

# OTTERS



## Introduction

The Wildwood Animal Workbooks for Key Stage 2 include Badgers, Otters, Frogs and Wolves. Each workbook follows a standardised pattern so that children can select different animals to study but still cover the same themes.

The activity sheets are appropriate for use either as an introduction before a visit or as follow up work. Each activity sheet is designed to link in with and support National Curriculum Programmes of Study for different subjects, including Science, Literacy, Numeracy and Art. There are also Key Stage 1 workbooks covering the same animals to aid differentiation.

## Activity Sheets

The following list gives details of the activity sheets contained in the workbook, including the relevant National Curriculum P.O.S and the learning objectives which each sheet covers.

### Adaptation



SUBJECT:

**Science**

P.O.S:

Sc2 - Living things in their environment

LEARNING OBJECTIVES: To understand that different animals are found in different habitats.

To understand that animals are suited to the environment in which they are found.

### Food Chains and Teeth



SUBJECT:

**Science**

P.O.S:

Sc2 - Living things in their environment

LEARNING OBJECTIVES: To understand that most food chains start with a green plant.

To identify the structure of a food chain of a specific animal.

To identify important features of an animal's mouth in relation to its diet.



## Food Chains and Diet



SUBJECTS:

Science & Numeracy

P.O.S:

Sc2 - Humans and Other Animals  
Ma4 - Processing, representing and interpreting data.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

To understand that different animals have different diets.

To present evidence about foods eaten by an animal in a suitable bar chart.

## Habitats and Homes



SUBJECT:

Science

P.O.S:

Sc2 - Living things in their environment

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

To identify different types of habitats.

## Tracks and Signs



SUBJECT:

Science

P.O.S:

Sc2 - Living things in their environment

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

To identify otters according to observable features.

## Human Impact and Conservation



SUBJECT:

Science

P.O.S:

Sc2 - Living things in their environment

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

To recognise ways in which living things and the environment need protection.



## Myths and Legends



SUBJECT:

Literacy

P.O.S:

En2 - Myths, Legends & Traditional Stories

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

To understand the difference between myths and legends and fact.

## Quiz



SUBJECTS:

Literacy & Science

P.O.S:

En2 - Reading for information  
Sc2 - Living things in their environment

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

To scan texts to find information.

## The Wildwood Otters



SUBJECTS:

Art

P.O.S:

Exploring and developing ideas

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

To record from first hand observation.

## Life Cycle



SUBJECT:

Science

P.O.S:

Sc2 - Living things in their environment

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

To understand that adults have young and that these grow into adults which in turn produce young.



## Activity



SUBJECT:

P.O.S:

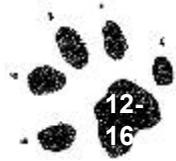
LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

**Literacy**

En2 - Reading strategies

To recognise words and show understanding of their meanings.

## Activity



SUBJECTS:

P.O.S:

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

**Art & English**

Investigating and making art, craft and design

En2 - Nonfiction and nonliterary texts.

To develop control of tools and techniques in art and design.

To understand the structural and organisational features of instructions.

## Glossary



SUBJECTS:

P.O.S:

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

**Science & English**

Sc2 - Life processes and living things

En3 - Spelling

To develop understanding of scientific vocabulary.

