

Appendix 8.2 Otter Survey Report



ORKNEY'S COMMUNITY WIND FARM - FARAY

Otter Survey Report

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Summary

ITPEnergised (ITPE) was appointed by Orkney Islands Council to undertake a survey for otter (*Lutra lutra*) on the island of Faray, located 1.5 km west of Eday and 2.5 km southeast of Westray.

A thorough search was undertaken of the coastal zone and up to 20 m from the shore as well as in suitable habitat along field drains, watercourses and their associated riparian zones. Throughout the survey, overhanging banks, cavities, bankside vegetation and riparian features, such as boulders and mud, were searched for signs of otter use.

The survey identified two hovers; one in the southwest of the island and the other in the north of the island. Both hovers were similar and identified within man-made rock structures enclosed on three sides and roofed. Both sites displayed historic sprainting. No evidence of a holt was recorded during the survey.

In addition to hovers, sprainting and feeding remains were found scattered around the edges of the island, indicating that the otters were foraging on fish, crabs and birds.

The results of survey indicate that the island shores and surrounding sea are used by low numbers of otter as commuting, foraging and refuge habitats.

1. Introduction

1.1 Overview

ITPEnergised (ITPE) was appointed by Orkney Islands Council to undertake a survey for otter (*Lutra lutra*) for the proposed wind farm development on the island of Faray, located 1.5 km west of Eday and 2.5 km southeast of Westray (hereafter referred to as 'the Site'). The Site has central Ordnance Survey Grid Reference HY 52995 36846.

1.2 Site Description

The Site is an uninhabited island located 1.5 km to the west of Eday (north-west of Fersness Bay) and south-east of Westray, lying between the Sound of Faray to the east and Rapness Sound to the west. Several drainage ditches run across the island, in addition to a few small, unmodified burn channels rising from the wetter areas. The shoreline comprises primarily rocky exposures and cliffs, with some beaches also present (south-eastern side of the southern tip; and in several locations along the western coastline). A number of abandoned dwellings are present, the majority of which have lost their roofing, but some of which are reasonably watertight and are used for agricultural storage.

The island is used for livestock (sheep) grazing, with a number of field enclosures present, to either side of a central track. At the time of survey, 200 head of sheep were on the island; however, this has historically been up to 850 animals.

1.3 Development Proposal

The survey was undertaken to inform a planning application for the development of a wind farm on Faray ('the Proposed Development').

2. Legislation, Policy and Guidelines

An overview of relevant legislation, policy and guidance is provided below.

2.1 Legislation

Otter is protected as a European Protected Species (EPS) under the Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 1994 (as amended). As such, it is an offence to deliberately or recklessly:

- Capture, injure or kill an otter;
- Harass an otter or group of otters;
- Disturb an otter in a holt or any other structure or place it uses for shelter or protection;
- Disturb an otter while it is rearing or otherwise caring for its young;
- Obstruct access to a holt or other structure or place otters use for shelter or protection, or otherwise deny the animal use of that place;
- Disturb an otter in a manner or in circumstances likely to significantly affect the local distribution or abundance of the species; and
- Disturb an otter in a manner or in circumstances likely to impair its ability to survive, breed or reproduce, or rear or otherwise care for its young.

It is also an offence to:

- Damage or destroy a breeding site or resting place of such an animal (whether or not deliberately or recklessly); and
- Keep, transport, sell or exchange, or offer for sale or exchange any wild otter (or any part or derivative of one) obtained after 10 June 1994.

It should be noted that otter shelters are legally protected whether an otter is present or not.

Otter is included on the Scottish Biodiversity List (SBL), where it is listed for avoidance of negative impacts (The Scottish Government, 2013). Otter is also listed as a priority species in the Orkney Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP) (Orkney's Biodiversity Steering Group, 2018).

2.2 Good Practice Ecological Guidance

As part of the protected species survey, recognisance has been taken of the following best practice guidelines/survey method publications:

- Competencies for Species Survey: Otter (CIEEM, 2018); and
- Monitoring the Otter *Lutra lutra* (Chanin, 2003).

3. Methods

3.1 Desk Study

The purpose of the desk study was to collect baseline information from the National Biodiversity Network (NBN) Atlas (NBN Atlas, 2019) and also a data request from Orkney Wildlife Information & Records Centre (OWIRC). This included any recent (i.e. within the last 10 years) records of otter within 5 km of the Site boundary.

