



Otter News No. 117, November 2020

Join our IOSF mailing list and receive our newsletters -
Click on this link: <http://tinurl.com/o3lrsmx>

This is a longer than usual e-update as we have so much to tell you since we last contacted you. We hope you will enjoy reading about the latest otter rescues in Sumatra and also at home here in Broadford. We update you on the otters in our sanctuary and the activities of Team Otter. There is also the usual mix of articles on otters across the world – good and bad - and information on how you can help IOSF and the otters.

Hairy-Nosed Otters Rescued from the Pet Trade (photos: Sumeco)

On 7 December, our brave colleagues from SUMECO in Sumatra, Indonesia, rescued three baby Hairy-nosed Otters. They had already contacted IOSF about their concerns and we immediately told them to go and get them and we would fund the rescue.

The team said it was a potentially dangerous area but with their vast field experience they were ready to do this for the sake of the animals and to save them from a life of cruelty and neglect.



Cub showing its hairy nose and nice sharp teeth!

At the beginning of the 20th century Hairy-nosed Otters appeared to be common in Southeast Asia but by 1979 numbers had greatly decreased. In 1998 they were believed to be extinct as there had been no recorded sightings for ten years. However, one scientist from Thailand, Budsabong Kanchanasaka, thought there might still be some present in her country and this was confirmed in 1999 when some were found being kept as pets.

Since then Hairy-nosed Otters have been found in Cambodia, Vietnam, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia and Laos, but the populations are isolated and vulnerable.

The rescued otters are only young and once again this highlights the problem of the illegal trade. The pet trade is usually associated with Asian short-clawed otters but this shows the harm it is doing to other species too.

WE URGE YOU NOT TO LIKE, REPOST OR ENGAGE WITH ANY SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS THAT ARE ENCOURAGING THIS TRADE.

Thanks to the SUMECO team for rescuing the otters and for their hard work for otters and wildlife across their area.

It's not easy for SUMECO to photograph all three otters as they are always on the move but this is a lovely photo (below) of at least two of them with Number 3 hiding underneath!



These three otters need our support. They have been nicknamed the “Three Banditos” but clearly need a name each. So we have launched a competition to choose their name and raise funds for their care. All you have to do is go to

<https://ottershop.co.uk/products/otter-names> make your donation and at the check-out click on 'Add a note to your order' where you can type the name. You may like to make a

suggestion for all three but it is £5 per name.

More on Illegal Trade

Red notice against notorious wildlife smuggler



On 15 October, Interpol issued a Red Notice against the 'Most Wanted' Nitup Lama, who is involved in organised wildlife-related crimes in Nepal including the biggest wildlife crime ever recorded. In 2006 Police launched a search operation after Lama was found to be involved in wildlife organ smuggling in Syafrubensi of Rasuwa. At that time, five people were arrested with 6 tiger skins, 36 leopard skins, **238 otter skins** and 113 kg tiger bones. This was by far the largest seizure in wildlife crime.

The Police claim that Lama is a key member of a gang smuggling tiger skins and bones from Nepal, but a Red Notice could not be issued as there were no details about him including his citizenship number. But now Police have gathered more information about him after another member of his group, 'Kunjokchiring Tamang', was arrested last June. The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) of the Police collected details about Lama and so issued an arrest warrant and recommended to Interpol that they issue the Red Notice.

Lama, of Chinese descent, had obtained Nepali citizenship by claiming to be a resident of Chhakampar in Gorkha, Nepal. He is currently aged 61 and was known among traders by nicknames such as 'Galchen' and 'Ngodup'. He is currently abroad but Police officials said that it would be easier to arrest him from abroad after placing him on a Red Notice.

We hope they are successful.

https://www.nayapatrikadaily.com/news-details/53533/2020-10-22?fbclid=IwAR1F4tXIIISR2w2HADAAhpVm_ByBAB898C_W6tyQHfVm42hUEdSpAH_CCYt8
(In Nepalese – Thanks to Aarti Basnet for the translation)

A Dubious Otter “Rescue” in The Philippines

(And, of course, we are not talking about our friend Diana Limjoco)

At the beginning of November the Palawan News featured a piece about a small Asian Small-clawed Otter cub which was found in Puerta Princesa City and taken to the Palawan Council for Sustainable Development (PCSD).

<https://www.facebook.com/palawanews/posts/2708644099465138>



These photos from the article show that the animal was very young, probably only a few weeks, and so it needed to receive special care. Its coat also doesn't seem to be in great condition.



As many of you will remember we have worked for many years with Diana Limjoco who lives in the city too. She hand-reared tiny cubs which came to her with their eyes still closed (left) so they were clearly a lot younger than this one. As we all know it is a very time-consuming and actually an expensive job, because of the need for the specialist milk and the amount of fish they need as they get older, but Diana is always willing and keen to take on the task, or at least provide advice.



One of Diana's cubs

We wrote to PCSD to see how things were progressing with the cub and to offer help through Diana. Apart from an automatic acknowledgement we received no response.

