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**EUROPEAN OTTER WORKSHOP: RESEARCH ADVANCES AND OTTER
CONSERVATION IN EUROPE**

Padula, Salerno, Italy
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Abstract: The workshop was attended by 110 delegates from 19 European countries and 2 from Israel, over three days. The first session was devoted to distribution, GIS modeling, habitat suitability and restoration; the second covered Genetics and conservation; the third was on home range, population dynamics and diet; and the fourth was about threats and conflicts. There was a round table focussing on the status and conservation of otters in Italy: identifying the topics and tasks necessary for the production on for a national action plan for otters. The species in Italy is critically endangered, the only viable population being found in the southern regions (Campania, Calabria, Basilicata, Puglia). The recent discovery of a fragmented population in Molise. The event also included a meeting of the European IUCN/SSC Otter Specialist Group. Proceedings will be published in *Hystrix*.

The meeting was hosted in the beautiful setting of the XIV century's Certosa di Padula, the largest Carthusian monastery in Europe. It is situated within the National Park of Cilento and Vallo di Diano, which hosts one of the most important otter populations in Italy. The meeting was sponsored by the National Park which, as an organisation is at the forefront of otter research in Italy. Foundings also included financial support for students attending from Eastern Europe and Israel. The Workshop was organised in collaboration with the Universities of Rome 'La Sapienza' and Molise.

The Workshop was dedicated to the memory of Claus Reuther, the late Chair of the IUCN SSC Otter Specialist Group who died on December 29th 2004 and dedicated much of his life to the protection of otters and their habitats. The aim of the meeting was to create a discussion forum on different research perspectives and to examine the possibilities of joint national and international research programmes and collaborations.

The Scientific Programme consisted of four sessions, each devoted to a topic relevant for otter research and conservation strategies. Each session consisted of talks by invited speakers and poster presentations. The meeting was attended by 110 delegates from 19 European countries and 2 from Israel. A total of 41 posters were presented over the three days of the meeting. Authors of posters were also given the opportunity to make a five minutes presentation of their work at the end of each of the four sessions of invited talks.

The opening ceremony was followed by a brief and personal remembrance of Claus Reuther by Michaela Bodner, Continental OSG representative for Europe.

The first scientific session, devoted to distribution, GIS modeling, habitat suitability and restoration, was chaired by Luigi Boitani. The invited talks started with Vadim Sidorovich who described the research methods, density variation and key factors for distribution of otters in Belarus. This was followed by Romina Fusillo who reported on modeling otter range distribution and its implications for conservation of the Italian population and Xavier Janssens who proposed a GIS-derived landscape constraint to model the occurrence of the elusive otter in Cevennes (France). Presentation on posters were made by Marcello Cannetiello - Ecological niche factor analysis in otter from Cilento and Vallo di Diano National Park, Amichai Guter -Reinforcing of the Eurasian otter population in Israel:

translocation as a step towards recolonisation, Anna Loy -Evaluating habitat suitability for otters through a fine scale GIS approach, Aksel Bo Madsen -Status and conservation of the otter in Denmark, Paola Ottino -Distribution and habitat use of the otter in relation to land use in the Araglin Valley, Southern Ireland, Lukas Poledník -Estimating numbers and densities of otters using GIS and Jerzy Romanowski - Monitoring of the otter recolonisation of Poland.

The afternoon session was dedicated to Genetics and conservation, and chaired by Ettore Randi, who also spoke on his own research interests - the patterns of genetic diversity in otter populations in Europe. The second invited talk was by Hugh Jansman who described the use of non-invasive genetics and telemetry to monitor the re-introduction of otters in the Netherlands. Posters presentation were by Dominic McCafferty -Non-invasive genetic sampling of the Eurasian otter using hair samples, Johanna Arrendal - Population structure in the Eurasian otter in Sweden through noninvasive genetic sampling, Laura Bonesi -Testing the ability to resolve population parameters of Eurasian otters when using the method of DNA fingerprinting on spraints, Ainhoa Ferrando -Distribution of otters genotypes obtained from non-invasive samples in a reintroduction area, Petra Hajkova - Factors affecting the success rate of spraint DNA analysis and Barbora Zemanova- Assessment of otter population size in Trebonsko using a non-invasive genetic method.

The session were followed by a rich and stimulating discussion, highlighting the problems and advantages related to the status and distribution of otters with the new non-invasive genetic techniques. The first session on Saturday focused on home range, population dynamics and diet and was chaired by Jim Conroy and Claudio Prigioni. In his presentation Jim discussed the role of diet in the ecology of the Eurasian otter in northern Europe, with especial reference to his studies in Shetland. This was complemented in the second presentation, where Jordi Ruiz-Olmo presented a wide ranging review on adaptations of Mediterranean otters to the heterogeneous habitat (stability vs. fluctuations). Poster presentations were by Livia Mattei on otter experimental release in the Aterno-Pescara basin, Paola Ottino on density and home range of otters on the Blackwater catchment (Ireland) and Nuno Pedroso on the diet of the otters in dams of South Portugal during the dry season.

