

LINCOLNSHIRE
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ENVIRONMENT
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LINCOLNSHIRE 200 BRIDGES OTTER SURVEY 2009

Final report

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LINCOLNSHIRE 200 BRIDGES OTTER SURVEY (2009)

INTRODUCTION:

The otter is a UK and Lincolnshire Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) priority species: this survey was undertaken to contribute to the action plan for the species by forming part of a species monitoring programme and helping to raise awareness of otter conservation and the importance of healthy rivers.

The 200 Bridges Survey (2009) is a repeat of work carried out in 1994 and 1999 which looked at the main river systems in the historic county of Lincolnshire (Lincolnshire county plus North Lincolnshire and North East Lincolnshire Unitary Authorities). Approximately 200 bridges were surveyed each year to look for signs of otter presence. Bridges over waterways are useful sampling points because otters mark their territories with distinctive droppings, called spraints, on prominent points such as the ledges under bridges. By resurveying sites that have been looked at in the past we can compare results and monitor changes in otter distribution.

METHODOLOGY:

Volunteers were invited to attend training sessions in June 2009 and survey work took place throughout the summer and autumn of 2009.

The survey methodology follows that used in 1999 and is similar to that used in the National Otter Surveys. The full methodology given to volunteers can be found in Appendix 3; the key points were as follows:

- Each survey site is a bridge or obvious point on a watercourse.
- Where possible a total of 600m of riverbank was surveyed with the bridge in the centre (one bank only).
- Any possible spraints found were taken for verification and other tracks/signs noted or photos taken.

A blank copy of the survey form can be found in Appendix 2.

Volunteers were provided with a letter to landowners for use should they need it (see Appendix 4), which explained that they were surveying on behalf of Lincolnshire Biodiversity Partnership and Environment Agency.

A National Survey for otters was also taking place in 2009/10; any 200 Bridges sites within 1km of the National survey sites were avoided in order to ensure that the national results were not affected.

A total of 199 bridges were identified for survey in 2009; 5 of these could not be surveyed due to issues with access, and 43 were avoided because of their proximity to National Survey sites. 151 sites were surveyed in total. See Figure 1 for a map showing distribution of survey sites.

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RESULTS:

Results summary:

Of the 151 sites surveyed 13 were found to have signs of otter presence, six of which were new records compared to 1999. Disappointingly, there were also six sites that were positive for otter in 1999 but not re-recorded as positive in 2009.

N.B. it is hoped that results for the 43 sites that were avoided this time due to proximity to National Survey sites can be added in at a later date.

See Figure 2 for a results map.

A full results table can be found in Appendix 1.

DISCUSSION:

The results are a little disappointing – anecdotal evidence and other records held by LERC and the Environment Agency suggest that otters are much more widespread than this survey has shown (see fig 3).

This could be explained by possible false negative results due to:

- Lack of experience in some volunteers.
- Length of time between sample collection and verification – there were a number of samples taken that were possibly otter but could not be confidently verified.
- Time of year – bankside vegetation often made it difficult to access to the toe of the bank.

It is hoped that some of these problems can be overcome in 2010 by offering volunteers some further training and then carrying out some targeted surveys earlier in the year before access to the riverbank is obstructed too much by bankside vegetation.

This could then form part of a rolling programme of resurvey work to cover the whole county approximately every five years (depending on the availability of volunteers).

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE SURVEY WORK:

In 2010 it would be desirable to revisit sites that were positive for signs of otter in 1999 but negative in 2009, and to survey the 43 200 Bridges sites that were avoided in 2009 because of proximity to the National Survey sites. There are also some gaps in coverage of the county:

- The South Forty Foot Drain and the waterways that flow into it.
- The Fens in the south east of the county.
- Waterways north of Sleaford and west of Billingham.
- The River Trent and waterways south and west of Scunthorpe.

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11 out of the 13 sites with signs of otter had spraints under the bridge, suggesting that in most cases a bridge spot check is sufficient to confirm otter presence. So it is recommended that future survey work is concentrated on the immediate vicinity of bridges plus any nearby features that look like potential sprainting sites. Bridges without ledges underneath or any potential spraint sites nearby could be removed from the list of sites to survey.

