

A family of smooth-coated otters at Yishun Pond

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Subjects: Smooth-coated otter, *Lutrogale perspicillata* (Mammalia: Carnivora: Mustelidae).

Subjects identified by: Simon Kee Mun Chan.

Location, date and time: Singapore Island, Yishun Central, Yishun Pond by Khoo Teck Puat Hospital; 21 February 2018; 1020–1130 hrs.

Habitat: Artificial freshwater pond in urban parkland, surrounded by public housing estate.

Observer: Simon Kee Mun Chan.

Observation: An adult otter was photographed eating a fish that it had caught (Fig. 1). It was a member of a group of six otters that were observed rolling about in the mud among the vegetation on a floating island in the pond (Fig. 2 & 3).

Remarks: The otters only make occasional appearances at Yishun Pond for it seems to be one of many water bodies frequented by them. Of the 11 distinct groups consisting of around 79 individuals of smooth-coated otter identified in Singapore as of January 2017, Yishun Pond seemed to be frequented by the ‘Lower Seletar group’ which then had seven members (Khoo & Sivasothi, 2018). The presence of otters that tolerate being in close proximity to humans provides a unique and positively entertaining and educational wildlife experience for staff, visitors and patients at the Khoo Teck Puat Hospital.

Smooth-coated otters became regularly sighted in Singapore since the mid-1990s after an apparent absence of about three decades. By 2014, this animal has been observed at many parts of the country (Theng & Sivasothi, 2018). The maintenance of clean and green waterways with abundant fish stocks, an effective wildlife protection law, and the public’s acceptance and tolerance of the otter as a charismatic low conflict species, are major factors that allow the otters to thrive in Singapore’s urban environment (Khoo & Lee, 2020).

References:

- Khoo MDY & Lee BPY-H (2020) The urban smooth-coated otters *Lutrogale perspicillata* of Singapore: a review of the reasons for success. *International Zoo Yearbook*, 54: 1-12.
- Khoo MDY & Sivasothi N (2018) Population structure, distribution, and habitat use of smooth-coated otters *Lutrogale perspicillata* in Singapore. *IUCN Otter Specialist Group Bulletin*, 35 (3): 171-182.
- Theng M & Sivasothi N (2016) The smooth-coated otter *Lutrogale perspicillata* (Mammalia: Mustelidae) in Singapore: establishment and expansion in natural and semi-urban environments. *IUCN Otter Specialist Group Bulletin*, 33 (1): 37-49.



Fig. 1. One of the adult otters munching on the head of a fish that it had caught in Yishun Pond.
Photograph by Simon Kee Mun Chan



Fig 2. The floating island in Yishun Pond where the otters were rolling about among the vegetation. Screenshot from video by Simon Kee Mun Chan



Fig. 3. Four members of the otter clan on the floating island. Photograph by Simon Kee Mun Chan