



Otter News February 2024

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Study Reveals Thai Connection with English Otters

We are all aware of the dramatic decline in otters in the 1950s-1960s largely because of the use pesticides which accumulated in animals at the top of the food chain, such as the otter. In addition, otters were still legally hunted at that time. After this there were projects to encourage otters to return including translocating them from parts of the UK where populations were stronger.

Cardiff University Otter Project has been working with scientists from the Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute and the Wellcome Sanger's Darwin Tree of Life project, to look at the entire genome of the Eurasian otter.

There have been genetic studies of otters in Britain before but this was the first time that they compared the DNA with otters in other parts of the world and this has produced some surprising results.

The Eurasian otter has 12 subspecies and ten of these subspecies are found in Asia. The project found that two Eurasian otters from Thailand were brought to Britain in the 1960s and it is possible that they bred with otters in eastern England. These Thai otters were, of course, from a different subspecies and this has resulted in slightly different genetics in otters in eastern England.



Eurasian otter (*Lutra lutra*) - UK
©Jim Manthorpe

At this stage this cannot be confirmed and they would really need to compare the genome of a Eurasian otter from Thailand with English otters to be certain. The problem is that this species has become rare across much of Asia, including Thailand, and so it is hard to get samples. We have contacted people in Thailand to see if they can help.

However, this work shows the importance of using modern techniques to look at the genetic diversity of threatened species such as otters.

<https://theconversation.com/could-a-couple-of-thai-otters-have-helped-the-uks-otter-population-recover-our-study-provides-a-hint-219140>

To read more about this study by Cardiff University Otter Project go to
<https://academic.oup.com/mbe/article/40/11/msad207/7275014?login=false>

Help Us Stop the Promotion of Otters as Pets

Recently we were sent a link to a Facebook group page for “funny otters lovers um”
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/691261452837859/permalink/820631166567553/>

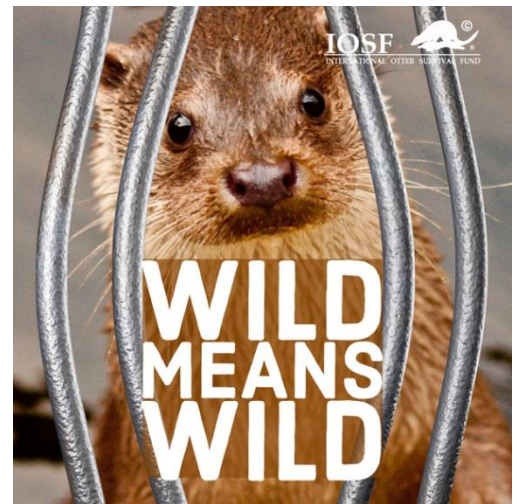


There were photos of “cute” otters and when we looked at the comments many said things like “I gotta get 1 where can I get 1”, “I really want one of these”, “I want one”.

We posted a reply saying that this is helping to drive the illegal trade in otters for pets and that in order to get the cubs from the wild they kill the mothers. The reply was declined! Presumably they don’t want to face the facts of what their desire for a pet otter really means.

This group has nearly 7,000 members which just goes to show how many people still don’t appreciate that otters belong in the wild.

We have made more comments but they may well be declined as well.



WE WOULD URGE YOU ALL TO LOOK OUT FOR SUCH POSTS ON SOCIAL MEDIA. DON'T SHARE THEM BUT MAKE A COMMENT ABOUT NOT KEEPING OTTERS AS PETS. ALSO, PLEASE SEND US LINKS TO THESE POSTS SO THAT WE CAN FOLLOW IT UP.

Update on Progress in Central America

As you know, IOSF’s latest training workshop was held in Mexico last November, together with Nutrias de México. A total of 47 participants attended either in person or via Zoom from eight of the nine countries in Central America that have native wild otter populations (Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama and Trinidad and Tobago); only Honduras was not represented.

