



## Otter News No. 147, November 2023



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<http://tinyurl.com/p3lrsmx>



### Please share our news

*This e-update has some sad news but there is also a lot of positive news too. It is very easy to get bogged down in the tragic things going on in the world, but we also have to remember that there are a lot of good people who are working hard to improve things for animals and also for people. All of you, for example, are contributing to our work in otter conservation, simply by supporting us. **And for this we thank you.***

*The Otter Oscars have also just been awarded. It is always such a hard decision to pick just one nominee to win the award but in the end we have to do it. That is positive in itself as it shows how many people are doing positive things in the various fields of the Oscars. You will find a list of the winners further on and this will be followed up with more information and photos of each of the winners.*



*As you know 16 November was our 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary and we were able to celebrate this during our 9<sup>th</sup> Otter Training Workshop in Jalcomulco, Mexico. The workshop was co-organised by Nutrias de Mexico and there were 29 people in person and another 19 joined by Zoom. Unfortunately, due to visa problems and political unrest, people from El Salvador and Panama couldn't join us*

*in person but they were able to take part online.*

*The workshop was so positive and all the participants were very enthusiastic about carrying the otter conservation work forward through a Central American Otter Network. This will enable them to share experience and materials and identify priorities for action.*

*The report on the workshop is being prepared, which we will share with you soon.*

*In this e-update we can share with you more positive steps we have been able to make in helping the world's otters. So we would like to thank you all for your great support which enables us to carry out this important otter conservation work – without you this simply would not be possible.*

*Finally, we would like to wish you all a very happy Christmas and a healthy and peaceful 2024.*

*From all at IOSF*

## William Mgomo Graduates (images courtesy William Mgomo)

**You all know about the great work that William does in community education in Tanzania where he has spoken to literally thousands of school children and visited many fishing communities.** And yet William is still a young man and has just graduated from Sokoine University of Agriculture specialising in Wildlife and Eco-tourism.

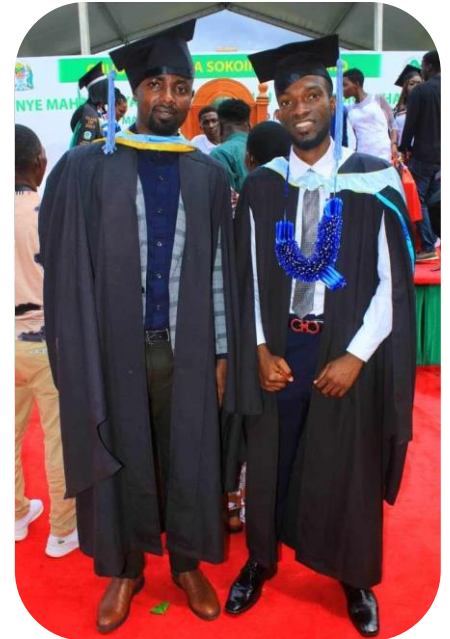


We first met William back in 2015 when he attended our African Otter Training Workshop in Mweka, Tanzania, and were so impressed by his enthusiasm and dedication to wildlife conservation. Since then we have been supporting him in his community work and his education.



William has now been transferred to the Lake Zone in Bunda district near to Lake Victoria. His family remain in Mbinga but he will obviously continue with his community work as he is totally dedicated to it.

As you know William has encouraged several other people to join him in his otter conservation and education work. One of them, Mrisho Mohamedi, also graduated at the same time so they could celebrate together:



So, many congratulations to them both and we look forward to working with you more in the future and to hearing about the next steps in your great work for otters.

## Otter News from Thailand More illegal trade news ...

**You will remember the case of the two baby otters which were found on a plane, along with several other animals, all bound for Taiwan.** These two cubs were “disposed of” i.e. killed by authorities, even though Taiwan Zoo could have cared for them.

Recently there was another case of two more otter cubs found at Bangkok Airport bound again for Taiwan. This time the Taiwanese smuggler believed he had a place that no-one would look for live animals – in his underpants! According to the report, the authorities investigated after “after noticing an unusually large bulge wobbling about below the waist.”

