



Otter News March 2024

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New Otter Species in Mexico

A recent study in the Neotropical otter, conducted by various researchers, including Dr. Pablo César Hernández-Romero who partnered with IOSF for the Central American Workshop held in Mexico, has found that there is substantial evidence to suggest that there is a 14th species of otter – with the Neotropical otter actually being two separate species.



Image ©Dr. Pablo César Hernández-Romero, Co-author

The study used DNA (from blood samples and other tissue) of otters from various regions across their range to be able to assess genome-wide nuclear markers of each of the samples.

The study showed that although exact ranges of each potential species is yet to be determined, it was found that there is substantial genetic evidence to suggest that the Neotropical otter is in fact, two separate species. Initially, it has been suggested that the range may (roughly) cover Mexico, Central America and South America, west of the Andes, with the species potentially dubbed *Lontra annectens*, with the rest of the range maintaining the original scientific name of *Lontra longicaudis*.

This is an incredible piece of research which goes to show that with otters, and all wildlife, we still have so much to learn!

We look forward to maintaining communications with Pablo and his team, and hearing about the next steps in this finding.

<https://academic.oup.com/jmammal/advance-article-abstract/doi/10.1093/jmammal/gyae009/7631689?login=false>



New Information on Smooth-coated Otters in Gujarat, India

A new paper by **Trivedi et al** is to be published in the next issue of OTTER, the IOSF Journal, and gives information on how smooth-coated otters are expanding their range in the Vadodara District of Gujarat. There are three species of otter in India but to date in Gujarat, only the smooth-coated otter has been documented and it has a limited geographical range encompassing Surat, Bharuch, Narmada, Valsad, and Vadodara Districts.

Due to urbanisation, industrial development, and agricultural expansion, the natural habitats of otters have been steadily shrinking. Wetlands, rivers, and marshy areas, which are essential for their survival, are increasingly being encroached upon. Otters are already facing a multitude of challenges in Gujarat, and they were even more alarmed to find snares being used to catch otters which people believe are posing a threat to their fisheries.

In this new study, the authors report new observations of smooth-coated otters in Vadodara District. Their data collection involved direct sightings, indirect sign surveys, and camera trapping techniques. These findings underscore the necessity for comprehensive research into the status, distribution, and habitat utilization patterns of otters within South Gujarat.



Otter photographed at Wadhvana lake.

You will be able to read the full paper in the Journal later this year.

Update on Otters Released in Cambodia

Nick Marx, Director, Wildlife Rescue, Care and Release Programs of Wildlife Alliance, sent us the following update on their smooth coated otters released into the forest of Angkor:

“The alpha male and female, both transferred from Phnom Tamao, and their 3 well-grown youngsters, born around December 2022, all seemed fine. The solitary male, who was driven out of the group by his brother, is still surviving comfortably on his own. However, Bunthoeun’s camera trap photos told us the female was not always returning to her release enclosure to feed. Sarin also



mentioned that she did not come for several consecutive days around November 9, although the times he did see her she looked well. The date was clearly relevant, for shortly into the New Year, Sarin first saw a little one swimming near a stream sluice not far from the otter release enclosure, the first pup to venture from its home, a hole in the bank above the stream. We now know there are 5 new additions, who will soon be increasing the fish bill. Our wish is that these too may grow up to enjoy the freedom of the forested lakes and streams of Angkor in safety.”

We hope for that too Nick.

The photos below were taken by camera trap to avoid disturbing the otters in the wild (©Wildlife Alliance)



Regulation of Trade in Asian Small-Clawed Otters in Japan

Recently a paper was published on how Japan is regulating trade in Asian small-clawed otters. This species is officially protected under domestic law as an "Internationally Rare Species of Wild Fauna and Flora" and since 1919 when they were upgraded from Appendix II to Appendix I of CITES the regulations have become much more strict. However, any animals obtained before the new regulations came into force or those bred in captivity can still be traded for commercial purposes by registration with the Ministry of the Environment.

This study looked at how the upgrading of the CITES listing has effected trade and also otter cafes. Between 1986 and 2019 a total of 382 live Asian small-clawed otters were imported into Japan. Since 2020 only one animal was imported for “scientific purposes”, whatever they are, and there were no reports of illegal imports – but of course they may well not have been detected.



