



## Otter News No. 134, August 2022

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### Good News from Cambodia

#### Baby hairy-nosed otter caught on camera

The Cambodian Fishing Cat Project recently posted an amazing video on Facebook a hairy-nosed otter cub with its mother! (<https://www.facebook.com/fishingcatcambodia/>). The footage was taken in a beautiful mixed mangrove stream in the Peam Krasop Wildlife Sanctuary. The team has been monitoring a pair of otters since 2017 and this is the second time they have found breeding in the period March to May. This is such useful information as so little is known about this species in the wild.



Photo from video: ©Cambodian Fishing Cat Project

The project works in some of the most remote forests in Cambodia where both fishing cats and rare hairy-nosed otters live. Back in March 2021, we reported in our e-update how the group had managed to persuade a fisherman to release his pet smooth-coated otter to the wild in Kratie province. The fisherman, called Horn Chhorn, saw a female and her three cubs, but when one of the cubs got stuck in his net he decided to take it home for a pet.

A few days later, Sophat Reaksmeay, a researcher with the Fishing Cat Project, heard about this from his father-in-law, Horn Heanh, who lives in the same village as Chhorn. Sophat immediately contacted Chhorn to explain why wildlife should never be kept as pets, and although reluctant at first he eventually let it go. For a while the baby otter called out for his family and in the end these calls were answered and the group of six otters came to take him back.

But this isn't the end of the story as the team from the project gave Chhorn some money to compensate him for the cage he had built and the fish he had fed the cub. So it is a story with a positive ending, as not only is the cub back with its family, but the community is now more aware of problems facing otters.

There are still problems with conflict between fishermen and otters and working with communities is vitally important. Their recent post with the video ends "Good luck baby, we'll be looking out for you!". It is wonderful to have these people watching out for all wildlife while they carry out their research.



## And Nick Marx has more good news ...

Earlier this year Phnom Tamao Wildlife Rescue Centre (PTWRC) was able to release a group of three smooth-coated otters at Angkor, one female and two males. Since then they have settled well and have been seen exploring together. PTWRC continue to leave fish and sometimes the otters return to the release enclosure for food.

Unfortunately there is also an unwanted result of these successes as when people hear about this work they think it is the perfect place to dump their pet otter which they no longer want. This happened to a male smooth-coated otter that was so tame, he was very easily caught. They had hoped to be able to introduce him to the three released otters but found that his canines had been removed and so he will have to remain in care. So sad.

## Effects of Drought in UK

**There has been a lot in the media about the hot and dry summer weather throughout the UK this year and the potential effects on aquatic biodiversity.** Those of us in the Highlands and Islands had none of this. People in the south think we were lucky and maybe the intense heat and lack of rain was extreme but our constant rain and cool weather was not great either. Only now in September are we having any real sun and there are still frequent showers.

In many parts of England water levels are so low that hose-pipe bans have been brought into place. The Environment Agency have said that only 8% of rivers and streams are at “normal” levels, 29% are regarded as “exceptionally low”, 31% are “notably low” and another 29% are “below normal”. Rivers quoted as being very low include the Thames, Great Ouse and the Yare in Norfolk, the Cam in Cambridgeshire, the Swale in North Yorkshire, and the Wye in Gloucestershire.

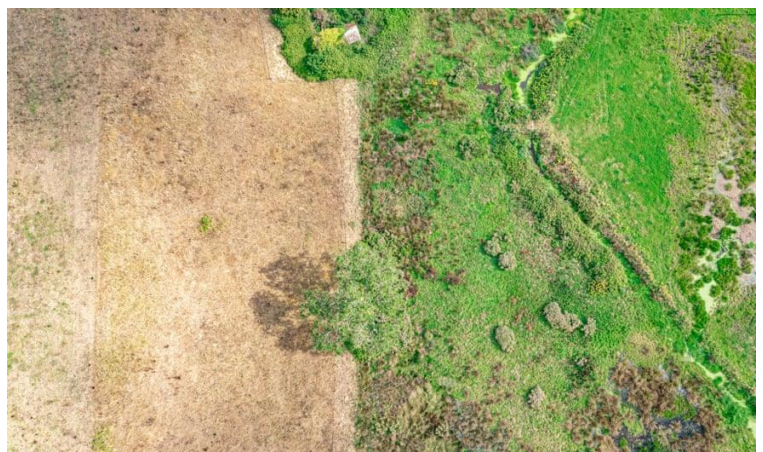
Of course this has serious repercussions for all wildlife relying on the aquatic ecosystem. Not only do the warmer waters cause physical stress but algal blooms become more frequent which reduces the amount of oxygen in the water. Furthermore, as water levels become lower the concentration of pollutants increases.

