

# THE SHOCKING FACTS OF THE ILLEGAL TRADE IN OTTERS

**FOR EVERY ILLEGAL TIGER SKIN FOUND THERE ARE AT LEAST 10 OTTER SKINS**

**Otters declined by 99%  
in Changbaishan nature  
reserve in NE China**

**800 otter pet owners in  
Jakarta alone**

**778 otter furs found in  
one haul in Tibet**

**Otters have disappeared from  
Kashmir's Wular Lake area**

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**A REPORT BY THE INTERNATIONAL OTTER SURVIVAL FUND**

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INTERNATIONAL OTTER SURVIVAL FUND, 7 Black Park, Broadford, Isle of Skye, IV49 9DE, Scotland

Tel/FAX: ++1471 822 487

[www.otter.org](http://www.otter.org)

## INTRODUCTION

There is no doubt that the illegal wildlife trade is having a serious impact on the fauna and flora of our planet and is driving some species towards extinction. In June 2014, a study by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and INTERPOL estimated that the worldwide value of this trade is over US\$200 billion. Not only is this disastrous for worldwide biodiversity, but this transnational organised crime has a negative impact on the economy and social structure of the countries involved, and particularly on poorer communities. In addition, it is helping to fund other criminal and even terrorist groups. A report on the link between wildlife crime and terrorism stated “The connection between terrorism and wildlife smuggling is clear. An 18-month undercover investigation conducted by our groups found an indisputable financial trail between the illicit trade in ivory and rhino horns and the Shabab. This connection is of increasing concern to world leaders.” Shabab were responsible for an attack at Westgate Mall in Nairobi.

In many countries wildlife crime is not seen as a matter of high priority and so there is only minimal effort in terms of money and enforcement effort. Some people even believe that it is just a local issue and is almost inevitable where there is poverty.

In general, concern about trade in skins and body parts has been largely concentrated on large fauna such as tigers, leopards and rhino and there has been much public outcry and conservation effort to protect these species. However smaller species, such as the otter, have been overlooked and their exploitation has gone largely unnoticed. Nevertheless trade in otter skins is extensive and is usually a part of the whole illegal wildlife trade operation. In fact otter skins are nearly always found during seizures of tiger and leopard furs.



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Otter fur is of such high quality that people consider it the ‘diamond’ of the fur business. Otters mostly hunt in water but unlike seals and whales they have no thick blubber (fat) layer to keep them warm. Instead they rely on their fur and this has two layers: the outer fur acts like a waterproof jacket to protect the inner fur and keep it dry, and the inner fur keeps the animal warm. This inner fur is incredibly dense - in Eurasian otters there are 50,000 hairs/cm<sup>2</sup> and the sea otter has 150,000 hair/cm<sup>2</sup>. It is this quality which makes them so valuable to the fur market.

There are five species of otter in Asia: Eurasian otter (*Lutra lutra*), smooth-coated otter (*Lutra perspicillata*), Asian small-clawed otter (*Amblonyx cinerea*), sea otter (*Enhydra lutris*) and the rare hairy-nosed otter (*Lutra sumatrana*). The hairy-nosed otter is confined to south-eastern Asia and the sea otter to the northern Pacific coastline.

Otters are a top predator in a wetland system and as they use both the land and aquatic habitats they are an ideal indicator species as to the health of these environments. In spite of this in many Asian countries in particular little has been done to protect them. They are threatened through degradation of wetlands, depletion of food sources, and hunting for the fur and pet trade. They are being harvested in the hundreds throughout the region as their fur demands a high price in the illegal wildlife trade.

The hairy-nosed otter is probably the world’s rarest otter. It was believed to be extinct in 1998 but isolated and highly threatened populations have since been found in Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, Indonesia and

Malaysia. And yet this otter is regularly found in hauls of skins and in January 2014 a skin was found at Mong La market in Myanmar (Burma).

The data presented in this report is clearly just a minimum as a certain amount of illegal trade is simply not being found. Otters are also frequently overlooked and are not itemised in reports, so numbers are not recorded.

## **THE FUR TRADE**

In February 2006, the International Otter Survival Fund (IOSF) was approached by the Akin Companies Group who expressed an interest in otter pelts and requested catalogues and price lists, together with information on the size and quality of the furs. They also asked if the otters were farm-raised or not.

The Akin Companies Group claimed to be an international trading and consulting company with branches in Romania, Ukraine and Kosova although the company seemed to be based in Turkey. Enquiries were made but their website appeared to be permanently “under construction”. However, this led IOSF to investigate the problem of trade in otter furs.