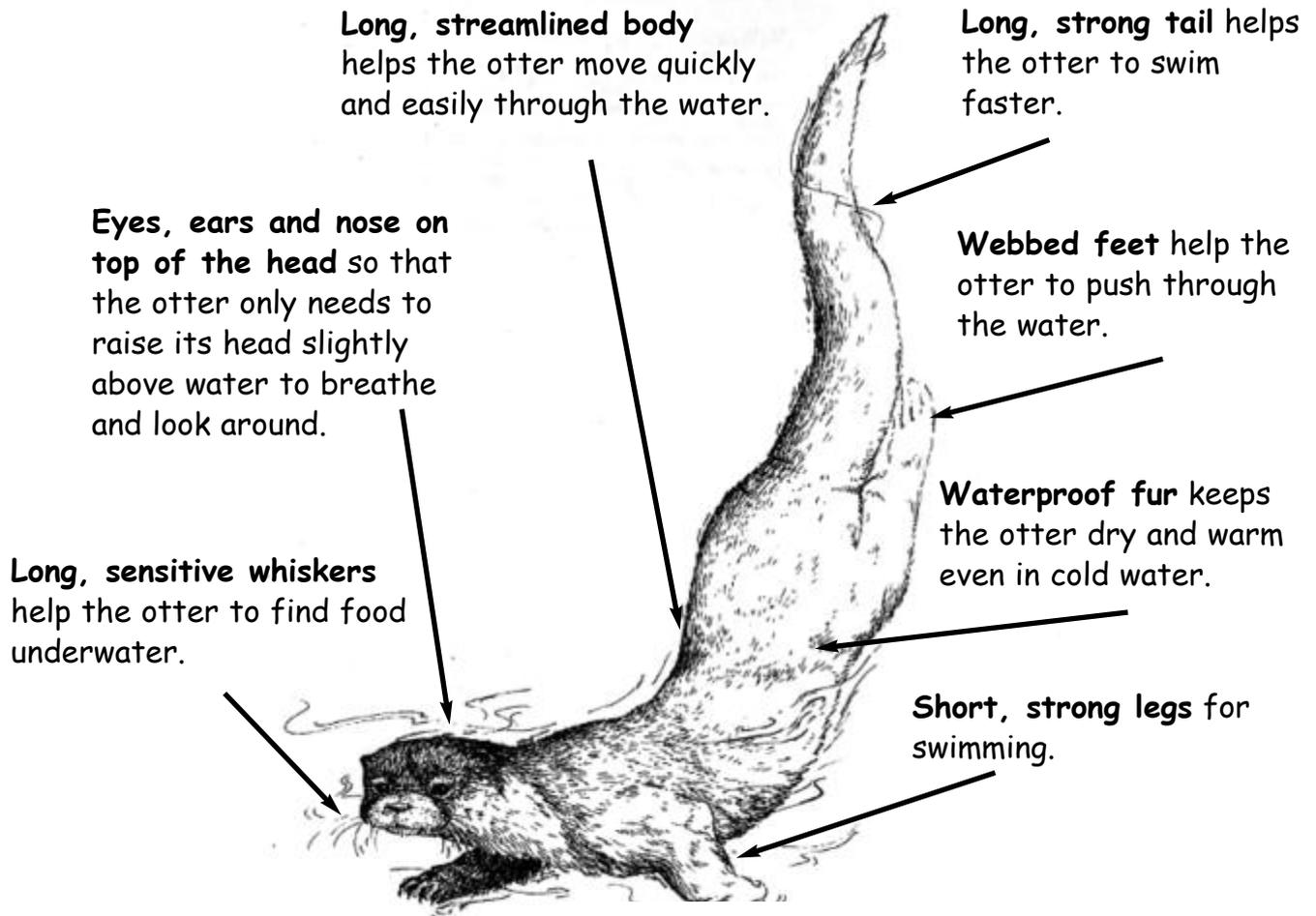
To have a secure understanding of the purpose and organisation of a glossary.

Please note that throughout the pack, underlined words can be found in the glossary.



## Life in the Water

Otters are members of the weasel family, a group of mammals which also includes the weasel, stoat and badger. Otters live near water and they have lots of features which help them to swim and catch their food under water.



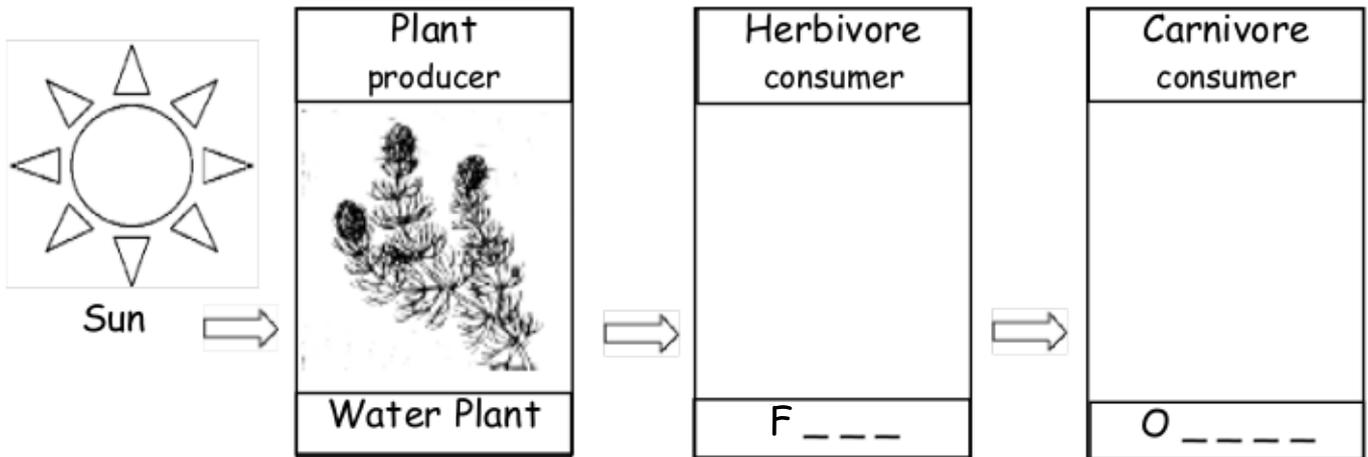
Question: Why do you think otters have such long whiskers?

