



Thirty Years of Otter Conservation

Otter News No. 145, August 2023

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Great News – Wales Bans the Use of Snares

IOSF has been working with various conservation organisations to get a complete ban on snares in the UK. These barbaric devices have been used for so-called “pests” for so long but obviously they do not discriminate which animals they will catch. We have had many otters with terrible injuries and people’s pets have also suffered in this way.

The law was changed so that only free-running snares could be used – that means that if the animal doesn’t pull, the wire will not tighten and will loosen until they pull again. Of course we all know that any animal trapped in this way will keep pulling to try and get free, so there is little difference between these and the self-locking snares.

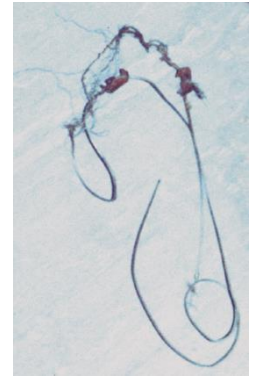
So the only way to stop this cruelty was a complete ban.

Now Wales has become the first country in the UK to bring in such a ban together with a ban on the use of glue traps which are set to catch small animals such as mice. The law should come into effect later this year, once it has been granted Royal Assent.



Otter receiving treatment after being rescued from a snare.

A snare recovered from an otter on the Isle of Skye



Of course the shooting lobby tried to include an exemption so that they can continue to use “humane” snares – as if there is such a thing but the Welsh Senedd saw through this and a complete ban will come in.

And now it looks as if Scotland will also bring in a ban on snares as the Scottish Government has published a consultation on the use of snares and powers of Scottish SPCA inspectors. In addition, they are also looking to bring in a REAL ban on foxhunting by blocking the various loopholes which still allows this so-called “sport” to continue.

It is so important that we tell the Scottish Government that these horrific devices MUST be banned completely and the Scottish SPCA should have greater powers to stop illegal killing and suffering of our wild animals.

The consultation can be found at <https://consult.gov.scot/environment-forestry/wildlife-management-in-scotland-2023/> which will inform the Wildlife Management and Muirburn (Scotland) Bill. You have until 3 October to respond and we would urge you all to make sure this ban does come into effect.

We also have to ensure that pressure is put on England and Northern Ireland to do the same.



But in Cambodia ...

Every quarter we receive an update on how things are going at Phnom Tamao Wildlife Rescue Centre (PTWRC) and the Wildlife Rapid Rescue Team (WRRT). We were pleased to hear that a new water purification plant has been built at the Centre which will certainly make it easier for the care of their hairy-nosed otter, Na-ree. This species is very vulnerable to poor water quality and so drums of fresh water for her pool had to be transported in from Phnom Penh.

The WRRT was formed in 2001 with Wildlife Alliance staff, officials from Forestry Administration (FA), Military Police and a Fisheries Administration official and their aim is to combat the illegal wildlife trade throughout Cambodia. If possible they immediately release animals back to the wild but if they need care they transport them to PTWRC.

If you want an idea of the amount of work carried out by WRRT since it started in 2001 just look at these figures:

- Rescued more than 75,000 live animals
- Apprehended over 7,800 offenders
- Confiscated 78,000+ dead animals and 19,000+ kilos of wildlife meat

Clearly, this is causing significant disruption of the illegal wildlife trade in Cambodia.

This is all really positive but there is always more to be done and this brings us back to the snares.



Photo: Wayne McCallum

Some time ago a small group of smooth-coated otters were released into Angkor by Wildlife Alliance and in January of this year five cubs were seen accompanying the adults. Sadly, in May a female otter was found dead in a snare, not far from the release site. It was clear that the snare had been set specifically to catch an otter, possibly by an angry fisherman who blamed the otters for his problems, in spite of the fact that he was probably fishing illegally. The otter turned out to be one of the youngsters and so now they have stepped up surveillance to make sure this doesn't happen again.

