



Otter News No. 114, July 2020

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Online Conferences and Presentations

During these times of restricted contact, webinars and podcasts have become even more important to allow people to share information. Last month we told you about some online sessions which we took part in as part of World Otter Day and World Environment Day. The advantage of these sessions is that they can be recorded so that people can watch or listen to them whenever convenient.



On 6 June, IOSF's Grace Yoxon took part in Climate Action North's Webinar for World Environment Day. There were a series of presentations all on a theme of "Time for Nature" and Grace's presentation was on "Time for Otters". Sharon Lashley, organiser of the event, has now put the full webinar on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCfxSJcoA1D-CRfMrISzBICg>. The whole webinar is well worth watching but if you only want to catch the otter section click on Part 2.

An inspiring podcast

Some of you will remember the name, Sarah Neill, as she has been such a great help in transferring otters up to Skye from northern England. Sarah has now become one of our Board members and recently she did a really inspiring podcast for the ESG Foundation. The podcast was largely about women in science and how she has become involved in so many projects. Not only is she on the IOSF Board, but she is a marine biologist and is involved in Surfers Against Sewage, British Divers Marine Life Rescue, Animals Asia and next year she will be going on an expedition as a sea woman to the Arctic with SEDNA Epic Expeditions. She is also a lecturer in Animal Care and Management at Kendal College. Her answer to the question how does she do it all? "Never say no".

She also stressed how each one of us has a duty to help our environment. It is not just the responsibility of governments and big organisations. Each one of us can make a difference if we think more about Reduce, Re-use and Recycle in our daily lives.

So if you want to be truly inspired to actually DO something to help our planet rather than just thinking there is nothing you can do as an individual - listen to Sarah - she is podcast No 3 here. <https://esgfoundation.org/esg-podcast?fbclid=IwAR038Jm05IZXPQT-0IMHh1-2hR7QGB9gQV1YG6JZqzXIRyRp58vlZsRnQjk>

Updates from Abroad

Phnom Tamao Wildlife Rescue Centre (All photos in this article are © Wildlife Alliance)
Phnom Tamao Wildlife Rescue Centre (PTWRC) is about 25 miles from Phnom Penh and cares for animals largely rescued from the illegal wildlife trade. As far as possible the animals are released back to the wild but if this is impossible then the animal will have as natural a life as possible at the Centre. PTWRC is the only sanctuary that has cared for hairy-nosed otters and they have the experience to deal with this species, as it seems very vulnerable to poor water quality. This is Neary, the female hairy-nosed otter currently in



care, who was donated by a monk in Pursat and almost certainly came from the Tonle Sap lake.

Each quarter Nick Marx, who is the Director of the Wildlife Rescue and Care Programmes, sends out a newsletter and we are grateful to him for the following information on their work with otters.

Many of the animals are collected by the Wildlife Rapid Rescue Team, which is the government task force implemented to crack down on the illegal wildlife trade and is supported financially and technically by Wildlife Alliance. Now some pet owners are voluntarily giving up their animals to the Centre. In May one otter came from Siem Reap and at the beginning of June the team was asked to collect two otter cubs. All of these are smooth-coated.

Many of the animals are collected by the Wildlife Rapid Rescue Team,



Of course when animals are released it is important to make sure they survive. After checking some released otters at Angkor, the team went on to visit Bun Salut, a famous monk who is fighting to save the forest and wildlife in Anloun Veng, Odor Meanchey. He takes in injured animals and during their visit they spotted a young hairy-nosed otter running around

his camp! Apparently two were donated from Siem Reap and, like Neary, must have come from the Tonle Sap lake. We hope that Nick and his team can take the cubs to PTWRC.



In his Newsletter, Nick wrote *“I always knew that releasing otters in Angkor would make life ‘interesting’ and this has certainly been the case. The pups born at the beginning of the year have grown and are now catching for themselves the fish we continue to place in the pond of their release enclosure. The family lives in the burrow they dug within the roots of a large tree, 20 meters outside their old enclosure. They seem to travel in the early mornings and evenings, and we occasionally get reports that they have been seen by staff or visitors to the Temples.*



It was a little worrying when we were sent a YouTube video taken in Angkor, of three dogs having a stand-off with the otters. The otter pups were not filmed, which led us to believe this must have taken place before their birth. The confrontation went on for at least 20 minutes with the dogs barking at the two otters, making attempts to attack. The otters resisted, making their own darting rushes at the dogs in defence. This was taking place in very shallow water, which will not have benefitted the otters much. The mobile battle continued and the film did not show the final outcome.

