



Otter News No. 136, November 2022

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As this is our last e-update before the Festive Season, we would like to wish everyone a Happy Christmas and New Year and we hope you will all have a healthy and peaceful 2023.



Otter Oscars - And the Winners Are...

As many of you will know, IOSF annually awards individuals in a number of categories for their commitment to otter conservation.



Once again we were overwhelmed by the number of worthy applicants and after a vigorous and difficult process to decide the eventual winners, the Committee chose the following winners for 2022:

Young Person – *Lim Wei Hang and Haizan anak Kamarul Zaman, Malaysia Nature Society (MNS), Malaysia*

Wei Hang and Haizan are Local Field Assistants and Otter Guardians for Malaysia Nature Society and were a vital part of the 2022 otter workshop run by IOSF and MNS in April of this year. During any of our workshops we need trusted, professional and highly-knowledgeable 'on the ground'

individuals to help us achieve our goals and we found the perfect pair in Wei Hang and Haizan. Despite their age, the two offered incredible knowledge and enthusiasm.

Wei Hang's and Haizan's passion for the environment was evident to see and IOSF cannot thank them enough for their help with the workshop!

Group or Organisation - *Chesapeake Bay Otter Alliance: Smithsonian Environmental Research Centre, USA*

This group is the East Coast of America's first organisation to work on detailed North American River Otter research and tracking. The initiative was based on recording sightings of otters, latrine records, DNA extraction and barcoding of spraint, parasite analysis, and other similar factors. All this research is new to the Chesapeake Bay area (the largest estuary in the US) and will offer vital information on the otters and their relationship with the ecosystem in their area.

Community Achievement – *Krunal Trivedi, Nature Club Surat, India*

In many areas we are aware of the conflicts between fishermen and otters which come largely from damage to fishing equipment and taking of fish. This can be an expensive loss to communities reliant on the trade.

Krunal set up methods to reduce the conflict felt by such stakeholders. As the programme developed, it was possible to establish a compensation scheme which reduced the financial losses on fishermen and also outreach programmes to help reduce the conflict even more. This, in turn, has helped ease the impact on communities but also help maintain otter populations across the Surat region.



Photography/Artwork – **Talia Rose, USA**

Otter enthusiast Talia Rose spends most mornings walking along the South Fork Eel River documenting the North American River Otters in the area. Her pictures have been used to create publications on diet, raise awareness in the media, communities and zoos.



The chosen picture (left) is of one of the otters that Talia has been following for some time, an otter dubbed “Oscar”. Oscar was separated from his family for a period of time before finding a “friend” and thriving once again!

Research – **WildTrack - Frederick Kistner, Larissa Slaney and co-contributors Asaf Ben Davi, Zoe Jewell and Sky Alibhai**

WildTrack have developed the non-invasive Footprint Identification Technology (FIT) to help monitor otter populations using their

unique footprints. Their programme has focussed on three of the four sympatric species of otter found across Asia (Eurasian, Hairy-nosed, Asian small-clawed and Smooth-coated otters) and identified noticeable differences in each of these. Hairy-nosed otters cannot be included yet as there is only one otter in captivity from which sample footprints can be collected.

The technology has already managed to have amazing successes with the three species and is being used to create successful non-invasive tracking methods and help build better community engagement. Of course, this is vital to reduce any impact on the species.

Using a combination of tracking methods and advanced technology, Larissa, Frederick and their team has helped, and will continue to help, us gain a better understanding of otters, their distribution and many other similar important monitoring aspects. The researchers would welcome more otter footprints, especially of known individuals and of Hairy-nosed otters, to further develop this FIT method.