In October 2007, IOSF’s Dr Paul Yoxon, gave a presentation on the fur issue at the IUCN Otter Specialist Group Colloquium in Korea. Following this presentation, Dr Hussain of the Wildlife Institute of India, commented that the situation was even worse than we thought.

**FOR EVERY ONE TIGER SKIN FOUND ILLEGALLY 10 OTTER FURS ARE ALSO FOUND, AND ONE HAUL IN LHASA, TIBET, REVEALED 778 OTTER SKINS. No-one knows the full effect of the otter fur trade on the otter populations, but in India there is irrefutable evidence that this illegal trade is causing the animals to become extinct in certain areas.**



*778 otter skins – the people in the photo give an indication of scale and the skins continue into the shade and beyond!*  
© Conservation International – photo taken from “Reduction of Tiger Skin Consumption in Tibet”, Conservation International China, 2006

It is estimated that at least 50% of otter skins are from India, which is totally illegal. In fact it was way back in 1993 that the last legal skins of smooth-coated otters were imported to China and these were then re-exported. However, skins from Pakistan, Turkey and Afghanistan are also highly valued.

In northern parts of India the otter is known as “Udbilao” or “Pani ka Kutta”. Unlike the tiger and leopard it is regarded as “nobody’s child” and no-one seems to be concerned for its conservation. Indeed there are also reports of body parts of otters being used in “traditional” medicine – workers at the Divya Yoga Pharmacy said *“they had prepared powders from crushed human skulls and animal parts, including the testicles of “udbilao” (Indian otter). While the crushed skull powder was used to produce medicines to treat epilepsy, the latter was used to treat sexual weakness.”*

The otter in India is endangered and highly protected, but this protection appears to be on paper only as there is no programme for REAL protection. In 2003, award winning filmmaker, Syed Fayaz, produced a documentary entitled “And Then There Were None”, which describes how otters have disappeared from Kashmir's Wular Lake area. Otters face a similar fate in Uttaranchal and skins have been seized from regions as far apart as Kerala and West Bengal.

Asian small-clawed otters were recently found in the Eastern Ghats and other regions of Odisha in India. They were found during biodiversity surveys and presumably their existence has previously been overlooked by workers even though clearly the local people knew they were there. Again they face the threat of illegal hunting and in the Karlapat Wildlife Sanctuary, the local Kondh tribe said that dogs are used to hunt the otters for meat and furs. The otters may also be trapped by surrounding the dens with nets or using spotlights at night. In some villages cubs were found being kept as pets but the people admitted that when they die they eat the meat and sell the fur to traders. Now the local people are saying that they have seen a drastic reduction in numbers of these otters over the last decade.

Poachers use various methods: Some use leg-hold traps or specially trained dogs, others pay nomads and migrant workers to do their dirty work for them. Their actions have resulted in otters in India being reduced to a few hundred and in isolated pockets. Now they are rarely seen outside protected areas, such as Periyar tiger reserve, Corbett tiger reserve, Dudhwa tiger reserve, Kaziranga national park, National Chambal sanctuary and coastal areas such as Bhitarkanika and Coringa wildlife sanctuary. So the link between tiger poaching and otters continues.

There is a highly organised network of traders and poachers and the pelts may be smuggled out in fake gasoline tanks using the ancient trade routes for salt, spices and wool. Some traders in Lhasa even boast that they have good contacts with customs officials along the China/Nepal border who allow them to carry out their trade. In 2005 the Central Bureau of Intelligence (CBI), reported that a well-known wildlife trader, Sansar Chand, had supplied between 3,275 and 3,825 otter skins to eight different Nepalese and Tibetan buyers. This had risen from 1974 when Chand was arrested for 680 skins including 85 otter, 1 tiger and 3 leopard. Also in 2005 a report by Wildlife Conservation Nepal stated that at any given time traders have at least 10-15 otter skins with them. Clearly they have developed a highly organised network of people involved in this crime.

In July 2014 the Pakistan Wildlife Foundation published a report on the “Status of Otters in Pakistan” which stated that “In Kashmir, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Gilgit-Baltistan the Eurasian otter is under extreme pressure as a result of illegal hunting and killing and otter hunters are doing their jobs freely...In 2011, the National Council for Conservation of Wildlife (NCCW) imposed a complete ban on the export of all wild mammals and their body parts especially the skins, but no improvement in enforcement of Wildlife Laws has been observed.” The smooth-coated otter was doing well in three provinces of Pakistan - Sindh, Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. However, the species then faced a serious decline, again due to the fur trade, and it became extinct from two provinces; Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Fortunately smooth-coated otters are beginning to recover partly because of flash floods in 2010 and 2011, which actually improved the habitat, and also because there is less interest from buyers in otter skins in the international market. So, the species is doing better now and has also been re-established at four locations in Punjab Province.

