

## Status of Otter in Southern Indian States: An Updated Report - 1999

V. NAGULU, C. SRINIVASULU and V. VASUDEVA RAO

SINCE LAST DECADE, we have been carrying out surveys to document the distribution patterns of otters in south India. Through this paper we attempt to summarize the status of otters in south India with particular reference to Andhra Pradesh. In southern India, otters are represented by three species namely, the Eurasian otter *Lutra lutra*, the smooth-coated otter *Lutra perspicillata* and the small-clawed otter *Aonyx cinerea* (Jerdon 1867, Pocock 1941, Nagulu 1996). Our studies indicate that the otter distributional range in south India is restricted to the east and west coasts, hilly terrain of the Western Ghats and also sporadically elsewhere on the mainland of the peninsula.

### STATE-WISE DISTRIBUTION OF OTTERS

#### Karnataka

A stronghold of the smooth-coated otter in Karnataka is Hampi. Besides, otters are also reported from other areas as in the hilly terrain of Coorg, especially at Sirimangala where Eurasian otter coexists with the small-clawed otter. Otters were also collected from Virajpet and Haleri from the same belt (Pocock 1941). There exist no further reports of otters from elsewhere, but we believe that further surveys along the Protected Area networks in major river basins are needed to confirm the present status.

#### Tamil Nadu

The small-clawed otter has been reported from the hilly areas of Nilgiri, Palani and Annamalai. The Eurasian otter has been reported from Moyar Project and also from

the Pembar river basin. On the east coast, the Eurasian otter has been recorded from the Vellar-Coleroon estuary system (Umapathy & Durairaj 1995).

#### Kerala

Our surveys in Kerala revealed that compared to the past records otters during the present time, are distributed in few pockets (Nagulu *et al.* 1997). Jerdon (1867) reported all the three species from the backwaters of Tellicherry and Calicut. Today, the Periyar river basin area has a thriving population of otters. The Eurasian otter is common in Eravikulam and Parambikulam areas, and also along the Peechi-Vazhani complex and Calicut. It is confirmed that all the three species of otters are found positively in Kerala, but their distribution is rather sparse and patchy.

#### Andhra Pradesh

Mostly the smooth-coated otter occurs in Andhra Pradesh. Like all other south Indian states this species is more or less patchily distributed in this state. We have reported smooth-coated otter to be present in 10 of 23 districts of the state (Nagulu *et al.* 1998). A stronghold of its population exists in mangrove and estuarine habitat of Godavari river, especially in and around the Coringa Wildlife Sanctuary, Kolleru lake and Mantralayam. The status and distribution pattern of the smooth-coated otter in Andhra Pradesh is depicted in Table I.

#### THE FUTURE

Otters are under great threat as their habitats are fast depleting under the ever-

Table 1. Status of smooth-coated otter *Lutra perspicillata* in Andhra Pradesh, India.

District	Site	Habitat	No. of Group	Group Size	Population status
East Godavari	Thallarevu	M & E	8	3 - 7	AB
	Plantation	M & E	15	2 - 8	AB
	Metlapalem	M & E	11	3 - 12	AB
	Sarihaddu Kaluva	M & E	14	2 - 10	AB
	Dindodivari Canal	M & E	13	2 - 12	AB
	Kandikuppam	M & E	22	4 - 16	AB
	Biccavoile	T	3	2 - 4	SP
	Ravulapalem	RB	4	3 - 12	SP
	Narsapuram	T	8	2 - 8	CO
West Godavari	Adavi Kalanu	T		2 - 4	SP
Krishna	Intheru	E	8 - 10	2 - 9	CO
	Kolleru	T	10 - 20	2 - 6	AB
	Kona	E	5 - 10	4 - 8	CO
Guntur	Nizampatnam	M & E	10 - 15	5 - 10	CO
	Amaravathi	RB	5 - 10	3 - 5	CO
Kurmool	Manthralayam	RB	10 - 12	5 - 8	AB
Adilabad	Kadam	R	10	5 - 10	CO
	Bajpeta	RB	4 - 6	3 - 10	SP
	Tulasipeta	RB	4 - 6	3 - 10	SP
	Adalithimma puram	RB	4 - 7	3 - 15	CO
	Lanja Madugu	RB	4	4 - 6	CO
	Chennur	RB	5	3 - 6	SP
Karimnagar	Upper Manair	R	7	5 - 8	SP
	Lower Manair	R	5	4 - 6	SP
	Shanigaram	T	3	3 - 6	SP
	Dharmapuri	T	3	3 - 6	SP
	Gaderu	T	5	2 - 4	SP
	Mahadevpur	RB	4	2 - 6	SP
Khammam	Kinnerasani	RB	5	6 - 10	SP
Warangal	Rammapa	T	5	2 - 8	CO
	Lakhnavaram	T	7	4 - 10	CO
	Pakhal	T	5	2 - 8	CO
	Eturnagaram	T	8	6 - 10	CO
Medak	Manjira	R	5	5 - 12	CO
	Singoor	R	5	2 - 8	SP