Although the regulations are now stronger, there has been a slight increase in otter cafes since 2018 and interest in otters remains high. There is still a demand for pets which can still create a threat to wild these animals are animal welfare issues “petting” and

Since 2022 many websites that they import otters so are However, shops and with registration there were 12 otter 2020 the number Ministry was 31 but in July 2022 it was 95. So the demand is still increasing, albeit with registration.



Asian short-clawed otter ©Lee Matthews

populations from which sourced and there are involving stress from unnatural conditions.

dealers say on their are finding it difficult to no longer selling them. cafes are still selling them numbers and in July 2022 cafes in seven cities. In registered with the

Historically Japan was a major market for pet otters but since the upgrade to Appendix II of CITES and the increased requirement for registration it has become more difficult for dealers to sell otters as the number available has dropped considerably. However it is vitally important that this should be monitored.

It is also important that there is more publicity about the effect of the trade on wild populations. That, of course, IOSF will continue to do.

The Big Give Green Match Fund

Next week... Are you ready?

For seven days, between noon 18th and noon 25th April, you can donate to our campaign and have your donation doubled. Which means **One Donation = Twice the Impact.**

Our aim is to raise a total of £5000, £2500 of which is match-funding already secured. So we're hoping that your donations will make up the other £2500.

This year we are supporting otters confiscated from the pet trade. Visit our campaign page at Big Give.com to find out more.

<https://donate.biggive.org/campaign/a056900002SEVxkAAH>

Donating starts from noon 18th April at this link.

News from The Sanctuary

Spring has arrived (slowly!) at IOSF's sanctuary and the otters seem to be enjoying it.

The charismatic and energetic duo of Louis and Maggie are doing really well and continue to entertain us. They are incredibly active in their pool which allowed us the opportunity to set up a camera trap to check out exactly what they are up to!

Despite having cared for 250 otters, they still continue to amaze us, and the camera trap footage shows some incredible behaviour. One of the otters is shown, across multiple videos, to be taking stones then dropping them in the water before diving in and ‘catching’ them! This is something unique to us, but truly amazing to see.

You’ll see in some of the other videos (and there were hundreds of videos of them doing this), that the pair love to “play fight”. There are constant cat and mouse games, where one chases the other, then they swap roles, and so on! These two seem to be an endless bundle of energy.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CiTt8RGxhgY>


Linnhe and River are also doing really well, and ready to take to their “new” place, recently vacated. We have done some maintenance work on the enclosure and they will be moved up soon!



Bealltinn (left) is enjoying the new “warmer” weather and spending a little bit more time sunbathing in her favourite spot. That being said, this weekend’s storms had her return to her sleeping quarters.

As always, we are forever grateful to you for caring and supporting our otters.

If you would like to support our cubs in the Sanctuary you can send a cheque marked "Hospital" on the back or make a donation online at <https://ottershop.co.uk/products/donate-to-iosf?variant=32787580616842>



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

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Snares – Information Wanted

We are all delighted that snares are being banned in Wales and Scotland but as yet nothing has changed in England.



The bad news is that we have received information of snares being used to catch otters in parts of England. Of course this is illegal already but the excuse put forward is that the snares are being set to catch mink. To us these devices are horrific and shouldn't be used for any animal, but as the law stands they can still be used for "vermin" in England.

We would like to hear from anyone who knows of an otter being caught in a snare or comes across snares set in a position where they can catch an otter e.g. by a watercourse.

Please send as much information as you can to enquiries@otter.org and if you have any photos that would be very useful. You can also report it on our website at <https://www.otter.org/our-work-trade-and-threats>

Please note: Your name, email and any other contact details will never be disclosed to any third party without your prior consent.

Thank you.

An Update on Bird Flu and Otters



Cardiff University Otter Project recently gave an update on bird flu and otters and the good news is that they have had no recent cases of otters testing positive. To date they had five positives out of 245 otters tested.

They also reported that risk levels for bird flu in wild birds were moved from high to medium on 1 November 2023. So in Cardiff their collection of otters from England and Wales for post mortem can return to normal i.e. without prior requirement for supplementary information

In Scotland SRUC are looking into the current situation and their advice at present remains the same regarding submitting otters for post mortem.



Time is fast running out to get your entries in for IOSF's Children's art competition, with winners to be announced on IOSF World Otter Day which is just over a month away!

IOSF will be accepting submissions for the contest until 22nd of May, a week before World Otter Day, when we will let the judges have a look and pick their favourites!

