

**IUCN OTTER SPECIALIST GROUP BULLETIN
VOLUME 22 ISSUE 1 PAGES 25 - 28**

Citation: Wright, L. (2005) Interesting Cooperative Bedding Gathering Behaviour In Captive Asian Small-Clawed Otters (*Amblonyx cinerea*). *IUCN Otter Spec. Group Bull.* **18**(1): 25 - 28

**INTERESTING COOPERATIVE BEDDING GATHERING BEHAVIOUR IN
CAPTIVE ASIAN SMALL-CLAWED OTTERS (*Amblonyx cinerea*)**

Lesley Wright

CCLRC Rutherford Appleton Laboratory, R1, 1.58, Chilton, Didcot, Oxon, OX11 8SR. Email: L.Wright@rl.ac.uk

Abstract: At Exmoor Zoological Park in Devon, UK, the Asian Small-Clawed Otter family cooperate to bend down bamboo canes to reach and remove the leaves for adding to their bedding



On 20th March 2005, I visited Exmoor Zoo in Devon, UK, to do behavioural observations on the Asian Small-Clawed Otters for the KASBAH project (WRIGHT, 2003). The otters there display an interesting method of gathering bedding, which might be of interest to other otter keepers.

At this time, the otter group consisted of a male, a female and their two six-month old female cubs. The pen is heavily vegetated, but the otters selectively prefer bamboo leaves for bedding, and have stripped the lower parts of the bamboo canes for this purpose. Over this winter, they developed a technique for gaining access to the upper parts of the bamboo.

First, the alpha female climbs up a bamboo cane to approximately four feet above the ground. There she appears to test the flexibility of individual canes by rocking on them using her front paws whilst balancing on the original cane with her hind feet and tail (see Figure 1). She then climbs onto the chosen cane, holding on with paws and teeth, and begins to use her body weight to sway the cane too and fro, gradually edging out on the cane as it begins to bend. During this process, the rest of the otter family gathers under the bamboo and watch.



Figure 1: Female climb bamboo cane and tests adjacent canes

As the cane bends, she lets go with her back paws and hangs on the cane, so that her weight bows it towards the ground. The rest of the family gather under where the leaves of the cane are descending, reach up and grab the leaves and pull it down. The whole family then rips leaves off the bamboo and takes them to the holt for bedding (see Figure 2). During the three periods of observation of this behaviour, the cane was ever left to spring back.



Figure 2: Female uses body weight to bend cane down; rest of the otter family seize leaves

When all the leaves have been removed, the rest of the otter family moves off to groom or forage, but the alpha-female then shreds as much as she can of the cane itself (see Figure 3) - on one occasion severing it and dragging it to the holt.



Figure 3: Female shreds the cane to add to the holt bedding

According to the keepers, the otters go through this routine several times a week, and on some days, several times a day; I observed three such events during a single day's observation. This behaviour seems to show a reasonably high degree of planning and co-operation to achieve the desired end. It also demonstrates that pen vegetation can provide good enrichment if the animals are allowed to make use of it for their own ends.

Acknowledgements - Thanks to Mr Danny Reynolds and Mr Steve Eddy at Exmoor Zoological Park for allowing me to work there, and providing information about the history of this behaviour.

REFERENCES

Wright, L.C. (2003) Assessing the Welfare of Captive Asian Small-Clawed Otters (*Amblonyx cinereus*): can Inductive Methods play a Part? *IUCN Otter Spec. Group Bull.* **20** (1): 35-41.

RESUME

INTÉRESSANT COMPORTEMENT D'ENTRAIDE DANS LA COLLECTE DE MATÉRIAU POUR LEUR LITIÈRE, OBSERVÉ CHEZ DES LOUTRES CENDRÉES (*Amblonyx cinerea*) EN CAPTIVITÉ

Au parc zoologique d'Exmoor, dans le Devon, au Royaume-Uni, les membres d'une famille de loutres cendrées ont coopéré entre elles pour plier des canes de bambou, dans le but d'atteindre et d'arracher les feuilles qu'elles ont ensuite ajouté à leur litière.

RESUMEN

COMPORTAMIENTO COOPERATIVO OBSERVADO EN MADRIGUERA EN LA NUTRIA DE RÍO DE UÑAS PEQUEÑAS ASIÁTICA (*Amblonyx cinerea*) VIVIENDO EN CAPTIVIDAD

En el Parque Zoológico Exmoor en Devon, Inglaterra, los miembros de la familia de nutria de río de uñas pequeñas asiática cooperan para doblar las hojas de bambú, remover las hojas, y sumarlas al lugar de descanso dentro de la madriguera.