

Himalayan Otter Network



photo Rajiv Bisht Puran Singh

Otters in the Himalayas
Newsletter from the Himalayan Otter Network
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News from the Himalayan Otter Network is a new platform for the community of students, researchers, and conservationists for sharing recent and current research and conservation projects in the Himalayan Mountains Region.

Ongoing Otter Research and News from the Himalayas

Raising knowledge about the Smooth-coated otter conservation among local communities and students in the lowland region of far-western Nepal

Pravin Giri

During the first phase of our study, we identified habitat degradation, human disturbances, unsustainable fishing practices, and the shrinking of lakes as the primary threats to otter survival. Additionally, infrequent conflicts between otters and fishermen, along with the unintentional killing of otters due to a lack of conservation knowledge about the species, have further contributed to their population decline. Surprisingly, no prior conservation programs specifically focusing on the Smooth-coated otter had been implemented among local communities by the park authorities and other conservation organizations. Considering the minimal conservation attention given to these species, we conducted awareness programs in five communities and 11 schools in the Kailali and Kanchanpur Districts. The programs specifically targeted students and local residents living near the habitat of the Smooth-coated otter in Suklaphanta National Park in Kanchanpur and Ghodaghodi Lake in Kailali District. The primary goal of the program was to educate youth and local people about the conservation significance of Smooth-coated otters and to shift their perspectives toward otter conservation. Throughout the process, we shared ecological information about SCO, major threats, policy provisions, and the roles of students and local residents in otter conservation, along with strategies for conservation. Additionally, we installed two hoarding boards outside the main entrances of Suklaphanta National Park and Ghodaghodi Lake that displayed messages regarding the importance of SCO conservation. Moreover, local people shared their experiences about their observations and encounters with otters. We noticed positive feedback from the participants, and they were excited to learn about the species found around their lakes and rivers.



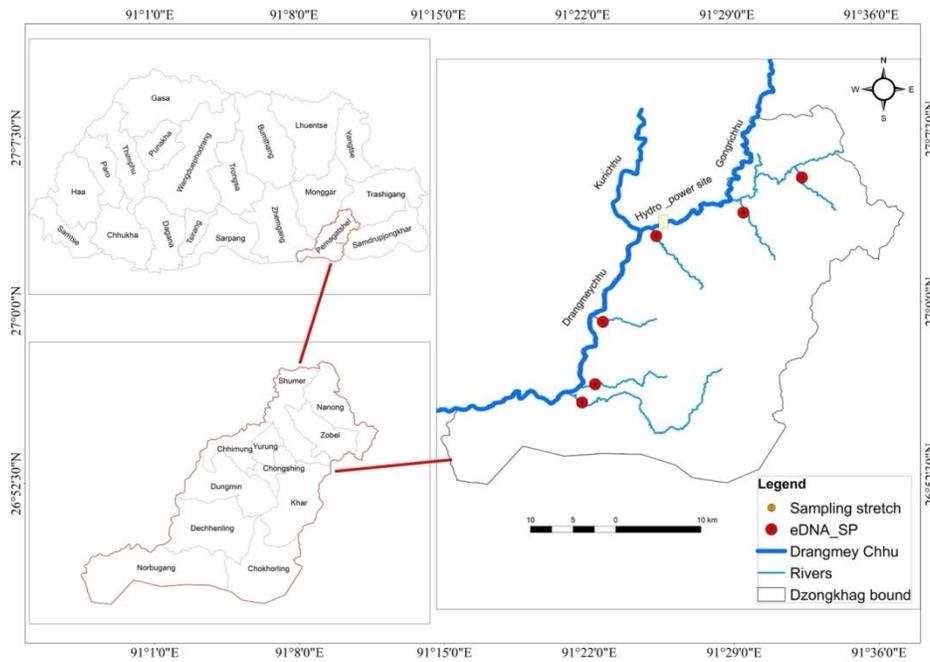
Otter Survey Planned for Bhutan

Tshering Tobgay

This fall of 2025, Royal Society for Protection of Nature (RSPN), in collaboration with the Department of Forest and Park Services (DoFPS) here in Bhutan will initiate a comprehensive otter survey focused in south-eastern Bhutan. This survey marks a significant step toward understanding the distribution, occupancy, and threats to otter populations in Bhutan's river systems. While otters have been sporadically recorded in Bhutan, scientific data on their presence and conservation status remains limited. This targeted fieldwork aims to close critical knowledge gaps and establish baseline information essential for the long-term conservation plan. The survey will focus on selected stretches of rivers within the Pema Gatsel district and Manas river basins, that is ecologically suitable for all three otter species reported in Bhutan, the Eurasian Otter (*Lutra lutra*), the Smooth-coated Otter (*Lutrogale perspicillata*), and the Small-clawed Otter (*Aonyx cinereus*). The field teams will conduct systematic surveys along riverine habitat in this region, employing techniques such as direct sign searches (spraints, tracks, dens), visual observations, and the deployment of motion-sensitive camera traps.

