

Appendix 8.2 Otter Survey Report – November 2019

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Appendix 8.2 Otter Survey Report – November 2019

Introduction

Overview

ITP Energised (ITPE) was appointed by Orkney Islands Council to undertake a survey for otter (*Lutra lutra*) at Orkney's Community Wind Farm - Hoy located in the south-east of the island of Hoy, Orkney (hereafter referred to as 'the site'). The site is centred on British National Grid (BNG) ND 27973 93844.

Site Description

The site measures approximately 488 hectares and comprises moorland with coastal pastures in the east and south, similar habitats are present north of the site, with glacial terrain (hill and valley) in the northwest of the island.

The site lies within a sloping landscape with a ridge running its full northern extent at an elevation of approximately 180 m AOD. The site drops to elevations of approximately 10 m AOD at the eastern extents of the Burn of Ore and the access track. The land to the south of the site rises back up to c.150 m AOD at Binga Fea.

The Burn of Ore flows from west to east across the southern extent of the site, with three small tributaries joining from the north.

Aims

The otter survey was undertaken to inform the planning application for the Proposed Development.

Legislation and Biodiversity

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

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;
- 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).

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).

Methods

Overview

This section describes the methods used for the otter survey, which comprised a combination of desk study and field survey

Desk Study

The purpose of the desk study was to collect baseline information from publicly available data including the National Biodiversity Network (NBN) Atlas (NBN Atlas, 2019). A data request was sent to Orkney Wildlife Information & Records Centre (OWIRC), although due to the COVID-19 lockdown the centre was closed. This included any recent (i.e. within the last 10 years) records of otter within 2km of the site boundary.

Field Surveys

The Proposed Development had undertaken a number of design iterations prior to the commencement of the survey which therefore covered the six turbine developable area and a 250m buffer (the ‘Study Area’) was undertaken in combination with the NVC survey between 16-21 November 2019.

A thorough search was undertaken of the riparian zone and up to 20m away from the water’s edge (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.

Survey Limitations

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

Baseline

Desk Study

The only record of otter located was from May 2011, otter spraints and lie-ups were recorded on Burn of Ore, near Ore Farm, approximately 1km southeast of the access track from T1 to T2, but c2.5 km downstream of the confluence of Burn of Longigill with Burn of Ore. There were no signs of otters away from the main burn (Orkney Sustainable Energy, 2011).

Survey Results

No evidence of otter was identified within the Study Area or the 250m survey buffer. Although no evidence of otter was recorded during the survey it was noted that the watercourses such as Burn of Ore south of the site may be utilised by otter for commuting between areas more suitable for foraging such as Heldale Water and the coast east of Lyness.

Recommendations

Although the presence of otter is deemed unlikely within the site in order to prevent possible harm or injury to otter the following recommendations, endorsed by SNH (SNH, 2019) are advised:

- Avoid damage or disturbance to otters or otter habitat, including avoiding any obstructions to established otter access to open water;
- Cap exposed pipe systems when contractors are off site, and cover or provide exit ramps from exposed trenches or holes, to prevent otters becoming trapped; and
- On-site vehicles restricted to 10 mph.

References

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