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## Food Chains and Teeth

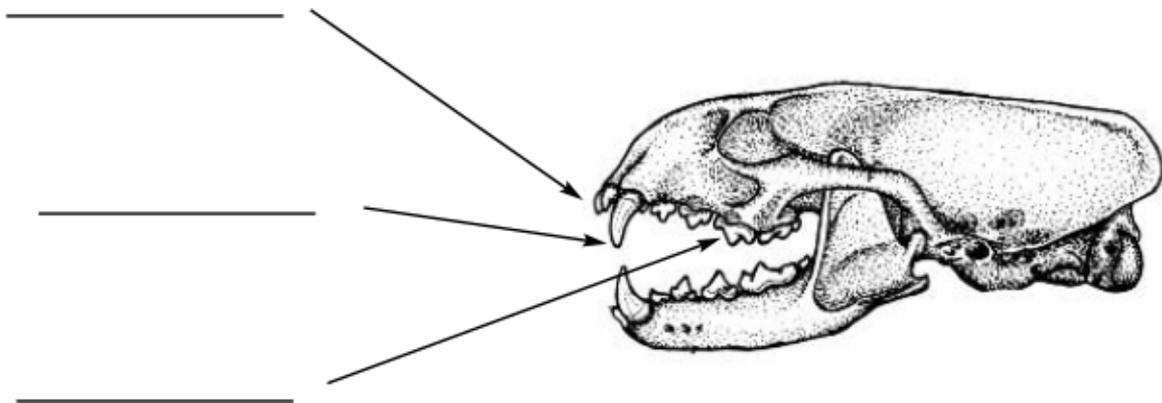
Can you draw and fill in the gaps of this simple food chain?



Otters have sharp teeth which are used mainly for eating fish, crabs, frogs and ducks. The teeth are different shapes with

- small incisors for cutting
- canines for holding and tearing
- carnassial teeth for shearing flesh.

Can you name the different type of teeth on this otter skull?



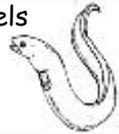
# Feeding Time

Otters are hunters or predators. They mainly eat fish, which makes up about 75% (three quarters) of their diet. Otters eat fish that are easy to catch. Otters that live near freshwater will take the slower swimming fish, particularly eels if they can. Otters that live near the sea catch bottom-dwelling fish because they are slow.

Because prey behaviour changes throughout the year, an otter's diet will also change in different seasons. Eels are taken more often in the summer as they burrow in the mud in the winter where they are hard for otters to find. Roach and salmon are easier to catch in the winter when the water is colder and the fish swim more slowly.

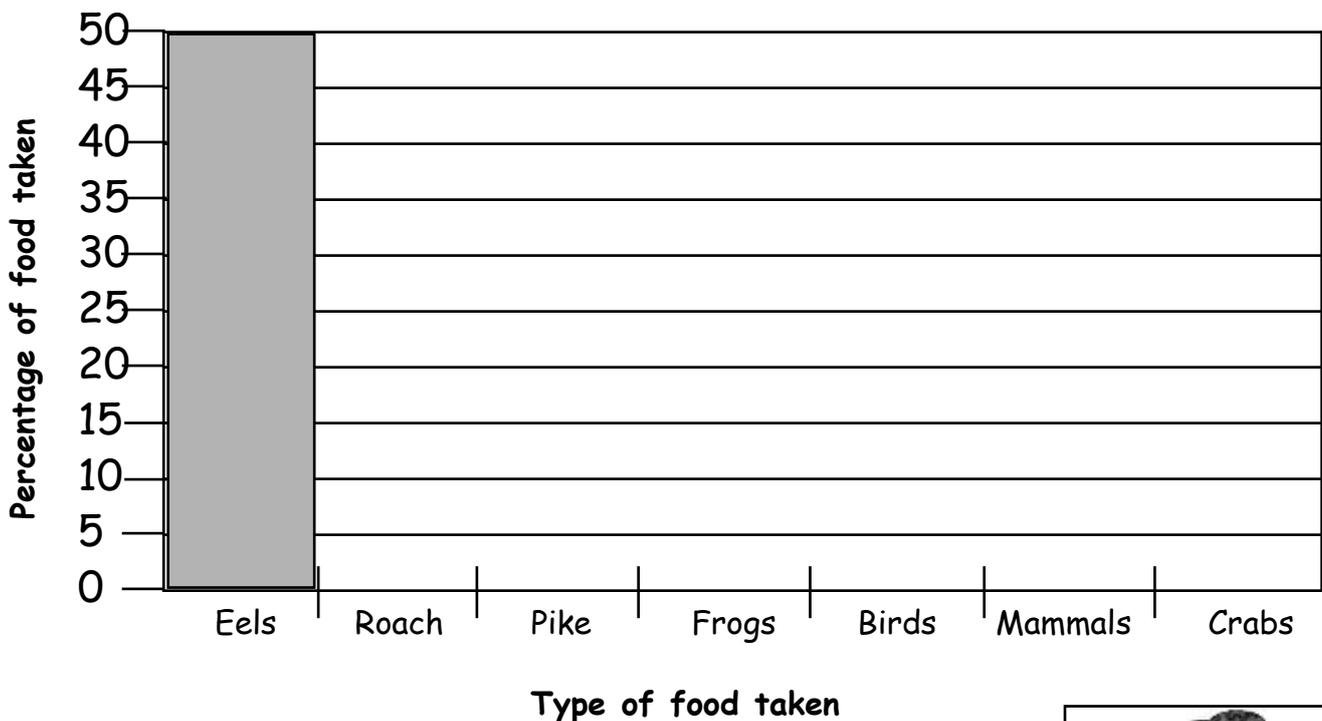
Although otters specialize on fish they are opportunistic animals and will eat whatever they can get. Other animals taken include crabs, frogs, ducks and mammals.

