

## Otter and Water Vole Report for the Rivers Ems and Lavant.

I have trawled through old hunt records for both the Courtenay Tracy and Crowhurst Otter hounds who both hunted around this area and have found no evidence of them hunting either the Lavant or Ems. This covers the period right up to the cessation of otter hunting in 1978.

There have been three National Otter surveys, 1984-1986, 1991-1994 and 2000-2002, which just cover 25 survey sites around this area. More specifically this covers sites on the Lavant, Ems, Pagham and the River Wellington to the west. All of these proved negative for otter.

From personal observations, I would not consider either the Ems or Lavant as potential rivers for otter colonisation. They are both very small catchments, often have very little water in them (especially winterbourne sections) are very disturbed. I do not know anything about their productivity but I doubt they could ever support a resident population. As always they could form part links to more important adjoining catchments, like the rivers Arun and Western Rother to the north and the Wallington to the West.

Although there are no records for otters currently on the Chichester floodplain the Pagham Harbour Nature Reserve and the many connecting ditches towards Chichester Harbour provide lots of opportunities if otters were ever to get back here by natural expansion along the coast. Of interest we did have an otter washed up on the beach near the estuary of the River Arun at Littlehampton in 2001. It later transpired that it had originally come from the River Itchen as it exactly matched the DNA profile of one of our animals from there!!!

Of greater interest is the presence of Water Voles, which appear to be hanging on well on many of the small chalk rivers and ditch systems that feed down to Pagham, Chichester and Langstone Harbours. On the River Ems, The Brook Meadows Conservation Group regularly monitors a population of water voles on the meadows in Emsworth. We have more specific data for this site if you need it. We also have small amounts of evidence of water voles at GR SLJ754071 New Brighton and OR SU766080 NE Westbourne. There use to be good populations all along the Ems and with a raising (or retention of water levels and more sympathetic bankside management, I would think we could restore them to the whole of this catchment I expect we could involve the Brook Meadows Conservation Group (450 members) in achieving this!

I went back to survey the Lavant this year and virtually all of it above Chichester was dry. As you know the channel has been completely messed about with and is very manicured and maintained. The banks are very compounded in parts or very gravely which would not be conducive for water vole recolonisation. I have not had a chance to survey the gravel pits at Westhampnett. This area is part of the "flood storage area for the Lavant" even though they have built "Sainsburys" on a large part of it!!! When the whole area completely flooded out some years ago any riparian habitats were inundated for days—again this is not Conducive for water voles.

Below Chichester and including sections of the Chichester Canal water voles can still be found .A comprehensive survey of the whole Chichester Coastal Plain was carried out between 2001 and 2003 as part of "Restoring Water Voles and other Biodiversity to the Wider Countryside"—A report on the Chichester Coastal Plain Sustainable Fanning Partnership. This was a partnership led by Wild Cru and FWAG but involved West Sussex County Council, EA, SE Otters and Rivers (Me and Frannie) and various others. I will give you a copy of this report.

There may be some opportunity to encourage water voles back into the Lavant but there would have to be a massive change in the adjoining land management to ensure water levels were maintained and riparian management would have to reflect a change to. With the flooding still raw in some people's minds this would be challenging.

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