



## Otter News No. 132, June 2022

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### Tanzania – William Continues His Amazing Work

Many of you already know William Mgomo, who is a passionate advocate for otters and never stops creating awareness for otters across the area where he works. William is always thinking of new, innovative ways to get more people engaging with otters and recently used one of Tanzania's main passions, football, to do this. He created an otter football competition for students to participate in. Not only did the participants and the community get the opportunity to take part in a fun, football competition but they also learned all about otters in the process. Between William himself and Professor Ndibalema, they all got to learn about otters, habitat preservation and all things otters – with lots of other students watching on too.

The teams wore specially made otter conservation football tops with the slogan "Conserve Tanzania's Otters" and prizes were given to the eventual winners. William stated that by using a true passion of the area, a lot of students are now wanting to become involved in otter conservation in the area. There are calls to create a network for the area and IOSF has already received emails from some of the students asking how they can be involved.



Photo: ©William Mgomo

We would like to congratulate Team Leopard who ran out eventual winners 3-2 in the final against Team Spanish.

William's outreach and Tanzania's otter work doesn't stop there. Fellow student, and now otter enthusiast, Ashura Talagimbudzah has also started working on her own programme. Ashura visited primary and secondary schools in the Ruvuma region – an area known to have otters. The aim of the project is to focus on the younger generation and encourage them to teach their local communities about otters. Furthermore, by building the foundations towards otter/wetland conservation, it will be easier than trying to change attitudes further down the line. The programme will increase human/otter perceptions moving forward.



Photo: © Ashura Talagimbudzah

During Ashura's outreach programme she has an emphasis on human-otter conflict management. In the past she has focussed on Elephant, Lion, Leopard, Hippopotamus, Rhino, Crocodile and Buffalo and now wants to help people understand how important otters are too.

It is wonderful to see all the positive work happening in Tanzania!



## Albino Otter in Iraq

Some of you will already have read about the albino Eurasian otter cub found in Iraq. Omar Al-Sheikhly, our Middle East co-ordinator, immediately contacted us for help. The cub was found in a net in the Tigris river by a fisherman, called Nasser Latif. He posted a video online and immediately received many offers to buy the cub, ranging from \$50,000 to \$100,000! An animal as rare as an albino otter will always command a big price from hunters or those seeking a rare pet. This just goes to show we still have a long way to go in our battle to eradicate this market.



Photo: ©Omar Al-Sheikhly

The Ministry of the Environment was able to get the cub and take it to Baghdad Zoo for proper care. We at IOSF have been in touch with them sending rearing protocols and veterinary advice in order to help with the otter, who has now been named Jenny.

Unfortunately, due to its colour, the poor otter is unable to be released. As an albino is so remarkably unusual, it would be far too easy for hunters to spot it, meaning the risk of recapture upon return to the wild is far too high.



**Team Otter**  
Over the past few months, **Yupukari Wildlife Club**, run by **Oswin Ambrose** and

**Save the Giants**, has been very active. They have been monitoring the local wildlife using techniques such as camera traps to observe what kind of animals can be found walking/flying through the village. They have also been birdwatching, creating arts and crafts of wildlife and enjoying both indoor and outdoor games.

It is great to see them so active and the great work that the group are doing.



**For more information on Team Otter, check out our website ([www.loveotters.org](http://www.loveotters.org)) or Facebook. If you are interested in forming your own Team Otter Club contact [Ben@otter.org](mailto:Ben@otter.org)**



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*



## More Threats to Otters

### Another otter dies in fishing line (Photo: © Scottish SPCA)

It is sad that despite all the warnings about taking care with fishing equipment otters are still dying as a result of people's carelessness.



Last month another otter was found in the Talla reservoir near Tweedsmuir. It had been strangled after fishing line was caught around its neck. So sad.

