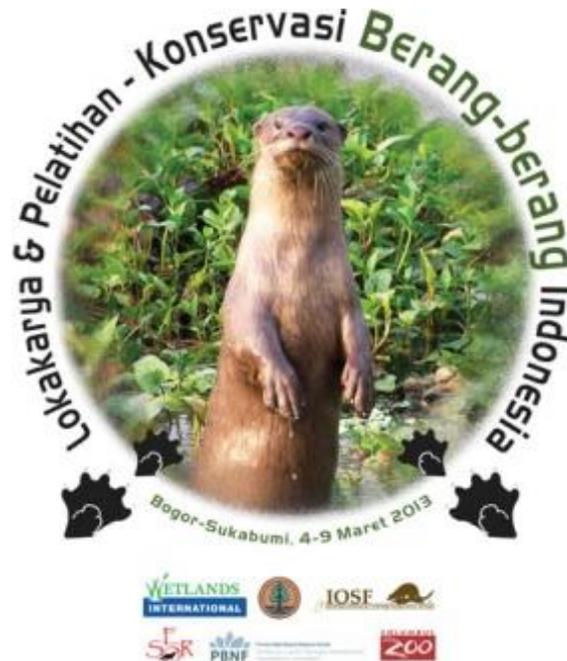


INDONESIA TRAINING WORKSHOP REPORT

4-10 March 2013
Bogor, Java



Throughout Asia, otters are largely overlooked and conservation efforts are focussed on the big mammals, such as elephant, tiger and rhino.

There are four species of otter in Indonesia and they are all listed in the IUCN Red List:

- Eurasian otter (*Lutra lutra*), classified in the Red List as “Near Threatened”.
- Smooth-coated otter (*Lutrogale perspicillata*), classified in the Red List as “Vulnerable”
- Asian small-clawed otter (*Aonyx cinereus*), classified in the Red List as “Vulnerable”. In Indonesia there is a significant trade in these otters for pets.
- Hairy-nosed otter (*Lutra sumatrana*) classified in the Red List as “Endangered”. This species was believed to be extinct in 1998 but IOSF-supported projects in Thailand and Vietnam revealed small isolated populations and the species has now also been found in Cambodia and Sumatra.

In Indonesia there is almost no baseline data on population and distribution for any of the four otter species. More research is needed in order to plan practical and effective conservation programmes but there are insufficient scientists to do this. There is also conflict between fishermen and otters, as they are seen as competition and we need more protection for otters from illegal trade. At present only the Eurasian and hairy-nosed otters are protected and we therefore need to encourage the government to give full legal protection to the other two species – the Asian small-clawed otter and the smooth-coated otter.

The aims of the workshop were therefore:

- 1) to train participants to carry out their own fieldwork and research
- 2) to encourage more education and public awareness
- 3) to involve government officials and draw their attention to the role of otters as ambassadors of a healthy environment, problems in otter conservation and the illegal trade.

The workshop was hosted by the Wetlands International Indonesia Programme with the classroom sessions at Bogor and the fieldwork at Cikananga. Participants came from Sumatra, Kalimantan (Borneo) and Java, as these are the only Indonesian islands where otters can be found. Some worked for NGOs or government institutions, others were lecturers or students, and some belonged to the Otter Lovers Group.



The first day was opened by the Deputy Minister for Forestry, Bupak Agus Sutito, who welcomed all the participants. This day was designed for government officials, students, lecturers, rangers, and staff from the National Parks and gave a broad overview of otters, their ecology and importance in conservation and an introduction to the work of IOSF.

The Ministry of Forestry is responsible for all conservation including otters and they had asked us to come up with recommendations for otter conservation. The last session of the day saw the Indonesians drawing up these recommendations which would be presented to the Ministry the following week.

There were also some members of Otter Lovers Indonesia who keep otters as pets, most of which have been wild caught. Most pet otters are Asian small-clawed but hairy-nosed otters have also been found as pets. Often the animals are kept in very poor conditions and so they die, and another otter is simply caught as a replacement. Clearly this is having a significant impact on wild populations and an important session stressed that catching otters for pets has to stop. There were presentations on problems with keeping otters as pets and how to care for any orphans found so that they remain wild and can be released back to their natural environment.

The next two days were to teach people how to do otter fieldwork and education/public awareness. Unlike Europe where we only have one species of otter, in Indonesia there are four species and so it is important to be able to identify them and know their specific habitats. For any conservation programme to be successful it must be founded on recent sound scientific data obtained by trained professional researchers, and these participants will now be able to start collecting the data we need. We also looked at problems such as the conflict between fishermen and otters.

We then moved to Cikananga Wildlife Rescue Centre, where they are caring for three Asian small-clawed otters. Wild Asian small-clawed otters live in the area around Cikananga, where they hunt for crabs and small fish in the tiny streams around the rice fields. This gave an opportunity for field work looking for signs and we did manage to find spraint (droppings), a footprint and a holt.



Habitat of Asian small-clawed otters



Asian small-clawed otter holt

At the end of the workshop an Indonesian Otter Network was formed so that they can co-ordinate work and act quickly if a cub is found in need of help. The recommendations and priorities for further work were presented by Paul and Grace to Bupak Agus Sutito, from the Ministry of Forestry at a meeting after the workshop. The Ministry is responsible for all conservation in Indonesia, including for otters. They have been very supportive for the otter workshop and are keen to develop otter work even more.

The Indonesian Otter Network will set up a forum to share information and also a Facebook page for Indonesians interested in otters. One participant, a lecturer, is keen for his students to on otters. A few days after the workshop Reza Lubis, from Wetlands International Indonesia, who organised the workshop, received an email from one of the participants with a photo of a hairy nosed otter taken in Kalimantan.

Thanks to all the participants who made this workshop so extremely positive - it is vital that it is the local people of Indonesia who lead this work and IOSF will support them where necessary.



We are very grateful to Columbus Zoo, the Prince Bernhard Nature Foundation and Stacie Bockheim for helping to fund the workshop. We are also grateful to Prof Padma de Silva (IOSF's Asian co-ordinator), Prof Syed Hussain (India), Farid Jaafar (Malaysia), Ruth Davidson (now Sri Lanka) and Aad Aadrean (Sumatra) for all their time and effort in providing the training. And of course we would like to thank Reza Lubis (Wetlands International Indonesia) for all his work in organising the whole event.



Wildlife Conservation Award Winner,
British Animal Honours 2013



IFAW Animal Action Award Winner 2012

