

## SHORT COMMUNICATION

### **IUCN/SSC Otter Specialist Group: Otters in Captivity Task Force (OCT) – SUPPORTING QUALITY CAPTIVE OTTER CARE WORLDWIDE –**

Jan REED-SMITH  
OCT Chair  
*jrsotter@iserv.net*



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Work on creating the Otters in Captivity Task Force was begun in earnest in 2007 after OSG chair Jim Conroy reiterated Claus Reuther's earlier request that the OSG look at how we could best interface with our colleagues working with otters in captive settings. I am pleased to report that this task force, known as OCT, has made some valuable progress in establishing our goals, identifying objectives, meeting some targets, and solidifying positive working relationships with otter professionals worldwide.

The OCT identified promoting worldwide communication between individuals working with otters in captivity and all other settings as the group's mission (Appendix B). The goal of our mission is to reinforce or create strong lines of communication and cooperation between all professionals working with otter species. To accomplish this we established several objectives and have begun work in several target areas.

#### **MEMBERSHIP**

Because facilitating communication, cooperation, research, and quality care is central to the OCT our objective is to create a truly international working group. At this time the core task force consists of eleven members representing zoos and conservation organizations from the U.S., Europe, and Australia. The OCT has an impressive international group of professionals serving as advisors, sub-group chairs, and sub-group members. We would like to include additional zoo representatives from South and Central America, Mexico, Asia, and Africa. The OCT also is looking for any field biologists interested in assisting with our mission. If you have zoo contacts or are interested in promoting quality care of captive otters and cooperative research please contact Jan Reed-Smith at [lontracat@live.com](mailto:lontracat@live.com). Appendix A lists OCT members, advisors, and subgroups.

#### **COMMUNICATION**

As a result of OCT outreach efforts the first broad-based international captive survey is being conducted on diets fed Asian small-clawed otters. This project was developed and coordinated by Jackie Moody and others at the Marwell Zoo (England) to survey

EAZA (European Association of Zoos and Aquaria) member facilities, but with the assistance of OCT it was expanded to include ARAZPA (Australasian Regional Association of Zoos and Aquaria), and AZA (Association of Zoos and Aquariums) institutions. This international effort should contribute greatly to our understanding of nutritional issues associated with this species in captive settings. The international and regional studbook keepers for this species are both members of the OCT and we look forward to working with them to facilitate future international efforts they undertake.

## **WORKING SUB-GROUPS**

The core OCT group identified a gap in the availability of quality husbandry knowledge, particularly easily accessible short documents that contain information on critical elements of captive care for each species. Because we did not want to duplicate work done by the many excellent professional zoo and aquarium organizations we first contacted these groups to obtain existing husbandry documents. Next we established small working groups tasked with creating short, 10 to 15 page documents covering critical issues, which are easier to share and translate into range country languages. The first of these, Asian small-clawed otter has been completed. One of our advisors, Scott Robertson who works in East Asia has volunteered to find translators for this document. We greatly appreciate Scott's help with this and ask anyone who may be able to help with translation to contact the OCT.

At this time we have sub-groups working on giant, North American, Eurasian, and African spotted-necked otter documents targeted for completion in early 2009. Additionally we have the veterinary group led by Heike Weber, nutrition group led by Katrin Ruff, and a rehabilitation group consisting of three professionals known for their success at releasing orphaned otters back to the wild. The documents produced by the veterinary and nutrition groups will cover general information applicable to all otter species and be available on the Otter Specialist Group website along with the species care documents. The rehabilitation document will not be posted on the website but will be made available to OSG members and qualified professionals by contacting [lontracat@live.com](mailto:lontracat@live.com).

## **THE FUTURE**

We have several ideas we are working on for the future. These include creating a short document covering the basics of husbandry training. This will focus on training animals to willingly enter crates for weighing or movement to veterinary facilities eliminating stress on the animals and staff. Additionally, we are exploring creative ways we can interface with the world's zoo organizations to promote cooperative research and the banking of tissue/blood samples for genetic work, etc. Other areas we are exploring are the creation of an online database of photos illustrating what good otter enclosures should look like, healthy captive otters, enrichment ideas, denning boxes, etc., and coordinating an international otter keeper workshop at the next International Otter Colloquium.

