



# Species

ISSUE 64

## 2023 Report of the IUCN Species Survival Commission and Secretariat



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## The IUCN Species Survival Commission (SSC)

The IUCN Species Survival Commission (SSC) is a science-based network of thousands of volunteer experts from almost every country of the world, all working together toward achieving the vision of “a just world that values and conserves nature through positive action to both prevent the loss and aid recovery of the diversity of life on earth.”

Members of SSC belong to one or more of near 200 Specialist Groups, Red List Authorities, Action Partnerships, Task Forces, and Conservation Committees that make up the Network, each focusing on a taxonomic group (plants, fungi, mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, fishes, and invertebrates), national species, or a disciplinary issue, such as sustainable use and livelihoods, translocation of species, wildlife health, climate change, and conservation planning.

Framed by the Species Conservation Cycle, SSC’s major role is to provide information to IUCN on biodiversity conservation, the inherent value of species, their role in ecosystem health and functioning, the provision of ecosystem services, and their support to human livelihoods. This information is fed into the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species.

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### 2021-2025 Species Strategic Plan

The IUCN Species Strategic Plan encompasses the joint work of the IUCN Species Survival Commission and a number of partnerships to achieve more than 2,700 targets proposed by the Network during the 2021-2025 quadrennium.

To accomplish those targets, the Species Conservation Cycle was established, which is the conceptual framework for the Network activities. The Species Conservation Cycle’s main purpose is to guide efforts for valuing and conserving biodiversity through three essential components that are linked to each other:

**ASSESS:** Understand and inform the world about the status and trends of biodiversity.

**PLAN:** Develop collaborative, inclusive and science-based conservation strategies, plans and policies.

**ACT:** Convene and mobilise conservation actions to improve the status of biodiversity.



Their implementation requires two transversal components:

**NETWORK:** Enhance and support our immediate network and alliances to achieve our biodiversity targets.

**COMMUNICATE:** Drive strategic and targeted communications to enhance our conservation impact.

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### SSC Species Report

Annual progress in the implementation of the 2021-2025 Species Strategic Plan is documented in the SSC *Species Report*, which consists of a comprehensive description and analysis of the activities and results generated by the members of the SSC Network and Centers for Species Survival (CSS) each year. Each SSC and CSS group contributes to this document by providing a yearly summarised description of their achievements, which is presented in stand-alone reports.

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## Structure of the IUCN SSC and CSS Stand-alone Reports

Stand-alone reports summarize the activities conducted and results generated by each group member of the SSC and CSS. Following, is the structure of the stand-alone report and the contents under each session.

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### Title of the group

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### Photograph(s) of the Chair/Co-Chairs

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### Group information

Includes names of Chair/Co-Chairs, Vice-Chairs, Deputy Chairs, Red List Authority Coordinators, Program Officers, Species Survival Directors, and Species Survival Officers, their institutional affiliations, number of members and social networks currently active.

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### Logo of the group

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### Mission statement

Includes the mission of the group.

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### Projected impact for the 2021-2025 quadrennium

Includes the description of the impact on species conservation resulting from the implementation of the targets formulated by the group for the 2021-2025 quadrennium.

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### Targets for the 2021-2025 quadrennium

Includes the targets planned by the SSC or CSS group for the 2021-2025 quadrennium ordered alphabetically by component of the Species Conservation Cycle. Each target is labeled with a numerical code (e.g., T-001, T-012) that identifies it in the SSC DATA database and its status for the reported year is indicated (Not initiated, On track or Achieved).

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### Activities and results

Includes the targets for which activities were conducted and results were generated during the reported year, ordered alphabetically, first by component of the Species Conservation Cycle, and second by Activity Category. Description of activities and results includes the indicator that best describes progress, its associated quantitative or qualitative result, and the narrative description of the activity conducted or result obtained. Each activity or result reported is linked to the Key Species Result to which it is mainly associated (e.g., KSR#1, KSR#5).

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### Acknowledgements

Includes the acknowledgements to funding agencies, partners, and persons who contributed to the progress of the targets of the group.

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### Summary of achievements

Summarises information of the group's strategic plan for the quadrennium and progress achieved implementing targets for all the components of the Species Conservation Cycle during the reported year.

Animalia

Fungi

Plantae

National Species

Disciplinary

Action Partnership

Task Force

Red List Authority

Committee

Center for Species Survival

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### Example for the recommended citation:

Duplaix, N. and Loy, A. 2024. 2023 Report of the Otter Specialist Group. In: IUCN SSC and Secretariat. *2023 Report of the IUCN Species Survival Commission and Secretariat*. Gland, Switzerland: IUCN. 14 pp.

# IUCN SSC Otter Specialist Group



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<https://www.himalayanotternetwork.org>

## Mission statement

The Otter Specialist Group (OSG), founded in 1974: (1) provides leadership for the conservation of all 13 Otter species; (2) determines and reviews on a continuing basis the status and needs of Otters, and promotes the implementation of necessary research, conservation and management programmes by appropriate organisations and governments; (3) communicates the status and conservation needs of Otters, and (4) promotes the wise management of Otter species.

## Projected impact 2021–2025

By the end of this quadrennium, we expect to reinforce people's engagement in the conservation of Otters in Asia to reduce conflicts and illegal pet trade. Our focus is also on expanding our presence in Africa and implementing our knowledge of the status and conservation needs of African Otter species, as well as on developing conservation strategies for species hotspots in Southeast Asia and isolated populations in Europe and Asia. We also expect to increase awareness and capacity building of our members through training on conservation planning and human-wildlife coexistence.

