

otterreview

the International Otter Survival Fund

2013



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... from Paul



It's been another really busy year for IOSF. We received two awards: Grace won the IFAW Award for Conservation and IOSF was presented with the Conservation Award in the first ever British Animal Honours, in recognition of 20 years dedicated to otter conservation.

Our Indonesian otter workshop went very well and people left with more knowledge of the problems facing otters and with positive attitudes, which they will take back to help otters in their own areas.

We have also had sadness as our vet died at the young age of 48. Alan was a lovely man and great vet and we will miss him very much. He not only helped us so much with our own animals but was always willing to help with otters worldwide.

In the hospital we have had six otters, including one from Ireland, which will soon be released, and I have been busy constructing a new otter pen. You can read more about this later.

So what does 2014 hold for IOSF? We are already planning another Asian workshop in Bangladesh, working with our friend Dr Feeroz of Jahangirnagar University. The

aim of these workshops is to spark new otter conservationists who go and achieve more for otters. We had hoped to do this in China, but it appears to be hard to find somewhere for fieldwork so more initial survey work needs to be done. It is a sad fact that otters have declined in China by over 90% and yet all focus is on pandas and tigers. So work on otters is urgently needed.

We will, of course, continue to care for orphaned and injured otters, and campaign to abolish hunting and give otters a better standing on this fragile planet.

As this is our 20th anniversary, we are giving here a summary of work throughout those 20 years. We have supporters in 32 countries and have supported projects in 31 countries including Argentina, Canada, Georgia (former USSR), Lithuania, Nigeria, Portugal, Spain and Venezuela. We have also helped with cubs from 10 of the 13 species from 16 countries including: Bulgaria, Portugal, Bangladesh, Chile, Ecuador, Belize, Guyana and Republic of Congo. And over the years we have carried out many otter surveys, particularly on the west coast of Scotland.

Clearly we cannot tell you about everything so we have chosen one particular project from each year and hope this will give you an indication of all the important work which has been done worldwide.

We are very aware that we couldn't achieve any of this without you, our wonderful loyal supporters. So many thanks again for your help and support.

We very much appreciate it as we know things are not easy for anyone and we would assure you that every penny you give goes into caring for otters and their conservation.

Paul

HOW YOU CAN HELP IOSF

There are various ways you can become involved with IOSF. Make your online purchases and web searches count with **EveryClick.com**.

• GIVE AS YOU LIVE



Give as you Live™

www.giveasyoulive.com/join/internationalottersurvivalfund

• SCRAP OR SELL YOUR OLD CAR FOR FREE

at <http://giveacar.co.uk/charities/international-otter-survival-fund>

• DO IT FOR CHARITY AND PARACHUTE FOR FREE!



— call the office for an information pack.

CORPORATE SPONSORSHIP

Why don't you encourage your company to become a corporate member. They will receive all the up-to-date information about IOSF and then your work colleagues can also become involved.

Contact enquiries@otter.org for more information and find more fundraising ideas at

www.otter.org/howYouCanHelp.aspx



20 YEARS OF IOSF

1993

IOSF was formally founded in November 1993. Our aim was, and still is, to work to protect all species of otter worldwide through practical conservation, research, education and caring for orphaned and injured otters.

We had seen our first otter many years before on the shore at Elgol, Skye, and were totally captivated. Our first otter casualty was in 1988 - an adult otter hit by a car just outside Broadford. And now we wanted to do more to help these wonderful animals.

And so IOSF was born.



1994

Naturally much of our early work was more local. The Skye Bridge was being built and destroying otter habitat on the islands between Kyle of Lochalsh and Kyleakin. The story of the Skye Bridge, its construction, the environmental protests and the toll issue is a book in itself, but the way the matter was dealt with by the government was pretty appalling. In fact construction began before the environmental impact study was complete and otter holts were destroyed. This is especially shocking when the bridge over Eilean Ban was moved slightly so it wouldn't go through the grave of one of Gavin Maxwell's otters!



North American river otter

© PWS

1995

Already in 1995, IOSF was alerted to the threat to otters from the fur trade but at this stage our concern was not so much in Asia as in America and Canada. The leading article in Otter News No 6 read:

“DOUBLE HYPOCRISY – A RING OF BLOODY WATER

While there has been much publicity over the years about the fur trade, it is hard to believe that in 1995 there is still such exploitation of the North American River Otter (*Lontra canadensis*). In the last ten years in excess of 300,000 were killed for fur in Canada and America, many using the gin trap or leg-hold trap outlawed years ago in Britain and many other countries in Europe. Otters trapped in the wild inevitably suffer slow agonising deaths.

