



Otter News No. 109, February 2020

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New Otter “Species Champion” In Scotland



©Michael Russell (WHFP)

On Saturday 22 February, the International Otter Survival Fund (IOSF) was delighted to welcome Scotland’s new Otter Species Champion, MSP Kate Forbes, as she announced her new role. Otters were previously unrepresented under the Scottish Government’s Species Champion scheme but Ullapool Sea Savers Poppy Lewis-Ing, who is the group’s otter ambassador, worked hard to get an otter champion and MSP Kate Forbes gladly took this on.

Joined by Ullapool Sea Savers (USS) and the Scottish Wildlife Trust we held a meeting to discuss otters and the potential threats that they face around the country. Potential threats such as new developments, human disturbance through tourist trips and environmental education were all discussed.

Kate Forbes is the MSP for Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch and after the meeting she said: *“Otters play an important role in maintaining a balanced ecosystem where so many different species can thrive. I am proud to represent a constituency which contains such diverse range of species and today I’m delighted to become species champion for the otter”.*

Following the meeting, four members of IOSF’s Team Otter Broadford club joined Kate and the others from the meeting, at a nearby layby to take part in USS’s layby litter-pick campaign. A large proportion of countryside litter eventually finds its way into the world’s oceans and if we can all do just a little bit to help prevent it doing so then we will make a difference. In what was a relatively clean layby we managed to collect just under 12kg of waste!

USS are members of the Team Otter and Poppy Lewis-Ing is their Otter Ambassador. In 2018 Poppy was awarded IOSF’s Young People’s Otter Oscar for her efforts with the rest of the Group to prevent kelp dredging off the West Coast of Scotland. At the meeting she said *“Otters are an incredibly intelligent species, I love the way they use tools to open their food and wrap kelp around themselves to prevent them from floating away. They are really nurturing towards their young and of course they are very cute. I think otters should have a Species Champion as they are a very important part of Scotland’s ecosystem and I believe they deserve a voice in parliament to protect their future and habitat. I’m delighted that Kate Forbes has agreed to champion otters as she cares about the environment and is a local politician”*



Team Otter Broadford continues to meet to learn about wildlife. This month they started their new "Team Otter news" video where they talk about the latest otter news, and what they have been doing lately.

As you will have read, on Saturday 22 February, they joined the Ullapool Sea Savers (USS) and new Otter Species Champion for Scotland, MSP Kate Forbes, in their new "Lay-By Litterpick" Campaign. George, Struan, John and Dylan all came as we headed in the Land Rover to a layby near Broadford. On first arrival at the lay-by it seemed pretty clean but after just 15 minutes the group had managed to collect just under 12kg of litter!

The new campaign was brought forward by USS as much of our rubbish ends up in the oceans. If we can stop the rubbish at the source, then we can help reduce pollution in the sea!

Keep an eye on news of Team Otters in Laos and Nepal coming soon.



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.

News from The Sanctuary

It has been a busy month in the sanctuary.

Firstly, Karma is still doing well and getting close to release. She really is a beautiful otter and her coat is immaculate and constantly groomed. Once this poor weather moves on as spring arrives we plan to release Karma back in to the wild, where she belongs.

Otto and Harrie, our charismatic duo, have settled well into their new quarters. Every time new hay is delivered they take their time to ensure that it is all exactly where they want it. Otto, the more brassy of the two, is often seen waiting for his food to arrive before eating it outside. Harrie is a lot more shy and usually chooses to wait until the 'coast is clear' before venturing out.



Karma



During February, 3 became 4, as we welcomed a little otter from Arisaig, on the mainland near to the

Isle of Skye. We were contacted by Emma Walters who had said that the little otter had been found peeping (or whistling) at her front door. How and why he got there, we are unsure, but an adult otter was later found nearby after being hit by a car so we guess this could be the mother.

It hasn't taken long for Sparky, the new cub, to settle in and after initially eating chunks of salmon quickly moved on to tails and now full fish. He is exactly what we want from an otter at this stage – even if that does mean hostilities when we feed! The name Sparky was chosen for a couple of reasons. An IOSF supporter had contacted us and asked if an otter could be named in respect to his grandfather. Given his fiery nature, the name 'Sparky' worked well.

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

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http://www.otter.org/documents/IOSF_Fundraising_Pack.pdf

Otters in Care Abroad

Update from DR Congo

We've had an update from the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The spotted-necked otter cub that is in the care on Kikongo Otter Sanctuary has been named **Mbu (Mboo)**. In DR Congo when there are twins, the older sibling is called Mbu, with the younger being called Mpia or Pika. Unfortunately, as we know, the younger of the two cubs sadly passed and in memory they thought that Mbu was a fitting name.

