

## REPORT

### THE SECOND RECENT RECORD OF HAIRY-NOSED OTTER (*Lutra sumatrana*) IN SABAH, MALAYSIA

Junichi ISHIGAMI<sup>1</sup>, Laurentius Nayan AMBU<sup>1</sup>, Augustine TUUGA<sup>2</sup>,  
Toshinori TSUBOUCHI<sup>1,3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Borneo Conservation Trust

<sup>2</sup>Sabah Wildlife Department

<sup>3</sup>Seisa University Graduate School of Education

E-mail: [jun1tunosi@gmail.com](mailto:jun1tunosi@gmail.com), [mambu56@gmail.com](mailto:mambu56@gmail.com),  
[mAugustine.Tuuga@sabah.gov.my](mailto:mAugustine.Tuuga@sabah.gov.my), [mmtsoubouchi@seisa.ac.jp](mailto:mmtsoubouchi@seisa.ac.jp)



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**Abstract:** A Hairy-nosed Otter (*Lutra sumatrana*) was sighted and photographed in an area near the village of Dagat, Lower Segama, Sabah, Malaysia, on 16<sup>th</sup> April 2016. Available literature on *L. sumatrana* suggested that this is the second recent record in the state of Sabah, Malaysia. There are 12 confirmed specimen records collected from the island of Borneo. In the Sabah state, there are two specimen records which are from Mengalong River in 1876 and from Sandakan in 1880. All of recent specimen records from the island of Borneo are collected from Brunei Darussalam. In the Sabah state, the first recent record was in Deramakot Forest Reserve in 2010, camera trapped by the carnivores study spearheaded by the Sabah Wildlife Department. The Deramakot Forest Reserve is about 130km away from the present locality record. Due to the paucity of data on the species's population status and its conservation status, it is highly suggested and timely that a state-wide survey of this species be undertaken in order to understand its population status, density and distribution in Sabah.

**Key Words:** Hairy-nosed Otter, *Lutra sumatrana*, Dagat, Tabin, Ramsar

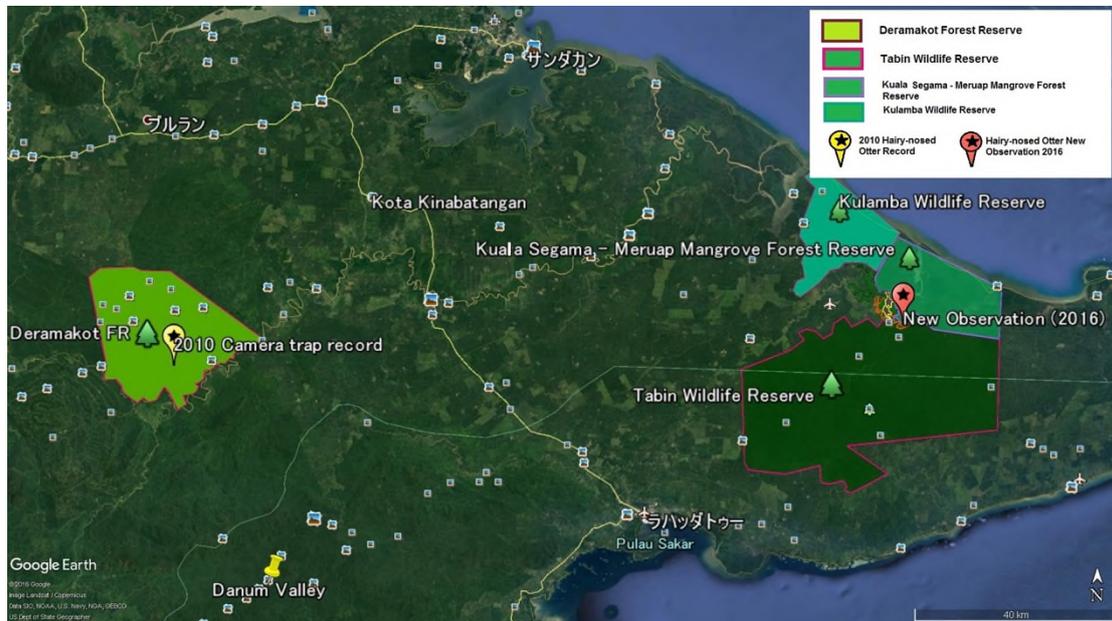
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The Hairy-nosed Otter (*Lutra sumatrana*) is distributed at scattered locations in Southeast Asia. Records of both collecting and sighting for this species are fewer than for the other two otter species on the island of Borneo. There are 12 confirmed specimen records collected from the island of Borneo. The details of collected locations are: two from Sabah, four from Sarawak, four from Brunei, and two from Kalimantan. All recent specimen records from the island of Borneo are collected from Brunei Darussalam. The latest specimen recorded was a road killed specimen collected at Brunei Darussalam in 1990 (Sasaki et al., 2009).