## Targets 2021–2025

### ASSESS

**T-014** Ensure affiliation to OSG is mentioned in peer-reviewed papers.  
Status: On track

**T-015** Conduct Red List assessment for the Eurasian Otter (*Lutra lutra*) in Bangladesh, Indonesia, Cambodia, Myanmar, Malaysia, Lebanon, Borneo, Indonesia, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakstan, Azerbaijan, Syria, Mongolia, Jordan, Iran and Japan.  
Status: On track

**T-016** Conduct Red List assessment for the Eurasian Otter in Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia.  
Status: On track

**T-017** Conduct Red List assessment for the Eurasian Otter in non-EU European countries.  
Status: On track

**T-018** Assess impact of hunting on North American River Otter (*Lontra canadensis*) in the US.  
Status: On track

**T-019** Assess impact of hunting on Smooth-coated Otter (*Lutrogale perspicillata*) in Iraq.  
Status: On track

**T-020** Assess impact of hunting on Smooth-coated Otter in the Russian Federation.  
Status: Not initiated

**T-021** Circulate a questionnaire to members on climate change impacts.  
Status: On track

**T-022** Complete Red List assessment of all 13 Otter species.  
Status: Achieved

**T-023** Make Red List training mandatory for assessors and the management team.  
Status: On track

**T-024** Assess threats to Otter species in Sikkim, India and other key areas in the Himalayan region.  
Status: On track

**T-039** Complete Green Status assessment for all species.  
Status: On track

**T-043** Launch two OSG research projects in South Africa, Uganda and Benin.  
Status: Achieved

**T-056** Promote research on emerging threats in freshwater habitats.  
Status: On track

### PLAN

**T-027** Expand Sea Otter (*Enhydra lutris*) plan.  
Status: On track

**T-028** Develop the Himalayan Otter Conservation Strategy.  
Status: On track

**T-029** Develop an action plan for endangered and/or isolated populations of Eurasian Otter.  
Status: On track



North American River Otter (*Lontra canadensis*)  
Photo: M. L. Haring

**T-030** Develop an action plan for endangered and/or isolated populations of Eurasian Otter in Africa.

Status: Not initiated

**T-031** Survey conservation plans already planned.

Status: On track

**T-032** Ensure every threatened species has a plan.

Status: On track

**T-034** Conduct a funding search for the 'Otters of Nepal' book for community conservation.

Status: Achieved

**T-035** Plan a Sea Otter and River Otter conservation meeting.

Status: Achieved

**T-037** Develop a conservation strategy for the Eurasian Otter in the Alps.

Status: On track

**T-038** Use GSP guidelines on IUCN engagement in global policies – Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), CITES, Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) – to help OSG members becoming engaged in national policies.

Status: On track

**T-040** Develop conservation plans for critical areas: Borneo as species hotspot.

Status: On track

**T-041** Develop conservation plans for critical areas: Sub-Saharan Africa.

Status: On track

**T-057** Develop a Nepal Otter Action Plan.

Status: On track

**T-064** Produce a mini-version of the World Otter Conservation Strategy for broader distribution.

Status: Not initiated

**T-065** Write and distribute How to Save an Otter conservation planning methodology book.

Status: On track

#### **ACT**

**T-025** Enact Citizen Science initiatives in Asia.

Status: On track

**T-026** Enact Citizen Science initiatives in Africa.

Status: On track

**T-042** Reschedule meeting in Singapore to 2025 to set up a wildlife trade monitoring plan: local actions to enhance Otter conservation in key Otter trade source and consumer countries.

Status: On track

**T-044** Develop eDNA probes for freshwater Otter species.

Status: On track

**T-045** Develop a standard survey protocol and guidelines for Asian species.

Status: On track

**T-046** Develop a standard survey protocol and guidelines for African species.

Status: On track

**T-047** Test and implement eDNA monitoring of Eurasian Otter (Himalaya, India, Nepal, Italy).

Status: Achieved

**T-048** Prepare background materials for proposal to list Hairy-nosed Otter (*Lutra sumatrana*) on CITES Appendix I.

Status: Achieved

**T-049** Develop Google Map of OSG research and conservation actions worldwide.

Status: On track

**T-050** Sustain and expand the Himalayan Otter Network.

Status: On track

**T-051** Expand the Lighthouse project experience to hotspot critical areas.

Status: On track

**T-052** Promote an African Otter Network.

Status: On track

**T-053** Promote an Alpine Otter Network.

Status: On track

**T-054** Prepare an updated version of the 1983 CITES Otter identification manual.

Status: Not initiated

**T-055** Control pet trade for Asian Small-clawed Otter (*Aonyx cinereus*) and Smooth-coated Otter.

Status: On track

**T-071** Prepare new guidelines for Otters in captivity.

Status: On track

**T-074** Sustain Giant Otter conservation.

Status: Achieved

#### **NETWORK**

**T-001** Promote funding of projects in Africa.

Status: On track

**T-002** Promote funding of projects on pet trade in Asia (Indonesia, China, India, Nepal).

Status: On track

**T-003** Trace distribution of partnerships across assess, plan, act, network and communicate.

Status: On track

**T-004** OSG Otter Partners: extend participation in OSG activities to otter supporters and NGOs. Create guidelines for this new form of OSG membership.

Status: On track

**T-005** Establish in-kind partnerships with local governments and NGOs.

Status: On track

**T-006** Carry out members survey.

Status: On track

**T-007** Identify gaps in OSG skills.

Status: On track

**T-008** Strengthen collaboration with other IUCN components (IUCN National Committees, Freshwater Conservation Committee, Climate Change Specialist Group, Conservation Planning Specialist Group).

Status: Achieved

**T-009** Survey and map OSG projects.

Status: On track

**T-010** Support European Union-funded projects for Otters.

Status: Not initiated

**T-011** Involve research institutions, associations, zoos, NGOs, national parks and Veterinarian Health Service in roadkill collection and necropsies.

Status: On track

**T-012** Train in conservation planning.

Status: On track

**T-013** Document on threats to freshwater species.

Status: On track

**T-036** Expand involvement with Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA), European Association of Zoos and Aquaria (EAZA), World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (WAZA) and One Plan approach.