It seems even more bizarre that this is a legal trade which exports to countries like Germany, Italy, Denmark, Finland and even Great Britain, albeit on a small scale. While the highest percentage of furs goes to the China and Hong Kong markets, there are still roughly 18,000-20,000 furs a decade exported into western European countries, countries which have protected their own species of otter years ago”

It is sad to say that this is still going on, as you will read in our Review of 2013.

1996

1996 saw IOSF venture into Russia in the Central Forest Biosphere Reserve, where the wildlife is amazing with wolves, bears, wild boar, eagle owls and, of course, otters. We took groups to visit the area and experience living deep in the forest and met Vitali Kotchetkov, a wolf expert, who took us to hear wolves howling in the night. We also visited Valentin Pazhetnov, who rears and releases orphaned bears.

On otters we worked with Dr Vladimir Katchanovsky, who was carrying out research into distribution. He was also breeding European mink for release as they are threatened by their larger American cousins and numbers have declined considerably.



Valentin Pazhetnov with cubs

1997

We know the problems caused by litter and we received an otter with a horrific injury. He had been seen scavenging on boats by fishermen in Kyle of Lochalsh harbour and he clearly had something around his neck. It turned out to be a cable tie which had cut in so deeply that his breathing was affected and his head was badly swollen. The only reason he had survived was because of the fishermen. Believe it or not he recovered and was released back to the harbour and a couple of weeks later he was spotted about three miles up the coast at Balmacara.



Kyle otter

1998

There was little information about otters in Turkey and so IOSF supported a project by Nuray Guven working in the Sultan Marshes. The main purpose was to gather the first biological data about otter distribution in freshwater and to carry out a public awareness programme. She later extended her work into other parts of the country, including areas of the Black Sea, Mediterranean, Aegean, Marmara and Middle East region. The results were given to wildlife protection managers and National Parks together with recommendations for increased protection of otters.

1999

Although our international work had increased so much we were never going to lose sight of the importance of caring for our own British otters, from the individual casualty to the practical conservation of the species.



A major threat facing otters in Britain and many countries, is from the road. So IOSF tested the efficiency of wildlife warning reflectors in reducing deaths at four “black spots” on Skye. The reflectors are made by Swarovski and were effective with deer and kangaroos, but no-one had tried it for otters. Following the installations otter road deaths at these sites were reduced by 75%, and these reflectors have since been installed elsewhere on Skye, in Shetland, Orkney, and elsewhere in the Highlands.

2000

In 1998 the hairy-nosed otter was believed to be extinct as signs had not been found for many years. However Dr Budsabong Kanchanasaka considered it possible that some small populations could still exist in Thailand. IOSF put in some funding and in 2000 Budsabong did indeed find some animals in southern Thailand.

Since that first exciting discovery hairy-nosed otters have been found in Cambodia, Vietnam, Indonesia and Malaysia but populations are small and isolated and they are still very much at risk. Like all Asian otters they are threatened by the fur trade and they have also been found being kept as pets. Unfortunately they appear to be very vulnerable to poor water quality and so pets rarely survive.

2001

In 2001 we funded work by Claudio Delgado in Chile on the feeding ecology of the seacat or marine otter, known locally as Chungungo. Since then Claudio has gathered much data on population density and conservation status and has found that the main threats are, of course, from humans, particularly through habitat alteration including road construction. Otters are protected and fortunately illegal hunting does not seem to be a major threat. Claudio continues to work in education and public awareness through the Conservación Marina Research Program.



© Matthew Steer and Maureen Hardert

2002

In March IOSF's Paul Yoxon went to help with a project to look for more hairy-nosed otters in southern Vietnam. Tracks and spraints of both hairy-nosed and Asian short-clawed otters were found at several sites but camera-traps failed to get any pictures. It seems the otters do not stay in one place for a long time but move quite a distance to forage. Hairy-nosed otters often feed on fish caught in fishing nets and traps which are damaged in the process, so farmers often try to kill them.

2003

In 2000 we held a conference on Skye for people working on otters and the effects of pollutants. In 2003 this was followed by a conference on "The Return of the Otter in Europe - where, when and how". This brought over 100 delegates to Skye from all over Europe to discuss the European situation. In eastern Europe the decline was less than in western Europe, where numbers are now recovering to some extent due to improved water quality. However there is no room for complacency.

Eurasian otters have a vast range from Ireland in the west to eastern China, and they were formerly also found in Japan. And yet we know virtually nothing of their status in the vast part of their range including the huge mass of Russia and China.

2004

In 2003 there was a poison spill in the Commander Islands which form part of the Aleutian chain, extending across the northern Atlantic from Alaska to Kamchatka in eastern Russia. Vladimir Sevastianov had already noticed a serious decline in sea otter numbers in the Bering Sea from approximately 120,000 in the 1980s down to 6-8000 in 2000. This suggested that even before the spill there was something seriously wrong in the ecosystem. IOSF funded field work over summer 2004 which found that otters are becoming more migratory as the huge kelp forests have almost disappeared.