3.2 Field Survey

The field survey of the whole island was undertaken on the 24th of August 2019, by Newton Harper, a suitably qualified field ecologist with over 25 years-worth of conservation and consultancy experience. A thorough search was undertaken of the coastal zone and up to 20m away from the shore, including a search of the field drains and short watercourse and their associated riparian zones (where suitable habitat was found to be present). Throughout the survey, overhanging banks, cavities, bankside vegetation and riparian features, such as boulders and mud, were searched for the following signs of otter use:

- Spraints – otter dung, which is used for marking territories, is often located on prominent features within the channel or on the bank (including weirs, bridges, rocks, tree roots, confluence of watercourses, etc.); and
- Footprints – located in soft mud, silt or sand banks.

Other potential evidence of otter presence was also searched for in the survey. The following signs, when interpreted in conjunction with spraints and footprints, can provide data to support an assessment of otter activity on a site. They cannot, however, be used in isolation to definitively indicate otter presence/absence:

- Resting-up places – comprising couches (areas of flattened vegetation) or hovers (lay-up areas, including ledges under rocks or hollows under fallen trees or roots);
- Potential holt sites – holes or dens;
- Runs and trails – pathways from the water into dense cover or around bankside trees;
- Slides – down banks as an entry to waterbodies; and
- Feeding remains – e.g. remains of fish, birds and amphibians.

3.2.1 Survey Limitations

The otter survey was carried out according to current recommended guidelines and took place during dry and clear weather conditions. As such, there are considered to be no limitations to the survey results.

4. Results

4.1 Desk Study

The desk study identified no existing records of otter from within the Site boundary, but three records were identified of otters within 10 km of the Site boundary, the nearest being at Mill Loch in the centre of Eday, 3 km east of the Site, and one additional record from Westray and one from Sanday.

4.2 Field Surveys

Figure 1 presents the results of the otter survey, as well as relevant Target Note (TN) locations detailing further information obtained from the survey. The results are described below; the TNs are presented in full in Annex A.

Two hovers were identified during the survey, one (TN9) in the southwest of the island and the other (TN10) on the north of the island. Both hovers were similar and identified within man-made rock structures enclosed on three sides and above. Both sites displayed historic sprainting. No evidence of a holt site was recorded during the survey.

Additionally, sprainting and feeding remains were found scattered around the edges of the island, indicating that the otters were foraging on fish, crabs and birds (TN1 – TN8).

No other definitive evidence of otter was identified during the survey. However, a local fisherman known to the surveyor, stated that he sees otters using the island and seas around the island on a regular basis.

5. Discussions and Conclusions

The identification of both recent and aged spraints and feeding remains, together with two hovers, indicate that habitats on the island are used by otters as commuting and foraging habitat and also for temporary refuge.

The island habitats were identified as generally unsuitable for holt creation and therefore permanent otter presence on the island is considered highly unlikely. The island is therefore used as part of a territory for either a lone otter or by very low numbers of animals, as indicated by the quantity and apparent age of the various items of evidence found during the survey.

6. References

Chanin, P (2003). *Monitoring the Otter Lutra Lutra*. Conserving Natura 2000 Rivers Monitoring Series No. 10. English Nature, Peterborough.

