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EUROPEAN RIVER OTTER STUDBOOK

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Between 1981 and 1985 data were collected through two questionnaires. All known otter keepers and breeders were asked for co-operation.

Results:

At the end of 1985 one hundred and five otters were held in captivity at 29 different places in a sex ratio of 44 males to 60 females. The sex of one animal was unknown. Forty percent (i.e. 13 males and 24 females) were wild-born while 50% (26 males, 36 females and one animal of unknown sex) were captive bred.

For details of reproduction, see Table 1. It should be noted that otters have reproduced in captivity before the period 1981-1985 at Great Witchingham, Earsham and Innsbruck. In Table 1 it can be seen that the number of births has increased remarkably as has the number of facilities where otters have bred.

Table 1: Reproduction of *Lutra lutra* between 1981 and 1985 according to the studbook data

Facility	Litter/Cubs					1981 - 1985	Cubs older than one month
	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985		
Bayerischer Wald BRD	-	1/0.2	-	1/0.2	1/1.0	3/1.4	2/0.4
Bern CH	-	-	1/0.1	-	1/2.0	2/2.1	1/2.0
Hoyerswerda DDR	-	-	-	1/2.1	1/2.0	2/4.1	1/1.0
Innsbruck A	-	1/1.1	3/5.2.2	-	1/2	5/6.3.4	4/6.3
Koln BRD	-	-	-	1/3	-	1/3	-
Krefeld BRD	-	1/0.2	1/1.3	-	1/2.1	3/3.6	3/3.6
Novosibirsk USSR	-	1/2	2/1.1.2	2/2.2	1/1.0	6/4.3.4	3/3.3
Oderhaus BRD	-	-	-	-	2/1.1	2/1.1	-
Wilmering Vechta BRD	1/1.1	-	2/4.0	2/1.3	2/1.2	7/7.6	5/6.6
Zurich CH	-	-	-	-	1/3.1	1/3.1	1/2.1
Total Litters	1	2	9	7	11	32	20
Total Cubs	1.1	1.5.2	11.7.4	5.8.3	13.5.2	21.26.3+8	23.23

Litters of unknown number of cubs are statistically supposed to be 2

Cubs not surviving the first 30 days accounted for 32% of all cubs born. Litters in which not a single animal survived were 37.5%. Both percentages must be interpreted as rather high.

In summarizing both published and unpublished communications concerning the keeping and breeding of otters in captivity, the following points appear to lead to success:-

- a varied diet with a minimum of two feeds a day;
- unlimited access to dens which are undisturbed, warm enough, dry, dark and not draughty;
- facilities for the absolutely undisturbed rearing of cubs;
- the possibility to separate male and female.

Problems

One of the problems is the purity of the specimens living in zoos and parks. It may be that the question of which individuals are descendants of *Lutra lutra* barang X *Lutra l. lutra* crossings (probably produced in Great Britain) will never be answered.

Another problem, connected with the previous one, is the degree of co-operation with the studbook keeper. A studbook is only as informative as the information on which it is based. The co-operation with the majority of river otter keepers is quite good, but

there are some keepers not co-operating at all. Amongst them is the first otter breeder in this century and until now the most successful, Philip Wayre, Chairman of the Otter Trust at Earsham and owner and director of the 200 at Great Witchingham. In particular this non-cooperation suppresses investigations into the source of captive-bred English otters which would be of great importance to people planning re-introduction projects and also for zoos and parks breeding otters of this provenience.

A third problem is that too often breeders of river otters are supplying siblings to other facilities, so inbreeding problems can arise.

The fourth problem is unbelievable! There are too many otters bred in captivity and it is very difficult to find qualified places in zoos and parks for keeping all the cubs produced.

The participants at the second conference of "Continental European Zoological Gardens" at Cologne in 1985 decided to establish breeding programmes for extremely threatened species, of which 19 different ones were selected to take part in the "European Programme for Breeding in Favour of Maintenance, EPBM". One of them is the European otter.