Mbu continues to grow and is becoming quite the character, as he plays in his area and

explores the water around him. During a recent rain storm he took the opportunity to play around with fallen leaves in rain filled pools.



Mbu ©Rita & Glen Chapman

He is still drinking a little milk but is slowly moving on to solids. Sico and Delphin, who were so integral in the rearing of the Congo clawless otters, have once again stepped in to care for Mbu. They will help in his next stage of development as he starts to explore the river/swamp area around.

As always we are grateful for the great work of the Kikongo Otter Sanctuary.

Update from Vietnam (Photos: SVW)

We recently heard about the progress of the 15 young Asian small-clawed otter cubs which had been confiscated by Save Vietnam's Wildlife (SVW). Sadly three died – two were very small when they arrived and they just didn't make it. Another one died in January after getting diarrhoea.

Four of the otters (two males and two females) were transferred to Cuc Phuong on 9 January and they are doing very well. They are eating fish and soon crabs and mussels will be added to their diet.



Cuc Phuong otters

There are still eight otters at the Pu Mat rescue centre and they are also doing very well. They too are on solid food and the biggest one is already 2.7kg.



Otter at Pu Mat having receiving check-up by the vet

It is always sad to lose an animal but we think that SVW have done a great job to get these 12 to this stage, especially when you consider the appalling start they had in life. Below are some photos to show how they are progressing.

If you would like to donate towards the care of Mbu or the Vietnam otters you can do so or adopt them at the [Otter Shop](http://www.ottershop.co.uk). Just make sure you tell us whether it is for Mbu or Vietnam.

Donate to IOSF <https://www.ottershop.co.uk/donate-to-iosf-c2x11601155>



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

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China's Wildlife Market Ban and the Implications

Following the spread of the coronavirus, China has taken the decision to impose a permanent ban on all wildlife trade within the country. Experts believe that the virus originated in bats and spread to humans through wildlife markets within the country through intermediary species, such as pigs, pangolins and civets. This isn't the first time that a worldwide human medical problem has stemmed from wildlife markets. For example, the outbreak of SARS is believed to have originated in bats again and transferred to people through civet cats.

According to the "People's Daily", the ban covers all "wildlife protected by the law, other terrestrial animals, and terrestrial wild animals in breeding farms". The ban also prohibits hunting, trading and transport of terrestrial wild animals for eating." This ban does not, however, cover species that have been bred for the long-term in farms for "medical" and "scientific" purposes, for example, the farming of black bears for their bile as this is for "medical" purposes.

According to people in Beijing working to halt the wild animal trade, Chinese President Xi Jinping is reported to have said "We have long recognised that the risk of eating wild animals is high, but the 'wild meat industry' is still large, which poses a major potential risk to public health and safety. We can no longer be indifferent."



otters caged for trading ©Scorpion

Previous laws within China have been in force since 1989 but there have been many loopholes. This new ban has a much wider scope and therefore should reduce the number of wild animals killed or taken from the wild for the trade.

https://www.scmp.com/news/china/article/3052151/china-bans-trade-eating-wild-animals-battle-against-coronavirus?utm_term=Autofeed&utm_medium=Social&utm_content=article&utm_source=Twitter#Echobox=1582554847

As we know, many of the otters that are traded in the illegal pet trade originate from Thailand with many heading to countries such as China.

This new ban has given hope to wildlife crime fighters that they can reduce and eventually end the trade. Maj. Gen. Viwat Chaisangka, head of the Thai police's natural resources and environmental crime unit said "This ban may be the right time for us to get more data about traffickers. It will help to stop the wildlife trade."

Clearly the trade of species, such as otters, is illegal but with greater cross border cooperation and urgency from the governments to stop this, we hope that this will reduce both demand and supply.

<https://asia.nikkei.com/Spotlight/Coronavirus/Coronavirus-an-unlikely-gift-in-Thailand-s-fight-to-save-wildlife>



World Otter Day – Wednesday 27 May 2020

There is still time to apply for a World Otter Day grant to help with an event you are planning to celebrate all about otters.

There are three grants of £100 each and you should submit your application **no later than Friday 27 March 2020**. The winning applicants

will be announced on Friday 3 April. You will find the application form at https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfs_H1vRoec2_a0BkaQAzH00a-OpxdYNICFAoj1-7-iYsya8Q/viewform

You may wish to sponsor an extra grant of £100 to help with more events – just contact us at enquiries@otter.org or you can do it online at the shop putting a note that it is a World Otter Day Grant Sponsorship.