A prairie dog was also found in his pants – this species is from USA so what this animal

went through to get as far as Thailand we can only imagine.

The authorities have arrested the smuggler and he now faces charges of violating Thailand’s Customs Act, Animal Epidemics Act and Animal Conservation and Protection Act. We contacted Wildlife Friends Foundation Thailand (WFFT) about this and they told us that the animals have been handed over to the Wildlife Conservation Office for care.

One positive aspect to this story is that Phanthong Loykulnant, a spokesperson for the Customs Department, said “*Thailand is not a gateway to smuggle exotic animals out of the country. We will catch anyone who tries to take animals on planes.*” Let’s hope



this message gets out to the people who think that smuggling animals is a way to make money.

Otters are a protected species in Thailand and so it is illegal to sell otters, but of course this is taking place in certain markets. We are in

## And now for some good news...

(images courtesy WFFT)

**On 17 November WFFT received a report of another Asian small-clawed otter, Thung Ngern, which had been kept alone in really terrible conditions for many years.**



The WFFT team immediately set off to fetch him even though they are already at capacity for otters. His condition was so poor that he had to go straight for medical help and they were amazed he had survived so long on his diet of noodles and meatballs!

touch with WFFT to see how we can work together to help the authorities in stopping these illegal sales. We will keep you in touch.

<https://nypost.com/2023/12/07/lifestyle/tourist-attempts-to-hide-exotic-wildlife-in-pants-at-airport/>



Thung Ngern is a handsome male but he has never had the company of other otters, which is so important to this species. So WFFT will be gradually acclimatising him not just to proper living conditions with water but also helping to adapt so that he can hopefully meet up with others of his kind.

He has already energetically explored his new home, rolling in the sand and splashing in the water and possibly for the first time he has tasted fresh fish.

<https://www.thedodo.com/daily-dodo/otter-living-alone-in-tiny-wooden-box-perks-up-when-he-sees-his-rescuers>

*If you would like to support the work of Wildlife Friends Foundation Thailand and their care of Thung Ngern and all the other otters in their care you can send a cheque marked "Thailand" on the back or make a donation online at [www.ottershop.co.uk](http://www.ottershop.co.uk) THANK YOU*

## Tripadvisor

We were recently sent a link to a post on Tripadvisor about an otter café in Tokyo called Harry's ([https://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/Attraction\\_Review-g1066456-d12801543-Reviews-Harry\\_Harajuku\\_Terrace-Shibuya\\_Tokyo\\_Tokyo\\_Prefecture\\_Kanto.html](https://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/Attraction_Review-g1066456-d12801543-Reviews-Harry_Harajuku_Terrace-Shibuya_Tokyo_Tokyo_Prefecture_Kanto.html))

Some of the comments reported that the otters, and other animals too, are not kept in particularly good conditions in spite of what they say. They even say you can buy a hedgehog

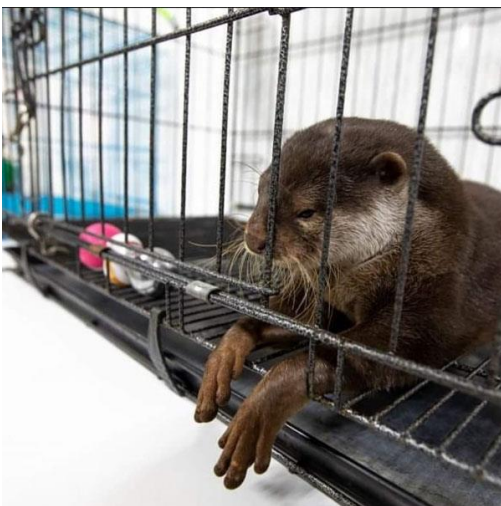


to take home with you! You can't buy the otters, but people will still want one and this is what encourages the illegal live trade in otters.