Species such as salmon and trout cannot migrate upstream to spawn and along the River Mole in Surrey fish had to be relocated into bigger water bodies. This clearly impacts on otters as their prey availability is reduced. For some time now IOSF has been saying that the apparent “increase” in numbers of otters in UK may be more the result of them having to travel further to find their prey resulting in larger home ranges, rather than more actual otters. If water levels are so much lower now and there are even less fish this must inevitably be the case.

It is clear that with climate change periods of dry summer weather will probably become more common and so there have to be plans for conserving water and also regenerating wetlands. And this is where beavers can be a great help. When we visited Vadim Sidorovich in Belarus back in 2001 he showed us the clear benefits of beavers in wetland ecosystems. The beavers were naturally building dams creating ponds which in turn collected fish, frogs and crayfish as prey for otters and the native and Critically Endangered European mink.

So could the reintroduction of beavers in UK help our water problems too or could they cause even more problems for farmers by flooding the land.

Take a look at this photo:  
(Image Jake Newman: KOR Communications)





This is a photo taken with a drone of a small tributary of the River Otter in Devon. How is it that on one side the vegetation is yellow and parched and yet in the river valley on the other side it is green and lush? How is it that water is coming out of the drainage ditch but everywhere else it is dry?

The answer is simple – it is the beavers.

They arrived in the valley about five years ago and were part of the River Otter Beaver trial, which involved the Clinton Devon estates, Devon Wildlife Trust and Exeter University. They have found that their activities are greatly enhancing the wetland by taking the river system back to where it used to be and this is beneficial to invertebrates, including dragonflies, fish and birds such as woodcock and snipe. These wetlands also store carbon.

And there are more benefits of beavers – preventing floods. Some 40 houses in a village downstream are reaping the benefits of that as they were at risk of flooding before the arrival of the beavers. As the beavers build their dams they create new ponds, as in Belarus, and the dams can slow the flow of water during heavy rainfall, thus preventing or at least reducing flooding.



So why is it that the National Farmers' Union are against the protection of beavers? The problem is that people want to farm across the flood plain and so the beavers' work is very inconvenient. Richard Bramley, an arable farmer who is chair of the NFU's environmental forum, said "I've always taken the view that if you want to 'rewet' an upland area to benefit wildlife or reduce flood-risk downstream, you can do it without beavers – you can put in a leaky dam or a more solid structure

without the variable that is the beaver." And in the next breath farmers are moaning about lack of money when the beavers will do this work free of charge!

In Bavaria there were similar concerns 30 years ago but now they realise that they can happily co-exist. In Devon one farmer lost an acre of his productive land but further downstream there is great pasture and the ponds provide drinking water for his cows. Richard Brazier, a professor of Earth surface processes at the University of Exeter said "If you look downstream, it's productive farming. If you look up, it's wild and messy biodiversity."

Beavers were hunted to extinction in Britain 400 years ago and they have since been reintroduced into Argyll. From 1 October 2022 they will be recognised as a native species in England once more with legal protection. On 2 September the Government published guidance for farmers on how to "manage beavers" and this includes the statement that "as a last resort" farmers can apply for a licence to kill them to protect crops!

So what is the answer? As always it is a complex issue but surely we should be embracing the help of beavers in our environment. There are now at least 100 wild beavers in the River Otter and their answer is to have a "beaver officer" to help farmers resolve their problems without killing the animals.

[https://inews.co.uk/news/environment/uk-drought-rivers-lowest-levels-otters-kingfishers-salmon-wildlife-disaster-1793175?ITO=newsnow&fbclid=IwAR3\\_GD4Vq5WpgTp6vNIVXOt1Dk8CVdwz-3Nn137aqGNn1GUPTM6rKoT3i9Q](https://inews.co.uk/news/environment/uk-drought-rivers-lowest-levels-otters-kingfishers-salmon-wildlife-disaster-1793175?ITO=newsnow&fbclid=IwAR3_GD4Vq5WpgTp6vNIVXOt1Dk8CVdwz-3Nn137aqGNn1GUPTM6rKoT3i9Q)

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/aug/24/you-cant-control-what-beavers-do-or-how-they-do-it-could-rewilding-help-england-fight-droughts>



## News from The Sanctuary

We now have six otters in the sanctuary, following the arrival of two youngsters from the SSPCA, who asked us for help while their otter rehabilitation facility underwent some renovation/construction work. Both of these otters came from around Troon, though they are not related and there is quite a big size difference.