So we wrote again, only by then we knew that the cub had been released back into the wild. This cub was so small that it should still be with its mother but somehow it had become separated. As it was just released it would simply die or be predated upon. There is no other alternative.

Yet again an automatic response but no reply ...

The Palawan Times ran another piece following our approach to PCSD

https://palawan-news.com/international-non-profit-group-questions-pcsd-handling-of-rescued-otter/?fbclid=IwAR2TA0iFrXEkrZm9CRitCGrLB1n_6fOFuCnA8e_sGhhAkU6Rdi5E3Kr18sU

Finally on 7 December we received a response. This said that the otter was released *“taking into consideration the best option for the survival of the said wildlife species ... with the technical assistance of the staff of Western Philippines University who is a member of the IUCN Otter Specialists Group (OSG). The otter is no longer a newborn that needs milk in order to survive and it is at least four months or older, healthy and not injured since it can already swim and take small fishes. The said species was released in a healthy fresh environment with very clean shallow water with rock substrate, lots of potential den and abundant food supply of freshwater fishes,*

prawns, shells crams (crabs) and other aquatic organisms. The released otter was spotted and found alive in his/her new niche."

This is clearly meant to say "we know what we were doing" but there are several problems with this: 1) Just because you are university staff or member of OSG does not mean that you understand about rescue and rehabilitation – it is a very specialised field just as geneticists are specialists in their field. 2) Just because it is not "newborn" and can maybe hunt a bit for itself does not mean that it does not need the support of its family group. 3) It is good that the habitat appears to have been suitable but the otter is too young to understand how to survive there. 4) When was the otter spotted? It may have survived a few days but the long-term outcome is not optimistic.

IOSF will be writing back to PCSD but sadly, it is too late to help this poor animal. However, we are working with others to establish protocols for any similar incidents in the future. If otters are taken to PCSD then ALL staff must know these protocols and ensure that the animal receives the best possible care and is not condemned to die in this way. They have to be willing to take advice from people who understand otter care, such as Diana.

In the Philippines, otters are only found native on Palawan, although smooth-coated otters appear to have swum across to Turtle Island from Malaysia. As in Indonesia this is because of the Wallace Line. This was discovered in 1859 by a British naturalist, Alfred Russel Wallace, who realised that the fauna and flora in Eastern Indonesia is different to that in the West. In fact a distinct line can be drawn between Bali and Lombok with species in the East being more Australasian and those in the West being more Asian. So in Java and Sumatra there are, or were, species including tigers, rhinos and of course otters. In the East these do not exist but there are marsupials.

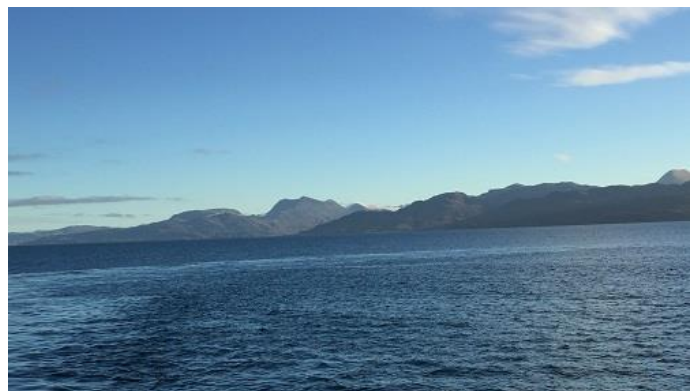
Wallace's work was even more important and the truth is that HE really was the founder of the Theory of Evolution and not Charles Darwin. He studied birds, butterflies and other invertebrates and realised that there were so many different forms that the origin of life was not a ladder but that it was more like a tree with species diverging from a common ancestor. In 1858 Wallace was in Indonesia and wrote a paper called "*On the Tendency of Varieties to Depart Indefinitely from the Original Type*". This outlined the principles of natural selection in evolution and he sent it to someone he thought could be interested – Charles Darwin. And as they say, the rest is history.

So back to the otters of Palawan. The Wallace Line was extended by Thomas Henry Huxley to show that the biodiversity of Palawan is different to the rest of the Philippines, And this is why otters are only found on this island in the Philippines. This makes the population even more important and we will continue to press PCSD to create proper protocols and protection for their otters.

News from The Sanctuary

Well the news this month is that 4 otters became 3 and then instantly became 4 again!

What a wonderful day for Sparky's release and the weather couldn't have been better. Although it was the beginning of November it was sunny and warm and we had the most



beautiful views from the ferry as we sailed over to Mallaig.



From there we drove a while to a remote shoreline which was to be his new home. It was ideal with rocky shores and seaweed providing perfect feeding grounds and various suitable places for lie-ups and holts.

He was a bit reluctant coming out of his box but eventually ventured out to explore - over the seaweed, in amongst the rocks...and finally into the water.

We watched for a while as he checked out his new area and then left him in peace to start his new life.