Status: On track

**T-068** Build capacity of people involved in projects in Africa.

Status: On track

**T-076** Create an Otter Youth Circle and promote capacity building within their members.

Status: Achieved

#### **COMMUNICATE**

**T-058** Expand World Otter Day community celebrations on multimedia.

Status: On track

**T-059** Expand World Otter Day community celebrations in Asia.

Status: On track

**T-060** Expand World Otter Day community celebrations in North America and Canada.

Status: On track

**T-061** Expand World Otter Day community celebrations in Central and South America.

Status: On track

**T-062** Expand World Otter Day community celebrations in Europe.

Status: On track

**T-063** Giant Otter (*Pteronura brasiliensis*) day village celebrations in Peru and Brazil.

Status: Achieved

**T-066** Expand available OSG otter educational materials to new countries and languages.

Status: On track

**T-067** Strengthen the collaboration with IUCN One Programme and work more closely with the Commission on Education and Communication.

Status: Achieved

**T-069** Hold the XVth International Otter Congress.

Status: Achieved

**T-070** Establish an OSG Newsletter.

Status: Achieved

**T-072** Publish OSG Bulletin regularly.

Status: Achieved

**T-073** Organize the 1st Eurasian Otter Workshop.

Status: Achieved

**T-075** Celebrate 50th OSG anniversary (1974-2024).

Status: On track

**T-077** Organize the 2nd Eurasian Otter Workshop.

Status: On track

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### **Activities and results 2023**

#### **ASSESS**

##### **Green List**

**T-039 Complete Green Status assessment for all species.** (KSR 6)

Number of new Green Status of Species assessments completed: 2

Result description: The assessment for the Sea otter was completed and is under revision by the Green Status Task Force. Assessment for the Neotropical Otter (*Lontra longicaudis*) is completed and is waiting for revision by the Green Status Task Force. Smooth-coated Otter, African Clawless Otter (*Aonyx capensis*) and Hairy-nosed Otter assessments have been initiated. Finally, the assessment of the North American River Otter and Southern River Otter (*Lontra provocax*) will be initiated soon.

##### **Red List**

**T-015 Conduct Red List assessment for the Eurasian Otter (*L. lutra*) in Bangladesh, Indonesia, Cambodia, Myanmar, Malaysia, Lebanon, Borneo, Indonesia, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Syria, Mongolia, Jordan, Iran and Japan.** (KSR 7)

Number of countries that have done National Red List Index (NRLI) or nationally disaggregated global RLI: 4

Result description: East Asia coordinator B. Chan reported that the Eurasian Otter population in China is slowly expanding along the



Marine Otter (*Lontra felina*)  
Photo: Kevin Schaffer

eastern China coast, with a project monitoring seven individuals in the surroundings of Hong Kong. Simultaneously, a paper detailing 130 years of Otters in Hong Kong has been submitted to *Oryx*. Meanwhile, species coordinator Alexsey Oleynikov analysed the population dynamics and density of otters and American Minks (*Neovison vison*) in the Middle Sikhote-Alin region in Kazakhstan, examining their spatial distribution during the winter period and the composition of groups based on sex and age. Despite past occurrences, survey results showed no Otter signs in the Irtysh River flowing in the Pavlodar region, while Otter signs were found in the Kazakh section of the Black Irtysh River above Lake Zaysan, revealing signs of environmental degradation such as unusually low water levels during spring floods, high turbidity, foam patches, and substantial plastic waste along the banks. Planned analyses of Otter faeces for heavy metals will provide data for pollution assessment. Additionally, Alexsey Oleynikov will author an essay on the Otter for the Mammal Atlas

of the European Part of Russia, and another essay on the status of the Eurasian Otter in Central Asia is set to be produced by him for the Red Book of Kazakhstan.

**T-017 Conduct Red List assessment for the Eurasian Otter in non-EU European countries. (KSR 6)**

Number of new national Red List assessments published: 0

Result description: A session will be dedicated to the new Red List assessment at the next Eurasian Otter Workshop that will be held in Taiwan in 2025.

**T-024 Assess threats to Otter species in Sikkim, India and other key areas in the Himalayan region. (KSR 6)**

Number of threats identified and assessed: 0

Result description: There is by far now more understanding about the conditions in Nepal than anywhere else, although there is currently a reconnaissance survey, awareness program and collaboration with government authorities in Arunachal Pradesh. In the lowlands of the mountain range, which goes down to about 100 or 200 m in all countries,

and where Smooth-coated Otters predominate, and to a lesser extent, Small-clawed Otters, by far the most significant threat is habitat destruction by humans. Activities include alteration of vegetation, diversion of water for agriculture, grazing cattle, presence of dogs, pollution from industrial sources and human sewage, bankside road construction, dredging for sand and gravel, and overexploitation of fish. Poaching seems to be in decline and not significant (except perhaps in Arunachal Pradesh). At higher elevations, in the foothills and low mountains, where mainly Eurasian Otters are present, again, it is human disturbance, although possibly at a somewhat lower level, but accelerating. The other significant factor is the presence and construction of new hydroelectric generation dams, which significantly alter the potential for successful hunting of prey by otters. Many new dams are planned across the Himalayan rivers. The condition that threatens otters at all elevational levels is climate change, including the outcomes of severe flooding, higher air



and water temperatures, and after a temporary increase in volume, a severe reduction of water levels in rivers and wetlands. The [Himalayan Otter Network](#) was established in 2016 to foster a partnership connecting conservationists and researchers across the Himalayan region in order to strengthen the protection of otters living in the rivers and wetlands of this spectacular landscape.

#### Research activities

##### **T-014 Ensure affiliation to OSG is mentioned in peer-reviewed papers.** (KSR 5)

Number of scientific publications about species research that acknowledge SSC affiliation: 1

Result description: Affiliation to the Otter SG mentioned in the following paper: Jamwal, PS *et al.* (2023). 'Environmental DNA revealed high accuracy in detection of the Eurasian Otter in Himalaya'. *Aquatic Conservation: Marine and Freshwater Ecosystems*.