We are so excited to see what you create for this contest and have your chance to get an amazing ottery prize, and have your designs shown online, on IOSFs website and social media!

Send all your entries to ben@otter.org!



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

Otter Trapping in Wisconsin

Last month we wrote about the trapping situation in Indiana. This month it is Wisconsin that we are looking at, where the Department of Natural Resources recently announced that the otter trapping season in the Northern Zone of the state was closing a month early as the state-wide quota had been reached. This quota is 2,500!!



North American river otter ©Karen James

They say that the current season framework and regulations allow them to provide trapping opportunities while also ensuring river otters continue to thrive in Wisconsin.

What they don't say is how the quota has increased dramatically. In 2021 Ben Yoxon published a paper in the IOSF OTTER Journal "A REVIEW OF TRAPPING OF NORTH AMERICAN RIVER OTTERS (*Lontra canadensis*)". He looked at data

obtained from the various authorities overseeing trapping for the seasons 2013-2014 to 2018-2019 and already at that time Wisconsin showed an increase of 68.8% from 907 in 2013-2014 to 1531 in 2018-2019. Now the figure has leapt again to 2,500 – a further increase of 969 or 63.3%!

So how can they say that this level of trapping allows otters to thrive in the state!

We also don't know, at this stage, how quotas have been increased in other states, but we will be looking into it.

<https://www.wispolitics.com/2024/dept-of-natural-resources-northern-zone-river-otter-trapping-season-closing-early/>

More Education Work in Tanzania (photos ©William Mgomo)

You will all be familiar with the wonderful work being done in fishing communities and in schools by William Mgomo. Recently he sent us a report on his most recent projects.



"Let me share with you my wonderful experience since becoming an otter conservationist. I have engaged in otter issues since 2015, after attending the IOSF training workshop held in Tanzania. Since then I have worked on improving local knowledge of otters by visiting schools, communities, fishermen and fish farmers in Ruvuma Region. During this time I frequently saw signs of otters and I also sighted one

in Lake Nyasa. In Lake Victoria I feel lucky, as on my first trip to the location I spotted 3 otters



swimming early one morning, after two days of searching for them from dawn till dusk. My recent otter education and awareness work took place in Muluseni village, on Ukerewe Island, Lake Victoria. The area offers a favourable environment for otters with undisturbed lake shores covered with trees and stones. Whilst here I managed to visit a fishing community in Lugezi fishing camp and also spoke with 421 students and five teachers at Muluseni Primary School.

I had an in depth discussion with Mr. Livin (an ex-chairman of the island), Mr. Mangara and Mr Patrick who is current chairman of the village. In our conversation we shared experiences of otters, known locally as Ikalagonge in Kikerewe language, and I discovered that previously fish and otters were both in good numbers in the area. I learned that the fishermen have used "unfriendly" fishing equipment over the years, such as dragging a long net to catch all the fish, including the juveniles. Unfortunately this technique destroys the fishing grounds. Poisons have also been used at times, and these methods have reduced the number of fish in Lake Victoria, which has also had an effect on the otter population in the area."



William is planning to do a more detailed study on Ukerewe Island, Lake Victoria, to assess the attitude of fishermen towards otters and their conservation. He will interview the fishermen and carry out a standard field otter survey. This will cost £1,750 and he has managed to raise £750. We are therefore looking to raise £1,000 to cover the rest of the project costs.

If you would like to support William's vital work in Tanzania you can send a cheque marked "Tanzania" on the back or make a donation online at www.ottershop.co.uk



... we appreciate each and every one of your donations. We understand that financially times are not easy for many, which makes your support all the more special.

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You can find out more information on our website <https://www.otter.org/take-action-corporate?rq=corporate>

Otter Shop Product of the Month

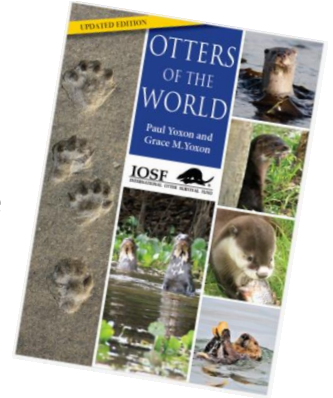


www.ottershop.co.uk – click through to the Home page

Have you seen the new otter design products that arrived recently? They were so popular, we have more stock arriving soon. Don't miss out... <https://ottershop.co.uk/products/otter-design-products-catherine-redgate>



In Stock... the updated edition of Paul & Grace's book "Otters of the World", including a new chapter and updated information. Get yours now, at the Otter Shop <https://ottershop.co.uk/products/iosf-otters-of-the-world-paul-grace-yoxon-signed>



IOSF World Otter Day 2024 is getting closer.
Raffle

Our annual **World Otter Day** raffle has now been launched and you can purchase your ticket numbers on our JustGiving page <https://www.justgiving.com/campaign/world-otter-day-raffle-2024> Please take time to read the information and remember **DO NOT** gift aid if you are entering the raffle.

