



Virtual Fisheries Forum 26/01/2022 (Keeping Your Otter Fence Secure).

Q&A session

Q. Rabbits can splay the netting as witnessed at our site. Surely the knots are meant to lock and as such shouldn't splay?

A. (Richard Bamforth) You can watch younger rabbits and they will zip in/out through the bespoke otter fencing product mesh freely but as they get bigger, they may begin to splay the mesh as they squeeze through, especially large buck rabbits and especially on the 50x120mm sections. Knots in wire mesh should lock but sadly it is evident they do slip despite manufacturers claims. This may have resulted from damage whilst unrolling, or subsequent becoming snagged whilst tensioning, or simply damage, wear & tear over time. Alternatively, it may be caused by damage from other mammals, e.g., badgers or livestock. It's a case of regular checking to fix splays as they arise.

Q. Is there a mechanism to book a site review from the Angling Trust FMA's? We think we are secure but seeing this presentation has made me have doubts!

A. (Richard Bamforth) Yes, that's one of mine and Jake Davoile's primary job roles to visit sites and advise on Otter Fencing around fisheries. The service is free of charge. Please get in touch.

Q. If you secure a fence with an Otter inside how would you get them out?

A. (Alex Clegg) I believe Richard and Jake our FMA's hold what is referred to as a CL36 license to be able to live trap Otters for subsequent movement immediately outside of fenced fishery sites, to prevent serious damage. But the fence must meet certain specific specifications as determined by Natural England

A. (Richard Bamforth) Yes that is correct, however, only those people who are registered under the CL36 licence are permitted to trap. It is

important to note that the licence permits that we can only move the otter's immediately outside the fence for release and not for example drive them 20+ miles away before release elsewhere. If the fence is not secure, there is the obvious risk that they will simply gain entry again through the original weakness. Hence, my phrase - you must ensure that your fence is bomb proof. Experience has illustrated that 99% of the time otters are simply coming and going even though the fisheries assume an Otter is trapped inside their fence.

Q. What is the smallest pipe an otter can squeeze down? Our fishery has 150mm inlets and a 300mm outlet, both several metres long?

A. (Richard Bamforth) As a general rule of thumb if you can fit your fist through a hole an Otter can squeeze through it. An Otter could be in and out of a 150mm diameter pipe easily let alone 300mm. Depending on the situation, ideally take a cordless drill, put holes in the top & bottom of the pipe and insert a non-flexing bar through to secure the entry point, which will still allow water to flow. The gaps between the bars should be no more than 2"/50mm apart.

Q. We have a 4" plastic drain running in from a neighbouring pool, could an Otter travel down the drain?

A. (Richard Bamforth) In theory yes but the same vertical bar block strategy as recommended to the previous question will be sufficient to secure the opening. Obviously, it's all relative to the size of the otter and the distance of the pipe underground. Trail cameras are an excellent aid to figure out what is going on if you suspect Otters are gaining entry through a certain point like this and I would strongly recommend checking the footage to ensure the Otter is outside the fence before doing the work to secure the pipe.

Q. Can an otter climb a vertical tree adjacent to a fence and jump across to clear the fence, is there a recommended set distance between trees and fence?

A. (Richard Bamforth) The footage shown demonstrates that they can at least come down trees and I assume that is how the otter reached that point originally, but I think it will be a very extreme case for an Otter to climb a large vertical tree and then jump. Leaning trees are another

matter where an Otter could more easily elevate itself and slide over a fence barrier, before jumping down.

Q. Is it known how far an otter will travel along a dry 100mm pipe and secondly, how far might they go if the pipe is running full bore?

A. (Richard Bamforth) Trail cameras are best to figure out what is going on if you suspect Otters are gaining entry through a pipe. I don't know how far one would be willing to travel through a 100mm pipe, but I wouldn't write off the possibility of Otter's accessing via the pipe until you have monitored with trail cameras for a good time period. As for an Otter going through when the pipe is at full bore, it's all relative and I would suggest this depends on the velocity of the water. They are more likely to wait for the pressure of the water to subside.

