

MEDIA RELEASE

CARNIVORE AND PANGOLIN CONSERVATION PROGRAM CUC PHUONG NATIONAL PARK

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“ASIA’S RAREST OTTER SPECIES FOUND IN VIETNAM”

The field team of the Carnivore and Pangolin Conservation Program came face-to-face with two Hairy-nosed Otters in their latest surveys of U Minh Ha National Park, Mekong Delta Vietnam. The Hairy-nosed Otter (*Lutra sumatrana*) is arguably the rarest species of otter in the world and is without doubt the least known of the 13 otter species worldwide.

This is the first time the presence of a Hairy-nosed Otter has been confirmed anywhere in Vietnam since 2000. The Hairy-nosed Otter was thought to be extinct throughout the world in the 1990s. However, recently was rediscovered in Cambodia, Thailand, and in Indonesian Sumatra and Borneo. In Vietnam, the most recent record of this species is from 2000 in U Minh Thuong National Park by the Institute of Ecology and Biological Resources.

So little is known about this species that it is currently listed as Data Deficient in the IUCN Red List. However, the IUCN Species Survival Commission’s Otter Action Plan defines the Hairy-nosed Otter as a species of global conservation concern. The Hairy-nosed Otter is listed as Endangered in Red Data Book of Vietnam (2007).

The Carnivore and Pangolin Conservation Program has been conducting field surveys in U Minh Peat swamp forests since September 2007. In March 2008, whilst night spotting the field team discovered two Hairy-nosed Otters along a canal bank in U Minh Ha National Park, Ca Mau province.

“We were only about two and half metres away from them when we spotted the two otters. It was truly amazing to see such a rare species in the wild,” said Nguyen Van Nhuan, Research Officer, the Carnivore and Pangolin Conservation Program.

“The Hairy-nosed Otter is notoriously shy and mostly nocturnal. They eat fish, frogs, reptiles, snakes, and insects. Their survival is critically linked to protection of their habitat which is peat swampland and seasonally flooded forests,” said Nguyen Van Nhuan.

Vietnam is home to four species of otter, including the Hairy-nosed Otter (*Lutra sumatrana*), the Smooth-coated Otter (*Lutra perspicillata*), Eurasian Otter (*Lutra lutra*), and Oriental small-clawed Otter (*Aonyx cinerea*). All four species are seriously threatened by habitat disturbance and hunting for skins, medicine and meat. Human impacts on their habitat include modification of water bodies, water pollution, uncontrolled use of pesticides and destruction of wetlands for logging and agriculture.

“U Minh Ha National Park is located in Tran Van Thoi district, Ca Mau province, and covers an area of over 8000 hectares. U Minh Ha’s peat swampland ecosystem plays a crucial role in providing habitats for a variety of endangered, vulnerable and threatened species of birds, mammals, and fish, including the Hairy-nosed Otter, the Asian Small-clawed Otter, Small Indian Civet, Common Palm Civet, Leopard Cat, Sunda Pangolin, Long-tailed Macaque, and Sambar Deer,” said U Minh Ha National Park Director Mr. Nguyen Van The.

It is great news that Hairy-nosed Otters have been found in U Minh Ha National Park and we are keen to work with the Carnivore and Pangolin Conservation Program to continue this critical research,” said Nguyen Van The.

“Finding Hairy-nosed Otters in the area will help build a strong case for conservation recommendations for the U Minh Ha National Park. We will work closely with the National Park to develop the best protection for endangered species like the Hairy-nosed Otter,” added Nguyen Van Nhuan.

The Carnivore and Pangolin Conservation Program team plans to continue their work in the U Minh Peat swamp forests, particularly the area of *Melaleuca* and peat swampland located between U Minh Ha and U Minh Thuong National Parks that may act as a corridor for wildlife to move between the two protected areas.

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