

**PROPOSAL FOR INCLUSION OF SPECIES ON THE APPENDICES OF THE CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF MIGRATORY SPECIES OF WILD ANIMALS**

A. **PROPOSAL:** Listing of the southern river otter (*Lutra provocax*) in Appendices I and II of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS)

B. **PROPONENT:** Government of the Argentine Republic

C. **SUPPORTING STATEMENT**

1. **Taxon**

1.1. Class: Mammalia

1.2. Order: Carnivora

1.3. Genus, species and subspecies, including author and year:  
*Lutra provocax* (Thomas 1908) (In Ann. Mag. Nat. Hist., 1(8): 31)

1.5. Common name(s), where appropriate

English: Southern river otter

Spanish: Huillín, lobito de río patagónico, nutria de Chile, lobito patagónico

French: Loutre du Chili

2. **Biological data**

2.1. Distribution (present and past)

Chile and Argentina. In Chile it ranges from the southern part of the central area, with as its northernmost limit Río Cauquenes and Chachapual, to the north of Chillán (36°S), where it is to be found in the continental waters between the region of Bío Bío and Aysén ((Siefeld 1983, 1989). North of the Chacao Channel the southern river otter inhabits freshwater environments (Siefeld 1983). In Argentina, historical sources speak of the occupation of the western, cordilleran part of the Patagonian region, from Neuquén to Santa Cruz (Massoia 1976). However, its present range is thought to be confined to the southwest corner of Neuquén and the northwest portion of Río Negro, in the secondary basin of Lake Naheul Huapi (basin of Río Limay) and south of Lanin National Park (Lakes Lácar, Hermoso and Melinquina) (Parera 1994). In Tierra del Fuego province it is to be found in isolated groups in the marine environments of the Beagle Channel and Isla de los Estados (Schiavini 1992, Massoia and Chebez 1993, Schiavini and Bugnest 1994, Schiavini et al 1995).

There is practically no information available about the historical range of the species. In Chile, Siefeld et al (1977) state that "in the past the river otter was common in the continental waters of central and southern Chile". The same authors consider that it is no longer to be found in the central portion of its historical range. At present it is regularly sighted only in the southern part of Chile. In Argentina, it is suspected that its range has dwindled owing to the strong impact of hunting, which is practised for the sake of the river otter's valuable skin. There is some foundation for this, qualified by the fact that until 1983 there was knowledge only of records for eight localities in the country (Chehébar 1985).

All stages in the species' biological cycle take place in range, as it does not possess breeding or wintering areas.

2.2. Population (estimates and trends)

There is only very scant information available.

In Chile, Sielfeld (1992) provides information concerning the relative abundance of the species south of 48°50'S, showing densities of 0.73 individuals per linear km of coast, 0.57 individuals to a burrow and a burrow density of between 37,300 and 45,000 (with a 90 per cent reliability margin).

In Argentina, the only available information derives from a survey carried out by Chehébar (1985) in the Nahuel Huapi National Park, where 28 per cent of the sites visited revealed the activity of otters. Chehébar mentions that the species is not common in the National Park. Schiavini and Bugnest (1994) and Schiavini et al (1995) provide information on otter distribution in the Tierra del Fuego National Park. In that Park, there were found to be five burrows to 53.5 linear km of coast, giving a density of 0.26 burrows per linear km of coast. According to information gathered from people who have long been in the Beagle Channel area, there were occasional sightings of otters in that area until some 25 years ago.

2.3. Habitat (brief description and trends)

In both countries the species inhabits marine and freshwater environments in the Andean and Patagonian regions.

In Chile it is to be found exclusively in fresh water north of the Chacao Channel. South of Río Baker (48°S) all sightings have been in marine environments (Sielfeld 1983). The same author maintains that the reason for this distribution lies in the decreasing productivity of bodies of fresh water with increasing altitude, and in the small supply of food resources in more northern bodies of water, such as crustaceans and batrachians, and the rarity of native fish (*galáxidos*).

Sielfeld (1983, 1990) identified habitat features for the species in southern Chile, south of 48°50'S latitude, stating that "it inhabits the stony and rocky coasts of the protected channels and bays of the archipelago of Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego". In the southern part of Chile, the great majority (98.2 per cent) of the otters' burrows are located in areas with hygrophilous coastal woods containing "Guindo" (*Nothofagus betuloides*) as the dominant species, and "Canelo" (*Drymis winteri*) and hardwood or mayten (*Maytenus megellanicus*) as secondary species. Furthermore, the river otter avoids shores exposed to surf and sea swell, a negative correlation being noted between the presence of the seaweed *Durvillea antarctica* (typical of exposed coastline) and of burrows of the species.

In the continental part of Argentina, it has an exclusively freshwater range. In the Nahuel Huapi National Park (Argentina), Chehébar (1985) defined as good sites for otters those with abundant littoral wooded vegetation and a complex coastal morphology; sites with scant littoral vegetation lying at a distance of more than 30 metres from water and sandy beaches were identified as sites of moderate quality for otters, with those without plant cover were identified as unsuitable. In the Tierra del Fuego National Park, the characteristics of the habitat where burrows are found match those described by Sielfeld for otters living along marine coasts.

