

## SHORT NOTE

### NEW OBSERVATION OF THE HAIRY-NOSED OTTER (*Lutra sumatrana*) IN SUMATRA

Kurnia LATIFIANA<sup>1,2</sup> and Rob S. A. PICKLES<sup>3,4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Tambling Wildlife Nature Conservation, Pengekahan, Way Haru Village, Bengkunt Belimbing Subdistrict, West Lampung, Lampung Province, Indonesia

<sup>2</sup>Forest Resources Conservation, Faculty of Forestry, Universitas Gadjah Mada, Jalan Agro No.1 Bulaksumur Yogyakarta, 55281, Indonesia

<sup>3</sup>Department of Biology, Trent University, Peterborough, ON, Canada, K9J 7B8

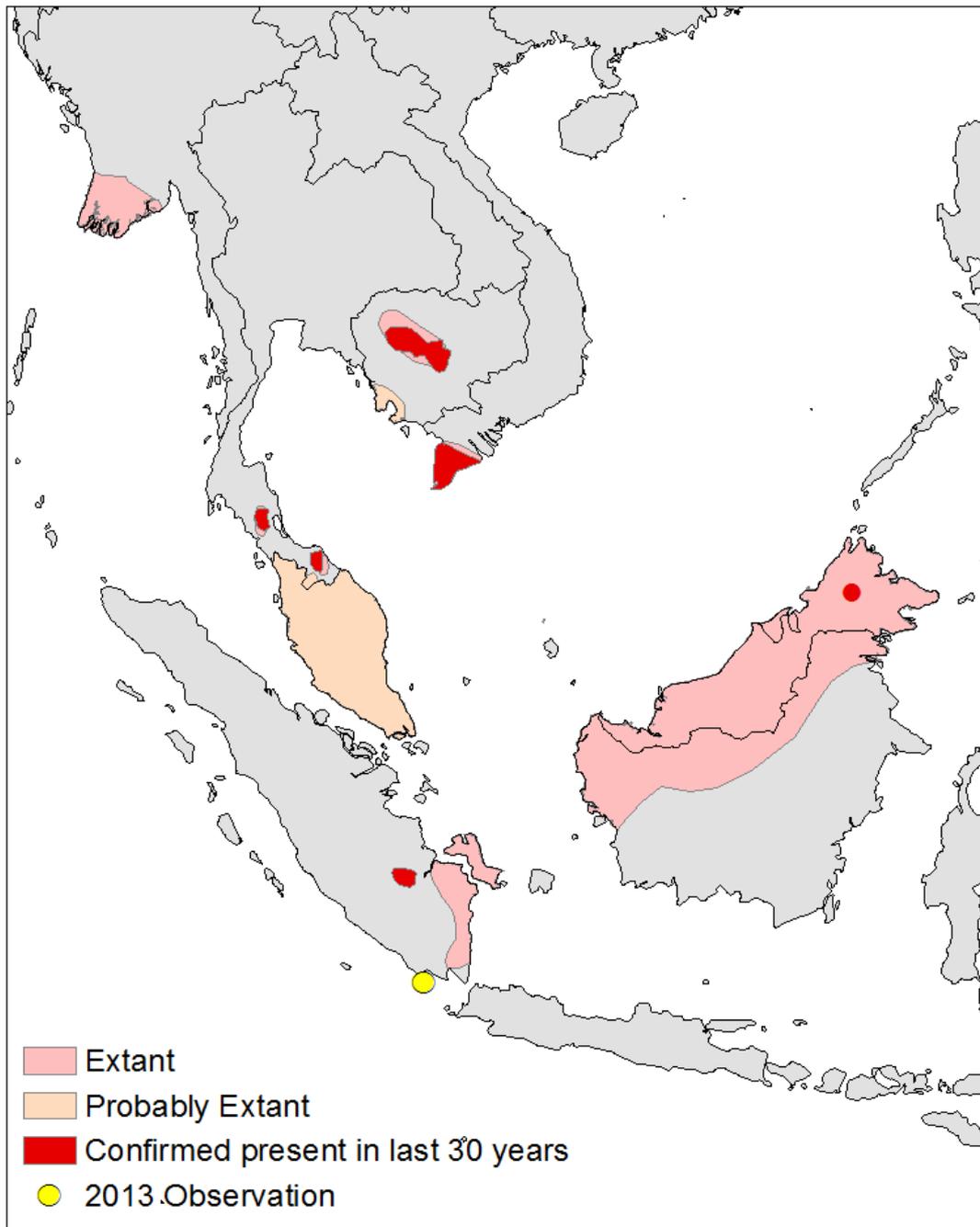
<sup>4</sup>Panthera, West 40th Street, 18 Floor, New York, NY 10018, USA



**ABSTRACT:** An adult hairy-nosed otter (*Lutra sumatrana*) was photographed by the authors in Tambling Wildlife Nature Conservation, a privately managed concession within the Bukit Barisan Selatan National Park in southern Sumatra. This observation represents the southern-most record of the *L. sumatrana*'s known range and is only the second time in the last fifty years that the species has been recorded in Sumatra.

