



Otter News No. 119, January 2021

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Mboo Near to Release in Dr Congo (photos: Rita & Glen Chapman)



Do you remember Mboo (right), the little spotted-necked otter, taken to the Kikongo Otter Sanctuary in the Democratic Republic of Congo. That was just over a year ago and he is now getting ready for release.

Isn't he a handsome chap with his striking throat and lip markings, and he seems so at home in the river. He has already become more independent and has his favourite swamp and haunts. Although Mboo does catch a variety of insects on land and in water, spotted-necked otters eat more fish than the Congo clawless otters which Rita and her team have already cared for and released. This means that there is more potential for problems with people and their fishing activities.

So they have been getting him ready by taking him to places where he is less likely to encounter anyone although, of course, in the end he will be able to go where he wants. The plan is to take him to an even more remote wild river with plenty of fish and eels and Delphin and Sico will spend some days with him there, allowing him to get used to it. Then they will slip away when he seems happy and content and able to fend for himself.



Rita also told us "We had a report this morning about a large Congo clawless pair of otters that was seen on one of our emerging sand bars a few weeks ago. The two came out of the water and rolled around on the sand before becoming aware of the witness on the other bank close by. It's always encouraging to hear reports of Congo clawless otter activity in our area. There seems to be a year around presence of them fairly close by in forested stream valleys where people have constructed fish ponds. Otter slides in the mud, paw holes where they have been digging for worms, and empty water snail shells, and of course tracks are some of the signs they leave. We like to believe Mazu, Kamiya and Mweka are still in the area producing pups every year now!"

It is the same with us when we visit an area where we have previously released otters. There is one site on Skye where we released our very first otter and if we see one we always wonder if it is descended from Su.

News from The Sanctuary

The most exciting news in the Sanctuary was the arrival of three tiny cubs from Inverness, which were found after a container was moved and they were found underneath. Unfortunately instead of stepping back and watching to make sure mum came back to move them to another safe place, they were picked up and ended up coming to us. They weighed less than 600g and their eyes had only recently opened.

Sadly the smallest of the three died. She had been active and fed well at 11pm but by the time of the first morning feed at 5am she was a bit lethargic, although she did take some milk. By 8am she was dead. She had



shown no symptoms at all but the post mortem revealed problems with the heart and also possibly the brain. Very sad.



However, the other two are doing very well and are now over 800g and VERY wriggly! At the moment they don't have names but are known as Big Blob (BB) and Little Blob (LB) because of their lip markings. LB is very easy to feed and just downs the bottle nice and steadily. BB is improving but has been hard to feed due to lack of concentration on the bottle and wriggling! They are always so happy when they are put back together after their feed and spend time climbing over each other and trying to groom one another. On one occasion we peeked in at them and had to giggle at the stranded turtle impressions of LB. You too can enjoy the video here... <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mpYPcDqj104&t=10s>

In the meantime, DJ and Louis, have been introduced to each other. Although they are both from Broadford, they were found at opposite ends of the village and are not brothers. There is about a month difference in age and so DJ was a lot bigger but Louis has done his best to catch up. Usually we introduce cubs as soon as they are feeding well but with the size difference we had to wait. But there were no problems and they quickly took to each other. They do squabble over fish and play fight, which is all natural behaviour.



The weather here has been very cold and everything has been frozen for quite a while now. But this means nothing to the otters on the croft. Effie and Reva snuggle up together in their warm hay and we are pleased to say that our **Ottercam** is now back online after various technical problems. So you can watch these two at <https://otter.org/Public/OtterCam1.aspx>.



As I am writing they are busy grooming each other. They are particularly active when they are given fresh bedding and have to make sure it is in just the right place!

With the cold dry weather we have found Bealltainn outside more often – she doesn't seem to like the rain and often we find her in her box when we go to feed. When we had the snow her footprints showed us how active she is and she has now started taking small twigs and bits of vegetation into her sleeping box to add to her hay. This is a good sign of natural behaviour.



During the snow we also found footprints of a visiting wild otter lower down the croft. We have had incidents such as this before and in fact on one occasion an otter actually climbed into a pen. Our fences are designed to keep our otters in and not necessarily keep others out. The two otters in the enclosure at the time were not pleased to see the invader and gave him a bloody nose for his trouble. So after we had got him out we had to keep him for a few days until it healed.

Otters will always keep you on your toes, but to be honest, we feel so privileged to be able to care for all of these wonderful creatures and help them get back to the wild.

IOSF Otter Adoption Gift Box – find them at the Otter Shop



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



Team Otter IOSF was delighted to hear of more education work by our friend Kiengkai Khoonsrivong in Laos. Following his work in Summer 2020 in the Bolikhamxay province of the country, Kiengkai continued his outreach programme visiting the Luangprabang and Oudomxay provinces.