Don't forget to let us know what you will be up to so we can add it to the World Otter Day 2024 events map! Please contact us at ben@otter.org

You can see all the events so far on the World Otter Day map here – <https://www.google.com/maps/d/edit?mid=1OzFrVdZsqGJftvjrX3Q1rdUCi1NwJU&usp=sharing>



Webinar

9 of 12



DAY WEBINAR
JOIN US 29TH MAY 2024
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Our webinar is FREE, but if you would like to support this World Otter Day event, you can make a donation here: <https://ottershop.co.uk/products/donate-to-iosf-world-otter-day-webinar>

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

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSciylpYHZnzWbogg1dJhNpCPB6ExiLQloh1u2PvQgolRokcjiA/viewform?usp=sf_link

News in Brief

Otters in Israel

An otter survey in northern Israel has documented that there are positive signs for the species in the country, despite growing concerns over their long-term survival. The survey has shown that otters have returned to areas that they have previously been lost.

Hopefully this is a positive outcome in the revival of Israeli otter populations

<https://www.haaretz.com/life/nature-environment/2024-04-07/ty-article/.premium/at-least-the-otters-are-returning-to-israels-north/0000018e-b985-db6c-9ee-fd95a6980000>

West Virginia Otters

West Virginia Division of Natural Resources are asking for River otter sightings from to help them gain more of an understanding of otter populations across the state. They are calling for all “Citizen scientists” to log any information they have on otters using the link below. These can be dead or alive findings as they will all help put together the ‘jigsaw’ of otters in the area.

Please note, the picture in the link is of a Eurasian otter. The Eurasian otter is not native to north America so if you see one of these in West Virginia, then please let us know as soon as possible 🙏

<https://wvdnr.gov/participate-in-wildlife-conservation-with-these-4-wvdnr-citizen-science-surveys/>

Image of The Month (©Linda Wilinski) **IOSF was recently contacted by** our friend, Linda, in the US, over concerns that she hadn't seen any young otters by this point of the year. Linda is a keen otter enthusiast and does her best to protect her local otter populations, and monitors them regularly. Just a few days after the initial email. Linda sent this picture (along with some others) and we are delighted to see that the female is a mother once again!

Linda is also very conscious about protecting these otters and keeps all exact locations of 'her' otters secret, to minimise potential disturbance!

Spring, has sprung for these otters.



North American river otter cub



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Our supporters are always valued by us as a crucial source of support for the work that we are doing, and those of you that become life supporters are highly appreciated.

For a one-off payment of £350 you can become a Life Supporter and give your long-term commitment to help secure a better future for otters in the UK and around the world.

We will send you a certificate showing your life supporter status and you will continue to receive full updates in our newsletters, on all of the work that we are doing.

<https://www.ottershop.co.uk/become-a-life-supporter-c2x9466694>

A LEGACY IS A GREAT WAY OF GIVING TO SOMETHING CLOSE TO YOUR HEART and every gift makes a difference. After your family, have you ever thought of leaving something in your will to charity? Please consider remembering the International Otter Survival Fund in your will and help our work, protecting otters, to continue.

Including a legacy in your will ensures that your wishes are carried out, so it is important to discuss this with your solicitor. You can stipulate a specific restriction for its use, but remember that without restriction your legacy can be directed to where it is required most urgently.

Should you choose to provide a legacy for the International Otter Survival Fund in your will, we thank you and appreciate your support in this way.

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

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<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=aHR0cHM6Ly9kb25hdGUtYXBpLmVp1c3RnaXZpbmcuY29tL2FwaS9kb25hdGlvbnMvZiZiMjIxODIyYzE5NGZkZjhlMGYyYzMDQzOjYyYzU=>


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



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

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

Annual Adoption Renewal Rates	
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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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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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Join our IOSF mailing list. Click on this link:
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The International Otter Survival Fund
Working to Save the World's Otters