Percentage (fraction out of 100) of different types of food taken by one otter over one month

	Eels 	Roach 	Pike 	Frogs 	Birds 	Mammals 	Crabs 
Percentage % taken	<b>50</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>

Can you complete the bar chart below using the information from the table?  
(To help you, eel numbers have been done for you).

Percentage of different foods taken by an otter over one month



## Habitats and Homes

Otters like to live near the water, in a place where there are plenty of bushes and undergrowth to hide in. This is their favourite habitat. Otters live in holes up to 10m underground which we call holts. They may use old rabbit burrows or natural holes among bankside rocks or the roots of certain trees. Otters don't like to dig their own holes! Some otters in Scotland live close to the sea; we call them coastal otters. They have their holts among the rocks and caves of the sea shore.



Can you see the  
entrance to the holt?



As well as their holts, otters also have daytime resting places which may be under a bush or inside a pile of brushwood. These are called couches.

### Marking their home

Otters are solitary animals - this means that outside the breeding season males and females live apart. However, family groups will form when the female has babies. We call these kits. The kits may stay with their mum for about a year or sometimes longer.



Male otters and family groups have their own territories. These are areas where they live which are defended by the animal that lives there. Otters mark their territory by leaving smelly droppings, which we call spraints, in places where they can be easily seen.

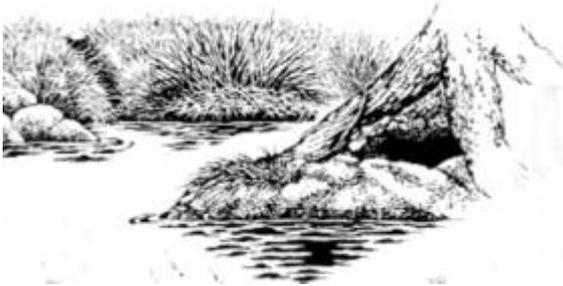
Question: Can you think of any places along a river bank where an otter might leave a dropping?

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# Tracks and Signs

Otters are very shy animals and are not often active during the day. They are therefore very rarely seen in the wild. In order to discover where otters live, you need to become an otter detective and look for the signs that they leave behind.



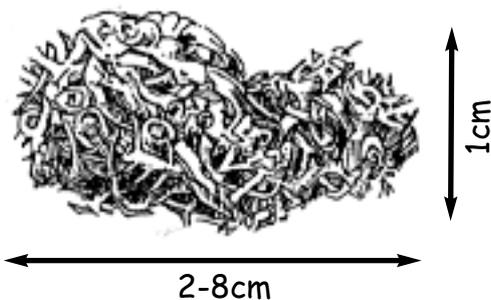
## Otter Holts

Look out for holes in the bank amongst waterside trees with large roots or piles of sticks and brambles at the edge of the water. Otters that live by the sea may make their home in rocky hollows along the coast.



## Tracks

Soft mud, sand or snow are the best places to look for otter prints because they show up well. You might see trails leading to the water or patches of earth next to the water where the plants have been trampled and the ground smoothed. This might be a 'rolling place' where the otter rolls on the ground to get dry. Pathways leading down to a river or lake bank into the water may be used as slides by otters for play.



## Otter droppings

These are called spraints. They usually contain lots of fishbones and scales. Otters leave them in places where they can easily be seen. This might be on top of a boulder, on a grass tussock or molehill, on sand bars or ledges under bridges.



Can you see any signs of otters in our otter enclosure? Write down or draw a picture of any signs you see.



## Otters and Humans



In the past otters have been killed for their fur, because it is very thick and could be used to make warm clothing. Fishermen also wanted them to be killed because they thought that the otters ate the fish which they wanted to catch. They have also been killed just for sport by hunting with special dogs called otter hounds. Otter hunting used to be known as the "sport of kings" and became fashionable in Elizabethan times. However, it was not until the 18th century that it became a sport for its own sake.

More recently (in the 1960s) otters were affected by the use of pesticides. These were poisonous to otters. Farmers would spray pesticides onto their crops but some would wash off in the rain and trickle away into rivers. Then the poisons would get into the bodies of fish. Otters would eat the fish and become poisoned. Nowadays farmers use pesticides which are not so poisonous to wildlife.

### How can we help otters?

Otters are now protected by law and it is against the law to kill or trap them or disturb their breeding areas. The best way that we can help otters is by looking after their wetland habitat. Creating more suitable habitat might also help otters to increase in numbers again.