During his outreach

programme he managed to visit over 200 children and teach them about the importance of otters and wetland habitats in their respective areas. He also talked to local communities about the presence, perceptions and other factors relating to otters.

We are delighted to have supported this project and helped to grow awareness for otters in Laos. We look forward to seeing more from Kiengkai and his team moving forward.



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.

Montenegro Public Awareness Programme

Ninoslav Djurovic has been doing great education work in Montenegro for some time now through his NGO NVU Living Green, and has also established 7 Team Otter Clubs.

Like everywhere else things have been hard in Montenegro but Nino is not one to give up. He recently emailed to tell us of his plans to do more visual awareness through public signs and a mural using local artists. For this he needs to raise funds to cover the cost of waterproof paint, brushes, etc. Art is a great tool for creating awareness, as Omar Al-Sheikhly has shown in Iraq (OTTER, Journal of the International Otter Survival Fund Volume 6 pp 27-29, 2020, https://otter.org/documents/journals/IOSF_Journal_Vol6_2020.pdf)



IOSF wants to help fund this work in Montenegro and you can donate at <https://ottershop.co.uk/products/donate-to-iosf?variant=33085260857482>. Select "Other" and then put Montenegro as a note at the check-out.

Thank you.

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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Abandoned Cub in Singapore

At the beginning of January we were contacted by otter workers in Singapore about a two week old cub belonging to the Bishan family which had been found abandoned outside the holt. They had tried reintroducing the cub back to the family but they just ignored it and moved on to another holt, as they often do. It is believed that the cub was born to a young inexperienced female who couldn't care for it so it was taken to ACRES, a wildlife rescue centre.

The cub appeared to be physically healthy but there were various other problems. There were no suitable facilities but ACRES were willing to help with providing the best care in the interests of the cub.

If the cub survived there were also problems with release as all the waterways in the country have optimum populations already. As smooth-coated otters are a social species, how would the cub fit into a group? The option of moving it was considered but this would not be possible as the Singapore otters are unusual in that they are hybrid and so this could cause all sorts of genetic problems if it bred with otters in another country.

In the end the decision was made to euthanize the cub, a decision which we at IOSF did not agree with. We believe that euthanasia should only be considered as a last option and we feel that other options should have been considered first. It is quite possible that a similar situation could occur again and so the Singapore Otter Working Group are looking into the provision of suitable rehabilitation facilities and working with international partners to create guidelines for best care in the future. IOSF will be working with them on this.

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.

Otter Shop Product of the Month

Semi-professional photographer David Coultham, based in Argyll, Scotland and specializing in landscape and wildlife photography, has teamed up with IOSF to support our work.

David is generously donating 50% of profits from the sale of his fantastic otter photographs to IOSF. Follow the link from the Otter Shop to David's web site where you can purchase your otter photographic products. There are over 50 images to choose from and you will find a great choice of options including paper prints, canvas

prints, aluminium and even 3D effect printing.

<https://ottershop.co.uk/collections/otter-art/products/wild-otters-from-david-coultham-photography>



A sample of David's



otter photography

Yet another Source of Environmental Toxins

When we think of pollution from boats we are usually thinking about oil spills, but as fibreglass boats break up they release toxins and microplastics. Fibreglass was recognised as a revolutionary material particularly for the production of small leisure boats and so there was a boom in the 1960-70s. Now many of these boats have reached the end of their useful lifespan and space for disposing of them properly is limited. Hurricanes are also devastating and in 2017 after "Irma" and "Harvey" some 63,000 boats were either damaged or destroyed.

Unfortunately many boats are simply dumped at sea by drilling a hole in the hull. Some believe that these will make great artificial reefs but the worry is that as they break up they release microplastics. So far studies have been localised but as more and more boats are dumped it could become a major problem for all marine life.



There are other potential hazards from abandoned boats. In two estuaries in eastern England researchers from Plymouth University found high levels of copper, zinc and lead in sediment and in the guts of ragworms. Of course, such elements will become concentrated higher up the food chain, as in otters. In addition asbestos was often used as an insulator and paints often contained lead and mercury-based compounds and tributyltin as antifouling agents. Even if the boats are not beyond salvaging, any repairs will inevitably release clouds of airborne dust including fibreglass and possibly asbestos

and the other chemicals.

It is vital that we are mindful of the threats to our marine life from our boats, not just from oil, but from the materials used to build them.

<https://theconversation.com/abandoned-fibreglass-boats-are-releasing-toxins-and-microplastics-across-the-world-143857>

A Positive Story on How Wildlife can help Mental Health Problems

We all know how mental health problems can have a devastating impact on a person's life and on those around them. We also know that for many people access to nature and wildlife is so important and now with the restrictions imposed because of Covid-19 this access is so much more limited.