Key: M & E - Mangrove and Estuarine Habitat, T - Tank, RB - River Bank, E - Estuarine Habitat, R - Reservoir, AB - Abundant, CO - Common, SP - Sparse

The future of otters in southern India depends on judicious conservation-oriented management inputs. Checking of habitat loss, over exploitation of aquatic resources, curbing biotic interference and excessive aquaculture, and promoting awareness amongst the local people will certainly go a long way in conserving otter.

escalating human pressures. The future of otters in southern India depends on judicious conservation-oriented management inputs. Checking of habitat loss, over exploitation of aquatic resources, curbing biotic interference and excessive aquaculture and creating awareness amongst the local people about the importance of otter and aquatic habitats will certainly go a long way in conserving these endangered species.

Nagulu, V., Vasudeva Rao, V., Srinivasulu, C. & Ramana Rao, J. V. (1997) A preliminary survey of otters on the Malabar coast and the adjoining hill reservoirs and streams. *IUCN Otter Spec. Group Bull.*, **14(1)**, 30-34.

Nagulu, V., Vasudeva Rao, V., Satyanarayan, D. & Srinivasulu, C. (1998) Otter records and otter conservation perspectives in Andhra Pradesh, India. *IUCN Otter Spec. Group Bull.*, **15(1)**, 31-37.

REFERENCES

Jerdon, T. C. (1867) *The mammals of India*. Thomson College Press, Roorkee.

Pocock, R. I. (1941) *Fauna of British India: Mammals*. Vol. II. Taylor & Francis Ltd., London.

Nagulu, V. (1996) Status of otters in southern India. In: *Santiapillai, C., Sasaki, H. and Ando, M. Proc. IUCN/SSC Asian Otter Specialist Group Meeting in Thailand 1996*. Asian Institute of Technology, Bangkok, March 15-16, 1996. Otter Research Group, Japan. 32-44 pp.

Umamathy, G. & Durairaj, G. (1995) Preliminary studies on the feeding ecology of the otter (*Lutra lutra*) at Pitchavaram East Coast of India. *IUCN Otter Spec. Group Bull.*, **11**, 31-33.

**P.S.** In 1991 the editor examined an otter skin collected from the local fishermen around Manjira Wildlife Sanctuary and identified it as Eurasian otter. According to fishermen the specimen was from Manjira Reservoir area.

INTRODUCTION

The conservation and ecological status of the common otter (*Lutra lutra*) in southern India has not been adequately studied. A preliminary survey of otters on the Malabar coast and the adjoining hill reservoirs and streams was conducted in 1997. The common otter (*Lutra lutra*) is a small mammal. It is found in a variety of habitats and feeds on a wide range of aquatic and terrestrial animals. The common otter is a good indicator of the health of the aquatic ecosystem. It is also a good indicator of the health of the terrestrial ecosystem. The common otter is a good indicator of the health of the aquatic ecosystem. It is also a good indicator of the health of the terrestrial ecosystem. The common otter is a good indicator of the health of the aquatic ecosystem. It is also a good indicator of the health of the terrestrial ecosystem.