##### **T-021 Circulate a questionnaire to members on climate change impacts.** (KSR 6)

Number of new climate change vulnerability assessments completed: 1

Result description: A members survey on evidence of extreme events (droughts and

floodings) impacts on otters is planned for 2024, with support and advice from the SSC Climate Change Task Force.

##### **T-023 Make Red List training mandatory for assessors and the management team.** (KSR 6)

Number of species that have been assessed through the different tools: 1

Result description: The Co-Chair Anna Loy attended a webinar on October, 23 dedicated to the new SIS platform sRedList for species assessments. Novelties and instructions were shared with OSG members. A webinar by the Red List Working Group dedicated to Otter SG species coordinators is planned for 2024.

##### **T-043 Launch two OSG research projects in South Africa, Uganda and Benin.** (KSR 5)

Number of research projects completed or supported by SSC members per taxonomic group and region: 2

Result description: Projects in Uganda and Benin have been completed.

##### **T-056 Promote research on emerging threats in freshwater habitats.** (KSR 5)

Number of scientific publications about species research that acknowledge SSC affiliation: 3

Result description: Eurasian Otter Coordinator Anna Roos and other OSG members are investigating new emerging freshwater pollutants and pathogens and their possible impacts on otters. Here following are some published papers: (1) Rohner, S, *et al.* (2023). "Back from exile? First records of Chewing Lice (*Lutridia exilis*; Ischnocera; Mallophaga) in growing Eurasian Otter (*L. lutra*) populations from northern Germany". *Pathogens*, 12(4), 587; (2) Rohner, S, *et al.* (2023). "Present in the Aquatic Environment, Unclear Evidence in Top Predators—The Unknown Effects of Anti-Seizure Medication on Eurasian Otters (*L. lutra*) from Northern Germany". *Toxics*, 11(4), 338. Otter post-mortem observatories have been established in the UK ([Cardiff](#)), Sweden, and Italy. The illegal otter pet trade is an emerging threat to Asian species, especially Asian Small-clawed Otter (*A. cinereus*) and Smooth-coated Otter (*L. perspicillata*). A study of otter trade in Vietnam revealed a persistent illegal trade of otters (Gomez, L, and Nguyen, MD. (2023). "A rapid assessment of the illegal otter trade in Vietnam". *European Journal of Wildlife Research*, 69(4), 77. 3).

## PLAN

### Planning

#### **T-027 Expand Sea Otter (*E. lutris*) plan.**

(KSR 8)

Number of conservation plans/strategies developed: 1

Result description: In March 16-19, 2023 the Seattle Aquarium hosted the 13<sup>th</sup> biennial Sea Otter Conservation Workshop. It was the first time it was held in person since 2019. There were over 160 participants and 68 talks on sea otter biology, ecology, husbandry, advocacy and conservation.

#### **T-028 Develop the Himalayan Otter Conservation Strategy.**

(KSR 8)  
Number of conservation plans/strategies developed: 1

Result description: A study was run on the presence and distribution of Smooth-coated Otters in the western branch of the Karnali River, along with distribution relation to habitat variables, as a contribution to the conservation strategy for the species in Nepal. The study has been published in the *OSG Bulletin*: Kathariya, R., et al. (2023). "Effects of Habitat Variables on the Distribution of Smooth-Coated Otters (*L. perspicillata*) along the Kauriala Branch of the Karnali River, Nepal". *IUCN Otter Spec. Group Bull.* 40 (3): 165 – 174.

#### **T-029 Develop an action plan for endangered and/or isolated populations of Eurasian Otter.**

(KSR 8)  
Number of conservation plans/strategies developed: 1

Result description: The 2nd Eurasian Otter Workshop is planned in Taiwan in 2025. The meeting will likely contribute to assessing

the status and conservation needs for isolated populations of *L. lutra*, especially in Asia.

#### **T-031 Survey conservation plans already planned.**

(KSR 8)  
Number of conservation plans/strategies updated: 1

Result description: A conservation project on the Giant Otter is run by the OSG species coordinator Caroline Leuchtenberg in Perú in collaboration between the San Diego Zoo Institute for Conservation Research and WildCRU. Additional partners are the Peruvian National Parks Authority (SERNANP), the Frankfurt Zoological Society and SePeru, a non-governmental organization whose mission is developing sustainable activities among local communities. A Reintroduction program for Giant Otters is run in the Ibera National Park in Argentina in collaboration with Rewilding Argentina "Projecto Ariranhas" has been founded to strengthen the conservation of the Giant Otter and the ecosystem, seeking to improve human coexistence with the species and the engagement of stakeholders in conservation actions and decisions.

#### **T-034 Conduct a funding search for the 'Otters of Nepal' book for community conservation.**

(KSR 8)  
Number of conservation plans/strategies developed: 0

Result description: In 2023, a large grant was obtained from WWF for Nepal's otters conservation.

#### **T-035 Plan a Sea Otter and River Otter conservation meeting.**

(KSR 8)  
Number of conservation plans/strategies developed: 1

Result description: In March 16-19, 2023, the Seattle Aquarium hosted the 13<sup>th</sup> biennial Sea Otter Conservation Workshop. Launched in 1999 it was our 24<sup>th</sup> year hosting the workshop and the first time it was held in person since 2019. There were over 160 participants and 68 talks on Sea Otter biology, ecology, husbandry, advocacy, and conservation. This was the first time we invited the North American River Otter community to join us to share conservation challenges and successes. The conference also hosted break hour meetings for the Department of the Interior and two non-profits-Defenders of Wildlife and the Elakha Alliance — both planning for eventual reintroductions of Sea Otters in both Oregon and California.

#### **T-040 Develop conservation plans for critical areas: Borneo as species hotspot.**

(KSR 8)  
Number of conservation plans/strategies developed: 0

Result description: Article on otters in Borneo has been submitted to *OSG Bulletin* as part of planning process.

