

## Oriental small-clawed otters on Pulau Ubin

**Subjects:** Oriental small-clawed otter, *Aonyx cinereus* (Mammalia: Carnivora: Mustelidae).

**Subjects identified by:** Noel Thomas, Robert C. H. Teo & Nick Baker.

**Location, date and time:** Pulau Ubin, Sungei Puaka; 19-20 October 2016; 1627-1627 hrs.

**Habitat:** Mangrove.

**Observer:** Noel Thomas, from images obtained with camera trap.

**Observation:** A camera trap was installed at a spraint site discovered on 18 October 2016. Ten individuals, all apparently adults, were recorded utilizing the area as a spraint site and passing through. During a 24-hour period between 1627 hrs on 19 October 2016 to 1627 hrs on the next day, the site was visited seven times at 1629 hrs (Fig. 1), 2149 hrs (Fig. 2), 0325 hrs, 0416 hrs, 0526 hrs, 0630 hrs and 0741 hrs; each time by between one and ten individuals. The video recorded at 1629 hrs on 19 October 2016 showing the otters defecating, urinating and scent marking the site can be viewed at <https://youtu.be/1N-6VqY9ZEY>.



Fig. 1. Group of small-clawed otters using location as a spraint site on 19 October 2016 at 1629 hrs. Camera trap video still by Noel Thomas



Fig. 2. Apparently the same group of small-clawed otters passing through the same location on 19 October 2016 at 2149 hrs. Camera trap video still by Noel Thomas

**Remarks:** This is the latest record of the Oriental small-clawed otter on Pulau Ubin, and probably the first video records of this species from Singapore. Previous records from Pulau Ubin between 1999 and 2016 are collated below (with the names of the observers in brackets):

1. One in freshwater pond at National Police Cadet Corps campsite on 23 May 1999 at 0705 hrs (Chua Ee Kiam & Subaraj Rajathurai).
2. A 'cat-sized otter' was seen at Noordin Bridge between 20 and 25 May 2002 (Raymond Ng & William Chan).
3. One swimming in Sungei Ubin ponds on 26 April 2005 at about 1300 hrs during high tide (Robert Teo).
4. A family of four, including 2 juveniles, photographed first at Sensory Trail and then along the eastern bank of Sungei Ubin, on 11 July 2004 at 0956 hrs, and at the latter location again on 18 July 2004 at 0826 hrs (Jerry Liew).
5. Fresh tracks were photographed along the eastern banks of Sungei Ubin on 1 August 2004 at 0824 hrs (Jerry Liew).
6. One swimming in Sungei Ubin ponds on 11 May 2005 at about 1500 hrs (Robert Teo).
7. One near Puaka Bridge on 11 January 2006 at 1145 hrs (Ali Ibrahim).
8. One pair at Sensory Trail mangrove ponds on 7 April 2010 at 0915 hrs (Mark Lim).
9. One pair swimming in Sungei Ubin on 14 October 2010 (Robert Teo & Parusuraman s/o Sethembaran Athen).
10. One at sluice gate along Sensory Trail on 22 October 2013 at around 1230 hrs (Robert Teo).
11. One along Jalan Noordin on 9 December 2013 at 1245 hrs (Noel Thomas).
12. Five sets of tracks at Sensory Trail mangroves on 20 November 2014 (Serin Subaraj).
13. Three on a mangrove bank along Sungei Jelutong on 22 December 2014 at 1430 hrs (Serin Subaraj).
14. Two swimming in the mangroves at the mouth of Sungei Mamam on 14.01.2015 at 1030 hrs (Serin Subaraj).
15. Seven in mangroves at Sungei Jelutong on 12 July 2016 at 0854 hrs (Wong Tuan Wah, Robert Teo, Justin Tan & Nur Fatin). Photographed by Wong Tuan Wah.

*Aonyx cinereus* is regarded as a 'critically endangered' species in Singapore (Lim et al., 2008: 199 as *Aonyx cinerea*). It can be distinguished from the more frequently observed smooth-coated otter (*Lutrogale perspicillata*) by its significantly smaller size (head and body length up to 50 cm) and small feet with partially webbed digits that bear short claws that do not extend beyond the tips of the digits. The smooth-coated otter is larger (head and body length to 75 cm) and has large feet with fully webbed digits and prominent claws (Baker & Lim, 2012: 153-154 as *Aonyx cinerea*).

#### **References:**

- Baker, N. & K. K. P. Lim, 2012. *Wild Animals of Singapore. A Photographic Guide to Mammals, Reptiles, Amphibians and Freshwater Fishes*. Updated edition. Draco Publishing and Distribution Pte. Ltd. and Nature Society (Singapore). 180 pp.
- Lim, K. K. P., R. Subaraj, S. H. Yeo, N. Lim, D. Lane & B. Y. H. Lee, 2008. Mammals. In: Davison, G. W. H. P. K. L. Ng & H. C. Ho (eds.). *The Singapore Red Data Book. Threatened Plants & Animals of Singapore*. Nature Society (Singapore). p. 190-207.

**Note:** The contributors thank the various observers for sharing their sightings of Oriental small-clawed otters on Pulau Ubin. Assistance from Joel Thomas is much appreciated.

Contributors: Noel **Thomas**, Robert C. H. **Teo** & **Serin** Subaraj  
Contact address: [noelthomas@nparks.gov.sg](mailto:noelthomas@nparks.gov.sg) (Thomas)