**Keywords:** *Lutra sumatrana*, Sumatra, Tambling

The hairy-nosed otter (*Lutra sumatrana*) is the world's rarest otter species and its cryptic habits coupled with the difficulty of reliable identifications in the field mean that we lack a good understanding of where the species occurs. The historical distribution stretches from northern Myanmar, South Thailand, Cambodia, South Vietnam, Peninsular Malaysia, Sumatra and Borneo (Figure 1) (Duckworth and Hills 2008; Wright et al., 2008; IUCN 2013). Evidence of the species' continued occurrence in the Malay Archipelago come from recent camera trap footage in Sabah, northern Borneo (Wilting et al., 2010), while the only record of the species in Sumatra in the last fifty years was a road-kill from Sekayu, Palembang, South Sumatera Province (Lubis 2005). The new record is from the southern tip of the Bukit Barisan Selatan National Park, Lampung Province (S 50 51' 38.1" E 140 33' 37.0") (Figure 1). This is 350km south of the 2005 observation and the southern-most record of the species



**Figure 1.** The location of this observation (yellow dot) in *L. sumatrana*'s range. The extant and probable extant range delineations are from the IUCN red list (IUCN 2013)

The observation was made at 10.02 am, 10<sup>th</sup> March 2013 at an estuary mouth on the west coast of Tambling. The otter was first seen at a distance of 50m from the observers, approximately 20m from the high tide line, the animal remaining unaware of our presence as we approached to within 25m. The total duration of the observation was probably no more than five minutes. The otter scent marked a log and groomed itself on the sand before swimming across the river and heading into the swamp. We identified the species from photographs taken at the time based on its large slanted nostrils, furry rhinarium and stark white patches on its lower lip (Figure 2).



**Figure 2.** *Lutra sumatrana* in the Cukuh Babui estuary, Tambling Wildlife Nature Conservation, Bukit Barisan Selatan NP. The otter's characteristic hairy rhinarium and striking white patches on lower lip seen here clearly distinguish the animal from *Lutra lutra*.

The firm sand did not yield good prints, but one impression of a forepaw had a width of 57mm and a length of 59mm (Figure 3). Only four toes were visible. The largest toe had a width of 10mm and the pad with was 21mm. In the fairly symmetrical print the claws were distinct but the interdigital webbing was not visible. Kanchanasaka (2001) reported average forepaw track widths of 58mm from a sample of 23 observations.



**Figure 3.** Forefoot print made by *L. sumatrana* during the observation.

The habitat around the estuary is flooded swamp dominated by nypa palm (*Nypa fruticans*) and mangroves (*Bruguiera* sp., *Avicennia* sp.) with banyans (*Ficus microcarpa*) palms (*Pandanus tectorius*) and baringtonia (*Baringtonia asiatica*) also present, consistent with previous observations of *L. sumatrana*, which have mostly been made in swamps and flooded lowland forest (Wright et al., 2008) (Figure 4).



**Figure 4.** The habitat where the otter was observed (above): the estuary mouth closed by a sand bank and (below) the mangrove swamp further upriver.

In southern Thailand and Vietnam the species has been found in peat swamp forest, with cores of *Melaleuca* (*Melaleuca cajuputi*) (Kanchanasaka, 2001; Nguyen et al., 2001). The only other recent record of *L. sumatrana* in Sumatra was in an area of flooded open swamp and palm oil plantation (Lubis, 2005). In March the dry season begins in southwestern Sumatra and as the flow rate of the rivers reduces, leading to the mouths of many of the small rivers flowing into the sea become backed up by sand banks, creating a series of temporary lagoons. The Cukuh Babui lagoon appears to offer good hunting potential for prey of *L. sumatrana* with dog-faced water snake (*Cerberus rynchops*) and mangrove cat snake (*Boiga dendrophylla*) common. Water

snakes have been reported to represent as much as 18% of the diet of *L. sumatrana* (Kanchanasaka, 2001).

Tambling could represent an important site for the conservation for *L. sumatrana* in Sumatra due to the park's extensive nypa dominated swamps and lagoons along its west and southern coast coupled with the effective control of human encroachment and hunting.

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## RESUMÉ

### NOUVELLE OBSERVATION DE LA LOUTRE DE SUMATRA (*Lutra sumatrana*) A SUMATRA

Une loutre de Sumatra adulte a été photographiée par les auteurs dans la réserve de Tambling, une concession privée dans le parc national de Bukit Barisan Selatan dans le sud de Sumatra. Cette observation représente l'observation la plus au sud de l'aire de répartition connue de *Lutra sumatrana* et seulement la deuxième observation des 50 dernières années de cette espèce à Sumatra.

## RESUMEN

### NUEVA OBSERVACIÓN DE LA NUTRIA SUMATRANA (*Lutra sumatrana*) EN SUMATRA

Una nutria sumatrana (*Lutra sumatrana*) adulta fue fotografiada por los autores en Tambling Wildlife Nature Conservation, una concesión manejada en forma privada, dentro del Parque Nacional Bukit Barisan Selatan, en el sur de Sumatra. Esta observación representa el registro más meridional de la distribución conocida de *L. sumatrana*, y es la segunda vez en los últimos cincuenta años que se registra la especie en Sumatra.

## RINGKASAN

### PENGAMATAN BARU BERANG-BERANG HIDUNG BERBULU (*Lutra sumatrana*) DI SUMATERA

Seekor berang-berang hidung berbulu (*Lutra sumatrana*) terfoto oleh penulis di Tambling Wildlife Nature Conservation, sebuah konsesi yang dikelola oleh swasta di dalam Taman Nasional Bukit Barisan di selatan Sumatera. Pengamatan ini merupakan catatan sebaran paling selatan dari *L. sumatrana* dan merupakan catatan penemuan kedua kalinya jenis ini selama lima puluh tahun terakhir yang tercatat di Sumatra.