IOSF’s World Otter Day 2019

IOSF’s World Otter Day was another huge success. There were so many events all over the world – in fact in over 30 countries.

There was also a lot of public awareness created through social media which reached so many people. In fact we were trending 7th in the world on Twitter. So, when you consider all the things going on at the moment that is a huge achievement.

At IOSF there was an Otter Watching Day and four individual otters were spotted – a single adult at one location and female and two cubs at another.

The latest issue of OTTER, the IOSF Journal (No 5) was also published – you can read more about this below.

Our next e-update for June will include more on the events that took place, as we are still receiving photos and news.

But in the meantime, many thanks to everyone who took part.

https://www.google.com/maps/d/edit?mid=1vlqH9SpkuJUm2G_IHe1s5QywPtbpfqm&ll=3.0633702-4744318852C0&z=2
Otter, Journal of The International Otter Survival Fund

As mentioned above, Issue 5 of our Journal was published on World Otter Day and it includes the usual mix of papers on otters worldwide, two of which we have outlined below:

**Eurasian Otters:** A review of the current world status

The Eurasian otter (*Lutra lutra*) has the widest distribution of all 13 otter species but the actual worldwide status is very uncertain. It is classified as “Near Threatened” in the IUCN Red List and has a declining population.

It disappeared in many parts of Europe largely due to pollution but with considerable effort to improve environmental conditions they are starting to return in some areas. However, the rate of this return is largely exaggerated which is creating problems with fisheries. In vast parts of its range in Asia and North Africa there is very little data and there are few modern records.

At a meeting of the IUCN Otter Specialist Group in Korea in 2007, proposals were put forward that the species should be downgraded to “Least Concern”. This was based on the fact that populations seemed to be recovering in Europe.

IOSF was represented at this meeting and was able to demonstrate that even if populations are recovering to some degree in Europe we have little or no reliable data from the vast extent of the range, i.e. North Africa and the whole of Asia. The category of the species was therefore left as 'Near Threatened'.

The IOSF review aimed to assess the worldwide status of the species as at 2019 to ascertain what recent data is available. Questionnaires were sent to otter scientists in all 77 range countries that have or have had populations of Eurasian otter. They were asked for data on distribution, estimated population and trends, threats, illegal trade and the sources of the information given. In addition, a literature search was carried out for recent publications.

This revealed that there is still no detailed data from much of Asia and North Africa and even in Europe there is little detailed and regular monitoring so it is impossible to give a reliable population trend. It is therefore vital that we continue conservation efforts and increase public awareness and research to obtain up-to-date information on the status of the species. It is also necessary for range states which currently intend to cull otters to appease fishery concerns, such as Austria, accept that this cannot be justified unless and until sufficient data is obtained.

*The full review can be found in the IOSF Journal.*

**Otters in Chornobyl, Ukraine**

At the present moment there is a TV programme on the nuclear disaster which took place at Chornobyl in northern Ukraine on 26 April 1986. We are using the Ukrainian spelling “Chornobyl” as the commonly used spelling of “Chernobyl” is actually Russian. At that time Ukraine was still part of the USSR.
We are all familiar with the awful events which took place and the repercussions from the nuclear fall-out, which obviously continue to this day. It is usually categorised as the greatest technological catastrophe in human history which resulted in extremely high radioactive contamination of vast territories. The Government had to evacuate nearly 91,000 residents from 74 settlements in the Ukrainian part of the most affected zone (ca. 2600 km²) and to cease traditional land use and economic activities. It also caused the gradual transformation of agricultural and forestry lands into wilder habitats within this area and somehow resulted in a remarkable growth in wildlife abundance and diversity.

Regular zoological field surveys within the Ukrainian part of the exclusion zone were almost ceased by the mid-1990s and there were virtually no surveys focused on semi-aquatic mammals e.g. Eurasian beaver and Eurasian otter. There was therefore no factual information on their distribution and abundance and an assessment published in 2006 was based exclusively on the published data for the adjacent region of Belarus and the extent of suitable habitats in Ukraine.