We are hearing about more and more people taking part – and so far individuals, groups and organisations from 26 countries are involved. If you have an event planned, let us know and we can add it to our IOSF World Otter Day Map! Email ben@otter.org with your details.



And if you are busy on the actual day you can hold your event on any day that suits you or that allows for the biggest crowds/effect, such as a weekend. In the past we have had events that have lasted a day, a week or a month, whatever suits you! Remember this is YOUR opportunity to raise awareness and much needed support for otter conservation across the world.

So let's join together again and make IOSF World Otter Day even bigger and better than 2019.

Otter Shop @www.ottershop.co.uk

Product of the Month

This wee chap proved a popular purchase before and so the fluffy otter keyring is back in stock. It makes a great little gift or an extra to add to your order.

<https://www.ottershop.co.uk/mini-fluffy-otter-keyring-c2x30054898>



IOSF on Bute

On 11 February IOSF's Paul Yoxon gave a talk on "*Eurasian otters in the UK and the work of the International Otter Survival Fund*" for the Bute Museum & Natural History Society. We were extremely lucky to have a weather window to allow us to travel to Bute as for most of the rest of the week the ferries were off due to gales and the day after we returned the Rest And Be Thankful was closed due to another landslide!

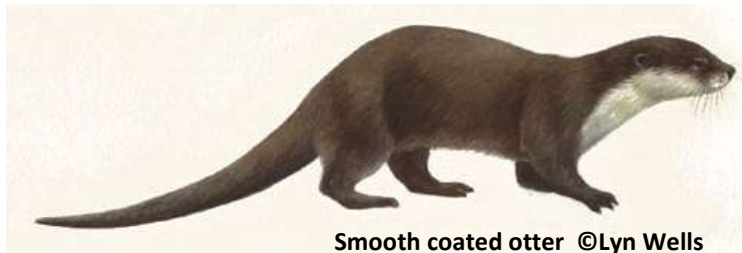
The talk was very well attended and generated a lot of interest. People commented that otters seem to be increasing on the island which is probably due to improved waters in the Clyde estuary.

Many thanks to the Committee of Bute Museum & Natural History Society for inviting us to their island.

News in Brief

Otters in India

Smooth-coated otters have been reported in north Telangana and Kapra Lake in the city of Hyderabad and they have now been spotted in Gundlapally of Nalgonda district. Osmania University had previously studied the occupancy of the species and, between 1995-2000, they were known to be in 8-10 sites.



Smooth coated otter ©Lyn Wells

Since then populations have become greatly depleted and they are rarely seen. This new sighting is therefore important as it is increasing awareness for the species and maybe populations are expanding out once more.

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/hyderabad/smooth-coated-otter-spotted-in-nalgonda/articleshow/73817034.cms>

Further news of unusual otter sightings in India brings us on to a Eurasian otter being spotted in Chilika Lagoon on the east coast of India. The Fishing Cat Project had camera traps installed to monitor the feline species in the area but managed to capture a photo of a Eurasian otter, as well as the more common smooth-coated otter. This is the first ever sighting in Chilika and a report is to be submitted for Issue 6 of the Journal.

In 2019 IOSF published a report in Issue 5 of our Journal on the Eurasian otter worldwide status which stated that very little is known about the species across much of its range. This finding provides amazing new data on the species and is an opportunity to gain more information on populations in the area.

<https://www.newindianexpress.com/states/odisha/2020/mar/01/eurasian-otter-spotted-in-chilika-brings-cheers-for-wildlife-lovers-2110486.html>



Eurasian otter ©Lyn Wells

Playful otters spotted in England

Two otters have been caught on camera in the River Foss near the centre of York. Otters were known to be in the river but any camera footage is rare due to their shy nature.

https://www.yorkmix.com/move-over-david-attenborough-uplifting-york-video-shows-two-otters-frolicking-in-the-foss/?fbclid=IwAR3-oHG3fJh4trR5pc6wLFvc1HR4wybv7wUPGFNSZXNr74fK1_5LHLtOHw



In Lincoln, otters have been caught playing on the edge of Brayford Pool. The two otters were seen playing before they were joined by a third.

The presence of these playful otters shows the improved water quality of the area which is great for us all.

<https://thelincolnite.co.uk/2020/02/watch-otter-ly-adorable-trio-play-together-in-lincoln/>

Bears and Otters

After years of research, Dan Monson, a federal scientist and sea otter expert based in Anchorage, has now concluded that at least one of Katsai's brown bears is preying on sea otters.

It started when he noticed an unusual trend in otter carcasses that he was finding. Many of the individuals were in their prime and more and more were beginning to show up. At first he couldn't work out the reason. It was known that the bears did like to scavenge on dead otters that washed up but then he realised that at least one individual has more of a taste for fresh meat.