As communication is a key element of the OCT we invite all otter researchers to consider revitalizing the research database created several years ago by the OSG. This would provide us an excellent source of information to share with our captive institutional partners who may be interested in supporting field research and allow us

to monitor ongoing projects that may match with captive institutions' conservation targets. In the latter case the OCT can then notify the researcher of potential funding opportunities they can pursue. Finally, we will continue adding to the library of husbandry and captive care resources already placed on the OSG website (library – Captive Task Force). For this effort I would like to thank Lesley Wright for her dedication and invaluable help.

In closing I encourage anyone interested in the work of the OCT to please contact me.

## **APPENDIX A: COMPOSITION OF THE OSG**

### **Members**

Jan Reed-Smith, Chair (N. A. river otter - captive & spotted-necked otter – field); Lesley Wright (Asian small-clawed otter), Sheila Sykes-Gatz (giant otter), Heinrich Krueger (Eurasian otter), Carol Heap (Eurasian, Asian small-clawed, giant otter), Dr. Aleš Toman (Eurasian otter), Heike Weber (Eurasian otter, veterinarian), Lionel Lafontaine (Eurasian otter), Katrin Ruff (Eurasian otter, nutritionist), Lindell Andrews (Australasia Regional studbook keeper, Asian small-clawed otter), Grace Yoxon (Eurasian otter, rehabilitation, IOSF), Sarah Duncan (International studbook keeper, Asian small-clawed otter).

### **Advisors**

Helen Bateman (reproductive physiology), Scott Robertson (field biologist, Asia), Nicole Duplaix (OSG Vice Chair, field biologist, giant otter), Helen Waldemarin (field biologist, South America), Stewart Muir (*EAZA Small Carnivore* TAG, Chair), Dusty Lombardi (AZA Otter SSP, Chair), Claudia Wilson (AZA Otter SSP, Vice Chair), Sarah Duncan (International Studbook Keeper, Asian small-clawed otter), Heike Weber, DVM (EAZA Vet Advisor for *L. lutra* EEP), George Kollias, DVM, PhD (Cornell University School of Veterinary Medicine, Seneca Park Zoo), Helénè Jacques, DVM (Eurasian otter, African otters – field), Gustavo González, Sr., DVM (La Jungla Zoo), Christine Osmann, DVM (Zoo Dortmund, giant otter), Astrid Günther-Weigl, DVM (Leibniz Institute for Zoo- and Wildlife Research (IZW) Research Group – otter vaccination speciality), Katrin Ruff, PhD, (Ökologische Bildungsstätte Oberfranken Naturschutzzentrum Wasserschloß Mitwitz e.V. – Nutrition), Mike Maslanka, MS, (Smithsonian Institution - nutrition), Geraldine Nicasio, PhD (ZOO 911, medical and nutrition consultants), Juan Sabalones, (Maryland Zoo - Water treatment and water systems), Tanya Thibodeaux, (rehabilitator), Melanie Haire, (rehabilitator and vet technician).

### **Sub-groups**

African spotted-necked otter - Nerissa Foland, San Diego Zoo; Danyelle Benza, Phoenix Zoo; Ryan Sear, Omaha's Henry Doorly Zoo; Stephanie Cantabene, Monterey Bay Aquarium

Asian small-clawed otter - Carol Heap, Chestnut Centre; Lesley Wright, OSG; Lindell Andrews, ARAZPA, ASC regional studbook keeper and species coordinator; Sarah Duncan, AZA, ASC International studbook keeper

Giant otter - Sheila Sykes-Gatz, Dortmund Zoo

N.A. river otter - Meredith Owens, North Carolina Aquarium @ Pine Knoll Shores; Scott Shelley, Columbus Zoo and Aquarium; Victor Alm, Oakland Zoo; Brian Helton, Sedgwick County Zoo

Nutrition - Katrin Ruff , PhD; Mike Maslanka, MS; Geraldine Nicasio, PhD

Health Care - Heike Weber, DVM; George Kollias, DVM, PhD; Helénè Jacques, DVM; Gustavo González, DVM; Christine Osmann, DVM, Astrid Günther-Weigl, DVM

Rehabilitation Group - Grace Yoxon, IOSF; Melanie Haire, Zoo Atlanta; Tanya Thibodeaux, ARC Animal Rehabilitation

## **APPENDIX B: REMIT OF THE OSG**

### **IUCN/SSC Otter Specialist Group: Otters in Captivity Task Force (OCT) – Supporting quality captive otter care worldwide -**



*Photo: Asian small-clawed cubs  
Courtesy of Zoo Atlanta*



*Photo: Spotted-necked otter  
Courtesy of Jan Reed-Smith (RINP project)*

#### **OCT Mission Statement:**

The IUCN/SSC Otter Specialist Group's Otters in Captivity Task Force (OCT) promotes worldwide communication between individuals working with otters in captivity and all other settings.