You can read more about their work in the article in IOSF's latest Journal - https://www.otter.org/documents/journals/IOSF_Journal_Vol8_2022.pdf

Special Award – **Wolfgang Gettmann, Germany**

Dr Wolfgang Gettmann has been a loyal supporter of IOSF and otter advocate for many years. He was the director of the Düsseldorf Aquazoo in Germany from 1994 – 2013. In November 2005 a female Asian small-clawed otter had a litter of cubs but she wasn't able to feed all of them and two died shortly after birth. So Wolfgang stepped in to stop another one from dying - this was Nemo. Wolfgang raised him by hand and together they became great ambassadors for otters. They put on exhibitions, gave talks and attended various events to tell people about otters. Sadly Nemo died in 2018, but Wolfgang continues to work tirelessly to highlight otters and the needs for their protection.

Look out for photographs of the winners and their awards on our web page for the Otter Oscars, once we have received these.

Keeping Otters off The Roads in the Netherlands

There has been quite a bit in the media recently about the otter recovery in The Netherlands but there are always problems when it comes to them crossing roads. We recently received the following information

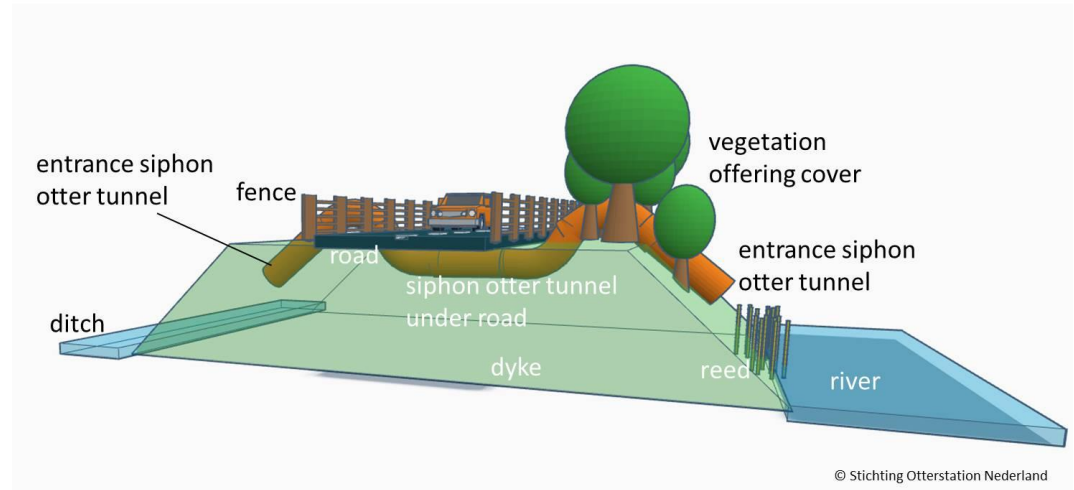


from Addy de Jongh of the Stichting Otterstation Nederland (Dutch Otterstation Foundation) in the Netherlands about a new method of keeping otters off the roads there:

“The otter in the Netherlands is also spreading in the area of our main rivers. Here are many dykes to prevent the land from flooding. On the dykes there are often busy roads. This poses mortality risks for otters crossing the dykes to and from the rivers. Special fauna passages are needed. Normal fauna tunnels cannot be constructed inside the dykes, because of a flooding risk. We designed a way of tackling this problem by designing a fauna tube with a siphon.

siphon otter tunnel under road on dyke

The entrance and exit of this siphon fauna tunnel is positioned on the slope of the dyke, the siphon part is constructed above ground level on top of the dyke from where the tunnel bends gradually underground under the road coming above ground on the other side of the road, connected to the second siphon part of the tunnel and the other entrance/exit of the sloped tunnel part.



The slopes inside the tunnel are no problem for the otter (being a mustelid species), but inside at the bottom side of the slopes the surface should be (made) rough to give enough grip. We have tested different kinds of tunnels with bends and curves like this and it appeared that otters use such without any problem. “

This is a positive development to prevent road mortalities and as you can see fences have been put in to make sure that the otters do use these tunnels.