Forest landscapes now dominate the area and it is well drained by rivers of various sizes, lakes and drainage canals. Otters were known to be present long before the disaster but until 2018 no survey had been carried out. Then Ievgen Skorobogatov, Andrey Atemasov and Sergii Gashchak carried out the first otter survey within the exclusion zone using so-called “standard methods” (searches for spraints and other signs of otter presence).

The results showed that signs of otter presence could be found throughout the area. The otters used large rivers more than smaller ones and more than flood-plain lakes. The least favourable habitats were drainage canals as with the lack of agricultural and forestry activity these had been abandoned and totally overgrown. This means that they are no longer a suitable habitat for otters and only a few of the main canals and small local networks are still maintained in an operative state for reasons of radiation safety.

This habitat distribution of otters corresponds well to the data for adjacent territories in Belarus and Ukraine obtained by tracking surveys in winter. This enabled the researchers to produce a rough population estimate of 72-153 individuals within the zone. However they point out that this is only a preliminary study which needs to be followed up. However it does demonstrate that apparently the otter is a still quite common species within the Chornobyl exclusion zone.

The full paper can be found in the IOSF Journal.

Other papers, short communications and reports are:

- IOSF World Otter Day 2018. IOSF
- Otter Oscars 2018. IOSF
- Asian Otter Conservation Network Report. de Silva, PK
- African Otter Network (AON) and the Power Of One initiative. Reed-Smith, J
- First photographic documentation of smooth-coated otter (Lutrogale perspicillata)
in Mahi River, Gujarat, India. **Nagrecha, PG & Suthar, AR**
- Preliminary study on the occurrence, distribution and traditional knowledge of otters in the Lake Victoria Basin, Kenya. **Omondi, R and Nyamunya, P**
- Towards a cooperation between the Eurasian otter (*Lutra lutra*) and local people of Hima Anjar/Kfarzabad, Lebanon: A case study. **Ramadan-Jaradi, G, Serhal, A and Khatib, B**
- The frequency and size of main prey items taken by the Eurasian otter (*Lutra lutra*) on the Isle of Harris, Scotland. **Hunter, K**
- Recent records of the Eurasian otter (*Lutra lutra*) in the Mercure-Lao River Valley, South Italy. **Roviello, GN & Roviello, V**

*The Journal is available either as a hard copy from the Otter Shop or you can download it free at* [http://www.otter.org/Public/MediaAndResources_Resources_Journal.aspx](http://www.otter.org/Public/MediaAndResources_Resources_Journal.aspx)

**CORPORATE MEMBERSHIP - WHETHER YOU OWN A BUSINESS OR ARE EMPLOYED, does the company have a green policy/ support conservation? Then perhaps the company would like to consider becoming a Corporate Member with IOSF and supporting our work with otters.**

You can find out more information on our website [http://otter.org/Public/HelpUs_CorporateSponsorship.aspx](http://otter.org/Public/HelpUs_CorporateSponsorship.aspx)

**IOSF and Partnership for Action Against Wildlife Crime Scotland**

IOSF has been a partner of the Partnership for Action Against Wildlife Crime Scotland (PAWS) since 2004. PAWS includes the police, land managers, conservationists and the Scottish Government who have all come together to fight this crime against Scotland.

This year PAWS is having a stand at the Royal Highland Show in Edinburgh together with Police Scotland. The event will take place from 20-23 June and each year it attracts thousands of visitors – in fact in 2018 there were nearly 200,000 visitors!

As a partner we have sent leaflets, copies of our report into the Asian otter trade and a poster about illegal snaring and otters. Although PAWS is mainly for wildlife crime in Scotland, it is a great opportunity for us to reach members of the public and their volunteers can tell them some of the work that we do.

We all know how wonderful it is to watch otters and other wildlife in their natural environment but it must not be to the detriment of the animals involved. Young animals and birds may be abandoned due to the thoughtless action of some person wanting to get closer. Otters can be disturbed so that they leave their prey, wasting the precious energy used to catch it. Seal pups risk injury and infection as they scrape their umbilical cords rushing to get off rocks and into the water.