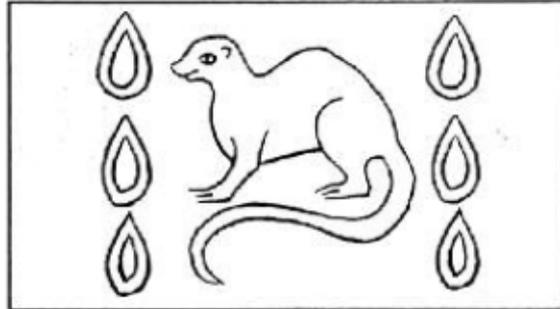
Have a look at this list and put a tick next to the things that an otter **would** like and a cross next to the things an otter **would not** like.

1. A dirty river with very few fish.
2. A clean river with lots of fish.
3. Few or no trees on the riverbank.
4. Lots of trees and bushes on the riverbank.



## Otter Myths and Legends

Around the world, otters have been seen as animals with grace and courage, whose power can be called upon in times of trouble. Otters are playful animals and today many people see them as spirits of fun and joy.

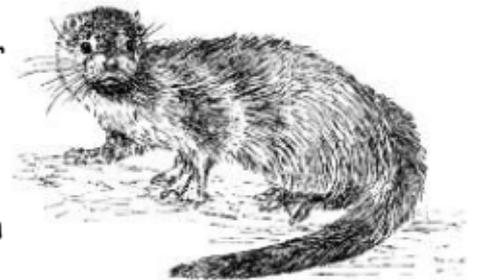


### Stories

- + People in Finland tell the story of a hero who visited the God of the Dead in search of magic charms. He escaped from the dark realm by turning himself into an otter to slip through the large iron net thrown across the black river to trap him forever.
- + The Vikings tell a story of a man called Otr who was turned into an otter by his father who was a magician. He was then killed by the fire God Loki who wanted his fur.

### Superstitions and Beliefs

- + The Celts did not know if the otter was a mammal or a fish.
- + Other people believed that otters were fish which grew fur when on land!
- + Native Americans believed that the otter could turn into a human. Their holy women used the otter's powers to make people feel better and carried otter fur, teeth or claws in their medicine pouches.
- + Native Americans also thought of otters as the organizers of the animal kingdom because their homes are divided into rooms.
- + People kept arrows in otterskin bags because they thought it kept them dry by magic. They also thought otter skins were magical and wearing an otter skin would save a person from drowning.
- + People used the otter skin to help soothe the pain of fever, smallpox and child birth. Licking a still warm otter liver would enable the person to heal burns (by licking them).



**Can you make up your own story about otters?**



## Otter Quiz

1. What is an otter's home called?

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2. What is their favourite food?

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3. What do we call animals that only eat meat?

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4. Does the male otter help to raise the kits (babies)?

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5. Describe the otter's favourite habitat.

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# Otter Life Cycle

There is only one species of otter in Britain. This is the Eurasian otter (which means that it lives in Europe and Asia). However, some of the British otters live near freshwater and some of them live close to the sea (in Scotland) - these are called coastal otters. This difference in habitat means that the otters have some differences in their life cycle. The coastal otters tend to have smaller litter sizes and breed in the summer.

1. Kits are born in the holt at any time of year. Their eyes are closed but they have fur. Otters have 1-5 kits in a litter.



2. By two months old, the kits are regularly coming out of the holt and learning to swim.



3. The kits have stopped drinking milk by the time they are 3 months old. Their mother catches fish for them.



5. Adult otter. The kit can now catch its own food and will leave its mother to find its own territory.



4. The kits learn to catch their own food.



Question: Why do you think otter kits are born with fur?

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## Otter Word Search

Can you find all the words to do with otters in the grid below?

There are 20, running forwards, backwards, up, down, across and diagonally. Some of the letters are used in more than one word.

To help you, here are some clues for the words you are looking for: K \_\_\_ - a baby otter, H \_\_\_ - an otter's home, W \_\_\_\_\_ - an otter likes to live near this, R \_\_\_\_\_ - some otters live near this, S \_\_\_ - other otters live near this, D \_\_\_ - otters like to do this into the water, S \_\_\_ - how otters get about in the water, W \_\_\_\_\_ F \_\_\_ - what otters use to help them swim, L \_\_\_ T \_\_\_ - what otters use to help them dive, S \_\_\_\_\_ - otters sometimes use these to get into the water, C \_\_\_\_\_ - an otter's resting place (we use them too!), S \_\_\_\_\_ - an otter dropping, T \_\_\_\_\_ - an area that is defended by the otter living there, G \_\_\_\_\_ - otters do this to keep their fur waterproof, M \_\_\_\_\_ - an otter is one of these because it has a furry coat, C \_\_\_\_\_ - an otter is one of these because it only eats meat, F \_\_\_\_\_, F \_\_\_\_\_, C \_\_\_\_\_ - food that the otter likes to eat, E \_\_\_ - the otters favourite kind of fish.