#### **For captive biologists:**

All institutions holding otters should support in-situ and ex-situ conservation efforts for these charismatic species. Providing financial and or technical support for these efforts is crucial as is the proper captive care of these species. The OCT recommends that all captive facilities work together to further improved care and sound breeding/contraceptive management of the world's captive otter populations, including the development of, use of, and distribution of best care practices via husbandry manuals based on captive and field study experience. We support and encourage efforts being made to advance all of these goals by professional organizations such as the African Association of Zoos and Aquaria, Australasian Association of Zoos and Aquaria, Canadian Association of Zoos and Aquariums, European Association of Zoos and Aquariums, Association of Zoos and Aquariums, and many others. Copies of current husbandry manuals are available at the OCT website, <http://www.otterspecialistgroup.org/Library.html>.

### **For field biologists:**

The OCT encourages all in-situ researchers to become involved in some capacity with the zoos/aquariums working with otters in their range countries. This can take many forms including; offering technical advice regarding behaviour or habitat requirements, offering to do informative talks for employees or zoo/aquarium members, or providing informative materials for use in fund raising.

For additional information please contact: Jan Reed-Smith, Chair: [lontracat@live.com](mailto:lontracat@live.com)

### **Resumé: Groupe Loutre de l'UICN/SSC : Groupe de travail sur les loutres captives (OCT)**

Créé en 2007, le Groupe de travail sur les loutres captives (OCT) de l'UICN est une interface nouvelle entre conservateurs de loutres *in situ* et *ex situ* sur le constat d'un déficit d'échanges entre biologistes de terrain et biologistes oeuvrant en captivité. L'OCT est constitué de plusieurs sous groupes de travail à la fois pour chaque espèce mais aussi pour les thèmes suivants: soins vétérinaires, alimentation et réhabilitation. La communication entre ces divers partenaires ainsi que leur entière coopération permet d'établir des documents de synthèse sur base d'expériences et de compétences partagées. Ainsi, un premier travail sur la nutrition d'*Aonyx cinereus* vient de paraître et d'autres devraient rapidement suivre début 2009.

Les sujets à aborder ne manquent pas: entraînement médical, établissement d'une banque de données de tissus et de sang en vue d'analyses génétiques, base de donnée photographique. Si vous souhaitez participer à l'OCT ou si vous désirez obtenir de plus amples informations, contactez Jan Reed-Smith sur [lontracat@live.com](mailto:lontracat@live.com)

### **Resumen: UICN/CSE Grupo de Especialistas en Nutria de Río: Grupo de Trabajo para la Nutria de Río en Cautiverio (OCT por sus siglas en ingles) - En Soporte de la Calidad del Cuidado en Cautiverio de la Nutria de Rio en el Mundo**

Las Tareas relacionadas con la creación del Grupo de Trabajo para la Nutria de Río en Cautiverio comenzaron en el año 2007 luego de que el director del Grupo de Especialistas en Nutria de Río (OSG por sus siglas en inglés) Jim Conroy reiterara un pedido previo de Claus Reuther solicitando que la OSG encontrara formas de interactuar con colegas trabajando con nutria de río en condiciones de cautiverio. Es mi placer anunciar que este grupo de trabajo, conocido como OCT –por sus siglas en inglés- ha hecho avances importantes en el establecimiento de nuestros propósitos, ha identificado objetivos, completado algunos de ellos, y ha solidificado una relación positiva de trabajo con profesionales del área alrededor del mundo.

El OCT identificó como su misión el promover alrededor del mundo la comunicación entre individuos trabajando con nutria de río en cautiverio y en otras condiciones (Apéndice B). El propósito de nuestra misión es reforzar o crear lazos fuertes de comunicación y cooperación entre todos los profesionales trabajando con diferentes especies de nutria de río. Para alcanzar este propósito, hemos establecido varios objetivos y hemos comenzado a trabajar en varias áreas de interés.