



# Initial findings of otter surveys in U Minh peat swampland in the Mekong Delta, Vietnam

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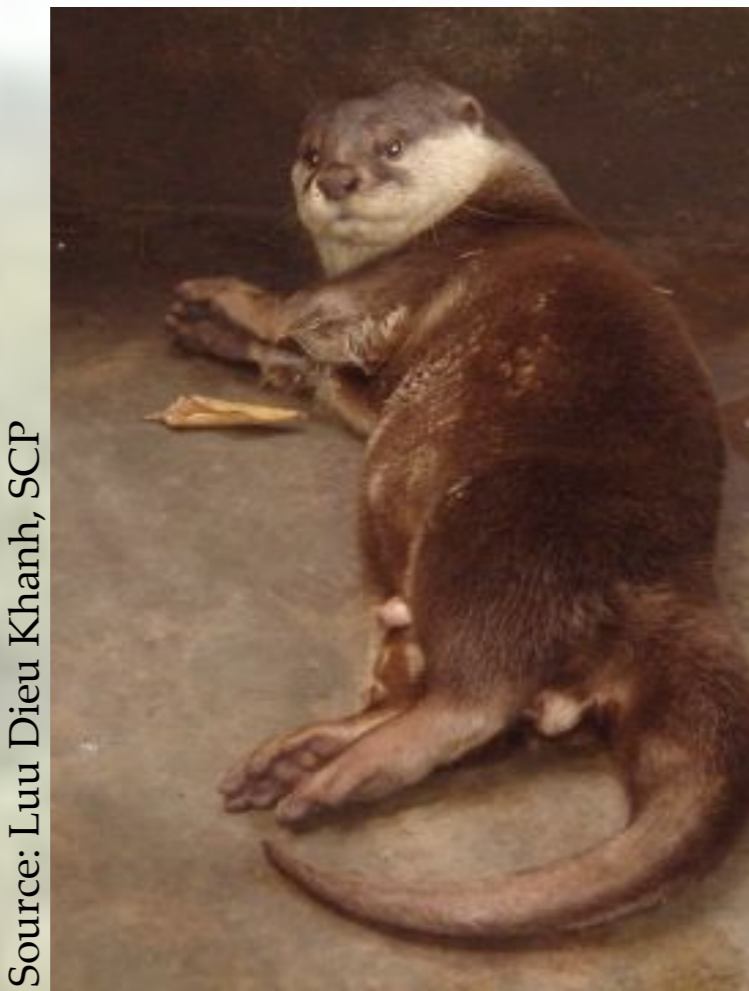
## Otter species of Vietnam

Vietnam supports four species of otter:



Source: David Giles

Eurasian Otter  
(*Lutra lutra*)



Source: Luu Dieu Khanh, SCP

Oriental Small-clawed Otter  
(*Aonyx cinerea*)



Source: Scott Robertson, SCP

Hairy-nosed Otter  
(*Lutra sumatrana*)



Source: Scott Robertson, SCP

Smooth-coated Otter  
(*Lutra perspicillata*)

## What are the main threats to otters in Vietnam?

- Hunting for skins, pets, medicine and meat.
- Habitat disturbance, including: modification of water bodies, water pollution, uncontrolled use of pesticides and destruction of wetlands for logging and agriculture.

## Conservation status

- Their status is uncertain in Vietnam.
- Under Vietnamese law, all four species are prohibited from exploitation and use for commercial purposes.
- All four species are listed on the IUCN Red List (2007). *L. sumatrana*, listed as Data Deficient, is believed to be the rarest of the Asian otters. The IUCN/SSC Otter Action Plan defined *L. sumatrana* as one of five otter species of global conservation concern.

