

WORLD OTTER DAY

African Spotted-Necked Otter
Hydrictis maculicollis

*Celebrate with us on
May 26, 2021!*

Spotted-Necked Otter

World Otter Day



Contents

Forward.....	Page 3
PR Requests/Messaging.....	Page 4
Conservation Efforts.....	Page 6
Natural History.....	Page 8
Otter Fun Facts.....	Page 9
Crafts.....	Page 12
Activities.....	Page 13

The Otter Education Advisory Group invites you to participate in World Otter Day on May 26, 2021! World Otter Day was founded by the International Otter Survival Fund as a way to celebrate otters while raising awareness about the threats otters are facing in the wild, and highlighting conservation efforts around the world. The Otter Education Advisory Group has put together this tool kit to help you highlight these amazing animals during World Otter Day.

In this packet you will find otter facts, conservation efforts, messaging, activities, and more to help you highlight World Otter Day at your facility. We understand that, with the Covid-19 pandemic, many facilities have restrictions. For those facilities, we have provided modified activities to help you highlight this exciting event safely!

We hope you can join us in celebrating Otters on May 26th! If there are any questions regarding this packet please feel free to email us at ottereducationadvisorygroup@gmail.com

Thank you and Happy World Otter Day!

Sincerely,

The Otter Education Advisory Group

The otter Education Advisory Group is an AZA group under the Small Carnivore TAG and the Conservation Education Committee. The group is a collective of dedicated animal care and education professionals who provide resources to inspire Zoos and Aquariums to promote an active enthusiasm for otter education and conservation through facility promoted community engagement.



Section Two: Spotted-Necked Otter Keeper Talking Points and PR requests

See the section below on fun facts.

Let's focus on actionable conservation efforts everyone can do at home. Otters are highly sensitive to pollution and will abandon their territory if it becomes polluted. This is why we need to do our part! Refuse, Reduce, Reuse, And Recycle. Think of one new thing you can start doing to cut down on your waste and pledge to start it on World Otter Day. This is something everyone can do now and have a lasting effect on helping otter conservation.

Some easy actionable conservation efforts are;

- Using reusable shopping bags
- Using reusable water bottles
- Buying a large bag of snacks, instead of many individually wrapped bags
- Making your bathroom waste free by buying products with recyclable packaging.

Messaging and Action Items

What can you do to help otters?

- Visit your local zoo! Accredited zoos that house otters donate money to conservation efforts around the world. Your local zoo might support conservation projects that directly impact otters in the wild.
- Reduce your plastic usage and consumption. Try to avoid single-use plastic. Switch to reusable straws and water bottles, use cloth bags when grocery shopping, and be mindful of other ways to "Go Green". Plastic inevitably ends up in waterways, which can directly impact the health of the environment, and therefore the health of otters.
- Reduce, reuse, recycle. Similar to the above point. Make sure trash is placed in proper receptacles, and recycle it if possible.
- If interested in supporting African Spotted-Necked Otter conservation efforts in Africa, visit africanotternetwork.org for more information.

PR Requests

Thank you so much for your involvement in celebrating World Otter Day this year!

Please feel free to post any related videos for World Otter Day. These could be: otters, ferrets, skunks, wolverines, weasels, badgers, pine martens, polecats. They're all in the same Mustelid family!

We have activities that we would love you link to through your social media, with the #WOD21 and #YouOtterKnow

***This year we want to try out something NEW, getting #DanceLikeNoOtter trending on TikTok. Make a video on TikTok with the sound Hips Don't Lie (feat. Wyclef Jean) and use the #DanceLikeNoOtter. You can share the video on your other social media platforms too! The goal is to go where the youth are to help spread otter awareness to the next generation.

Conservation Efforts

The IUCN categorizes African Spotted-necked Otters as Near Threatened with a declining population. There are numerous factors that play a threat to the survival of the species which include: pollution, habitat loss and degradation, lack of prey, and negative interactions with humans/human settlement.

Things that can be done to help Spotted-necked Otters in their native range include stricter regulations concerning the development of river banks (where these otters make their dens), better/stricter monitoring of pollution entering waterways, education regarding the ecological importance of otter species, and restoration of habitat.

People that live alongside these otters should be encouraged to avoid building structures on riverbanks to preserve natural areas for the otters, and should report sightings of these otters in the wild. Not a lot of information is known about this species in its native ranges, and citizen assistance in identifying where they live would aid in conservation efforts. Correctly disposing of waste and recycling when possible also goes a long way in keeping waterways clean for otters, and helps to aid in a healthy ecosystem for all riverine species.

Site-specific Conservation Locations

Tanzania: *Rubondo Island National Park* has the only actively protected/ patrolled waters in Lake Victoria. The Tanzanian National Park Authority Staff is actively engaged in conservation outreach within local communities. Otter populations appear stable at this time. An outreach program began in 2009 utilizing otter information, and involved local students as well as park staff.