The incident was reported to the Scottish SPCA who pointed out the serious risk to wildlife from rope, line, netting etc., which can trap animals or they may even ingest it. As their inspector, Jack Marshall said *"It can take a number of days for wildlife to succumb to an injury like this and sometimes it can be hard to spot wire wrapped around flesh as it may be so tight that it's hard to see."*

**SO PLEASE, ALL FISHERMEN, TAKE ALL YOUR LINE AND EQUIPMENT HOME WITH YOU.**

**BUT IT ISN'T JUST FISHING WASTE WHICH IS A DANGER – ALL LITTER CAN POSE A THREAT TO WILDLIFE, SO JUST TAKE IT HOME.**

<https://www.glasgowworld.com/news/environment/scottish-sPCA-issues-warning-over-discarded-fishing-line-after-otter-found-dead-3742770>

### Rat poison endangers otters

There was an article in Germany recently about the threat to otters from rat poison as the toxins flow into water courses. In fact, a study by the Federal Institute for Hydrology in Koblenz examined the livers of 120 otters killed on the road and found a 30-fold increase in concentration of these rodenticides. The threshold for sensitive species is about 200 nanograms per gram after which they can suffer negative or even fatal effects and one otter from Schleswig-Holstein was found to have 920 nanograms. This is very worrying.

Rodenticides work by inhibiting blood clotting, so that the animals basically bleed to death internally, which is a horrible death for any animal. Recently in Berlin birds of prey were also found to have high concentrations of rodenticide, presumably from eating poisoned rats and mice. This all sounds very familiar, as in the 1950s/60s birds of prey like peregrine falcons were found to be disappearing after building up toxins from organochemicals used in agriculture. These chemicals passed on to the otters when it entered the water system and we all know the devastating effect this had on populations throughout Europe.

This therefore has to be a wake-up call before our otters and other wildlife start to disappear again. One possible solution put forward is to use bait protection stations in the sewage system, which prevent these toxins entering the waste water system.

We contacted Fiona Howie, Scottish Rural College in Edinburgh, and Liz Chadwick at Cardiff University Otter Project about this as they carry out most otter post mortems in UK. Fiona replied that all otters are tested for rodenticides whether or not poisoning is suspected. As yet she hasn't found any cases where an otter died from such poisoning but occasionally they do find detectable levels. It is good to hear that our otters are being monitored in this way.

<https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/rattengift-fischotter-umwelttoxikologie-umwelt-100.html>



## Vic Simpson's Work Leaves a Great Legacy for Future Research

Some of you will remember the great veterinary pathologist, Vic Simpson, who sadly died at the end of July 2018 aged 77 years.

We first met Vic in 2000 when he attended the IOSF Otter Toxicology Conference on the Isle of Skye and it was the start of a great friendship between us. Vic was always at the end of the phone if we needed his expert help and he carried out many post mortems on our otters. In 2006 we sent a young cub down to him and he identified Tyzzer's disease, which was the first case found in an otter and the first in a wild animal in Britain.

Vic and his wife Jane (photo right courtesy Jane Simpson) moved to Cornwall and he became a Veterinary Investigation Officer for the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in Truro. He officially retired in 2001 but this just meant that he could concentrate on wildlife and he set up the Wildlife Veterinary Investigation Centre, or Wildlife 'VIC'. He collected so many long term datasets and sample archives which are such a vital source of information. Jane was very much a part of the work and in April, she contacted us to say that all the otter samples had been sent to Cardiff – he had collected samples from 697 otters over 15 years! But it wasn't just otters that he worked on and samples of bats, birds, large and small mammals have gone to the Natural History Museum. So now they can all be used in future research for the benefit of Britain's wildlife, as Vic would have wished.