Unlicensed disturbance of mammals and birds may result in a conviction under the Wildlife
& Countryside Act 1981, Conservation (Natural Habitats &c) Regulations 1994 or marine legislation and fines up to £5,000 or 6 months’ imprisonment.

On 17 May the National Wildlife Crime Unit launched an initiative called 'Undisturbed' designed to raise awareness amongst wildlife watchers and photographers about the risks and dangers in disturbing wildlife across the UK. The initiative will use social media (principally Twitter) to launch a weekly message which, will hopefully ripple out across a wide variety of people and groups.

There will be a seasonal/species related Tweet every Friday until 1 November 2019. The Tweet for otters will be on Friday 28 June. IOSF is obviously helping on this day.

So we would ask you all to follow the UK NWCU twitter account @ukwildlifecrime and retweet the message every Friday but particularly on the Otter Day on 28 June.

Team Otter - Join our Team Otter Clubs
Five pupils from Evergreen Middle School, Evergreen, Colorado, USA (Kileigh Ackerman, Hannah Peddy, Ava Sparks, Finley Anderson and Karl Keil) chose otters as part of their group project. Their project was to pick and research a country and a threatened animal from there to raise awareness for that species. The group chose Bosnia and Herzegovina as their country and Eurasian otters as their animal (see picture below). So they asked IOSF for help with information on otters.

They also had to create a website on their chosen country and a donation letter that was sent to area businesses to raise awareness on the animal they picked. They then had to develop a game based on their animal, with prizes, and create an education poster board showing information on it. The game they designed was Otter Ball where you had to kick two different sized balls through the holes from five feet out to win an Otter Pop. They served Sape cookies and Bosnian Tea Biscuits to visitors to their stall.

A massive thank you to Kileigh, Hannah, Ava, Finley and Karl and Evergreen Middle School for raising awareness of otters.

News from The Sanctuary
Karma and Oscar 2 are doing very well. Karma in particular seems to have grown a lot recently.

Sometimes we hear neighbouring otters having a “conversation” through the fence though
by the time we get there all is quiet and there are no otters to be seen. On Saturday I heard the familiar squealing noises and crept up to see. There was Karma up against the fence but no sign of Oscar. But the noise continued. To my amazement I could see Oscar moving about in his box and it was him making all the noise – on his own! The only reason I could think of was that the day before I had put more hay into his box and he was in a temper because it wasn’t where he wanted it!

In last month’s e-update we told you about a juvenile otter which was hanging around houses in Strath Conan, near Dingwall. We had advised the house owner to keep an eye on it and for a while things were quiet. Then while Paul and Grace were away in London another call came – Ben feels there is always a call-out when they are away! This time the otter needed to be picked up. It was not injured but it was felt that it was still at risk.

Jackie West from Achnasheen went straight there as she is so much closer and then Ben arrived to help. The otter, named Juggles, was hiding under a cupboard in the kitchen but she was soon in the traveling box and on her way to Skye. Fortunately she was uninjured and so just needed a rest and food.

If you would like to support our cubs in the Sanctuary you can send a cheque marked “Hospital” on the back or make a donation online at www.ottershop.co.uk
Otter Pet Trade
The illegal trade for pet otters is becoming a rapidly growing concern for otters across the world. Otters are being taken from the wild and forced into a life of captivity.

The most recent news comes from Indonesia where a Russian international was arrested for attempting to smuggle four otters, as well as 10 scorpions, out of the country. The otters, believed to be Eurasian, a species very rare in Indonesia, were confiscated from the individual as he attempted to leave the country in Bali.