East Africa great lakes (Lakes Victoria, Tanganyika, and Nyasa): otters live on all three lakes, but their status needs further study.

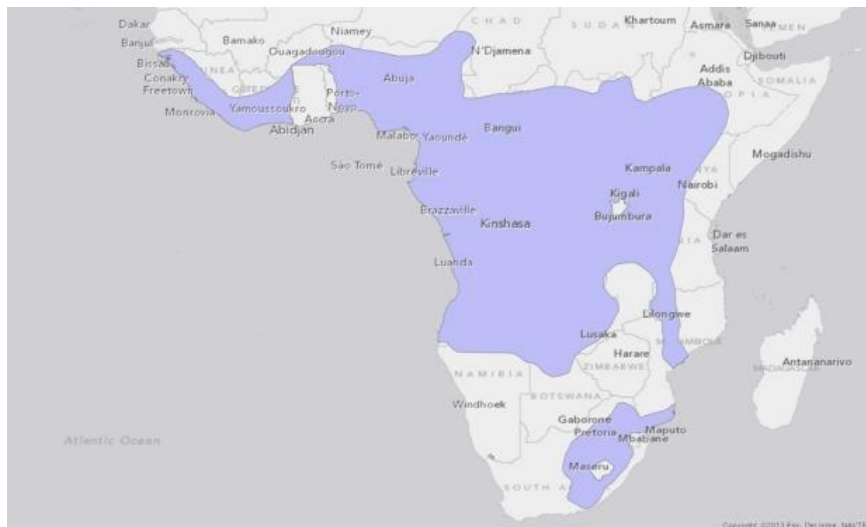
South Africa: *Drakensberg Park*, a large protected area with several major rivers. Continued protection of this area is important. Education outreach programs focusing on how important the park is for wildlife should be supported.

Uganda: Kibale National Park and Nile River area. Otter populations have not been studied, but local reports have seen Spotted-necked otters in the Nile area. More study should go into this region for future monitoring and protection.

Benin: Hlan River and Oueme Valley both have confirmed otter populations. Further awareness and protection are needed to help them remain stable. Research has been done regarding otter and fisherman conflict; mitigation strategies and ways to reduce conflict have been created.

Natural History

- **Social Animals:**
 - African Spotted-necked otters are a socially gregarious species typically found in somewhat fluid groups of two or more individuals.
 - The most common groupings seen are females with their offspring, adolescent groups, and groups of males.
 - In captivity, this species is best housed in pairs or as a family group.
- **Diet:** Carnivore: Mostly fish (typically 3-30 cm long), amphibians, and crustaceans
- **Life Expectancy:** Up to 8 yrs in wild; up to 14 years in captivity.
- **Reproduction:** 1-3 cubs are born at a time. Young are born blind and remain dependent upon mother for up to a year. Males do not participate in the raising of young in this species.
 - Gestation – 60 days
 - Sexual Maturity – 2 years
 - Breeding Season – June and July
- **Habitat/Range:** The Spotted-necked otter has a sub-Saharan distribution stretching from Guinea Bissau in the west to south-west Ethiopia in the east, and southwards as far as eastern South Africa. Permanent sources of unpolluted freshwater with high densities of fish are necessary to support Spotted-necked otters. Areas of open water such as large lakes, rivers and swamps are preferred and dense marginal vegetation such as reeds, grass and bushes are important for cover.



- **Predators:** Some reports of predation by Nile crocodile but not well documented. Young pups can fall prey to fish eagles.

- **Relatives:** The Spotted-necked otter (*Hydriictis maculicolis*) originally colonized Africa from Eurasia, but its exact relationship to other *Lutra* species is still somewhat unclear.
- **Physical Features:** The Spotted-necked otter owes its name to the mottled blotches of creamy-white markings typically visible on its neck and chest. Dense, water-repellent fur, ranging in color from chocolate to reddish brown.
- **Adaptations:** More aquatic than other African otters, this species has fully webbed paws with sharp, well-developed claws.
 - Two layers of dense water-repellent fur: outer guard hairs, and an undercoat of denser hairs that trap air for insulation.
 - The two layers of thick fur keeps otters from losing body heat in water. They groom fur by scratching and biting it (not licking) and by rubbing against grass, rocks, or logs. This activity is vital to their physical and mental health.
 - Short, broad muzzle conceals relatively small teeth, adapted for catching fish.
 - They have a clear eyelid that acts similar to a set of goggles when underwater. This helps protect their eyes but still allows them to see well.
- **Conservation:** Unfortunately, throughout its range the population of Spotted-necked otters is declining as a consequence of a broad range of human activities. The foremost of these are pollution and general degradation of freshwater habitats associated with agriculture. They are currently listed as Near Threatened on the IUCN Red List.

