

## REPORT

# OCCURRENCE, FOOD RESOURCES AND FOOD PREFERENCE OF SPOTTED-NECKED OTTERS (*Hydrictis maculicollis*) IN COASTAL AREA OF ONDO STATE, NIGERIA

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**Abstract:** The study examined the occurrence and food preference of Spotted-Necked Otters (*Hydrictis maculicollis*) in the riverine area of Ondo state, Nigeria. Focus group discussion (FGD), field observation and laboratory analysis were adopted for data collection. Data obtained were analysed through descriptive (tables, charts) analysis. The results revealed that Spotted-Necked Otters are present in eight (8) major rivers (Alape, Oluwa, Ufara, Oriopo, Okukaluju, Korogbene, Opuotu and Ita-Oluwa) within Ilaje and Ese-Odo local government areas of Ondo State. The respondents stated that preferred habitat of Spotted-Necked Otter is freshwater rivers and streams as well as the shallow area of water bodies with no or low current, undisturbed/calm water, areas of fish abundance and areas with vegetation cover. Seven food items (fish, crab, water snail, snake, small mammals, insects and palm cannel) were identified as being consumed by Spotted-Necked Otters in the study area. The most preferred food item of Spotted-Necked Otters are various fish species. It was reported that Spotted-Necked Otter does not feed on Bullhead catfish. Faecal analysis result revealed fish in the highest proportion of 67.19% followed by crabs with a percentage of 18.86 while rodentss/small mammal had the lowest percentage of 0.42%. A total of nine fish species were identified from the Faecal analysis of Spotted-Necked Otters: three species of Cichlidae, two species of Clariidae, and one species each of Anguillidae, Claroteidae, Gymnarchidae and Osteoglossidae. The presence of Spotted-Necked Otters was affirmed during field survey and FGD and they were reported to consume seven food items but mainly feed on fish species. It is recommended that efforts should be put in place to reduce the otter-fishermen conflict that may result from fish preference by otters in the area. Since vegetation cover is one of the factors determining habitat preference of Spotted-Necked Otter, the rate of vegetation removal should be reduced.

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## INTRODUCTION

Otters are carnivorous mammals in the Mustelidae family and subfamily Lutrinae. The 13 extant otter species worldwide are all semiaquatic, aquatic, or marine mammals (Amhaouch et al, 2020) and favour a range of wetland habitats. Two species are marine; the other eleven species live predominantly in fresh water throughout America, Europe, Africa, and Asia, in freshwater ecosystems that sustain an abundance of prey such as fish, crayfish, crabs, mussels, and frogs. Otters are well known to play important ecological roles in the wetland ecosystem and contribute benefits to the surrounding communities. Hence, otters have been perceived as the ambassador of wetland conservation. Even though it has this vital reputation, otters are still facing serious threats such as wetland degradation, pollution, otter-human conflict, and illegal trade for pets (Woo, 2020).

Most river otters are opportunistic feeders, feeding on whatever is most easily obtained. Diet often varies seasonally or locally, depending on which prey is available (Lariviere, 2024). However, some mustelids have specialized diets. For example, Clawless otters (genus *Aonyx*) specialise in crustaceans (especially crabs), worms and molluscs, whereas other otters (genus *Lutra*) are primarily fish eaters.

Most otter species are nocturnal and/or crepuscular carnivores and are capable of travelling long distance in search of food over most of their range (Thapa et al, 2021). The Spotted-Necked Otter requires permanent water sources with high fish densities (Hoffmann, 2008; Perrin and Carugati, 2000) and comparatively large tracts of extensively used semi-natural ecosystems (Freitas et al., 2007; Ogada, 2007). Prey is consumed either in the water or on shore. Otters shows no prey preference, adapting their diet to the fish populations that are available (Krawczyk et al., 2016; Sittenthaler et al., 2019). However, otters do show a preference for small fish (small species or juveniles of large species) (Amhaouch et al., 2020).

Faecal analysis of undigested materials is widely used to assess the diets of otters and is an important method to determine what kind of prey is present (Abdul- Patah et al., 2014). Faecal components may include fish scales, bones, feathers, arthropod chitin and mucus.