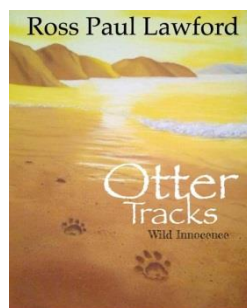
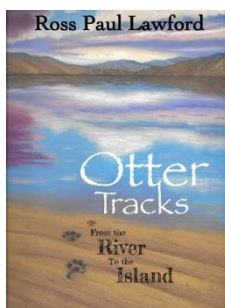
Ross Lawford from Edinburgh is an amateur photographer and for years he had severe mental health problems. When he was in his 20s he was more or less housebound because of acute agoraphobia and this was followed by serious depression.



He couldn't work and had no friends but he would spend all day watching wildlife such as birds and foxes from his window. Eventually he began to plan an outdoor expedition to experience nature at close quarters. This was to change his life. Eventually he was able to volunteer at a wildlife sanctuary and work with the public on nature tours on the Isle of Mull.

And as we would imagine, otters have been a great part of this healing process and their antics proved a great inspiration for him. He has taken some stunning photos of otters, including this gorgeous picture of three cubs, which received a great comment on his Otter Tracks Facebook page "It's important to correctly stack your otters for storage"!!

Ross has also produced two books. The first entitled "Otter Tracks from the River to the Island" is already available and it describes how he encountered an otter he named Squeaks and how this helped him on his journey back to health. He has a wonderful way of writing: *"The little otter bounds out, armed with an abundance of energy; she's like a coiled spring that's been released. She stands on her back legs to get that little bit taller to best view the man staring straight back. Her deep hazel eyes stare me down as her nose twitches uncontrollably, whilst her long whiskers drape down to cover her pale cheeks, her front paws grasped together as she let out a quiet squeak."*



His second book called "Otter Tracks: Wild Innocence" will be available in March.

When Ross was furloughed from his job he took advantage of the spare time to encourage his young son, Daniel, to learn more about wildlife and, of course, introduced him to otters. "It's wonderful" he said "we can never get that time back."

Coming to the [Otter Shop](#) soon

There is a wonderful quote on the Otter Tracks Facebook page "Enigmatic & beautiful the Otter is without a doubt one of the most wonderful creatures we have, a true wild spirit of the water, forever to wander wild & free."

Ross is an inspiration to anyone suffering from mental health issues. You may not be in a position to watch otters, to take photos or write a book. But enjoy the wildlife where you are – Nature is a great healer.

Check out the Otter Tracks Facebook page to see more of his great photos and his books.

<https://www.facebook.com/ottertracks1981>

<https://www.scotsman.com/lifestyle/family/nature-saved-my-life-scottish-photographer-reveals-how-wildlife-healed-his-soul-3005207>

Darcey Bussell's Wild Coasts of Scotland

IOSF and one of our Team Otter clubs will be part of Darcey Bussell's Wild Coasts of Scotland series which is to begin on Monday 8 February 2021.

During the series Darcey visits four islands, Islay, Bute, Uist and Skye, the home of IOSF. We tell the story of our otters and our Broadford Team Otter members explain why they are so passionate about making a difference to our wildlife and the environment. The Broadford Team Otter are very enthusiastic about removing litter and during the filming they set about clearing a section of beach which is home to otters.

IOSF is being featured on the first episode on Monday 8 February at 9pm on More4.

For a preview on the series, please visit here (<https://fb.watch/3q8R8Dq4A8/>)

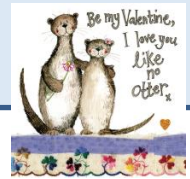
Congratulations to our local MSP, Kate Forbes

Our local MSP, Kate Forbes, has recently announced her engagement to Alasdair (Ali) MacLennan, who also lives in Dingwall. Kate Forbes is the MSP for Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch and also the Scottish Finance Secretary.

In February 2020 she was named as the Scottish Government's Otter Species Champion. Otters had previously been unrepresented under the Scottish Government's Species Champion scheme and Ullapool Sea Savers Poppy Lewis-Ing, who is the group's otter ambassador, worked hard to get an otter champion. Kate gladly accepted saying "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 I'm delighted to be species champion for the otter".

IOSF would like to extend its best wishes to the happy couple.

Valentine's Day at the Otter Shop



News In Brief

Otters in India

India is home to three species of otters - Eurasian, smooth-coated and Asian small-clawed otters. *Wild Otters*, an organisation in Goa, are appealing to the public to help them gain a better understanding of otters across India. They are asking other conservationists and wildlife enthusiasts to help them document otters and have produced a field book to help distinguish species, identify signs and advise on best practices that won't disturb the otters. The group will hold online meetings to help with any queries etc. and any records can be sent through to the group through safe means to protect the otters from disturbance.



