

# THE ALARMING TRADE IN OTTER FURS



A Report by :

The International Otter Survival Fund (IOSF)



# Report done with the help of :

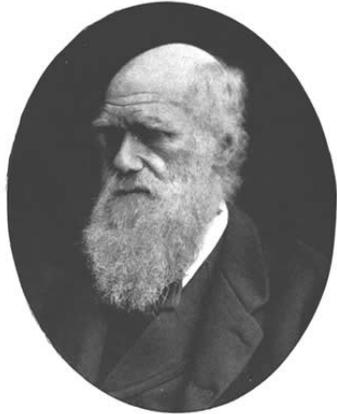
- Dr Vladimir Sevostianov. President Commander Island Association.
- Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA)



- Wildlife Protection Society of India



- Wildlife Conservation Nepal



- "I know of no sight more sorrowful than that of these unoffending animals as they are seen in the torture grip of these traps. They sit drawn up into a little heap, as if collecting all their force of endurance to support agony; some sit in a half torpid state induced by intense suffering. ... as you approach [they] start up, struggle violently to escape, and shriek pitiably, from terror and as the pangs occasioned by their struggles."

*Charles Darwin, 1863, quoting a person who had observed many trapped animals. Darwin added:*

"It is scarcely possible to exaggerate the suffering thus endured from fear, from acute pain, maddened by thirst, and by vain attempts to escape."

- This is a serious world problem Interpol says the illegal trade in wildlife products is worth \$12 billion dollars a year.





- In the past concern about trade in skins and body parts has been largely concentrated on large fauna .



# The Problem – The Asian Species

- **The Asian Small-Clawed Otter, (*Aonyx cinereus*) .  
Near Threatened**
- **Eurasian Otter, (*Lutra lutra*). Near Threatened**
- **The Smooth-Coated Otter, (*Lutrogale perspicillata*). Vulnerable, on a downward trend**
- **The Hairy-Nosed Otter, (*Lutra sumatrana*).  
Near Threatened**
- **Sea Otter (*Enhydra lutris*) Endangered**

# The Problem

- In September 2005 an article entitled “**Otters: Dressed to Kill**” appeared in the Times of India News Network. This began *“They were everywhere. In upscale shops in old Lhasa, on the streets of Linxia in China’s Gansu province and on the bodies of young men and women attending horse festivals in Tibet. But there’s one image – a young man wearing a traditional Tibetan dress embellished with six otter heads ...”*
- In March 2006, an article in the Anchorage Daily news described the revived interest in otter pelts at auctions there. According to the article *“Otter prices have exploded on the national market thanks to increased demand in Asia. Otter pelts on the auction weekend were steadily pulling in about \$125-150, up from about \$50 just a few years ago.”*
- Sea otter pelts are also being sold in Russia, with at least 300 skins being sold on the black market in Moscow in summer 2005. Most of these were obtained illegally from the Commander Islands Biosphere Nature Reserve. Since then we have been informed that a further 300 sea otter skins were being sold openly on the black market at Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy, with 200 of them from the Commander Islands. Most of these skins will be sold on to the markets in China.
- August 2007 Prices \$350 a skin

# Lets Look at some countries



# Tibet

- **The problem seems to be particularly bad in Tibet where otter furs form part of the national dress, the chupa, and many of the illegal furs are destined for this market.**



**His Holiness The Dalai Lama is against the use of animal furs and made a public appeal in January 2006**



# India

- **Most of the Tibet skins come from India which is totally illegal.**

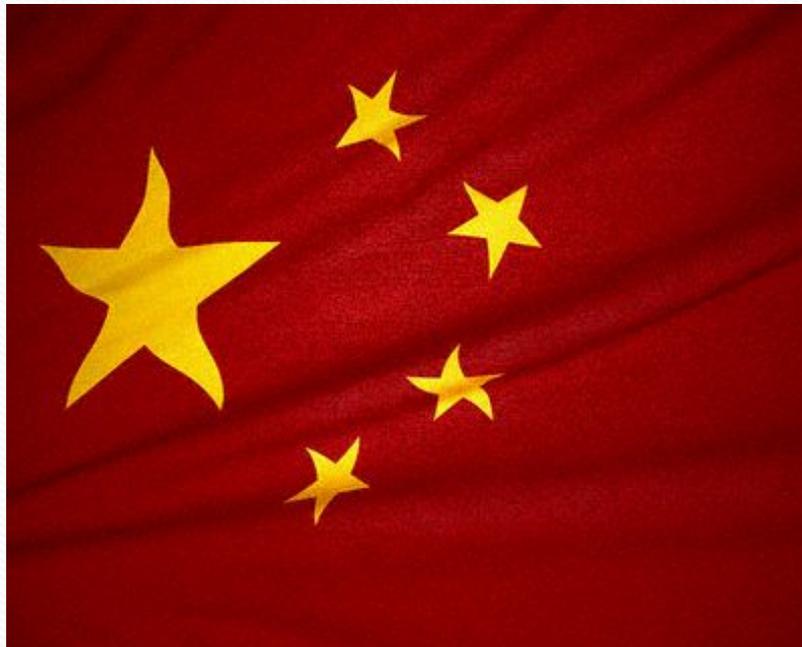


# India

- **The otter in India is endangered and highly protected, but this protection appears to be on paper only as there is no programme for REAL protection. There is a highly organised network of traders and poachers and otter skins are usually found in any haul of tiger and leopard skins. The pelts may be smuggled out in fake gasoline tanks using the ancient trade routes for salt, spices and wool. Some traders in Lhasa even boast that they have good contacts with customs officials along the China/Nepal border who allow them to carry out their trade.**