More Calls for Culls of Otters

When a species starts to recover from very low populations there are often concerns about the effect of the revival on existing species, the habitat and on human activities. This is particularly true of carnivores, such as the otter. As we all know, otters were almost wiped out in Europe in the mid-20th century largely because of the use of chemicals, such as the organochlorines in pesticides. At the same time hunting was still legal which put even more pressure on populations.

In some parts of Europe numbers have started to recover, in some cases by reintroduction programmes but also by a degree of natural migration. However, in most places they haven't recovered fully to their previous numbers or ranges – otters breed slowly and so it is impossible to have a sudden “explosion” in numbers.

This is certainly true in Germany and they are now recorded in the upper Danube and in the Berlin area for the first time in almost one hundred years. Of course this is great news, but it is also marred by the fact that in parts of Bavaria they believe there are too many otters and a cull is needed. This happens so often and yet fishermen don't seem to realise that otters, and other predators, do not take all available prey but live in a predator-prey equilibrium to ensure all species can thrive. If only humans were the same, as we have been responsible for the disappearance of so many species since we arrived on the planet.

The call for the cull seems to be gaining some momentum and even some environmentalists and German NGOs are beginning to think a cull may be necessary.



Naturally we were not willing to accept this, so we contacted Dr Hans-Heinrich Krüger who formerly worked at the Aktion Fischotterschutz/Otter-Zentrum in Hankensbüttel and now runs his own consultancy, <https://www.mustela-consult.com>. He told us:

"More than a year ago the "Bund Naturschutz Bayern" and the "Aktion for Otter protection" had gone to court to fight against the decision of the Bavarian administration to all three otters to be killed in a pond area. It was declared as an experiment on how to kill otters in such areas. The pressure of the pond owners was and is very high leading the administration to this decision.

The judgement of the court was that such a decision to kill three to six otters, only males, makes no sense and the NGOs won this court case.

But the administration did not accept the judgement and started an appeal hearing. This appeal was accepted by the court and now we are waiting for this appeal hearing. The administration came with no new facts but you never know what will be the decision at the end."



In the presentation of the hunting society, they stated that otters were "back up to about 1-2% of their previous numbers". This makes absolutely no sense whatsoever!

Hans-Heinrich continued *"We don't know **how many** otters lived in the 1950s and also today. We can only tell about **the area** the otters inhabit. In the 1950s the population declined and otters occurred only in the east/north of Germany (former East-Germany). But in the 1980s the otter population increased and we have good data about the area of the population today.*

Another issue is how the hunters in Austria, in Kärnten, killed the otters with the conibear trap, which is an extremely cruel trap. Also in Austria there are more and more states which allow otter hunting and so the German fisherman are looking to Austria and asking: "How do and did they manage that otter killing is legal?"

Many of our long-term supporters will remember the similar cull in Austria a few years back which Hans Heinrich is referring to. This was in spite of the fact that as a member of the European Union, Germany (and Austria) is bound by the European Union Fauna and Flora Habitat Directive, which gives the otter full protection.

There is a lot of evidence that culling doesn't solve problems with predators. An article in the Huffington Post (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/scientists-agree-its-time-to-end-the-war-on-wildlife_us_58a77e73e4b026a89a7a2b08) gave an interesting comment on the subject and referred to various articles in the American Society of Mammalogists special issue on this topic. These were related more to predators such as wolves and bears rather than otters, but the principles are largely the same. The article is well worth reading but what it says is that if you remove a top predator from an area it will often be replaced by another, which can cause even more problems. One study of the predation of wolves in Idaho showed that by using non-lethal methods to protect sheep, the number taken by wolves was reduced by more than three times compared with the use of lethal methods.

Another example is the Salmon in the City project and Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) who have found a positive resolution to monitoring returning salmon populations. In the past, the fish would be 'trapped' in counting areas where they would be counted and released further upstream to continue their travels. This allowed the conservationists the opportunity to manually count each fish before letting them free. But this was



also a problem for the salmon populations as predators, such as the North American River Otter, took advantage of this 'buffet' to get themselves an easy feed – all before the salmon had the opportunity to spawn further upstream.