Liz Chadwick of the Cardiff University Otter Project said *"The beauty of archived samples is that we can effectively use them to 'go back in time' and ask questions retrospectively, as new questions are asked, techniques develop, or as funding becomes available. Many of our research questions ask how things have changed over time – for example, which chemicals have increased, or decreased; what changes have we seen in population genetic structure, how has diet changed as fish communities have responded to changes in climate or habitat. The archive will give us a clearer understanding of the changes and challenges faced by otters over the past few decades, and the potential challenges to come."*

At the Natural History Museum, Samantha Luciano joined the team for a six-months internship to make an inventory of all the samples. She said *"Vic Simpson weighed, measured, observed, catalogued, preserved and protected all these small animal parts in a rigorous manner. Now that his legacy has been passed on, it is our duty to continue this work?"*

The collections at the Museum include frozen and formalin-preserved samples, mounted specimens, skeletons, feathers and hairs as well as histological slides. Each of Vic's 1,356 slides has to be matched with a specimen in the collections if possible. The data will be digitised to make it available to other researchers and for use in the CryoArks database. This provides samples for genetic and genomic research by organisations such as the [European Association of Zoos and Aquaria \(EAZA\)](http://www.eaza.eu) and the [Global Genome Biodiversity Network \(GBBN\)](http://www.ggbn.org).

This long-term project will require a lot of work, but in the end it will be a great tribute to Vic Simpson and a great contribution for zoological research and species conservation.



## It's Otterly Confusing! How to Distinguish Between Asian Otter Species by their Footprints.

Larissa Slaney and Frederick Kistner of the WildTrack Specialist Group in Germany are carrying out research into how to identify otter species from their footprints. This research is unique and given time they hope to be able to identify not just the species but the sex, age and even individual animals.

Asia has four otter species which may overlap in range: Eurasian otter (*Lutra lutra*), Asian small-clawed otter (*Aonyx cinereus*), smooth-coated otter (*Lutrogale perspicillata*) and hairy-nosed otter (*Lutra sumatrana*). So being able to identify these species using this non-invasive technique would be extremely useful.



The team have developed algorithms to distinguish between the different species by their footprints using Footprint Identification Technology (FIT). They have been collecting footprints from various zoos and they have found that FIT is able to identify otter species with an average accuracy of 97%. At our recent workshop in Malaysia, Larissa was able to collect footprints of otters in the wild to test the system. She also trained the participants in how to record footprint data and this was so well received that they would like to start using FIT as a monitoring tool for otter surveys in the country.

Since then Larissa has given a presentation on the project to the British and Irish Association of Zoos and Aquariums (BIAZA). They also gave a talk at the JMP European Summit in front of software developers, mathematicians and statisticians who were all very interested in this otter research and delighted that their skills are contributing to wildlife conservation.

In order to develop the programme further, more footprint data is necessary and the team would welcome further contributions of footprint images from ex-situ organisations in the UK and beyond. This whole project shows what can be achieved when conservationists, zoos and similar organisations, IT specialists and mathematicians work together.

You will find more about this exciting project in the forthcoming issue of the IOSF OTTER Journal due out in August. If you would like to help with providing footprint images you can contact WildTrack through their website (<https://wildtrack.org/>) or contact [enquiries@otter.org](mailto:enquiries@otter.org) and we will forward your details on to them.



## News from The Sanctuary

It has been another busy month at the sanctuary. The rebuild of the hospital hit a major “glitch” when the original builder pulled out of the job leaving us with just two walls and half a roof! Luckily, we have been able to find someone who is going to step in and finish the job properly. Unfortunately, Covid struck just as he was about to start but hopefully things will get moving again soon.

Although in our last update we said we had been having lovely weather, the rain has returned and generally this summer has been very wet. This has slowed things down on the maintenance of existing enclosures.



Bealltinn has not been particularly impressed with the weather again. She is a real “sun-babe” but has been in her sleeping box most days.

Storm is a wonderful animal – so big and strong and hopefully we will be able to release him soon.

Wally is not so little any more and is growing quickly with a daily feed of four fish.

Baird is such a cutie and is on two fish per day now. He is very quick to run out and grab one and then dash back to his sleeping area to eat in peace.

Cassie, our local otter, is doing very well in her enclosure. She has four fish per day and keeps very much to herself, which is a good sign.

