



## Otter News No. 148, December 2023

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### IOSF Student Research Grant (photos courtesy Andy Rothwell – Benbecula survey) Many students carry out their degree dissertation without a long-term view of



where this will lead. Dissertations involving field survey techniques for otters are clearly not covered in many university courses and so if a student wants to carry out an otter project it can be very difficult for them to know where to start. IOSF is therefore providing a sponsorship opportunity open to all undergraduates **who have already completed their first year**, to help and encourage young students into field research on otters and their ecology.

The IOSF Student Research Grant is designed to help students carry out an otter field survey under the guidance of a



professional ecological surveyor. Andrew Rothwell has carried out many ecological surveys, especially for otters, including the National Otter Surveys of Scotland and England. He is willing to give his time for free and will undertake a field survey with them to train them in the various techniques involved, including post-survey work such as diet analysis. This could form the basis of their dissertation for their degree and we would hope that it could lead to more ecological work on otters in the future.

This project is now in its third year, with previous surveys being carried out on the islands of Barra and Benbecula.

This year it is the turn of North Uist, another of the islands in the Outer Hebrides, Scotland, and IOSF is offering two students the opportunity to join in this survey by covering the cost of accommodation and travel whilst on the island. The dates are 7-21 September 2024.



Contact [enquiries@otter.org](mailto:enquiries@otter.org) for more information and an application form.





**World Otter Day is coming!** It might still be four months away but it is time to get planning and make this year even bigger again. It's all about growing awareness and support for otter conservation and raising the profile of the species. We can all do something, whether it's a small or big event, posting on social media– it's all down to what you want to do, want to achieve and have some fun!

29 May 2024

If you need any inspiration, or do have some plans to run an event, then let us know and we can add it to the World Otter Day events map, or give you some help and advice.

### Grants

As always, IOSF is offering three £100 World Otter Day grants to go towards the running of an event. This can be an education day, an awareness campaign, some otter research! Follow the link to find out more!

[https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfs\\_H1vRoec2\\_a0BkaQAzH00a-OpxdYNICFAoj1-7-iYsya8Q/viewform?usp=sf\\_link](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfs_H1vRoec2_a0BkaQAzH00a-OpxdYNICFAoj1-7-iYsya8Q/viewform?usp=sf_link)



Kids, it is time to dust off your pens, pencils and crayons and get creative! IOSF's Children's Art Competition is now underway and we want to see your otter-ly amazing artwork! Use your imagination and creativity to showcase your talents with a chance of winning an otter prize!

We have two age groups, aged 11 and below, and aged 12-16 for your submissions and the competition will run for the next few months. Winners will be announced on **World Otter Day!**

If you need further information or to submit your entries (please include your age with your entry), contact [ben@otter.org](mailto:ben@otter.org)

We look forward to seeing your creations.



**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).**



## Camera Trap Study Highlights Conservation Needs of Thailand's Coastal Otters

A new camera trap study has demonstrated the importance of coastal forests and wetlands for two otter species (Asian small-clawed otter, *Aonyx cinereus*, and smooth-coated otter, *Lutrogale perspicillata*) living on the coast in southern Thailand. In these areas there is more and more human pressure on the natural habitat and the researchers wanted to find out what effect this is having on the otters. Otters in south east Asia are well known for being generally adaptable to human activity and urbanisation – just look at Singapore for example. However, there are still many threats such as road collisions, water pollution, reduction in prey availability and conflict with fish and shrimp farmers.

But these are not the only threats and it brings us straight back to the illegal wildlife trade with otters being caught in the wild



Asian small clawed otters ©Diana J Limjoco

to sell. As part of the project the team will analyse spraint samples to compare with otters confiscated as pets not

only in Thailand but also in Japan and Indonesia.

