



## Recommendations and Results of the IXth International Otter Colloquium (IOC)

Frostburg/USA, June 4 - 10, 2004

The IUCN/SSC Otter Specialist Group (OSG) and the participants of IXth IOC agreed on the following results of IXth IOC and recommendations for further work in otter conservation:

### I. Worldwide and as a basis for the priorities of the Otter Action Plan under revision they recommend:

1. to ensure that the standards for distribution surveys which are already available (sea otter, Eurasian otter [for Europe], giant otter) will be used in all future surveys, and to continue and to increase the efforts to prepare standards for distribution surveys for all other otter species.
2. to support the efforts to develop an Internet and GIS based worldwide databank system to store, to process, and to present distribution data for all otter species.
3. to initiate and to support research and conservation activities referring to otters regarding regional priorities on the basis of the following ranking:
  - Africa
  - Asia
  - Latin America
  - North America, Europe.

to initiate and to support research and conservation activities referring to otters regarding species oriented priorities on the basis of the following ranking:

- Congo clawless otter (*Aonyx congicus*)
  - Hairy-nosed otter (*Lutra sumatrana*)
  - Japanese otter (*Lutra nippon*) (if identified as a separate species)
  - Southern river otter (*Lontra provocax*)
  - Marine otter (*Lontra felina*)
  - Giant otter (*Pteronura brasiliensis*)
  - Sea otter (*Enhydra lutris*)
  - Small-clawed otter (*Aonyx cinereus*), Smooth-coated otter (*Lutrogale perspicillata*), Cape clawless otter (*Aonyx capensis*), Spotted-necked otter (*Lutra maculicollis*), Neotropical otter (*Lontra longicaudis*)
  - Eurasian otter (*Lutra lutra*), North American river otter (*Lontra canadensis*).
4. to welcome and to accept the offer of the AZA/Otter SSP to use and to expand its network of facilities keeping otters for supporting and funding in situ conservation on otters and to improve the cooperation of otter keeping facilities world-wide.
  5. to give urgency to the compilation of a protocol for necropsies of all species of otters. Discussions should take place within the continental groups of the OSG to examine their protocols with the aim of achieving common protocols for each species of otters.

### II. For Africa they recommend

1. to expand the network of information sources on otter distribution data by establishing further cooperation with conservation and research institutions or projects being already active in Africa and targeting even at other species, with African universities and research agencies, with park and reserve staff, and with safari and tourist guides.
2. to establish a network of qualified trainers and advisors (from Africa and from abroad) having practical experience with field work on otters in Africa, who are willing and able to train and to advise newcomers for survey and research projects.
3. to identify priority areas where research on the distribution of and/or on threats to otters should be carried out if financial and personnel resources are available.
4. to take action via international or national bodies to achieve that otters and their habitats will receive protection in more than the 29 out of 54 African countries where they currently afford full or partial (i.

e. only in conservation areas) protection.

### III. For Asia they recommend

1. to extend the survey efforts to countries such as Syria, Lebanon, Iran, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Azerbaijan, China, Mongolia, Brunei, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, Bhutan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Myanmar. This is subject to availability of seed money and reliable scientist who could pursue the surveys in their respective countries.
2. to intensify efforts to develop a network of scientists among the above mentioned countries to assist the OSG in data collection.
3. to promote ecological studies to gather information on the sustained reproduction and survival of otter species in the region where information on their status and distribution is already available.
4. to continue the efforts to monitor the distribution range of all Asian species to detect any change/shrinkage in the range size. The priority species for the region in order of priority is *L. sumatrana*, *A. cinereus*, *L. lutra* and *L. perspicillata*. Similarly, monitor the sea otter population in the North Pacific Ocean to determine the current status.
5. to continue public awareness programmes in selected countries such as Nepal, Laos, Cambodia, Myanmar and India with an objective to prepare and translate otter and wetland habitat conservation literature in local languages.

### IV. For Europe they recommend

1. to intensify the efforts to update and to complete the (digital) distribution map for *Lutra lutra* (at least for Europe) on the basis of surveys carried out by the Standard Survey Method as recommended by the OSG.
2. to establish a task force for training and advising people as well institutions in those countries (especially in Eastern Europe), where standardized survey results are missing, and who are willing to carry out surveys by the Standard Survey Method recommended by the OSG.
3. to welcome the initiative taken by geneticists from several different European and Asian countries to analyse samples of *Lutra lutra* at one laboratory and to analyse the results in a cooperative approach.
4. to make the use of trap transmitters mandatory, in case otters need to be caught (e.g. for research or release projects). In areas where there is a good mobile network GSM trap transmitters are preferred. Where there is not, conventional VHF trap transmitters have to be used.

### V. For Latin America they recommend

1. to develop standard survey methodologies for all Latin American otter species and commence implementation, prioritising range border areas, corridor areas and threatened areas.
2. to preferentially support the continuation of existing long-term research projects and to encourage new long-term work.
3. to use otters as umbrella/flagship species in the conservation and management of aquatic environments, focusing on advocacy with government authorities and conservation organisations.
4. to identify and understand new threats and implement management activities, in cooperation with government authorities and NGOs, to address the known threats.
5. to expand education, communication and public awareness activities related to these species among indigenous, local and national stakeholders.
6. to strengthen the role of zoos as centres of excellence for otter conservation education, research and in-situ conservation support, using management husbandry guidelines, cooperative breeding programmes (studbooks) and effective communication to achieve these aims.
7. to encourage communication amongst and identify new OSG collaborators in all countries of Latin America

#### A. Specifically for the Giant Otter they recommend:

1. to continue the assessment of predator-prey relationships, including conflicts with subsistence and commercial fishermen.
2. to evaluate the positive and negative impact of tourism in different habitats and implement management guidelines in order to maximize the benefits.
3. to encourage the development of a long-term research and conservation project in the Llanos of Venezuela or Colombia.
4. to undertake collaborations between field scientists, zoos, and genetic labs to evaluate the potential use of genetic analysis tools in giant otter research.