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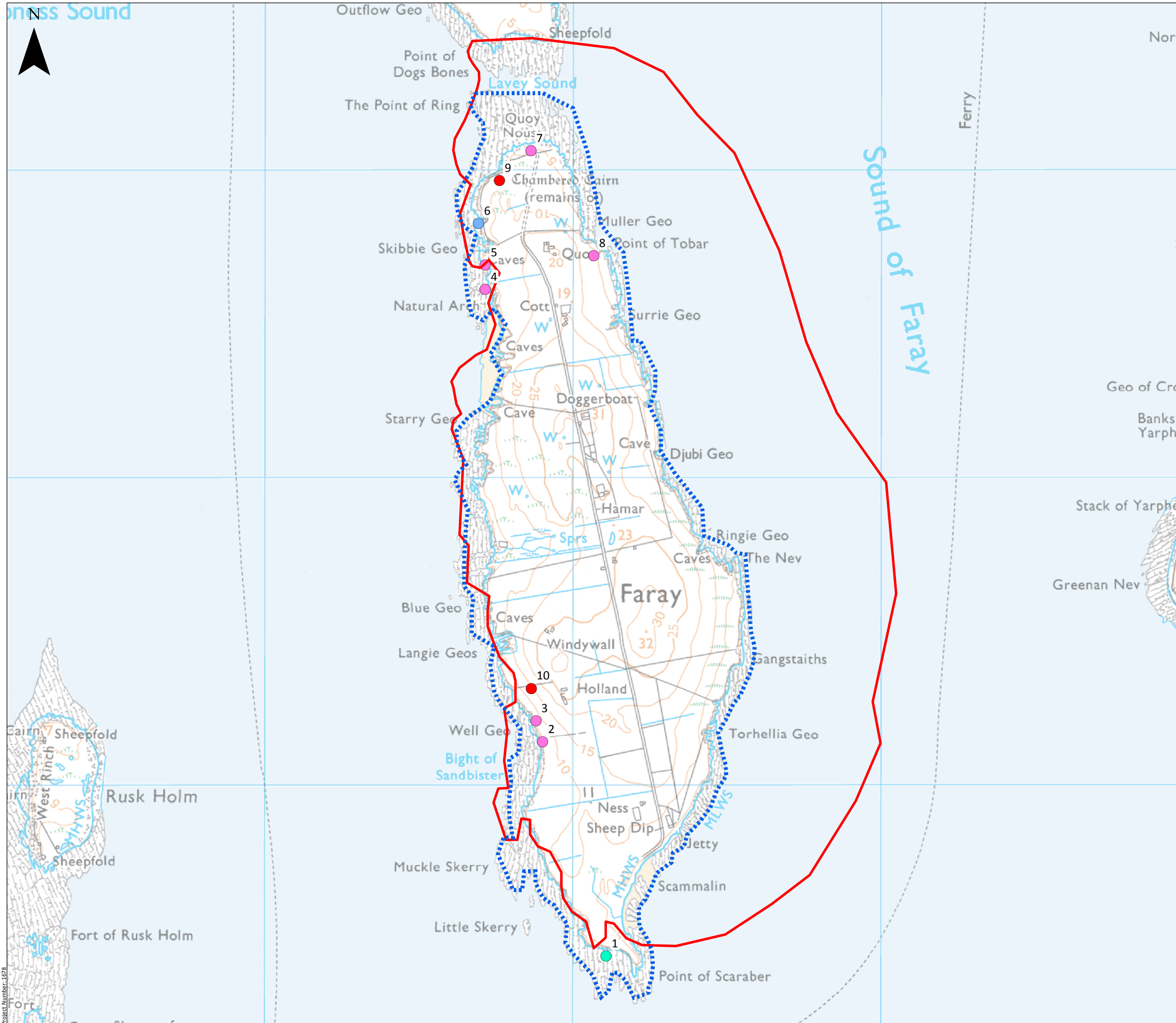
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The Scottish Government (2013). Scottish Biodiversity List. Available online at: <https://www.gov.scot/Topics/Environment/Wildlife-Habitats/16118/Biodiversitylist/SBL> (accessed May 2019).

Figure 1: Otter Survey Results

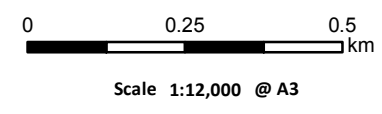


KEY

- Site Boundary
- Survey Area

Evidence of Otter

- Hover
- Spraint
- Spraint with bones
- Spraint with feathers



Orkney's Community Wind Farm Project - Faray

Figure TA8.2.1




Otter Survey Results




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Annex A. Target Notes


Target Note (TN)	Grid Reference	Description
1	353100 1035400	 <p>Crab remains in sprainting on grass</p>
2	352800 1036200	 <p>Spraint on grass</p>

Target Note (TN)	Grid Reference	Description
3	352700 1037400	 <p data-bbox="571 824 778 853">Spraint on dried mud</p>
4	352700 1037600	 <p data-bbox="571 1406 730 1435">Spraint on grass</p>
5	352700 1037700	 <p data-bbox="571 1989 730 2018">Spraint on grass</p>

Target Note (TN)	Grid Reference	Description
6	352600 1037800	  <p data-bbox="571 1305 863 1330">Spraint with feathers on grass</p>
7	352600 1037900	<p data-bbox="571 1335 815 1391">Spraint on grass. No photograph available.</p>
8	353000 1037700	 <p data-bbox="571 1955 799 1975">Recent spraint on rocks</p>

Target Note (TN)	Grid Reference	Description
9	352900 1036200	 <p data-bbox="564 1859 1380 1915">Hover. Area under rocks used as a resting place, spraint not fresh, indicating no recent use by otter</p>



Target Note (TN)	Grid Reference	Description
10	352900 1036300	 <p data-bbox="571 835 1369 887">Hover. Area under rocks used as a resting place, sprainting not fresh, indicating no recent use by otter</p>



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