Conference delegates



2005

We have worked with Mordy Ogada from Keynatta University on a few projects and in 2005 he was concerned about the impact of the invasive Louisiana red swamp crayfish on Cape clawless otters. Mordy works in the Kenyan rift valley and initial studies indicated that otters were headed for local extinction.

So how was this caused by crayfish? It was all a question of a balanced ecosystem. Large-mouth bass fish were introduced to Lake Naivasha in the 1950s for sport fishing but ate almost everything so crayfish were introduced as alternative prey.

However crayfish expansion led to a drop in native freshwater crabs which can cope better with varying water levels. These crabs are prey for otters so their



Mordy and others involved in the Kenyan project

disappearance was a potential disaster. Louisiana crayfish density did decline due to heavy predation by birds and monitor lizards, which may help in the long term. Now we need to see if crabs and otters manage to return.

2006

IOSF was asked by Jimena Guerrero of the Universidad Autonoma Del Estado de Mexico for help with a project on the Neotropical otter. Very little is known about this species – in 2006 it was classed in the IUCN Red List as "Data Deficient" and it still is. In Mexico this species is found in rivers, lakes and coastal lagoons from sea level to 1,700 metres and Jimena examined which habitat factors influenced density. Jimena has continued to study her Mexican otters at Glasgow University and recently sent us a copy of a Mexican magazine with a special issue on otters, which will help to increase public awareness.

2007

In October 2007, the IUCN Otter Specialists Group Colloquium was held in South Korea. More than 140 delegates attended and IOSF's Paul Yoxon made a presentation on the otter fur trade. On the last day, a few people decided to turn "talk" into ACTION. Annette Olsson was working with Conservation International in Cambodia at that time and together we worked on a campaign of public awareness, education and community liaison to find out how we could provide an otter-friendly alternative to hunting. This led to the first training workshop for new field workers in Cambodia in 2009, which included students from other Asian countries.



Paul & Grace, South Korea



Waseem Khan & smooth-coated otter

2008

In April 2008 IOSF did an otter survey of County Longford in Ireland. Recent surveys suggested that the population had declined by about 18% in the past 25 years due to poor water quality, loss of habitat and road kills. Otter signs were found on most medium to large water courses and along all lakesides in the county. We also identified an ideal release site for two otters, Guinness and Tipple, who had come to Skye as cubs as there were no otter rescue facilities in their home country. The otters were released later in the year.

2009

Waseem Khan (WWF Pakistan) contacted IOSF as he wanted to gain more experience in otter conservation, so we suggested he attend the workshop in Cambodia. Since then he has continued to work for otters in his home country and launched an otter awareness campaign in Sindh Province. We contacted him about a smooth-coated otter being kept in very poor conditions at Haleji Lake. The otter could not be released but following his recommendations it was moved to a decent enclosure with natural vegetation and a good-sized pool. He has also founded the Pakistan Wildlife Foundation.

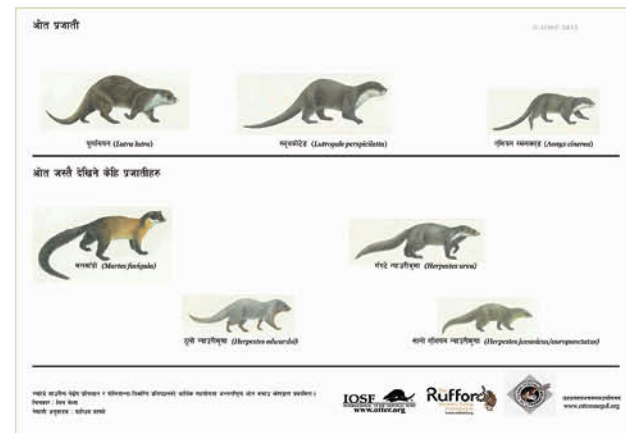
2010

Mazu, a one-week old Congo clawless otter was delivered to missionaries, Glen and Rita Chapman, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, after a hunter killed her mother. Mazu thrived and became an ambassador for otters in the region as the local people of Kikongo, particularly Delphin and Sico, took her to their hearts. Mazu returned to the wild two years later but then another otter, Kamiya, came to the Chapmans and the Kikongo Otter Sanctuary was born.

In 2009 Ruth Davidson in Indonesia rescued a young Asian short-clawed otter. Ruth was originally from Inverness so naturally the cub was called Nessie! By 2010 he had grown and needed the company of more otters so he was transferred to the Cikananga Wildlife Rescue Centre where he still lives.

2011

IOSF has several Asian contacts working on public awareness/education programmes within local communities, but people can be confused about what they have actually seen. Confirmed otter sightings would provide valuable information on species distribution and also encourage people to report more and become more active in conservation. IOSF produced otter ID cards which have illustrations of otters and the species with which they can be confused and also basic information on otters. The first two cards were in Indonesian and Nepalese but they are in a standard format for translation into other Asian languages.