Baird and Marina happy together

The smaller one, Marina, is now in with Baird. Initial meetings were frosty but they are now inseparable. Worryingly, when Marina arrived at SSPCA they found plastic and polystyrene in her spraints, although this disappeared quickly when fed properly. We don't know if she was eating these out of desperation or if she ingested them with her food but either way, it shows the risks these materials pose to our wildlife.

Mist, the second of the SSPCA otters, is doing really well and shows the perfect wild temperament that we like. At first he didn't like the white fish he was given and insisted on salmon fillets, but now he is tucking into whole white fish.

The other otters are all doing well and soon it will be time for Storm to take his place in the wild where he belongs. Wally, who was found near Dingwall and resides next to Storm is growing well. He is a very secretive animal and really dislikes any disturbance.



Mist



Storm



Wally

Bealltainn, who has been with us since May 2020, has developed into a beautiful adult otter. She has created her own holt in her enclosure where she uses the long vegetation as protective cover and rarely uses her sleeping box. Unfortunately, she continues to show little sign of being able to adapt to life back in the wild and doesn't like water!

***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](http://www.ottershop.co.uk)***

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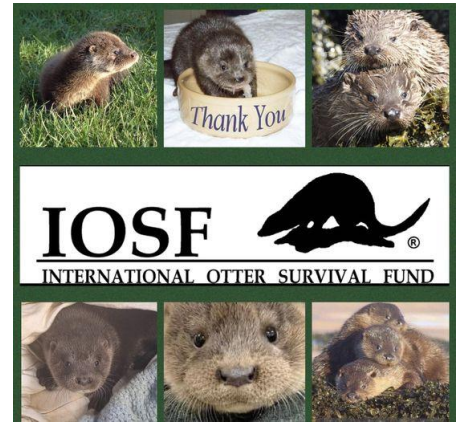



## IOSF Podcast

Ross Lawford is a wildlife photographer and author and recently he asked IOSF's Grace Yoxon to take part in his "Nature in Conversation" podcast. Grace talks about the start of IOSF in 1993 and our work at the sanctuary, education and also international projects. The podcast is accompanied by some lovely otter photos and video footage of otters in the wild.

So if you want to hear more you will find it at:  
<https://youtu.be/E7COOLUf1XI> or on Spotify at

<https://open.spotify.com/episode/1ujmdHIY1wiQBKNyWLNvo?si=zL6XhxOZQQa8dYA8pxij1Q&fbclid=IwAR3iTE2G36iK85dywUEiDNbQm0PJDNObPrpQavgkW7n1n0wt0vRRG4bwmQl&nd=1>





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### Team Otter Broadford is back!

After a long break for the summer holidays, we were delighted to get back together for our first meeting of the new term. The Primary group used the first session to have a mixture of team games on the beach including as creating 'animal art' with beach items, rock towers, throwing games

and finding fossils. Congrats to the eventual winners - Peter and Blair!

The High School group took the time to count the collections for their "Team Seas" campaign. Many of you will remember how they created an awareness campaign for the organisation and worked with the local supermarket and social media to raise money to help remove plastic from the ocean. After all their hard work, the kids managed to raise £754.10 which will help to remove around £340kg of plastic from the ocean – that's roughly the weight of the average Polar Bear!



Thanks, as always, to our volunteer helper Nick!



*For more information on Team Otter, check out our website ([www.loveotters.org](http://www.loveotters.org)) or Facebook. If you are interested in forming your own Team Otter Club contact [Ben@otter.org](mailto:Ben@otter.org)*

## Otters Rock (Photos ©Celia Hills)

In early August whilst on holiday in Southwold, Suffolk, brothers Thomas (12) and James (11) and their cousins Theo (12) and Lily (8) painted stones found on the beach outside their beach hut and sold them to passers-by. They very kindly chose the IOSF as their desired destination for the funds, raised from their sales, in order to help us, and the otters, and we are very appreciative of their efforts! In total they raised £20 from their great designs, so a big thank you very much Thomas, James, Theo and Lily!