If you look at the Tripadvisor website ([https://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/Trust-IIFsY9GSDYn4-Animal\\_welfare\\_policy.html](https://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/Trust-IIFsY9GSDYn4-Animal_welfare_policy.html)) it says:

- "Tripadvisor will not sell tickets to, or generate booking revenue from, specific experiences where tourists come into **physical contact with captive wild animals** unless certain exceptional circumstances apply. The circumstances in which Tripadvisor would allow for sale an experience that involves physical contact between guests and captive wild animals are as follows:
- ...Any feeding or touching program in a captive environment, conducted under the supervision of zoo and or wildlife officials, where physical interaction is initiated by the animals themselves as a natural behavior (i.e. the animals are not drugged, baited or intimidated into compliance) and where those animals can disengage from contact at will."

Clearly the animals do not "initiate" the physical interaction and they are also not able to "disengage from contact at will".



We immediately contacted Tripadvisor and were delighted to get the following response within a matter of hours!

*"Thank you for contacting Tripadvisor.*

*Please note we have raised your concerns with the listing for Harry Harajuku Terrace and it has been deleted from our site. It should take 24-48 hours for the live site to update.*

*Thanks for reaching out.*

*Kind regards,  
Tripadvisor Customer Relations Team"*

We are happy to report that Tripadvisor has been true to their word and the café has now been removed from their site. This is a very positive response from Tripadvisor and we are grateful to them for their quick action.

If anyone comes across a similar "attraction" being featured on their site please send us the details to [enquiries@otter.org](mailto:enquiries@otter.org) and we will follow it up.

## News from The Sanctuary

I don't know how many times I say "why do we work with otters – they are so badly behaved!" And recently Eden and Winston have been proving this. They are in an enclosure next to Louis and the gate between them is locked with a bolt and a couple of hooks. Of course we always check

that everything is closed after feeding them but on Sunday, one of the hooks was off. Did I forget to close that – surely not. So I made sure everything was definitely closed but the next day, the hook was off again. The two rascals are deliberately knocking it off! It isn't a major problem of course, as



we have several closers on the doors as a safeguard but it just demonstrates how mischievous they can be!



It's a big world out there! But it can't be all bad if there is fish ☺

Louis (above) changed a lot while we were away for the training workshop and he now has access to the outdoor nursery part of his enclosure. He is also eating two whole fish a day and is very impatient for his food. It is great to see this progress after his indecision as to whether he wanted salmon chunks or soup.



Bealltinn (left – hiding in the rushes) continues to be elusive. The fish disappears and spraint appears but she is not in the box and there isn't much vegetation for her to hide in. But the other day we managed to spot a tail just poking out from a bed of rushes.

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.

UK taxpayers...

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of your gift to IOSF:  
*giftaid it*



## Snares to be Banned in Scotland

Some of the best news we have had this year is that Scotland is joining Wales in bringing in a total ban on the use of snares. This is so long overdue and so many animals

have suffered while various people continued to use these awful devices. Indeed, up to 72% of animals caught in snares were classed as “non-target” species. Of course, whether

they were “target species” or not is irrelevant as NO ANIMAL deserves to suffer in this way.

But now we can celebrate that Gillian Martin, Minister for Energy and Environment confirmed that she plans to introduce a “FULL BAN ON THE USE OF

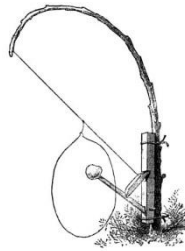
SNARES” in the Wildlife Management and Muirburn (Scotland) Bill. They had tried to water it down by looking into a licensing scheme but this was rejected as it brings

“unacceptable risks to animal welfare of both target and non-target species”.

At last compassion and respect for animals has prevailed and we welcome this great news for animal welfare in Scotland.

IOSF has been working with many other organisations to bring about this ban and we thank you all for your support in this.

We must also extend our thanks to the Minister for taking this action.



Following a break, with Ben away at the Mexico workshop, it was back to business for Team Otter Broadford.

Skye has been enjoying some magnificent weather, albeit cold, so whereas the club is often forced to go inside at this time of year, we have been lucky enough to spend much of it outside.

The Primary School kids have been busy litter picking over the last few weeks. What is sad is that we continually have to do this and revisit the same places, being met with lots more litter - it's really time that people stopped doing this, not just in Skye, but everywhere. A special mention goes to Franco, Noel and Innes, who have worked tirelessly over the last few weeks to collect loads of litter.