The Spotted-Necked Otter is listed on CITES Appendix II (<https://cites.org/eng>) and classified as Near-threatened on the IUCN Red List (Reed-Smith et al., 2015). Major threats to otter populations include habitat destruction, reduction in prey biomass, water pollution and poaching (Karami et al., 2006). Changes in habitat structure often alter the availability of food resources or acceptance of novel food resources (Contesse et al., 2004). Conflict between fishermen and fish predators is prevalent worldwide. In particular, otters are considered to be one of the main fish predators and conflict has been recorded between fishermen and otters by many authors in Europe (Kloskowski 2011; Poledníková et al., 2013; Santos-Reis et al., 2013), Brazil (Rosas-Ribeiro et al., 2011), Africa (Akpona et al., 2015, de Vos 2018, Salami et al., 2022).

A thorough understanding of the diet, food preference and feeding patterns which largely defines the ecological niche of a species is an essential element in determining what limits populations and therefore essential for effective conservation management (DWNP, 2010). For carnivores, food is often limited, and diets may vary between regions. During these periods of food shortage less preferred foods are often taken. Understanding these limitations and differences allows for planning an effective context-specific conservation strategy. In this study, therefore, we aimed to determine the food resources and preference of spotted necked otter in Ondo State, Nigeria.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Description of the Study Area

This study was carried out in the riverine area of Ondo state, comprising four local government areas: Ilaje (with an area of 1,318 km<sup>2</sup>, population figure of 277,034, major occupation is fishing), Ese Odo (an area of 762 km<sup>2</sup>, a population of 154,978 at the 2006 census, major occupation is fishing, and farming), Okitipupa (land mass of 803 km<sup>2</sup>, population of 234,138, major occupation is farming), and Irele (area of 963 km<sup>2</sup>, population of 145,166, major occupation is farming) (Fig. 1). The area experiences a tropical climate consisting of both wet and dry seasons (Agunbiade et al., 2010). The wet and dry season average rainfall index and temperature are wet: 3000 mm, 28 °C, and dry: 800 mm, 32 °C (Agunbiade et al., 2010). Mangrove swamp is the dominant vegetation type in this area, especially the red mangrove, *Rhizophora racemose*, and the white mangrove *Avicennia* spp., typical of swamps. A striking feature of vegetation in the area is the desiccation induced by marine water incursion into about 10,000 hectares of freshwater swamp forest. The area is drained by many perennial streams and rivers (Agunbiade et al., 2010). The area supports a wide range of aquatic animals (Babatunde, 2010). These abundant aquatic resources are the primary source of livelihood for people in the area (Kabir et al., 2020).



Figure 1. Map showing major communities of the southwest coast of Nigeria

### Method of Data Collection

Data for the study was collected using quantitative and qualitative research techniques. The instrument used for data collection includes Focus Group Discussion (FGD), Field Observation and Laboratory Analysis.

### Focus Group Discussion (FGD)

A total of 15 FGD sessions with experienced fishermen (respondents with more than ten years of fishing experience) were conducted in the following communities: Mofehintokun, Motiala, Aboto, Ago-debo, Zion-Igbokoda, Kurugbene-Igbokoda, in Ilaje Local Government Area, and Igbobini, Inikorogha, Igbekebo, Kiribo, Sabomi,

Iluagbo, Arogbo, Agadagba and Igbotu in Ese-odo Local Government Area. The group size was between 10-12 members. Interviews were conducted on subject relating to food resources and food preferences of otters in their area. Questions were asked in the simplest format using familiar terms, and translations in local language were done. Each interview session was not more than 1 hour.

### ***Field Observation***

The Reece survey method (a modified transect survey method) was adopted, in which a total of four rivers in the coastline communities in the study area were surveyed for this research. The rivers include: Taleta or Ufara, Oluwa, Korogbene/Okukaluju and Itaoluwa. The Reece survey method involves walking along the riverbank and using canoes on water to observe the animal Faecal droppings/spraint and food remnants in fish traps and nets (otters bite or partially consume the fish), otter predation (verified by the presence of teeth marks and confirmed by an experienced fisherman on each fish species captured per day) (Akpona et al., 2015). Reece transects were walked between 6am - 11am (morning) and 4pm – 6:30pm (evening) for each of the rivers. The research was done for a period of 90 days (three months from May to July 2004.). Otter spraints were collected along the four rivers where otter presence has been reported (Abdul-Patah et al., 2016).

