

## SHORT NOTE

### **SMOOTH-COATED OTTER *Lutrogale perspicillata* RECEIVES FORMAL PROTECTION IN INDONESIA, BUT SMALL - CLAWED OTTER *Aonyx cinereus* DOES NOT**

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**Abstract:** The illegal wildlife trade in Indonesia is a major threat to a long and growing list of species. Otters are no exception and recent research has shown the trade in otters as pets in Indonesia is on the rise. While it is illegal to capture and trade otters from the wild in Indonesia, until recently only two of the four native otter species received formal legal protection, and the remaining two species were protected by an insubstantial zero-harvest quota. Recently, the government of Indonesia has provided full legal protection to the Smooth-coated Otter, however, and unfortunately, the Small-clawed Otter remains absent from the list of protected species in Indonesia, and therefore more vulnerable to exploitation.

**Keywords:** Indonesia, otters, wildlife trade

There are four species of otters in Indonesia, all found west of the Wallace Line in the Greater Sundas. These are the Eurasian Otter *Lutra lutra*, Hairy-nosed Otter *L. sumatrana*, Small-clawed Otter *Aonyx cinereus* and the Smooth-coated Otter *Lutrogale perspicillata*. There is little information on the status of wild otter populations in the country, but it is generally believed that all four species are in decline due to increasing loss and degradation of suitable habitat, impacts from environmental pollution, human-otter conflicts and poaching for trade.

For these very reasons, all four otter species have been assessed and considered at risk from extinction with the Hairy-nosed Otter listed as Endangered, the Small-clawed and Smooth-coated Otters as Vulnerable, and the Eurasian Otter as Near-threatened on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species (Aadreaan et al., 2015; de Silva et al., 2015; Wright et al., 2015). Furthermore, the Eurasian Otter is prohibited from being traded internationally for commercial purposes as it is listed on Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) Appendix I, while the other three species are listed on Appendix II, allowing for trade with a valid permit.

Recent studies have shown a sharp increase in the illegal trade in otters for pets, with many of these being traded online (Aadreaan, 2013; Gomez et al., 2016; Gomez and Bouhuys, 2018). Indonesia has emerged as a key source and demand country for pet otters. In Gomez and Bouhuys (2018), Indonesia is revealed as a major consumer of otters with over 700 otters found for sale online. It was also implicated in the international trade of otters to Japan. Indonesia dominated, by a high margin, in the number of online advertisements for otters in comparison to the other countries assessed in Southeast Asia. It also appears that much of this trade is being supplied by wild-caught otters. In Java, few otters were observed for sale in pet markets but there were traders willing to acquire otters for the right price. There were some traders who claimed these were sourced entirely from the wild, and some who claimed a mix of wild-sourced and well as captive-bred otters, although the latter could not be verified.

It is cheaper to trap wild otters than breed them. In addition, there did not appear to be a steady supply of otters into the pet markets in Java, suggesting that breeding was not actively and consistently supplying the market. This is a concern, especially for the Small-clawed Otter, the species currently most impacted by the pet trade.

In July 2018, the Indonesian government launched a revised list of protected species in Indonesia under the *Government Regulation No.7, 1999, Concerning the preservation of flora and fauna*, a list which until now, hadn't been updated since it was gazetted. In the past, only the Hairy-nosed Otter and Eurasian Otter were protected by this law in Indonesia. The new list however now includes the Smooth-coated Otter. This essentially means that the trade and harvest of wild-caught Smooth-coated Otters is now prohibited unless it involves second generation captive-bred individuals, which may only be bred by traders under special permit. Violation of the law stipulates a five-year prison sentence and a fine of IDR100 million (USD7 200) under the *Act of the Republic of Indonesia No.5 of 1990 concerning conservation of living resources and their ecosystem*.

While this is certainly good news for the Smooth-coated Otter, that still leaves the Small-clawed Otter vulnerable, the species currently most exploited for trade in Indonesia (Gomez et al., 2018). Hunting and trade in animals that are not protected is regulated under *Regulation of the Minister of Forestry No. 447/Kpts-II/2003* concerning administration directive of harvest or capture and distribution of wild specimens. The regulation states that a yearly provincial quota is set for all animals that can be captured in the wild. Catching animals for which no quota has been set, in excess of quota that have been set, or outside provinces for which quotas have been set, is deemed illegal, even when the species concerned is not considered protected. No harvest quotas have yet been established for the Small-clawed Otter. While this inadvertently protects the Small-clawed Otter from trade, no punishments for transgressions are stated however under this law, and therefore this regulation is difficult to enforce.

We applaud the government of Indonesia for the inclusion of the Smooth-coated Otter in the list of protected species in Indonesia and encourage the authorities to take swift and strong actions to end the illegal trade in this species. However, this protection needs to extend to the Small-clawed Otter as well. This species is not only in high demand as a pet locally, but it is also coveted internationally in countries like Japan where there is no protection for non-native species especially if they are listed in CITES Appendix II, permitting their sale even if they're obtained illegally.

As such we strongly urge the government of Indonesia to take steps to protect its Small-clawed Otter. We also urge the government of Indonesian to enact provisions to regulate online wildlife trade. The seriousness of the illegal trade should be reflected in both wildlife and online trade laws, particularly through high penalties for any transgressions of the law. Strong penalties could favour law enforcement agencies by serving as a strong deterrent, especially as online trade also encourages opportunistic trade, which should be weeded out.

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## RÉSUMÉ

### **LA LOUTRE À PELAGE LISSE, *Lutrogale perspicillata*, A OBTENU UNE PROTECTION OFFICIELLE EN INDONÉSIE, MAIS PAS LA LOUTRE CENDRÉE, *Aonyx cinereus***

Le commerce illégal d'animaux sauvages en Indonésie est une menace majeure pour un nombre élevé et croissant d'espèces. Les loutres ne sont pas une exception et une étude récente a montré que le commerce de loutres, en tant qu'animal de compagnie, est en augmentation en Indonésie. Bien qu'il soit illégal de capturer et de faire le commerce de loutres issues du milieu naturel en Indonésie, jusqu'à il y a peu, deux des quatre espèces de loutres natives avaient obtenu une protection légale officielle, et les deux espèces restantes étaient protégées par un quota de capture zéro inefficace. Récemment, le gouvernement d'Indonésie a fourni une protection légale totale à la loutre à pelage lisse, cependant et malheureusement, la loutre cendrée reste absente de la liste des espèces protégées en Indonésie, et est, de ce fait, plus vulnérable à une exploitation.

## RESUMEN

### **LA NUTRIA LISA *Lutrogale Perspicillata* RECIBE PROTECCIÓN FORMAL EN INDONESIA, PERO LA NUTRIA DE UÑAS PEQUEÑAS ASIÁTICA *Aonyx Cinereus*, NO**

El comercio ilegal de fauna silvestre en Indonesia es una de las grandes amenazas que pesan sobre una larga y creciente lista de especies. Las nutrias no son la excepción, e investigaciones recientes mostraron que el comercio de nutrias como mascotas en Indonesia, está en aumento. Aunque es ilegal capturar y comerciar nutrias silvestres en Indonesia, hasta hace poco solamente dos de las cuatro especies nativas de nutrias recibían protección legal formal, y las otras dos especies estaban protegidas por una cuota-cero de cosecha, insustancial. Recientemente, el gobierno de Indonesia ha provisto de protección legal completa a la nutria lisa; sin embargo, y desafortunadamente, la nutria de uñas pequeñas asiática continúa ausente de la lista de especies protegidas en Indonesia, y por lo tanto más vulnerable a la explotación.