The fur trade is still very active in some remote areas of China, even though it is illegal to hunt otters as they are listed as Category II of National Protected Animals by law since 1995. There is also some transboundary illegal trade or smuggling along the borders of China, Nepal, Burma and India as in Tibet, where otter furs are used to trim part of their dress - the chupa. Otter body parts such as liver, bones and tail have been used in traditional Chinese medicine, but there is little information on current use and also there are insufficient products available.

So the situation in China is also extremely serious. Otters used to be widespread except for in a few provinces in arid zones but now they are hardly ever observed in the wild and secondary signs are rarely found in just a few provinces. Based on the China National Wetlands Survey completed in 2003, otters could only be detected in 12 provinces and 3 autonomous regions, and they are rare in 9 of the 15 provinces and regions. Historical data indicated that in 1975 there were 1,360,000 otters in the Changbaishan Mountain nature reserve in north-east China. By 1985 only 33 otters remained and by 2001-2009 there were less than four. **This means the population has declined in this area by 99%.**

In Cambodia the general level of illegal hunting is also severe because of high prices for wildlife products on the market and low levels of enforcement. There is little border control, and it is relatively easy to smuggle products through to Vietnam, Thailand or Laos. The main traffic goes through Vietnam to China, which has the biggest market for these products. Even in 2008 skins could sell for as much as \$200 each, which is a large sum of money for a family who survives on a few dollars a week.



In 2007 Conservation International staff carried out an interview with a Cambodian fisherman and otter hunter from the Tonle Sap Lake, and he said that the annual take of otters was quite high. He alone had caught and sold 49 otters in 4 years, and of these 23 were hairy-nosed otters, 10 were smooth-coated and 16 were unidentified. Six hairy-nosed otter skins and one Asian small-clawed otter skin were also confiscated from a wildlife trader in Phnom Penh (see photo left)The hairy-nosed otter skins were misidentified as smooth-coated otters by the authorities

Thus the pressure on the hairy-nosed otter is very high.

Hairy-nosed otters used to be present in northern Myanmar and in January 2014 a skin from this species was found being traded at a market in Mong La. So it seems likely that there are still some individuals living there, but of course we have no idea how many there are. Unlike the other three species of otter found in Myanmar (Eurasian, Asian small-clawed and smooth-coated) hairy-nosed otters are not protected as no-one actually believed they were present. So they are at great risk from the wildlife trade. In 2008 a report was brought out looking at the status of small carnivores in the country and otters were believed to be the most severely threatened species. Indeed, in 2014 TRAFFIC informed us that “otter poaching levels in Myanmar are terrifying - most places no longer have otters. “

The effect of the trade is not restricted to Asia and it is not only Asian species of otter which are involved. In April 2006 IOSF received information from Austria, which said that during the severe winter in the Danube Delta the channels and lakes were frozen, which made it very easy to kill Eurasian otters using dogs. In one village a man collected 120 otter furs which were then exported to Turkey, and then probably on to Tibet. This has resulted in a definite decrease in the number of otters in the Danube basin.

Sea otter skins are also being sought resulting in an increased market in Alaska. On 27 March 2006, the Fairbanks Daily News-Miner of Alaska reported that prices of sea otter furs had risen from \$50 to \$125-\$150 because of increased trade in Asia. "A few years ago, I couldn't sell an otter but Asia is just driving the market hard." said Jim Masek, vice president of the trappers association.

[http://www.wolfsonnews.org/news/Alaska\\_current\\_events\\_1649.htm](http://www.wolfsonnews.org/news/Alaska_current_events_1649.htm)

In August 2014, a search online for otter furs found prices ranging from \$175 for a small skin to \$375 for extra-large (<http://www.chichesterinc.com/Otter.htm>). The website for Moscow Hide and Fur (<http://www.hideandfur.com/inventory/7205.html?MS>) offered skins for up to \$650. Some could be found for just \$69.95, but those under \$299.95 were generally damaged to some extent.

In Australia the black market for endangered wildlife is increasing and the number of species being traded has doubled since 2008. According to the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) 6% of worldwide seizures from 1996-2008 originated from Australia.

Sea otter pelts are also being sold in Russia, with at least 300 skins being sold on the black market in Moscow in summer 2005. Most of these were obtained illegally from the Commander Islands Biosphere Nature Reserve. Since then we have been informed that a further 300 sea otter skins were being sold openly on the black market at Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy, with 200 of them from the Commander Islands. Most of these skins will be sold on to markets in China.

