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**STATUS OF EURASIAN OTTER (*Lutra lutra*) IN IRAN**

Mahmud Karami<sup>1</sup>, Roohallah Mirzaei<sup>2</sup>, Mona Hamzehpour<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Campus of Natural Resource, Tehran University, e-mail: mkarami@chamran.ut.ac.ir*

<sup>2</sup>*Senior Expert, Tehran University, E-mail: i\_mirzaei@yahoo.com*

<sup>3</sup>*Senior Expert, Islamic Azad University*

**Abstract:** Signs of otters have been found on three occasions in recent years - in 1986, 2000 and 2006. This probably indicates sporadic transient otters from the Lebanese coast, and may represent an important source of genetic variability for the largely isolated Israeli otter population.



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**INTRODUCTION**

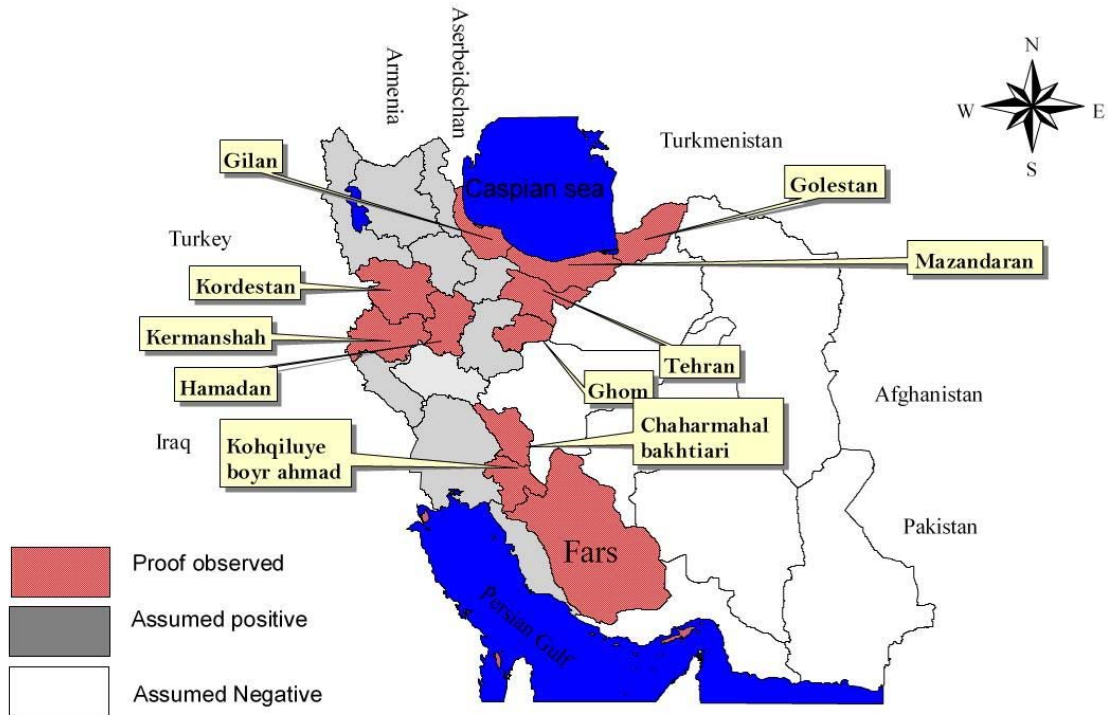
Eurasian Otters are distributed through most of Iran's aquatic ecosystems. Since there are no comprehensive reports on their occurrence, Dr. Karami (Tehran University) decided in 2005 to start studying the species in this country. He therefore instigated two theses on this. In this report we review all information about the species in Iran, and we later hope to publish scientific articles about the status of Eurasian otter in Iran.

**DISTRIBUTION**

Review of scientific sources and interviews with otter-aware people clearly showed that the Eurasian Otter lives in most of the aquatic ecosystems of Iran. Extensive distribution, however, does not mean the species has a high population or high density. The species is found in most of Iran's rivers, lakes, pools, etc. such as Gilan, Mazandaran, Azarbayejan, Tehran, Kordestan, Kermanshah, Markazi, Isfahan, Khorasan, Chaharmahal-Bakhtiari, Fars, Khozestan, and Lorestan provinces (Kiabi, 1993). Eetemad (1984) in his study of the physical and morphological characteristics of the Eurasian Otter referred to the subspecies *L. l. seistanica* and *L. l. meridionalis*. The first subspecies was found in most areas referred to in the text above. The second subspecies was found only on the banks of the Heermad River (Eetemad, 1984). Dr. Kiabi in 1993 introduced the Eurasian Otter in Aquatic Organisms Magazine, in which the distribution was described (Kiabi, 1993; Figure 1). Later, when discussing mainly Smooth-Coated Otter in the Haw-al-Azim wetland also Eurasian Otters were covered (Ziaee, 1996). Mirzajanei (1998) referred to locations where Eurasian Otters are found in Iran, including biometry of dead animals from various locations.