2012

IOSF supported Paras Acharya from Tribhuvan University in his otter study in the Bardia National Park of Nepal. This area is still in pristine condition with no human disturbance, in contrast to other river systems, and he found a significant population of smooth coated-otters. He therefore proposed that the park management should declare this area as core otter habitat. Effective conservation practices developed here should be replicated in other otter-bearing river basins within protected areas where there is high human pressure.

AND IN 2013 - INTERNATIONALLY

Indonesia Workshop

In March Paul and Grace went to Indonesia for an otter training workshop. Here there are four species of otter - Eurasian, Asian short-clawed, smooth-coated and the rare hairy-nosed. Habitat destruction is a major threat and much of the natural vegetation of Java has been removed for palm oil plantations. Otters are also very popular as pets in Indonesia. Most pets are Asian short-clawed otters as they can be trained relatively easily, but hairy-nosed otters have also been found. The otters are nearly all wild-caught and the mother is often killed to get the cubs. So clearly this is having a serious impact on wild populations.

The purpose of the workshop was to train new otter researchers in field techniques and education/public awareness. Classroom sessions were held in Bogor and the first day was opened by the Deputy Minister for Forestry, Bupak Agus Sutito. The Ministry is responsible for Indonesian conservation and they asked for recommendations for measures necessary for otter conservation.

Some pet-owners also attended and heard of the threat to wild otters from this trade. They clearly had no idea of this and confirmed that they would look for captive-bred otters in future. This is a small start but the word is out and it will grow.



The final two days were for fieldwork, which was done near Cikananga Wildlife Rescue Centre. Here we met the three Asian small-clawed otters, Nessie, Lenci and Merci.

At the end of the workshop an Indonesian Otter Network was set up with members on Sumatra, Java and Kalimantan. They will co-ordinate surveys and work to implement the recommendations presented to the Ministry of Forestry.

We are grateful to Columbus Zoo, the Prince Bernhard Nature Foundation and Stacie Bockheim for helping to fund this workshop. We are also grateful to Reza Lubis (Wetlands International Indonesia) for organising the whole event and to Prof Padma de Silva (IOSF's Asian co-ordinator), Prof Syed Hussain (India), Farid Jaafar (Malaysia), Ruth Davidson (now Sri Lanka) and Aad Aadrean (Sumatra) for all their time and effort in providing the training.

Otters and Fisheries in India

For her dissertation for Master of Science in Ecology and Environmental Sciences, Apoorva Kulkarni researched the "Socio-economic and conflict studies in relation to the smooth-coated otters and fishermen in the Cauvery River, Karnataka, India." Of course, this fits very well into the whole fisheries issue which has been concerning IOSF.

Working with fishing communities Apoorva looked at the conflict between fishermen and otters. The perceived conflict is very high and she is keen to have more information to give to fishermen to show the importance of otters in the environment.

Apoorva was also thrilled to receive a fellowship to attend a summer school at the Duke Marine Lab in North Carolina, USA. Only seven people from around the world were chosen as a



Global Fellow in Marine Conservation for 2013-2014. The five-week course dealt with marine conservation and policy making and Apoorva naturally chose marine mammals (including sea otters) as her specialist subject. She gave a presentation on her studies in India and told fellow-students about otters. She was surprised how many students were unaware of their existence and ecological role within their own neighbourhood.

20 Years The International Otter Survival Fund - 1993-2013

2004 - Sea Otters Study of the Commander Islands, Russia



2008 - Tipple & Guinness, Ireland



1994 - Su - first otter in care at IOSF



1995 - Iraqi Marshes



1996 - Taiga Forest, Russia



1998 - Survey in Turkey

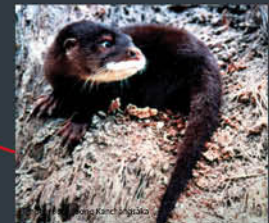
1999 - Sushi smooth-coated otter in India



2006 - Neotropical Study Project, Mexico



2001 - Marine Otter/Sea Cat territory, Chile



2000 - Hairy nosed Otter discovered in Thailand



1997 - Giant Otter survey, Guyana



2010 - Mazu, Congo Clawless Otter, Democratic Republic of Congo



2009 - Otters of Lake Victoria, Kenya (Spotted-necked Otter)



2007 - The Peace Bell, Korea



2005 - Study of Cape Clawless prey by Mordy Ogada, Kenya



2002 - Work in Belarus



2011 - Asian Short-clawed Otter, Nessie/Cikananga Wildlife Rescue Centre, Indonesia



2003 - Paul Yoxon in Vietnam - Hairy-nosed Otter survey work

The Fur Trade

IOSF has always been very concerned about the fur trade and its huge impact on otter survival, particularly in Asia. In many areas they are now becoming rare and almost extinct, as in China.