2.4 Migrations (types and movements, distances, proportion of the population migrating)

The species is migratory as defined by the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals. No regular migrations are reported but it is said to cross international borders regularly throughout its annual cycle in the Argentine and Chilean parts of Tierra del Fuego, and more specifically in the Beagle Channel. The Tierra del Fuego National Park borders Chile in the west. In the course of a 60-hour-long survey signs of otters were seen but no animals were

able to be observed, suggesting for the same individuals extensive ranges through parts of the Chilean and Argentine coast.

Otters are territorial animals that live in a number of burrows within their territory, on the basis of which the radius of action of individuals may be directly plotted. They may however travel considerable distances (more than 30 km in several months), as has been detected in the Nahuel Huapi National Park through the use of transmitters (Chehébar 1992).

### 3. Threat data

#### 3.1. Direct threats to the population (factors, intensity)

##### Capture

There is no exact record of numbers captured in the past. Iriarte and Jaksic (1986) report that 38,263 otter skins were exported from Chile between 1910 and 1984. These figures are based only on what has been freely admitted by exporters and do not include illegal exports through bordering countries nor domestic consumption, which represent unknown quantities.

In Argentina, according to Chehébar (1985), the species has been strongly affected by hunting, which has been responsible for its decline and a reduction of its range. According to Parera (1995), most of the otters removed have been taken in the second half of this century, but no figures are available in this connection.

Foster-Turley et al (1990) state that there was a great deal of trade in the skins of this species in the past, although quite how much is unknown. The exporting States are unknown, and as for importers, the main one is said to be Germany, although there is no mention of the species in CITES reports for 1978 and 1979.

Due to the isolation of different parts of the species's range, it is very difficult to control illegal hunting. The low income of local fisherman make illegal hunting a need for them.

##### Predation

No data are available concerning predation directed at this species.

#### 3.2. Habitat destruction (impact of change, extent of loss)

Sielfeld (1992) has shown that in Chile the alteration of the coastal habitat through human intervention significantly affects the presence and abundance of otters. What is most striking is that the human intervention referred to by this author took the form merely of temporary fishermen's camps. This suggests that where human impact is most long-lasting and strongly felt, as on the Argentine coast of the Beagle Channel, the presence of otters is made impossible.

The Andean region of Argentine Patagonia shows alteration on the semiarid verges of rivers running into the various basins. Moreover, owing to the building of hydroelectric dams in these sub-Andean semiarid areas, the banks of the new bodies of water created by man are made unsuitable for otters, and it will take many years before the riverside vegetation and morphology are restored (Chehébar 1990).

The recent discovery of discontinuous otter activity in the Beagle Channel suggests that the modification of the coastal habitat in that area is responsible for the discontinuity in the presence of the species in the Argentine part of the Beagle Channel. Tierra del Fuego National Park is one of the few places in the Argentine part of this area where the habitat combines the characteristics

identified as suitable for the presence of otter burrows. Furthermore, there have been occasional sightings of otters on the Chilean coast facing the Argentine part of the Channel, in Isla Navarino, an area that has not been altered as much as the Argentine seaboard.

3.3. Indirect threats (e.g. reduction in the number of offspring as a result of pesticide pollution)

No data are available as yet.

3.4. Threats specifically linked to migrations

Destruction of the coastal habitat required by otters for their burrows is a factor affecting the capacity of areas formerly occupied by otters to support the species and is preventing their resettlement, as in the case of the southern coast of Isla Grande de Tierra del Fuego.

3.5. National and international use

Being a likeable animal, the otter possesses tourist value. However, owing to its shyness, it is difficult to make it a pole of attraction for ecotourism. In any event, the significant increase in the population of the Californian marine otter, in the United States, which is now a tourist resource, may serve as an encouraging example of what can be achieved.

4. Protection status and needs

4.1. National protection status

ARGENTINA

The species is protected in Argentina through its presence in national protected areas, such as the Nahuel Huapi, Lanín and Tierra del Fuego National Parks, and the Isla de los Estados Provincial Reserve in Tierra del Fuego province. It should be noted that these protected areas account for a substantial portion of its known present range in Argentina. Furthermore, it was because the presence of otters was detected in part of the Tierra del Fuego National Park, that a Strict Nature Reserve was established within that Park.

The National Parks Authority characterizes the species as a "Species of Special Value".

In Tierra del Fuego the otter is protected from capture, marketing and industrialization by Provincial Act 137, promulgated on 15 April 1994.

CHILE

The otter is protected by Decree No. 40 of the Hunting Regulations of 22 February 1922, which establishes an "absolute prohibition" on the hunting of this species and forbids any kind of capture. It is listed as "endangered" in the Red Book of Terrestrial Vertebrates of Chile (CONAF 1988, in Sielfeld 1993).

Various protected natural areas in Chile contain populations of this species, such as the Alacalufes, Isla Riesco and Holanda Forest Reserves and the Hernando de Magallanes and Alberto de Agostini National Parks (Sielfeld 1990).

However, owing to the isolation of various portions of the range of this species, it is very difficult to control illegal hunting.

4.2. International protection status

It is considered to be a vulnerable species in the IUCN Red Book (Groombridge 1993).

It is listed in Appendix I of CITES.

4.3. Additional protection needs

Protection of coastal areas shared by or bordering on Chile and Argentina.

5. **Range States**

Argentina and Chile.

6. **Comments from Range States**

7. **Additional remarks**

8. **References**

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## Proposal I/1

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