

Partially eaten tilapia discarded by smooth-coated otters

Subjects: Smooth-coated otter, *Lutrogale perspicillata* (Mammalia: Carnivora: Mustelidae) [Fig. 1]; Mozambique tilapia, *Oreochromis mossambicus* (Teleostei: Cichlidae) [Fig. 2].

Subjects identified by: Contributors.

Location, date and time: Singapore Island, Marina Reservoir near Marina Barrage, along eastern shore; 12 September 2014; around 1830 hrs.

Habitat: Urban, freshwater. Dammed estuary surrounded by open parkland and buildings.

Observers: Contributors.

Observation: A group of seven otters left two dead tilapias of at least 20 cm total length on a road about 5 m away from Marina Barrage. The otters had retreated to the reservoir to avoid the observers, but stayed close to the shore (Fig. 1). Only the head and cheeks of both fish were observed to be consumed (Fig. 2).



Fig. 1. Five members of the otter group can be seen at the bottom centre of the picture. They are frolicking in the Marina Reservoir with the buildings of Gardens by the Bay and Marina Bay Sands, as well as the Singapore Flyer in the background. Photograph by Tan Yee Keat



Fig. 2. A partially eaten tilapia discarded by the otters on the road beside the reservoir. Note that apart from the head, the rest of the body is intact. Another partially eaten fish with the same condition lies a few metres away in the background (indicated by arrow). Photograph by Tan Yee Keat

Remarks: This group of otters is believed to be the same family that has recently become resident in the Marina Reservoir (Ee, 2014). Their apparent readiness to part with partially eaten prey (instead of carrying these with them) seems to imply that food is abundant and easily obtainable in the habitat. The present observation suggests that alien species (such as the tilapia) do benefit certain native piscivores (such as the smooth-coated otter) as a source of prey (Yong et al., 2014). It is not clear why only the head and cheeks of the tilapias were eaten. Perhaps due to the abundance of food, the otters can afford to be wasteful, and eat only the ‘choice’ parts of their prey.

References:

Ee, D.. 2014. Wild otters raise family around Marina Bay. *The Sunday Times*. 28 September 2014: top news, 10.
Yong D. L., B. W. Low, A. Ang, M. Woo & C. Ho, 2014. Multiple records of aquatic alien and invasive species in diets of native predators in Singapore. *BioInvasions Records*. 3 (3): 201-205.

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