The illegal wildlife trade continues to be a major problem within the country despite the authorities’ attempts to crack down on it. https://www.nst.com.my/world/2019/05/491157/indonesia-nabs-russian-trying-smuggle-baby-otters-scorpions

More is being documented and more awareness is being raised in relation to this trade. IOSF has for a long period of time being campaigning to get otters ‘on the map’ when talking about the illegal trade of wildlife. In 2008 we produced a report on the fur trade, which was updated in 2014 to include the pet trade (http://www.otter.org/documents/IOSF_Illegal_Trade_in_Otters_Report_2014.pdf). In Issue 4 of OTTER, the IOSF Journal (2018), Sharne McMillan published a paper “Too cute! The rise of otter cafés in Japan”. Sharne had attended IOSF’s 2016 training workshop in China and is currently working on the otters in Hong Kong.

Wildlife photographer, Aaron Gekoski and the World Animal Protection have teamed up to produce a documentary into the illegal pet trade of otters. Gekoski visited a number of countries to carry out a detailed investigation into the origin of the otter pet trade, otter café’s in Japan, and much more.

Among those interviewed, Gekoski was Leona Wai in Malaysia, winner of IOSF’s 2019 World Otter Day grant, to get her perspective of the trade and the detrimental impact it is having on otter populations in the country.
Please take time to watch the video and become more aware of the cruel trade that is having such detrimental impacts on the long-term future of otter populations in the region. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ubcDXOo70n0&feature=youtu.be&fbclid=IwAR11kK6oLYi4ktoCp_9toJX-g7UFH59nYz7n3dbGLW9k7_uKhpFwo4qzeA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ubcDXOo70n0&feature=youtu.be&fbclid=IwAR11kK6oLYi4ktoCp_9toJX-g7UFH59nYz7n3dbGLW9k7_uKhpFwo4qzeA)

Performing Otters in pet café ©Yumiko Okamato

If the documentary wasn’t enough, **here is why otters make terrible pets!**

IOSF has many times urged people to understand that otters just don’t make good pets. They are smelly, messy, destructive and aggressive. No matter how tame a wild animal is it can revert back to its instinct during times of stress and uncertainty. So if you value your fingers you should rethink any ideas to have your own pet otter. There are a few people who keep Asian small-clawed otters but these people are very experienced and know their behaviour very well and how to handle them. Even they sometimes get bitten.

Besides the hygienic reasons for not keeping a pet otter there are also potential problems with giving them the wrong diet. Recently an otter died in a zoo in America when visitors through “human” food over to it. We have had discussions with some zoos about the food they are feeding their otters. They may have the correct nutritional content but nothing can beat giving the animal the closest food to what it would have in the wild. This can be a problem if you have a pet otter.

There are also the effects that it is having on the individual. Otters are wild; they are born into a wild environment with wild instincts. Small and metal cages, concrete floors, crowding people are just not things they are intended to encounter. This can leave the otters stressed leading to ill health and it starves them of their wild nature.

Next, consider the conservation impacts that the pet otter trade is having. If you have watched the video, you will be well aware that most of the otters that enter the trade or head to otter cafés are brutally taken from the wild. More often than not, mothers are killed while they try to defend her litter. Young otters are taken and ‘cared’ for and forced into a life of neglect and cruelty. Often these cubs won’t survive and will simply be replaced and another mother will lose her life as another litter is taken from the wild.

As you would expect, this has massive implications for the long-term survival of otters within the area, particularly Asian short-clawed otters, which are the most common species taken as pets. [https://www.care2.com/causes/heres-why-pet-otters-are-a-terrible-idea.html](https://www.care2.com/causes/heres-why-pet-otters-are-a-terrible-idea.html)

IOSF is working hard to investigate and reduce the illegal pet trade, including Japanese otter cafés, and will continue to do so.
Royal Garden Party
Princess Michael of Kent has been a great supporter and patron of IOSF’s campaign against the illegal wildlife trade and we have been very grateful to her for her help. Earlier in the year we received a phone call saying that she wished to invite Paul and Grace to the Royal Garden Party at Buckingham Palace on 15 May.

This was in recognition of 25 years of caring for otters throughout the world and in particular for the work we are doing against the illegal trade.