The information gained through this citizen science will help to provide further understanding of otters across the region, such as species, threats, distribution and much more.

<https://lifestyle.livemint.com/smart-living/environment/ecologists-look-for-indian-otters-111610774328859.html>

Karnataka - Otters have been spotted in the backwaters of Kandlavana in the Kundapar taluk, India. Poaching, as well as excessive prawn cultivation and chemicals have heavily affected the coastal region and, therefore, the otters of the area. Initially only one otter was seen but since then a large family of smooth-coated otters has been found. This has excited wildlife enthusiasts within the area and there are now calls for more efforts to be done to help protect the otters and these wetlands.

<https://www.deccanherald.com/state/karnataka-districts/otters-spotted-in-backwaters-at-moodlakatte-934608.html>

Elsewhere, in **Bengaluru**, two single smooth-coated otters have been reported at two different locations and people are both excited and puzzled by the otters' appearance. The area had been thought to be unsuitable for otters and as this is a very social species which lives in family groups it is very rare to spot one on its own. It is believed that it could have strayed from the group to find food, or could be a pregnant female attempting to find somewhere to have her cubs. No-one is exactly sure - but it is great to see otters appearing.

<https://www.newindianexpress.com/cities/bengaluru/2021/jan/12/two-otters-in-spotted-in-bengaluru-wildlife-enthusiasts-delighted-and-puzzled-2248874.html>

Western Ghats - The Eurasian otter has been confirmed in the Western Ghats, despite not being seen in the

area for almost 70 years. Unfortunately the information came from an incident where an otter was found dead by the road. The species identity was confirmed through pictures and genetics. There is now a call for more survey work to be done to get more information on Eurasian otters (and other otters) across India.

https://www.thehindu.com/sci-tech/energy-and-environment/western-ghats-is-home-to-the-eurasian-otter/article25145259.ece?fbclid=IwAR3kNxe2GTG--BOMJe-TMvFy1oveoJ_NzIVN5TRGKI1AMtzkGnEQMjEg5kk

Sea otters in San Francisco

We all know the history of the sea otter, hunted to the brink of extinction for fur and how it is now making a steady, but not yet full, recovery. Scientists and conservationists have longed to find new areas to help the otter populations continue this recovery, since plateauing at around the 3,000 number in California.



Sea Otters ©April Severin

One possible place could be San Francisco Bay. Despite having some areas that are of high concern with busy shipping lanes, excess chemicals and other issues, there are other areas that look to be the perfect home. Jane Rudebusch, of San Francisco State University's Estuary and Ocean Science Centre, and her team has mapped the bay to show some potential spots. Rudebusch is confident that otters can survive within the area but concedes that much more work needs to be done to maximise the chances of success. Firstly, is there enough prey in the "clean" areas, or will the otters soon move into high risks spots? Secondly, will the otters stay put and not just leave straight away, as has happened in other translocations of sea otters? And thirdly, will there be any conflicts with fisheries?

Safe to say, much more work needs to be done but it is great to see that there are plans to help otters try to return to former haunts.

<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/sea-otters-could-get-new-home-in-san-francisco-bay/>

Thank You...

for digging deep to send your donations, generously given to support our work in otter conservation.

Thanks also to The Humane Society and Nurture by Nature.

We can't do it without you.

Events

Have you given a thought to what you might do for #WorldOtterDay this May?

Of course, we do not know how the coronavirus situation will be, but we can certainly think about using the internet to get awareness messages out, such as make a video message about otters and the problems they face. Virtual events have become more popular, so you could set up a fundraising page for a run, walk, swim, dance, sing, knit, bake... the list is endless. Perhaps you can have an eBay auction and make IOSF your charity to support.

https://www.otter.org/Public/Events_OurCurrentEvent.aspx

<https://www.otter.org/Public/HelpUs.aspx>



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Raise FREE Donations... when you shop online. It's simple and costs you no more than your shopping. Visit one of our charity pages to discover how easy it is for you to help otters even more:



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

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



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



Simply download the Pledjar app - use code OSF001 and select IOSF as your charity of choice. You can then choose to round up your card payments and donate those extra pennies to help otters.

- **Android:** https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.pledjar.app&hl=en_GB
- **iOS:** <https://apps.apple.com/gb/app/pledjar/id1504894760>

Regular and secure giving to IOSF and otter conservation... at your fingertips. Text OTTER 10 to 70085 to donate £10 (or change the amount to however much you wish to give)



You can donate monthly via our partners at the DONR giving platform that allows an easy and safe way method to give. This can be as little or as much as you can afford. Visit <https://www.donr.com/iosf> to find out more.

Annual Supporters' Rates

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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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If you are reading this for the first time and would like to receive all IOSF mailings, click [here](#) to sign up. Please be assured that we will never pass on your details to any other party and you will only ever receive emails from us.

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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