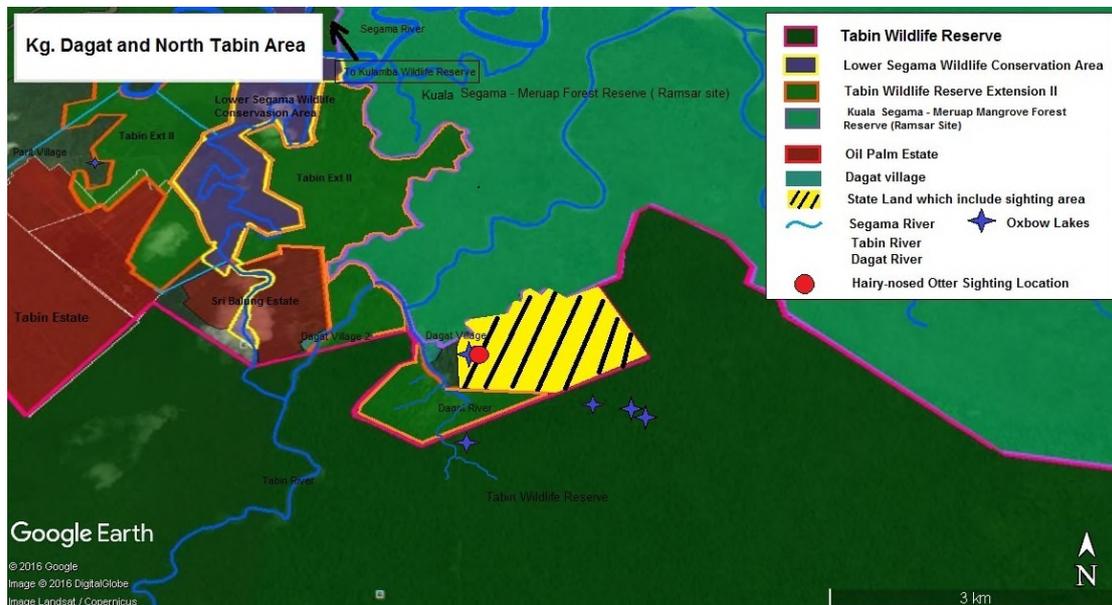
In the state of Sabah, the status of this species was unknown since there was no recent formally record until one animal was photographed by camera trap at Deramakot Forest Reserve in 2010.

## SIGHTING LOCATION

The location of the sighting is a small oxbow lake on state land some 500m east of the village of Dagat, 650m north of Tabin Wildlife Reserve and 600m south of the Ramsar Site. GPS coordinates of the location are 5° 21'52"N 118° 46'45"E. The altitude of the area around sighting location is 20 – 30m a.s.l. (Figure 1, 2).



**Figure 1.** Map of east part of Sabah state with Hairy-nosed Otter sighting locations and Forest / Wildlife Reserves nearby. There is no habitat connectivity between the two recent sighting locations, 130km apart



**Figure 2.** Location of the sighting site in the Tabin Wildlife Reserve and the LKSW Ramsar site, where the freshwater swamp forest and the lowland dipterocarp forest mix.

The 550 acres of state land is a mixture of secondary freshwater swamp forest and lowland dipterocarp forest, containing some oxbow lakes. The nearest river to the sighting location is the Dagat River which is 600m away. Dagat River and Mantis

River connect to Tabin River which ultimately flows into the lower part of the Segama River.

