



Thirty Years of Otter Conservation

Otter News No. 146, October 2023

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Student Otter Survey of the Isle of Benbecula

IOSF's second student survey project took place on the Isle of Benbecula in September. Again this was led by experienced otter surveyor, Andrew Rothwell, and this time he was joined by Freya Ryan and Sarah Green, both in their second year at Bangor University.

During the two week survey they were fortunate to have some wonderful weather with only two really bad days and even the midges weren't bad.

They had seven good observation sessions of otters, most of which were on the east side of

the island, which is more remote and with plenty of glorious rocky coastline for the otters to forage in.

They collected spraints and found many Stickleback remains, which is more unusual than the normal fish we have found in other surveys on the west coast and islands. The spraint will be analysed in more detail to give a more detailed picture of the otter diet.

The students were very enthusiastic and super keen to learn and so we look forward to hearing more of their results from the project.

A more detailed report will be prepared and published in the 2024 issue of the IOSF Otter Journal.



Photos © Andrew Rothwell



News from The Sanctuary

Unlike so many parts of the UK we have had it very dry recently. We had some strong winds during Storm Babet but not the rains.

Since our last e-update there have been quite a few changes.

Dòbhran was released back to the wild on Mull in September. He had been found as a small cub after his mother was hit on the road. He was such a tiny scrap when he arrived but over the year he had become a big strong adult male, ready to take his place in the wild.



Dòbhran's journey home involved two ferry crossings and then a drive through the beautiful Argyll countryside. Once on Mull we met up with Sue, Darren and Nigel from the Mull Otter Group who had helped to get him to us in October 2022.

They had a perfect release site with some coastal tree cover and plenty of rocky shoreline to hunt. All the way there he had been keen to get out but once he arrived Dòbhran changed his mind. He peeked out of the open door a few times and then finally took the brave step onto the shore. Now it was time for him to explore in amongst the seaweed moving gradually along the shore. He was at home and we were no longer needed, so we left him in peace.



One of the local people has been watching out for Dòbhran and he seems to have settled back into life on Mull.



On 12 October we received a call about an adult otter which had been hit on the road to Elgol. He just dashed out in front of the driver and there was nothing she could do to avoid him. But he is a very lucky otter and after a check over and x-rays by the vet he came to us to recover. His right front leg was not broken but he could not put any weight on it.



When we went to check him on his first night, he was extremely aggressive, no doubt due to fear and pain, even though he was on painkillers. But he soon settled down and enjoyed his supply of fish and his cosy bed in the hay (photo left).



He has recovered miraculously and is putting weight on the leg, although he walks with a pronounced limp. Hopefully soon he can be released to continue with his life.

As you know, **Bealltainn** is a real sun-babe and she has abandoned her sleeping box in the day to lie in the sun. She has a perfect little nest in the grass (photo right) but at night when it is colder, she does retreat into the hay.



Eden and Winston are getting big but we will have to keep them until the spring before they can be released. They are so private that it really isn't easy getting a decent photo of them.



Louis is our latest

arrival (photo left), who came from the Isle of Lewis. He was another tiny soul and has led us a merry dance with his feeding habits. When he first arrived he was eating chunks of salmon. Then he went off that and so we tried him with some salmon "soup" which he loved. Then back to chunks, soup again! Sometimes he "pigs" out on food and then doesn't eat again for a little while, which always worries us. We think he has been teething and it is a lot easier to slurp up the soup than use his tiny teeth to get at the salmon bits. Louis is very active and feisty, now weighing a

healthy 2kg and... salmon chunks are on the menu again but we are hoping that it won't be too long before he is eating white fish.

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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During the last short while, we have seen two Team Otter clubs working together to help the Team Otter Broadford's 30 for 30 Beach Clean challenge.