But the day wasn't over. That evening we had a phone call about a tiny cub screeching just on the outskirts of Broadford. Of course we know that area very well and it is quite a way from the sea, so how it came to be there we don't know. Ben went up and waited to see if Mum would appear but as it was cold and dark he decided it was best to bring it back. The cub was a bit lethargic and cold but after some liquids and a warm night it was more active in the morning.



So just as Sparky left us a new otter entered our life.

The new otter is a gorgeous chap. He was named after our old vet, Donald John MacLennan, who died recently aged 92. He was a real local hero, a true icon who inspired many, including many of the IOSF team. He always had time for people and animals and was a real gentleman. He came from the Isle of Harris but had lived and worked on Skye for many years. In the 1960s he treated Gavin Maxwell's otters and so he went full circle when he started to treat ours. Apparently when Gavin was ill he said he didn't want to be treated by a doctor but by Donald John! It was a tribute to him that when our Team Otter kids were asked to suggest a name for the new cub, they agreed on DJ.

DJ is doing really well. He stayed on a milk bottle for a lot longer than usual and weaned very gradually. So he got both salmon and milk feeds during the day. Then he went right off the salmon and when we tried him with a fish tail he tucked straight in. Now he is eating two whole fish per day! We are so lucky to have fishermen friends as our stocks in the freezer were getting low, so we are grateful to Martin MacKinnon who drops off a bag of mixed fish when he can. This is great as it is what they would have in the wild. When we tried DJ with a butterfish he thought his Christmas had come - he left the white fish and the butterfish disappeared quickly.



As you can see, DJ is a real little character. For a while he loved his fluffy toy and would play and roll on it, but now he has grown out of that! He had an odd way of sleeping in his warm cat bed but he has turned that upside down and now sleeps underneath.



You can now adopt DJ at the Otter Shop <https://ottershop.co.uk/products/iosf-otter-adoption-gift-box>



Effie and Reva (left) are now in their enclosure on the croft and enjoying the extra space and pool. Like many of the otters before them they have excavated at the side of the pool and hide there if disturbed. When they receive fresh hay they love to hide in it. It is always good to see that they don't like contact from people or disturbance.

There is nothing really new to report about Bealltinn – she continues to feed well and enjoy her enclosure but still doesn't show that truly "wild" side.



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 Thank you

Donate to IOSF <https://www.ottershop.co.uk/donate-to-iosf-c2x11601155>



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

UK taxpayers:

Increase the value
of your gift to IOSF:
giftaid it

Evergreen Insurance Services Help Otters



Do you need to reconsider your insurance cover? If so you can support IOSF and help otters at the same time.

For a few years now Evergreen Insurance Services has been making a donation per policy taken out with them through us.

Now they have a special Christmas/Advent promotion which can again help our otters. They will be giving £1,000 to the charity that receives the most nominations from **Friday 27 November to 31 December**.

How? When a quote is requested through Evergreen the customer can choose a charity to benefit – hopefully IOSF! If a quote is requested during the special period it will count as a nomination for us and at the end the charity with the most nominations wins the £1000 prize.

But your enquiry doesn't have to be for insurance needed now even though it is an Advent prize. If it is needed later in the year Evergreen would get in contact nearer the time, but the enquiry needs to be made during the time period. Quotes can be requested on their website (<http://www.evergreeninsuranceservices.co.uk>) or through our own website at https://otter.org/Public/HelpUs_WhatYouCanDoToHelp.aspx

There will be a running total of who is currently leading the event on the Evergreen website and looking now we still need a lot of votes please.

Are Our Pets Harming Our Waterways?

We all care for our pets and don't want them catching fleas, but some of the insecticides used on dogs and cats are running into the water and killing aquatic invertebrates. This obviously has serious repercussions for other species higher up the food chain, such as the otter.

A study in England tested nearly 4,000 samples from 20 rivers between 2016-2018. They found the chemical fipronil in 99% of the samples and also imidacloprid – both have been banned from use on farms. Fipronil is commonly used in flea products and what is worse is that when it breaks down the new compounds are even more toxic, even in really small concentrations.

The highest levels were downstream from water treatment plants so the source is from urban areas rather than farmland. Many pets are routinely treated every month even if there is no flea problem and often the pollution comes from treated dogs swimming in rivers.



Prof Dave Goulson, of the University of Sussex said that just one flea treatment of imidacloprid for a medium-sized dog had enough toxin to kill 60 million bees. This news comes after the report that only 14% of English rivers are believed to be “healthy”.

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/nov/17/pet-flea-treatments-poisoning-rivers-across-england-scientists-find?fbclid=IwAR0XXK0aVixzNrxidLVXuqNS3G1I0JYstZ3xJIZNKJSViMpAxeOpIPFUJuM>

A More Positive River Story

The River Trent in Stoke is not one of the nicer sections of river; in fact the local Wildlife Trust described it as “hideous” with no natural habitat, just concrete. So it is encouraging to learn that it is to be rerouted to encourage wildlife including otters, and aid flood prevention. The river will soon flow through the old Stoke City football ground and about 40,000 tonnes of earth has been dug out for the new meandering channel. It is hoped that this will improve habitat for water invertebrates and fish which will attract kingfishers and otters.