# China

- **China, is the biggest market place and a total of 1,833 otter skins were found openly on sale in 2006 in Linxia in Gansu Province, all for use on the chupa.**



# Other Countries

- **Otter skins also come from Pakistan, Turkey and Afghanistan.**
- **We have the legal trade in American (*Lontra canadensis*) river otter skins.**
- **In April 2006 IOSF received information from Andreas Kranz. Austria, which said that during the severe winter in the Danube Delta the channels and lakes were frozen, which made it very easy to kill otters using dogs. In one village a man collected 120 otter furs which were then exported to Turkey and then probably on to Tibet.**
- **The Danube Delta was surveyed very carefully this March and hardly any otter signs were found at all – this is an area which has been studied over a number of years so there is a lot of background information on otter numbers . A similar situation was found in the Ukraine part of the Danube Delta last October.**
- **Sea otter (*Enhydra lutris*) skins are also being sought resulting in the increased market in Alaska and there are also illegal imports of the Eurasian otter (*Lutra lutra*).**

# Shops in Tibet



## KNOWN trade since 2000

- 2000 - Khaga, India, 221 otter, 4 tiger and 70 leopard skins.
- 8 August 2001 – Xiaguan, China, 134 otter, 23 tiger and 33 leopard skins.
- 11 February 2003 – Siliguri, India, 19 otter and 20 leopard skins.
- 4 April 2003 – Kathmandu, Nepal, 14 otter and 109 leopard skins.
- 22 May 2003 – Samalkha, India, 18 otter and 7 leopard skins
- 8 October 2003 - Sangsang, Tibet, total of 1390 skins - 778 otters, 31 tiger, 581 leopard and 2 lynx skins.
- 20 April 2004 – Kathmandu, Nepal, 24 total of otter and leopard skins.
- 11 July 2004 – Kathmandu, Nepal, 11 otter and 3 tiger skins.
- 31 January 2005 – Delhi, India, 42 otter, 2 tiger, 38 leopard and 1 snow leopard skins.
- 8 March 2005 – Delhi, India, 4 otter and 3 leopard skins.
- 6 April 2005 – Delhi, India - three Tibetans found with 14 otter skins and 45 leopard which were being sent to Nepal.
- Summer 2005 – 300 sea otter skins sold on black market in Moscow.
- 2 September 2005 - Langtang National Park, Nepal, 279 skins were seized, including 216 otter skins.

- **11 September 2005, Zhangmu, which is in sight of the Tibet-Nepal border, 92 skins were found - 20 otter, 12 tiger and 60 leopard skins.**
- **10 January 2006 – Faitelpur, India, 1 otter and 14 leopard skins.**
- **3 February 2006 – Delhi, India, 4 otter and 34 leopard skins.**
- **Sea otter trade at Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy, Russia - Winter 2005/2006 300 sea otter skins sold in the black market in Petro.**
- **Sea otter fur prices in Fairbanks, Alaska, have risen from \$50 to \$125-150 because of increased trade in Asia.**
- **Linxia in Gansu Province, China, is the biggest market place with a total of 1,833 otter skins openly on sale including Eurasian otter (*Lutra lutra*) and smooth-coated otter (*L. perspicillata*).**
- **2005 - According to a report by the Central Bureau of Intelligence (CBI), a wildlife trader, Sansar Chand, supplied between 3275 and 3825 otter skins to eight different Nepalese and Tibetan buyers. This had risen from 1974 when Chand was arrested for 680 skins including 85 otter, 1 tiger and 3 leopard. Clearly they now have a highly organised network involved in this crime.**
- **Wildlife Conservation Nepal report that at any given time traders have at least 10-15 otter skins with them.**
- **50% trade comes from India but also from Pakistan, Turkey and Afghanistan**
- **Otter numbers have drastically declined in India and also in the Danube basin following hunting for furs over winter 2005-2006.**



# Otters skins seized in China, Nepal and India

Date	Place	Number
11/02/03	Siliguri, India	19
04/04/03	Kathmandu	14
18/03/04	Daklang, Sindhupalchok Nepal	6
11/07/04	Thankot check point, Nepal	11
17/04/05	Baudha, Kathmandu	38
04/09/05	Syafru, Rasuwa, Nepal	238
08/10/06	Sangsang, Tibet, China	778
<b>Total</b>		<b>1104</b>

( Source: Wildlife Conservation Nepal, EIA, UK, and Department of Forests, Nepal, 2005 )

# Trade in Otters in India 1994 to 2006

• Individual Animals	783 Tiger
	2766 Leopard
	777 Otter
• People Accused in above cases	1898
• People convicted	30
• Wildlife convictions involving firearms	95

( Source Crime and Politics of the Big Cat trade, EIA 2006)



- However, there is positive news which we have just received from Debbie Banks of EIA by email:

*“We’ve just come back from the Litang Horse Festival and the good news is that not one single person was wearing genuine skin of any kind – we saw some fake leopard and fake otter – but otherwise nothing being worn by any of the dancers, horse riders, officials or public!”*

# Conclusions

- It is clear that trade in otter skins is widespread and having a drastic effect on populations of different species of otter worldwide and not just in Asia. This is in spite of the fact that Nepal and China are signatories of CITES.
- The trade in otter skins is a large part of this whole illegal trade which includes other endangered species such as the tiger and leopard, but the scale of the trade in otters has been largely overlooked. Therefore efforts must be made to stop this illegal trade in skins completely.
- Everyone here and their respective organisations must work together to stop this – we need more data, more public awareness and more action.