



Thirty Years of Otter Conservation

Otter News No. 144, July 2023

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Wildfires in Greece

No-one can have been unaffected by the terrible images coming out of parts of Europe of the huge wildfires raging through the countryside. The Greek island of Rhodes was particularly bad but Corfu and Evia were also on fire. The area in Corfu is exactly where the otters stay particularly in the summer when other rivers have dried up and are crawling with tourists. On Evia the fires are in the south where again there are scattered otter populations.

These images hit home particularly to Graham Roberts who is an ecologist who visited Corfu in 2019 on holiday and found signs of Eurasian otters (*Lutra lutra*) along the coast. He decided to return in September 2021 to undertake a proper survey, which he wrote up in the IOSF OTTER Journal Volume 8 in 2022.

The island has a diversity of wetland and coastal habitats with four significant wetlands linked to coastal areas, all designated as Natura 2000 sites: Antiniotissa, Chalkiopolou, Lake Korisson and the Alikes Wetland. The majority of the rivers are relatively small, with any permanent water of significant depth nearer to the estuaries and the upland areas often dry up completely in the summer.

Graham found positive otter signs at only 33 of the 103 sites he surveyed and he estimated that the population

Photo of a wildfire by [Egor Vikhrev](#)
on [Unsplash](#)



Upper river
Potomas/ Ropas
near Loutsas
© Graham Roberts

is not large, possibly consisting of just a few individuals utilising large areas of the island, particularly the coast, at varying times of the year. There are small, undeveloped sections of coast, largely in the north, with small river estuaries and these appear to be important refuge sites. Some areas are close to the Albanian coast and it is highly likely that otters move naturally between the two countries, which would maintain this small island population.



When he visited in 2021, Graham was concerned about the degradation of many of the coastal wetlands with fly-tipping, over-abstraction of freshwater and ongoing development. Now these areas have been hit by the wildfires. Graham emailed his local contacts and has just received a reply. Apparently the area badly affected on Corfu is very much in the vicinity of several headwaters near Old Perithia and Loutsas in the north of the island. This is where he has found otter signs regularly over his last four visits.

In his last visit in May he surveyed the islands of Lesbos and Chios – in the past there has been some evidence of otters, although not a lot, but in May they were totally negative. The populations on Corfu and Evia are therefore critically important island populations in the Mediterranean and the preservation and management of existing Natura 2000 sites is of huge importance to Corfu's native water dependent wildlife that includes otters. During that May visit he also returned to Corfu for two weeks and found positive signs of otters at two of the Natura 2000 sites.

It is understood that otters possibly survive on only six of the 6,000 Greek islands which makes the very presence of otters on Corfu of national importance to Greece's natural biodiversity. Graham has also been working to inform the local people of Corfu and interested environmental organisations about the importance of otters on the island.

He is planning a return visit in Spring 2024 and wants to visit Lefkada and Samos as well to assess the populations there. After his last visit to Corfu, Graham told us "I viewed for over 15 minutes a large old dog otter fishing in a wetland--my first Greek Otter ever!!"

At the moment Graham is trying to raise funds to support this important survey and IOSF is keen to help him.

If you would like to help Graham and the otters of the Greek islands you can donate online at www.ottershop.co.uk - click on 'Add a note to order' at cart and put "Greek islands". Alternatively, you can send a cheque with "Greek islands" on the back to IOSF, 7 Black Park, Broadford, Isle of Skye, IV49 9DE.

Thank you.

Sea Otters in Japan

In 2014 Paul and Grace were invited to a workshop in Japan, as part of a feasibility study into reintroducing Eurasian otters to the Shiretoko National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, in Hokkaido. At that time sightings of sea otters were not common and it was believed that the animals had strayed down from the nearby Russian Kuril Islands.

There were reports that they were breeding around Moyururi island in Nemuro city in 2010 and they were again recorded as breeding in 2018. However, now it seems that there is a definite small breeding population in Japan and four pairs of mother and pups have been seen since the beginning of July off Cape Tofutsu in eastern Hokkaido. They are a part of a group of about 14 otters, but this is still a very vulnerable population.



They are being seen at the promenade at Cape Kiritappu and the public are being urged to watch them but not interfere.

These new records suggest that their distribution may be expanding southwards from the Kiril





Islands.

