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AKTION FISCHOTTERSCHUTZ E. V. (GERMAN CAMPAIGN FOR OTTER PROTECTION): ACTIVITIES 1992

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Abstract: This report covers captive animal studies during period, studies in the wild including one on avoidance of otter road traffic casualties commissioned by the Ministry of Traffic, which will be used to inform new highway building, two surveys and a pollution assay in 6 states showing poor otter numbers correlate with higher PCB levels. A habitat management programme, Otter 2000, establishing migration corridors for otters was initiated. There has been good progress with the revitalisation of the River Ise. The Otter-Zentrum itself has had a very good year, with high visitor numbers and many new births.

RESEARCH IN CAPTIVITY

At the research station in Hankensbüttel, the following main studies were completed, continued or started (Rogoschik 1992):

- a morphological study of the organs of *Lutra lutra* (Zogall 1992);
- an ethological study on the marking behaviour of *Lutra lutra* (Heins 1992);
- an ethological study on the prey catching behaviour of *Lutra lutra*, which will run until 1995;
- a long-term study on the ontogeny of otter cubs born in captivity, which includes 8 litters;
- a study on PCB levels in spraints of otters in captivity was started in 1992 (Reuther 1992b) and will be continued in 1993.



RESEARCH IN THE WILD

- In cooperation with the ministry of environment of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern (a federal state in the north of East-Germany) a telemetry study has been started in 1992. To date one female otter has been caught and tracked.
- By order of the Federal Ministry of Traffic a study was started to avoid traffic accidents with otters. This problem is increasing in East-Germany after the German reunification. The results of this study - which will be finished at the end of 1993 - shall be taken into account when all the new highways will be built which are planned by the government.

SURVEYS

- A survey using the standard method in Lower-Saxony (a federal state in the north of West-Germany) was finished in autumn 1992. Of 938 sites only 18 (1,9 %) were found positive (Binner et al., in prep.).
- In December 1992 a two-year survey using the standard method was started in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. Appr. 1000 sites will be surveyed.

POLLUTION

- 133 otter spraints from 6 German federal states were analyzed for the pesticides Lindane, Dieldrin and DDE and for PCBs to get an overview of the potential contaminant burden of otters via their prey. The data give the impression that in areas where otter populations are not thriving or not increasing the majority of spraints show a higher pollution burden than in areas where the populations are stable or increasing (Reuther & Mason 1992).

HABITAT MANAGEMENT

At a meeting entitled "Otter Protection in Germany" on September 5-6, 1992 where more than 70 people working in otter conservation participated, an otter habitat network programme was presented. It is based upon the idea of migration corridors which shall guide otters from the increasing populations in East Germany to the fragmentary populations in the west. With this programme "Otter 2000" a network of otter habitats will be established (Reuther 1992c).

RIVER ISE PROJECT

The revitalisation of the river Ise network (now more than 450 km long) makes good progress. More than 100 ha of property on both sides of the main river were bought and changed from industrial to alternative agriculture. More than 15 km of hedges and riparian forest were planted. A team of 6 scientists and several students or external experts has done a lot of scientific studies within this project (Prauser et al., 1992, Reuther 1992d).

OTTER CENTRE

In 1992 more than 112 000 people visited the Hankensbüttel Otter Centre, that means that since its opening in 1988 more than 500 000 visitors have come to this nature conservation education centre. A now stonemarten enclosure for the public was opened in 1992.

BREEDING

Two litters of *Lutra lutra* were born on September 22 (1,1) and November 8 (2,1). These increase the number of litters born in the otter centre since 1988 to 6 and the number of cubs to 13. At the end of 1992. 19 otters were kept at the otter centre.

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