In Asia the problem is largely related to poverty, as are most environmental issues. Poor fishermen regard otters as competitors for fish and if they can earn a bit extra to feed their family by hunting then they will do it. We cannot condemn them for this.

However in America and Canada it is totally different. Here hunting is nothing to do with feeding the family but is often largely sport. In 2010 IOSF obtained figures from official government department records for both America and Canada which showed that just under 40,000 otters are killed annually. This takes no account of animals which have not been registered or those caught incidentally when beaver trapping, and it is only for river otters, not sea otters.

In Illinois otters almost became extinct so they were protected in 1929. However, numbers still declined and by 1990 there were less than 100. So they were reintroduced. Now they are proud to announce that have held their first otter trapping season for 84 years and it was a success with about 2,000 otters "captured" which really means "killed"! The next trapping season

American river otter



© Tonya Thibodeaux



© Lee Matthews

Asian short-clawed otter

begins in November, and will last for about five months.

How can we criticise people for doing what they can to survive, even if it involves killing otters, when we turn a blind eye to the wanton killing in America and Canada?

IOSF will not do this and will continue to do all we can to campaign against it.

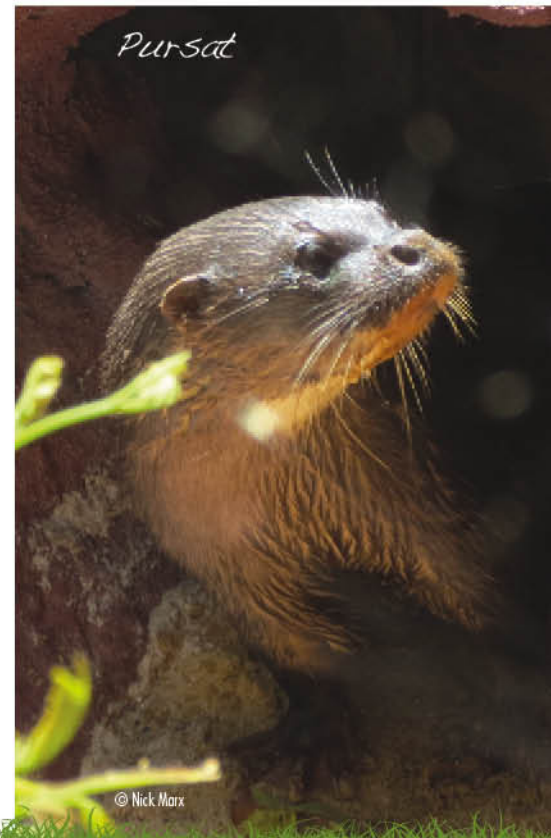
Update from Cambodia

As you know, IOSF has supported the otters at Phnom Tamao Wildlife Rescue Centre (PTWRC) in Cambodia for a number of years. The Centre was set up by the Forestry Administration of the Cambodian Government and is considered to be one of the best wildlife sanctuaries in south-east Asia.

Pursat, the only hairy-nosed otter in captivity, is being cared for at PTWRC but there are also several smooth-coated otters. An adult male smooth-coat was rescued by the

Wildlife Rapid Rescue Team and is currently in the Quarantine area. He is called Rolong, meaning "smooth" in Khmer.

Clearly he cannot stay in the Quarantine area and so we were delighted to receive funding from Colchester Zoo Action for the Wild to pay for a new enclosure, which is now under construction. In the past PTWRC have bred smooth-coated otters very successfully and they aim to use this enclosure to encourage breeding and release the cubs.



© Nick Marx



© Nick Marx

African Update

It is now over a year since Kamiya went to Kikongo and became the second resident at the Kikongo Otter Sanctuary. She is already becoming more independent and so it will not be long until she goes back to the wild like Mazu.

In July someone brought Glen an otter aged about 6 months. Its mother had been chased away so he made sure they understood that this was totally wrong.

Then he had to decide what was best for the animal. Eventually he concluded that he should try to reunite it with its mother so he and Delphin released the young otter where it was found. It appears that all went well as they later found tracks of both an adult otter and youngster together.

In Namibia, Charlie and Mark Paxton received a young Cape clawless cub, still with its eyes closed. Again the cub had been taken from her mother.

Clearly education is vital to prevent people taking youngsters from their mother. Glen and Rita are already busy with this with the help of Delphin, who is a great teacher, and the Paxtons will also be preparing education material for their area.