<https://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/14971330>

Thanks to Yumiko Millie Okamoto for permission to use these photos she took on a visit to Cape Kiritappu.

Update from Thailand

(images © WFFT)

In May we told you about the rescue of two otters by Wildlife Friends Foundation Thailand (WFFT). Oreo is a hairy-nosed otter and he was being kept as a pet with Bacon, an Asian small-clawed otter.



Oreo



Bacon

The two are inseparable so WFFT decided they needed their own bigger enclosure and they have just shared some photos showing the work going ahead.



They also told us that another two otters arrived just a few days ago – also rescued from the pet trade.

Clearly their work is really important so, if you would like to donate towards the care of Oreo and Bacon, you can donate at the [Otter Shop](#) - just click on WFFT in the drop-down menu.

Many thanks



News from The Sanctuary



The big news is that Dòbhran will soon be on his way home to the Isle of Mull. He arrived with us in October 2022 after his mother was apparently hit on the road and he was found nearby. Now he is ready to return. Sue Morley from the Mull Otter Group met with us to help transfer him to Skye and the Group have already identified a suitable release site.

Eden and Winston continue to do well. Eden has always been the more nervous of the two and continues to hide under the hay when we look in, to check on them both. Winston just stands his ground and makes a vocal warning to keep away.

All we have seen on Bealltainn recently is an empty box! The vegetation is very high in her enclosure and provides so many possible hiding places. But she continues to feed well and indeed recently she has been taking an extra fish. But her pool still looks unused!



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->



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

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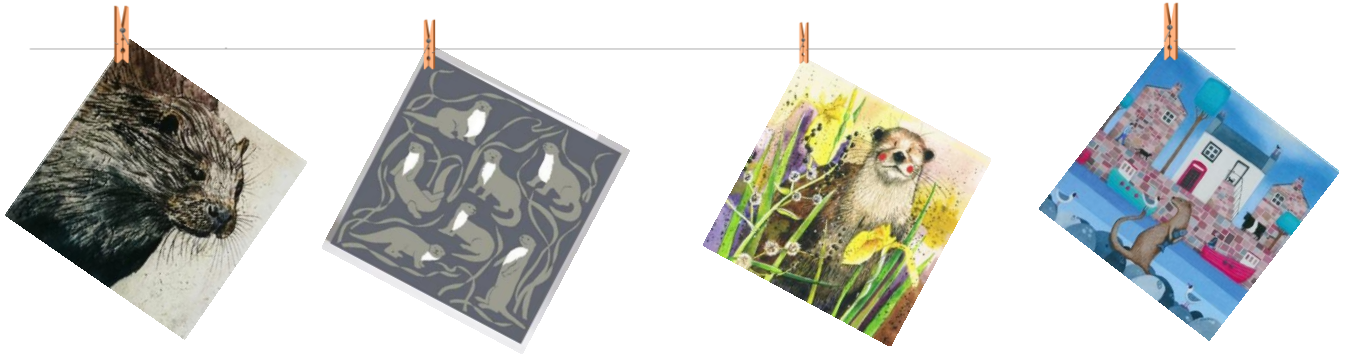
Otter Shop Product of the Month

www.ottershop.co.uk

Need to send a card? Check out the Stationery Cupboard at the Otter Shop, where you'll find a great selection for all occasions... printed and e-cards. <https://ottershop.co.uk/collections/the-stationery-cupboard>

These are some examples:





Thank You...

for all the donations that we have received, large and small, for the many projects we support.

Thanks also to The Goldcrest Charitable Trust, The Matthiesen Foundation, The Walker 597 Trust and Rockhampton Zoo.

And, to our Corporate Sponsors:

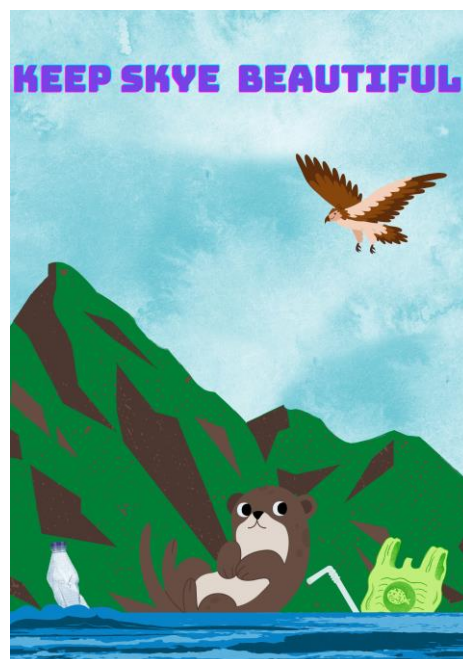
Andrew Poplett Enterprises Ltd, holidaycottages.co.uk,
Interated Utility Services Ltd. Nurtured by Nature



Many of you will remember the posters that the older group in Team Otter have put up around Broadford and surrounding areas! Well, we are delighted to say that people have seen them, and asked for them to be put in other places too.