We interviewed Dr Abdoli, who has searched many Iranian rivers for otter signs, and who has found indications of their presence in most of them, such as the Chaharmahal-Bakhtiari. In addition he has seen a number of otters in the Fars province, and along the Haraz River. Mirzajanei (1998) described finding otters in Kordestan and Gilan provinces. Karami found a carcass of a Eurasian Otter in Kermanshah, and one from the Jajrood River (pers. comm.). Mirzaei, who is currently studying *Lutra lutra* on the river Jajrood, found two carcasses of otters during his fieldwork on the Jagrood River, and also otter signs (spraint and tracks) in the area and Taleghan River. He recounted that when visiting Anzali, he understood that otter skins were sold commonly in one of the bazaars, and that they are

caught accidentally in fishing nets in this area. In Golestan province, many skins were recovered by environmental officers from criminals (Figure 7).



**Figure 1:** Map of Eurasian Otter Distribution in Iran (Mirzaei, 2006)

Mona Hamzehpour is working on a study of the presence, distribution and population density of Eurasian Otters in Deylaman-Dorfac hunting-prohibited area, where she found a number of otter-signs (spraint and tracks) on the long Shenrood river, where she live-trapped an otter, releasing it four months later.

We also understand from interviews with the Environment Department’s specialist in Malayer, that the species occurs in Hamedan province.

It therefore appears that Eurasian Otters are well distributed in our country, but we should begin an orderly and systematic program for studying population densities and distributions so we can regulate management actions. The information available already today is summarized below (Tab.1):

**Table 1:** Some information about researchers who study Eurasian Otters in Iran

Area Monitored	Name of Researcher	Date of Study
All of Iran	E. Eetemad	1984
All of Iran	B.H. Kiabi	1993
Haw-al-Azim wetlands (Mesopotamian)	H. Ziaei	1996
Mahabad Dam, Sefidrood River, Anzali wetland & Kermanshah	A. Mirzajanei	1998
Jajrood River, Tehran	R. Mirzaei	2005-2006
Shenrood River	M. Hamzehpour	2005-2006
Shafarood River, Gilan	M. & M. Ershad	2006

**BIOMETRY**

Very little information on the biometry of Eurasian Otter in Iran is available (Tab. 2, 3).

**Table 2:** Characteristics of Otters from different areas in Iran

Province	Area of capture	Head and body (cm)	Tail (cm)	Back foot (cm)	Ear (cm)	Sex (m/f)
Mazandaran	Neka River	68	40	9	-	f
Gilan	Sangar Dam	66	39	12	2	f
Golestan	Gorgan	43.5	27	10.5	1.7	f
Tehran	Jajrood River	71	41	21	-	f
Gilan	Shenrood River	67	42	18.5	1	f

**Table 3:** Some Information about two Otters from Anzali and Kermanshah.

Measurement	Anzali Wetland	Kermanshah
Length of skull	10.80	11.62
Width of mastoid	6.40	7.11
Distance between eyes	1.5	1.51
Length of nose	4.05	3.60
Width of zygomatic	7.69	7.12

**REPRODUCTION**

We do not have any information about timing of reproduction.

**FOOD HABITS**

Diet has been investigated on the Jajrood River during the current study (Tab. 4) (Mirzaei, 2005).

**Table 4:** Food diet of Eurasian Otters on the Jajrood River during a year

Prey	Frequency (%)
Fish	90.76
Crabs	3.66
Birds	3.58
Insects	2.00

## PARASITES

Mona. Hamzehpour recorded parasites of the otter in her thesis (Tab. 5) (Hamzehpour, 2005).