The High School group have been putting their craft skills to the test by building some scarecrows, after being asked by our local football team if we could help out. The football team has a problem with geese grazing on the pitch and the inevitable geese droppings left behind. The kids helped build the scarecrows by preparing the wood, building the frames and 'dressing' the scarecrows. Next week, they will finish them and put them up.



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

## News from Cardiff University Otter Project

Cardiff University Otter Project has been carrying out research on various topics concerning otters for many years and in their latest Newsletter they highlighted just some of their work.

### Otter genomics

PhD student Sarah du Plessis published her first paper on 'Genomics reveals complex population history and unexpected diversity of Eurasian otters (*Lutra lutra*) in Britain relative to genetic methods.



As we all know the British otter population, alongside otters in most of Europe, had a great population crash in the 1950s-1960s, largely due to chemical pollution. However, there were four main areas which held otter numbers and Sarah compared the genetics between these four stronghold areas. This produced some interesting results:

- In the south there is clear evidence of the link between pollution and population declines with a "bounce-back" effect as pollution was reduced, although numbers have still not fully recovered.
- In the north and Wales there appears to have been two different drivers of the population change, although this is not fully understood as yet.
- In the east of England there are two strongly divergent lineages which had not been identified before. This appears to have come from otter releases but not of British Eurasian otters but most likely from Thailand!

Of course more work needs to be carried out to see the whole picture.

Check out the full article from Cardiff University news: <https://www.cardiff.ac.uk/news/view/2782493-uncovering-the-genetic-history-of-british-otters>

### Fyke Nets

Fyke nets have been a threat to otters for many years as the animals go in and drown when they can't get out. Fyke nets are used to catch fish, especially eels, and crustaceans and these are very attractive prey to otters so they venture into the traps.



Otters killed in fyke nets

The Environment Agency stipulates that these nets must be tagged and fitted with an otter guard but recently there have been a number of otters drowning in illegal fyke nets. 48 otters have died in these traps since 1994 but of course, there will be many more which have gone unreported, particularly since their use without guards was made illegal.

### Avian influenza (AI) and otters

This has been a concern for AI in mammals, including otters for some time now and in February



2023 CUOP began testing for it during their post mortem work. SRUC (Scotland's Rural College) are also checking for AI before carrying out full post mortems on otters.

At the moment there have been confirmed cases in mammals including otters, red fox, grey and harbour seals and common dolphin. In the four cases found in otters they were originally found to be negative but on more detailed tests they were found to be positive which suggests that the risk of infection when collecting carcasses is still very low. Also, it appears that the infections found so far have come from the mammals scavenging on birds, rather than passing it from mammal to mammal.

However, it is important that we remain vigilant.

## News in Brief

### Tiger Reserve is also a haven for otters

**The Kawal** Tiger Reserve in Telangana state, central India is proving to be a haven for smooth-coated otters, called "Neeti Pilli" in the local language, Telugu. They are found on the Kadam and Gadavari rivers and also along bunds in canals, which are manmade embankments to control water flow and prevent flooding. People grazing cattle sometimes see the otters and there are potential problems with fishermen who say they damage nets and take the fish.



© Dr Bivash Pandav

The forest officials appreciate the importance of their presence in the ecosystem and so they are taking steps to ensure their conservation. As usual the otters face threats from human activities such as habitat loss, water pollution and over-exploitation.

<https://www.newindianexpress.com/good-news/2023/dec/10/kawal-tiger-reserve-turns-a-haven-for-smooth-coated-otters-2640195.html>

### Cheeky raccoon steals an otter's fish

An otter received a nasty shock while it was enjoying its fish dinner when a raccoon snuck up on it and stole the fish. In the video you can see the otter looking shocked to find the fish gone!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rfXxOSILd-w>

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

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





## Otter Shop Product of the Month

[www.ottershop.co.uk](http://www.ottershop.co.uk) – click through to the Home page



Our A5 2024 calendar  
(opening to A4)



IOSF Christmas cards  
(pack of 10)



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Delightful A4  
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Christmas Ideas: <https://ottershop.co.uk/>



We are so encouraged by the generosity of our supporters, individuals, charitable trusts and businesses. We couldn't do what we do without you.