#### **T-041 Develop conservation plans for critical areas: Sub-Saharan Africa.**

(KSR 8)  
Number of conservation plans/strategies developed: 1

Result description: The OSG is contributing to the [African Otter Network](#) (AON). The AON aims at combining efforts to ensure African otters are well known and conserved in clean and thriving freshwater ecosystems. The Instagram page of AON was created in May 2023. AON met online on June 1, 2023, reporting preliminary

results from the survey in Lake Mutanda and Lake Bunioni in Uganda, updating on people working on otters in South Africa, reporting a new otter location in Morocco, and announcing an article by Jan Reed Smith on the literature on African otters. The OSG also funded surveys and local community engagement in Benin (run by OSG Africa coordinator Chabi Djagoun), and Uganda (run by South Asia coordinator Katrina Fernandez). Chabi Djagoun attended the 31st International Congress for Conservation Biology on 23-27 July in Rwanda and gave a talk on “Otter Conservation Strategies in Africa: From Community-Based Management to Protected Areas”, and finally, a draft of the African Otter Conservation Strategy was released in May 2023.

**T-057 Develop a Nepal Otter Action Plan.** (KSR 8)

Number of conservation plans/strategies developed: 0

Result description: A grant from the Darwin Initiative will foster the release of a National Otter Conservation Strategy in Nepal in collaboration with WWF.

**T-065 Write and distribute How to Save an Otter conservation planning methodology book.** (KSR 8)

Number of technical documents to support the development of conservation plans/strategies: 1

Result description: A Zoom webinar on otter releases and re-introductions was held on the 7th of March, 2023 to discuss the preparation of two proposed new OSG documents: (1) “Guidelines on Otter Translocations and Re-introductions” led by Jason Palmer. A document that will include captive management, releases and follow-up and monitoring. Jason Palmer will take the lead, working with others; (2) “History of Otter Re-introductions and Translocations”. This document will review the reports, successes and failures of historical translocations of

Sea Otters, North American River Otters, Giant Otters, Eurasian Otters and more recently, Short-clawed Otters. Guidelines will refer to the Global Translocation Perspectives Document prepared and will ask advice from the SSC Conservation and Translocation Specialist Group.

**Policy**

**T-037 Develop a conservation strategy for the Eurasian Otter in the Alps.** (KSR 9)

Number of policies where SSC members provided technical input: 1

Result description: The ‘LutrAlp’ online meeting convened on March 9, 2023, was organised by Caterina Ferrari from the Gran Paradiso National Park in Italy and drew 31 participants from five countries (Italy, France, Switzerland, Austria and Germany) representing various institutions including NP Gran Paradiso, NP Adamello-Brenta, Pro Lutra, Alka Foundation, ASTERS, Alpi Marittima Protected Area, Villaggio degli Orsi, Swiss Info Fauna, Liguria Regional Administration, Bolzano Province Administration, University of Milan, University of Molise, University of Udine, IUCN Otter Specialist Group, Oikos, Lutra Otter National Plan France, LPO Auvergne Rhône-Alpes, LPO Provence-Alpes-Côte d’Azur, Parco Mont Avic, and ALPARC. Discussions centred on several key points: (1) The expansion of Otters in the Alps, aiming to establish an online, public map of Otter occurrences in the Alpine region utilising already published data from France and Switzerland, with plans for an operative meeting for interested contributors; (2) The creation of a dataset of genetic data for Alpine Otters, to be shared among labs specializing in Otters, to be further discussed with a select group of experts; (3) The establishment of a database documenting conflicts related to Otters, such as those arising in aquaculture, fisheries, and fish farms; (4) The development of guidelines for Otter monitoring in the Alps, with progress already made by the Italian team pending the finalisation of standardised bridges. Additionally, there was an agreement on

the necessity to initiate a communication strategy regarding otter presence and dispersal in the Alpine region, alongside discussions on funding strategies.

**ACT**

**Conservation actions**

**T-026 Enact Citizen Science initiatives in Africa.** (KSR 10)

Number of areas under management for the species or group of species: 1

Result description: Continental coordinator Chabi Djagoun joined the ICCB Congress in Kigali, Rwanda supported by the Otter Specialist Group. He presented the talk ‘Otter Conservation Strategies in Africa: From Community-based Management to Protected Areas’. During the conference he engaged many African attendees, discussing OSG and disseminating information about the African Otter Network by distributing postal cards and brochures. About 50 people signed and left their email for future involvement in OSG activities, including 34 attendees from 11 African countries.

**T-050 Sustain and expand the Himalayan Otter Network.** (KSR 10)

Number of threatened species benefiting from *in situ* conservation action: 2

Result description: In 2023, Pushpinder Singh Jamwal and Sanjan Thapa were appointed as new Himalayan Otter Network coordinators. Emerging initiatives, possibly from Nepal, will be focused on eDNA surveys. The Darwin Initiative funded a three-year project in Nepal to WWF/UK and WWF/Nepal. The project will be implemented in the Lower Karnali Watershed in Western Nepal, where the traditional livelihoods of Tharu and Sonaha communities are threatened by intensive fishing practices and river aggregate mining. The project will develop an inclusive and climate-smart National Otter Conservation Strategy for Nepal through a series of consultation workshops and multi-stakeholder meetings with federal, provincial and local governments, conservation organisations,



Neotropical Otter (*Lontra longicaudis*)  
Photo: Caroline Leuchtenberger

and local communities. Bhutan also has an ambitious national survey and is looking for funding. Surveys were performed in three Himalayas states in India—Ladakh, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh.