## THE MARKET

In September 2005 an article entitled "Otters: Dressed to Kill" appeared in the Times of India News Network. This began "*They were everywhere. In upscale shops in old Lhasa, on the streets of Linxia in China's Gansu province and on the bodies of young men and women attending horse festivals in Tibet. But there's one image – a young man wearing a traditional Tibetan dress embellished with six otter heads ...*"



In Tibet otter fur forms part of the national dress, the chupa, and many of the illegal furs are destined for this market. Otter skins are mostly used to trim the chupa and only those in a high position, such as chieftains, wear the whole skin as an indication of their wealth or social standing. These costumes are worn at many of the festivals but these are no longer purely traditional fairs but have become tourist attractions. In addition official state functions also have traditional cultural events and the wearing of highly decorated fur costumes is seen as a means of demonstrating the wealth and status of Tibetan culture.



**The Tibetan traditional dress, the chupa, trimmed with otter fur**

© Belinda Wright WPSI/EIA

The Dalai Lama is against the use of animal furs and made a public appeal in January 2006 to stop using wildlife products. Since then there have been incidents of the burning of stockpiles of wildlife skins in some monasteries. However, they are a symbol of status and cultural identity and the Chinese have banned such incidents of burning as they see it as a public demonstration of allegiance to the Dalai Lama. Furthermore, it is now compulsory to wear real furs at festivals and formal events with a penalty of a heavy fine or dismissal for a government official for non-compliance.

Linxia in Gansu Province, China, is the biggest market place and a total of 1,833 otter skins were found openly on sale, all for use on the chupa. Information from EIA and WPSI indicates that traders from Lhasa bring otter, tiger and leopard skins to Linxia to sell to the Hui Muslim-Chinese community, who are highly skilled tanners.



**Fur traders in Tibet © Debbie Banks EIA/WPSI**

They then sell them on to the Tibetans in Sichuan, Gansu and Qinghai Provinces, for whom Linxia is more accessible than Lhasa. However, in the Bharkor area of old Lhasa alone, 305 otter skin chupas were on sale.

The market is not confined to Tibet or even neighbouring countries, and since the southern borders were opened in the 1980s the skins of various endangered species have become easily obtained.

Some products, including bones, skin and teeth, have been found listed on websites such as Ebay and Gumtree. EBay has a strict policy on the sale of ivory and endangered species and yet people are still managing to trade. IFAW found almost 300 protected species for sale on 14 websites.

## **THE PET TRADE**

Trade is not just in furs and body parts but also in live otters as exotic pets. The problem is particularly serious in Indonesia, where there are 800 otter pet owners in Jakarta alone. In August 2014, Chris Shepherd, from TRAFFIC, informed IOSF that in their surveys of



Jakarta markets “live otters are very often (almost always)

© TRAFFIC

available, whereas in the past we rarely saw them. The civet owner clubs springing up all over Java are expanding to other small carnivores, including otters, so the demand does appear to be increasing, as is the availability in the markets.”

A TRAFFIC report revealed that on 22 January 2013 Royal Thai customs officers discovered eleven live



Hairy-nosed otter kept as a pet in Kalimantan – it did not survive.  
© Reza Lubis, Wetlands International Indonesia

otters in a suitcase at Bangkok airport. The bag was scanned after it had been left at the oversized luggage area and they found five Asian small-clawed and six smooth-coated cubs (*see photos above*). It is believed that they were smuggled out of Thailand and were destined for Japan where they would be sold as pets. Unfortunately as the bag had no identification tags and was unclaimed the Thai Police could not make any arrests.

TRAFFIC’s Regional Director in south-east Asia, Dr William Schaedla said “This find is a surprise and a worrying one. Otter skins have been interdicted in trade elsewhere in Asia, but live otters are a new development as far as

we know. Yet another species we know little about is in danger from wildlife traffickers.”

There have also been cases of cubs being kept as pets by villagers, including hairy-nosed otters. Unfortunately this particular species is very vulnerable and rarely survives in captivity. There is just one rescued male at the Phnom Tamao Wildlife Rescue Centre in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, and all other cubs found have died.

As far as we know otters are not generally kept as pets in the northern areas of Pakistan but one otter conservation breeding farm in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has recently been reported. A pair of smooth-coated otters is being kept in that farm, which is situated out of the natural distribution range of the species.

Even live cubs are being advertised on the internet. In March 2010 Six young otters were confiscated by the Ho Chi Minh Environmental Police after being offered for sale on the internet (*see photo right*).