## Study area

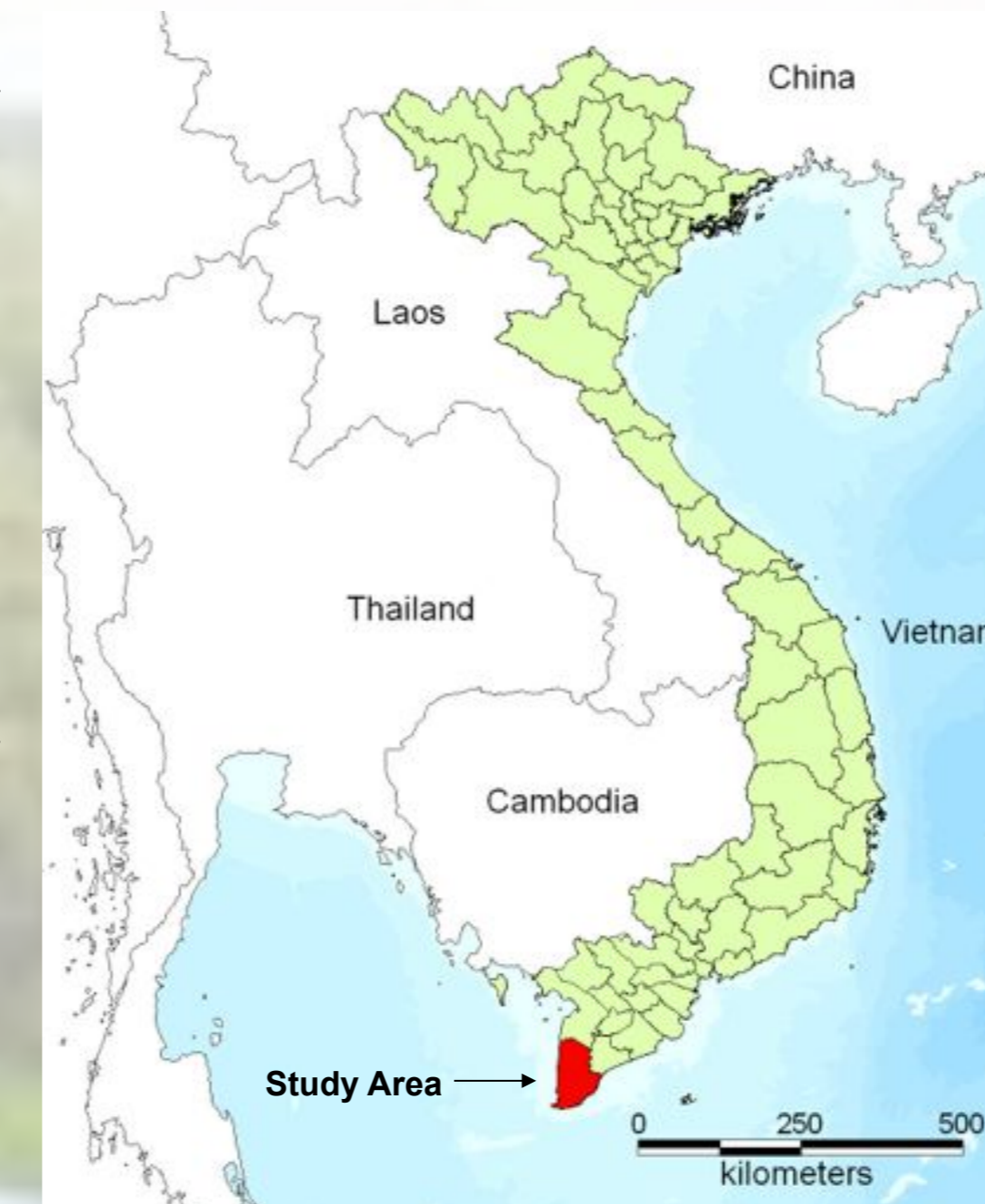
Location: U Minh Ha National Park and State-owned enterprise forests, Ca Mau Province.

Area: U Minh Ha National Park, approximately 8000 ha.

Main habitats: Seasonally inundated grassland, semi-natural (originally planted but no longer tended) mature *Melaleuca* forest, *Melaleuca* plantation, open swamps.

Elevation: maximum 2.5 m above sea level.

Method used: Semi-structured interviews with local hunters.



## Initial results

Twenty interviews were conducted, two possibly three species of otter were described by local hunters.



Figure 1. Reported methods of hunting otters, taken from interviews conducted in five villages surrounding U Minh Ha NP (n=20).

## Forest habitat preferences

- Local hunters see more otters in traditionally planted *Melaleuca* forest than in intensive forest.
- Unfortunately, the intensive production forest area around the National Park is increasing.



Source: Richard Bull, SCP

Intensive production forest



Source: Richard Bull, SCP

Traditional production forest

## Hunting pressure

- Ten people only hunt for meat.
- Skins sell between US \$5 - \$31.
- Live animals between US \$6 - \$31 per kilogram.
- Five hunters did not hunt otters because they have low market value.
- N= 20.



Source: Richard Bull, SCP

Oriental Small-clawed Otter (*Aonyx cinerea*) skin being stretched before being sold.

## Future work

- Camera traps have been set, results starting in November.
- Further local hunter interviews in potential corridor between U Minh Ha and U Minh Thuong NPs.
- Line transect surveys/ night spotting.
- Seminars in universities and other workshops in local communities.
- Posters/ postcards/ stickers for awareness raising.

## Funding requirements

- Increasing our understanding of the Hairy-nosed Otter (*Lutra sumatrana*) by conducting radio tracking studies in the U Minh peat swampland area.
- Rehabilitation facility for rescued otters.

## Acknowledgments

BP Conservation Programme; Houston Zoo, USA; Chicago Board Of Trade (CBOT); U Minh Ha National Park; Education for Nature – Vietnam; Ca Mau Department of Agriculture and Rural Development; Ca Mau Province's people committee.