However, the otters are still with us and remain unharmed, so all must have ended well. It is lucky these were village dogs and not trained hunters, which would have been too much for our brave otters to fend off and things would probably have ended very differently!

The other event of concern for our otters took place in May when a fisherman caught one of the pups in a fish trap he had illegally set in the lake near their holt. The man fell as he went to free the pup. The two parents, who were present and were also trying to free their youngster, attacked him, biting his head and leg. Sarin and Rith, our two staff in Angkor, who do such a great job ensuring the continued welfare of our released animals, went to release the pup, but it had made its own escape and fed with its parents in the release enclosure later in the day. The fisherman spent one night in hospital, receiving treatment, which I paid for, for although he was fishing illegally, he was poor and had done no lasting damage. Nets and fishing equipment in the area were blocking the water flow to the waterways and APSARA has now destroyed it all.”

We are always keen to support the great work being done by PTWRC. They rescue so many animals including bears, elephants, pangolins and of course otters. At present they have 22 smooth-coated otters, one Asian small-clawed and one hairy-nosed. They rely on support from the public and obviously times have been hard as a result of the virus and they have only just been able to open again for tours. So we would like to support them more and if you would like to, please donate at [The Otter Shop](#) by selecting the Illegal Wildlife Trade option then at cart click on ‘Add a note to your order’ and type ‘Cambodia’.

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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Mexico (photos: COBEA)

IOSF is delighted to be able to help Conservadores de la Biodiversidad y Educadores Ambientales (COBEA), who are looking after two young Neotropical otters in Tampico, Mexico. The two little otters have grown and are almost too large for their current enclosure.

We were delighted to be able to support the building of a new enclosure to help these otters in their transition back to the wild. COBEA is now starting to build the enclosure which will have a large pool for their use.

The two otters are doing well, eating lots and getting bigger by the day. We had asked COBEA for an update and some photos but Guillermo apologised for the quality and stated, it is hard to get a picture as they never stop moving. This, of course, we understand fully but their photos are pretty good!



Guillermo also told us of some exciting plans for otters in the Tampico area. He has been in touch with Dr. Pablo Hernandez, a friend of IOSF and a Neotropical otter expert who travelled to our Guyanese workshop, and they are looking to carry out more research into the species in their area to find out more about them.

They are also excited about the prospects of creating an IOSF **Team Otter** club in the area when things are allowed to begin again and will hopefully be able to partner with Protecting Otters Tampico, a group of school children who worked tirelessly to raise support for COBEA and their otters.

We would like to thank COBEA for their work with otters and enthusiasm to do more for the species in the area; Protecting Otters Tampico, the schoolkids, who are passionate about helping otters and can't wait to do more when the times allow; and to our friend Dr. Pablo Hernandez for his guidance and expertise on the species. We are excited to continue with

these plans in the future.

And from SUMECO, Indonesia

SUMECO, who are caring for one Eurasian otter and two Asian small-clawed otters have given us an update on their otters too. Ben, the latest Asian small-clawed otter, who was very thin and malnourished on arrival is doing much better! He is looking really well and his coat is back to the lush fur which otters are famous for. This is such a great improvement.



Asian small-clawed otters (SUMECO)

Good work SUMECO.

Laos Project (photo Kiengkai Khoonsrivong)

We are delighted to report on some community outreach and Team Otter work in Laos. In 2018 IOSF held its Laos training workshop and Kiengkai Khoonsrivong helped us to organise this. He has continued his interest in otters and is visiting local communities to deliver a message on otters and their conservation.

He is visiting five communities in the Bolikhanxai district in the centre of the country to raise awareness of otters in the area and discuss any problems they may be having. They are half way through their outreach programme and have already seen success which he has reported to us.

During this part of the programme aspects such as threats and benefits were discussed, as well as discussions on how otters and their populations have changed over the last 10 years. The community members stated that they had seen otters along a number of waterways in



the area and the main problems are over-fishing, loss of habitat and illegal trade for furs and meat.

