

REPORT ON THE ASIAN OTTERS AND WETLANDS TRAINING WORKSHOP IN CHINA 5-10 September 2016, Chimelong Penguin Hotel, Zhuhai, China

Otters are great indicator species as they are top predators and use both the land and water - they are therefore ideal symbols for wetland conservation.

There are three species of otter in China:



Eurasian Otter (*Lutra lutra*)
classified in the Red List as
“Near Threatened”

© Maureen Hadert/Matthew Steer



Smooth-coated Otter (*Lutrogale perspicillata*)
classified in the Red List as
“Vulnerable”

© Mustafa Feeroz



Asian Small-Clawed Otter (*Aonyx cinereus*)
classified in the Red List as
“Vulnerable”

© Lee Matthews



Populations of all three are declining, largely due to wetland degradation, depletion of food resources, and illegal hunting. The high quality of otter fur has meant that they have been an important target species for the fur trade. China is a major market, particularly in Tibet, where it forms a part of the traditional dress. Otters are now protected in China but, of course, illegal trade does still continue.

In China there has been great concern for the giant panda which has recently been downgraded from “Endangered” to “Vulnerable” in the IUCN Red List. Similarly there have been conservation efforts for tigers and elephants but there has been virtually no work done on Chinese otters and this was the first ever workshop on otters held in China.

33 participants attended the workshop from eight different countries - Nepal, Sri Lanka, Thailand, The Netherlands, Australia, Ukraine, UK and,

of course China. They came from zoos, universities and NGOs and the workshop was officially opened by Mr Matthew Rous, HM Consul-General Guangzhou.



Grace Yoxon, Paul Yoxon, Padma de Silva and Matthew Rous



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The first day began with a look at the otters of the world, an overview of Asian otters (their identification, ecology and threats), and Chinese otters (historical overview, status, current knowledge, legislation, threats). The afternoon continued with otters as wetland ambassadors, re-introducing otters, and caring for otters for release.

A major part of the workshop was education and public awareness, particularly in schools and zoos, and this was done both in presentations and in actual practice during a session with a group of local schoolchildren. There was also discussion about the best way to do education with older children (12-17 years) and adults.

Field techniques (survey methods and use of camera traps) were discussed but actual fieldwork was not possible as otters cannot be found near the venue. However, participants had a chance to practice spraint (droppings) analysis and identifying footprints from casts.



Identifying otter footprints from casts



Examining spraint

Threats to otters can come from conflict with fishermen and from roads and so mitigation measures were considered. However one of the main threats is from the illegal wildlife trade and this was looked at both on an Asian scale and from a more local scale in Nepal and China.

Tibet has always been a major market for otter furs but one participant who works on the Tibetan plateau told us that the use of real furs is declining there as the people become more concerned about conservation encouraged by the Dalai Lama. He has prepared a book on otters in Tibetan, which he is keen to have translated and printed in English.

The final afternoon was for discussion and to introduce the concept of setting up a Chinese Otter Conservation Network, a totally new initiative. The discussion was lively and there was great enthusiasm for setting up the Network.



Participants and children together have enjoyed the practical education session



The children show off their artwork



The children went into the park to talk to visitors about otters and give them leaflets in Chinese



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The aim is for the Chinese people themselves to work together to take otter conservation forward and they identified two priorities:

1. Base line otter surveys to get a better understanding of current distribution and status;
2. Education and public awareness.

Already a team from WWF Hong Kong and Ocean Park Hong Kong, have volunteered to help Sharne McMillan who is doing a PhD on otters in Hong Kong and she is also keen to help them with their education work – true co-operation. Participants are also enthusiastic to carry out survey work in northern China and in the Xiaokeng Forest Park in the south.

Overall the workshop was a great success. The Chinese Otter Conservation Network now plan to set up a website and use a Chinese social network site to keep in touch and to create more awareness. The sites will be run by the Chinese Network but a link to both sites will be put on the IOSF website. IOSF will keep in regular contact with the Chinese Otter Conservation Network which will also be linked to the Asian Otter Conservation Network, set up following earlier workshops.

Thanks to all the attendees:



1. Jyoti Bhandari, Chinese Academy of Sciences, China but originally from Nepal
2. He Bing, Nyanpo Yutse Environment Protection Society, Peking University, China
3. Yi-Lun Chiang, Kinmen Wildlife Rehabilitation and Conservation Association, Taiwan
4. Li Fei, Kadoorie Conservation China, Hong Kong
5. Yuanjun Huang, Chinese Academy of Sciences, China
6. Yang Huiqiang, Shanghai Zoo, China
7. Addy de Jongh, Stichting Otterstation Nederland, The Netherlands
8. Budsabong Kanchanasaka, Wildlife and Plant Conservation Department Bangkok, Thailand
9. Ho Siu Kit, AEC Ltd, Hong Kong
10. Nga Yee Lai, WWF Hong Kong
11. Ling-Ling Lee, National Taiwan University
12. Fung Luk, Ocean Park, Hong Kong,
13. Sharne McMillan, University of Hong Kong but originally from Australia
14. Elena Nesterko, Stichting Otterstation Nederland, The Netherlands/Ukraine
15. Vasantha Nugegoda, Ocean Park, Zhuhai, China
16. Lala Peng, Ocean Park, Zhuhai, China
17. Maggy He Qijing, Wildlife Conservation Society China Program, China
18. Matthew Rous, HM Consul-General, British Consulate-General Guangzhou, China
19. Mohan Bikram Shrestha, Wildlife Conservation Nepal
20. Purna Man Shrestha, Small Mammals Conservation and Research Foundation, Nepal
21. Padma de Silva, IOSF Asian Co-ordinator, Sri Lanka
22. Wasana de Silva, Chinese Academy of Sciences, China, but originally from Sri Lanka
23. Zhang Xiaohong, Wetlands International China
24. He Yong, Green Earth Volunteers, China
25. Grace Yoxon, International Otter Survival Fund, Scotland
26. Paul Yoxon, International Otter Survival Fund, Scotland
27. Ning Zuomei, Snow Alliance, China
28. Zeng Shengwei, Dalian Student Environmental Alliance, China
29. Miro Li, Ocean Park, Zhuhai, China
30. Delu Zhang, Ocean Park, Zhuhai, China
31. Tiger Li, Ocean Park, Zhuhai, China
32. David Lai, Ocean Park, Zhuhai, China
33. Jiesui Zeng, Wildlife Conservation Society China Program, China

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- Colchester Zoo
- Anderson Rogers Foundation

If you would like to contribute to help with the important work of the Chinese Otter Conservation Network you can donate at the Ottershop at www.ottershop.co.uk. Thank you.



Book on otters in Tibetan



IFAW Animal Action Award Winner 2012



Wildlife Conservation Award Winner, British Animal Honours 2013