But as in the UK, the only way to be sure that our wildlife is protected against such devices is to ban the use of snares and make sure that the law is enforced. We know that Nick Marx and his team at PTWRC and WRRT will continue to work on this.

Update on Greek Islands Appeal

Thanks so much to everyone who donated to help Graham Roberts return to the Greek islands to see how the otters have fared after the disastrous fires.

As a result of our appeal we have received a really generous £284 from you, our loyal supporters, and an additional £1175 from Zoo Montana. So we have been able to send Graham £1,459 to help with this project.

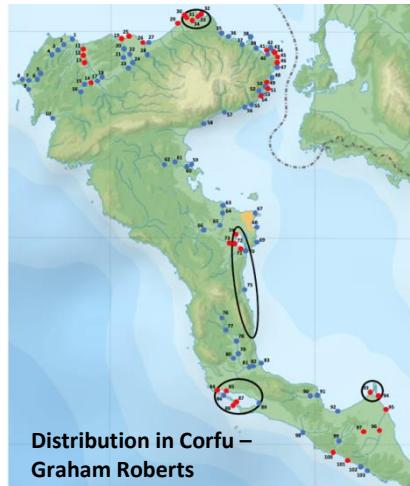
When we told Graham about this he said “Wow thanks Grace - - that is amazing and a great help.”

Only six of the 6,000 Greek islands have historical records of otters which means that these populations are so important. Graham has spent the last three years surveying four of these six islands and now intends to complete the survey



with a further two visits next year to the other two islands of Lefkada and Samos and he will also revisit Corfu. It has been revealed that otters are now absent from Lesbos and Chios but still holding on in Corfu and Evia. However, the severe weather events and serious fires on Corfu and Evia are obviously putting further stress on these isolated populations.

Graham has established good contacts on Corfu and intends to get a local group of interested "otter spotters" on board who can keep him and IOSF informed of the current status on an annual basis.



There is no doubt that safeguarding precious wetland environments on islands experiencing dramatic extremes with Climate Change, already limited water resources, and dependence on mass tourism are going to be huge challenges for future generations.

Following next Spring's survey, a full report will give an overview of all six islands which can be used to target the Greek Government with its duties to protect and enhance this increasingly rare mammal and its habitat.

We will, of course, keep you informed of his project and again many thanks for your wonderful support for this valuable work.

Eurasian Otters in Israel

Otters are rare in Israel and numbers have drastically declined over the last few years. They seem to have disappeared completely from the Golan Heights, Harod Valley, Beit She'an Valley, and Jezreel Valley. Nowadays they are found in the Upper Jordan River basin, the Hula Valley, the Sea of Galilee region, and the Jordan Valley. Otter signs have been found further south along the southern Jordan River, which may indicate that they are spreading southwards. Nevertheless, numbers are believed to be less than 100 individuals.

It is the same old story about what has caused this decline – habitat degradation and loss, pollution and deaths on the road. In the past 15 years, at least ten otters were killed on roads in the Hula Valley. So the Nature and Parks Authority built a number of land bridges above water level and set up camera traps to monitor their use. And they are working. One otter was caught on camera at a site where four others had been killed previously.

And as in Minnesota, other animals are benefiting from these crossings including mongooses, martens and various rodents.

<https://www.ynetnews.com/environment/article/hjgawnq63>

Amit Dolev and his colleagues gave a presentation at the IOSF conference "Return of the Otter in Europe – Where and How?" which is published in the OTTER Journal Volume 2 (https://otter.org/Public/MediaAndResources_Resources_Journal.aspx).



In this they stated "Until the middle of the 20th century otters were abundant in Israel on all coastal rivers extending from the Lebanese border to the Tel Aviv area, as well as along the Jordan River basin from its source to the Dead Sea. The Harod and the Yizrael Valleys served as a corridor between the Jordan River and the coastal plain populations. However, during the 1960s the otter population underwent a dramatic decline due to illegal hunting, water pollution, and the drainage of aboveground water sources.