Otters are top predators in mangrove areas and indeed are sometimes referred to as “tigers of the mangroves”. And as with all otter species they are essential to maintain the health of the ecosystem and are great environmental indicators. Since the 1990s many mangrove areas have been cleared for crops and aquaculture

reducing the amount of available habitat for the otters.

Naruemon Tantipisanuh, a conservation researcher at King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi in Thailand, carried out a five year study over 7,150 km<sup>2</sup> of the Andaman Sea coast and its more-developed Gulf of Thailand shoreline. They set camera traps at 1,137 sites (934



Smooth-coated otters ©Timothy Brown

on the Andaman Sea coast and 203 along the Gulf of Thailand). These were used to record otter activity and the results showed that although the otters can survive in human-modified areas they still rely on natural habitat, such as mangrove forest.

The results showed that the larger smooth-coated otter dominated areas along the Andaman Sea coast whilst Asian small-clawed otters were more common in the Gulf of Thailand, particularly where there are aquaculture ponds. This enabled the team to create maps to identify priority areas for conservation, particularly in the provinces of Krabi and Trang – only 20% of these areas are protected in any way.

The full report of the study is published in *Global Ecology and Conservation* Vol 48 (2023) – “Assessing effects of landscape modifications and identifying priority areas for two Asian otters in coastal wetlands” Tantipisanuh et al.

<https://news.mongabay.com/2024/01/camera-traps-help-identify-conservation-needs-of-thailands-coastal-otters/>



## Zoos Help Publicise Threat to Otters from the Pet Trade

**IOSF continues to work with many different organisations to get the message across that otters should not be kept as pets.** Lizzy Humphries is Senior Keeper at Battersea Park Children's Zoo and you will remember the great poster created by the zoo to create more awareness.

Lizzy followed this up with an article about the role of zoos to educate the public on welfare portrayals on social media and this was published by BIAZA (British and Irish Association of Zoos and Aquariums).

It is not good enough for zoos just to show their animals to the public – they have a duty and responsibility to make them aware of threats and how important conservation is. At Battersea, whenever they give public talks about the otters they stress that otters are not pets.

Lizzy says in her article “Conscious efforts have been made to change the way zoos portray their animals on social media, but it is difficult to prevent visitors from sharing footage that could be misinterpreted from their own social media accounts. When human-otter interaction is viewed on social media, it becomes normalised. The clicks and likes spread the image. When zoo social media accounts post uncontextualised pictures of an animal affected by the pet trade, they could accidentally encourage the trade, which can be seen when the posts receive public comments such as “I want one!”, “I just want to hug it!” The image of a keeper physically interacting with a wild animal normalises a behaviour which potentially has conservational repercussions.”

The article goes on to say what zoos and keepers can do to help and we would urge anyone involved in the zoo world to read this article and seek to do more to aid proper conservation.



[https://biaza.org.uk/news/detail/blog-Otters-and-social-media-zoos-should-encourage-bold-changes-to-social-media-habits-to-positively-impact-a-conservation-crisis?fbclid=IwAR0N5Y\\_Qzm\\_yc-MnT4\\_Sn\\_ggz2W2IUBalHJ\\_MmoveY0qIbkD-uJU6fpChh4](https://biaza.org.uk/news/detail/blog-Otters-and-social-media-zoos-should-encourage-bold-changes-to-social-media-habits-to-positively-impact-a-conservation-crisis?fbclid=IwAR0N5Y_Qzm_yc-MnT4_Sn_ggz2W2IUBalHJ_MmoveY0qIbkD-uJU6fpChh4)



## Good News from South Korea

South Korea is taking some major steps forward in animal welfare.

Firstly, some of you may have read that South Korea are bringing in a ban on the dog meat trade – yes it will take a little

Photo by [Anoir Chafik](#) on [Unsplash](#)



while to be fully enforced but it is a start.

And there is more good news as they are also banning exotic animal cafés. We have always concentrated on the otter cafés in Japan but they are also present in other countries, such as South Korea. The first pet café opened in Taiwan in 1998 – it was for cats, but since then similar facilities have opened up in many other countries and they also began to include wild animals, such as otters.