We have had various other calls for help. Last week a French tourist contacted us after he had accidentally hit an otter near Kyle of Lochalsh. We went straight there and the otter was lying quietly by the side of the road. However, as soon as we put the carrying box down it shot off down the steep bank through thick brambles and gorse. There was no way we could follow it in there so we put the word around in the area in case someone did spot it later. We have heard nothing more and as the otter ran off so quickly, we hope that it was able to recover in the time we took to get there.

This week we had a call from the person who found Baird as he had an otter in his porch! This otter was not a tiny cub like Baird but a young adult, so we didn't want to rush in and bring it to the hospital. Instead we advised him to put some fish outside of the porch to entice it out and then close the door. About half an hour later he phoned to say it had eaten two fish and then raced off back to the sea. We must always be very careful not to pick animals up too quickly. Again this otter may have needed a quiet place to rest and once it had done that and had a snack it was ready to go again. Hopefully it will stay out of the porch now!



***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](http://www.ottershop.co.uk)***



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**CORPORATE MEMBERSHIP - WHETHER YOU OWN A BUSINESS OR ARE EMPLOYED, does the company have a green policy/ support conservation? Then perhaps the company would like to consider becoming a Corporate Member with IOSF and supporting our work with otters.**

You can find out more information on our website [http://otter.org/Public/HelpUs\\_CorporateSponsorship.aspx](http://otter.org/Public/HelpUs_CorporateSponsorship.aspx)

## Otter Shop Product of the Month

[www.ottershop.co.uk](http://www.ottershop.co.uk)

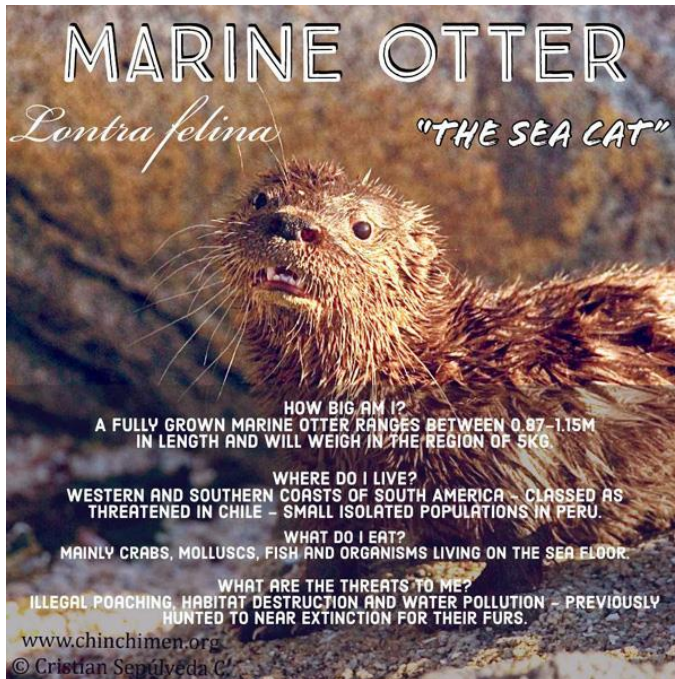
You will find a selection of otter adoption gift boxes (including an e-voucher) at the Otter Shop – a gift that keeps on giving and always a popular choice.

Contents vary.

<https://ottershop.co.uk/search?q=adopt>



## 13 Weeks of Otters



**From Monday 4th July to Monday 26th September we will be running our new "13 weeks of Otters" series.** The collection will highlight a new otter species every week, aiming to raise awareness and increase knowledge of our favourite animals, and will be posted on Monday afternoons. The main fact file text will be shared through our Facebook page (and later on our blog), along with an informational image, and will give a good insight into the chosen otter of the week. A shorter post alongside the image will be put onto both our Instagram and Twitter platforms. We kicked things off with the Marine Otter (Sea Cat), and we are really pleased with the feedback received. If you would like to follow this series, be sure to keep an eye on our social media pages on Monday afternoons, all the links you need are below:

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

<https://twitter.com/IOSF/>

[https://www.instagram.com/iosf\\_otters/](https://www.instagram.com/iosf_otters/)

### \*Used Stamps\*

Unfortunately, due to the fall in prices and rise in costs, we are no longer able to convert to cash the used stamps that you have kindly collected and sent to us over the years. **Consequently, we are unable to accept these anymore, so we have to ask that you please do not send them.** Thank you for your past support with this.