The sighting location is in the Tabin Wildlife Reserve (1,225km<sup>2</sup>) and the Kuala Segama - Meruap Mangrove Forest Reserve (176.5km<sup>2</sup>). The Tabin Wildlife Reserve is the largest wildlife reserve in the state of Sabah, with class VII classified forest. It is mainly covered by lowland dipterocarp forest except the low altitude northern part where it is covered by swamp forests. There is some Primary Forest in the central area which called Core Area.

The Kuala Segama - Meruap Mangrove Forest Reserve contains large scale Nippah swamp forest and Class V Mangrove forest. This Mangrove forest reserve is a part of the Lower Kinabatangan - Segama Wetland Ramsar site (788.03km<sup>2</sup>) which is the largest Ramsar site in Malaysia.

There are two connections between the Tabin Wildlife Reserve and the Kulamba Wildlife Reserve which is the second largest wildlife reserve (206km<sup>2</sup>) in the state of Sabah, and also a part of the Ramsar site. The connectivity through Kuala Segama – Meruap Mangrove Forest Reserve is wider but almost covered by swamp forest such as Nippah swamp forest and Mangrove forest. Connectivity through the Lower Segama Wildlife Conservation Area (24km<sup>2</sup>) along the Tabin River is the only connectivity through dry land. However, the forest is thin and degraded, and also there is abundant human disturbance.

Because of the importance of dry land connectivity between these two largest wildlife reserves, the land beside the Lower Segama Wildlife Conservation Area has been gazetted recently as the Tabin Wildlife Reserve Extension II, the Kulamba wildlife Reserve Extension II, and the Sungai Segama Forest Reserve.

#### **SIGHTING DETAIL**

The observation was recorded on the 16<sup>th</sup> April 2016. The sighting time was between 0936 to 0948 hours as follows:-

0920 hours - The observer was resting at the edge of a small oxbow lake

0936 hours - A lone otter was observed swimming, diving and surfacing the lake repeatedly

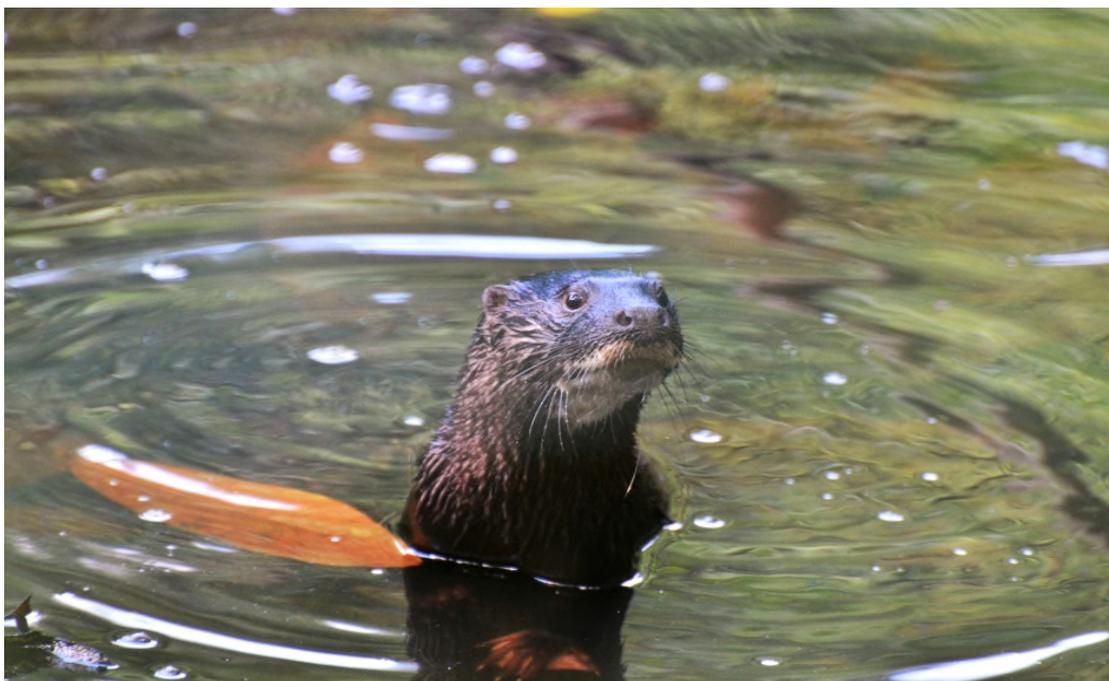
0938 hours - The otter detected the presence of the observer. It swam towards the observer and stopped about 4m away and began to perform threat behavior, uttering short “grrrp” sounds for several minutes before it swam back to the middle of the oxbow lake. The otter then repeated this sequence, going back to the observer and making threat sounds. The otter repeated this behavior several times. A short video recording was taken; (Figure 3-5)

0948 hours – The otter climbed to the bank of the other side of the oxbow lake.

