



Virtual Fisheries Forum 19/11/20 - Maintaining Your Otter Fence

Q&A Session with Richard Bamforth, FMA

Q. You must have lots of experience with trail cams. Can you recommend a good one? How much should I spend?

A. Richard Bamforth: As the old adage goes, you get what you pay for - and this is true of trail cams. I know many people who swore by cheap models from Aldi. NatureSpy is a good website for exploring the various cameras and offers a great service. Most trail cams cost from around £50 up to £200-300 for a higher spec model. Jake and I as Fisheries Management Advisors use a combination of Browning, Stealthcam and Spypoint cameras.

Q. We installed Tornado fencing 2 years ago having suffered an otter incursion. We are in the Norfolk Broads so otters abound. Unaware that otters climb trees! Is this a real danger?

A. Richard Bamforth: If you are talking about a single vertical tree trunk going straight up then there should be nothing to worry about. If the tree has lots of low horizontal branches etc which an otter can use to weave its way up however, this would be a concern. I have images of an otter several metres up a tree. I also have trail cam footage of otters climbing a 1.75m vertical fence. Be aware of any tree preservation orders, nesting birds, hibernating bats etc when looking to manage trees near your fence. Any leaning trees or branches that would allow an otter up and over a fence should be removed.

Q: You mentioned that using brush cutters around the bottom of a fence should be undertaken with caution given the potential for damage. What can you use safely?

A: Richard Bamforth: Use a brush cutter to make the basic path around the fence, but don't be then tempted to go too close and risk damaging the fence material. Changing to a nylon trimmer cord is a possibility but may still damage rabbit/ chicken wire hexagonal mesh. You could also spray off the area around the bottom of the fence line with a herbicide 2-3 times a year.

Q. You mentioned rabbits a couple of times and the problems they can cause otter fences. If they are a problem, how are they best managed?

A. Richard Bamforth: Some fisheries will be able to control the rabbits, others might not. It could be that you have a warren on the inside – you would need

to clear that warren before rabbit proofing the boundary fence with chicken wire, which would prevent new rabbits from entering.

Q. Where can I get information on electric fences, such as specs etc?

A. Richard Bamforth: I am very cautious around plain electric wires. A barrier is still important to make the electric wire effective so please bear this in mind. For information and specs, I would suggest visiting any respectable agricultural merchants who will advise. Many have free catalogues available.

Q. What do you suggest to spray with at the bottom of the fence line?

A. Richard Bamforth: At this moment in time Roundup (Glyphosate). It's a chemical currently under the spotlight and how much longer it will be available to purchase I don't know. Ideally you won't be using it in very close proximity to your water anyway, but if you do you'll need personnel qualified to PA1W. Anyone using the spray should have proper training through PA1/ PA6.

Q. How often do you need to check a fence that goes through the water?

A. Richard Bamforth: Any kind of wire mesh which enters the water is going to corrode far quicker than a mesh on dry land, therefore it is very important to check this regularly. Either feeling with your hands or boots works well along the submerged areas of the fence line.

Q. We have spoken to the landowner about a single barbed wire fence a metre from the proposed otter fence. He says not to do it. How much do you think this is needed?

A. Richard Bamforth: The principle reason for the single or double strand of barbed wire fence, off-set 1m from the otter fence, is purely and simply to prevent farm livestock, but essentially cattle from rubbing against the posts which in turn may cause them to either break off or lean inwards over time. Cattle are also heavy enough that their hooves will damage the fence at ground level should they stand on it, or 'poach' an area of ground around the otter fence. Horned sheep have been known to get caught in the mesh and splay the wires. The advantage of a single (or double wire) barbed wire fence is that it still allows the cattle to lean through and graze that narrow strip of grassland, without damaging the actual otter fence.