The first surveys, conducted in the 1980s and 1990s, illustrated a stable population in the Hula and the Harod Valley; no evidence of otters was found in the southern Jordan River, while along the coastal plain,



evidence of only a few individuals were found. Little information about the current distribution of the otter population in Israel has been published since then until a comprehensive survey was conducted in 2000-2001. This was followed by increased research efforts in the following two years (2001-2003), including distribution surveys every six months. These latest observations confirm that:

1. Otters are present in aquatic habitats and fishponds in the Hula Valley, in the northern Jordan River catchments and the Harod Valley.
2. A single record from the Zvulun Valley and Carmel coastal area in 2000 suggests the existence of a remnant population along the coast, which may become extinct.
3. New findings have indicated previously undocumented otter activity in the Golan Heights.
4. A landscape bottleneck between the Harod and Yisrael Valleys may act as a barrier and prevent the re-colonisation of the coastal region.”



Things have clearly deteriorated since then and it is hoped that these mitigation measures and further studies will help the Israel otter population.

A Message from William in Tanzania

Dear Otter lovers!

I hope you all doing well and working to protect otters and their habitats. I would like firstly to thank IOSF for their financial support and tireless efforts for protecting otter life. I feel blessed to be part of conserving the otter, and speak for an animal that cannot share the challenges they face themselves.

For my latest project, I managed to visit three schools and also fishermen in Lake Nyasa.

Firstly I visited Mkali beach, where I spoke with 35 fishermen about the importance of protecting otters, the challenges they face and how they can engage in conservation. The fishermen shared their views on how they perceive otters, and not all believed that otters are a destructive animal. Some think that the otters possess roots in their mouth that enable them to catch plenty of fish. When I asked who has the root from otter nobody

had it, and they said it is just a myth.

For my school visits, I worked with Lundo Secondary school (156 students), Ngindo (321) and Lundo primary school (313). The students love the



lesson, shared their understanding and got chances to ask questions about otters and their conservation as well.

Finally, I managed to speak with fishermen in Chinura beach, a place where fishermen had



caught an otter with a fishing trap (hook). Chinura Beach is one of the places that I have already visited to speak to fishermen, as well as planting trees. After talking to them regarding what happened, they explained to me that they

unfortunately found the otter after it was already dead, after being trapped for long hours on the fishing hook. They always set their traps for fish during the late evening, and revisit them in the morning, and so they believe the otter was trapped in the night.

The place where otter was killed was on the shore of Lake Nyasa, in the Ndegere hills. This area is now protected, and is managed by Tanzanian Wildlife Management Authority (TAWA), who I am currently working with. This is a place that is not yet destroyed by human activities and the fishermen have said is the favourable environment for the otters.

The best ways to sensitize people to the conservation of otter in Lake Nyasa is to establish a football league for fishermen to compete in, with a trophy that carries the otter message, and to formulate environmental clubs in schools that will be responsible for otters and environment as well.

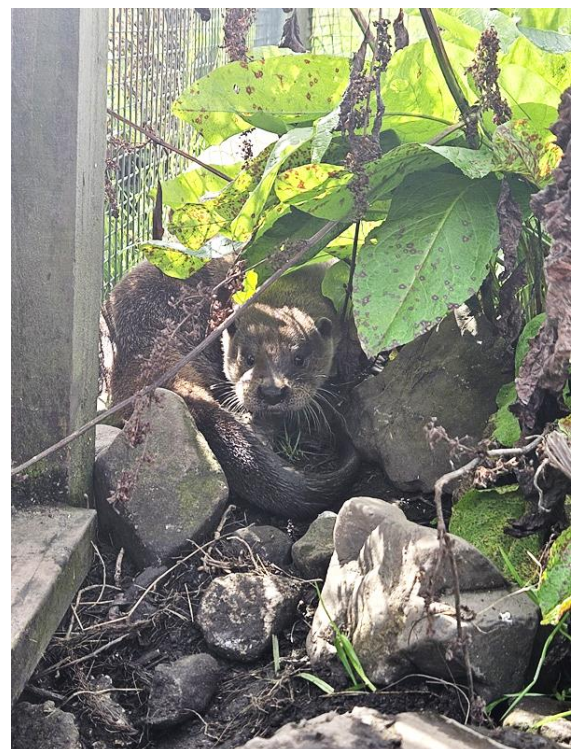
If you would like to support William's great education work, you can send a cheque marked "Tanzania" on the back or make a donation online at www.ottershop.co.uk and select "Tanzania projects" from the drop-down menu. Thank you

