



Minimum Acceptable Husbandry and Welfare Requirements of Captive Asian Small-Clawed Otters (*Aonyx cinereus*)

DIET

In the Wild

- ❖ High metabolic rate, rapid digestion, 40-60% time in wild spent foraging/feeding
- ❖ In wild eat 20% of body weight per day in meals of ~500g
- ❖ In wild eat wide variety of food, majoring on crustaceans and molluscs

Recommended Diet

- ❖ 20% freshwater fish, preferably fresh not frozen
- ❖ 80% meat (beef, chicken, horse, venison or IAMS cat food)
- ❖ Roughage food (day old chicks, rabbit in fur)
- ❖ Enrichment food as scatter (such as crayfish, mealworms, snails, crickets)
- ❖ At least 3 meals of 350g (1lb) per otter in morning, early afternoon & closing time
- ❖ Pregnant and lactating females should have 25% more
- ❖ Cubs up to a year old should be fed as much as they want
- ❖ Weight Reduction – feed lower calorie food, or food with more bulk. Reduction of quantity of food leads to aggression and behavioural problems

SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

In the Wild

- ❖ Alpha pair with successive litters of cubs, building up to large groups
- ❖ Male helps with cub rearing
- ❖ Older siblings help with cub rearing
- ❖ Females mature at 1 ½ years but breed successfully from 2 onward
- ❖ Group breaks up on death of one of alpha pair

In Captivity

- ❖ Monogamous pairs can have litters twice a year with up to seven cubs
- ❖ Do not remove male
- ❖ Do not remove offspring till at least 18 months old, with experience of helping raise cubs
- ❖ Stable combinations: adult pair (unrelated), pair plus offspring (10+ animals), males if introduced when very young or siblings
- ❖ NEVER keep single animals alone

EXHIBIT

- ❖ 20% water to 80% land
- ❖ Grass, dirt, pebbles, non-abrasive sand etc not concrete
- ❖ Plants especially grasses, bamboo
- ❖ Deep enough to allow digging
- ❖ Pond with shallow sloping edges
- ❖ Pond cleaned once a week
- ❖ CLEAN DRINKING WATER IN CONTAINER DISINFECTED DAILY
- ❖ More than one nestbox/den
- ❖ Shelter from sun, rain, wind, cold, heat (den, crate, cardboard box, pile of hay, heat lamp if temperature falls below 10°C)
- ❖ DO NOT LOCK OUT OF DEN
- ❖ Lots of bedding: grass, hay, straw, shredded paper, towels, carpet
- ❖ 1.5m fence with inner overhand of 30cm, or unclimbable wall
- ❖ Bury wall/fence 80cm deep
- ❖ 60m² for pair plus 5m² for each additional animal
- ❖ Natural light, fresh air
- ❖ Supplemental heating if low temperatures (less than 10°C)



VETERINARY CONSIDERATIONS

- ❖ Vet should treat like 'a carnivore'
- ❖ Anaesthesia using isoflurane and O2 and animals to be monitored constantly until ambulatory
- ❖ Vet examination yearly
- ❖ Vaccinate with killed vaccines for distemper, parvovirus, rabies (if present in country)
- ❖ Faecal monitoring for internal parasites every 6 months and before shipping out
- ❖ Keep records

BEHAVIOURAL PROBLEMS

- ❖ Constant begging is NOT normal; usually caused by hunger so feed more, and in more meals
- ❖ Constant begging means for more than 30 minutes before expected feed time
- ❖ Solitary otters will develop behavioural problems
- ❖ Seek help if otters are: eating soil/gravel, have bald patches, show repetitive behaviours such as circling and jumping at a certain place, constant loud calling, twisting neck backwards
- ❖ Seek advice from places with large collections of this species

FURTHER INFORMATION

- ❖ Zoo Standards for Keeping Otters in Captivity (2002)
<http://itech.pjc.edu/sctag/otterstandards.doc>
- ❖ AZA Asian Small-Clawed Otter Husbandry (1998)
<http://itech.pjc.edu/jkaplan/sctag/extra/HusbManl.doc>
- ❖ UK: Carol Heap, The Chestnut Centre Tel: 01298 814099
<http://www.chestnutcentre.co.uk/welcome.htm>

MINIMUM STANDARDS

These standards represent the absolute minimum acceptable standards for keeping this species in captivity. They fall very short of the optimum conditions. Falling below these standards seriously affects the welfare state of the animals.

This document was prepared by members of the IUCN Species Survival Commission Otter Specialist Group at the Xth International Otter Colloquium, 10 – 16th October 2007, Hwacheon, South Korea.

