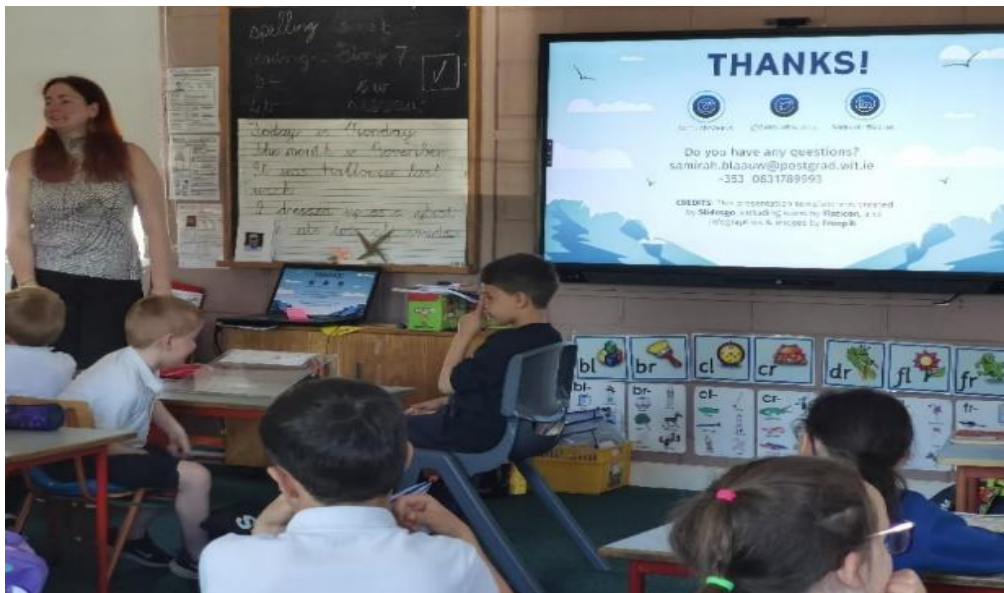




Otter talks, May 2023.

As part of World Otter Day 2023, Samirah Blaauw, PhD student at South-east Technological University, presented talks to two different primary schools in Lough Carra catchment, on her PhD work exploring the biology and genetics of the Otter. The focus of these talks was to convey to the primary school children the difference between native Otters and non-native American Minks, the methods of monitoring used to differentiate between the two species, types of monitoring, i.e. invasive and non-invasive, and what happens to samples after they are collected.



The talks started with an introduction into the life of the Otter, and the types of monitoring programmes used, i.e. invasive and non-invasive. Invasive monitoring involves physically drawing blood or cutting hair. Though this type of sampling is very good at collecting the animals DNA, it is also very stressful for the animal, and requires the animal to be caged,

and in some instances sedated. Non-invasive sampling involves collecting Otter faeces and Otter spraint (a jelly like discharge from the animal's anal glands). Samirah's work favours non-invasive sampling, as it involves less disturbance of the animals. She displayed pictures of the faeces samples to the children, and explains where she finds them, under bridges and on rocks, especially on rocks sticking out of rivers where otters may rest on from time to time.

When the samples are collected, in sample tubes, they are labelled with the time, date and coordinates of where they were found, and sent down to the lab in SETU in Co. Waterford for analysis. The data collected will provide information on how many different Otters reside around the lake, age groups, gender, and diet. This is all important information for conservation management.



Otter faeces, and the sample tube used for collecting the faeces.



The children were really interested in knowing the abilities of the two animals, Otter and Mink. *Which is a faster swimmer? Who would win in a fight between an otter and a mink? Can otters climb trees? Who is faster on land?*

Animal	Otter (<i>Lutra lutra</i>)	Mink (<i>Neovison vison</i>)
Face	Broad face, round nose	Narrow face, pointed nose
Colour	Brown coat with brownish white throat	Usually darkish, black coat with white spot directly under chin
Tail	Thick and tapering with short hairs	Long and bushy, especially when dry
Size	Bigger than a domestic cat	Smaller than a domestic cat, same size as a ferret
On Land	The otter is slow and generally sticks to the river's shore	Much quicker on land and will explore further afield. Will even attempt to climb
In Water	Excellent swimmer, both underwater and on the	Able to swim, but not as proficient as the otter. Knows its limitations.

	surface, really at home in the water.	
Personality	Shy and elusive. Very protective of their young.	Bold and opportunistic.
Faeces	They are 3-10cm long and brownish grey, consisting of fish and bones. They do not have an unpleasant smell	They are 4-7cm long and black, consisting of fur, feathers, and bones. They have a distinctly strong and unpleasant smell

Table 1. The differences between the Otter and the Mink.



Fig. 1. An information poster on the monitoring programme.