NEWS FROM THE SANCTUARY

The big news this month is that Dòbhran (pictured right) will soon be heading home to Mull. He arrived in October 2022 after he had been found by the roadside near where a female, presumably his mother, was killed by a car. He was quick to take to his food and hasn't really looked back. So now it is time for him to take his place back on his island. We look forward to sharing photos of his release in due course.

Bealltainn, also from Mull, has become a total recluse and we very rarely see her. We can tell she has been into her sleeping box as there is an otter-shaped dip in the hay! But other than that and the occasional view of a disappearing tail she keeps well hidden. This could be good from a release point of view BUT she still doesn't use her pool so couldn't hunt.

Eden and Winston are in fine condition. They have a habit of taking their fish into their pool which shows that this is where they expect them to be. They have also created a "holt" under one side of the pool and disappear in there



whenever we disturb them for cleaning!

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 <https://ottershop.co.uk/products/donate-to-iosf?variant=32787580616842>

	<p>Please support IOSF and help to ensure that important conservation and awareness work continues.</p> <p>UK taxpayers...</p>	<p>Increase the value of your gift to IOSF: <i>giftaid it</i></p>
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After the school summer holidays, Team Otter Broadford are back!

The Primary School has had a variety of projects in our meetings so far and we've welcomed four new recruits, Sam, Remy, Oscar and Dylan, to the group.

We started with path-building, repairing a community path that was destroyed in some extremely heavy rain during August.

With sunnier days now here on Skye, this week's meeting was an exploring day! As the tide was out, we searched rock pools to see what we could find... Fish, crabs, hermit crabs, starfish, shrimps and a whole array of wildlife were observed in the rock pools left on the shoreline!



The High School group are continuing to work on their beach clean target, which has managed to get going again! A clean-up in Kilbride, and another in Armadale, both on Skye, have brought the number up to 9 – but there is a big effort still to go! Please give them some extra encouragement with a donation on their JustGiving page

<https://www.justgiving.com/page/team-otter-broadford-1676536990827>

Plans are underway for more beach cleans, including some from our friends at Team Otter Seaside Elementary, in Canada!

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



Otter Shop Product of the Month

www.ottershop.co.uk

This lovely monochrome otter illustration is available for you, or as a gift. Each one has been signed by well-known TV presenter and farmer, Jimmy Doherty and is presented on textured FSC certified paper. Jimmy was the otter ambassador in a wildlife/charity awareness campaign. The prints are unframed, A4 size and are designed and made in England. (shipped flat)

Don't miss out... get yours today
<https://ottershop.co.uk/collections/new-products/products/otter-print-a4-creature-candy>



Can Citizen Science Really Work?

Ask the 200+ volunteers in Herefordshire who have been regularly monitoring the water quality of the River Wye and it is a firm **YES**.

In May, Natural England downgraded the condition of the Wye following a decline in Atlantic salmon and white-clawed crayfish. The local people were so concerned for their river that they banded together to take water samples from the source in the Cambrian mountains to the Severn estuary. With so many people involved in the project and professional analysis this amount of evidence could not be ignored.

Jon Ungood-Thomas and Maximilian Jenz publicised this work in the Observer (12 August 2023) and after looking at 256 freshwater habitats on 38 river stems which are sites of special scientific interest (SSSIs), they found that only (9%) are in



Photo by [Rob Wicks](#) on [Unsplash](#)

“favourable” condition. That is a terrible statistic.

Of course there are targets to restore water quality but not until 2042 and then only 75%.