### 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>

**A LEGACY IS A GREAT WAY OF GIVING TO SOMETHING CLOSE TO YOUR HEART** and every gift makes 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](http://otter.org/Public/HelpUs_Legacy.aspx) will take you to our dedicated web page concerning making a Legacy.

## Walt Welles

**We were saddened to learn of the recent death of Walt Welles, who lived in Duisdale on the Isle of Skye.** Walt had his 100<sup>th</sup> birthday on Christmas Eve last year and he had supported our work through Skye Environmental Centre since the 1980s.

Although he lived on Skye for nearly 40 years, Walt was born in New York and spent most of his career at sea, including being a part of the wartime transatlantic convoy. He first visited Skye as a young man when on leave and eventually came to settle on the island.





He had a keen love of wildlife and called us to check his land for otter holts and also when pine martens moved into his attic. He didn't want to move or harm them but just wanted some advice. His house had a fantastic view over the Sound of Sleat and he put that down to his long life.

Walt was a true gentleman with many a great story to tell and he is a sad loss to the community.

**Thank You...** for your continued generosity to help us in our work with otters.

We also thank: Alice Noakes Charitable Trust, Big Wild Thought.

And, our Corporate Sponsors: Andrew Poplett Enterprises Ltd, The Fenn Bell Conservation Project, Nurtured by Nature, [holidaycottages.co.uk](http://holidaycottages.co.uk).

Also, Mrs. Barnstijn, in memory of her husband and long-time supporter of IOSF.

*You keep us moving forward*

## Otter Shop Product of the Month

[www.ottershop.co.uk](http://www.ottershop.co.uk)

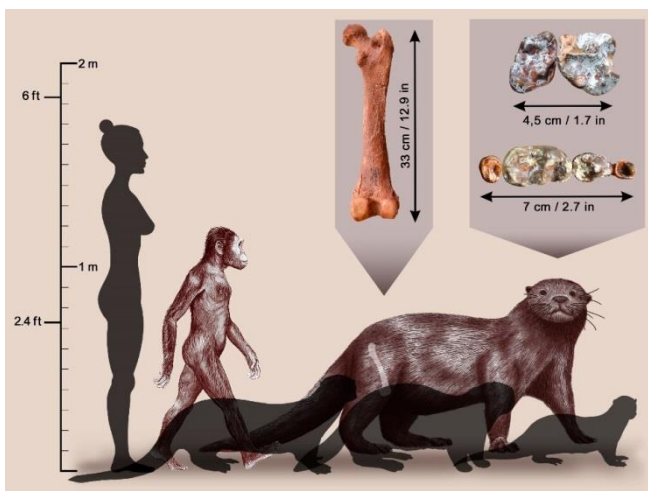
Oscar Otter is back in stock and he's waiting for you. Now is your chance to get one of these friendly characters in your home... a friend for life.

[https://ottershop.co.uk/products/oscar-otter-a-collectable-character-dora-designs?\\_pos=2&\\_sid=7082794b9&\\_ss=r](https://ottershop.co.uk/products/oscar-otter-a-collectable-character-dora-designs?_pos=2&_sid=7082794b9&_ss=r)



## An Otter the Size of a Lion?

We are all in awe of the magnificent giant otter of the Amazon basin which can take piranha, anaconda and caiman as prey. But this is just tiny in comparison to a long extinct otter found in Ethiopia which was about the size of a modern day lion! Scientists estimate that it weighed 200kg as compared with 32 kg for the giant otter! Other huge otters have been described from Eurasia and Africa but this is believed to be the biggest of them all.



It has been named *Enhydriodon omoensis* after the Lower Omo Valley in southwest Ethiopia, where it was found.

The image below is a reconstruction of the fossil otter compared with three current species, left to right: the giant otter; the sea otter; and an African otter. It lived during the Plio-Pleistocene time, about 3.5-2.5 million years ago, and so would have overlapped with early Hominids, Australopithecines. These are also shown with a modern human for size comparison.

Photo credit: Sabine Riffaut, Camille Grohé / Palevoprim / CNRS – Université de Poitiers



The otter's femur and dental remains are shown in the insets on the image and it was examination of the teeth which revealed that the new species was not aquatic and preyed largely on terrestrial animals. However, other otters of the same genus, *Enhydriodon*, appear to have been semi-aquatic like modern otters.