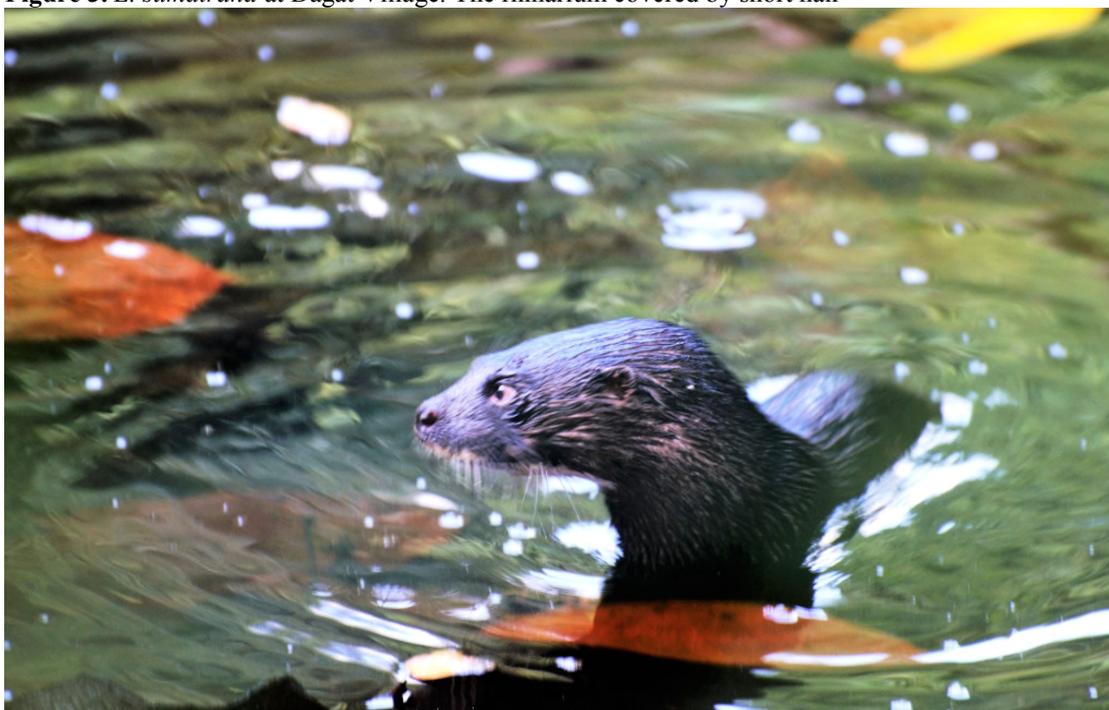
#### **CONDITIONS**

The weather was cloudy. The water level was clear and somewhat in low at tide. Some fish, probably Snakehead (*Channa striata*) and Climbing Perch (*Anabas testudineus*) were observed in the lake and those fishes could have attracted the otter. Birds such as Oriental Paradise Flycatcher (*Terpsiphone affinis*) and White-crowned Forktail (*Enicurus leschenaulti*) were observed at the edge of the oxbow lake while some Black-and-red Broadbills (*Cymbirhynchus macrorhynchos*) were nesting on some branches above water.

Due to the lack of, or decrease in, rainfall and prolonged period of drought due to effect of El Niño since 2015, the smaller oxbow lakes, pond and forest rivulets dried up. The water level of the oxbow lake and Dagat River has been drastically reduced several feet by the prolonged drought.