Team Otter Seaside Elementary, in New-Brunswick, Canada, have completed two beach cleans in the Bay of Fundy, on the Atlantic coast of Canada. The group first went to Bayshore Beach, near the school in October, and last week headed out on their second beach clean at Saints Rest Beach. Great to see these youngsters out and about, helping their local environment 😊



Team Otter Broadford, who are spearheading a 30 for 30 beach clean campaign, have added a few more to their 'Done' list. Firstly, a few of the group (Struan, Dylan and Blair) took themselves to a beach local to their home village, saying said that there "wasn't too much", which is great to know, although any rubbish is 'too much'. They then teamed up with An Crùbh, a local community hub, to complete a beach clean at Reraig Beach on the local mainland. Initially, the group said it "wasn't bad" but after a few hours' work, the kids and other volunteers eventually removed a massive 180kg of rubbish from the shore. Finally, this week, two members of the club begged to do a beach clean - Franco and Innes did that at Torrin Beach, removing another bag of litter!

They are still working towards cleaning 30 beaches, their current total being 14 - with more plans underway. You can help support their fundraiser by donating, or sharing this - https://www.justgiving.com/page/team-otter-broadford-1676536990827?utm_medium=fundraising&utm_content=page%2Fteam-otter-broadford-1676536990827&utm_source=copyLink&utm_campaign=pfp-share





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.

The Big Give Christmas Challenge is coming!



Great news... IOSF is participating in this year's Big Give #ChristmasChallenge.

For one week only, your donations made to us via **Big Give** can be doubled! Between 28th November - 5th December you can double the difference you make:

One donation, twice the impact.

We're raising funds for our **Team Otter** – helping connect kids to nature. So if you're thinking of making a donation... Save the date.

It all starts on #Giving Tuesday

Find out more about our campaign - <https://donate.biggive.org/campaign/a056900002RXprhAAD>

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



Raising Awareness in Tanzania (photos © Mrisho Mohamedi)

We are delighted to report on more education work in local communities in Tanzania conducted by Mrisho Mohamedi. This time Mrisho visited the Ruvula Village, in the Mtwara District, in the South eastern tip of Tanzania, bordering northern Mozambique along Ruvuma River.



With fishing the main activity in the area, and playing a big part in people's lives, the purpose of the programme was to connect with fishing communities and teach them about otters, and gain a better understanding of any issues with them. The project lasted a number of days, and was well received by a number of fishermen that were connected with.

Perceptions of Otters

The individuals talked to had a good knowledge of otters, particularly those involved in fishing activities on fresh water (Ruvuma estuary) but those that work in coastal areas are less familiar.



- Fishermen are aware of damage to fishing gear and believe they can be destructive animals.
- Some believe that, eating otter meat can aid in curing and improve sexual ability and power.
- They believe that otters are very shy animals and are difficult to observe.

Following the initial discussions, Mrisho spread the word of otters, and their importance to the fishermen, covering

aspects such as: geographical distribution, challenges facing the species (such as habitat loss, water pollution, disturbances to their habitat, hunting) and also the importance of having otter populations – using the importance of Lions as a connection.



Finally, Mrisho encouraged the fishermen to become a good ambassador for otters and wetlands by helping spread the word and maintaining a positive attitude towards otters, and wildlife.

He also had time to meet with some local children who had a mixed understanding of what otters were, and if they have seen them. Some did state that “they looked like mongoose”!



Although the programme was well received by the majority of the fishing community, not every fisherman was ‘on-board’ and took part, and further showing why we must continue to work together, to include everyone in conservation plans and helping to conserve otters and their wetland habitats.



Mrisho has recommended what can be done moving forward, and took time to thank William Mgomo and Said Kachakacha for their support, and to the people Ruvula village for their support, time and collaboration during the programme.

If you would like to support this outreach work in Tanzania, you can make a donation at the Otter Shop. Just follow the link <https://ottershop.co.uk/products/donate-to-iosf?variant=41408992575647>

News in Brief

Dead otter found in Gibraltar

A dead Eurasian otter was picked up by Environmental Protection officers in the area of Coaling Island, Gibraltar. A post mortem revealed that the otter was probably less than a year old and had most likely been hit by a vehicle. Otters are known to be in some of the nearby rivers and also the ports and marinas in the Bay of Gibraltar and the Department of the Environment are monitoring them. Otters in the Port area were unheard of only a few years ago and the question now is whether there is actually a small resident population. The biodiversity has been increasing with osprey, grey heron and little egret, so hopefully this is a good sign that otters are also returning.