### ***Laboratory Analysis***

A total of twelve Faecal samples (fresh and dried) were collected along the rivers surveyed, put in separate containers and labelled. Feeding remnants were also collected along with the Faecal samples. The Faecal samples collected were dried and separated according to fauna groups (such as crabs, fish, rodents, mammals and insects), and parts (such as bones, scales and feathers). For identification, the remains were photographed using a digital camera and sorted according to group and part.

### ***Data Analysis***

Data obtained were stored in Microsoft Excel and later subjected to descriptive analysis such as frequency tables and charts to further describe the information gathered from the study. Arc GIS was used to map the occurrence of otters in the study area.

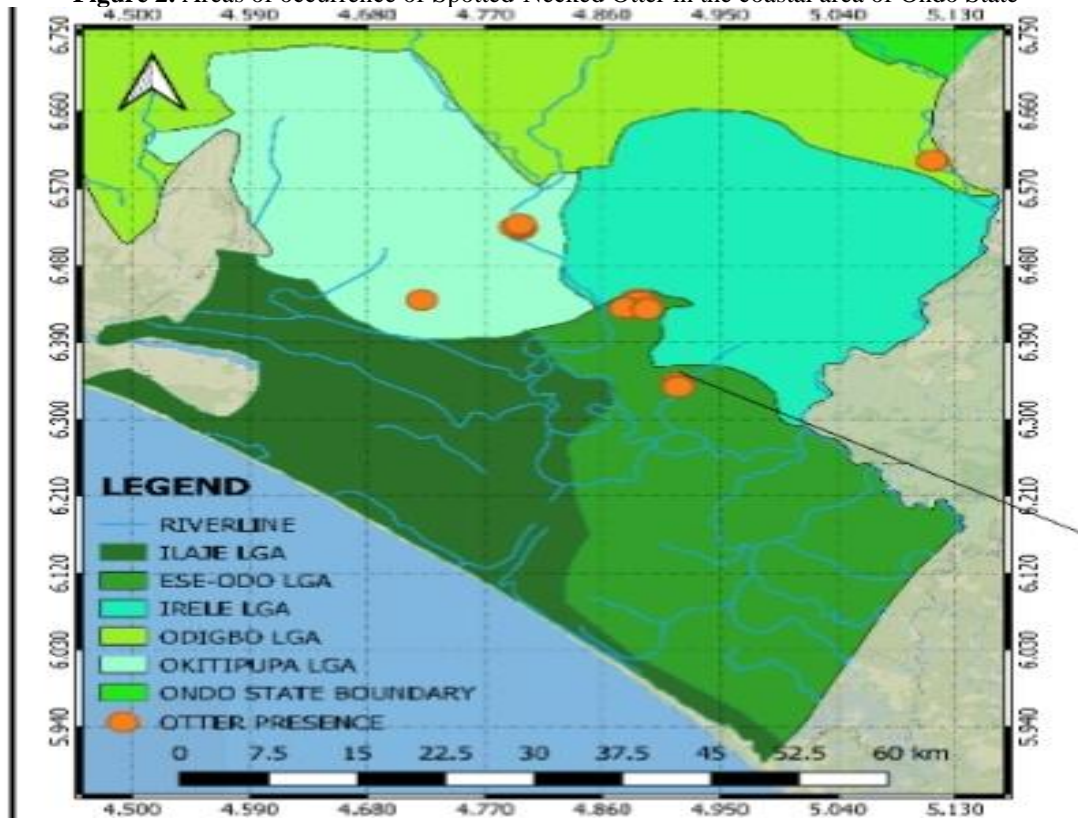
## **RESULTS**

### **Distribution Pattern of Spotted-Necked Otters in Coastline Communities of Ondo State, Nigeria**

The result of the field survey revealed that Spotted-Necked Otter are present in eight major rivers within the Ilaje and Ese-Odo Local Government Areas of Ondo State. These rivers include the Alape, Oluwa, Ufara, and Oriopo in Ilaje Local Government Area, and Oluwa, Okukaluju, Korogbene, and Opuotu in Ese-Odo Local Government Area. Otter presence in these rivers was established through direct sighting and observation of otter activities and indicators such as footprints, fishing gear (net and trap) destruction, Faecal samples, food remnants, and otter resting points (couch/track). The GPS coordinates of Otter distributions are presented in Figures 2 and 3.