We do not want our workshops just to be “talking shops” but to be the catalyst for practical otter conservation, so what has happened since November? At the end of the workshop the Nutrias de Centromérica Network was formed to take the project further and there has already made significant progress.



All members of Nutrias de Centromérica are carrying out a literature review and data search to establish what knowledge there is about otters in their country. This will be shared on IOSF World Otter Day (29 May 2024) through a webinar so that everyone in the network can put forward their data and decide future work.

In addition, workers in Belize have installed camera traps (donated by Idea Wild for the workshop) – image left - and they have recorded otter spraint in various parts of their area. The Belize group is also preparing to celebrate World Otter Day in May with primary school students in two communities.

In Costa Rica they have set up IOSF Costa Rica and are developing more education and awareness work and research.

In Mexico, efforts to monitor otter populations, habitat quality and environment education programs continue. In addition, the non-profit organisation, Okapia, is investigating the abundance and distribution of otters in the state of Morelos – this is with support from Nutrias de México, COESBIO, Cámara Salvaje, university students, and experts. The objective is to survey five distinct rivers and to assess the environmental and social factors that may threaten



otter populations. Thus far, two out of the five sites have been visited to measure water quality and install camera traps: in one they discovered otter tracks for the first time, and in the other, tracks were found again.

So far, the new network has established priorities for future work including further research on distribution of otters and threats, education in schools and community education,

This new network and the enthusiasm of the workshop participants, will lead to a much more practical and effective otter conservation programme for Central America.

Otter Trapping in Indiana

Back in the 1990s IOSF began helping with a reintroduction project for North American river otters in Indiana. They had been pushed towards extinction because of unregulated hunting and habitat change and so 303 otters were released at 12 sites in the state.



The reintroduction was regarded as so successful that the species was taken off the “endangered” list in 2005. Move on ten years and you find the Indiana Department of Natural Resources (DNR) opening the first otter trapping season in the state allowing two otters to be killed per trapper. In 2023 there were about 4,000 licenced trappers in the state and the trapping season lasts from 15 November to 15 March. If the state quota of 750 otters is taken before the end date then the season

closes and that is what happened this season.

After catching an otter, trappers must register their catch and turn in the skinned carcass and separated pelt, the carcasses are kept by DNR to provide data on populations. Pelts are given a CITES tag.

According to the DNR, “The framework of the river otter season was carefully designed to limit the total harvest and support Indiana’s river otter population. Indiana is fortunate that our systems and regulations allow us to strike a good balance between providing trapping opportunity and ensuring our river otters continue to thrive in Indiana.”

One trapper commented that “it’s very easy to catch your two, and we try to avoid them as much as possible till the fur becomes really nice in the wintertime.” He uses the vile contraptions called body grip traps or foothold traps for beaver and racoons and has often found an otter instead. He went on “I had caught so many incidental wise that, even right now, I don’t truly target the otter in Indiana because we’re gonna pick our two just while we’re beaver trapping. We’ve got a lot of beavers down here, and the beaver and otter live in the same places. So odds are, while you’re out beaver trapping, you’re gonna catch your otter anyhow.”



<https://www.purdue.edu/fnr/extension/natural-resources-commission-updates-wild-bulletin/>
<https://tribtown.com/2024/03/07/otter-trapping-season-reaches-quota-closes-early-2/>



It is amazing that otters have become so “common” that they can now be trapped and killed again having once been endangered and at risk of extinction. Do they have to wait until numbers again become so low that they have to do another reintroduction?

IUCN states that hunting can be allowed if it is sustainable. That means that you have to know how many you have and how many are being killed. There are figures for how many are being killed but every time IOSF has asked for actual data in terms of actual numbers of otters now living in the wild of USA, we are told “lots”, “plenty”, etc. This is not data but conjecture. It therefore cannot be regarded as sustainable.

Are we being cynical when we ask if otter reintroductions have been largely driven by the fur trade to allow more otters to be trapped and killed?

