IUCN SSC Otter Specialist Group

Conservation Success Stories

Eurasian Otter in Europe

IUCN SSC Species Survival Commission

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Eurasian Otter in Europe

IMPLEMENTED BY

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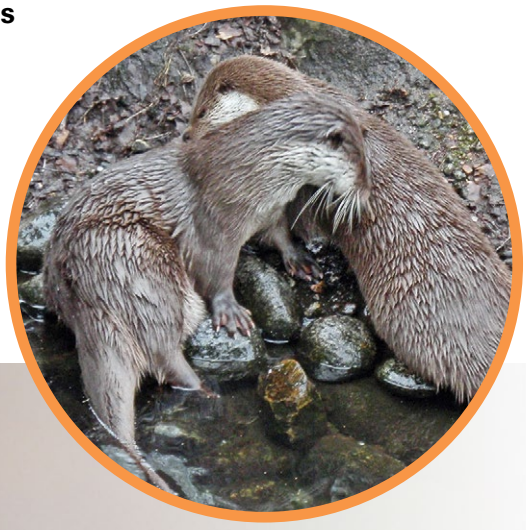
THREAT ADDRESSED

Threats addressed included: poaching, destruction of riparian habitats, and water pollution

TARGET

Test and implement e-DNA monitoring of Eurasia Otter (Himalaya, India, Nepal, Italy). (T-047); Promote the Alpine Otter Network. (T-053); Promote research on emerging threats in freshwater habitats. (T-056)



Legal protection across the EU supports recovery of otter populations

Success category:
Red List downlisting

Success story:

The Eurasian Otter (*Lutra lutra*) was once widespread throughout Europe, but it declined dramatically in the 1960s and 1970s, disappearing from most central and northern Europe. Specifically, it likely went Extinct in Liechtenstein, Belgium, Luxemburg, the Netherlands, and Switzerland. Despite its wide range across three continents, based on trends observed in Europe, in 2000 the species was classified as Vulnerable (VU) in the Global Red List. Main threats were direct persecution for fur trade, water pollution, especially the high concentration of pesticides like PCBs, destruction of riparian vegetation belts, and poaching due to conflicts with anglers and fish farms.

Following strict protection, banning of harmful pollutants, protection of riparian habitat by EU, and awareness raised through 10 European Otter Workshops held every three years since 2004 – including one online during the COVID pandemia –, the species is now recovering in many countries, including Switzerland and Belgium. The process was reinforced by restocking (UK, Sweden, Spain) and reintroduction (the Netherlands) efforts. Accordingly, the species was downgraded to Near Threatened (NT) in 2004.

Recovering across Europe is still ongoing and filling the gap between the western and eastern populations, leading to the recent proposal of downgrade to Least Concern (LC) in the European territory. ■ **ANNA LOY**

SUCCESS LEVEL

Highly successful

REASONS FOR SUCCESS

Recovering of otter populations has been, and still is, dependent on legal protection of the species and its habitat across the EU countries, mainly through the Habitats Directive (43/92/EC) and the Water Framework Directive (60/2000/EC). Also, direct protection against trade is offered by CITES, where the Eurasian Otter is listed in Appendix 1. The process has also been fostered by many projects focused on conflict mitigation funded by the EU through the LIFE funding programme for the environment and climate action. The programme funded 30 projects in 16 EU countries.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

https://eunis.eea.europa.eu/species/1435

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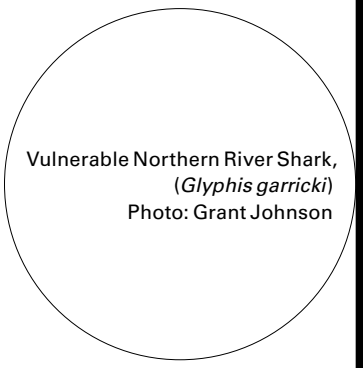


Vulnerable Northern River Shark, (*Glyphis garricki*)
Photo: Grant Johnson

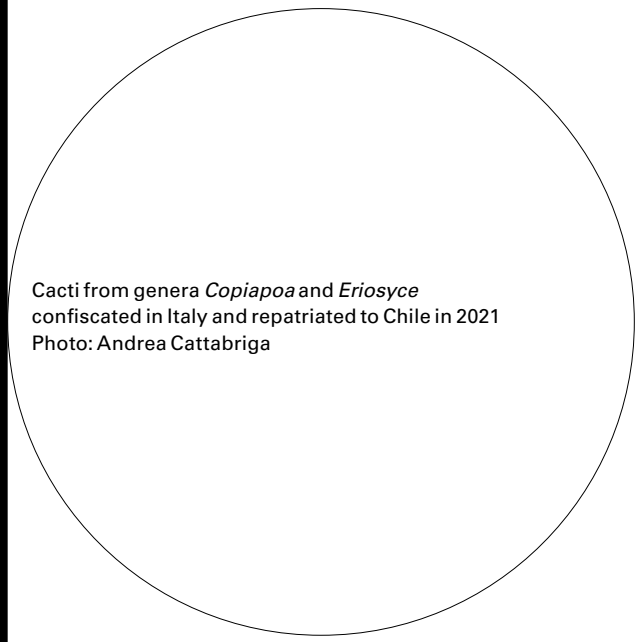
Interviews about human wildlife interactions with local inhabitants
Photo: Kiran Thapa Magar

Vicuña management by Cooperativa Agroganadera de Santa Catalina and Comunidad Aborigen Atu Shapi de Morritos. Santa Catalina, Jujuy Province, Argentina
Photo: Yanina Arzamendia

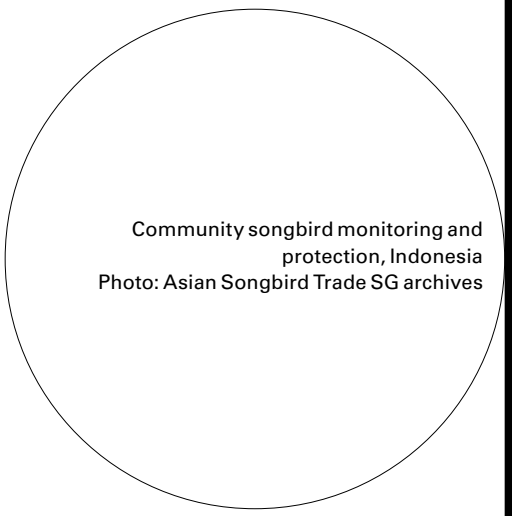
Story photo credits

European otter (*Lutra lutra*)
Photo: zoogalaxy.net

Two european otters (*Lutra lutra*) at Korkeasaari Zoo
Photo: Kallerna, Wikipedia (Public domain)



Cacti from genera *Copiapoa* and *Eriosyce* confiscated in Italy and repatriated to Chile in 2021
Photo: Andrea Cattabriga



Community songbird monitoring and protection, Indonesia
Photo: Asian Songbird Trade SG archives

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