<https://www.chronicle.gi/young-otter-found-dead-in-coaling-island/>



Eurasian otter ©Alan Horner

New record of Eurasian otter in China

The Eurasian otter has been rediscovered on Qi'ao Island which is the largest island in Lingding Yang, a channel in the Pearl River delta. Eurasian otters are called “che-gu” by the local people and in the 1970-80s they were often seen in the area. However, numbers declined in the 1990s and after the

construction of the Qi'ao bridge in 2001 they became really scarce. In November last year possible spraint was found in the north of the island and molecular analysis confirmed that it was from a Eurasian otter. More research will be carried out to find out more about the possible population and others in the Guangdong area.

Kadoorie Farm & Botanic Gardens
<https://www.kfbg.org>

Villagers in India concerned about otter attacks

Over 200 villagers, including women and children, have sustained injuries as a result of otter attacks while bathing in the Iruvazhinji River. Naturally, this is a worry and they have asked for the Forest Department to protect 50 vulnerable bathing points with steel mesh. They also want the state government to help with medical expenses. As yet the department has not responded to these requests.
<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/kerala/otter-threat-no-action-yet-to-address-villagers-concerns/article67380072.ece>

Successful arrest of poachers in India

In September, forest officials in Kalaburagi district of Karnataka arrested three hunters and recovered three otter skins together with 1kg pangolin scales, 500g porcupine quills, mongoose hairs, and 11 wild boar teeth. They also found spears and other hunting equipment during the raid.

The hunters are professional and sell their “products” to customers from different parts of the state and also neighbouring states. The officials received a tip-off and posed as prospective customers and the



accused have been charged under the Wildlife Protection Act.

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/karnataka/forest-officials-arrest-three-hunters-recover-otter-skins-pangolin-scales-porcupine-quills-mongoose-hair-and-wild-boar-teeth-from-them/article67306489.ece>

Clever coyote steals an otter's meal

This is a great video to demonstrate how clever animals can be when trying to get a meal. An otter hides a fish under the ice but a coyote uses his nose to find it.

<https://a-z-animals.com/blog/watch-this-clever-coyote-use-its-nose-to-steal-an-otters-hard-earned-meal/>

Sea otters found in orca stomach

On 14 April 2020 an adult female Orca was found dead in the Commander Islands, off the far eastern coast of Russia. A post mortem revealed that it had eaten seven sea otters, all of which appear to have been swallowed whole! Six of the otters were found in the stomach of the whale but the last one was lodged in its oesophagus and it is believed that this may have resulted in the death of the Orca from asphyxiation.

In the 1990s there was a decline in sea otters in Alaska and the Aleutian Islands and some people suspected predation by Orca, based on nine observed attacks but no

confirmed kills. Orca do eat mammals including seals and smaller cetaceans, but there seems to be

little direct evidence of them eating otters. Results have been published from several post mortem examinations, but there is only one other published record of a sea otter being found in the stomach of an Orca.

In addition to the otters, the stomach also contained many cephalopod beaks and it is not known whether these prey items were part of her normal diet or if it showed the diet of her

group. It is important that post mortem examinations are carried out on other dead Orca found in the area as it could just be an isolated incident or could mean that predation by Orca is more of a problem for otters than previously thought. However, this is nature and both Orca and sea otters have to survive in their environment.

<https://www.sciencealert.com/orca-appears-to-have-been-felled-by-a-single-small-creature>

Fomin et al published a more detailed report in *Aquatic Mammals* 2023, 49(5), 462-467

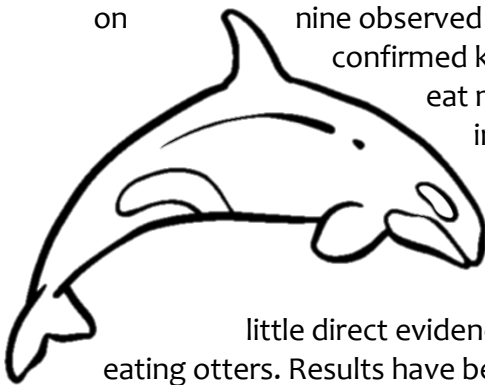


Sea otter predation by wolves

In our January e-update we spoke about the predation of sea otters by wolves on a remote Alaskan island, Pleasant Island, where deer numbers had been reduced. Now a study has been published in the October issue of the journal "Ecology" which shows that wolves on the Alaskan coast regularly prey on otters and also harbour seals.