**Figure 2.** Areas of occurrence of Spotted-Necked Otter in the coastal area of Ondo State



**Figure 3.** Locations where Otters were sighted directly during the survey

***Distribution based on Focused Group Discussion***

The result from the Focus Group discussions establishes the presence of Spotted-Necked Otters along these major rivers: Itaoluwa, Alape, Utara, Opuotu, Okukaluju, Korogbene, Oriopo and Oluwa in the Ilaje and Ese-odo Local Government Areas (Table 1). All the respondents said that the Spotted-Necked Otter is present in the study area. It was considered by all respondents that preferred habitat of Spotted-Necked Otter is fresh water rivers and streams. The Spotted-Necked Otter is called “Lombo” by the Ilajes and Apois while the Ijaws in Ese-Odo call it “Okosi”. The majority of the respondents in the communities affirmed that they had seen otters directly. They also

said they have on many occasions seen indicators/signs of otter presence such as spraints/Faecal droppings (Fig. 5), footprints, food remnants of fish (Fig. 6), fishing gear destroyed, otter latrines and otter resting sites. Furthermore, the respondents said that otters come on land to eat crab, rest and defecate. It was also believed that Spotted-Necked Otters prefer shallow areas of water bodies with no or low current, undisturbed/calm water, areas of fish abundance and areas with vegetation cover.

**Table 1.** Distribution and habitat preference of Spotted-Necked Otters in riverine areas of Ondo State based on Focus Group Discussions

Question(s)	Response	Communities	Associated Rivers
Presence of Spotted-Necked Otters in the area.	All the respondents confirm the presence of Spotted-Necked Otters in the area.	Ago-debo, Aboto, Iluagbo, Motiala, Mofehitokun, Igbobini, Inikorogha, Kiribo, Sabomi, Agadagba, Arogbo, Igbotu	Oluwa, Ufara, Alape, Itaoluwa, Opuout, Okunkalaju, Korogbene
Habitat type where Spotted-Necked Otters are found.	All the respondents said they are found only in the freshwater rivers and streams.	All the communities above	All the rivers above
Have you ever seen live otters?	All of the respondents said they had seen otters in the study area	All the communities above	All the rivers above
Spraints, Footprints, Feeding Activities, Resting sites, Otter Latrines, Tracks	All of the respondents said they had seen indications of otter presence across the study area.	All the communities above	All the rivers above
Carcass of otter trapped in fishing gear	All respondents reported to have seen otter carcasses	All the communities above	All the rivers above
What habitat do the otter prefer?	All the respondents said they preferred shallow water with low current, undisturbed water, areas of fish abundance and areas with vegetation cover.	All the communities above	All the rivers above

### Food Resources of Spotted-Necked Otter in the Coastal Area of Ondo State

In the FGD, the respondents in all communities identified seven food items consumed by Spotted-Necked Otters in the study area (Table 2). These food items include fish, crabs, water snails, snakes, small mammals, insects (beetles) and palm kernels used as bait in fish traps. All the respondents stated that the most preferred food item of Spotted-Necked Otters is fish. Some of the fish species mentioned as consumed by Spotted-Necked Otters in the area are Tilapia (e.g *Oreochromis niloticus*, *Tilapia zilla*), *Clarias* species, African Bonytongue (*Heterotis niloticus*), Ohanri (*Gymnerchus niloticus*), etc. However, 95% of the respondents reported that Spotted-Necked Otters preferred *Clarias* species, which may be due to the fact that they have no scales, while 5% of the respondents said they preferred Tilapia species to other fish. It was reported

that Spotted-Necked Otters do not feed on the Udicat/Cory/Bullhead catfish, locally called “akokoniko”, possibly due to its hard bony fins/spines (Fig. 4). The respondents stated that Spotted-Necked Otters feed on any size of fish (small, medium and big). They also reported that feeding time is early hours of the day and late hours of the night, which is when human fishing activities are reduced. In the Aboto, Motiala and Akintubuwa communities, the respondents reported that Spotted-Necked Otters feed on snakes when they are caught in fish traps.

