any photographs or camera trap footage that you may possess which shows a female otter with her cubs from any year. It is important the cubs are with mum so I can estimate the birth date based on their size compared to mum. I will only require one photo of the family not multiple. If you record a family over an extended period, I would appreciate either the earliest images you have, or those that best show the relative size of the young compared to the mother.

Alongside the photograph or footage, I would need the date (month and year) and the location where the family was seen. Grid reference coordinates or “what three words” location will be preferable; however a rough location (town, or postcode) will be sufficient if those are not available. You may withdraw from this research study at any time.

If you can help, please respond to my below email address, and title the email “Otter Helper” and I will happily send further instructions on how to submit your picture/footage.

All the information you give will be stored safely and secured in a password controlled hard drive account which will be accessible to myself and my Supervisors Dr Patrick White (Edinburgh Napier University, MCIEEM, IUCN Otter Specialist group member) and Dr Melanie Findlay (Findlay Ecological Services, MCIEEM, IUCN Otter Specialist group member).

Alternatively, I have attached a poster which I would be very grateful for you to share amongst your members if you can.

The information you give will be entirely anonymous and your information will be kept confidential. There will be no way to identify you in any report of the research findings.

If you have any questions about the research, feel free to contact me or my supervisors.

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Supervisor: Melanie Findlay, mel@findlayecologyservices.co.uk

Yours Sincerely

Kirsten Oliver