**T-055 Control pet trade for Asian Small-clawed Otter (*A. cinereus*) and Smooth-coated Otter.** (KSR 10)

Number of threatened species benefiting from *in situ* conservation action: 2

Result description: A survey on pet trade of *A. cinereus* revealed Japan as a major market for otters (publication: Gomez, L, and Shepherd, CR. (2019). “Stronger international regulations and increased enforcement effort is needed to end the illegal trade in otters in Asia”. *IUCN Otter Spec. Group Bull.*, 36(2), 71-76); a study on otter trade in Vietnam revealed a persistent illegal trade of otters, with 85 live otters and four dead otters confiscated between 2018 and 2021. All seizures involving otters in Vietnam were of live animals, the majority of which were small-clawed otters (publication: Gomez, L, and Nguyen, MD. (2023). “A rapid assessment of the illegal otter trade in Vietnam”. *European Journal of Wildlife Research*, 69(4), 77). Since the opening of the first cat cafe in Taiwan in 1998, the popularity of animal cafes has grown across Asia, with the Asian Small Clawed Otter as among the most traded species (McMillan, SE, *et al.* (2021). “Exotic animal cafes are increasingly home to threatened biodiversity”. *Conservation Letters*, 14(1), e12760)

**T-071 Prepare new guidelines for Otters in captivity.** (KSR 10)

Number of technical documents provided to support conservation actions: 0

Result description: The OSG Otters in Zoos Task Force is reviewing the guidelines for captive otters and contacting some *in situ* people for help. A dedicated page is devoted to otters in zoos in the [OSG website](#).

**T-074 Sustain Giant Otter conservation.** (KSR 10)

Number of technical documents provided to support conservation actions: 4

Result description: In 2023, four technical documents to support conservation actions were developed: (1) Actions regarding the *ex situ* population were included in the Giant Otter Project (Projecto Arrhianas) in Brazil. The Giant Otter Project was created in 2019 by the OSG species representative Caroline Leuchtenberger, as a result of studies and conservation actions with the species conducted for almost two decades in the Brazilian Pantanal. In 2020 Caroline and her team founded the Association “Giant Otter Conservation Fund”. In Brazil, we are working with the AZAB and the Brazilian Environmental Agency to establish an *ex situ* program for the Giant Otter; (2) The “Otter Week” was celebrated at the end of May 2023 at the São Paulo Aquarium, it was a great experience and we are already planning how to expand this event next year to other zoos; (3) The Giant Otter species coordinator Caroline Leuchtenberg joined the IUCN Ecotourism Sanctuary Project; and (4) The *Giant Otter newsletter* was released on February 2023.

**Technical advice**

**T-044 Develop eDNA probes for freshwater Otter species.** (KSR 10)

Number of technical consultations provided to support conservation actions: 3

Result description: (1) A toolkit was derived from two genes of the mitochondrial genome, cytochrome b and NADH5 for the Asian Small-clawed Otter, the Smooth-coated Otter, and the Hairy-nosed Otter was developed by Kalus Koepfly that could be easily modified and adapted for eDNA, especially if used to assay the presence/absence of different species in an area or region; (2) An eDNA assay has been developed for North American River Otter: Padgett-Stewart, TM, *et al.* (2016). “An eDNA assay for river otter detection: a tool for surveying a semi-aquatic mammal”. *Conservation Genetics Resources*, 8(1), 5-7. available [here](#); (3) A species-specific probe for eDNA detection of Smooth-coated Otter has been designed and tested in a mangrove system in Goa, India. Results were published in the *OSG Bulletin*: Duke, AC and Goldberg, CS. (2022). “Investigating the Distribution of the *L. perspicillata* using Environmental DNA: Preliminary Results”. *IUCN Otter Spec. Group Bull.*, 39 (2): 110 – 120.

**T-045 Develop a standard survey protocol and guidelines for Asian species.** (KSR 10)

Number of technical consultations provided to support conservation actions: 1

Result description: In 2023, Nepal completed a survey protocol. Other countries to follow.



Giant Otter (*Pteronura brasiliensis*)  
Photo: Fernando Trujillo

**T-047 Test and implement eDNA monitoring of Eurasian Otter (Himalaya, India, Nepal, Italy).** (KSR 10)

Number of technical consultations provided to support conservation actions: 1

Result description: A multispecies eDNA survey in various freshwater bodies in central Italy confirmed the accuracy of eDNA detection of otters, revealing new occurrences of the species in Central Italy. Results will be presented at the next European Congress of Conservation Biology on June 20-23, 2024 in Italy. New Himalayan Otter Network coordinator Pushpinder S. Jamwal is organizing a meeting on eDNA monitoring for otters in Himalaya.

**T-052 Promote an African Otter Network.** (KSR 10)

Number of technical consultations provided to support conservation actions: 1

Result description: The project in the five study areas in Uganda continued with several activities, including the analysis of data collected during the 2022 survey and the signing of an agreement with Makerere University in March 2023. Additionally, a poster featuring the three African species has been created for accessibility to local communities, schools, tourist businesses, cafes, restaurants and other suitable locations. Capacity building and outreach initiatives are planned at each project site, encompassing public engagements, talks, presentations, distribution of outreach materials and showcasing camera trap images and videos. School presentations and informal meetings, conducted in the local language of the study areas, aim to disseminate information on Otter behaviour and their ecological significance. Survey results from Lake Mutanda and Lake Bunyonyi yielded 16 and 17 direct observations of Spotted-necked Otters (*Hydrichthys maculicollis*) respectively. At Lake Mutanda, four camera traps were deployed across eight locations over two weeks, resulting in 13 camera trap nights and 17 recorded videos of Spotted-necked Otters. Individual

Otters were identified based on neck spots, with pictures added to a library for future population counts. At Lake Bunyonyi, two camera traps were placed at different locations for a total of 10 camera trap nights, capturing 14 videos of Spotted-necked Otters.

