



## Information Note: Otter holt challenge



**Otter numbers declined during the 1950's, mainly due to use of pesticides, hunting and habitat destruction. By the 1970's otters were on the brink of extinction in Wales. However, conservation efforts and legal protection have supported a steady population recovery along the rivers and coast of Wales.**

Otters are shy, playful mammals well adapted to life in the water. They have a long, streamlined body, which can grow up to 1.2m in length in males (dogs) and 1m in females (bitches).

With their webbed feet and powerful tail, they can swim at up to 12km per hour underwater but they do have to come to the surface for air.

They eat mostly fish, birds, small mammals, amphibians, crustaceans and molluscs.

Otters can live in most types of wetland including floodplain woodland, reedbeds, rivers and fens, where there is undisturbed water and plenty of undergrowth.

The nocturnal otter needs safe 'lying up' sites to rest in during the day.

Natural resting sites would be found under bank-side tree roots, or in dense undergrowth adjacent to healthy rivers particularly, under mature ash and oak tree roots.

Each otter requires around 30 sites in its territory, which can be up to 12 miles for a dog otter.

Over time, many bank-side trees have been removed for a range of reasons, such as flood protection, invasive species management, tree disease, etc. The reduction of natural materials available for otter holt building in some areas has led to conservationists installing artificial otter holts on some sites. Materials used for their creation depend on what is available, the cost, riverside accessibility, etc. They are built where there is minimal disturbance from humans and their dogs.

### Holt designs include:

- a log pile holt made from logs and brash
- a buried pipe and chamber holt built with breeze blocks, paving slabs and drainage pipe
- floating/raft holts and living holts using cut willow



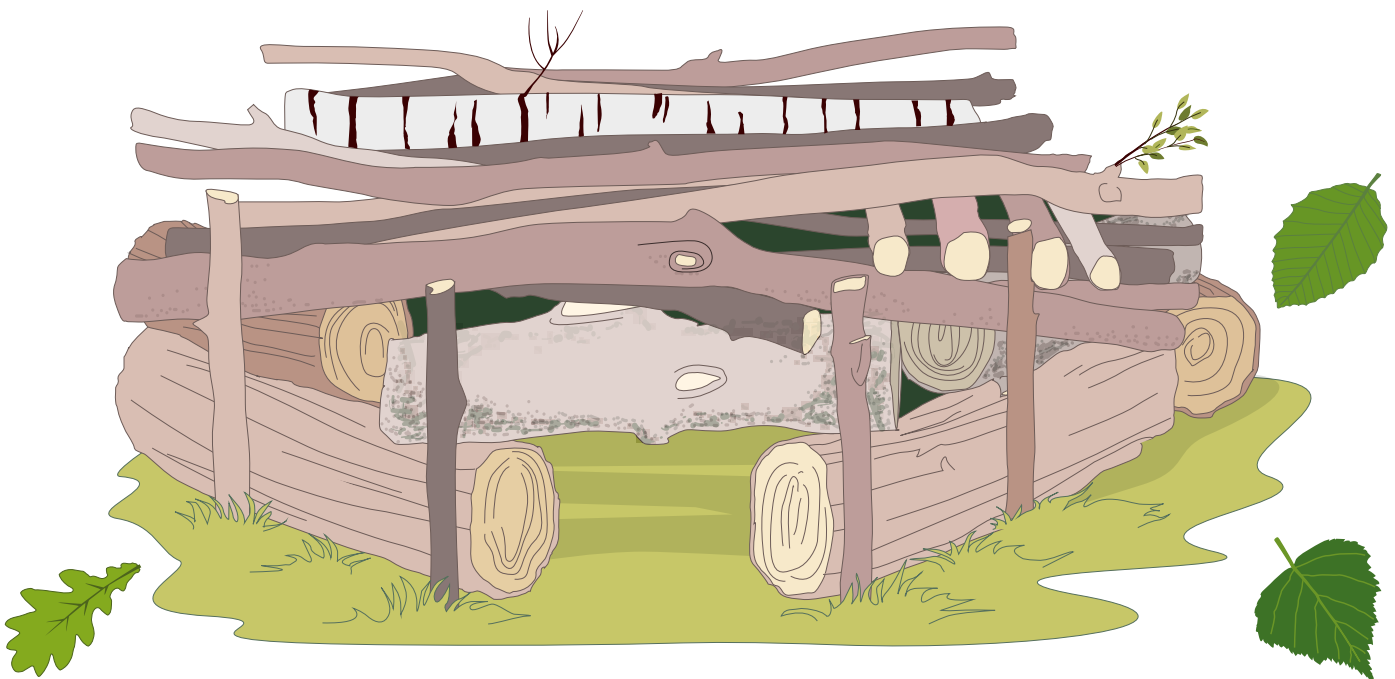
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### Otter Holt Challenge

Why not try your hand at building an otter holt?

You will need:

- a large, flat space
- access to a selection of logs, poles and brash
- to work as part of a group



#### Step 1

Use the logs to design your otter holt layout with the following features:

- 1 A riverside entrance and a landward entrance (min 20cm wide)
- 2 Interconnecting rooms/passages (min 25cm wide)
- 3 A cosy bedding chamber (approx. 50cm<sup>2</sup>)

#### Step 2

Use the poles to make a ceiling, which will support the roof.

#### Step 3

Use the brash pile to create a roof and cover all gaps.

### Looking for more learning resources, information & data?

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or go to [www.naturalresources.wales/learning](http://www.naturalresources.wales/learning)

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