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ASIAN SMALL-CLAWED OTTER (*Aonyx cinera*)

Threat Level

The Asian Small-clawed Otter is classified as vulnerable and they are facing extinction within the next fifty years.

Habitat

There is a species of otter on every continent in the world with the exception of Australia and Antarctica. The Asian Small-clawed Otter can be found in Indonesia, South East Asia, South China and the Himalayan foothills of Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal. There is also an isolated population living in India. Generally they inhabit areas of equal parts land and water. This may include small streams, rice paddies and coastal mangroves.

Diet

The diet of the Asian Small-clawed Otter consists of fish, crustaceans and shellfish, small land prey and eggs. In the wild can take down prey twice their own size. In captivity a variety of seafood and meats can be added to their diet, as well as treats such as peanuts and corn. They are excellent hunters due to their speed. They have a very streamlined body for fast swimming and agility – they have one of the most flexible backbones of all vertebrates. In the wild, Asian Small-clawed Otters eat one third of their body weight in food each day. Otters are very active and have an extremely high metabolism. They can spend 40-60% of day just on hunting and eating.

Life Span

In the wild, Asian Small-clawed Otters generally live to the age of 8 to 10 years, but in captivity they are capable of living to the age of 20.

Description

Both sexes generally weigh between 2.5 - 3kg. Of the 13 species of otter found throughout the world, this is the smallest, attaining a body length of 41– 64cm and a tail length of 25-35cm. Asian Small Clawed Otters have fully webbed “feet” and partially webbed “hands”, which greatly assist survival in their primarily aquatic lifestyle.

FAST FACTS

Asian Small-clawed Otters gained their name as they have small rounded fingernails instead of claws. This makes their fingers more mobile and therefore capable of manipulating slippery prey such as fish.

They are equipped with two layers of fur and a natural body oil that coats the fur forming a waterproof layer.

The air trapped between the fur layers allows the otters skin to remain warm and dry at any time of the year.

Otters spend much of their time grooming so as their fur does not lose its water resistant qualities. Asian Small Clawed Otters are a threatened species in the wild due to habitat loss, pollution and hunting for their fur (pelt).

Asian Otters have fully webbed back feet, but their hands are only partially webbed.



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Breeding

Asian Small-clawed Otters are sexually mature as early as 12 months of age, but usually do not reproduce until 2 to 3 years of age. They mate for life and can produce two litters of young per year. Each of these litters can produce up to six cubs.

Otters are very social and will live in large family groups of up to 20 individuals.

Communication

Asian Small Clawed Otters have a variety of calls to communicate their intentions. These range from:

- a high pitched “bark” to gather the family group together,
- a quiet bird-like “chirp” and a low hum used between a mother and her pups,
- a long growl represents an aggressive call,
- a sharp “Hah” is a warning of potential danger.



FAST FACTS

Asian Small-Clawed Otters have acute hearing. Their ears are specialized to fold flat against their head when they are swimming. This is to prevent water build up in the ear canal.

- These Otters are nocturnal, and spend most of the day fast asleep in their dens, preferring to hunt at night.

- When Otters swim, air bubbles surface to the top of the water from air particles trapped within their fur.

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