Another researcher, Grant Hilderbrand, who focused on bears, noticed that one individual spent a significant amount of time on offshore islands – an unusual trait among bears. When he followed this particular bear he found a number of seal carcasses that had been killed, most likely by #85, the bear in question. This meant that instead of scavenging on dead seals as is the norm, this bear was actually hunting them. They then flew over the bear in a helicopter and saw it swimming offshore heading for a group of hauled out seals, cutting off their escape by hunting them from the water. This behaviour was totally different to anything the scientists had seen before.

Hilderbrand shared his information with Monson, who was researching unusual otter deaths, and then it all made sense. Monson set up camera traps that confirmed what they had been thinking – the otters were being predated on by at least one bear.

Monson believes that more than one bear is doing this and more work is to be done to establish how many and what affect this is having on otter populations.

<https://www.alaskapublic.org/2020/02/09/hungry-alaska-bears-find-a-new-prey-katmais-sea-otters/>



Pollution problem continues

Last month we told you of Limpet, the baby sea otter, that was mistaking golf balls for shells, their usual prey.

This month is no different and once again we are staring an increasing problem in the face – human pollution having a detrimental impact on wildlife, and otters. This time it is in the Netherlands where a young otter has plastic wrapped around its neck. It is believed that the otter is a juvenile and therefore still growing meaning the restriction on its neck could

eventually prove fatal. Friend of IOSF, Addy de Jongh, has been working to try and catch the otter.

We have mentioned many times, a similar case where a young otter managed to get a cable tie around his neck. By the time we managed to catch him the tie had cut deep into his neck. However, following treatment by our vet he was released back to the wild. He was in Kyle of Lochalsh and only survived because the fishermen fed him scraps and so it was easier for us to find him. Addy and his team are searching in a vast area which makes it much more difficult.



This is once again a sad showcase of the impact we are having. We need to be more responsible for our actions and ensure that we are reducing waste and dispose of what waste we do have properly.

<https://www.celebsnet.com/breaking/Otter-is-walking-in-with-plastic-waste-to-the-neck-by-the-nature-of-Nieuwkoop-h8996.html>

Otter genome identification to help UK otters

The Wellcome Sanger Institute has released the first ever genome identification for Eurasian otters, in partnership with Cardiff University Otter Project. The new information will help us to understand the genetic differences, biology and potential threats and will help with otter conservation efforts across the UK.

During the height of industrialisation, otter populations plummeted due to inadequate healthy waterways. Waters were contaminated with chemicals from industries and agriculture and this meant that otters nearly disappeared from England entirely. Since then, such chemicals have been banned and significant efforts have been made to clean up wetlands meaning that otters are starting to recover.

The genome study will help to identify different potential threats and how they will affect the remaining populations. It will offer vital information as to how otters survive and what is likely to have the same drastic effects on populations as happened before, hopefully preventing a repeat.

<https://www.eveningexpress.co.uk/news/otter-genome-sequenced-to-help-conservation-efforts/>



Help Otters through Your Insurance



IOSF has just received a donation from Evergreen Insurance Services who donate to wildlife and nature organisations from the commission they earn when arranging policies. So every time you buy an insurance policy from Evergreen they will give up to 25% of their commission income to IOSF – at no cost to you.

They can arrange all sorts of policies both personal and business.

So even if your policy is not due yet click on the Evergreen link under "Supporters" on our website at <https://www.otter.org/Public/Links.aspx> and remember when you arrange the policy to say that you want the donation to go to IOSF.

Thank You to...

all who have kindly donated during February, towards our work with otters. And, to The Spear Charitable Trust, The Craignish Trust, Nurtured by Nature and The Padma and Krishna Foundation, for their support.

Events

Visit our website to find out what might be happening in the otter world near you, including:

11 October 2019 – 30 March 2020

Exhibition on "*Lutra lutra*, the Otter" by Dr Wolfgang Gettmann, former Director of Dusseldorf Aquazoo and owner of Nemo the Otter. He will consider environmental problems by focussing on the otter.

Museum Mensch und Jagd in der Burg Bruggen, Germany
Entrance fee - Pay what you like.

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Don't forget, if you are aware of any otter-related events taking place, send us the details (Title, time, date, place and cost (if applicable), and we will post it on our Events page.

<http://otter.org/Public/Events.aspx>



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



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



The Giving Machine

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

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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

LEGACY - A LEGACY IS A GREAT WAY OF GIVING TO SOMETHING close to your heart and every gift will make 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.

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

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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**.

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