**Table 2.** Food resources and preferences of Spotted-Necked Otters from FGD

Food Resources and Preferences	Responses
What type (s) of organism are eaten by Spotted-Necked Otters in your area?	The respondents said they eat fish, crabss, insects, small mammals, prawn, snakes, palm kernels.
Which of the food resources is preferred by Spotted-Necked Otters?	The respondents said they preferred fish to other food items
What are the factors responsible for their food preference?	The respondents said it is availability of the food resources
Are there any fish species otters don't eat?	The respondents said they don't eat Bullhead cat fish (Akonikoko)
Do Spotted-Necked Otters have a preference for certain sizes of fish	The respondents said they don't have preference for any size of fish



**Figure 4.** Bullhead catfish (Akonikoko), Less preferred prey of otters in the area



**Figure 5.** Spraint of Spotted-Necked Otter collected at the River Oluwa in the Iluagbo community



**Figure 6.** Food remnant from Spotted-Necked Otter observed At the River Utera in the Aboto community

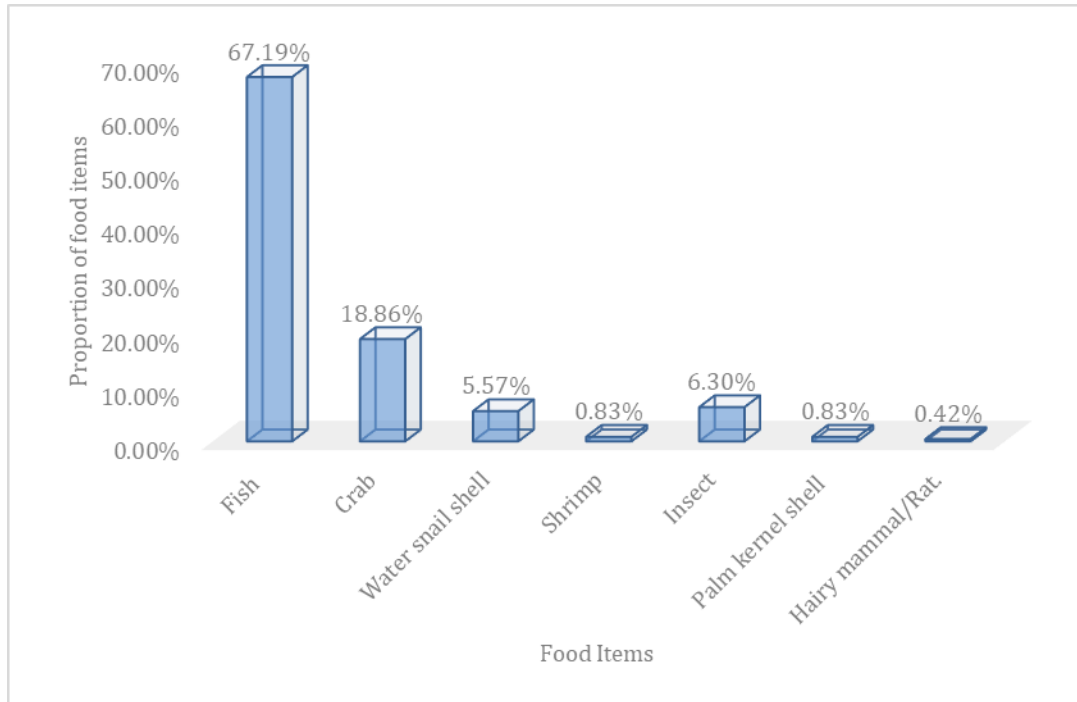
### ***Food Items Identified and their Relative Abundance from Spotted-Necked Otter Faecal Analysis***

A total of seven food items and unidentified species were recorded in the Faecal analysis of Spotted-Necked Otter samples collected across the seven major rivers where the animal was found (Table. 3, Fig. 7). Fish had the highest proportion of 67.19%, followed by crabs with a percentage of 18.86, while rodents/small mammals had the lowest percentage of 0.42%. This indicates that fish is the most preferred food item of Spotted-Necked Otters in the study area. In the Oluwa River, five food items were identified: fish, crab, water snail, insects and palm kernels. In the River Ufara, four food items were identified: fish, crabs, water snails and insects. In the River Okukalaju/Korogbene, five food items, fish, shrimp, crabs, snails and insects, were recorded. A total of nine fish species were identified from the Faecal analysis of Spotted-Necked Otters (Table 4). This comprised three species of the Cichlidae family, two species of the Clariidae family, and one species each of the Anguillidae, Claroteidae, Gymnarchidae and Osteoglossidae families.