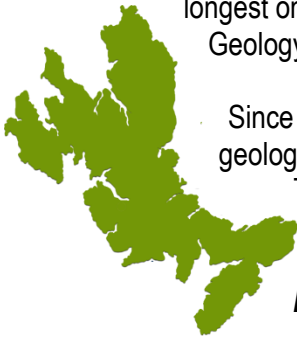
Obviously, the otters were just being smart but now their task to catch the salmon has become a little more difficult (and more natural). New technology in the form of an underwater camera will allow the group to monitor otter populations remotely. This means that the salmon can pass up river naturally maintaining the predator/prey balance.

It is great to see how there can be positive resolutions between fisheries and otters. Too often we hear of conflict between the two. But simply 'culling' the animal is never the answer.

<https://vancouverisland.ctvnews.ca/new-salmon-monitoring-system-at-saanich-river-will-prevent-buffet-for-otters-1.6107560>

Skye Otter Monitoring Project

We have been monitoring otters on the Isle of Skye since 1990. That is 32 years, which is probably the longest ongoing monitoring programme in the UK. It also resulted in my PhD on the Effect of Geology on the Distribution of Otters on the Isle of Skye coastline published in 1999.



Since 2014 we have sampled 15 sections distributed around the Isle of Skye in different geological sections.

This year out of the 35 holts, 27 were active and 8 not active. This gives a percentage of active holts as 77% which does not differ significantly from the previous 9 years. A full report on this research will be published after the tenth survey in 2023

Paul Yoxon

Events

IOSF's Paul Yoxon will be presenting a talk "Otter Ecology and Conservation" for the Assynt Field Club

<https://www.assyntwildlife.org.uk/event/otters-ecology-and-conservation-with-dr-paul-yoxon/>

This will take place at Lochinver Village Hall, Lochinver, Sutherland, Scotland on Thursday 15th December 2022 at 7.30pm. Adults £3 and refreshments are available after the talk.

If you are in the area, why not pop along and enjoy this otterly interesting event.

News from The Sanctuary

Our five otters have again become four with the release of Wally (right).

He was found near Dingwall in Inverness-shire, but as this is quite a busy area we chose a site a bit further away on a beautiful Highland river. The day was not as idyllic as it had been for Storm but it didn't worry Wally. He obviously



didn't like the exact spot that we had chosen, so he turned away from the river and ran up the bank, only to reappear several metres downstream, which he obviously thought was much better. The site has big pools in the river for feeding and great woodland bankside vegetation for him to hide up in.



Marina and Baird are now in one of the croft enclosures which gives them a better and more natural area. It is often amusing to see how the otters behave especially when they squabble over fish. We have seen them play "tug of war" and eventually the fish splits and they each run off



proudly with their bit. Baird and Marina are the same but the other day Baird came out and grabbed a fish and ran back in to eat it. There was a tremendous amount of shouting and squealing and then he reappeared to get another one. Clearly, although she is smaller, Marina had mugged him and stolen his fish!

Dòbhran from Mull is coming on well and has grown quite a bit. He too is on the croft but still limited to the nursery area. He is a very inquisitive little otter and was quick to go out to explore his new home.

And our resident Bealltinn has been pretty busy over the last few days. The weather has become quite a bit colder so she has been collecting rushes from inside her enclosure to make herself a nice cosy bed.