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.



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

**GiveACar** - turn your old car/bike/van/caravan into cash for IOSF. With free collection, your vehicle will be auctioned or sold for scrap, depending on its condition, and the proceeds (minus service fees) raised going to support our work in otter conservation.

Find out more at <https://giveacar.co.uk> or call 020 7736 4242

## Thank You...

for your donations. We appreciate how difficult things are for people and are motivated by your kindness.

We also thank: Barry Green Memorial Fund, The Beryl Evetts & Robert Luff Animal Welfare Trust Ltd., The William Dean Countryside and Educational Trust

And, our Corporate Sponsors: Andrew Poplett Enterprises Ltd, The Fenn Bell Conservation Project, Nurtured by Nature, [holidaycottages.co.uk](http://holidaycottages.co.uk).

*You keep us moving forward*

## News in Brief

### Otters and Coyotes

We have shown you previous pictures of when two top predators come together and particularly in relation to otters. We have shown you crocodiles, caiman and jaguars but this time it's a North American River Otter and a Coyote. The interaction was spotted by a dog walker where both animals stood their ground without ever harming one another.

Always interesting to see how top predators interact.

<https://www.clickorlando.com/news/local/2022/05/05/watch-otter-chases-coyote-in-seminole-county-neighborhood/#/>

### Concerns over Malaysian otter

The Sabah Wildlife Department in Malaysia have issued warnings to the general public to stay away from an otter that appears more friendly than usual. The otter in Tun Fuad Stephens Park, Bukit Padang has been filmed getting water from joggers and they say that it isn't as shy as other animals have been.

It is really important that we always respect wildlife. An animal that is showing relaxed behaviour around people is still a wild animal and should it feel threatened or afraid will revert to its natural state and may bite. This will not only hurt the people in question but have long-term implications for the otters and their survival. Please avoid otters, and other wildlife, at all times and watch from a respectful distance.

<https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2022/05/795043/sabah-wildlife-department-advises-public-stay-away-otter-spotted-park>

### Otters help seagrass restoration

A new study published in Science Journal, revealed that when sea otters forage amongst seagrass they disturb the roots and leave holes in the sea floor. This encourages the plants to flower more quickly and also leads to

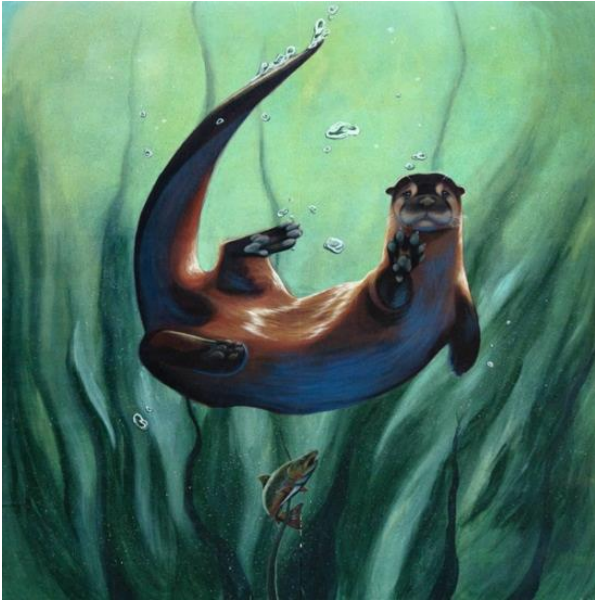




higher genetic diversity. In areas where sea otters have been present for a long time, the genetic diversity of the seagrass was 30% higher than in other areas.