If you would like to help with this important education work in Africa, please send a cheque marked "Africa education" on the back or you can donate online at www.ottershop.co.uk



© Kith & Glen Chapman

Hungary

In September, Paul and Grace went to Hungary with a group of volunteers to work at the Otterpark in Petesmalom. The Otterpark is part of the Somogy Provincial Association for Nature Conservation (SPANC) which is a Hungarian environmental organisation founded in 1980. Their aim is to create a wildlife corridor from Lake Balaton in central Hungary to the River Drava, which forms the southern border with Croatia. They bought 300 hectares of meadowland and about 500 hectares of fish ponds or lakes and are restoring the wetlands.

Some lakes have already been restored and have good stocks of fish including pike and carp. These lakes also provide an ideal habitat for various fish-eating species such as greater egrets, herons (grey, purple and bittern), cormorants, white-tailed eagles and, of course, otters.

Our main task was to repair one of the park's otter enclosures. A creek runs through the enclosure but the banks were badly eroded by the water flow. So the aim was to dig down below water level, put in a plastic lining to hold the soil, and then fill it back in again. This was certainly quite a job especially as it was very hot in the first few days.

Another job was to clear weeds from a gravel island constructed to attract

nesting terns and plovers, which was also hot work as there was no shelter from the sun. Our final job was to tackle some invasive plants around the park, but the extent of these plants is so vast.

Our group of volunteers did a tremendous job and were treated to amazing Hungarian hospitality. Many thanks to Andrew, Elaine, Graham, Fiona, Matt and Ania for all their hard work and relentless enthusiasm! And also to Hajni, Jani and Tibor and everyone at Petesmalom and SPANC for giving us such a wonderful week. We wish you every success with your work.



© Andrew Cameron

2013 IN THE UK

Otters and fisheries Conference

So much publicity has been given to the “fact” that otters are everywhere and of course people working in fisheries are worried. However, although otter signs are appearing in new areas they are NOT everywhere and their situation is still very fragile.

In November 2012, IOSF held a conference in Edinburgh bringing together over 60 people interested in different aspects of this issue - otter scientists, ecologists, government departments, anglers, carp fishermen and fish farmers.

There was a certain uneasiness in case people with totally different viewpoints could end up arguing. Of course our own concern is for otters but fishermen care equally passionately about their fish and this could have led to conflict. But

everyone was open for discussion and to learn more about the other viewpoints.

Presentations were varied from a case study on otters in Somerset to IOSF's Paul Yoxon discussing the limitations of spraint surveys which cannot provide actual otter numbers. A Stirlingshire fishfarmer gave very useful information on the damage caused by otters and this must be taken into consideration. Hajnalka Kovacs from SPANC in Hungary described how their lake system is used by fishfarmers to earn a living but that otters, cormorants, herons, egrets, white tailed eagles and many other fish-eating birds are also thriving.

There was much discussion and finally it was decided to form a small working group to take things further.

Otter Network of the British Isles

Due to all the information and mis-information available, it was suggested to IOSF that it would be useful to have a network for all those actively involved in otter work throughout the UK and Ireland. Here workers can share best practice, survey results, methodology and offer support to each other.

Another purpose is to help with fisheries problems. IOSF receives enquiries from fisheries throughout the UK so it is particularly useful to put them in touch with local individuals or groups who can help.

IOSF is acting as a hub for the network and a forum has been set up to share information, which is already being well used. This is the first step and we will keep you in touch with developments.

Action on Otter Road Deaths in Scotland

In April we received a very sad report of four otters killed together on the A90 in Perth and Kinross. We passed the report (via Catherine Lloyd, Tayside Biodiversity Co-ordinator), along with two previous otter road deaths on the same road, to the Perth and Kinross Biodiversity Officer in Planning, David Williamson.

Within about a week David met with Transport Scotland to inspect the sites and it seems that because of high water levels, the four otters had been crossing the road rather than go through a culvert. Transport Scotland promised to erect barrier fencing to keep the otters away from the road. At the second site however, there was no obvious reason for the otters to cross the road so this area will be monitored to identify the best solution. It is always reassuring to receive a prompt response to such a problem. Thanks.



PASS IT ON

Recycle your otter news by passing it on to friends and family; your local library or school; Doctors 'surgery or hospital; vets waiting room, etc.

Don't waste it, spread the word.

News From the Sanctuary

Over the 20 years we have cared for 167 otters and this year we have had six in our sanctuary.

Shamrock came from Ireland and was acting very tame, even taking fish from the hand, so we were worried she could not be released. However, after time in an enclosure well away from people she is now wild again and disappears under her sleeping box whenever we approach. We are now arranging her release together with Emma Higgs of Wildlife Rehabilitation Ireland, and by the time you receive this she will be back in her Irish home.

We have had two Skye otters which, surprisingly, is unusual as most otters come

from further afield. One cub, Willow, arrived on Boxing Day from Carlost, not far from the Talisker distillery and he is now back in the wild. The other decided she would rather stay in a luxury room of the Isleornsay Hotel!