The communities are very positive and came up with ideas of how they could help their otters. The main suggestions were as follows:

- 1) Improving local environments and reducing illegal trade with support from local government officials.
- 2) Governmental organisations should

work closely with communities to protect otters.

- 3) Governments and NGO's should work together to increase otter populations.

So far, Kiengkai and his team have visited two of the five communities planned during the project and in August and September he will visit the remaining three. We look forward to seeing his full report on the entire project.

IOSF was delighted to fund and support this project.



Team Otter

As part of the Laos project, Kiengkai has also set up a Team Otter programme.



During the kids' sessions, they discussed otters and held a children's artwork competition with the teachers picking the eventual winner. The children had fun and learned about the importance of otters and wetland habitats.

We are delighted to welcome them to our **Team Otter** Network.

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

Once the otters are in the new enclosures we only check them once a day when we feed them. However, every so often we have to spend a bit more time in there to do a bit of essential work and they really don't like us interfering. The other day we had to do a bit of digging to help the drainage where they had done their own "landscaping". They were not amused! They came out huffing and puffing when we left as if to say "did you have to do that? All you're supposed to do is leave the fish and clear off"!!

Sparky is younger than Harrie and Otto but he is already a big strong animal. Normally he just snatches a fish and retires grumpily into his sleeping box to eat it but the other day it was such lovely weather he took it out on to his "lawn" to eat in the sun.



Otto and Harrie just stick out their heads to see when dinner is served and again just grab and run.

Bealtainn is a beautiful young otter, but she is still not acting as wild as we would like. She is eating well and backs off when we put the fish in but she is not wary of us when we go into her enclosure to check she has enough bedding. We are hopeful that



this will come and she will take back her true wild self, as otherwise she cannot be released.

As to the stoats, they are like little “ghost” animals. When we feed we may see the quickest of flashes of brown and then nothing. But we can hear movement under their box and that is about it as when we move the box they just vanish!

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

Otter Oscars

Nominations for the International Otter Survival Fund's Otter Oscars 2020 are now open!

Do you know someone that has done something amazing for otters this year? IOSF's annual awards give special recognition to those who have worked to help otters and you can now nominate someone (including yourself) that is deserving of the award.



There are a number of categories:

- Children (under 18)
- Community Achievement
- Group or Organisation
- Research
- Photography/Artwork
- Special Award

We will be accepting nominations until November 27th!

You can find out more and get the nomination form at https://www.otter.org/Public/News_OtterOscars.aspx

Creature Candy

We are thrilled to be receiving support from CreatureCandy.co.uk and Lizzie Barker.

You will find lots of great wildlife art at the Creature Candy website on textiles, stationery, mugs and jugs.

And, the lovely people there are supporting IOSF - simply use this code IOSF10 to receive a 10% discount from your first order with them and IOSF will also receive a 10% donation. How fantastic is that!



Even better, they are working on an otter design, so we'll let you know when it is available.

There are exciting new products from Perkins & Morley at the Otter Shop now. Find them at <https://ottershop.co.uk/collections/new-products>



Distant Ophthalmoscopy for a Wild Otter

(photos ©John Williams)

It is strange how things work and how old contacts come back to help you many years later.



Some of you may have seen the posts by John Williams from the Isle of Bute who takes amazing wildlife photos. At the end of June he contacted us about a family of otters he had been following regularly on the island. Unfortunately, one of the cubs appeared to have a serious problem with its eye and it looked completely clouded. However, it didn't seem to be stopping the cub from feeding and if it got a bit disorientated Mum was always there to help. In fact, if the cub wasn't catching enough she would bring it food and make sure its sibling didn't try to muscle in on the food.

There was nothing we could do as if we tried to catch it that would just cause stress to the whole family. But we were glad to know that John would keep a close watch on how things progressed.

About two weeks later the eye seemed even worse and was red and swollen but then recently John sent us his latest photo. The eye seemed clearer but we couldn't tell if it could see anything at all.



Then we remembered David Williams, who specialises in veterinary ophthalmology and who joined us for our conference on Otters and Toxicology on Skye back in 2000. The very person to ask. John's photos were so good and detailed that David was able to say "I think we're dealing with glaucoma here and the one

picture with the big pink blob is one that has caught the retinal reflection through a dilated

pupil. Can't do anything about it unfortunately."