Matt Laurence from the Environment Agency said “*For the residents of Stoke-on-Trent, and for wildlife, this is an imaginative and inspiring use of a derelict brownfield site. Where once the noise of fans rang out on a Saturday afternoon, it’s hoped it will soon be the plop of fish swimming and whistle of birdsong filling the air instead. And, we will all take on responsibility for ensuring this new stretch of the Trent is protected for generations to come.*”

This is the first major waterway to be rerouted to improve habitat but hopefully similar projects can be undertaken on other rivers.

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2020/10/24/hideous-river-trent-becomes-first-major-waterway-rerouted-encourage/>

Rats Under a Warden’s Office!

Recently we were sent a link by Shelley Folland, who used to live near us on Skye and did her dissertation on the use of freshwater by otters on Skye – nowhere on Skye is further than 4 miles. She is now living in Norfolk and sent a link to a report by a warden who thought he had rats under his office. He could hear the young rats under the floor and was not impressed.

But when he had a closer look he smelt that



characteristic odour of otter and found a pile of spraints under the floor. He put up a camera trap and sure enough there was the mother otter with her two youngsters emerging from under the wooden office.

The warden felt suitable chastised for being so cross at the “rats” and started to creep around the office so as not to disturb them. A while later things were quiet as the youngsters had followed their mum out of the natal holt to start their new adventure in the wild.

It is odd that the otter dismissed the whole wild area of the reserve and instead chose to have her cubs under a shed beside the carpark – but otters always know where THEY want to be.

You can read the full amusing article here – although we are not sure about the use of the word “sow” for a female otter! <https://www.wheatfen.org/news/rats-under-the-wardens-office/>

More from Nature-Loving Fishermen

In our last e-update we included a comment from Richard Self, a fisherman, who enjoys his fishing but respects local wildlife. As a fishing lake bailiff he felt that it is their responsibility to protect their stock and pointed out that they do a lot of positive work to keep the environment healthy and improve it.

We received a response to this from Steve King, another fisherman and also a life member of IOSF:

“Good to read the piece by angler Richard. I can assure you he is not the only angler who loves otters. I am an angler. I don't actually do any fishing at the moment for various reasons, but I've still got my tackle and intend to use it again. I am a life member of IOSF.

I love ALL wildlife - except some of the non-native species who can damage our environment such as mink, signal crayfish, grey squirrels etc. I have been fortunate enough to have some close encounters with otters while out fishing. Sitting quietly on the bankside, so long as any wind is in the right direction, they don't always notice me. I've had close encounters with other species too, such as stoats, kingfishers, and others. It's an important part of the experience for me. And I know I'm not alone in this.

However I am embarrassed to say that quite a few other anglers I've spoken to when on the bankside don't necessarily have the same point of view. Too many times for my liking they blame otters for their inability to catch!

Richard mentioned migrant cormorants as a problem. A friend of mine, a fellow angler who is very well informed and not inclined to knee-jerk reactions, says this is by no means proven. I am in my 60's now and in my youth many fisheries had rules stipulating that all pike must be killed! Thankfully anglers are far more enlightened in respect of pike these days. But these attitudes to otters and, perhaps, cormorants, do remind me of those old and ignorant attitudes towards pike. Left to their own devices natural ecosystems tend to sort themselves out and achieve balance. The biggest problems - as indicated in the later part about poor and worse water qualities in many British rivers - is when us humans mess it up! My reading on otters indicates that, after road traffic, the main control on otter numbers are other otters. They are very territorial.

There hasn't been a whole lot of it, but research into otters feeding habits indicate that they tend to concentrate on small fish, four inches and smaller. They will take larger fish - and these are sometimes visible on banksides, adding fuel to the anti-otter brigade - but these are likely to be older, less fit and/or poorly fish that are unlikely to have survived much longer anyway.”



It is great to receive these positive messages from fishermen. The report of a dead otter in an illegal trap also came from a fisherman who cared for wildlife.

Steve makes an interesting observation that “some blame otters for their inability to catch” - it is far easier to blame a so-called competitor.

It is all about a balanced ecosystem. Old attitudes can be slow to change but with people like

Richard and Steve speaking out for otters and other wildlife we can hope for this to start.

UPDATE ON OTTER CAUGHT IN AN ILLEGAL TRAP

In our last e-update we reported on the death of an otter in an illegal trap in Dalry, Southern Scotland. This was reported to the Police by a fisherman and when we contacted them for an update we were given the following quote:

"PC John Cowan, Wildlife Crime Officer for Police Scotland confirms that a female otter died after being trapped in an illegal Fyke net set on The Water of Ken in South West Scotland. The net is believed to have been set to catch Signal crayfish.

Police will continue to work with partners including Galloway Fisheries Trust to stop this practice and provide a safer environment for the otters and other protected species to thrive."