#### B. Specifically for the Neotropical Otter they recommend:

1. to clarify the taxonomy of *L. longicaudis*.

2. to evaluate the extension of conflicts between otter and fishermen and fish farm owners.
3. to encourage long-term research and conservation projects in different hydro-ecoregions.

**C. Specifically for the Marine Otter they recommend**

1. to improve coordination regarding research and conservation of the species between range countries and disseminate the results of the studies carried out so far in Chile.
2. to expand the research on the biology and ecology of the species, especially south of 42° S and in Peru.

**D. Specifically for the Southern River Otter they recommend**

1. to expand the research on the biology and ecology of the species, especially in the marine part of its distribution range.
2. to broaden the watershed management activities to prevent habitat loss and to restore already impacted areas, using the Tolten River basin as an example.
3. to work with government authorities, conservation organizations and local people, in Argentina and Chile, in order to mitigate the impact of poaching and agriculture on the species.

**VI. For North America they recommend**

1. to encourage the use of digital databases established by the GAP project in North America to serve as a basis for establishing a unified methodology. A considerable amount of research and management activities have been focused on the North American river otter. However, there has been no widespread effort made to establish standardised approaches for surveying river otter populations. An effort should be made to engage biologists responsible for managing otters in states and provinces to initiate model projects.
2. to develop an outreach program to engage different aspects of the conservation community likely to have an interest in river otters. This outreach program should include, but not be limited to, participation in conferences hosted by such groups as: a) furbearer technical committees, b) Defenders of Wildlife (e.g., Carnivores 2004), c) The Wildlife Society.
3. to interact with zoos and aquaria to disseminate information related to the concept, "Otters as Flagships for Conservation".
4. to make an effort to encourage Canadians to become more active in research with otters and to foster their interest in participating at future international otter colloquia.
5. to make a concerted effort to document if native otter populations persist in the south-western United States. No efforts to reintroduce river otters in the region should be implemented until these surveys are completed.
6. to encourage states to evaluate factors limiting natural expansion of remnant (non-reintroduced) otter populations.
7. to take a proactive position to implement methodologies to avoid or minimise impacts of depredations. In many areas, reintroduced otter populations appear to be expanding their distribution. Consequently, there is increased potential for an increase in conflicts between otters and commercial fish hatcheries.
8. to ensure that reintroduction projects incorporate genetic evaluations in the decision making process for selecting sources of founding individuals. Also, genetic evaluations should be conducted to evaluate the influence of reintroduction projects on local and regional genotypes.

**VII. For the Sea Otter they recommend**

1. In the modern world sea otters are oceanic emissaries, and they function as a keystone species in the nearshore marine system. Current studies have shown sea otters serve as important sentinels of changes in the health of their ecosystem. To address the many environmentally complex issues relating to sea otter conservation, we will continue the existing alliance of scientists, managers, agencies, non-profit organizations, and academic institutions that are working for the southern sea otter recovery and we propose to develop a similar capacity for the northern sea otter.
2. To increase monitoring of health and disease agents in all three subspecies of sea otter through comparative and systematic approaches among populations. Standardized methods will have the potential to greatly improve our understanding of how agents affect a population and will help identify and mitigate anthropogenic causes of illness.
3. To identify appropriate conservation measures for the declining northern sea otter population in southwest Alaska including listing under the Endangered Species Act
4. To continue regional research and management meetings on an annual basis to share progress on current research programs and management issues.
5. To continue research on sea otter population trend, life history, and community ecology to improve our ability to detect mechanisms of population fluctuation throughout the sea otter range

6. To identify a plan for hosting an international sea otter meeting on a regular basis for which most of the research and managing entities can attend and provide input. Such a meeting may include elements of existing meeting formats such as the U.S. – Russia Sea Otter Working Group Meeting under the Area V Agreement.
7. To continue to standardize methods of monitoring population abundance and health by collaboration with sea otter researchers and managers from Canada, Japan, and potentially Mexico

**VIII. As a group, the members of OSG agree**

1. on asking Claus Reuther (Germany) to continue as Chairman of the OSG, and to share work and responsibility with the Continental Coordinators for Africa (Jan Nel, South Africa), Asia (Padma de Silva, Sri Lanka), Latin America (Frank Hajek, Peru), North America (Tom Serfass, USA), the sea otter (Angela Doroff, USA), and Europe (Michaela Bodner, Austria); the latter function will be discussed as part of a meeting of the European section of OSG in the framework of the international otter conference scheduled for 2005 in Italy.
2. on continuing the revision process for the Otter Action Plan, targeting at the publication of a summarising introduction of all otter species, the threats they are facing, the different conservation priorities, and the country reports. More detailed (biological and technical) information will be published on the OSG website.
3. on welcome the preparation of Arno Gutleb to continue the work as editor of the OSG Bulletin.
4. on accepting and welcome the offer of the AZA/Otter SSP to financially support the printing of the OSG Bulletin.
5. on trying to revive and to optimise a group-internal e-mail list serve to improve the communication network.
6. on improving fundraising activities.
7. on holding the Xth International Otter Colloquium in 2007 in South Korea by accepting the invitation of Dr. Sungyong Han and the city of Hwacheon.