

Smooth-coated Otter

Lutrogale perspicillata

RED LIST STATUS

VULNERABLE

Mijbil, the otter in “Ring of Bright Water”, was a smooth-coated otter, taken from the wild population in the Mesopotamian marshes and raised as a pet.

ALIAS: Indian smooth-coated otter, Asian otter

PREDATORS: crocodiles, dogs, monitor lizards

THREATS: habitat loss, intensive poaching, fishing nets, pollution, pet trade

SIZE: 106-130 cm (body 65-79 cm, tail 40-50 cm); 7-10 kg

A close cousin to the Asian small-clawed otter, the smooth-coated otter has a large distribution that is slowly but steadily shrinking: its range once spread from the Middle-East to southeast Asia. Its problem is and has always been its biggest asset: a short, smooth, velvety fur, warm chocolate brown on the back and soft grey on the stomach, for which they are often killed and skinned. These otters are mainly nocturnal, although they can be diurnal when undisturbed. Smooth-coated otters form large, vocal, family groups, preying primarily on fish and crustaceans, and occasionally on frogs, crabs, insects and birds. Found mainly in large rivers, peat swamp forests, mangroves and estuaries, they may also use the slow flowing waters typical of rice paddies and floodplains in some regions. The smooth-coated otter needs thick riverside vegetation in which to hide, dig dens and raise cubs. Recently, illegal trapping for the fur and pet trade has taken a heavy toll in many Asian countries in which this species occurs and law enforcement is lacking.