So now at least we have a diagnosis. It is highly likely that the otter will become totally blind in that eye but blind otters can survive in the wild and it is being taught how to do that by its attentive mother. So although this will be a disability it should be ok. And John, of course, will keep looking out for it.

Thanks to both John and David

And if you want to see any of John's amazing photos go to <https://www.facebook.com/Isle-of-Bute-by-John-Williams-717844045023904>

Thank You To

Foundation Ensemble, The Mary Heap Charitable Trust, Nurtured by Nature, Walker 597 Animal and the Trelux Charitable Trust.

We also thank all of our supporters who have donated over the past month towards all the work we do in otter conservation both here in the UK and abroad.

News in Brief

Otters on the Isle of Wight

A piece caught our eye recently about the confirmed presence of otters on the Isle of Wight, particularly as the expert being quoted is none other than Andy Rothwell, who is a member of our Advisory Board. Andy has been carrying out surveys particularly for otters and water voles for many years and has joined us on many of our island surveys.



In 2015 a survey carried out on the island found no evidence of otters, but when Andy repeated the survey this year he found positive otter signs upstream of Horryngford and also water voles, eels and harvest mouse.

This is largely down to the hard work of the East Yar Project Group which is a group of ten farmers and landowners who have been restoring the habitat between Budbridge above Newchurch, and Longwood Lane, Sandown in partnership with the Down to the Coast Landscape Partnership Scheme. They have been removing shading trees and constructed fish passes to improve the river for all wetland species.

Andy had always felt that the river should be a great place for otters and now that they have been found it is hoped that they will form a breeding population.

<https://www.countypress.co.uk/news/18567298.otter-spotted---isle-wight-return-iconic-uk-animal>

Financial benefits of recovering sea otter populations

When sea otters almost disappeared, the numbers of crabs, clams and sea urchins increased and new fisheries sprang up along the eastern North Pacific coast. So naturally people involved in those industries were unhappy to see the otters return and compete with them for the catch. However, their return also helped the kelp forests to re-establish

However, a new study by Edward Gregr and his colleagues has worked out the key economic costs and benefits of the otters' return. Apparently the overall economic benefit of sea otters through increased tourism, finfish fisheries and carbon capture exceed the losses from fisheries by 46million Canadian dollars per year. But of course this won't help those who work in the other fisheries and this includes a lot of indigenous people.

The hope is that by quantifying the benefits in this way it can help people to accept natural changes to the ecosystem and help to find alternative livelihoods.

<https://www.myvetcandy.com/newsblog/2020/6/11/recovering-otter-populations-lead-more-benefits-than-costs>

How can you tell how old a sea otter is?

The answer – look in its mouth.

However, that may not be a particularly nice experience as with age plaque builds up and the otter's teeth get broken or knocked out completely through constantly biting on hard shells. This also means that they can have terribly bad breath!

It is easy to differentiate cubs and very old otters who often have scars but it would be useful to have a bit more detail. In the past the age has been estimated by removing a tooth and then examining a cross section under the microscope to see growth rings, much like in trees. But of course, it isn't a good idea to remove a tooth from a living animal.

The wear and tear on an otter's teeth depends on what they eat and how. If they use a stone to break open clams it is a lot easier on the teeth, but around San Nicolas Island in California they use their incisors to scrape the meat out of spiny red sea urchins and there is far more damage.

It can be useful to know an animal's age both from the point of view of the individual and from the population's reproduction rates and life expectancy. When people are tagging wild otters it would therefore be useful for them to give them a quick dental check before release.

<https://www.atlasobscura.com/articles/sea-otter-teeth>

Wise sea otter climbs on a boat to escape orca

John Dornellas is a guide for Coldwater Alaska and when he was exploring Kachemak Bay he spotted three transient orcas. There was a male, female and calf and the adults were probably teaching the young one to hunt.

There were also sea otters around and this is probably what the whales were after. But one wise otter knew exactly how to escape and it climbed on to the back of John's boat.



Sea Otter ©April Severin

John managed to get it all on video and you can see how close the orca was to catching the otter. The otter tried to go back in the water four times but each time climbed back on board because the whales were still circling around the boat. Only once the orcas had moved off did the otter finally leave.

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-8571301/Sea-otter-chased-killer-whale-leaps-safety-boat.html>

The History of the Singapore otters

We are all familiar with the antics of the smooth-coated otters living in Singapore. But do we know the history of this.