In addition to traditional field methods, RSPN is preparing to introduce environmental DNA (eDNA) techniques in collaboration with College of Natural Resources in Bhutan. This cutting-edge tool enables the detection of species presence from water samples by identifying genetic material shed by animals into the environment. The inclusion of eDNA offers a non-invasive and highly sensitive approach to confirm otter presence, particularly in remote or logistically challenging areas where direct sightings or signs may be rare. This fall's survey will lay the groundwork for incorporating eDNA into future monitoring protocols for otters in Bhutan.

Beyond biological data collection, the survey will also integrate community-based research through public perception studies. Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with local households, particularly those living in riverside communities. These interviews will explore community knowledge, attitudes, and interactions with otters. The fall survey will also include the beginning of targeted awareness programs in schools and villages along the survey routes. Educational posters, illustrated fact sheets, and public presentations will be shared with community members to promote awareness of otter ecology and their role in maintaining healthy river systems. This integrated survey effort by RSPN is to build national capacity for otter conservation and advocate for stronger protection of Bhutan's freshwater biodiversity. The fall 2025 survey not only represents a milestone in otter research in Bhutan but also reinforces Bhutan's commitment to science-based and community-driven conservation. Findings from the survey will be disseminated through RSPN's website, newsletters, and peer-reviewed journals to support national and international conservation dialogue.

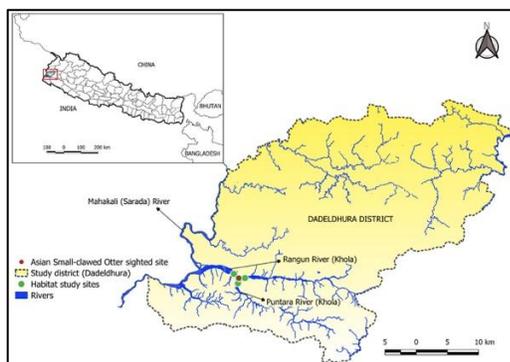


Map: Bhutan Study sites

Rediscovery of Asian Small-clawed otter in Nepal after 185 years

Mohan Bikram Shrestha

In November 2024, a juvenile Asian Small-clawed Otter was sighted at the river junction of the Rangun Khola and its tributary the Puntara Khola at Parsuram Municipality-12 of Dadeldhura District in far-western Nepal (29.132819°N 80.335374° E; 401m asl). The species was last sighted in Nepal in 1839. The otter was in feeble state. It was nurtured in the Forest Office for a week before released back into the wild. The presence of the juvenile otter implies the presence of other otter individuals in the area. This rare observation is a significant confirmation of the species presence in Nepal and warrants detailed study and conservation initiatives to conserve the species. Small-scale mining, fishing and draining water in its habitat are some potential threats noted for aquatic and semi-aquatic life. Thus, a timely implementation of conservation effort would benefit this exceptionally rare species.



Map: Location of Small-clawed juvenile in Nepal.



Juvenile Asian Small-clawed Otter (Photograph: Rajeev Chaudary)

Otter Survey in the Kholongchu and Drangmechu Rivers in Eastern Bhutan

Norbu, L., Jamtsho, T., Jamtsho, K., Tenzin, P., and Lhendup, U. (2024). A Survey of otters in the Kholongchu and Upper Drangmechu Rivers, Eastern Bhutan. *IUCN Otter Spec. Group Bull.* 41(3):125 - 139.

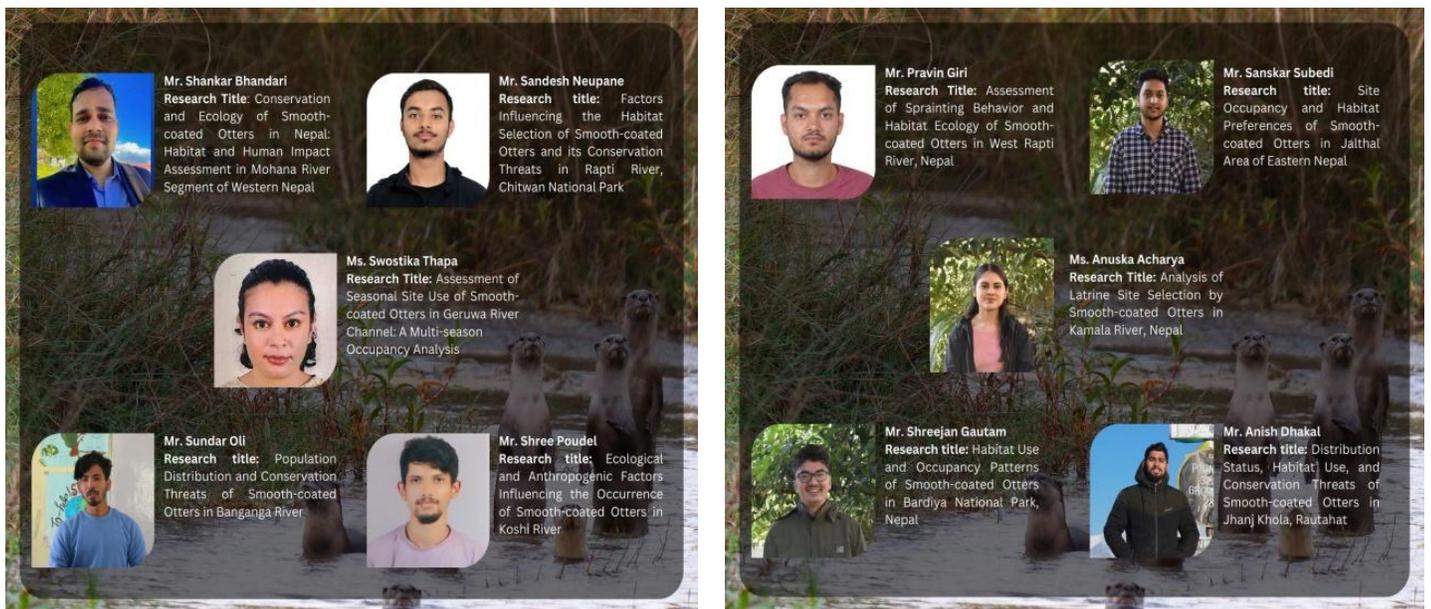
A survey in Eastern Bhutan documented the presence of three otter species, the smooth-coated otter, the small-clawed otter, and the Eurasian otter, in Trashigang Forest Division in Eastern Bhutan. This was the first preliminary survey effort on otters in the eastern Bhutan, despite the fact that the region, including the Kholongchu River and the upper Drangmechu River, and their tributaries inside Trashigang Forest Division landscape, have extensive suitable habitat for otters. The survey found multiple otter sign such as tracks, scats, latrines and dens in sites with vegetation cover, along sandy river banks with large boulders, and with minimal human disturbances. Based on the survey findings, all three otter species appear to inhabit the river systems, with some overlap their habitat use, thus suggesting likely coexistence or sympatric behaviour of these species.