We are delighted to see this positive response from the Police and that they are continuing to investigate the case. We will update you on any further developments

IOSF Otter Shop

Don't have the Christmas shopping panic. At the Otter Shop you will find a selection of 'Instant' gifts for you to download/print/give. We have vouchers for our Otter Adoption gift box, Otter Watching Days, Gift Vouchers, gift donations Find them at the [Otter Shop](#)



Seachange Wine

IOSF is delighted to have partnered with Sea Change Wine, a company that is passionate about helping increase support for ocean conservation. Sea Change Wine has offered IOSF a unique code which allows customers to get a 5% discount off any of their wines, while offering a 5% donation to IOSF!

So, you can get some amazing wines at a discounted price, while helping otters – WIN WIN!

All you have to do is visit their website - <https://seachangewine.com/> and pick the wines of your choice while using discount code **INTLOTTER5**



***Please note** – wines can only be sent to addresses in the United Kingdom. Discount code can only be used **ONCE** per email address and can't be used in conjunction with other vouchers or discounted items. It will however work on our buy 6 bottles and get £2 off per bottle. Full T&C's can be found at <https://seachangewine.com/terms-conditions/>

Team Otter

The part of Aarati's programme for children was to look into forming a Team Otter club for those with a real passion to help. Children from six schools attended to learn about otters through fun and engaging games. There was also an educational video on Smooth-coated Otters which included cartoons



to develop their knowledge and inspire and excite them to conserve their local otters. Afterwards there was a quiz with prizes for the correct answer and a 'Find the way to feed the otter, puzzle game'.

An outdoor game 'Find the otter - treasure hunt' divided players into two teams who searched for the hidden otter by following a trail of clues which were designed to provide interesting facts on otters.

At the end of the session, a group of ten interested children formed a Team Otter club, known as 'Oat ko toli' in the local language. They are fascinated with the idea of conservation of otters locally and teaching what they have learnt to their friends and other members of society. The formation of the club will increase awareness about otters and a desire to help solve conservation issues.

This sounds like a wonderful programme and it is encouraging to see the enthusiasm of the ten children in the new Team Otter Club at Shuklaphanta, especially as they want to spread the word to their friends.



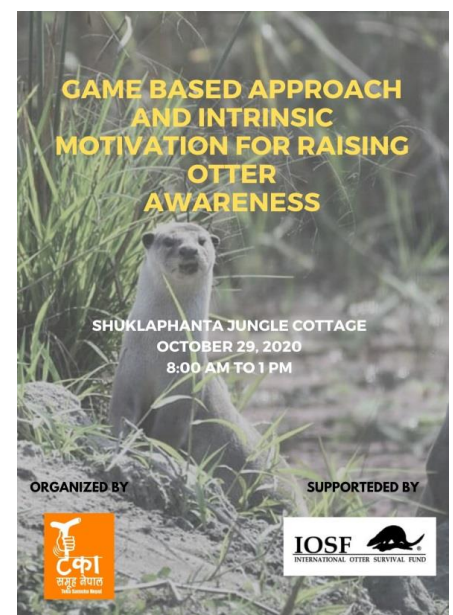
For more information on Team Otter check out our website (www.loveotters.org) or Facebook. If you are interested in forming your own Team Otter Club contact Ben@otter.org.

Community Education in Nepal (images Aarati Basnet)

IOSF was delighted to support Aarati Basnet and her community outreach programme in Shuklaphanta National Park, Nepal, focusing on the indigenous "Rana Tharu" community. Aarati received a World Otter Day grant but her project had to be postponed until the end of October due to Covid restrictions.

Shuklaphanta is one of the last strongholds for Smooth-coated Otters in Nepal and her aim was to increase awareness of otters amongst local communities and especially children. Presentations covered otter identification, status in Nepal and globally, ecological importance, threats and the role of the local community in research and conservation. A presentation by Mr. Prashant Ghimire gave an overview of wetlands, their functions, uses, the need for their preservation and current issues.

The chief guest was Tilak Bhatta, Principle of Retina International School, who gave the closing speech. He emphasised that such otter conservation programmes should be conducted on a regular basis thanked the organising team and encouraged them to conduct further programmes in the near future. He also highlighted the importance of wetlands, small mammals and otters in our ecosystem and assured his support for otter conservation in the future.



At the end of the programme Aarati said “*Creating awareness about otters and their habitat aroused the curiosity of both students and local people. By the end of the programme we found increased knowledge and a changed perspective of local children regarding otters and their conservation. We are delighted with the outcome of the event and will continue to work with students and the local community to instil in them a sense of otter conservation and environmental responsibility.*”



This World Otter Day programme was clearly very successful and you can read below about developments with the children.

William Mgomo Continues his Work in Tanzania

As many of you know William joined our African workshop in 2015 and since then has been a passionate advocate of otters and wetland conservation in the area of Lake Nyasa.