T	E	E	F	D	E	B	B	E	W
N	I	D	I	V	E	R	E	L	A
I	C	K	S	T	S	L	R	A	T
A	B	R	H	Q	E	O	O	M	E
R	G	A	A	O	E	N	V	M	R
P	E	E	I	B	L	G	I	A	E
S	L	I	D	E	S	T	N	M	V
W	S	G	O	R	F	A	R	G	I
I	C	O	U	C	H	I	A	C	R
M	O	O	R	G	X	L	C	V	S
U	T	E	R	R	I	T	O	R	Y



## Make an Otter Mask!

You will need:

- ◆ crayons or coloured pencils
- ◆ a pair of scissors
- ◆ sellotape or glue
- ◆ some thin elastic

1. Cut out the otter face and otter nose. Make sure you don't cut off the tabs!

2. Colour in the face and the nose. Ask a grown-up to help you cut out the eye holes.

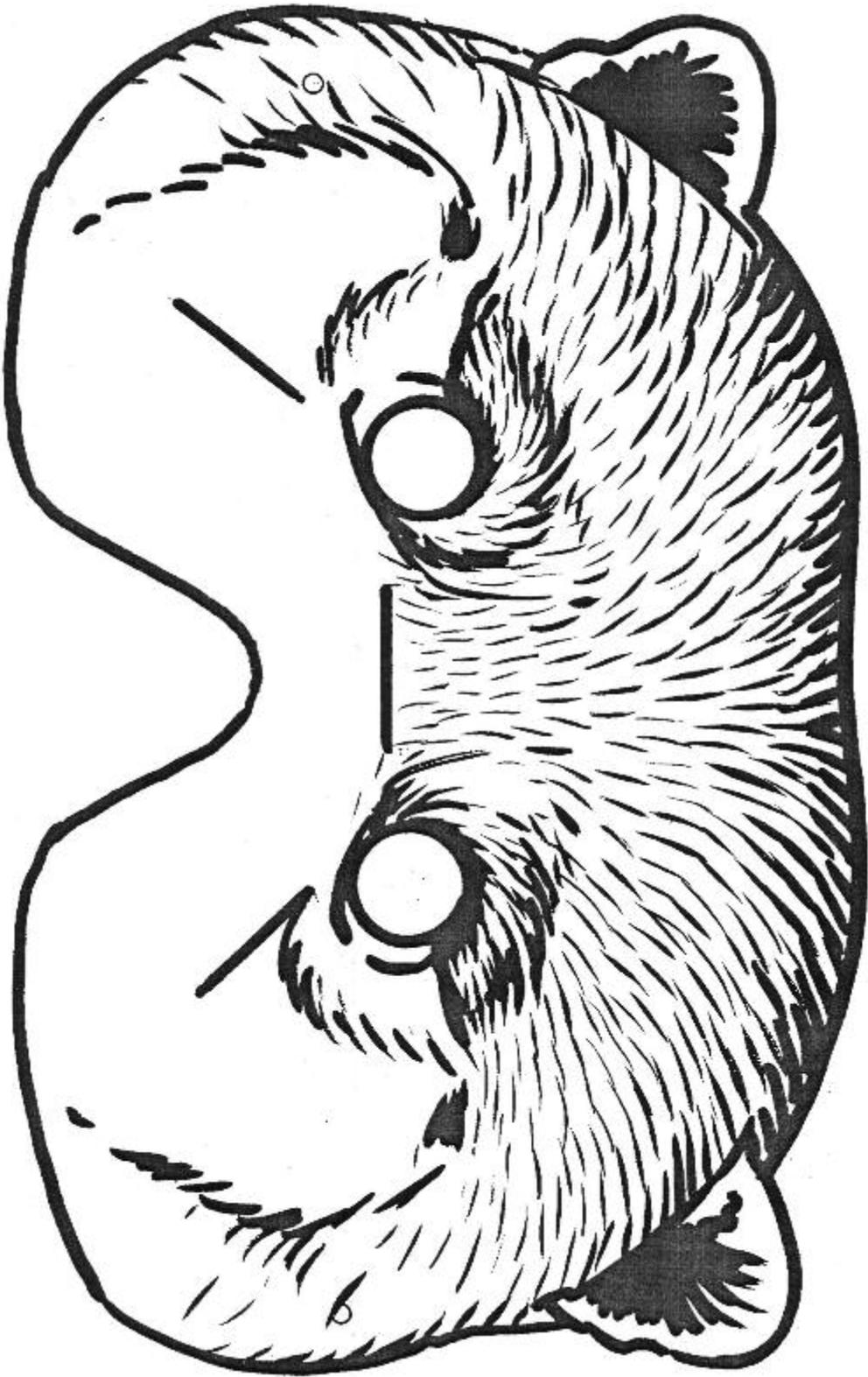
3. Cut the 3 slits in the face and push the tabs through them. Fasten with sellotape or glue.