Q. How do you feel about netting with a ground skirt but no overhang, but 2 lines of electric?

A. (Richard Bamforth) Sounds fine, but the nature of some sites will dictate that an overhang is not possible. As for the electric, providing that it is well maintained and not shorting out, sufficiently powerful enough and possibly even running on 2 separate circuits so if one fails the other keeps going. In these situations, I prefer to see a barrier style fence used in conjunction with electric scare wires. Please get in touch and we can discuss the specifics further of your fence in question.

Statement. I've met Jake Davoile (Angling Trust FMA) 3 years ago and his advice was fantastic, but we are still trying to raise the 15k to put the fence up!

A. (Alex Clegg) Good otter fences are not cheap but there is some funding support available towards fencing projects soon is that right Richard?

A. (Richard Bamforth) Yes, the Angling Improvement Fund (AIF) will be announced at the end of February this year where clubs, fisheries and other angling organisations can apply for financial help towards Otter fencing.

A. (Alex Clegg) There will be a virtual fisheries forum specifically about the AIF and how to be successful in application coming soon so keep an eye out on our social media for when it is advertised.

Q. Which Angling Trust FMA covers the midlands area?

A. (Richard Bamforth) If you drop me an email, I'll confirm who is most local as we share the midlands on a case-by-case basis.

Q. I've heard fish farmers saying they chicken mesh the bottom of their otter fence to stop rabbits splaying the mesh. Is there any scope to change the mesh so the bottom section has much smaller apertures? Chicken mesh does not last etc? Obviously, this also excludes more non otter animals.

A. (Richard Bamforth) Yes, that is a viable means of preventing Rabbit splaying issues along with hexagonal (Chicken/rabbit) netting. Obviously given the gauge of the hexagonal mesh it certainly does not last as long as heavier grades, especially at the interface with ground level, or waterlogged areas. There are also mesh products out there which have tapered mesh gape starting narrow (50x50mm) at the foot of the fence and getting to standard gape size (50x100mm) further up above where Rabbits would be an issue. Horse netting is the technical name I believe, but please check the sizes, but please check with the suppliers/manufacturers.

Q. How effective is electric fencing?

A. (Richard Bamforth) Some sites have had great success with electric fences. Provided it is installed correctly, you have a fast current that is powerful enough and the fence has clear pathways each side and is checked frequently to remove debris, or anything which could short the circuit they can be highly effective. When considering electric fences, I do personally prefer a barrier fence, incorporating scare wires rather than relying solely on plain electric scare wire.

Q. Is use of barbed wire at the top and bottom of the fence a good blockage for keeping Otters from climbing over/digging under?

A. (Richard Bamforth) Again many people swear by using barbed wire in this fashion. The line of barbed wire towards ground level is often used specifically for badger fences as well to try and deter them from damaging the lower part of the netting. A determined Otter will likely find a way eventually to slink through where the barbed wire is off set above the top of the netting, specifically at mid-point between the intermediary posts.

Q. Are there any other cheaper methods to deter Otters?

A. (Richard Bamforth) People will use motion activated lights/sonic noise generating cameras which will startle the animal, but these are often not effective in the long term. Alternatively, the otter(s) will simply move to another area which is not covered by a motion camera etc. Human presence will help, but it is unrealistic to have people patrolling 24/7. Similarly, you will often see otters in close proximity to people, where to a degree they have become habituated to human presence. A secure, well maintained otter fence is the only reliable way to prevent Otter predation from impacting on high value Stillwater fish stocks.