Originally it was unknown whether they were actually killing the otters or scavenging on carcasses. However, in 2021 three wolves were seen hunting and eating an adult sea otter and a pool of blood at the site indicated that the otter had been killed there.

The recent study indicates that wolves in Katmai seem to concentrate their hunting at sites where the behaviour of the prey is more predictable, such as tidal streams of rocky islands. They also seemed to be most active at low tide which is when otters



spend more time on land, and are therefore more vulnerable. In addition, the wolves are often hunting alone which is more unusual.

Southern sea otters retain their protective status

We all know how important sea otters are to maintain the ecological balance. They are a keystone species eating lots of shellfish and thereby protecting the kelp forests which in turn helps to capture and store carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. So it was a concern when the US Fish and Wildlife Service looked into delisting the otters as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act. This was in response to a petition from the Pacific Legal Foundation on behalf of the Californian Sea Urchin Commission, who claimed that

<https://www.livescience.com/animals/land-mammals/watch-rare-footage-of-wolf-hunting-sea-otter-in-alaska-at-low-tide>

numbers of sea otters had doubled since they were protected.

However, the great news is that in September the US Fish and Wildlife Service agreed that they should keep their federal protection. Sea otters were on the brink of extinction due to the fur trade but they have recovered to some extent in recent years, although they still face several threats. So this protection is vital to maintain sea otter populations.

<https://laist.com/news/climate-environment/and-in-otter-news-sea-otters-retain-their-endangered-species-status>

IOSF Otter Oscars

Nominations for our eighth year of IOSF Otter Oscar Awards will be accepted until Friday 24th November 2023 - 16.00 UK Time. This is an opportunity for you to give special recognition to those who work tirelessly and enthusiastically (young and old) to improve our connection and understanding of otters and their environment.

We have six categories but **Please Note** - you can nominate someone for more than one category but only one nomination per category:

- » **Young Person** (under 18)
- » **Community Achievement**
- » **Group or Organisation** (including children's and young people's clubs, natural history groups, etc.)
- » **Research**
- » **Photography/Artwork** (1MB minimum size please)
- » **Special Award**

The results will be announced week commencing Monday 4th December 2023.

Visit https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScpBO7orWI_7ncmaYtIPL8EFnd1bEYUvzy2qM-YQixiYD-LvA/viewform to make a nomination and read the terms & conditions.



Otter Shop Product of the Month

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

New, New, New...



Our A5 2024 calendar (opening to A4) is full of IOSF otters from over the years. You might recognise them. Get your Christmas cards soon – another beautiful otter in snow from Jon Nelson, and our new pen is the ideal partner, to help you write them out. The rose-gold metal finish is set off perfectly against the dark blue of the pen barrel in a soft touch finish.

<https://ottershop.co.uk/>

Image of The Month

This Giant Otter surrounded by water hyacinth was taken by ©Burak Dogansoyal on a visit to the Pantanal, South America. Unusually, the otter has very little in the way of neck markings.





A big thanks, as always, to our regular sponsors and donators. Your dedication to supporting our work continues to inspire us.

And, as always, we have special thanks, to the following:

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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.



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It's simple and costs no more than what you spend:

Donate – one-off or regular


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



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


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

OR, scan and add our charity code 62575


<https://donate.giveasyoulive.com/donate?cid=630>


<https://donate.justgiving.com/donation-amount?uri=aHR0cHM6Ly9kb25hdGUtYXBpLmp1c3RnaXZpbmcuY29tL2FwaS9kb25hdGlvbnMvZjZiMjlxODlyZES5NGZkZjhIMGM4YWYyZMDQzODYyYzU=>


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



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

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

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Child:	£13.00 per year
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All other countries:	
Adult:	£30.00 per year
Child:	£15.00 per year
Family:	£40.00 per year

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Discover Ways You Can Help

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

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Working to Save the World's Otters