Cubs have been advertised through Facebook and [www.Kaskus.us](http://www.Kaskus.us), (one of the largest Indonesian internet forums) has animal trade section, where otters are frequently sold. These are usually Asian small-clawed, which unfortunately are not protected in Indonesia. It is likely that hundreds of otter cubs are being separated from their family and their parents killed every year to supply this trade.



## THE SOLUTION

It is clear that trade in otter skins is widespread and having a drastic effect on populations of different species of otter worldwide and not just in Asia. This is in spite of the fact that many countries, including Nepal and China, are signatories of CITES. It is also clear that the illegal wildlife trade destroys ecosystems and finite resources and funds other criminal activities.

The trade in otter skins is a large part of the whole illegal trade which includes other endangered species such as the tiger and leopard. But the scale of the trade in otters has been largely overlooked and it still does not receive the high profile attention of these other species. Therefore more effort must be made to focus attention on this illegal trade if we are to stop it.



There must be more international collaboration. IOSF has become a member of Animals Asia, Partnership for Action against Wildlife Crime (PAW) and the Coalition Against Wildlife Trafficking (CAWT). The aims of CAWT are “to focus public and political attention and resources on ending the illegal trade in wildlife and wildlife products”. As a member we join with other organisations “to address the growing threats to wildlife from poaching and illegal trade, working individually and jointly toward achieving the Coalition's goals, with each partner acting where it can contribute most effectively.”

The International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime (ICWC) includes CITES, together with organisations, such as the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), INTERPOL, the World Bank and the World Customs Organisation (WCO), because of the link with other organised crime, such as drugs. Together they are working to create a more effective structure to provide support to countries in the fields of policing, customs, prosecution and the judiciary.

At the end of August 2014, a second meeting of the South Asia Wildlife Enforcement Network (SAWEN) was held in Kathmandu, Nepal. Here representatives from eight countries (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka) finalised and endorsed the SAWEN statute and began the process of developing an action plan for the next six years. Inter-governmental organisations, international and regional organisations involved in the illegal wildlife trade issue, joined with international donors and organisations such as INTERPOL, CITES, UNODC, World Bank, TRAFFIC and WWF.

Mr Megh Bahadur Pandey, Chief Enforcement Coordinator of SAWEN said at the meeting: “Minimizing illegal wildlife trade from south Asia is crucial to the conservation of wildlife in the region. Countries cannot fight highly organised and globalised wildlife crimes in isolation and need to collaborate and cooperate with other countries and partners”. Through this there will be more “transboundary cooperation and collaboration for intra-country law enforcement initiatives through intelligence sharing on poaching and trade trends, along with exchanging knowledge and skill for fighting wildlife crime across south Asia.”

<http://www.traffic.org/home/2014/8/27/south-asia-to-develop-action-plan-to-curb-wildlife-trafficki.html>



Whilst the internet enables buyers and sellers of otters and otter products to trade, it can also be a valuable tool in collaboration between organisations working to reduce the trade. A new app called “Wildlife Witness” has been developed which allows people, in particular tourists, to take a photo with the exact location and send it to TRAFFIC so they can investigate further. The app will help to give more detailed information on the trade and how to report it safely, and highlight where more enforcement is necessary.



Another new initiative is WildLeaks (<https://wildleaks.org>), which is the first, secure, online whistleblower platform dedicated to Wildlife and Forest Crime. Unlike other organisations, WildLeaks is focused on getting information especially regarding key elements (individuals or organisations) behind wildlife crimes, and regarding the networks and the modus operandi. The objective is to prevent those crimes (when possible), get a better understanding of certain phenomenon, disrupt any related activity and facilitate the identification, arrest and prosecution of the people involved.

To do this they use a very secure online platform so that people can submit information safe in the knowledge that they will remain anonymous. It is managed by a small group of very experienced individuals, which includes the directors of environmental investigation NGOs, environmental lawyers,

accredited journalists, security professionals and ex-law enforcement officers. Highly experienced and responsible team of professionals evaluate documents and tips provided to WildLeaks and then advise on the most appropriate action. This may be to begin or continue an investigation with their own teams and/or in collaboration with trusted partners, and/or share the information with trusted contacts within selected law enforcement agencies and/or share the information with media partners. Whatever the course of action their aim is to facilitate the identification, arrest and prosecution of criminals, traffickers, businessmen and corrupt governmental officials behind the poaching of endangered species and the trafficking of wildlife and forest products.

WildLeaks is developing collaborations with other NGOs, who can spread the word through their own programmes, literature and website to encourage people with information to speak out. Such collaboration is essential.