It was a beautiful day – in stark contrast to the weather on their attendance at a similar event at Holyrood Palace in July 2017. The Queen was represented by HRH Prince Charles and the Duchess of Cornwall and Princess Anne and there was also an opportunity to wander around the gardens of the Palace.

Paul and Grace were very honoured to be invited to this prestigious event. They would also like to thank all of the loyal IOSF supporters, without whom this would never have been possible.

Thank you.

Product of the Month @www.ottershop.co.uk
We have some new Perkins & Morley cards just in, including these two designs.

https://www.ottershop.co.uk/PBSearch.asp

We’re sure you’ll love them.

News in Brief
Can the European Eel be saved?
The European eel (Anguilla anguilla) is facing a bleak future. Listed as “Critically Endangered” this species is in serious danger of becoming extinct in the wild. A new project has begun to try and understand the eels’ mysterious life cycle, involving a gruelling migration to the Sargasso Sea. The new research will help provide information to help
European eels are one of the otter’s favourite foods. Their recent plight has meant that otters are now being forced to prey on seek alternative food, and this may be why more are being seen in more garden fish ponds. By ensuring there are practical and efficient measures to involve the return and repopulation of European eels we will see benefits for many species, including otters.

https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/may/18/slippery-challenge-can-the-european-eel-be-saved-from-oblivion

Rat poison is affecting urban wildlife

A study in Cape Town, South Africa, has revealed that rat poison is entering into urban food webs and having a major impact on urban wildlife. The nature of the poison is slow acting and allows for the rats to become an easy meal for predators of the area. This could also be a threat for otters as these chemical enter the complex food web.

We urge everyone to consider the environment when deciding to use rat poison or any other chemical that will end up in the food chains and the environment.


Otters back from extinction in Hampshire, UK

Twenty years ago there were no otters in Hampshire and Sussex but now they are back. New video footage shows two otters play-fighting on the river Meon in South Downs National Park.

Of course we don’t know if these are resident and breeding, but as we often say, this is great for the area, as there will be a more balanced ecosystem and the waterways are once again clean!


Gamekeeper accused of shooting wildlife

A gamekeeper has appeared in court after being charged with shooting wildlife, including an otter. The man will appear in court on June 13.

It is obviously illegal to kill an otter and it is good that this action is being prosecuted. They are a protected species and any individual who purposefully attempts to harm or kill the species will face punishment.

Singapore otters in bus stop

Onlookers were surprised when a group of otters were spotted at a bus stop in Singapore. It is believed that the ‘Zouk family’ had been chased into the area by Singapore's famous Bishan otter family. When it comes to otter watching you can wait all day for one and then 6 come along at once!


A Whale Which Swam Like an Otter

There was an interesting article recently about an ancient species of whale which appeared to swim like an otter. The first cetaceans (whales and dolphins) date from 50 million years ago and were found in southern Asia. These ancient whales looked very different to our current species and they appeared to evolve from small four-legged hoofed animals. They dispersed westwards through north and west Africa to North America but there was little information on how they actually did this.

In 2011 a well preserved fossil whale was found by Mario Urbina and an international team in Peru. This dates from the middle Eocene (just over 40 million years ago) and it was almost complete - it even included evidence of tiny hooves! Olivier Lambert, from the Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences, is a co-author of a new paper on the find and he has kindly given us permission to use some of the photographs here.

The animal would have been up to 4m long including the tail and it was named *Peregocetus pacificus*, meaning "the traveling whale that reached the Pacific." This latest discovery suggests that not only were they good swimmers but they were also good at moving around on land – definitely sounds like an otter! They didn't find the complete tail but the vertebra was similar to that of otters and beavers and this suggests the tail was involved in swimming. Also the scientists believe that the long toes of the whales were probably webbed – again like otters. If you look at the photo below it is very otter-like apart from the long snout!