In October, thanks to support from the African Otter Network, William spoke to 433 pupils at Mbaha Primary school and 34 fishermen at Undu Beach about the presence of otters and the challenges they face for survival. William stressed how important it is that local communities understand the role that otters play in ecosystems. He said “*Sometimes people hate wild animals because they know nothing about them. By raising awareness to the fishermen and school kids it will help to change their attitudes towards*

otters and other wild animals.”



The fishermen at Undu Beach do not appear to have any major conflict with otters although there is occasional hunting for bush meat. There is a traditional belief that “roots” in an otter’s jaws help to catch fish, but after their discussions they all agreed that the otter’s skills come from their physiology rather than such a “root”.

William has also told us that he is now planning to go to University to continue his education. Once again, we would like to thank William for his hard work and dedication to otters in his area

and we wish him well with his studies.

Pakistan Work

IOSF was delighted to support Zafeer Ahmed Shaikh in his research into Smooth-coated Otters (*Lutrogale perspicillata*) in Haleji lake and surrounding wetlands in the Thatta District of Sindh Province, Pakistan.

He looked at the presence and human perceptions of the species and found that they are still present but populations are small and only in isolated areas across the wetland habitats. Numbers are believed to be decreasing due to a number of threats such as habitat loss, pollution and trade.

A full report of the research will be produced for the IOSF Journal volume 7.

We would like to thank Zafeer for his work and passion for otters and look forward to working together in the future.

Egyptian Otter

This magnificent otter statue, which is 45.5cm high, is featured on the website of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/544088>). It is dated from the Late or Ptolemaic Period (664–30 BC) when bronze otter statuettes were put on top of small bronze boxes. They were portrayed standing with their forepaws raised to indicate the otter's adoration of the sun god when he rises in the morning. In myth otters were associated with the goddess of Lower Egypt Wadjet, whose cult was centered in Buto, in the Northern Delta.

If you want to see the statue in person you will need to go to The Met Fifth Avenue in Gallery 134,



Sea Otter Catches Shark

Sea Otter Savvy is an organisation which has a science-based educational outreach programme to foster community awareness and involvement. The aim is to reduce human-caused disturbance to Sea Otters and promote responsible wildlife viewing. A very important job.

Recently they posted some great photos on Facebook taken by Don Henderson and Alice Cahill at Morro Bay in California. Instead of the usual photos showing a mother holding her cub on her belly, the otter was holding a horn shark! (see below). Southern Sea Otters take mainly invertebrates, such as sea urchins, crabs, abalone and clams and they have never before been recorded taking a shark. Northern Sea Otters are more likely to take fish including sharks.



Horn sharks are solitary predators and hunt at night for molluscs and crustaceans – similar prey to Sea Otters. It isn't known if the otter was looking on the shark as prey but it appears the shark wasn't eaten.

This is such a rare encounter but unfortunately not seen by any of the Sea Otter Savvy scientists. However they said *“It was likely an adult female, is the first recorded encounter with a horn shark, and the shark appeared unharmed - while some nibbling may have occurred, the shark was not consumed. When you observe wildlife quietly from a respectful distance you may get lucky and witness unique behaviours such as this.”*

This last sentence is so important – the more we observe wildlife quietly so that they are unaware of our presence, the more fascinating behaviour we will see and the more we will learn.

You can find out more about Sea Otter Savvy at (<https://www.seaottersavvy.org/>) or through Twitter or Facebook (@seaottersavvy).

Photo courtesy of Sea Otter Savvy, Don Henderson and Alice Cahill

https://ftw.usatoday.com/2020/11/sea-otter-catches-shark-in-extremely-rare-species-interaction?fbclid=IwAR1wRxVNPqcRPDIlp3ouV1Qibu2RSRaxyelWENsmWi83eCZxmnHsftKP_NE

Otter Encounters

Nowadays there are a lot of excellent photographs being put on social media and we have featured the photos of some great photographers in our 2021 calendar, available at the Otter Shop https://ottershop.co.uk/products/new-2021-iosf-otters-calendar?_pos=1&_sid=b550550d6&_ss=r



However, Colin Black seems to be able to get the most extraordinary images. The Scotsman recently featured one of his photos where a black cat is watching from the river bank as an otter swims past with a fish in its mouth.

<https://www.scotsman.com/news/people/moment-cat-looks-enviously-otter-swims-past-juicy-fish-its-mouth-3048385>

And he has just posted the following sequence of photos showing an otter being hassled for its salmon. Can you believe the cheek of the birds to

actually peck the otter’s tail!

Colin’s pictures are stunning and he seems to capture the character and behaviour of all the animals he portrays – not just otters, but also foxes, badgers, pine marten and also landscapes. It is well worth checking out his website <https://colinblackphotography.com/>



News In Brief

Farmer charged with destroying otter habitat

The director of a farming company in Norfolk has been charged with two counts of “damaging/destroying otter and water vole shelters” and one count of “damaging/destroying a breeding site of a protected European species, a water vole and otter”. The offences are said to have occurred at Diss between 1 October and 31 December 2018. The company, Paul Rackham Ltd, has also been charged with the same offence and also “acting in contravention of an environmental permit on or before 13 February 2019”.