**T-053 Promote an Alpine Otter Network.** (KSR 10)

Number of technical consultations provided to support conservation actions: 1

Result description: An online meeting was organized on November 11, 2023, by Caterina Ferrari, and was attended by 19 representatives from four Alpine countries (Switzerland, Austria, France, and Italy) and the Alpine National Park network ALPAC. Attendees agreed to share published and old data of otter occurrences on a map, to be presented and discussed at a meeting planned for January 2024. Also, a draft of the agreement among Lutra Alps partners will be prepared and shared. The mission of Lutra Alp was also agreed upon as “an Alpine group able to work on the long term, to use ‘old’ and future data provided by all partners about otter to suggest, take and propose actions toward monitoring, conflicts resolution, etc.”. A monitoring protocol for the Eurasian Otter in the Alps was discussed and shared by an Italian regional representative in the Regional survey promoted by WWF Italia in 2022-2023.

**NETWORK Agreements**

**T-004 OSG Otter Partners: extend participation in OSG activities to otter supporters and NGOs. Create guidelines for this new form of OSG membership.** (KSR 4)

Number and type of stakeholders: 4

Result description: In 2023, the OSG reports activities from partners as follows: (1) Fundacion Rewilding Argentina is supporting an experimental reintroduction of the Giant Otter in the Ibera Park (Corrientes, Argentina), coordinated by the species coordinator Caroline Leuchtenberg;

(2) The OSG species coordinator Caroline Leuchtenberg and OSG member Lorenzo Quaglietta were invited to teach in the workshop organized by Woo Chee Yong on Otter Radio-Telemetry, held in Malaysia November 17th and 26th 2023; (3) WWF Italia funded a survey in all regions where otters were declared extinct in Italy in the last century, coordinated by OSG Co-Chair Anna Loy. Results will be presented on World Otter Day in May 2024; (4) Seattle Aquarium hosted the XIII Sae Otter Conservation Workshop organized by the Sea Otter OSG coordinator Shawn Larson on March 17-19, 2023. The Conference was opened to the extended North American River Otter community and joined by the OSG species coordinator Tom Serfass. The meeting also hosted break out meetings for the Department of the Interior and two non-profits-Defenders of Wildlife and the Elakha Alliance-both planning for eventual reintroductions of sea otters in Oregon and California.

**Capacity building**

**T-068 Build capacity of people involved in projects in Africa.** (KSR 2)

Number of people trained in conservation action: 1

Result description: The OSG funded the participation of the African coordinator to the International Congress of Conservation Biology at Kigali, Rwanda, July 23-27, 2023, to disseminate knowledge about Otters and promote engagement of African researchers in Otter monitoring and conservation. The continental coordinator gave an oral talk ‘Otter Conservation Strategies in Africa: From Community-Based Management to Protected Areas’ and participated in the Species Survival Commission meeting, discussing strategies to strengthen the SSC membership, especially in regions with limited representation, including Africa. He disseminated information about the African Otter Network and contacted 35 attendees from 10 African countries interested in joining the Otter Specialist Group.

## Membership

### **T-009 Survey and map OSG projects.** (KSR 2)

Number of SSC members recruited: 0

Result description: Projects survey and mapping was initiated and is still ongoing.

### **T-076 Create an Otter Youth Circle and promote capacity building within their members.** (KSR 2)

Number of SSC members recruited: 5

Result description: The Otter Youth Circle was created on July 2023; an email for the Otter Youth Circle was set to create a safe and efficient communication channel. A [sub-page within the OSG's website](#) has been dedicated to the Otter Youth Circle with contacts and resources that will be freely available to the general public. The Otter Youth Circle's efforts were promoted through OSG social media channels (Facebook, Instagram, mailing list, newsletter) to encourage participation, and in the summer of 2023, a survey was sent out to all young OSG members. Results allowed identify activities that would be of interest for the young members (under 35 years old): training, events and talks.

## Synergy

### **T-001 Promote funding of projects in Africa.** (KSR 1)

Number of 'funding' partners established and maintained: 1

Result description: OSG supported the participation of the OSG Continental Coordinator for Africa Chabi Djaoun at the International Congress in Conservation Biology held in Kigali, Rwanda on 23-27 July 2023, where he gave a talk "Otter Conservation Strategies in Africa: From Community-Based Management to Protected Areas".

### **T-003 Trace distribution of partnerships across assess, plan, act, network and communicate.** (KSR 1)

Number of 'in-kind' partnerships established and maintained: 3

Result description: Continental and Species Coordinators organized meetings in North and South America, Asia, as well as Africa and Europe. The *Giant Otter newsletter* was released in February 2023.

### **T-007 Identify gaps in OSG skills.** (KSR 1)

Number of 'in-kind' partnerships established and maintained: 1

Result description: At the 15th OSG International Otter Congress young OSG members had a lack of participation. In 2023 OSG created the Otter Youth Circle to promote participation and capacity building for younger members.

### **T-008 Strengthen collaboration with other IUCN components (IUCN National Committees, Freshwater Conservation Committee, Climate Change Specialist Group, Conservation Planning Specialist Group).** (KSR 3)

Proportion of SSC groups that advance their targets through collaborations with other IUCN components: 2

Result description: OSG Co-Chairs and some OSG members joined the webinar organized by the Indianapolis Global Center for Species in June 2023 to answer questions about the Survival Saving Species Challenge investment to change the decline of a single species. The goal of the award is to support a conservation project in its efforts to improve the existing status of a threatened species to its next best designation, putting it on the path to recovery. A member survey on climate change impacts on otters is planned for 2024 with support and advice from the SSC Climate Change Task Force. The OSG Co-Chair Anna Loy and OSG member Andreas Kranz joined and gave talks at the IUCN Human-Wildlife Conflict and Coexistence Conference held in Oxford, UK from March 30 to April 01, 2023. Contacts for future collaboration were made with coordinator Laura Perry of the newly established IUCN SSC Task Force CEC Behaviour Change and with Jamie Copsey of the IUCN SSC Conservation Planning SG.