Special thanks go to the following:

Hector Gordon Russell Trust, Harbinson Charitable Trust, Co-op Community Help Rockhampton Zoo, Big Wild Thought, Marjorie Coote Animal Charity Trust

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## Remembering Aleš Toman

On 8 September of this year, RNDr. Aleš Toman (1956) left us prematurely. His last trip to his beloved Africa was fatal.

Aleš studied Systematic Biology and Ecology at the Faculty of Science in Olomouc, but he lived most of his life in the Czech Highlands. He started his professional career at the Museum of Highlands in Jihlava, where he worked as a zoologist. An important period of his life was his work at the Otter and Fauna Protection Station in Pavlov near Ledec nad Sázavou, which was established at the beginning of 1990s as part of the then Czech Institute of Nature Conservation - later the AOPK ČR. After many years as

head of the station, he moved to the Jihlava Zoo and then to the Plzeň Zoo, and then as the head of the municipal shelter for abandoned animals in Jihlava. Since 1992, his great love was Africa, where he travelled several times a year as a guide on natural history expeditions.

Our professional cooperation started in the early 1990s. The youthful enthusiasm combined with the freedom provided by the velvet revolution in Czech 1989



was an ideal starting point. At that time a nice cooperation started with the Dutch Otterstation Foundation. Together we embarked on the rescue of the then critically endangered otter with full commitment. Pavlov soon became an Otterstation on a national level.

We became active members of the IUCN Otter Specialist Group, and established intensive cooperation with otter conservation organisations in Europe and around the world. In 1993, a Dutch sponsor enabled us to participate in the VIth International Otter Colloquium in South

Africa, and many other joint trips followed (Scotland, Netherlands, Zimbabwe, the Danube Delta and many others).

The many weeks spent in our countryside, in Třeboň region during otter trapping for telemetry research, nights doing telemetry in the Jeseníky Mountains, will never fade from our memory. Our common otter work and joint activities gradually extended to other species - the peregrine and saker falcon, the European mink in the Danube Delta, black Grouse, woodpeckers and migratory bird species in the Austrian Alps and endangered owls.

It remained so even after Aleš's departure to the Jihlava Zoo and actually until the last days. On 7 September 2023, our film about beaver wetlands was premiered at the Jihlava Zoo, for which Aleš provided beautiful footage of kingfishers. He was supposed to be at the premiere. But Aleš didn't come. Early the next morning it became clear that he was losing his battle with malaria at the time of the premiere.



Aleš in Africa (unknown photographer)

Aleš had his share of difficult moments in life, but he always managed to overcome them with his eternal smile and optimism and his ability to enjoy life to the fullest. His undying vigour influenced a wide range of people interested in nature until his last

days, whether at home or during his many travels in Africa. He was also a great ambassador of Czech humour and culture.

He will be greatly missed by all who knew him.

*Václav Hlaváč, Addy de Jongh and Andreas Kranz*



## Image of The Month

©Renata E. Chiarella

This photograph of a Neotropical otter shows the inquisitive and playful side of otters. Renata is a professional photographer and spent time working at Projeto Lontra - Institute Ekko Brazil, where she made a photographic record of the otters in their care.



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

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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>

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Including a legacy in your will ensures that your wishes are carried out, so it is important to discuss this with your solicitor.

You can stipulate a specific restriction for its use, but remember that without restriction your legacy can be directed to where it is required most urgently.

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

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



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



<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=aHR0cHM6Ly9kb25hdGUTYXBpLmp1c3RnaXZpbmcuY29tL2FwaS9kb25hdGlvbnMvZjZiMjIxODlyZzE5NGZkZjhIMGM4YVYyZDU=QzODYyZzU=>





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




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

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### Discover Ways You Can Help

There are many ways in which you can raise money and awareness to help the otters in our **Fundraising Pack** or find out what some of our supporters have done over the years in the online **newsletters**.

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Working to Save the World's Otters