We are now planning to have them placed in a few more communities around Skye and are happy to send you our designs if you want them in more areas!

It is a great encouragement for the kids to see that their work is appreciated and now they want to do even more.



Please message our Facebook page (Team Otter Broadford) and we can show you all of our cool designs, and help make the world a cleaner place.

Team Otter Broadford is still working towards its 30 for 30 fundraiser. You can check out their progress here and please donate if you can! - <https://www.justgiving.com/page/team-otter-broadford-1676536990827>

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

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

An Otter Will Always Do What an Otter Wants To Do!

Where we live on Skye we are fortunate to be able to watch otters around our coastline, and it is



particularly fascinating to watch the different behaviour. We have seen them catch and bring to shore a conger eel of about 5 ft (1.5m) – that is no mean feat when you consider the strength of the eel and the fact that the otter can only hold it in its jaws as it swims!

We have also seen several family groups of mothers and cubs playing and grooming and recently we have had a female and her cub fishing in front of our house. One evening the pair came in to the shore and disappeared up a nearby burn. We have seen that many times before but we have never seen when they come back. So we set a camera trap to find out.

When we checked the camera trap a few days later there was nothing.

Instead by the entrance to our small hut overlooking the shore was a pile of spraint on a stone. Clearly the otter left us a message – *'If you want to know where I am, I am here!!'*

NEWS IN BRIEF

Sea Otters

We have told you many, many times about how otters can have major benefits on the environment, restoring habitats, increasing biodiversity and much more. Again, this is highlighted in the following link.

<https://reasonstobecheerful.world/sea-otters-reintroduction-coastal-ecosystem-climate/>

that otters can be of benefit. A new study from Monterey Bay Aquarium and Middlebury Institute of International Studies' Center for the Blue Economy generates more than \$3 million USD for coastal communities across California

<https://phys.org/news/2023-06-wild-sea-otters-generate-millions.html>

The study found that communities around Elkhorn Slough, a well-known otter habitat, benefits



substantially from eco-tourists, with otters being the main reason for people to visit the area. So much of this economic gain can be put down to the otters themselves.



Sea otter, Elkhorn Slough ©Wendy Yates,
Nurtured by Nature

Elkhorn Slough is the perfect illustration of how nature and ecosystem improvements can have major positive impacts for the people that share these places. It is also worth noting, that it is important for balance, and the efforts of Monterey Bay Aquarium, Sea Otter Savvy and other organisations to reduce tourism impacts on the otters themselves is vitally important. It is essential to maintain a safe, comfortable distance, for both you and otters.

These problems are more apparent with cases such as the “surfing otter” (<https://www.ktvu.com/news/wildlife-experts-seek-to-capture-surfing-santa-cruz-sea-otter-deemed-public-safety-risk>).

You may have seen this otter online and displaying what may seem like charming and funny behaviour. However, otters can be aggressive with a strong bite and by being in such close proximity to people can pose a serious risk to both the otter and people.

The otter, nicknamed otter 841, was born in captivity at Monterey Bay Aquarium about five years ago. Her mother had been taken into care and that is when they found out that she was pregnant. They kept human contact to a minimum and released the pup in June 2020 but in September 2022 she started to become more used to people when they actively gave her food. This just reinforces the dangers which can develop out of such actions.

Please always respect wildlife. And where this is a rare case of an otter actually approaching us, show them respect and space – and most of the time, they will do the same to us.

"Fangsheng" otters

A Buddhist ritual known as “Fangsheng” – translating as “life release” – is helping to feed otters in Tibet. The ritual is the religious practice of saving and releasing animals that were destined to be slaughtered. The fish are bought from markets, and released back in to the wild during the ceremony.