Paul has done much maintenance work on the pens over the year. On 5th November 2012 an extreme gale removed our new metal shed and took it a couple of hundred yards away. Unfortunately the shed formed part of the side of the otter pen housing one of our otters, Ness. Of course she vanished but re-appeared a few days later. So we decided to repair the fence and move the shed.



Shamrock

Isleornsay



Willow

A visiting otter has been persistently trying to dig into the pens and eventually it succeeded in getting in with Bubble and Squeak. They naturally took the opportunity to “release” themselves. Fortunately they were old enough and we were planning to take them back to their Cumbrian home soon. Since then we have seen them foraging on the shore, so they seem to have settled back into the wild.

So another task for Paul was to repair the damage done by the visitor! We decided that our croft pens are actually too big and so we will split them in two. This is far more workable when catching them but still provides them with a good-sized area.

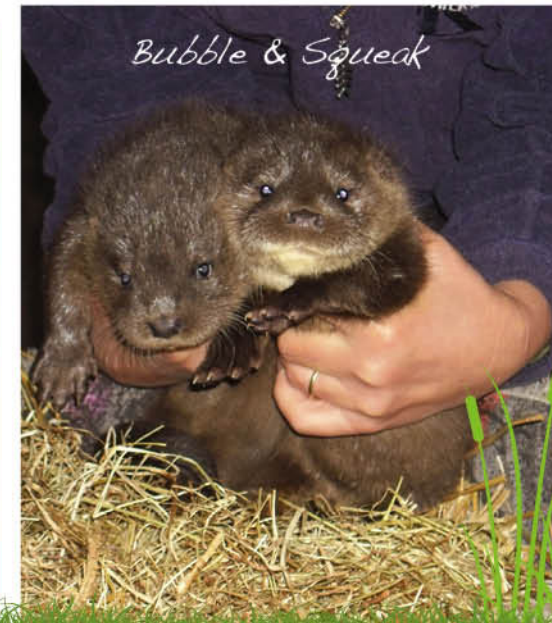
If you would like to support the otters at the sanctuary, please send a cheque marked “Otter Sanctuary” on the back or you can donate online at www.ottershop.co.uk

OTTER NEWS ON PDF

Help IOSF to put more money into otter conservation by reading your OtterNews online.

If you are happy to do this please email us at enquiries@otter.org quoting your sponsorship number, and reduce our printing and postage costs.

If you prefer, we are still happy to send out a printed copy to you.



Bubble & Squeak

Otter Awareness Day

We had a great response to Otter Awareness Day which was held on 29th May. Various supporters held different fundraising events whilst others did equally important “awareness” for otters.

In India, 29th May is also Apoorva’s birthday, who you will have read about above, and she celebrated it in a very special way. Her field assistant, who is also a fisherman, is determined to start otter conservation in his community and so set himself up to try and spot otters. To his delight he saw eight otters cross the river from one island to another and managed to video the entire event. This is a very unusual sighting in that region and Shivu presented Apoorva with the video as a

Restoring Eel Populations to Help Otters

Our rivers once teemed with eels but since the 1970’s they have suffered a 90% decline. They were a major source of food for our otters but over-harvesting and pollution have caused them to decline. This could well be why otters are becoming more of a problem in domestic fish ponds and fisheries.

IOSF is pleased to support Herefordshire’s Golden Valley Fish and Wildlife Association, who are working to restore numbers and buying juvenile eels (*Anguilla anguilla*) destined for world markets and using them to restock the rivers.



Stream used by otters, Pabay

birthday gift. He also promised to share the video with his fellow fishermen and explain to them the beauty of otters and their importance in the ecosystem.

Here on Skye, Grace went to the local Out of School club in Broadford and had a fun time with the kids looking at all the different species of otter in the world.

Brydon Thomason, Gary Bell and Richard Shucksmith from Shetland Nature undertook a sponsored otter tracking day. Not only did they raise over £800, they also managed to spot an amazing 25 otters!

In the USA, Florida Aquarium also organised some events to raise awareness and support the otters.

Pabay Otter Survey

We have been members of the Highland Biological Recording Group (www.hbrg.org.uk) since it started in 1987 and the group always organises field trips to encourage biological recording of various species. This year we were fortunate enough to receive permission to visit the Isle of Pabay, in Broadford Bay. There were visits in June and again in August, so that different species could be recorded according to season.

Grace and Paul from IOSF went in June to do an otter survey. They had carried out a survey in 2000 and it was immediately noticeable how the removal of sheep and most rabbits had allowed the vegetation to become very overgrown – in 2000 there had been so many rabbits which provided a great source of food for otters. Now the otters have reverted to a more “normal” diet of fish.