For more information on this, have a look at Ben’s paper on the trapping trade of North America in Issue 7 of the IOSF Otter Journal which you can download at <https://www.otter.org/our-work-research>

News from The Sanctuary

Two out – two in!!

Well the big news is that Eden and Winston are now back in the wild where they belong. They were very enthusiastic to get away which made getting good photos difficult!! Winston was straight into the water but Eden went for a bit of a wander first.



Just waiting...



Time to go

Photos ©Raime Orr

Two new otters have also arrived with us – Linnhe and River (photo right), who came from the Scottish SPCA wildlife rescue centre. Linnhe was only about four weeks old when he was found after his mother had been killed on the road near Loch Linnhe in Argyll and Bute. River was found in the Livingston area of Scotland, again he was alone and approximately 9 weeks old.

They are both male and are growing well. Their enclosure



has only a temporary pool at the moment but each time it is filled they promptly hop in and make such a mess that it is soon empty.


Louis (below left) and Maggie (below right) are hilarious. They love their pool and we can often watch them from a window as they splash about together. They have a great appetite and squabble over a fish, just as wild cubs do.



Spring is definitely coming... Bealltinn was spotted sunbathing again in her favourite corner. As you can see from the photo below she is not impressed someone watching her relax.



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...

Increase the value of your gift to IOSF:

giftaid it



The Team Otter Broadford High School group has been working on its latest campaign - **the reduction of the use of disposable sauce sachets.**

It had been brought to our attention by members of the public about the growing number of disposable sauce sachets that

have been found in our community, and we decided that we wanted to do something about it. *“Our plan was to write letters to all the food establishments around Broadford to see if they would consider finding a more environmental, and sustainable way of offering sauces and condiments to their customers.”* Furthermore, these youngsters have written letters to the local media and also to local and national government, asking if this can be rolled out on a broader scale.



First step, they wrote the letters, and the following week it was delivery time. The kids walked through Broadford delivering their letters, about their thoughts and suggestions, to the various establishments in the area.



We look forward to hearing back from all the local hotels and restaurants.

If you are within our local area and would like to join our campaign, or are a restaurant and agree that these small changes can make a big difference, then feel free to message us, and join our campaign!

We want to make Broadford and Scotland as environmentally friendly as possible!

For more information about Team Otter, visit our website (<https://www.otter.org/our-work-team-otter>) and Facebook. If you are interested in forming your own Team Otter Club contact Ben@otter.org.



The Big Give Green Match Fund is coming soon and IOSF’s campaign has been accepted to take part in this match funding event – when your donations are matched. How great is that.

Look out for more information coming your way soon.

Save the date ☺





Andy Race



Ever since we can remember we have been getting our otter fish from **Andy Race Fish Merchants** in Mallaig but now, Andy has taken the decision that it is time for him to retire.

Andy always managed to get us supplies even when the winds of Storm Babet resulted in all the ferries from Mallaig to Armadale being cancelled. Rather than letting us down, Andy took it upon himself to drive via Fort William with two boxes for us. Just to show you how much effort he put in

- Mallaig to Broadford via the ferry is a round trip of 32 miles; Mallaig to Broadford via Fort William is a round trip of 250 miles!



Thank you Andy and your team for your hard work, and we all wish you a very happy retirement.

To all our wonderful supporters, we are grateful for your continued contributions and ongoing support which drives our work forward, helping more otters in more places. We can't do it without you.

Special thanks go to the following:

The Alice Mccosh Trust

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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 <https://www.otter.org/take-action-corporate?rq=corporate>

Otter Shop Product of the Month

www.ottershop.co.uk – click through to the Home page

Due in soon... the updated edition of Paul & Grace's book "Otters of the World", including a new chapter and updated information.