Heeun Monica Kim has written an essay called "Lovable Lutrines: Curated Nature and Environmental Migrants in the Ottercity". As she points out, it is ironic that pond owners in the city are angry that otters are encroaching their urban space, when actually it was the destruction of the mangroves by man which caused the otters to disappear in the first place.

The environment was largely destroyed by slash-and-burn agriculture and by 1883 about 93% of the forest had been converted to pepper, sugarcane and rubber plantations. In the 1960s their habitat became too polluted for most animal life and the otters disappeared. Now with hard work to restore the environment the famous otters have returned and the first began to appear in the 1990s.



This shows that if we do care for our environment rare species can return and we really have a responsibility to look after our

wild creatures and their habitats.

You can read more and get the full essay at <https://mothership.sg/2020/07/history-of-otters-in-singapore/>

Indian Forester bitten by an otter

Recently an otter was found in a pond at Patlakhawa village in Cooch Behar, North Bengal, and the local people called the Jaldapara Wildlife Division of the Forest Department to get them to move it. Otters are rarely seen in the area and until then no otters had needed to be rescued. However, as it was monsoon the water levels were high and so it may have been swept by the river and ended up in the pond. The otter was later released into the river Torsha.

An interesting side of this story is that the otter is reported in the article to be an Asian small-clawed otter but the photo of the caged animal is clearly a Eurasian otter. We have written to the Forest Department to point this out as Eurasian otters are far more rare in India and it would be useful to have more information.

However, during the capture the otter bit the finger of one of the foresters and he had to have a part of the finger amputated to prevent infection from spreading. Here at IOSF we are well aware of the potential infection which can develop from an otter bite. Our own, Paul Yoxon, was bitten by an otter many years ago and ended up in hospital for four days, and since then he has not been able to eat wheat. So we are always very careful to advise people

not to put themselves at any risk of being bitten.

<https://www.telegraphindia.com/west-bengal/otter-found-in-cooch-behar-foresters-finger-cut-off-after-bite/cid/1787462>

Indian communities help otter conservation

One of the biggest problems facing otters throughout the world is lack of awareness and it is therefore vital to involve communities in any conservation project. Rai, a local man from Rolep village on a tributary of the River Teesta, said “We thought otters were cats who came from the jungle and ate fish”!

Otters are safe in Protected Areas but these need to be linked via wildlife corridors. Human disturbance, habitat destruction, pollution, poaching and sand mining are all major threats. In addition, hydroelectric dams are often built without keeping to environmental guidelines, such as installing a fish ladder to allow fish movement, so this also effects prey availability.

The Teesta is a major river system in the eastern Himalayas and scientists have involved the community in an otter monitoring programme on the Teesta and Rangit using camera traps. So the people are now learning more about otters and helping to get valuable data. As it is a mountainous area and has heavy monsoons, the time available for such field work is very limited so the local involvement is so important. Until now there was little data on otters and already the project has provided evidence of Eurasian otters in the area.

<https://india.mongabay.com/2020/07/otters-beyond-protected-areas-in-the-himalayas/>

Otter caught on CCTV in Salisbury

A keen CCTV operator spotted an otter running through the empty streets of Salisbury at midnight one night. Otters are being seen more in urban areas and people interpret this as there being more otters. However it is more likely that their home ranges have increased in size so that they can get enough food.

<https://www.salisburyjournal.co.uk/news/18563616.otter-spotted-cctv-salisbury-city-centre/>

Major project to improve otter habitat

The Scottish Government has recently approved funding of £90,000 to improve the environment on the River Dee which will not only help otters but also Atlantic salmon and freshwater pearl mussels. The Dee District Salmon Fishery Board will use the funding to restore natural habitat on the Garbh Allt and Upper River Muick as part of the catchment-wide Dee Riparian Habitat Project. This will have positive impacts downstream as they bring back natural flood management.

This project is one of 16 successful schemes across Scotland to receive funding in the second round of the £4 million Biodiversity Challenge Fund.

<https://www.pressandjournal.co.uk/fp/news/aberdeen/2329169/funding-will-help-improve-habitats-for-salmon-and-otter-along-the-river-dee/>



Eurasian otter ©Andy Coventry

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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.

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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/>

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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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