In South Korea one such café is called Neighbour Otter which is on the 5th floor of a building in Daegu. Here the otters have a “play” area with toys and a pool and visitors are given food to give to the them. One enthusiastic visitor to Neighbour Otter said *“But also be warned, as they are switching between the pool and play area you may end up with a wet otter on your lap, so don’t wear anything too fancy.”* Is this how we want otters to be treated?

There have been concerns about the welfare of the animals in these cafés and so the government is taking action and banning establishments where visitors can see, touch and interact with many different wild animals – the amendment to the Wildlife Protection and Management Act was approved at a Cabinet meeting on 5 December 2023. This means that from 14 December 2023 it has become illegal to exhibit wild animals in facilities not registered as zoos or aquaria and it explicitly says that people will no longer be able to “touch, feed or climb on top of the animals to prevent distress.” Climb?!!!

People who own exotic animal cafes can either re-register as a zoo or aquaria with much more stringent regulation. Or alternatively they can close completely. They have until 13 December 2027 to sort this but the regulations regarding “touching, feeding or climbing on the animals” came into force on 14 December with penalties of 1.5 million won (approx. £1,200/\$1,540) per violation with a maximum fine of 5 million won (approx. £3,000/\$3,800).



Otter in otter café ©Yumiko Okamoto

These steps have to be welcomed by all who care about animal welfare.

[https://focusingonwildlife.com/news/south-korea-implements-ban-on-exotic-animal-cafes/?utm\\_source=mailpoet&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=newsletter-post-title\\_1120](https://focusingonwildlife.com/news/south-korea-implements-ban-on-exotic-animal-cafes/?utm_source=mailpoet&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=newsletter-post-title_1120)



## News from The Sanctuary

The main news this month is that Louis has a friend – Maggie. She came to us from Blyth Wildlife Rescue, Northumberland and after a short time of getting used to her new environment, she was introduced to Louis. As you can see the two are best pals and snuggle up in the hay together (right).

It has been really cold here over the last few days and sometimes it is hard to open the gate to the enclosure as it is frozen. But the otters don't seem to care and are their usual active selves. Bealltinn stays hidden in her snug sleeping box (below right), only venturing out to grab her fish when the coast is clear.



Eden and Winston are also behaving as normal and seem to have lost interest in the gate between them and Louis! We can start thinking about their release once the weather improves as they are both big, strong healthy otters.

*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>*



Please support IOSF and help to ensure that important conservation and awareness work continues.

**UK taxpayers...**

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## More Concerns about Plastics

**This is not** about otters but yet again it clearly demonstrates the risks to wildlife from plastics.

As their natural habitat and food sources have been reduced, bears are going into more urban areas to take advantage of free food spilling out from people's rubbish bins, but this can also mean that they ingest plastic.

In Telluride, Colorado, a sick bear had to be euthanised and during a post mortem they found that the digestive system was completely blocked by plastic. The poor bear was eating but not getting any benefit from the food and was simply starving.

In Colorado Springs it is law to secure rubbish in bear-resistant trash cans and Colorado Parks and Wildlife have issued a stern warning to local residents to make sure bears can't get at it: *"This is how a bear's stomach gets so full of plastic that it [has] to be euthanized. Please secure your garbage. Close your garage doors. Lock [your] vehicles. Remove attractants. Bears are foraging 20 hours a day now. Please keep them alive and wild."*

This is a warning to us all to take more of a responsibility for our rubbish and to make sure that no animals can take food out of it. People are familiar with seagulls, crows, urban foxes, etc stealing from bins but it is a serious problem to them.