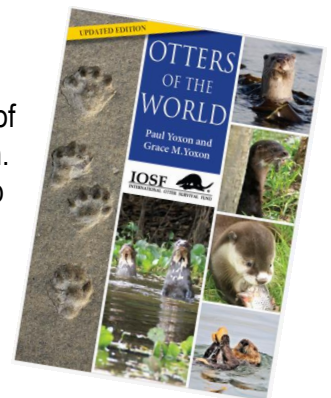
You can place a back order now, at the Otter Shop

<https://ottershop.co.uk/products/iosf-otters-of-the-world-paul-grace-yoxon-signed> and we'll send it out as soon as our new stock arrives.



New In... have you seen our new bamboo sip cup? It's so stylish and great to carry your drinks with you (hot or cold).

Find yours at the Otter Shop today <https://ottershop.co.uk/products/iosf-bamboo-ecosip-cup>





There is still time to submit an application for our **World Otter Day Grants**.

These £100 grants are towards the running of a **World Otter Day** event such as an education day, awareness campaign, or otter research!

Follow the link below to find out more and apply. **Closing date is Friday 22 March 2024**

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfs_H1vRoec2_a0BkaQAZH00a-OpxdYNICFAoj1-7-iYsya8Q/viewform?usp=sf_link

World Otter Day Webinar

IOSF World Otter Day 2024 is just over 2 months away and we are so excited to see and hear what you have planned.

In 2023 we had **World Otter Day** events in 40 countries, but we want to do even better this year and have more events, in more countries and raise the profile of otters around the world.

We love how **World Otter Day** shows how many people care – and for that we thank you!



If you are planning to run an event, let us know and we can add it to the World Otter Day 2024 events map! Please contact us at ben@otter.org

You can see all the events so far on the World Otter Day map here -

<https://www.google.com/maps/d/edit?mid=1OzFrVdZsqtGJftvjrx3Q1rdUCi1NwJU&usp=sharing>

Webinar

Once again, **IOSF** is hosting its third **World Otter Day** webinar.

The webinar will be hosted on Zoom, on **World Otter Day** itself, Wednesday 29th May 2024! As usual, we will run it in two parts, in the usual time slots:

Morning Session - 09.00 - 11.30am (UK Time)

Evening Session - 17.00 - 19.30pm (UK Time)

The webinar will include the following presentations - although, exact presentation titles will change:

Morning:

Wildlife Friends Foundation Thailand - Rescued Otters, and the pet trade

Lizzy Humphries - Battersea Park - Social media and its role in pet trade

Eco earth Crusaders - Community conservation of otters in Odisha

Aleksey Oleynikov - Otters in Kazakhstan

Dr. Elizabeth Chadwick - Otter Project at Cardiff University

Evening:

Chris Shepherd - The pet trade in otters

Louise Wilson - The benefits of working with dogs in otter and wildlife conservation

Miguel Maldonado - The impact of feral dogs on wildlife

Caroline Leuchtenberger - Projeto Ariranhas, and their work with Giant otters

Benjamin Bureau - Otters in Gabon



To find our more information, or to sign up for the Webinar, please visit

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSciyLpYHZNzWbgg1dJhNpCPB6ExilQloh1u2PvQg0IR0kcjiA/viewform?usp=sf_link

News in Brief

Otter makes an unplanned appearance at Odense Zoo, Denmark

A stream runs Odense Zoo and recently the director, Bjarne Klausen, was giving a television interview about increased water levels in the stream, when something caught his eye – an otter. Bjarne has worked at the zoo for more than 25 years and had never seen anything like that. They are known in many places around Odense but never coming into the Zoo. <https://www.dr.dk/nyheder/indland/det-har-jeg-aldrig-set-her-foer-uventet-gaest-dukkede-op-i-zoo?fbclid=IwAR1McmU4FPghzWz017viUzmmC6zRw9itqAU9VFUOK1dAC18VRCkktPalq>