Congratulation Sayanti Basak for IUCN/SSC position

Congratulations to Sayanti Basak who has recently been appointed to be the Programme Officer of the IUCN Center for Species Survival: India. She is a wildlife biologist with a postgraduate degree in Wildlife Science from the Wildlife Institute of India. A key part of her current role involves collaboration on National Red List assessments of species and Species Conservation Action Plans. Her broader interests span aquatic species ecology, behavioral ecology, conservation genetics, and environmental policy.

Congratulation to the WWF Otter Research Grant Winners

New otter research initiatives taking place across Nepal



Recent Himalayan Otter Network Publications

Bida, Y.B. 2024. Notes on feeding behaviour of Asian Small-clawed otters in Namdapha Tiger Reserve, Arunachal Pradesh, India. *IUCN Otter Spec. Group. Bull.* 40(1): 39-41.

Bida, Y.B. and Rai, M. 2025. Photographic Record of Eurasian Otter (*Lutra lutra*) from Namdapha Tiger Reserve, Arunachal Pradesh, India. *IUCN Otter Spec. Group Bull.* 42 (1): 9 – 13.

Dahal, S. and J.T. Heinen. 2025. A history of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and FLora Implementation in Nepal. Diversity 17, 312. <https://doi.org/10.3390/d17050312>

Giri, P. and Shrestha, P. M. (2024). Local Peoples' Knowledge and Perceptions of, and Conservation Threats to, Eurasian Otters in the Kali Gandaki Watershed in Myagdi District, Nepal. IUCN Otter Spec. Group Bull. 41(4): 249 - 261

Giri, P., S. Pariyar, P.M. Shrestha. 2025. Habitat factors influencing the distribution of Eurasian otter (*Lutra lutra*) in major rivers of Myagdi District, Nepal. IUCN Otter Spec. Group Bull. 42(1): 27-36.

Sharma, S., A. Subba, G. Pradhan, and A. Chhetri. 2024. Photographic evidence of incidental sightings of the vulnerable Small-clawed otter (*Aonyx cinereus* Illiger, 1815) in the mixed forest of Darjeeling and Kalimpong District as part of Central Himalayas. IUCN Otter Spec. Group Bull. 41(3): 140-153.

Shrestha, M.B., Shrestha, G., Dangaura, H.L., Chaudhary, R., Shrestha, P.M., Dewan, K., Sada, R., Savage, M., and Zuofu Xiang. 2025. Confirmation of the presence of Asian Small-Clawed otter *Aonyx cinereus* in Nepal after 185 years. *IUCN Otter Spec. Group Bull.* 42 (1): 3 – 8.

Thapa, V. and Lama, R.P. (2025). Artisanal Fishing Bycatch Confirms the Northernmost Distribution of Eurasian Otters (*Lutra lutra*) In Nepal. *IUCN Otter Spec. Group Bull.* 42 (2): 91 - 97.

Fifth Himalayan Otter Network Workshop Announced

We are pleased to announce that the **Fifth Himalayan Otter Network (HON) Workshop** will be held on **September 11–12, 2025**, in **Kathmandu, Nepal**. This workshop will bring together researchers, conservationists, and otter enthusiasts from across the Himalayan region to share knowledge, strengthen collaboration, and advance otter conservation efforts.

Further details regarding the venue, registration, and agenda will be shared soon.

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photo by Katrina Fernandez