There must also be more people working on otter conservation and education/public awareness. Research alone is not conservation, but for any conservation programme to be successful it must be founded on recent sound scientific data obtained by trained professional researchers. Furthermore, conservation programmes are far more effective when organised by local people, but in Asia there are very few scientists working on otters and their habitats.

IOSF has been working to provide a series of workshops to train students and park rangers from the region in otter field techniques, public awareness programmes, law enforcement and general conservation issues. Local government personnel are also invited to attend to encourage better law enforcement and otter protection. These workshops have been extremely successful.



In March 2013 a workshop was held in Indonesia (*see photo left*). As a result there is now an Indonesian Otter Network with representatives from the three islands which have otters, Java, Sumatra and Kalimantan (Borneo). They can co-ordinate research and will also be able to act quickly should any otter cubs be in need of care. The Indonesian Otter Network has been in touch with the moderators of [www.Kaskus.us](http://www.Kaskus.us) to point out that otters should not be traded on the forum due to similarities between otter species which are protected in Indonesia, i.e. Eurasian and hairy-nosed and those which are not protected, i.e.

Asian small-clawed and smooth-coated. However there has been no response as there is a big demand for these animals. They have also contacted sellers and buyers to ask them not to trade otters for pets as they are wild animals. Again most of them reply that Asian small-clawed otters are not protected and so can be legally sold. They also say that because of habitat destruction and the killing of otters in the fish farms they are able to ‘protect’ otters, as the animals seems happy to live with them. But none of them are willing to answer the question of where they get the cubs from - wild population or captive breeding. The Indonesian Otter Network will continue in this work and IOSF is acting in support.

Changes in attitude are hard to “verify” but can be recognised by trained field workers who liaise with local communities. Following a workshop in Cambodia in 2009, a local fisherman found a hairy-nosed otter in

fishing hooks and contacted one of the community workers, instead of selling the pelt for up to US\$200 - this clearly demonstrates the start of a change in attitude. Co-operation between local communities and project workers is essential but there have to be trained workers on the ground to facilitate this.

Clearly, the training workshop approach has proved highly effective and by training the next generation of otter workers reliable data on otters can be obtained. The next workshop will be held in Bangladesh in December 2014 and another is also planned for Lao PDR, which is an important route for illegal trade. As in Indonesia, a network of scientists will be developed to work with their own communities and government officials to encourage collaboration and co-operation in conservation and law enforcement. There is often conflict between fishermen and otters as they are seen as competition and so they sometimes take them to sell. The network will be able to work on resolving any issues to the benefit of the community, the otters, other wildlife and the environment as a whole.

By involving government officials in the workshops their attention is drawn to the role of otters as ambassadors of a healthy environment, problems in otter conservation and the illegal trade. They are therefore encouraged to implement better enforcement of existing legal protection and hopefully develop further protective measures, which will also reduce trade in other endangered species.

**There are also some positive signs.** In 2007 Indian wildlife officials in northern Jammu and Kashmir burned eight truckloads of illegal wildlife products worth almost US\$2.5 million. At least 125,000 items - including skins, rugs, fur coats and gloves made from dozens of tigers, snow leopards, leopards, hill fox, leopard cats, black bear, wolves and, of course, otters – were destroyed. This was done in public to draw attention to the fact that this is illegal and yet the scale of the trade is huge.

Countries are also starting to take more serious steps in law enforcement and penalties are increasing. In August 2007 two men in Yunnan Province, China were sentenced to 5 and 10 years imprisonment respectively for their part in smuggling rare wild animal products. The men were found guilty of purchasing a Bengal tiger and four otter pelts in Myanmar and transporting them by bus from Yingjiang to Tengchong,

However, prosecutions are still not common and are often extremely slow. Many fail completely but at least the risk of prosecution will begin to have a deterrent effect. The problem is also worldwide and in May 2014 police in New South Wales, Australia, arrested a man with 61 illegal wildlife products made from 24 endangered species, including otter skins.

It was recently reported by TRAFFIC that top traditional medicine companies and doctors in China have renounced the use of products from endangered wildlife. This followed a meeting which brought together Directors of top companies, government officials and key players within the traditional medicine sector, which was organised jointly by TRAFFIC and the East China Normal University and co-sponsored by the China Wildlife Conservation Association (CWCA) and Zhejiang Welcome Pharmaceutical Co. Ltd.

Of course, the emphasis is on the use of tigers but the participants agreed to refuse the use of endangered medicinal plants and animals protected under national and international legislation, which includes otters. Whilst most of the trade in otters is either for fur or pets there is still some use for body parts for medicine and so this action is very welcome.