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



Bealltinn (left) and Dòbhran



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

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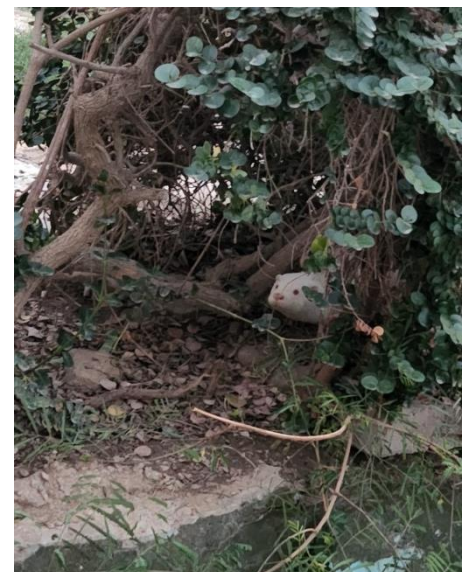
An Update on Dijla, the Albino Otter in Iraq

(photo credit: Dr. Haider)

Dijla, the albino otter that was rescued in Iraq, is doing well. She is growing nicely and becoming more nocturnal - as would be her natural state in the wild. This makes taking pictures difficult for her carers but they managed to get one (right), which clearly shows how healthy Dijla is and how she is enjoying her new surroundings!

If you would like to support Dijla's care you can adopt her at <https://ottershop.co.uk/collections/adopt-an-otter-and-other-ways-to-support-iosf> or simply donate at <https://ottershop.co.uk/products/donate-to-iosf?variant=42511664283807>

THANK YOU



Otter Shop Product of the Month

www.ottershop.co.uk



We have a great selection of **e-cards and e-gifts**, to help remove the stress of Christmas Shopping, when time is short. Click over to the Otter Shop and check them out
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Christmas Cards and Calendars... Calendar –

<https://www.askonline.shop/products/iosf-calendar>



Christmas cards –

<https://ottershop.co.uk/products/iosf-christmas-card-2022>



Last month you received an update from the amazing Yupukari Wildlife Club and all the amazing work it has been doing.

This month, we are focusing again on IOSF's Team Otter on the Isle of Skye! The two clubs have been busy, busy, this month! The primary school group has been working on their video – and are getting close to being ready to 'shoot'. We will need to wait for sunnier days and lighter nights to get it all together but the prep work is nearly there!

The high school group have been continuing to work hard on their bird boxes in the Men's Shed. They are learning new skills and creating a safe haven for Skye's garden birds to nest and thrive within. The building part is coming along nicely, minus a few hiccups, and the boxes are looking good!

We'd also like to thank our regular helper Nick for his time and our new helpers Eugenia and Kye, who are helping run the sessions with some fun games and crafts!



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

Thank You...

To every one of our supporters, who continue to help us through these difficult times.

Our thanks also go to Fondation Ensemble and the Marjorie Coote Animal Charitable Trust.

And to our Corporate Sponsors: Andrew Poptlett Enterprises Ltd, The Fenn Bell Conservation Project, Nurtured by Nature, holidaycottages.co.uk.

To those who took part in our Big Give Christmas Challenge #Giving Tuesday with donations.

We can't do it without you.



Photo of The Month

This image was taken by Mike Hooper in the Chek Jawa Wetlands on the Singaporean island of Pulau Ubin. This was only part of the family group which has several more cubs and adults out of the picture. This group ran across the mudflat before going fishing in the sea and we particularly like the little one at the back!



If you would like to submit a photo for our Photo of the Month please send it to Ben@otter.org together with the credit for the photographer.

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 will take you to our dedicated web page concerning making a Legacy.

News in Brief

Rocket station on Shetland

The Shetland Isles, one of the UK's most famous 'otter spots', is due to be the home of a new spaceport and become the UK's first vertical spaceport. The Island of Unst has been selected for the new development, and it is home to a number of species which may be effected by the rocket launches, including seabirds and otters.



SaxaVord, the company that has developed the site, have been advised to take a number of steps to reduce disturbance on wildlife. There will be a 'no-fly' period throughout the summer to reduce impact on nesting birds and they will create more 'otter shelters' which will be soundproofed to reduce disturbance on the otters.

All this will be set out in a consultation document published by the Civil Aviation Authority looking at the environmental impact of launching rockets into space from Shetland.