This has become great news for the otters in the area, who are taking this opportunity to prey on these newly released fish. The fish are not native, and despite their regular release are not overtaking any native prey within the river ecosystems. A recent study has found that despite thousands of fish being released only a few still reside in the rivers.

Why? It is believed that otters hold the answer. Studies have found that otters are taking advantage of this new food supply, mainly crucian and common carp, and enjoying this easier food supply. It is thought that they aren't choosing them for a desire for their taste, but mainly because they are easy to catch. These species aren't designed for cold, low-oxygen, high altitude habitats and therefore swim quite slowly and this is music to the otters' ears!

<https://www.livescience.com/animals/land-mammals/buddhist-ritual-saves-exotic-fish-from-slaughter-only-for-adventurous-tibetan-otters-to-feast-on-them-instead>



Concerns over otters' food supply?

The weather across much of the UK, particularly in June, has been hot and dry and environmental groups have raised concerns that this has led to a lot of fish being found dead in our fresh water ecosystems.



The record high temperatures led to algal blooms which starve waterways of oxygen, and therefore, kill fish. Mark Owen, of the Angling Trust, stated that there have been unprecedented numbers of dead fish and whereas this can happen later in the summer, it is very early for this to have already started.

But this begs the questions: What about the species that rely on fish and what about otters? With the increased number of fish dying, what does this mean for other animals, both below and above fish in the ecosystem!

<https://www.aol.co.uk/news/uk-hottest-june-record-caused-075226907.html>

Bristol's otters harmed by roads

A "grille" on one of Bristol's bridges is believed to be causing issues for otters in the area. The grille was put in to protect the area from flooding caused by various discarded human items and is designed to catch anything from going further in to the river, and therefore potentially preventing such issues.

However, this is having adverse effects on the otters. Two animals have been killed on the roads believed to be as a result of not being able to pass

through where the grille is. There are now calls for the style of this to be changed, to have wider bars and allow the option for otters to pass through in safety and not having to cross the road.

From IOSF's point of view, we would prefer it if these things weren't needed, as people weren't littering and affecting our habitats, wildlife and environment!

<https://www.bristolpost.co.uk/news/bristol-news/campaign-save-otters-being-killed-8566222>

Crayfish trap concerns

In recent weeks, three otters have been caught in illegal crayfish traps in two separate areas. The incidents both happened on the 28 June, one on Loch Ken, in southern Scotland and the other (involving two otters), on Loch Froume, in Gloucestershire, England.

Of the three otters involved, two of them unfortunately died, while the third (one of the River Froume individuals) was in severe stress at the time of being found but as yet the outcome is unknown.

Police are looking for information on both incidents to try and determine who placed these illegal traps in these waterways, and caused so much harm to otters in the area.



<https://stroudtimes.com/warning-graphic-images-of-drowned-otter-in-unlicensed-trap/>
https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cevjexje5r7o?fbclid=IwAR2sqGuyRF0KyIHUL5VGPg9AF23zEucj3yo9qNqoLy4e9Q-6qAZHky_aqMA



Image of The Month

'Always watching' – two spotted-necked otters in the Mabamba Swamp, Uganda. ©Max Baumgarten



IOSF Otter Oscars

We are now accepting nominations for the IOSF Otter Oscar Awards 2023.

IOSF's annual awards, the "Otter Oscars" is now in its **eighth year!** The awards offer special recognition to those who have worked to help otters, and you can now nominate someone (including yourself) who you feel is deserving of the award.

If you would like to nominate someone, then please click here.

(https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScpBO7orWI_7ncmaYtIPL8EFnd1bEYUvzy2qM-YQixiYD-LvA/viewform?usp=sf_link).

Please note, you can nominate someone for more than one category but only one nomination per category please. Awards are not awarded on the number of nominations, but the content within.

We will be accepting nominations until Friday 24 November and announcing the winners on Monday 4 December.

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



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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 http://otter.org/Public/HelpUs_Legacy.aspx will take you to our dedicated web page concerning making a Legacy.

You can follow us on:



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<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=aHR0cHM6Ly9kb25hdGUtYXBpLmp1c3RnaXZpbmcuY29tL2FwaS9kb25hdGlvbnMvZjZiMjIxODlyZjE5NGZkZjhIMGM4YWYyZjMDQzODYyYzU=>





<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)



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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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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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Working to Save the World's Otters