It is clear that much more needs to be done and it is vital that people and organisations continue to work together to combat the trade in wildlife. The UNEA report says that “the scale and nature of the illegal trade in wildlife has been recognised and some successes have been scored.” However, the otter is still overlooked and IOSF is working to draw attention to the serious impact trade is having on the world’s otters. Without action not only will the tiger and leopard disappear but also species of otter, in particular the smooth-coated and the hairy-nosed.

## CONSERVATION STATUS OF OTTERS:

The Conservation Status as identified by the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species of the species mentioned above is as follows:

Eurasian otter (*Lutra lutra*) – NEAR THREATENED

Smooth-coated otter (*Lutra perspicillata*) – VULNERABLE

Asian short-clawed otter (*Aonyx cinereus*) – VULNERABLE (upgraded from NEAR THREATENED)

Hairy-nosed otter (*Lutra sumatrana*) – ENDANGERED (upgraded from DATA DEFICIENT)

Sea otter (*Enhydra lutris*) – ENDANGERED

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

IOSF is grateful to many contacts from throughout Asia for background information and data including Prof Hussain (Wildlife Institute of India), Dr Reza Lubis (Wetlands International Indonesia), Annette Olsson (Conservation International), Chris Shepherd (TRAFFIC), Dr Vladimir Sevostianov (President Commander Island Association). In addition the following organisations have provided information and given their kind permission to reproduce photographs: Conservation International, Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA), TRAFFIC, Wildlife Conservation Nepal, and Wildlife Protection Society of India (WPSI)

## INTERNATIONAL OTTER SURVIVAL FUND

7 Black Park, Broadford, Isle of Skye IV49 9DE

Scotland

Tel: ++1471 822 487

[info@otter.org](mailto:info@otter.org)

[www.otter.org](http://www.otter.org)



Wildlife Conservation Award Winner,  
British Animal Honours 2013



IFAW Animal Action Award Winner 2012

Patron: Julian Pettifer. Joint Presidents: Laurence Broderick, Dennis Furnell. Head of Operations: Dr Paul Yoxon  
IOSF is an international fund set up to conserve otters worldwide and is organised by SEC Ltd solely for this purpose.  
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## APPENDIX 1: Summary of Trade

The following gives a summary of the KNOWN trade, which has come to light during the investigations by IOSF. This is mainly since 2000 and is just the tip of the iceberg as this is based on what is actually found - clearly many skins and live otters are being traded and undiscovered.

Date (d/m/y)	Place found	No	Species	Live/ Parts	Other Species	Arrest	Sentence	Notes
1974	India	85	?	Skins	1 tiger, 3 leopard	1		
1991-2003	Various	223	Eurasian	Skins				Far Eastern Customs
2000	Khaga, India	221	?	Skins	4 tiger, 70 leopard			
08/08/2001	Xiaguan, China	134	?	Skins	23 tiger, 33 leopard			
11/02/2003	Siliguri, India	19	?	Skins	20 leopard			
04/04/2003	Kathmandu, Nepal	14	?	Skins	109 leopard			
22/05/2003	Samalkha, India	18	?	Skins	7 leopard			
08/10/2003	Sangsang, Tibet	778	?	Skins	31 tiger, 581 leopard, 2 lynx			Total 1392 skins
18/03/2004	Daklang, Sindhupalchok, Nepal	6	?	Skins	7 leopard skins, 2 tiger skulls, bones, 175 strips of rhino skin			
20/04/2004	Kathmandu, Nepal	?	?	Skins	leopard			Total of 24 otter and leopard
11/07/2004	Kathmandu, Nepal	11	?	Skins	3 tiger, 5 sacks tiger bones			
31/01/2005	Delhi, India	42	?	Skins	2 tiger, 38 leopard, 1 snow leopard			
08/03/2005	Delhi, India	4	?	Skins	3 leopard			
06/04/2005	Delhi, India	14	?	Skins	45 leopard	3	?	En route to Nepal. 2 Tibetans, 1 Nepalese arrested. Purchased from Sansar Chand
17/04/2005	Baudha, Kathmandu, Nepal	38	?	Skins				
04/09/05	Syafru Besi, Rasuwa, Nepal	238	?	Skins	38 leopard, 5 tiger + 113 kgs of tiger bones	1		Well-known trader arrested in Boudha, Nepal
Summer 2005	Moscow, Russia	300	Sea	Skins				
11/09/2005	Zhangmu, Tibet/Nepal border	20	?	Skins	12 tiger, 60 leopard			
??/10/2005	Minneapolis St Paul Airport	?	Asian	?	Included black striped			1,388 individual animal parts from