<https://news.yahoo.com/colorado-park-rangers-issue-critical-063000581.html#:~:text=In%20nearby%20Telluride%2C%20Colorado%2C%20a,waste%20blocking%20its%20digestive%20system>

## News in Brief

### Otters named 'Animal of the Year' in Estonia

**Eurasian otters have** been named as the Animal of the Year for Estonia in 2024.

Teriolooga Selts recently announced the winner and started that otter numbers in Estonia have recovered, following long periods of uncertainty.

This is good news for the state of the environment, but as always IOSF is cautious about such reports especially as obtaining population numbers is just based on spraint surveys. An Estonian expert, Remek Meel, also said "In Estonia, the otter is doing quite well currently, but we can still lead to it becoming endangered as a result of our carelessness, hence the requirement to constantly monitor the population here".



The otter is considered an internationally endangered species and has been on Estonia's third-category protection list for nearly 50 years and hopefully the award of Animal of the Year can help encourage and raise awareness to the species conservation across the country.

<https://news.err.ee/1609210561/otter-is-estonia-s-animal-of-the-year-2024>



## Otter statue in England

**A new village** near Swindon, England, is set to be built with otters as the focal point of this development. It is planned that there will be an otter statue erected in the middle of the town to symbolise "sustainability, wildlife habitats, and biodiversity".

With the area near to a number of waterways, it is hoped that the statue will not only symbolise wildlife, nature and otters but encourage people to conserve it.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-wiltshire-67703590>

## River Clyde Otter

**An otter has** been spotted in Glasgow, near Glasgow Green, on the River Clyde. Otters are usually fairly elusive creatures and fairly difficult to spot, so it was with great pleasure, and surprise, that this Eurasian otter was spotted in Scotland's biggest city.

<https://www.glasgowtimes.co.uk/news/24028855.otter-spotted-swimming-glasgows-river-clyde/>

## High Court rules that failure to protect and restore water bodies is unlawful

**The High Court** has ruled that Defra, the UK's Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs, "*failed in their duty to restore and protect waterways from pollution*" with regards to the Costa Beck river, in the Humber district. Until a few years ago, this was known as a major fly fishing spot but there have been so many incidents of sewage pollution discharged into the Costa Beck that the condition of the river is now considered as "poor".

The Environment Agency were found to have "*failed in their mandatory legal duties to review, update and put in place measures to restore rivers and other water bodies under the Water Framework Directive regulations*".

This provides a case study in the inaction of the government in protecting and improving our waterways and could have major repercussions for the government with similar charges could be brought by other organisations.

As we have said so many times, if the water quality is so poor how can otters and other wildlife continue to thrive?

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/nov/20/defras-failure-to-protect-and-restore-water-bodies-unlawful-high-court-rules>

## 'Surfing' Otter Update

**Many of you** will remember the 'surfing' otter that came to relative fame about six months ago for its interest in surfboards. At the time the US Fish and Wildlife Service was hoping to capture and relocate it. Now, the story of "Otter 841" is a much more positive one.

Otter 841 is exactly where she has always been and, in October, gave birth to a little otter cub, dubbed "841+1". Efforts to relocate the otter have now been ended as she has started to act in a more natural way, and leaving the surfboards alone. It is believed that it was her pregnancy that led to this unusual behaviour as it has been observed that, at times, hormonal surges within female otters can cause them to be abnormally aggressive.



Sea otter and young ©Tabea Lanz





A lovely positive end to the story!

<https://lookout.co/otter-841-pup-start-2024-way-they-ended-2023-roaming-free-in-monterey-bay/>

### Otter rescued from Massachusetts Dam

In Massachusetts, USA, a dam is in the process of being removed to help the biodiversity in the area – but this wasn't before a North American river otter had to be rescued. The otter was struggling to use the fish ladder, although other otters have managed to cross before, and therefore was stuck in one part of the river.

After several attempts, including using a net that didn't survive the attempt, the otter was rescued and taken in to care. The otter was desperately hungry, so was given food and hopefully it will soon gain weight and return to the wild.