**Table 3.** Proportion of food items identified from laboratory analysis of Spotted-Necked Otter faeces

<b>Rivers/LGA</b>	<b>Food Items in Faeces</b>	<b>Proportion (%) Sample A</b>	<b>Proportion (%) Sample B</b>	<b>Average Proportion (%)</b>
River Oluwa in Ago-debo	Snail shell	10	15	12.5
	Fish bones and scales	60	60	60
	Crab shell	20	20	20
	Insect carapace	10	5	7.5
River Oluwa in Motiala	Fish	80	70	75
	Crab	10	10	10
	Insect	10	10	10
	Water snail shell	0	5	2.5
	Palm kernel shell	0	5	2.5
River Oluwa in Iluagbo	Fish	80	75	77.5
	Crab	15	10	12.5
	Hairy mammal/Rat.	5	0	2.5
	Water snail	0	10	5
	Beetle carapace/Insect	0	5	2.5
	Beetle carapace/Insect	15	5	10
River Itaoluwa in Igbotu	Fish bones and scales	65	60	62.5
	Crabs	15	30	22.5
	Palm kernel shell	5	0	2.5
	Water snail shell	0	5	2.5
	Beetle	5	5	5
River Ufara in Aboto	Fish	55	65	60
	Crab	35	15	25
	Water snail shell	0	15	7.5
	Snail	5	0	2.5
River Okukalaju/Korogbene in Inikorogha	Shrimp	10	0	5
	Insect	5	0	2.5
	Fish	65	70	67.5
	Crab	15	30	22.5





**Figure 7.** Proportion of each identified food item in the faecal samples of Spotted-Necked Otters in the study area

**Table 4.** Fish species identified from the faecal samples of Spotted-Necked Otters in the study area

Common Name	Scientific Name	Local Name	Family
Blue tilapia	<i>Oreochromis niloticus</i>	Ajikoro,	Cichlidae
Red belly Tilapia	<i>Tilapia zilli</i>	Ajepola, akororo	Cichlidae
African bony tongue	<i>Heterotis niloticus</i>	Agbadagiri,	Osteoglossidae
Frank fish	<i>Gymnerchus niloticus</i>	Ohanri	Gymnarchidae
Bagrid catfish	<i>Chrysichthys nigrodigitatus</i> ,	Igulu, Igangan	Claroteidae
Black chin Tilapia	<i>Sarotherodon melanotheron</i>	Pepere	Cichlidae
African catfish/mud fish	<i>Heterobranchus bidorsalis</i> ,	Aaro/Aso	Clariidae
African sharp tooth	<i>Clarias gariepinus</i>	Aso	Clariidae
Eel fish	<i>Anguilla anguilla</i>	Adagba	Anguillidae

## DISCUSSION

The large amount of food groups reported by the respondents and those found in the faecal samples of Spotted-Necked Otters indicated that there is diversity of food items to select from. They were found to feed on seven food items comprising both fish and non-fish items. This suggests that Spotted-Necked Otters are opportunistic carnivores that prey on the existing available food (both aquatic and terrestrial) in their habitat, instead of being specialised hunters. This is in tandem with the study by Abdul-Patah et al. (2014) in Benin, showing that otters are amphibious carnivores which forage largely in aquatic habitats and also take terrestrial prey, which make them an opportunistic feeder able to feed on a wide range of prey species. The finding of this report is also in line with the studies conducted on other otter species such as *Lutra lutra* in Hungary with six groups of prey (Lanszki and Sallai, 2006; Lanszki et al., 2016), *Hydrictis maculicollis* in Africa with five groups of prey (Perrin and Carugati, 2000) and *Lontra longicaudis* in Brazil with eight groups of prey (Pardini, 1998).