There is still a lot more to learn from otter fossils, including what caused their extinction about 2 million years ago while other species survived.

<https://phys.org/news/2022-09-ethiopia-scientists-fossil-otter-size.html>

The full scientific article can be found at <https://sciencepress.mnhn.fr/fr/periodiques/comptes-rendus-palevol/21/30>

## News in Brief

### Fire Brigade to the Rescue

Derbyshire Fire and Rescue had an unusual call out recently when an otter became trapped in a pipe connecting two overflow pools at a sewage treatment works. They may be used to rescuing cats in trees but this was a completely different task. The RSPCA asked them to help with the rescue and together they managed to get the otter into a pet carrying box and return it to the River Derwent.

<https://www.derbytelegraph.co.uk/news/derby-news/otter-rescued-sewage-works-derbyshire-7413827>

[A brief video of the rescue and the otter going back to the river can be seen at](#)  
<https://twitter.com/i/status/1554464305009000449>



Photo: Derbyshire Fire and Rescue Service

## Asian short-clawed otters in India

In August a post was made on the IOSF Asian Otter Conservation Network reporting that a group of naturalists had spotted two Asian small-clawed otters in the Sundarban Biosphere Reserve in West Bengal. They had been on a three-day visit to the reserve and on 14 August they spotted the otters at low tide in the mangrove forest.



Photo: ©Amit Das

The Sundarbans are one of the largest mangrove forests in the world and lie on the Bay of Bengal in both India and Bangladesh. During IOSF's Bangladesh otter workshop in 2014 we visited the areas and were fortunate to see wild Asian small-clawed otters ourselves.

## Sea otters to return to San Francisco Bay?

Over many different newsletters we have discussed the plight of the endangered sea otter. Once hunted to the brink of extinction, populations have recovered to a certain extent but nowhere near their previous range, nor previous populations.





Observations of sea otters in northern California are fairly sparse but there is fresh hope that the species could be reintroduced to the area. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service recently carried out a feasibility study which they presented to congress, and this suggested that the sea otter could be introduced into the northern California area up to Oregon State. However, no recommendation was made as to whether the species reintroduction should actually take place or not; it just concluded that it would be a possibility and that the sea otters would help the ocean ecosystem as a whole.

<https://www.sfchronicle.com/bayarea/article/Sea-otters-once-hunted-to-near-extinction-could-17336167.php>

It's not all positive news for Californian sea otters though as The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service are contemplating the removal of the otters from their current Endangered Species Act protective status, once a full status review has been completed. In view of the fact that they are still recovering from near extinction, it is of concern that this protective status would be lifted before otter populations had a proper chance to recover fully.

<https://www.independent.com/2022/08/24/feds-consider-delisting-southern-sea-otter-as-protected-species/>

### Otters in Toronto

There is growing belief that North American river otters may be returning to Toronto, Canada. It has been suggested that a video taken at Tommy Thompson Park and Ashbridges Bay is a family of otters (<https://streamable.com/2m09f1>) but otters are often confused with mink and it is hard to be certain. River otters were wiped out in Toronto in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century but there were reports of some animals on the outskirts of the city in 2012. So let's hope the otters are returning and that we will get more definite proof soon.

<https://www.blogto.com/city/2022/07/people-keep-spotting-otters-toronto-park/>

### Otter rescued from eagle attack

A young Eurasian otter had a lucky escape from an eagle in the Åland Islands, Finland. The otter was spotted swimming for its life as the bird attacked and nearby sailors came to the rescue. The otter was healthy and must have been separated from its mother during the eagle's 'attack' so it was taken to Viltrehab Åland, a rescue centre. The otter named Otis will be rehabilitated back to the wild where he belongs!

We also want to thank the centre's social media for emphasising that despite being cute – otters are not pets and should never be considered as such!

<https://www.newsweek.com/otis-otter-rescued-eagle-attack-sailors-tiktok-video-1732870>

### Eurasian otter in Odisha state, India

In July last year a team were carrying out a biodiversity survey and photographed a semi-captive Eurasian otter



Photo: ©Nimain Charan Palei

in a village in the Sundargarh forest division in Odisha state. Apparently a villager had rescued the cub from dogs in December 2020 and fed it cow's milk - cow's milk is not suitable for otters as they cannot tolerate lactose but presumably it soon went on to rice and fish. Every day it was taken down to the river and soon it was swimming well and hunting for its own prey. The fishermen tried several times to release it but it always returned home.