[https://news.yahoo.com/powerful-footage-shows-rescue-otter-020000461.html?guccounter=1&guce\\_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2xlLnNvbS8&guce\\_referrer\\_sig=AQAAAAve9X4n0RltpAqzpE1rYyVH4RWvxTGjJpYNv0GWTuJpmW-CTwuo9osMPqLJ3edW8WUIMPvy7GZjoVGyrQsTsezq653WQErYb9r7qp21m1uaQuiW9ct1PsGtu9fY3jwZ\\_oAe5sKztZbQ4Y8RvCdAelhIzWxD1CQ2eJ87WJ42Z0WP](https://news.yahoo.com/powerful-footage-shows-rescue-otter-020000461.html?guccounter=1&guce_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2xlLnNvbS8&guce_referrer_sig=AQAAAAve9X4n0RltpAqzpE1rYyVH4RWvxTGjJpYNv0GWTuJpmW-CTwuo9osMPqLJ3edW8WUIMPvy7GZjoVGyrQsTsezq653WQErYb9r7qp21m1uaQuiW9ct1PsGtu9fY3jwZ_oAe5sKztZbQ4Y8RvCdAelhIzWxD1CQ2eJ87WJ42Z0WP)

### Otter study in Northern India

With the help of local community members, Sunita Khatiwatra has been studying otters in northern India to gain more of an understanding of their current status in the area. Across the whole of India, otters are rare outside of protected areas, and this is even more the case in the northern area, including the Himalayan region.

Although briefly mentioned in reports, the study of otters in Sikkim, in particular, is largely unknown. Furthermore, there has also been limited literature as to whether habitats are suitable for otters to survive outside of the protected areas.

Khatiwatra emphasised how important it is to include communities in any research and conservation work. This was emphasised by local community members who simply didn't know otters existed until they became part of the research work. Therefore, inclusion is important in order to emphasise the role otters play in the ecosystem.

Protected areas are the lifeline of Indian otters currently, so it is important to gain more of an understanding, and focus conservation efforts on wetlands out with these confines.

[https://india.mongabay.com/2020/07/otters-beyond-protected-areas-in-the-himalayas/?fbclid=IwAR1oL09ANmlpKGS94cWvLDtO2DdX0\\_q-oe-ic8aQ6X8z5PYc0pBB52FGZsg](https://india.mongabay.com/2020/07/otters-beyond-protected-areas-in-the-himalayas/?fbclid=IwAR1oL09ANmlpKGS94cWvLDtO2DdX0_q-oe-ic8aQ6X8z5PYc0pBB52FGZsg)



Your continued support through donations and sponsorships, inspires our otter conservation work and helps to drive us forward, for which we are grateful.

Special thanks go to the following:

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## Otter Shop Product of the Month

[www.ottershop.co.uk](http://www.ottershop.co.uk) – click through to the Home page

The ever-popular Oscar Otter makes the perfect country companion for your home. He'll make you smile, while he holds the open the door open (or keeps it closed).

Find out more: <https://ottershop.co.uk/collections/at-home/products/oscar-otter-a-collectable-character-dora-designs>



## Image of The Month (©Linda Wilinski)

An award winning photographer, Linda Wilinski is also a strong advocate for the wildlife which surrounds her in Florida, particularly the freshwater springs. She is passionate to share her knowledge and encourages others to become involved in the conservation of the places and animals she loves. Here we are sharing one of Linda's many lovely images of the North American river otter.



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

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<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.

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<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






<https://donate.giveasyoulive.com/donate?cid=630>




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





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



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### Annual Adoption Renewal Rates

#### UK and EEC Countries:

Adult: £24.00 per year

Child: £13.00 per year

Family: £34.00 per year

Life Membership (all countries): £350.00

#### All other countries:

Adult: £30.00 per year

Child: £15.00 per year

Family: £40.00 per year

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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**.

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

Email: [enquiries@otter.org](mailto:enquiries@otter.org)  
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