**Table 5:** Parasites of otters found by examination of 158 spraints in Deylaman-Dorfak hunting-prohibited area

Parasites	Number
<i>Isospora spp.</i>	4
<i>Fasciola hepatica</i>	86
<i>Trematode egg</i>	837
<i>Nematode larva</i>	183
<i>Nematode egg</i>	388
<i>Capillaria spp.</i>	2391

## THREATS

Eurasian Otters have been hunted cruelly in our country because of their economic value, and because they are piscivorous carnivores.

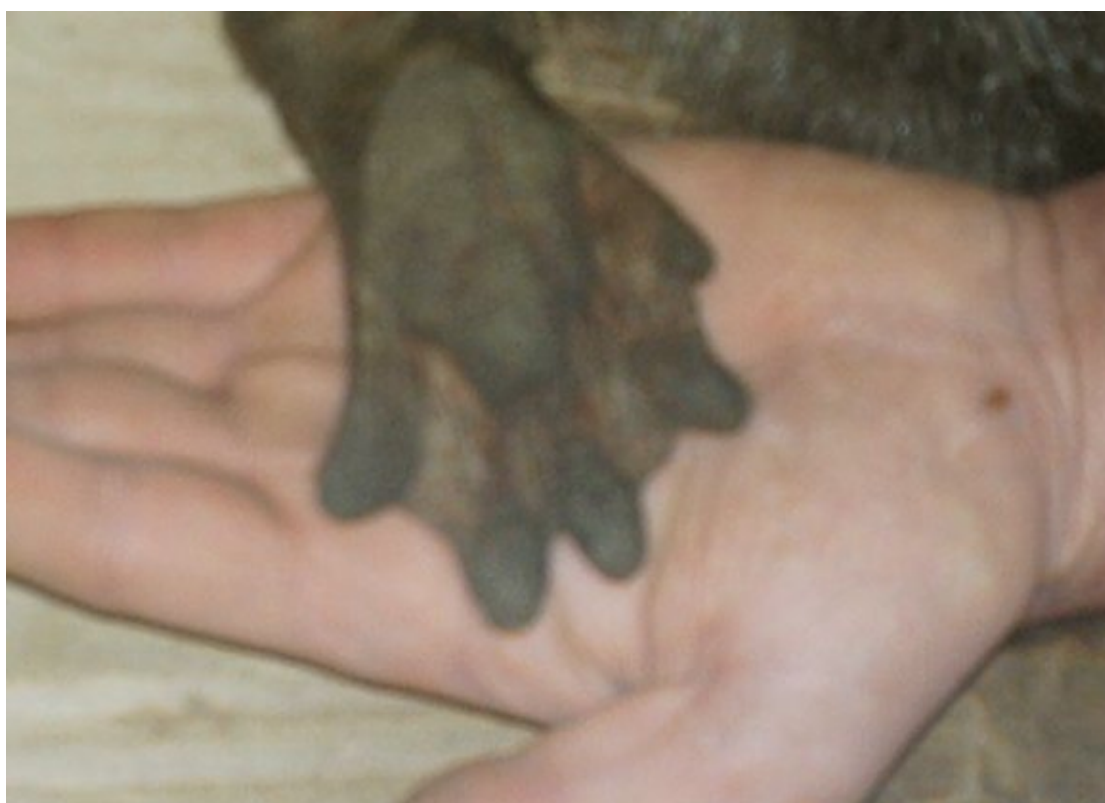
In Iran, the species has been hunted to protect fish farms, and for their pelts for sale, for taxidermy and for decoration in houses and shops. In the provinces in the north of Iran, where the habitat is especially suitable for otters, they are common as taxidermic mounts. On fish farms, they are hunted with traps, electric fencing and weapons, and this is an important factor in reducing numbers. In one fish farm pool, five otters died due to electric fencing in only 2 years, and 2 died similarly in Tehran. In the north, otters are drowned in fishery nets, whereas in the central provinces, habitat destruction and riverbank degradation are the problem. We do not have any information about otter deaths due to pollution.

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**Figure 2:** Live otter from Deylaman-Dorfak hunting-prohibited area (Hamzhepour, 2005)



**Figure 3:** Hand of live otter from Deylaman-Dorfak hunting-prohibited area (Hamzhepour, 2005)





**Figures 4:** Otter from Jajrood River (Mirzaei, 2005)



**Figures 5:** Otter from Jajrood River (Mirzaei, 2005)



**Figure 6:** Footprints of an otter on bank of Jajrood River (Mirzaei, 2005)



**Figure 7:** Some of otter skins from Golestan National Park ( photo: Khosroshahi, 2006)