Local people believed that phosphate-rich runoff from intensive poultry farms were the cause of the pollution and algal blooms. And there are

literally millions of chickens being reared in the area and the manure is being spread across farmland with the run-off going into watercourse in the Wye catchment.

So the good people of Herefordshire decided to do something about it and anglers, conservationists and local residents started their monitoring project. And they were right – A report by Lancaster University concluded that chicken litter was the main source of manure-causing phosphate pollution on the Wye.

This has had an even more positive outcome as farmers start to accept their responsibility for the phosphates.

Joe Orgee runs a farm with 48,000 free-range chickens at Much Cowarne and has created 11 wetland



pools to reduce soil loss, slow down the water and prevent excess nutrients getting into the streams. Since this was done the Wye and Usk Foundation have found a 53% reduction in total phosphorous levels in nearby water courses.

Another farmer, David Watts has 40,000 hens on his farm near Bromyard and has reed beds to filter any run off into the river Frome, a tributary of the Wye. He also regularly tests the water and land for phosphates.

This positive Wye Alliance Citizen Science project can be a model on other river catchments which have similar pollution problems and it is hoped that others will take this on board.

<https://www.theguardian.com/global/2023/aug/12/citizen-scientists-make-a-vital-difference-the-locals-who-proved-the-river-wye-was-polluted>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cmmj23rrvgdo>



A big thanks, as always, to our regular sponsors and donators. Your dedication to supporting our work continues to inspire us.

And, as always, we have special thanks, to the following:

Tesco Stronger Starts Scotland, Zoo Montana, Jones Family Charitable Trust, Big Wild Thought, Longleat Entertainment Ltd, Dr. Malcolm Pines (bequest), Steve Davidson.

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

News in Brief

Ancient otter-like seals

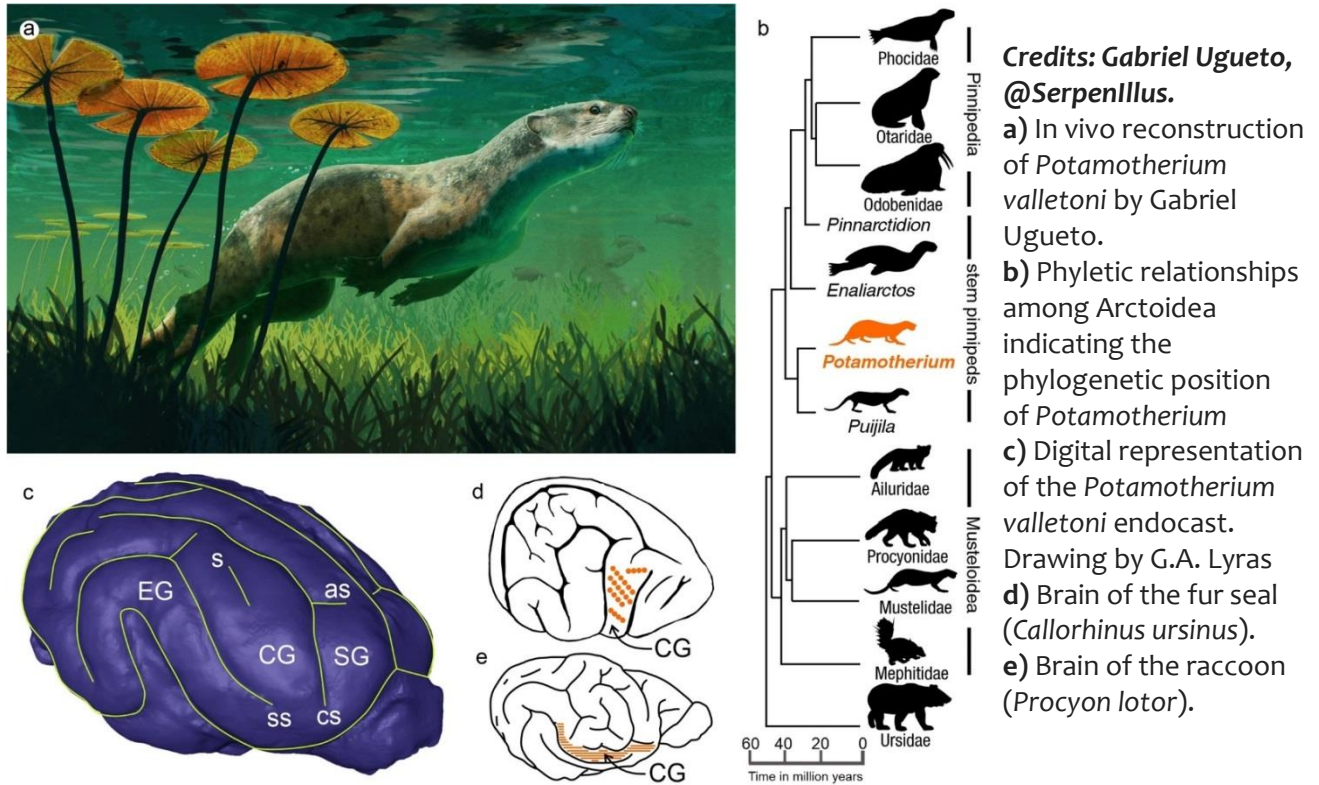
23 million years ago there were ancient forms of seals and otters and one particular seal, called *Potamotherium valletoni*, was very similar to our otters. Indeed it even seems to have developed the ability to use its whiskers to find food, much like many of our present-day otters.