Indian Otters

A rare sighting was recently reported of a Eurasian otter in the forests of Gaurela-Pendra Marwahi district, Chhattisgarh state, in central India. The Forest Department had set up camera traps which recorded night images of an otter climbing on to rocks in the Udbilav Sukhad River and then returning to the water. Otters are known as 'Udabilav' in Hindi, and this is believed to be only the second record of the otter in the state. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/raipur/rare-sighting-of-eurasian-otter-in-marwahi-forests/articleshow/107806937.cms>

Elsewhere in northeast India otter conservation is being hampered by lack of data. Three species are recorded in this part of India (Asian small-clawed, Eurasian, and smooth-coated) but they still face threats from hunting for the illegal wildlife trade, unsustainable fishing and development of human infrastructure.

Otters used to be regarded as common in this part of India but they are one of the least-researched species there and the first survey was only carried out in 2019 in the Pakke Tiger Reserve. And yet, the habitat seems to be ideal with rivers, marshes and ponds and many suitable holt sites in rock crevices and tree roots and plenty of bankside vegetation.

It is the same story as in so many parts of Asia – otter conservation is so far down the line as most effort is concentrated on high profile species such as tiger and elephant. The same is true in many parts of Africa. As a result there is a large gap in the knowledge of many aspects of otter ecology and the effects of the illegal wildlife trade and detailed research and surveys are necessary in order to create effective and practical conservation plans.

<https://india.mongabay.com/2024/02/insufficient-data-hinders-otter-conservation-in-northeast-india/>

Lovely video of otters in Cape Town

We all know that people like to make the most of summer weather on a beach but this video found a group of African Clawless otters playing around in shallow waters on a boulder beach near Cape Town.

<https://www.capetownetc.com/outdoors/otter-family-spotted-near-camps-bay/>

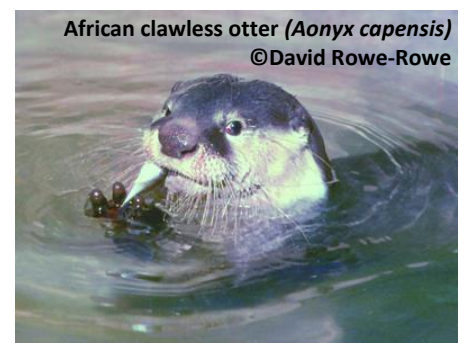


Image of The Month (©Sayed Mousavi)

This wonderful photo of Maxwell's otter (*Lutra perspicillata maxwelli*), a subspecies of the smooth-coated otter was taken in Iran near the border with Iraq by Sayed Mousavi. He is an independent researcher and professional wildlife photographer in Iran and has been monitoring and protecting the wildlife in western Khuzestan province in the southwest of the country for more than 13 years. He is passionate, respectful, and has been dedicated to the Maxwell's otters in the Hoor ol-Azim wetland since his childhood, considering its conservation his top priority.

Sayed was a co-author of a paper on "A preliminary population estimate of the vulnerable smooth-coated otter *Lutrogale perspicillata maxwelli* in the Hawizeh Marsh in Southeastern Iraq with confirmed occurrence in the Hoor Ol-Azim Wetland in Southwestern Iran which is published in the IOSF Otter Journal Vol 6 (2020) which you can download at <https://www.otter.org/our-work-research>



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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 <https://www.otter.org/take-action-legacy> will take you to our dedicated web page concerning making a Legacy.

Give a Little Extra Help

YOU can raise FREE donations when you shop online...

It's simple and costs no more than what you spend:

Donate – one-off or regular



<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



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



<https://donate.justgiving.com/donation-amount?uri=aHR0cHM6Ly9kb25hdGutyXBpLmP1c3RnaXZpbmcyY29tL2FwaS9kb25hdGlvbnMvZiZiMjIxODIyZzE5NGZkZjhlMGYyYzMDQzOjYyYzU=>







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




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

Vehicle Disposal – yes, even your old vehicle can earn great donations whether it's scrap or auction (fees apply)



Annual Adoption Renewal 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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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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Working to Save the World's Otters