In this study, Spotted-Necked Otter preferred fish to other food items as they consumed more than 65% of fish, with supplementary food items of shrimps/prawns, small mammals, amphibians, snails and insects etc. Despite the fact that Spotted-

Necked Otter were found to feed more on fish, the consumption of non-fish food items implies that conserving Spotted-Necked Otter in the study area can be boosted by these non-fish food items. This will also reduce the pressure of retaliatory killing by fishermen as reported by Salami et al. (2023) if Spotted-Necked Otter conservation planning is properly executed in the area and people are not allowed to fish with poison. This is in accord with reports by Hoffmann, (2008), and Ruiz-Olmo et al. (2001), that Spotted-Necked Otters feed predominantly on fish and require permanent water sources with high fish densities. Similarly, Anoop and Hussain (2005) reported that *Lutrogale perspicillata* consumed more than 72% of fish, with supplementary diets of prawns, mammals, amphibians and birds, while Perrin and Carugati (2000) also found that *Aonyx capensis* in Africa prey mainly on crabs.

The nine different species of fish consumed by Spotted-Necked Otters in the study area showed/indicated that they are more generalist and opportunist predators, that are not very selective. This is similar to the statement by Rheingantz et al. (2017) who considered *Lontra longicaudis* as a generalist feeder due to the plasticity of its diet. However, according to the respondents, Spotted-Necked Otter do not eat a species of fish called bullhead catfish due to its hard spine that can injure them or make it difficult to swallow. This is in agreement with the finding of Foster-Turley, 1992, Burhanuddin (1989) who reported that *L. perspicillata* feed on 13 species of fish with *T. trichopterus* and *T. pectoralis* highly consumed being the most abundant and easy to catch species in the area. Similarly, Abdul-Patah et al. (2014) also said that *A. cinereus* were found to feed on five different species of fish while Guerrero, et al. (2018) reported that *Lontra longicaudis* feed on six species of fish in Mexico.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study revealed that the Spotted-Necked Otter (*Hydrictis maculicollis*) is mainly found in the freshwater habitat of rivers and streams in Ilaje and Ese-odo LGAs in Ondo state. Otters were found in these major rivers: Oluwa, Itaoluwa, Utara, Opuotu, Alape, Korogbene, Oriopo and Okukalaju. The presence of Spotted-Necked Otters was confirmed through field surveys and FGD, using the presence of otter sign like footprints, faeces, couches (resting sites), food remnants and fishing gear damage, as well as direct sightings. Spotted-Necked Otters consumed seven food items but mainly fed on fish species with supplementary prey of crabs, small mammals, snakes, molluscs, insects and palm kernels. Nine fish species were found to be common in faecal analysis proportional to their availability. However, Spotted-Necked Otters were reported to avoid Bullhead catfish in the study area because of the hard fins and spines.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made; Efforts should be put in place to reduce otter-fishermen conflict that may result from fish preference by otters in the area; since vegetation cover is one of the factors determining habitat preference of Spotted-Necked Otters, the rate of vegetation removal should be reduced; gut content analysis should be conducted to further confirm the findings of this study.

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**RÉSUMÉ: RÉPARTITION, RESSOURCES ET PRÉFÉRENCE ALIMENTAIRES DE LA LOUTRE À COU TACHETÉ (*Hydrictis maculicollis*) DANS LA ZONE CÔTIÈRE DE L'ÉTAT D'ONDO, AU NIGÉRIA**