We were pleased to find that there are still plenty of otter signs. In fact, many of the recorders followed otter runs, which provided much easier access than tramping through the high vegetation.

A full report on the trip will be printed in the Highland Naturalist next spring. Anyone interested in joining HBRG or receiving a copy of Highland Naturalist should contact treasurer@hbrg.org.uk



Otter footprints, Pabay

FACEBOOK AND TWITTER

Keep up to date with all IOSF news through Facebook and Twitter – you will find the links at the foot of the first page of our website, www.otter.org

The Otter Shop is now on facebook. Please visit our page then like and share. Let’s get the Otter Shop to a bigger audience.



OTTERS ON THE INTERNET

We receive regular notices about items in the media concerning otters. If you want to keep up to date with these reports you can find them on our website at <http://www.otter.org/newsUpdates.aspx>

Snare Update

IOSF has always been very concerned about the use of snares and their barbaric cruelty on all animals. They are totally indiscriminate and will catch any animal – indeed there have been six otters caught in snares over the years but even so-called “target-species” should not suffer in this way.

IOSF is part of a joint campaign to ban their use in Scotland and OneKind is now increasing pressure on the UK government to make snares illegal. OneKind’s Louise Robertson sent the following update:

“Animal welfare charity OneKind (formerly Advocates for Animals) is stepping up its efforts to see the use of animal snares made illegal with the launch of a new postcard campaign. The charity, with the support of the International Otter Survival Fund,

is urging members of the public to support the campaign by sending a postcard to their MP.

The postcards ask MPs to put pressure on DEFRA Ministers to ban the use of snares. Snares are cruel, indiscriminate traps which cause terrible suffering, and in some cases, a slow, painful death for the animals which become trapped. A snare can harm any animal unfortunate enough to become trapped and have been known to cause horrific injuries to otters.

Please support OneKind’s campaign by filling in the enclosed postcard and sending it by freepost back to OneKind so they can send it to your MP on your behalf.”

More information is on the OneKind website (www.onekind.org) - click on Snare Watch. Please do support this campaign to ban snares in this country. Thank you.



Thanks

There are always so many people to thank but we do have to mention the following, whose help has been so valuable:

The H.B Allen Charitable Trust

The Animal Defence Trust

Care for the Wild

Colchester Zoo Action for the Wild

Hugh Fraser Foundation

The Dorothy Howard Charitable Trust

The International School in Stavanger

The Ivo Trust

The Ian Keith and Sylvia Keith Charitable Trust

The Matthiesen Foundation

Shetland Nature

The Shuman Animal Welfare Trust

Spear Charitable Trust

The Roger Vere Foundation

The Walker 597 Animal Trust

The J & J R Wilson Charitable Trust

Microsoft – donating computer software

Thanks to St Mary’s School in Glossop for donating funds to help with education work at Kikongo.

Jackie West and Andrew Cameron on our Advisory Board have provided so much help over the year and we are very grateful to them for all the time they give to us.

We would also like to thank all those who took part in Otter Awareness Day - the more we can make people aware of otters and the threats to them the more we can do to conserve them.

And a few others we have to mention:

Children and Parents Association of Rendcomb College who selected IOSF as one of their causes to support.

Other young supporters who, in various ingenious ways, have raised money for us include: George Rutteman, Alfie Pallett, Isabel Hayler Hughes and friends.

Rachel Marchant who bravely had her very long locks cut to a bob and raised money for IOSF.

Daphne Neville and her otters, and Wolfgang Gettman and his otter Nemo, who always support our work.

The Isle of Skye Brewery has brewed Skye’s Otter Ale to mark the 20th anniversary of IOSF. A donation will be received from every bottle sold.

Doug Lapsley for all his help with our website.

John McMinn, a long-standing friend of IOSF, for his help with otters.

GOOD NEWS FROM BELARUS

In spring, our friend, John Griffiths, visited Belarus to help Dr Vadim Sidorovich, mostly with work on wolves, but Vadim also specialises in the study of Eurasian Otters.

The Naliboki forest provides ideal habitat for otters but about 5-6 years ago Vadim noticed an alarming decline in otter numbers. Vadim and John thought that the creation of drainage canals for peat extraction and agriculture had led to rivers being diverted and streams drying up. But during his recent visit John saw that otter numbers are definitely increasing again and they even found two holts with signs of recent activity.



Wolf cubs

© John Griffiths

ABOUT IOSF

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Co-ordinator: Janet Wildgoose – Development Officer: Helen Stephenson

Head of Operations: Dr Paul Yoxon

Asian Co-ordinator: Prof Padma da Silva European Co-ordinator: Dr Vadim Sidorovich

Advisory Board: Andrew Cameron, Jackie West

A NOTE WHEN WRITING:

Could we please ask you to give us your sponsorship number whenever you write as it does help us to find your records more quickly. Thanks.



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