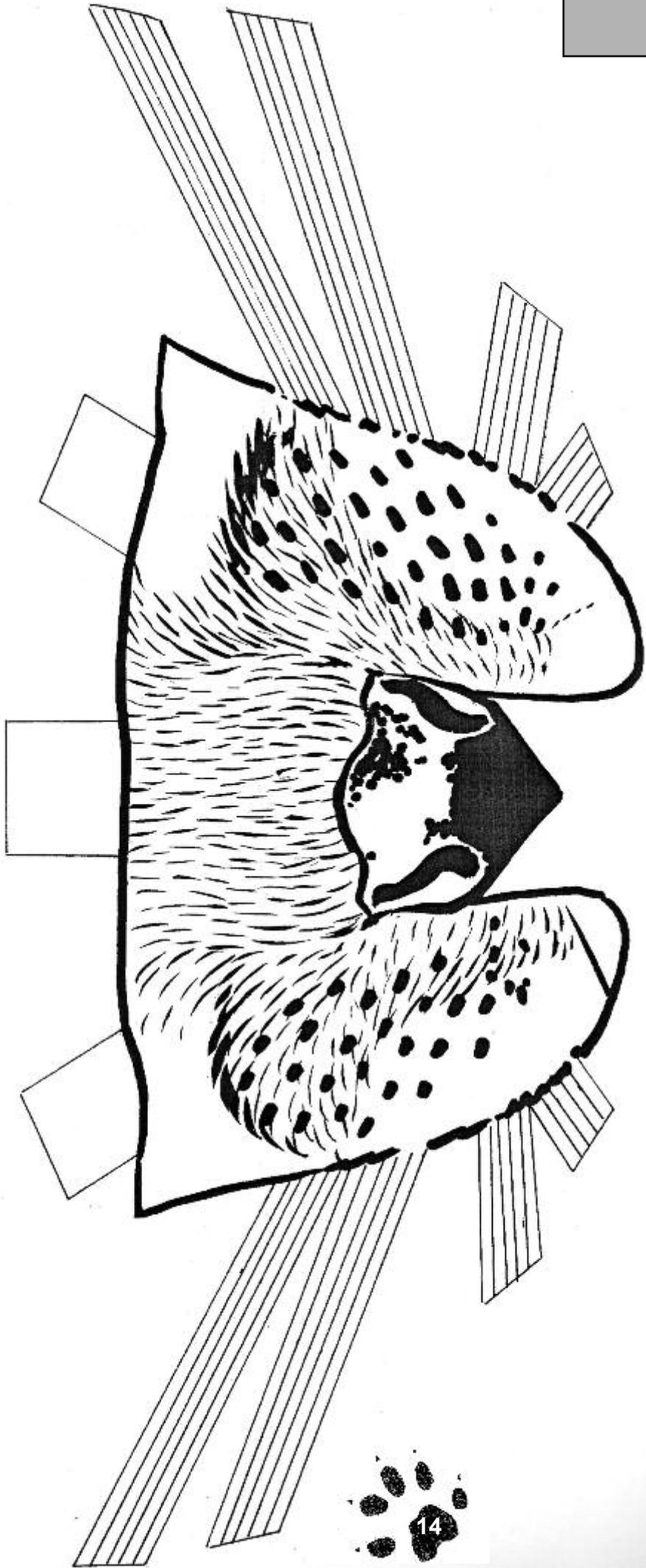
4. Measure the correct length of elastic to fit around your head.

5. Make two small holes in either side of the mask. Thread the elastic through and tie a knot.

6. Your mask is now ready to wear!







# Make a Dancing Otter Puppet!

You will need:

- ♦ crayons or coloured pencils
- ♦ a pair of scissors
- ♦ sellotape or glue
- ♦ 2 lolly sticks