No pleas were entered and the case was adjourned until 15 February 2021. We wait to see the outcome of this case as it is important for people and companies to realise they cannot just destroy wildlife habitat.

https://www.edp24.co.uk/news/crime/norfolk-farmer-charged-with-otter-and-vole-offences-1-6885114?fbclid=IwAR154Fc8-u8GSVz7QItPKINJTvg0p9j_8hbCLbVwnXzPsdPRtWgR9yrmZA8

Swans teach an otter how to social distance

WATCH: A group of swans took something of an offence to an otter feeding near to them, and one swan took it on itself to chase the otter away. The otter seemed particularly unfazed by the warnings and continued fishing nearby. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7LYTZGUYVuo>

Worries for Russian Sea Otters

An unusual algal bloom has had major effects on bottom-dwelling ocean life off the coast of Russia, which could have catastrophic effects on a number of rare species, including six species of salmon and Sea Otters.

As surfers off Russia’s Kamchatka peninsula enjoyed a relatively calm day on the surf things began to turn sour. A number of people became sick and 16 were hospitalised but no-one could really understand why. Then various ocean species including urchins, starfish and octopus started washing up dead all over the Kamchatka Eastern coast – in all it is believed that about 95% of the bottom-dwelling species, had perished. The problem spread West and more dead sea creatures appeared on the beach including thousands of fish, which gave bears food poisoning after eating them. Clearly this was a major issue!

The natural conclusion was pollution, but that wasn’t the case. In fact, scientists believe that the mass deaths were actually caused by an algal bloom and as they flew over the sea they could see an array of colours linked to it. Microscopic plankton produce half of the world’s oxygen but when they are overfed, or water temperatures increase, they can overpopulate. When this happens they die and as they decompose they starve the water of oxygen, and this has a knock-on effect on other organisms which die.

With so much of the potential prey dying it obviously raises concerns for the Sea Otters.

This further raises concerns about climate change and how we have to act before it is too late.

<https://www.nationalgeographic.co.uk/environment-and-conservation/2020/10/massive-marine-die-off-in-russia-could-threaten-endangered-sea>

Will Oregon have Sea Otters again?

Biologists and conservationists are considering the reintroduction of Sea Otters to Oregon’s coast but



Sea Otter © Sergey Zagrebelskiy

first they need to learn from previous mistakes.

In July 1970, 29 Sea Otters were reintroduced to a group of islands called Red Fish Rocks but it was not a smooth transition back to the wild as the otters were scared and reluctant to enter their new home. Fast forward a year and 64 more otters were released. This was looking good as the population was thriving and pups were being born. Everyone was positive that this time it had been a success but a few years later numbers again declined and by 1982 Oregon once again had no Sea Otters. Exactly what happened no-one knows as the animals were not tagged.

At the same time, a similar restoration process was happening on the Washington coast. Most of these otters died but a few survived and since then the population has swelled to about 2,000. It may be that the Oregon otters went to Washington – but no-one really knows.

There are now new calls to reintroduce otters to Oregon and a study was done to check there is enough suitable habitat to support around 4,500 animals. The next question was how these new otters would affect commercial fishing – and it is believed, not a lot. Sea Otters prefer shallower waters and generally feast on species such red rock crabs and kelp crabs. The fishermen, searching for Dungeness crabs, set their traps in areas that are too deep for otters.

Then there is the subject of otters and kelp and everyone knows of their importance to one another. With the otters gone, urchins have boomed and kelp is now sparse so the return of otters can help kelp density and increase biodiversity across the area.

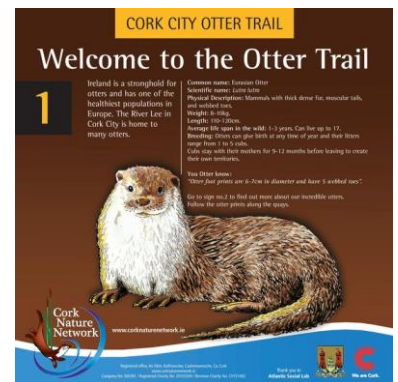
The Elakha Alliance is one of the area's leading advocates for the return of Sea Otters and are in the process of completing a feasibility study. It may be a few years away yet but it is hoped that Sea Otters may once again live on the Oregon coast.

<https://www.opb.org/article/2020/11/02/will-oregon-see-sea-otters-again/>

An Otter Trail in Cork, Ireland

Cork Nature Network have completed the construction of the Cork City Otter Trail, a four-stop 2km walk to try and spot Cork's urban otters. The walk offers information on the city's Eurasian otters, such as diet and conservation, and also helps people understand that they can see wildlife right on their doorstep.

<https://www.corkbeo.ie/news/local-news/nature-lovers-rejoice-trail-like-19186505>



Concerns for Israel's otters

There are concerns that otters in Israel are on the brink of extinction. Recently habitats that support otters in areas such as the Hula Valley have declined by as much as 44%. Such declines have happened in other areas and led to drastic declines in otter numbers, so there is concern for the otters' survival in the country.