The information on this otter adds considerably to the knowledge of

this species as it is about 300 km from the last report from Odisha.



There are three species in the state (Eurasian, smooth-coated and Asian small-clawed otters) and Nimain Charan Palei, one of the authors of the paper on these findings, managed to get some camera trap video footage of smooth-coated otters. He told us that they want to do further study on the distribution of all three species and this is well needed.

### Otter found in Parc del Montnegre and the Corredor, Spain

The Carnivore Research Group of Catalonia (FELIS-ICHN) was using camera traps to monitor feral cats and other carnivores in Parc del Montnegre and El Corredor when they got a surprise image of an otter. This was in a tributary of the Tordera river and otter breeding had already been found in the lower part of the river in 2021. They had not been found for 40 years and improvements in water quality and legal protection has helped the population to start to recover.

[https://parcs.diba.cat/es/web/i-informatiu/-/montnegre-es-detecta-per-primer-cop-la-pres%C3%A8ncia-de-ll%C3%BAdriga-al-parc-del-montnegre-i-el-corredor?fbclid=IwAR2KCOsqvhpohJUoF6cDmRm-4R-YZZISm6U79PXh4fytgTW3\\_sqHJSqJjDY](https://parcs.diba.cat/es/web/i-informatiu/-/montnegre-es-detecta-per-primer-cop-la-pres%C3%A8ncia-de-ll%C3%BAdriga-al-parc-del-montnegre-i-el-corredor?fbclid=IwAR2KCOsqvhpohJUoF6cDmRm-4R-YZZISm6U79PXh4fytgTW3_sqHJSqJjDY)

## IOSF Otter Oscars

We are now accepting nominations for the IOSF Otter Oscar Awards 2022.

IOSF's annual awards for otter conservation give special recognition to those who have worked to help otters, and you can now nominate someone (including yourself) that is deserving of the award.

If you know of someone that is deserving of recognition and you want to nominate them, then please click here

([https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScpBO7orWI\\_7ncmaYtIPL8EFnd1bEYUvzy2qM-YQixiYD-LvA/viewform?usp=sf\\_link](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScpBO7orWI_7ncmaYtIPL8EFnd1bEYUvzy2qM-YQixiYD-LvA/viewform?usp=sf_link)).

We will be accepting nominations until Friday 25<sup>th</sup> November and announcing the winners on Monday 5<sup>th</sup> December.



**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)

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

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### Annual Supporters' Rates

#### UK and EEC Countries:

Adult: £24.00 per year  
Child: £13.00 per year  
Family: £34.00 per year

#### All other countries:

Adult: £30.00 per year  
Child: £15.00 per year  
Family: £40.00 per year

Life Membership (all countries): £350.00





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<https://www.giveasyoulive.com/charity/iosf>

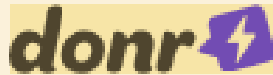


<https://www.easyfundraising.org.uk/causes/iosfund/>



<https://www.thegivingmachine.co.uk/causes/international-otter-survival-fund/>

OR, scan and add our charity code  
**62575**



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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://www.donr.com/iosf> to find out more.



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

**GiveACar** - turn your old car/bike/van/caravan into cash for IOSF. With free collection, your vehicle will be auctioned or sold for scrap, depending on its condition, and the proceeds (minus service fees) raised going to support our work in otter conservation.

Find out more at <https://giveacar.co.uk> or call 020 7736 4242

Have you enjoyed reading this? Then please **SHARE** it with someone else and spread the word.



If you are reading this for the first time and would like to receive all IOSF mailings, click [here](#) to sign up. Please be assured that we will never pass on your details to any other party and you will only ever receive emails from us.

## Discover Ways You Can Help

There are many ways in which you can raise money and awareness to help the otters in our **Fundraising Pack** or find out what some of our supporters have done over the years in the online **newsletters**.

International Otter Survival Fund  
7 Black Park  
Broadford  
Isle of Skye IV49 9DE  
Scotland

Email: [enquiries@otter.org](mailto:enquiries@otter.org)  
Tel/Fax: ++(0)1471 822487



Charity Number SC003875

Join our IOSF mailing list. Click on this link:  
<http://tinyurl.com/p3lrsmx>

[www.otter.org](http://www.otter.org)

**The International Otter Survival Fund**  
Working to Save the Worlds Otters