There are a number of factors that need to be taken into consideration in this development. For example, in order for the soundproof holts to be of benefit to the otters, the animals would clearly have to be in them at the time of launch. There is no way to guarantee this or know if the otters are indeed in there. Secondly, if they are in there, there is no way of knowing how resultant ground vibrations will affect the otters. These issues will clearly have to be taken into account.



*Please also note that the initial picture on the link is an Asian small-clawed otter, not the Eurasian otter that the UK is home to. In fact it looks very much like Wolfgang's Nemo! If we found this pictured species in Shetland, then we would have a major problem!

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/soundproof-holes-to-help-otters-flee-rocket-noise-at-uk-spaceport-v69b6kqjh>

What a mouthful

Check out the catch taken by this otter in Wales. The Eurasian otter caught this large pike for its dinner which is almost as big as the otter! See the images of Richard Rees from Pembrokeshire here

<https://uk.sports.yahoo.com/news/amazing-photos-show-otter-devouring-161513210.html>



Actually this isn't the first time we have had a photo of an otter taking a pike. If you look in our book "Otters of the World" there is another photo by Dean Eades (left) in the "What is an Otter" section. Signed copies of the book can be purchased at The Otter Shop at <https://ottershop.co.uk/collections/books/products/iosf-otters-of-the-world-paul-grace-yoxon-signed>

Concerns over genetic health of UK Otters

There are growing concerns that the lack of genetic diversity within UK otters is hampering conservation efforts and placing them at risk.

Cardiff University's Otter Project has discovered that despite otter populations recovering somewhat, there is a lack of genetic diversity which could leave them susceptible to threats such as disease. Added to the fact that there is believed to be a possible population decrease in otters across Wales, this new issue is causing concern for otter populations across the UK.



Although more research is essential to determine whether this is in fact the case, it is important not to be complacent over the otter's recovery!

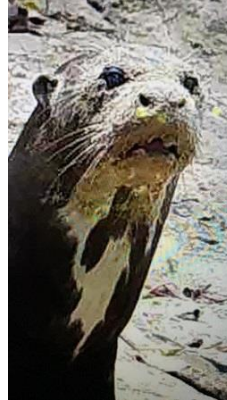
<https://www.cardiff.ac.uk/news/view/2684993-scientists-grow-concerned-for-the-genetic-health-of-otters-in-the-uk#:~:text=The%20genetic%20health%20of%20otters%20in%20Britain%20could%20be%20putting,changing%20pattern%20of%20otter%20genetics>



Otter or Jaguar?

The Rupununi river is in southwest Guyana, bordering the Brazilian Amazon and is home to some amazing wildlife including jaguars and giant otters. Yupukari is a small village on the Rupununi and when we were there for the training workshop in 2019 we were so fortunate to spot a wild jaguar and even managed to capture this wonderful image below. The photo of the giant otter (©Save The Giants) was taken with a camera trap used by local villagers who had been trained at the workshop.

They are indeed wonderful images but if the two were to come face to face, which do you think would come off better?



A video on Facebook will give an answer: https://www.facebook.com/reel/2099226086954743/?s=single_unit

And How About Crocodiles?

Omkar Patil and his team from an organisation called Mumbai Tarun Bharat, have produced an excellent video on the otters in the creeks of Konkan, Maharashtra, in the east of India. Their Species and Habitats Awareness Programme, in collaboration with The Habitats Trust, is in the process of creating 100 videos focusing on lesser-known species and habitats across Maharashtra.

Their otter video looks at both smooth-coated and Asian small-clawed otters and includes a brief interaction between the smooth-coats and a crocodile!

But the main aim of the video is to give information on otters and show how man and otters can live together. One of the team explains that the otters never exhaust the food supply but move on to another as “they ecologically balance the ecosystem”.

The otters were helping themselves to fish out of the fishermen’s nets and this was naturally causing some conflict, although the people didn’t want to harm the animals. However, now the local people are able to show ecotourists the wonders of the mangrove forests, including the otters. At the same time they can collect data to pass on to scientists monitoring the populations.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=15wQdJamyMo>

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

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<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



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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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