Q. Do you know the rough installation costs for fencing a 5-acre water, please?

A. (Richard Bamforth) Installation cost all depends on your preferred method of fencing, e.g., plain electric wires vs bespoke otter fencing products and site-specific characteristics, e.g., topography, machinery access etc. I'd say give me a ring and we can discuss it in more detail, or invite a few contractors to quote for the proposed works

Q. Does the Angling Trust have a list of recommended contractors? If so, I work for a fencing contractor, and we put up a lot of otter fencing. How could we be included on such a list?

A. (Richard Bamforth) No there is no preferred contractor list. I will usually direct people towards other fisheries local to them that have had work done so they can see the finished fence products and then they can make an informed choice for themselves. Alternatively, I may provide details of a few contractors within a geographical area.

Q. We have had to extend the overhang on our fence, also we have put a three-strand electric fence to stop them climbing. So far it seems to work. The wires are arranged with two close in and one further out. All the area around the fence is sprayed off. Is this enough?

A. (Richard Bamforth) Only time will tell, just keep maintaining the fence and inspecting the site. Maintenance and attention to detail is vitally important and particularly at key times of year like the back end of the year and through the winter months.

Q. There have been a lot of fences erected in the last couple of years. What is the life expectancy of a professionally installed fence?

A. (Richard Bamforth) This is a question for the manufacturers of the particular fence materials really. Some materials are obviously more robust and resilient than others. Ground conditions also play a large role in determining the life expectancy of materials, whether that be posts or the actually netting.

Q. Have you ever seen an otter climb over the typical overhang style fence?

A. (Richard Bamforth) When you say 'typical' I assume you are referring to the 500mm cranked, 45-degree overhang? If so, I have not personally but I wouldn't rule it out as a possibility. There are rumours this has occurred but to the best of my knowledge no video evidence has so far materialised.

Q. Great stuff, but we are in Wales. Are these facilities/funding supports mentioned available our side of the border?

A. (Richard Bamforth) I'm afraid Jake and I can only visit fisheries within England. I feel for many fisheries in Wales who will be in the same predicament, but obviously I can offer advice over the phone. If it's an extreme case, we may be able to visit, but I would first need to have that approved, so please don't rule that out.

In terms of funding, I would suggest you contact NRW and your local fisheries officer. But, by all means, give me a call and we can discuss the matter further.

Q. More a comment not a question, please advise that some herbicide spray can cause wire to rust, also strimming so that the fence gets whacked with the s trimmer cord is harmful to the galvanised wire?

A. (Richard Bamforth) There are pros and cons to all of it. It's tough to find a balance between the vegetation becoming overgrown to the point of being unable to inspect the fence line for weaknesses, but intern also not seeking to risk damaging/splying of the fence wires which a strimmer can do. You are right that some herbicides can weaken materials also. Be sensible and only do what you feel is safe and necessary.

Q. Once a fishery is fenced, is there any formal recognition that removal of a captive Otter can take place?

A. (Richard Bamforth) Yes, by those who are licensed to live trap under the CL36 licence and move an Otter to the area immediately outside of a fenced fishery. Please get in touch to discuss the matter in more detail. (Please also refer to the questions below).

Q. if you're in the process of erecting an otter fence are there any precautions you can take to prevent an otter getting trapped inside?

A. (Richard Bamforth) Obviously European otters are afforded full legal protection in the UK. If you are aware of an otter holt within the proposed area to be fenced, then you must consult with Natural England. Similarly, nobody wishes to see an otter inadvertently fenced within a site, so careful measures should be taken to avoid that event. Some methods may also be determined to require consent from NE, so again please get in touch with NE or ourselves and we can advise accordingly.

Statement. Not a question really, just an idea for others. Use scaffold tubes instead of wooden posts! Last for years and same price or cheaper than treated wooden ones.

A. (Richard Bamforth) Yes, scaffold poles will last well, but I would suggest this should be balanced with the visual setting of the site and their appearance. People also use recycled plastic posts which are particularly good for wet boggy areas compared to wooden posts which tend to rot more readily.

Key contacts from this forum meeting:

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