L'étude a examiné la présence et la préférence alimentaire de la loutre à cou tacheté dans la zone fluviale de l'État d'Ondo au Nigéria. Des Groupes de Discussions (GD), des observations sur le terrain et des analyses en laboratoire ont été mises en œuvre afin de collecter les données. Celles-ci ont été étudiées grâce à une analyse descriptive (tableaux, graphiques). Les résultats ont révélé que la loutre à cou tacheté est présente dans huit (8) grandes rivières (Alape, Oluwa, Ufara, Oriopo, Okukaluji, Korogbene, Opuotu et Ita-Oluwa) des zones de gouvernement local d'Ilaje et d'Ese-Odo de l'État d'Ondo. Les personnes interrogées ont déclaré que les habitats préférés de la loutre à cou tacheté sont les rivières et ruisseaux d'eau douce ainsi que les zones peu profondes des plans d'eau stagnante ou à courant faible, les eaux calmes ou non perturbées où les poissons et la couverture végétale sont abondants. Sept aliments (poissons, crabes, escargots d'eau douce, serpents, petits mammifères, insectes et graines de palmier) ont été identifiés comme étant consommés par la loutre à cou tacheté dans la zone d'étude. L'aliment préféré de cette espèce est sans conteste le poisson. Il a été mis en évidence que la loutre à cou tacheté ne se nourrit pas de poisson-chat barbotte. Le résultat de l'analyse des épreintes a révélé que les poissons avaient la proportion la plus élevée, à savoir 67,19 %, suivis par le crabe avec un pourcentage de 18,86 %, tandis que les rongeurs/petits mammifères avaient le pourcentage le plus faible : 0,42 %. Au total, neuf espèces de poissons ont été identifiées à partir de l'analyse des épreintes de la loutre à cou tacheté. A cette occasion, trois espèces de Cichlidae, deux espèces de Clariidae et une espèce d'Anguillidae, de Claroteidae, de Gymnarchidae et d'Osteoglossidae ont été identifiées. La présence de la loutre à cou tacheté a été confirmée lors de l'enquête de terrain et dans les groupes de discussion qui ont indiqué qu'elle consomme sept aliments mais se nourrit principalement de poissons. Il est donc recommandé de mettre en œuvre des mesures destinées à réduire les conflits entre les loutres et les pêcheurs, conflits qui peuvent être liés à la prédation dominante des poissons par les loutres de la région. Attendu que la couverture végétale est un des facteurs qui détermine la préférence de l'habitat de la loutre à cou tacheté, le taux d'élimination de la végétation devrait être limité.

**RESUMEN: OCURRENCIA, RECURSOS ALIMENTARIOS Y PREFERENCIAS DE ALIMENTACIÓN DE LA NUTRIA MANCHADA EN EL ÁREA COSTERA DEL ESTADO DE ONDO, NIGERIA**

Este estudio examinó la ocurrencia y las preferencias alimentarias de la Nutria Manchada en el área fluvial del estado de Ondo, Nigeria. Para la colección de datos, adoptamos las discusiones en grupos focales (FGD), la observación en terreno y análisis de laboratorio. Los datos obtenidos fueron analizados mediante análisis descriptivos (Tablas, gráficos). Los resultados revelaron que la nutria manchada está presente en ocho (8) grandes ríos (Alape, Oluwa, Ufara, oriopo, Okukaluji, Korogbene, Opuotu e Ita-Oluwa) en las áreas de los gobiernos locales de Ilaje y Ese-Odo, en el estado de Ondo. Las personas que respondieron expresaron que el hábitat preferido de la Nutria manchada son los ríos y arroyos de agua dulce, así como las áreas poco profundas de los cuerpos de agua con poca o ninguna corriente, agua no-disturbada/calma, áreas de abundancia de peces y áreas con cobertura vegetal. Se identificaron siete items alimentarios que fueron consumidos por la Nutria manchada en ésta área (peces, cangrejos, caracoles acuáticos, serpientes, pequeños mamíferos, insectos y aceite de palmiste). El item más preferido son los peces. No reportamos que se alimente del bagre

cabeza de toro. Los resultados de los análisis faecales revelaron que la mayor proporción correspondía a peces (67.19%), seguidos por Cangrejos con un porcentaje de 18.86%, mientras que los Roedores/pequeños mamíferos representaron el porcentaje más bajo (0.42%). Se identificaron un total de nueve especies de peces a partir del análisis faecal de Nutria manchada. Esto incluyó tres especies de Cichlidae, dos especies de Clariidae y una especie de Anguillidae, Claroteidae, Gymnarchidae y Osteoglossidae, respectivamente. La presencia de Nutria manchada fue confirmada en los relevamientos de terreno y en los FGD, y se reportó que consume siete items alimentarios , pero principalmente se alimenta de peces. Se recomienda que deberían realizarse esfuerzos para reducir el conflicto nutrias-pescadores que puede resultar de la preferencia de peces por parte de las nutrias en esta área. Como la cobertura de vegetación es uno de los factores determinantes de la preferencia de hábitat de la Nutria manchada, se debería reducir la tasa de remoción de la vegetación.