Otter Fun Facts

Spotted-Necked Otters all have unique spot patterns. They are so distinctive they can be used to tell individual otters apart. Some otters even look like they are wearing lipstick or have a mustache due to their white fur.

In Swahili, these otters are known as fisi-maji, or water hyena.

These otters can be very talkative, and have a variety of vocalizations.

Otter pups must be taught to swim, they are not born with these skills. Pups will stay with mom for a year or two, learning the things they will need to survive on their own.

They can hold their breath for several minutes when underwater.

Spotted-necked otter pups are born with orange spots that gradually turn a cream color as they mature.

References: The Global Otter Conservation Strategy by Nicole Duplaix and Melissa Savage (2018), African Otter Network, IUCN Otter Specialist Group

Spotted-Necked Otter

Hydriictis maculicollis

WHERE DO SPOTTED-NECKED OTTERS LIVE?

They live in unpolluted freshwater lakes and rivers throughout much of Africa



WHAT DO SPOTTED-NECKED OTTERS EAT?

Spotted-Necked Otters eat fish, frogs and small crustaceans like crayfish.



White chin and upper lip

White spotty neck and chest - they are unique to each otter so can be used to identify individuals

Short legs

Webbing on all paws for swimming



DID YOU KNOW?

Locally, these otters are called *fisi maji* meaning “water hyena”.

SPOTTED-NECKED OTTERS ARE A **NEAR THREATENED** AND **DECREASING SPECIES!**

Their fresh water habitats are decreasing.



Farming waste can poison otters.

In some places, otters are hunted to be used as food or for their skins.



CRAFTS

Several crafts can be made from recyclable materials that can be found in your home or picked up from outside! These following crafts can encourage people to help keep their communities clean by reusing household items or picking up items in their neighborhoods!

- **DIY Planters:**

- Yogurt pots or cups, glass jars, and plastic containers are all great items which can be recycled to prevent pollution, but also allow us to help the environment by planting seedlings and learning how plants grow!



- **DIY Windchimes or Mobile:**

- Soda cans, tin cans, sticks, plastic bottles etc. can all be strung together to make your very own mobile or windchimes to hang. You can decorate them with paint or markers.



- **DIY Toilet Paper Roll Otter:**

- Toilet paper rolls, paper towel rolls, cardboard, and markers/paints can all come together to help create your very own otter!



The following activity could be conducted at your facility and the items could be used as enrichment for the otters depending on the facilities policy!

- **Noise Maker/Rattle:**

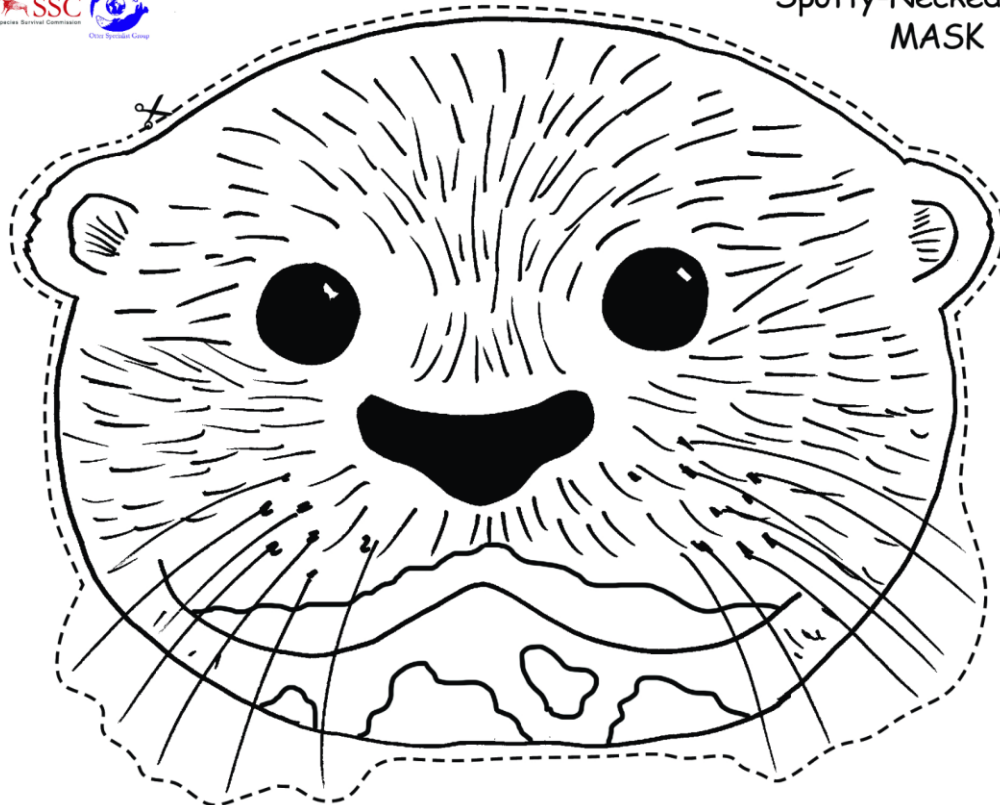
- Plastic Bottle (water bottles, gatorade bottles, soda bottles, etc) filled with small rocks, small shells, or other small nature items that the otters can have help create an easy noise maker!

