

Search-and-Rescue Otter Does Deep Dives to Solve Cases, Recover Evidence

Sometimes, the best man for the job just might be an otter.

Just ask Michael Hadsell, president of Peace River K9 Search and Rescue in Englewood, Florida.

Hadsell had worked with dogs to recover bodies and evidence, but in Florida, a lot of bad guys dispose of things deep underwater, where dogs can't go.

Hadsell's 2-year-old search-and-rescue cadaver recovery otter, Splash, on the other hand, was perfectly cut out for the job.

"God has put him (Splash) together to do this job, so he's perfect for what we're doing right now," Hadsell told WWSB-TV about the Asian small-clawed otter that he trained.



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He elaborated on the unique characteristics otters possess that make them excel at the task.

"These whiskers, we think, are the key to that," he told the news outlet.

"They use this bubble technique where they push the bubbles out, and they suck it back in, and they taste it. The taste response apparently goes to the brain and tells him it's a match to what he's looking for, but to get there he uses his whiskers, and they're kind of like a magnetic field."

FDLE Fort Myers had a special visitor!

Splash, a small-clawed Asian otter with Peace River K-9 Search and Rescue Dive Team visited FDLE alongside the team's founder and president, Michael Hadsell. Splash is trained to locate victims in low to no-visibility bodies of water. His...

– FDLE (@fdlepio) August 19, 2025

Splash communicates with Hadsell through a tether line signal system, according to WTVT-TV. When he detects a match for what he's been asked to look for, he alerts the human divers, indicating where they should search.

During roughly a year and a half on the job, Splash has played a key part in nine recoveries, including two pieces of criminal evidence and seven sets of human remains.

Hadsell said he doesn't know of anyone else using an otter in quite this way.

He got the idea after seeing working animals during his travels.

"I had lived overseas for a while, and I saw they used otters for fishing and hunting," he told WWSB.

"I thought, 'I wonder...'"

Then he saw an article that said otters could work odor problems underwater, "and I thought, 'OK. Maybe we can make this work,'" he said.

He told WTVT that he's compiling records about Splash's work so they can decide whether to start training more otters for the job.

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