**Figure 3.** *L. sumatrana* at Dagat Village. The rhinarium covered by short hair



**Figure 4.** Side view of the *L. sumatrana*'s head at Dagat Village showing flat skull

## **DISCUSSION**

The solitary otter observed in this site is presumably part of a population different from that camera-trapped in Deramakot Forest Reserve in 2010. The two areas are about 130km away from each other, cut off by settlements, road and other land use. During the sighting, the otter was solitary. It cannot meaningfully be speculated whether the lone otter is a resident of the area or a visitor.

It is possible that after activities of logging and clearance have decreased in the lower Segama River, populations of wildlife come back to this area. This phenomenon augurs well for gazettement of the Lower Segama Conservation Area. The area between the Lower Segama Conservation Area, the Kuala Segama – Meruap

Mangrove Forest Reserve and Tabin Wildlife Reserve need further investigation as to the composition of wildlife, include river line species.



**Figure 5.** *L. sumatrana* at Dagat Village when it was scanning upward. It is showing white patch on upper lip to under chin clearly.

### CONSIDERATION FOR CONSERVATION

The ecosystem between North of Tabin Wildlife Reserve, south of the Lower Segama Conservation Area and the Kuala Segama - Meruap Mangrove Forest Reserve needs to be investigated extensively.

*L. sumatrana* was reported several times by the fauna surveys conducted by Sabah Wildlife Department though no verification was possible so these cannot be treated as authenticated records. Sabah Wildlife Department believes that this species would occur in the wide range of the state of Sabah.

In view of the endangered conservation status of this particular species, a species management plan would be indispensable. Thus, statewide survey on the distribution and the status of the species is a prerequisite for the development of the species management plan as soon as possible.

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## RÉSUMÉ

### LE SECOND ENREGISTREMENT RECENT DE LA LOUTRE DE SUMATRA (*Lutra sumatrana*) AU SABAH, MALAISIE

La loutre de sumatra (*Lutra sumatrana*) a été aperçue et photographiée le 16 Avril 2016 dans une zone proche du village de Dagat dans le bat Segama, Sabah, Malaisie. La littérature disponible sur *L. sumatrana* suggère que cela correspond au second enregistrement dans l'état de Sabah. Il y a 12 enregistrements confirmés de ce spécimen de loutre collectés de l'île de Borneo. Dans l'état de Sabah, il y a deux enregistrements de ce spécimen qui proviennent l'un de 1976 de la rivière Mengalong et le second de 1880 de Sandakan. Tous les enregistrements récents de l'île de Borneo sont collectés en provenance de Darussalam. Dans l'état de Sabah, le premier enregistrement récent fut dans la réserve forestière de Deramakot en 2010, photographié par l'étude des carnivores menée par le département de la faune de Sabah. La réserve forestière de Deramakot est éloignée d'environ 130 km de la localisation de l'enregistrement présent.

A cause de la pauvreté des données sur le statut de la population de cette espèce et de son statut de conservation, il est hautement suggéré qu'une enquête à l'échelle de l'état sur cette espèce doit être menée pour comprendre le statut de cette population, sa densité et sa distribution au Sabah.

## RESUMEN

### SEGUNDO REGISTRO RECIENTE DE LA NUTRIA DE SUMATRA (*Lutra sumatrana*) EN SABAH, MALASIA

El 16 de Abril de 2016 fue vista y fotografiada una nutria de Sumatra (*Lutra sumatrana*) en un área cercana al poblado de Dagat, Segama Inferior, Sabah, Malasia. La literatura disponible sobre *L. sumatrana* sugiere que éste es el segundo registro reciente en el estado de Sabah, Malasia. Hay 12 registros confirmados (especímenes) colectados en la isla de Borneo. En el estado de Sabah, hay dos registros de especímenes, que son del Río Mengalong en 1876 y de Sandakan en 1880. Todos los especímenes recientes de la isla de Borneo fueron colectados en Brunei Darussalam. En el estado de Sabah, el primer registro reciente fue en la Reserva Forestal Deramakot en 2010, por una cámara-trampa en el marco de los estudios de carnívoros llevados adelante por el Departamento de Fauna de Sabah. La Reserva Forestal de Deramakot está a unos 130 km del registro informado en este trabajo. Debido a la escasez de datos acerca del estado poblacional y de conservación de la especie, sugerimos enfáticamente que sería muy oportuno que se lleve a cabo una prospección a nivel de todo el estado, para entender su estado poblacional, densidad y distribución en Sabah.