A simple online data entry form could be set up (or a spreadsheet) to be filled in by surveyors.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

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FIGURES:

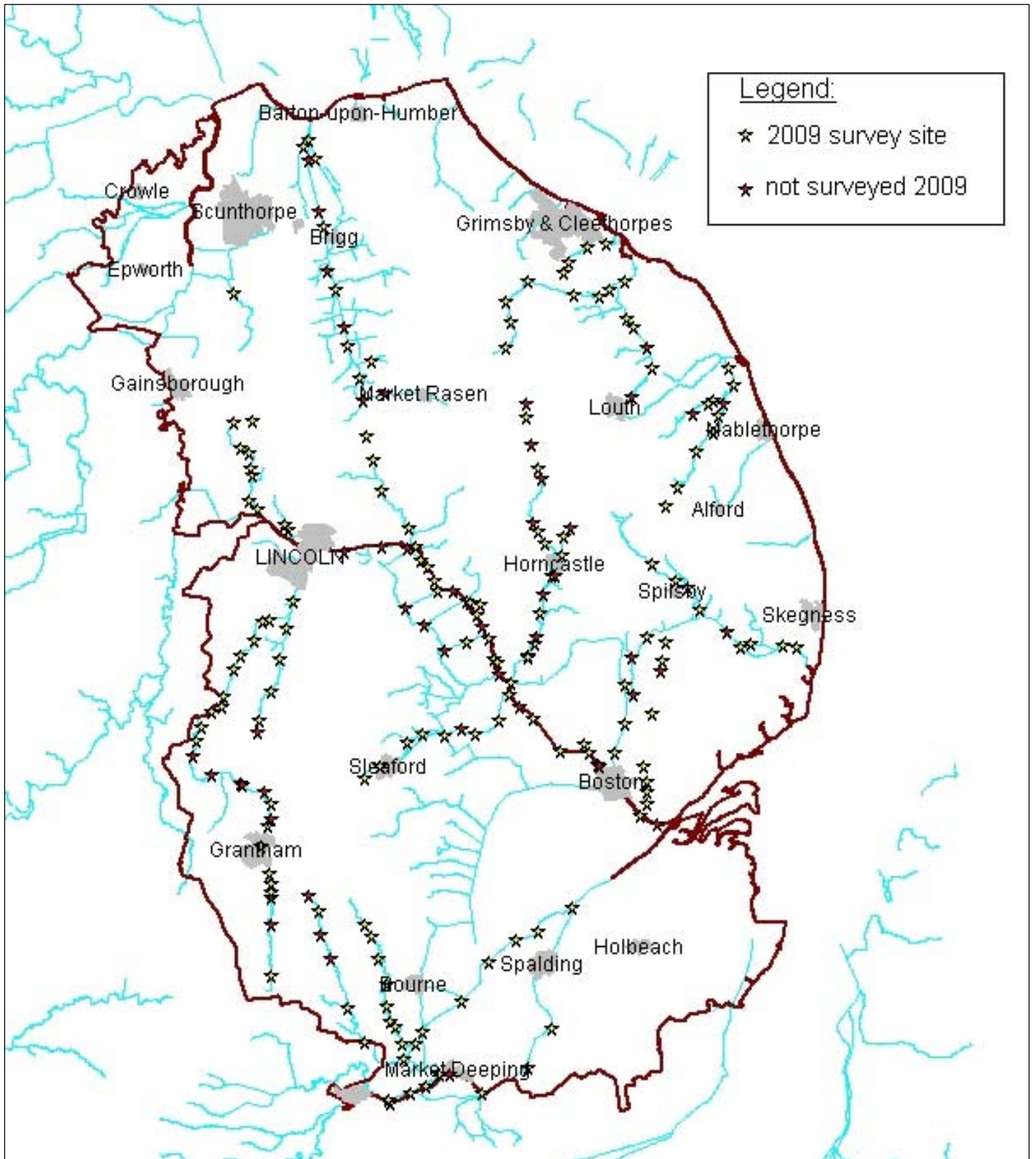
1. Distribution of sites identified for survey in 2009.
2. Sites with otter signs 1999 and 2009.
3. Other otter records held by the Environment Agency.

