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INTERNATIONAL OTTER SURVIVAL FUND

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Abstract: The IOSF was set up in 1993 to safeguard areas of otter habitat, and also to support people working in research and rehabilitation of otters worldwide. They have also set up a rehabilitation centre for otters in Scotland. The major current threat to otter habitat in Scotland is the proposed development of superquarries, and this is reviewed.

The International Otter Survival Fund was set up in November 1993 to safeguard areas of otter habitat and also to support people working in research and rehabilitation of otters worldwide, its centre is based in the heart of otter country on the Isle of Skye, where they organize an ongoing research and rehabilitation programme.

The future of the species lies in protecting the remaining populations and their habitat and it is therefore vital that we fully understand what features are essential for good otter habitat so that we can indeed protect them.

They have developed contacts with otter specialists in many countries and have to date regional representatives in Spain, Turkey and Russia, and are working closely with scientists in Brazil to understand the full impact of mercury poisoning in the Amazon basin and its effects on the Giant otter population. On a local level, the otter centre for the Highlands and Islands has been established to treat injured and orphaned otters locally, and have been campaigning extensively about the proposed superquarries in Scotland. A report published in January, on the threat of Coastal Superquarries to otters concludes that the effect of the Eurasian otter population from these developments will be severe. Already one of the largest of these quarries is planned at Lingarbay on the Isle of Harris in the Outer Hebrides, and planning consent for this is due to be announced this month by the secretary of state for Scotland. This development alone will threaten 22 otters and destroy a large area of habitat for a minimum of 50 years, by extracting some 600 million tonnes of aggregate in an area about 3 miles x 2 miles and actually removing a mountain.

IOSF Director, Paul Yoxon, states "This is only the tip of the iceberg with regard to superquarries and their impact on otter populations in Western Europe. The ARUP report commissioned by the Department of the Environment, identifies between 15 and 22 coastal superquarries sites in Western Europe and nearly all of these zones are situated in prime otter habitat; in fact many are located in Norway, where the last remaining healthy otter populations occur in this coastal zone; five superquarries are planned in the Highlands of Scotland, the stronghold of otters in Britain."

The International Otter Survival Fund urges European governments not to pay mere lip service to species conservation, but to act in support of European law protecting endangered species. Little was done when the Skye road bridge threatened the local otter population, and it is time that the legal protection given to the otter in the form of three laws in Europe was actually proved to be effective. They go on to state that if governments are serious about the conservation of the otter in Europe then steps must be taken to safeguard the last remaining areas where viable otter populations exist and such uncontrolled development should be checked. The Isle of Harris superquarry will be a test case not only for otter conservation but to see just how serious we are about conserving our native fauna and flora.

If you would like further information on IOSF write to:

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