The afternoon session, chaired by Michaela Bodner, was dedicated to threats and conflicts. Invited talks were given by Margarida Santos-Reis who described the conflict in fish farms in Portugal, Paul Chanin on road casualties and by Arno Gutleb who gave a thought provoking description on the possible implications for wildlife of prenatal exposure to pollutants. Posters were presented by Thrine Heggberget -Otters and roads, Alison Wilkie - Otter conservation in Scotland's First National Park, Katerina Poledníková -The impact of otter disturbance on the condition, state of health and stress indicator levels in common carp.

That evening, the colloquium hosted a meeting of the European IUCN/SSC Otter Specialist Group. This was chaired by Michaela Bodner, continental representative for Europe. The meeting was attended by representatives for Portugal (Margarida Santos Reis), Spain (Jordi Ruiz Olmo), Norway (Thrine Moe Heggberget), the Netherland (Addy de Jongh), Denmark (Aksel Bo Madsen), Poland (Jerzy Romanowski), Belarus (Vadim Sidorovich), Switzerland (Darius Weber), Italy (Anna Loy), and other OSG members (Arno Gutleb, Amit Dolev, Hugh Jansman). Arno Gutleb posed the problem of fundings for the OSG Bulletin, and Jim Conroy reported the offer by Paul Yoxon to support the publication of Bulletin through the International Otter Survival Found. The meeting was also told that Jim Conroy had been appointed by IUCN as the new chairman of the IUCN/SSC OSG.

During Saturday, two films on otters, made by the helper Lorenzo Quaglietta were shown during the lunch.

Throughout the meeting, the staff of the National Park was always in attendance to help out as required. All the delegates commented on the catering, the food for coffee breaks or lunches was to a very high standard, culminating in a simply superb conference dinner – thank you National Park

On Sunday morning, a round table meeting, moderated by Anna Loy, focused on the status and conservation of otters in Italy. Discussions concentrated on identifying the topics and tasks necessary for the production on for a national action plan for otters. The species in Italy is critically endangered, the only viable population being found in the southern regions (Campania, Calabria, Basilicata, Puglia). The recent discovery of a fragmented population in Molise resulted in the decision to invite a representative from the local region to join the team involved in the application of the Italian action

plan. The framework for the discussion was described by Piero Genovesi of Istituto Nazionale Fauna Selvatica, the Italian Government Game Service, and by Pierluigi Fiorentino, representative of the Italian Ministry of Environment. Giuseppe Tarallo, president of the National Park of Cilento and Vallo di Diano, pointed out the central and leading role of the Park in the funding of research and on the strategic role of the Cilento otter population for conservation of the species in Italy. Luigi Boitani, head of the research project on otters in the National Park of Cilento and Vallo di Diano, addressed to the importance of coordination between state and local governments for decision making. Livia Mattei, representative of Corpo Forestale dello Stato, the Italian Forest and Wildlife Service, asked for a more clear framework of agencies and structures involved in otter and river management and conservation. Antonio Canu, representative of Italian WWF offered the WWF experience in fund raising to help in research and management actions. Otter expert Gabriella Reggiani from Istituto di Ecologia Applicata pointed out that there was sufficient data to know the present distribution range of otters in Italy, but much work is still needed to assess densities of otters. Claudio Prigioni, head of the research project on otter in the National Park of Pollino, stressed the importance of studies on viable populations to obtain data on density, while Anna Loy focused on the importance of detailed surveys and habitat evaluation projects on fragmented and peripheral populations that will allow to predict potential and future expansion of otters in Italy.

Claudio Prigioni, chief editor of *Hystrix*- the Italian Journal of Mammalogy, offered to publish the Proceedings of the Workshop in a special issue to be produced at the end of 2006.

About 30 attendants also participated the post congress tour to the River Calore, where the main otter project operated by the National Park has been running. The tour guides were Saviana Pansino, Valentina Ruca, who did much of the radiotracking and field work, Ilaria Campana and Lucia Schettino.

The following helped greatly in the organisation of the conference - Salvatore Antonelli, Francesco Albergamo, Ilaria Campana, Marcello Cannetiello, Saviana Pansino, Lorenzo Quaglietta, Valentina Ruca, Lucia Schettino. Our sincere thanks for their efforts.

Pdf files of the abstract volume, pictures and the participants list can be downloaded from the National Park web site dedicated to the EOW at the address www.pncvd.it