Activities

<https://africanotternetwork.files.wordpress.com/2016/09/spotted-necked-otter-mask.pdf>



Spotty-Necked Otter
MASK



Follow the link below to find downloadable coloring books, posters, a , maze, printable fact sheets and more from the African Otter Network. These are a great way to have fun for World Otter Day while socially distancing your guests.

[Miscellaneous – African otter Network](#)

CLEAN THE WATERWAYS ACTIVITY

There are 13 different otter species throughout the world that live in a variety of habitats from rivers, marshes and mangroves, to coastal waters. All otters have an important role in their habitat because they are an indicator species. This means that their presence, or lack thereof, will show you how healthy the habitat or ecosystem in which they live, is. This is important because ecosystems are made up of living things, like animals and plants, but also non-living things such as water, air, and soil. Ecosystems are also all connected, so what happens in one can have a great effect on others and we, as humans, occupy an ecosystem as well. Not only for our sake, but for the sake of everyone we want to make sure that that all ecosystems remain healthy and we can look to the otters, as an indicator species, to see if we are doing that. The following activity is designed to assist you in communicating the message of the importance of keeping our waterways clean.

Materials:

Rubber tub, kiddie pool, or some other container to put water in

Trash/debris commonly found in waterways

Something to represent an otter and fish/other prey items (animal figurine of some sort)

Goal:

Container with water begins with the otter and fish/other prey item representations in it to show what the habitat starts out as. During the activity, trash/debris is added to the water and the fish/prey items and otters are simultaneously taken out of the water. Participants are then asked to take out the items that don't belong in the water and as the items are taken away, the fish/prey items and otters are returned to the water.

Take away:

Otters are an indicator species and they can tell you how healthy an ecosystem is. All ecosystems are connected and have an effect on one another. We as humans can have an impact on different habitats and ecosystems through our actions, but we can choose to have a positive impact on them by doing simple conservation actions, one of these being picking up and properly disposing of trash.

Other messages along with this could be recycling, saying "no" to plastic straws, using re-usable shopping bags, etc. This can be tailored to your institutions specific messaging.

Challenge your guests to pick up any trash they see in the park or their neighborhoods and properly dispose of it!

Otter Survival Board Game Activity

This level of activity requires staff to be very hands on with set up and directions for participants. Encourage families to fill their day at home during quarantine by recreating this in their yards and learning about otters.

Otter Survival Board Game Activity

Spotted-Necked Otters face a wide variety of threats in their environments, many of which are man-made. This hands-on activity allows children to explore some of these threats, and learn to make changes in their daily lives to benefit all wildlife.



Materials: sidewalk chalk
bowl with slips of paper (instructions)

Instructions: Children can help with creating the board (see above image), and the board can be as big or complex as desired. Create links between different spaces for fun short cuts. The children themselves will be the moving pieces during this game. Kids will draw instructions out of a bowl which will inform them on how many spaces to move. Alternatives could be to draw from a card pile or spin a specially made wheel. Props like trash, fish toys, recycled bottles, nets, alligators, etc. can be placed or drawn on the squares to identify hazards as they move along the board, and can also signify moves forward or backward.

Examples:

- you recycled a plastic bottle! Move ahead 2 spaces
- you ate sustainably sourced fish! Jump ahead 3 spaces
- you threw a plastic bag on the ground. Move back 2 spaces
- you left a net in the water after fishing. Move back 3 spaces.
- you are OTTER this world! Move ahead 2 spaces
- you bought an otter online for a pet! Start from the beginning.
- your boat leaked oil into the river! Move back 2 spaces.

Take Away:

Otters face a multitude of threats, most of which are inadvertently caused by humans.
We can change our habits to make the world a safer place for otters to live and thrive.

Otter Pick-A-Path

<https://reidparkzoo.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Otter-Bringing-the-Zoo-to-You-1.pdf>

WONDERFUL WHISKERS

Otters have whiskers just like cats and dogs. For otters, whiskers are useful tools under water. When water is murky and unclear, otters can use their whiskers to feel their surroundings and feel for food. Otters are skilled at using their whiskers to help them catch fish or frogs swimming by!



Otter Jeopardy

<https://jeopardylabs.com/play/otters-for-world-otter-day>