			small-clawed		weasel, slider turtles and leaf monkey			several endangered species.
2005	Linxia, Gansu Province, China	1,833	Included Eurasian and smooth-coated	Skins				Biggest market with furs openly on sale.
2005	India	3,275-3,825	?	Skins				Sold to 8 different Nepalese and Tibetan buyers
Winter 2005-06	Petro, Petropavlovsk-Kamthatskiy, Russia	300	Sea	Skins				Sold on black market
10/01/2006	Faitelpur, India	1	?	Skin	14 leopard			
03/02/2006	Delhi, India	4	?	Skins	34 leopard			
??/10/2006	Myanmar	4	?	Skins	1 Bengal tiger	2	5 and 10 years	Arrest in Yunnan Province, China. Bought in Myanmar. Otter pelts valued at RMB 160 320 (US\$ 21,300)
02/09/2014	Langtang National Park, Nepal	216	?	Skins				Total 279 skins
??/08/2007	Yunnan Province, China	4	?	Skins		2	10 & 5 years	From market in Myanmar October 2006
13/12/2007	Northern Karnataka, India	43	?	Skins	1 tiger, 21 leopard	1	?	Well known trader, Prabhakar. Followed intelligence from WPSI
2007	Alaska	75	Sea	Skins				Included spring-born pups. Pelts sold illegally. Only Alaskan natives can hunt sea otters and this person was not native
22/03/2008	Chatuchak (JJ Market), Bangkok, Thailand	1	?	Live	14 Slow Loris, 96 birds (including 24 owls), several tortoises, marine products (including 480 hard corals, 187 soft corals, 22 sea fans and 22 Giant Clams)		?	Royal Thai Police
13/05/2008	Minnesota, USA	1	Asian small-clawed	Parts		2	5 months + 2 year probation + \$9,000	

							fine	
22/12/2008	Alaska, USA	75	Sea	Skins		1	37 months + \$5,000 fine	Date of trial – investigation took 2 years
05/11/2009	Majnu Ka Tila, , Delhi, India	7	?	Skins		2	?	Tibetan refugee colony
14/01/2011	Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam	6	Asian small-clawed	Live	King cobra, loris, water monitor, cobra and Asiatic soft-shell turtle	1	3 years	Amongst 43kg of live wildlife. Otters offered for sale on internet
2012	Indo-Nepal border	?	?	Skins	Tiger, leopard, rhino horn, red sanders, live elephants and ivory, bear bile, live birds			For Nepal and beyond. TRAFFIC report
2012	Russian side of Russia/China border	?	?	Skins				100 bottles of ginseng vodka, 150 rifle cartridges and around USD 150 000 were also discovered, illustrating the crossover with other types of crime.
19/04/2013	Parramatta, Sydney, Australia	?	?	Parts	Included 11 orangutan skulls, 25 other skulls of monkeys, lynx, bears, and tiger. Teeth and skins from protected species such as orangutans, lynx. Feather headdress from bird of paradise.	1	1 year + \$3,700 + 384 hours community service	Numbers varied in reports. In one report there were 61 illegal products from 24 endangered species and in another it was 78 illegal wildlife products - a record haul.
18/10/2013	Tofino, Clayoquot Sound, British Columbia, Canada	1	Sea	Shot but live				Not trade – probably fisheries conflict. Shot with shotgun and blinded – will remain at Vancouver Aquarium
05/04/2014	Baikunthapur, North Bengal, India	1	?	Skin	Skin and bones of leopard	3	?	Going to China via Nepal
31/07/2014	Tree Island, Clayoquot Sound, British Columbia, Canada	1	Sea	Shot dead				Not trade – probably fisheries conflict.

## APPENDIX 2: The Trade in Numbers in India 1994 – 31 August 2006

Cases in India where the skins of tiger, leopard or otter have been saved	978
Individual animals represented by these cases and additional poaching reports	783 tiger 2766 leopard 777 otter
People accused in connection with such cases	1898
People confirmed as having been convicted and sentenced in association with these cases	30
Individuals that have been caught re-offending	49
Wildlife seizures involving the recovery of firearms	95
Seizures involving the recovery of cash	13 totalling INR 1,347,650

(Source “Skinning the Cat – Crime and Politics of the Big Cat Skin Trade”, 2006, EIA)

## APPENDIX 3: The Trade in Numbers in India 2009-2014

Year	Report
2009	Five cases of otter skin seizures reported from different parts of the country. 16 skins seized
2010	One skin of otter seized from a single case.
2011	Two cases reported. 20 skins seized
2012	No cases found
2013	One skin of otter seized from a single case.
2014	Poachers killed two otters and 10 skins seized from two cases.

(Source: WPSI)