

IUCN SSC Otter Specialist Group



Dr Nicole Duplaix

NAME: CHAIR / CO-CHAIRS	Dr Nicole Duplaix
NAME: RED LIST AUTHORITY CO-ORDINATOR	Dr Syed A. Hussain
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NUMBER OF MEMBERS	280 (including Deputy Chairs: Dr Arno Gutleb and Lesley Wright)

MISSION STATEMENT

The Otter Specialist Group (OSG) was founded in 1974. The aims of the Group, as set out by the SSC, are to:

1. Provide leadership for the conservation of all 13 otter species (Lutrinae).
2. Determine and review on a continuing basis the status and needs of otters, and promote the implementation of necessary research, conservation and management programs by appropriate individuals, organizations and governments.

SUMMARY OF MAIN ACTIVITIES 2015

2015 was a banner year of activities and accomplishments thanks to our very active members.

Phase II of The Asian Otter Plan launched: "Developing Recovery Strategies for Otters in Southeast Asia"

New Beginnings

1. The Otter Welfare Advisory Group was established to discuss and advise on otter welfare and ethical issues. The scope of the new group includes: a) Otter research design; b) Captive otters; c) Management of wild otter populations
2. The OSG/TRAFFIC Otter Trade Task Force. The OSG formalized its long partnership with TRAFFIC-Southeast Asia with this new sub-group which will focus on the illegal trade of otters and remedial actions.

Meetings

1. European Otter Workshop, July 2015, Natural History Museum, Stockholm, Sweden, with over 100 participants. The OSG Bulletin is publishing the proceedings.
2. Funding secured for our 13th International Otter Congress which will be held in Singapore, July 2016.

Media and Outreach

1. Our Facebook, Instagram and Twitter pages post daily entries to raise awareness about the OSG and otter conservation. We have 2,000 + followers.
2. E-book: "Why We Love Otters" with photos of all 13 species and personal contributions from our members. It will be downloadable from our website.
3. New website dedicated to the otters of the Himalayan foothills <http://www.himalayanotternetwork.org/>

Publications

1. A special issue of the Latin American Journal of Aquatic Mammals devoted to Giant otters 10(2). Open access.
2. The Otter in Zoos OSG Task Force published Summary of Guidelines for Giant Otters in Captivity. Downloadable.
3. The OSG Bulletin published one issue in 2015 with 14 articles (volume 32). Downloadable.

IMPACT ON CONSERVATION

Recognizing the need to reverse the escalating otter population declines in Asia, the OSG launched OSG Asian Otter Action Plan in 2007 to curb the illegal trade, establish recovery protocols and increase otter populations in key wetland areas. Phase I included gathering otter status data and holding otter field research and conservation workshops in four countries to train a new generation of otter field biologists.

In 2015 we launched Phase II "Developing Recovery Strategies for Otters in Southeast Asia" with a 5-country project coordination trip to reinforce our working relationships with local NGOs and government agencies and outline specific otter conservation strategies, tailored to the needs of each country.

We met with TRAFFIC-Southeast Asia and OSG members from mainland Malaysia and Sabah, Singapore, Lao PDR, India and the UK. As a result, we launched the OSG Otter Trade Task Force, to track, coordinate and disseminate otter trade data information with the assistance of TRAFFIC Southeast Asia and secured funding for the first two years. As our first task we created a database of otter seizures by querying law enforcement agencies, CITES, and NGOs in 13 countries, supplemented by a search of public records and journals. This database will be part of a joint report in 2016 that details the threats of poaching to otter populations and outlines a strategic approach to regional conservation. We created the Asian Otter Network Database to collect direct sightings and camera trap records of otters observed throughout Southeast Asia. Based on a Google Group interactive listing, the data is updated on an ongoing basis and the maps are downloadable.

We scheduled our next 13th OSG International Congress to take place in Singapore in July 3-8, 2016. The location of the triennial congress of the Otter Specialist Group is chosen in relation to the OSG's current conservation priorities. The Singapore Zoo's Wildlife Reserves Singapore foundation has agreed to host and partially fund the event. Funds from Fondation Segre will also help Asian students, researchers and VIPs attend the Congress. We secured funding from the Full Circle Foundation to launch a 2-year project in Borneo (Sabah) in 2016 to document the status of the four otter species there which is unknown and develop local outreach programs.

FUTURE GOALS & ACTIVITIES

Goals:

1. Increased otter populations in areas where threats are reduced
2. Eradication of illegal otter trapping, commerce, and conflict
3. Effective otter conservation and monitoring through research, education and public awareness programs

Ongoing Activities:

1. Protect otter species worldwide: conduct status surveys and raise awareness for better otter protection
2. Conserve habitat: develop and promote country-specific human dimensions programs
3. Reduce trade: expand the efforts of the OSG Otter Trade Task Force, review CITES status of Asian otters
4. Build capacity: organize more otter field research and conservation workshops in key areas

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We thank our 280 members worldwide who volunteer their time and effort to advise and participate in otter conservation activities and compile the otter Red List entries.

Our major donors include: The Altman Foundation; Fondation Segre, Wildlife Reserves Singapore Conservation Foundation (WRSCF), Wildlife Reserves Singapore (WRF), the Full Circle Foundation and Amigos Bravos who have funded the 13th International Otter Congress and the activities of the OSG-TRAFFIC Task Force.



Hairy-nosed Otter (*Lutra sumatrana*) © Nicole Dupliax