Caption: Artistic reconstruction of two individuals of Peregocetus, one standing along the rocky shore of nowadays Peru and the other preying upon sparid fish. The presence of a tail fluke remains hypothetical. Reconstruction by A. Gennari.
It is especially interesting that this is the first four-legged whale skeleton found in South America, and indeed the whole Pacific area. So it would seem as if these animals migrated from Asia to Africa and then to South America, which at that time was a much shorter distance than it is today and the ocean currents would also have helped.

Then it was easy for them to head north to North America. It is believed that it wasn’t until about 30 million years that whales became fully marine.

There is still a lot to learn about whale evolution but more finds in South America could hold vital clues. And we now know that these early whale ancestors would have moved much like present day otters.

The full report can be found at https://www.cell.com/current-biology/fulltext/S0960-9822(19)30220-9

Thanks
As you can imagine we have received donations from far and wide towards World Otter Day, but donations have also been given towards some of our other projects. We want to say Thank you to all for your generous support.
Raise FREE Donations... when you shop online. It’s simple and costs you no more than your shopping. Visit one of our charity pages to discover how easy it is for you to help otters even more:

https://www.everyclick.com/iosf/info
https://www.thegivingmachine.co.uk/causes/international-otter-survival-fund/
https://www.easyfundraising.org.uk/causes/iosfund

You can donate monthly via our partners at the DONR giving platform that allows an easy and safe way method to give. This can be as little or as much as you can afford. Visit https://donr.com/iosf to find out more.

Regular and secure giving to IOSF and otter conservation... at your fingertips.
Text OTTER 10 to 70085 to donate £10 (or change the amount to however much you wish to give)

There’s still time to join and help otters
The Kiltwalk is an opportunity for people to raise funds for their favourite charity by taking part in a sponsored walk in different cities in Scotland. It was originally designed to raise funds for children but now you can donate to any charity of YOUR choice. So why not join with thousands of others for a fantastic walk and raise funds for the otters.

Two Kiltwalks have already taken place in Glasgow and Aberdeen. But don’t despair, there is still time for you to take part as there are still two more dates this year:

- 18 August in Dundee
- 15 September in Edinburgh

Any funds collected by a Kilt-walker are raised by another 40% thanks to the generosity of The Hunter Foundation. So IOSF and otters will receive 140% of what you raise!

This is a great opportunity for you to have a great day out and raise funds and awareness for the otters. So come on all you walkers – let’s get Kiltwalking!

Find out more at https://www.thekiltwalk.co.uk/
BECOME AN IOSF LIFE SUPPORTER - OUR SUPPORTERS ARE ALWAYS VALUED
BY US as a crucial source of support for the work that we are doing, and those of
you that become life supporters are highly appreciated.

For a one-off payment of £350 you can become a Life Supporter and give your long-
term commitment to help secure a better future for otters in the UK and around the
world.

We will send you a certificate showing your life supporter status and you will continue
to receive full updates in our newsletters, on all of the work that we are doing.
https://www.ottershop.co.uk/become-a-life-supporter-c2x9466694

Events
Visit our website to find out what might be happening in the otter world near you.
Don't forget, if you are aware of any otter-related events taking place, send us the details
(Title, time, date, place and cost (if applicable), and we will post it on our Events page.
http://otter.org/Public/Events.aspx

LEGACY - A LEGACY IS A GREAT WAY OF GIVING TO SOMETHING close to your heart
and every gift will make a difference. After your family, have you ever thought of
leaving something in your will to charity? Please consider remembering the
International Otter Survival Fund in your will and help our work, protecting
otters, to continue.

Including a legacy in your will ensures that your wishes are carried out, so it is
important to discuss this with your solicitor. You can stipulate a specific restriction
for its use, but remember that without restriction your legacy can be directed to
where it is required most urgently.

Should you choose to provide a legacy for the International Otter Survival Fund in
your will, we thank you and appreciate your support in this way.

This link http://otter.org/Public/HelpUs_Legacy.aspx will take you to our dedicated
web page concerning making a Legacy.

All photos are © to the name/s as indicated, otherwise ©IOSF

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