### **T-011 Involve research institutions, associations, zoos, NGOs, national parks and Veterinarian Health Service in roadkill collection and necropsies.** (KSR 4)

Number of institutions and stakeholder involved: 1

Result description: The Italian National Park Abruzzo, Lazio and Molise funded a non-invasive genetic sampling of the Eurasian Otter population living in the Park, and a survey at the range boundary of the species in South-Central Italy. The Regional administration of Latium EU PSR funded a project on eDNA otter survey in some river basins of central Italy. A Network of Veterinary National Service, Governmental Health Service, University of Molise, and Forestry National Service established in 2021 is still operating in recording, collecting and analysing otter carcasses from road and illegal killing in Italy. Records are reported on a [map](#) managed by Anna Loy, Laura Bonesi and Simone Giovacchini. Cardiff University has an 'Otter Project' run by OSG member Elisabeth Chadwick aimed at collecting and analysing otter carcasses found across the UK.

### **T-036 Expand involvement with Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA), European Association of Zoos and Aquaria (EAZA), World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (WAZA) and One Plan approach.** (KSR 3)

Involvement with AZA, EAZA, WAZA, and One Plan: 2

Result description: The Co-Chair Nicole Duplax attended the 78th WAZA annual Conference in Sand Diego on 8-10 October 2023 and gave a talk at the IUCN CPSG meeting about otter conservation planning successes. Also, a new version of Guidelines for otters in captivity is being prepared by the OSG Otter in Zoos Task Force, and the Guidelines on Otter Rehabilitation, Translocations and Re-introductions are planned and will be prepared with advice from the SSC Conservation and Translocation Specialist Group.



Hairy-nosed Otter (*Lutra sumatrana*)  
Photo: Nicole Duplaix

## COMMUNICATE Communication

### T-058 Expand World Otter Day community celebrations on multimedia. (KSR 13)

Number of digital communication outputs developed in relation to specific taxonomic groups: 1

Result description: We have now about 24 countries and every year more are added. The OSG provides assistance with free publications and posters to new countries every year.

### T-059 Expand World Otter Day community celebrations in Asia. (KSR 13)

Number of digital communication outputs developed in relation to specific taxonomic groups: 2

Result description: The OSG websites host the OtterEd project offering a wide variety of [educational material](#) for each of the world's 13 species of otter, this material can be downloaded and used for the World Otter Day initiatives. Material has been already translated into Vietnamese, Russian, and Chinese, and is currently being translated into Malaysian and Turkish.

### T-060 Expand World Otter Day community celebrations in North America and Canada. (KSR 13)

Number of digital communication outputs developed in relation to specific taxonomic groups: 1

Result description: The OSG websites host the OtterEd project offering a wide variety of [educational material](#) for each of the world's 13 species of otter, this material can be downloaded and used for the World Otter Day initiatives. North American River Otter is under the Otter Education Advisory Group supported by the Association of Zoos

and Aquariums Conservation Education Committee and associated with the AZA Small Carnivore Taxon Advisory Group.

### T-062 Expand World Otter Day community celebrations in Europe. (KSR 13)

Number of digital communication outputs developed in relation to specific taxonomic groups: 1

Result description: The OSG websites host the OtterEd project offering a wide variety of [educational material](#) for each of the world's 13 species of otter, this material can be downloaded and used for the World Otter Day initiatives. Specific material has been dedicated to the Eurasian Otter, and translated into French, German and Italian.

### T-066 Expand available OSG otter educational materials to new countries and languages. (KSR 13)

Number of digital communication outputs developed in relation to specific taxonomic groups: 1

Result description: The OSG websites host the OtterEd project offering a wide variety of [educational material](#) for each of the world's 13 species of otter, this material can be downloaded and used for the World Otter Day initiatives. Four species (*L. canadensis*, *A. cinereus*, *P. brasiliensis*, and *H. maculicollis*) are under the Otter Education Advisory Group, supported by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums Conservation Education Committee and associated with the AZA Small Carnivore Taxon Advisory Group. OtterEd is now hosting all the Otter Education Advisory Group material. Material is available in English, Chinese, Vietnamese, Russian, French, Spanish, Swahili, Italian, Hebrew, and German, and is being translated into Malaysian and Turkish. Dedicated material to be used in World Otter Day is available for each species and some countries (Cameron, Uganda).

### T-067 Strengthen the collaboration with IUCN One Programme and work more closely with the Commission on Education and Communication. (KSR 13)

Number of digital communication outputs developed in relation to specific taxonomic groups: 0

Result description: OSG Co-Chair Nicole Duplaix is now on the Chair's Team.

### T-070 Establish an OSG Newsletter. (KSR 13)

Number of digital communication outputs developed in relation to specific taxonomic groups: 1

Result description: A newsletter was released in July 2023.

## Acknowledgements

We acknowledge the continued annual support of the Altman Foundation.

## Summary of achievements

Total number of targets 2021–2025: 76

Geographic regions: 35 Global, 9 Africa, 5 America, 19 Asia, 8 Europe

### Actions during 2023:

Assess: 9 (KSR 5, 6, 7)

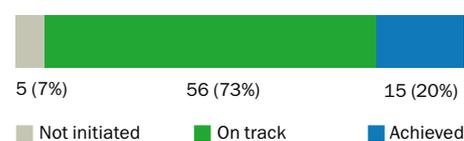
Plan: 11 (KSR 8, 9)

Act: 10 (KSR 10)

Network: 10 (KSR 1, 2, 3, 4)

Communicate: 7 (KSR 13)

### Overall achievement 2021–2025:





*Nothobranchius fuscotaeniatus*  
Photo: Csenge Nagy



*Tetra Parnaiba*  
Photo: Karina Molina



*Trioceros hoehnelii*  
Photo: Christopher V. Anderson



*Sternberia lutea*  
Photo: Hayri Duman



*Egretta rufescens*  
Photo: Ernesto Gómez



*Lactifluus neotropicus*  
Photo: Aida Vasco



Mayfly nymph (*Ecdyonurus* sp.)  
Photo: Astrid Schmidt-Kloiber  
and Wolfram Graf