Today most seals live in the marine environment, although there are exceptions such as the Baikal seal found in Siberia. However, in the past they appear to have been found more in freshwater habitats and even terrestrial.

Nowadays we are familiar with the fact that most otter species use their whiskers to find prey although some clawless otters use their “finger-like” digits to root out prey. Modern day seals also use their whiskers.



A new study by Alexandra van der Geer and colleagues looked at the actual structure of the brain and how this indicates foraging behaviour. Apparently the region of the brain called the coronal gyrus is involved in processing signals from whiskers. By comparing this in *Potamotherium* with extinct and living carnivores, they found that it was about the same size as in animals which use their whiskers to forage, such as the Eurasian otter, rather than those which use their forelimbs. At this time seals were still not fully aquatic and it may have been this ability to use their whiskers which helped them to adapt to hunting underwater.



More information: George A. Lyras et al, Fossil brains provide evidence of underwater feeding in early seals, *Communications Biology* (2023). DOI: 10.1038/s42003-023-05135-z
<https://phys.org/news/2023-08-million-year-old-otter-like-whiskers-forage.html>

Turtle tunnel helps otters cross the road

We all know the risks to wildlife when they cross the road and there are various methods in use to try and help the situation. In Minnesota they built three wildlife tunnels under Cliff Road along Lebanon Hills Regional Park and it is already being well used by otters, muskrats, squirrels and snapping turtles. Hopefully this will continue to be well used and saves hundreds of animals lives.
https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/turtle-tunnel-otters-road-cross_n_64df997de4b00bac4765461

Otter scares off a crocodile

We have seen cases before where a group of otters will take on creatures like cayman, but a recent incident in Singapore showed one single otter taking on a huge crocodile which was resting on a sandbar in the Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve. This species of crocodile – a saltwater or estuarine crocodile – is one of the biggest in the world but that didn't deter the otter. The crocodile initially made a lunge at the otter with its fearsome teeth and jaws, but in the end decided the effort wasn't worth it and it dropped into the water and swam away. The otter was clearly very pleased with itself and lay back to chill out on the sandbar.



Photos by courtesy: ©Serene Ong Hak Tee



<https://mustsharenews.com/otter-faces-off-crocodile/>

Image of The Month

This month's amazing image was taken on the Water of Leith, Edinburgh by ©Tom Kelly (Go Wild Edinburgh). We are sure you will agree, it is quite fascinating.





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

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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 will take you to our dedicated web page concerning making a Legacy.



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




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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**.

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7 Black Park
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Isle of Skye IV49 9DE
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