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IOSF STUDENT RESEARCH GRANT REPORT

The IOSF Student Research Grant was launched in 2022 to help students carry out an otter field survey under the guidance of a trained and experienced ecological surveyor, Andrew Rothwell. Following, a highly successful first grant and study on the Isle of Barra, IOSF decided to follow up this grant with a second, this time on the Isle of Benbecula, another island in the Outer Isles, on the West Coast of Scotland.

As with our first student grant, a number of universities across the United Kingdom were contacted with a view of offering two students the opportunity to gain an insight in to otter research techniques, as well as conservation issues associated with otters in Scotland.

Again, IOSF was inundated with applications for this opportunity, and following an extensive selection process, two students were selected to gain this opportunity. The two students (Sarah Green and Freya Ryan, both of Bangor University) joined trained otter and ecological surveyor, and IOSF board member, Andrew Rothwell, on the Isle of Benbecula during September of 2023, with accommodation provided.

During the survey time, the group were treated to some fantastic weather on Benbecula. They had seven good observations of otters, most of which were spotted on the eastern side of the island – which was to be expected as it is more remote and has the perfect habitats that otters prefer to reside in.

They collected spraints and found many stickleback remains, which is more unusual than the normal fish we have found in other surveys on the west coast and islands. The spraint will be analysed in more detail to give a more detailed picture of the otter diet.

The students were very enthusiastic and super keen to learn and so we look forward to hearing more of their results from the project.

A full report on the training programme will be produced in due course and published in the 2024 issue of the IOSF Otter Journal.

The biggest expense was the accommodation, and the funding provided enabled the two university students and the lead surveyor to carry out this project.

IOSF will be repeating this training project in 2023 on the island of North Uist for two more students of zoology, biology and ecology.



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