1. Cut out the otter face and otter tail.

2. Colour in the head and the tail. Cut the slits in the whiskers and curl them around a pencil.

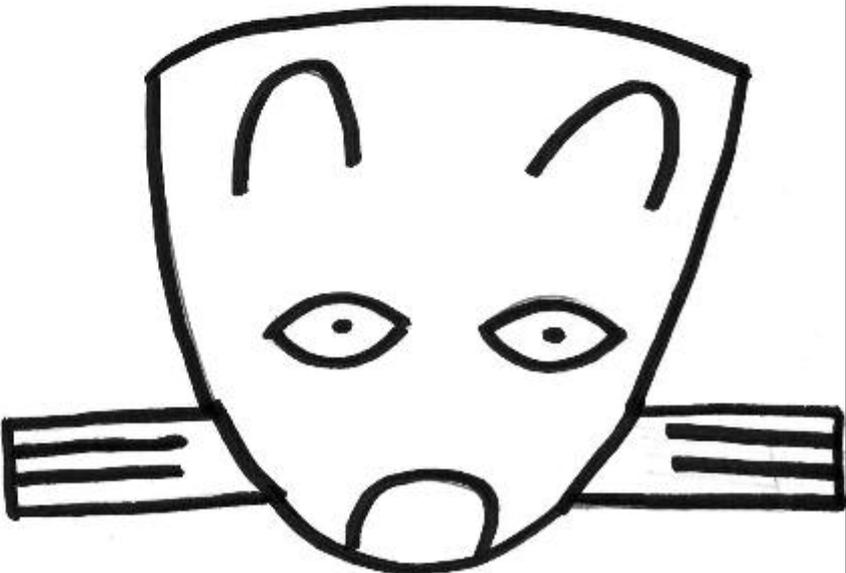
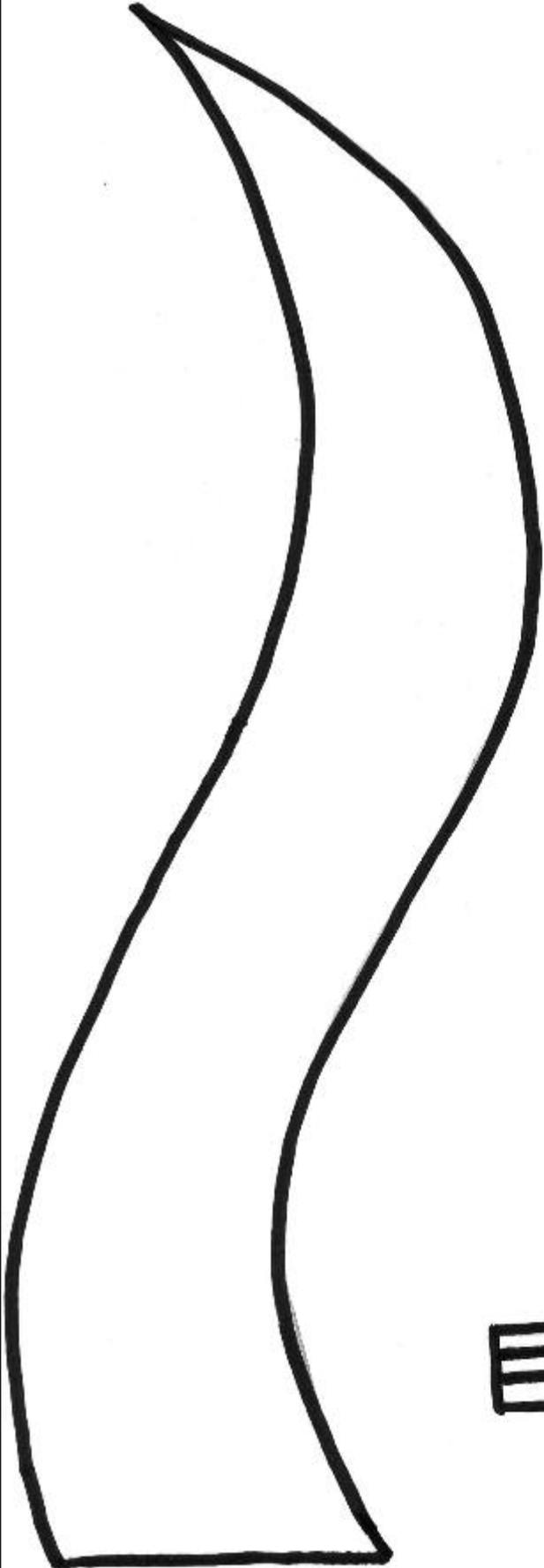
3. Cut out two wide strips of paper (about the same width as the otter's head). Fold them into concertina folds.

4. Glue or sellotape the two folded strips of paper together to make a long body for your otter.

5. Glue or tape the head and tail onto the body. Glue or tape one lolly stick onto the head and the other onto the tail.

6. Hold onto the sticks and make your otter dance and swim!





## Word List

- **canine** - fang-like teeth at the side of the mouth often used for stabbing and holding prey.
- **carnassial** - shearing, scissor-like teeth used for eating meat.
- **consumer** - an animal which eats plants or other animals. They are sometimes called herbivores, carnivores or omnivores.
- **couch** - an otter's resting place, often used in the daytime.
- **habitat** - a place where an animal lives.
- **holt** - a den near a river or by the sea which is used as a home by otters.
- **incisor** - rectangular teeth at the front of the mouth, usually used for cutting.
- **mammal** - a warm-blooded animal which feeds its young on milk and usually has fur.
- **opportunistic** - will take something by chance.
- **pesticides** - chemicals used by farmers to kill insects.
- **predator** - an animal which hunts and eats other animals.
- **prey** - an animal which gets hunted and eaten by other animals.
- **producer** - a green plant which can take energy from the sun and make food using the process of photosynthesis.
- **slide** - a path used by otters to slip into the water.
- **solitary** - an animal which lives by itself.
- **species** - a particular type of animal.
- **spraint** - an otter dropping.
- **territory** - a place where an animal lives, which it defends from other animals.