This is also important from a climatic point of view as seagrass removes carbon from the atmosphere about 30 times quicker than a rainforest so, otters can help to restore seagrass meadows and thus fight climate change.  
<https://oceanographicmagazine.com/news/otters-fuel-seagrass-production/>

## Otter Stars in the Northern Paint Fest, Carlisle (Images ©Florence Thornton)



Last month, talented artist and nature enthusiast, Florence Thornton, participated in this event, and if you were lucky enough to be there, what a treat. Left is the finished mural and we're sure you will agree, it is rather wonderful.

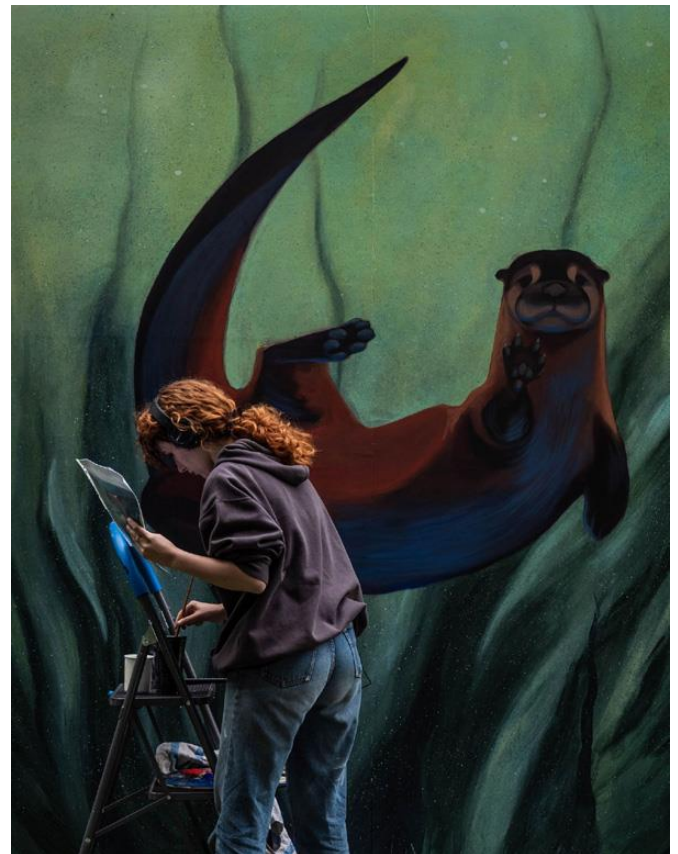
*"I was invited to paint a mural at the Northern Paint Fest organised by Blank Wall Assassins this year, it took place in Carlisle (UK). I wanted to take this amazing opportunity to raise awareness about one of my favourite animals, the beautiful and playful otter.*

*The event took place over 5*

*days and every day was fantastic, there was a great vibe between all the artists, everyone involved with the festival, and the public. I had countless people coming up to me to talk about otters and their conservation. All in all, I think the painting was a success, especially with children who I could hear exclaim in excitement, "Oooo, an otter!" from behind me as I painted.*

*This experience gave me hope that what I want to do, aka, use artwork to sensitize and create conversation about conservation and ecology can work."*

Discover more about Florence and her art:  
[@florence\\_thornton\\_art](https://twitter.com/florence_thornton_art)  
[florencethornton.com](http://florencethornton.com)



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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**



### Become an IOSF Life Supporter

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

### Annual Supporters' Rates

#### UK and EEC Countries:

Adult: £24.00 per year  
Child: £13.00 per year  
Family: £34.00 per year

Life Membership (all countries): £350.00

#### All other countries:

Adult: £30.00 per year  
Child: £15.00 per year  
Family: £40.00 per year

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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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Charity Number SC003875

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[www.otter.org](http://www.otter.org)

**The International Otter Survival Fund**  
Working to Save the Worlds Otters