APPENDICES:

1. Full list of sites, results, comments etc.
2. Blank survey form
3. Methodology
4. Access letter
5. Filled in survey forms

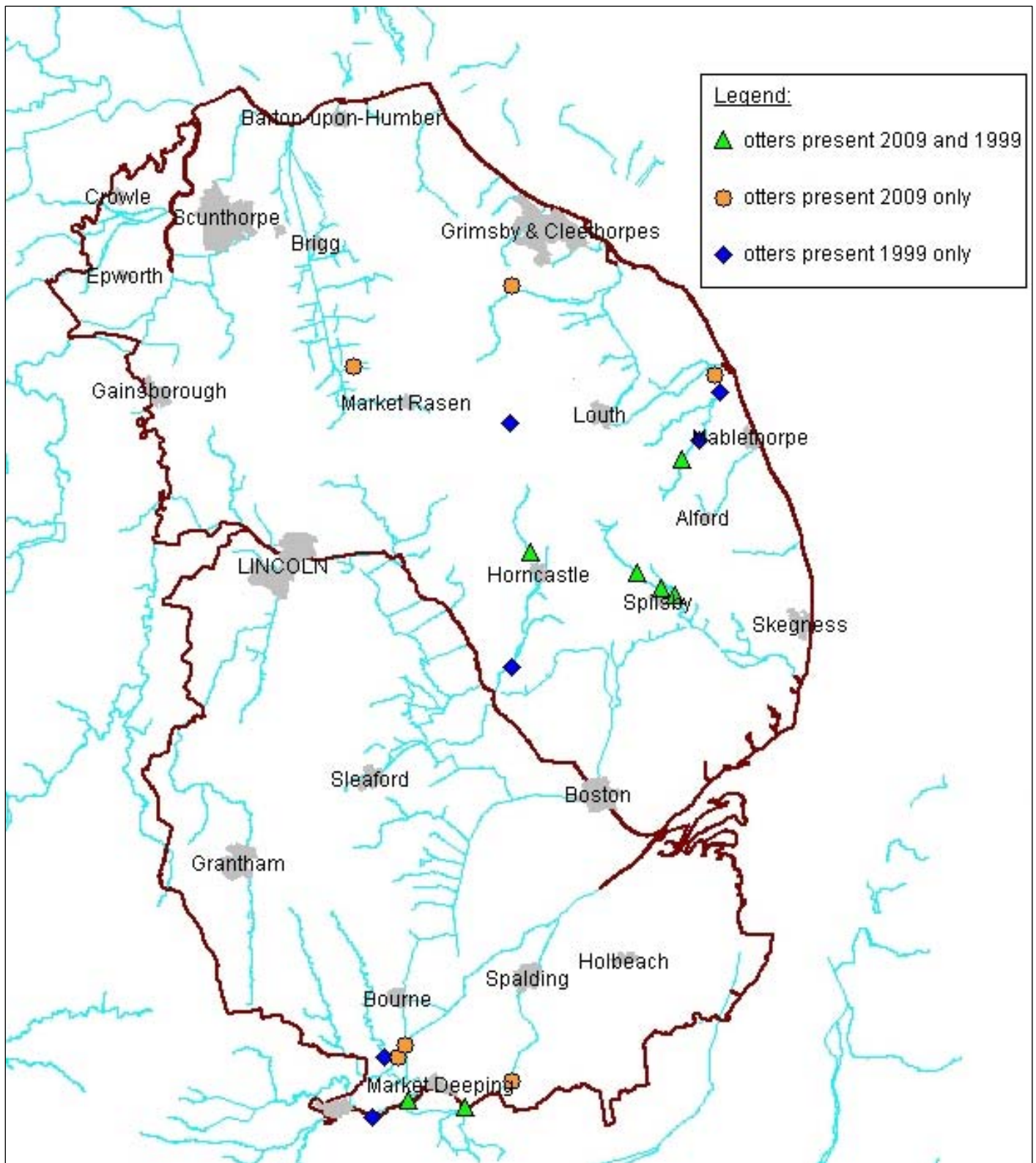
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Fig 1: Distribution of sites identified for survey in 2009.



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Fig 2: Sites with otter signs 1999 and 2009.



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Fig 3: Other otter records held by Environment Agency (Dead otter reports 2004-2010 and results of other otter surveys 2009).