However, all is not lost as a number of agencies plan to build artificial ponds to store water and this would also increase available habitat for otters. After otters were spotted in the Beit She'an Valley which has a number of "fish ponds" there is hope this can help them return to other areas.

Let's hope to hear of more sightings soon!

<https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-otters-may-soon-be-no-more-in-israel-green-group-says-1.9257937>

Dorset Police investigate otter disturbance

Police in Dorset, UK, are investigating a report that otters are being disturbed by over-enthusiastic photographers. We all know that it is illegal to kill or harm otters, but it is also illegal to disturb them. It is unlikely that this disturbance comes through any malice but it is really important to leave all wildlife undisturbed while you view them.



Juvenile Eurasian otters ©Bob McMillan

Please ensure you stay quiet, maintain distance and enjoy the beauty of animals acting naturally. You will also get the best photos that way.

<https://www.dorsetecho.co.uk/news/18872814.dorset-police-investigate-reports-otters-disturbed/>

Researching Hong Kong's otters

Otters that were once prevalent across Hong Kong are now becoming rare and harder to spot. Farmers used to see them on a regular basis but now sightings are becoming more unusual as otter numbers have declined, largely due to hunting and habitat loss.

Old tales related how Southern China's Pearl River Delta was inhabited by "every kind and variety of strange beasts". Now, strangled by human settlement, many of these "beasts", such as tigers, have gone, but the Eurasian otter clings on. However, much of the otters' wetland habitat has now been converted to fish-farms along the Hong Kong, China border.

A study by Sharne McMillan, friend of IOSF who attended our workshop in China in 2016, is trying to "fill in the gaps" in the knowledge of Hong Kong otters. Her study is using camera traps and DNA samples from spraint to determine more about the population size, distribution, territories, diet and breeding. They are also using local knowledge from those who live alongside the otters and their habitats. It is clear from their information that the decline in otter numbers has been relatively sudden, with sightings being described as "often" in 70s and 80s, with fewer in 90s, and in 2000s there have been almost none. The Eurasian otters' shy and elusive nature is perhaps its biggest ally, as people simply don't see them and therefore don't bother them.

IOSF is excited to see more about the Eurasian otters following the completion of Sharne's studies.

<https://www.scmp.com/lifestyle/article/3105270/scent-otters-hong-kong-secretive-nocturnal-carnivores-are-holding-out>



Eurasian otter caught on camera ©Phil Perry

Michigan poacher loses hunting licence for life

Kurt Johnston Duncan from Michigan has lost his hunting licence for life after he admitted 125

cases of wildlife crimes and killing animals illegally, including bald eagles and 18 wolves. The ban, which extends to the 48 member states of the Interstate Wildlife Violator Compact, also means that he cannot help anyone who is hunting or trapping legally. In addition, he must pay \$27,000 for the animals he has killed illegally and \$9,240 in court fees and costs and must hand over all his firearms and snares. He will also serve 90 days in jail and be on probation for 18-24 months.

Although no otters are recorded in this case we all know that poaching of otters does go on. Chief Gary Hagler, DNR Law Enforcement Division said *"We hope this poaching case acts as a deterrent to criminals for committing future wildlife crimes such as this."*

IOSF totally agrees with Chief Hagler.

https://focusingonwildlife.com/news/michigan-poacher-who-killed-18-wolves-bald-eagles-loses-hunting-license-for-life/?utm_source=mailpoet&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=newsletter-post-title_1120

Thank You

We appreciate all the donations you continue to send during these difficult times.

Thanks also to Garfield Western, The Nineveh Charitable Trust and Fondation Le PAL Nature

We can't do it without you.

giftaid it



GIFT AID IS A SIMPLE WAY TO INCREASE THE VALUE OF YOUR GIFT TO IOSF - at no extra cost to you. If you pay tax in the UK, IOSF can reclaim the basic rate tax (25%) on your gift. So, if you donate £10, it is worth £12.50 to IOSF.

It is a simple process to sign up to Gift Aid - all you have to do is make a Gift Aid declaration. If you are donating online, just select the "Yes" option on the Gift Aid box on the donation form. Alternatively you can download and print out the Gift Aid Declaration on page 13 of our Fundraising Pack which can be found at:

http://www.otter.org/documents/IOSF_Fundraising_Pack.pdf

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

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

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

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

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

You can follow us on:



Keep Us in Mind

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



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



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



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



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

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

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



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

Annual Supporters' Rates

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

Have you enjoyed reading this e-newsletter? Then please forward it to someone else and spread the word.

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**.

International Otter Survival Fund
7 Black Park
Broadford
Isle of Skye IV49 9DE
Scotland

Email: enquiries@otter.org
Tel/Fax: ++(0)1471 822487



Charity Number SC003875

Join our IOSF mailing list. Click on this link:
<http://tinyurl.com/p3lrsmx>

www.otter.org

The International Otter Survival Fund
Working to Save the Worlds Otters