

**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 marine otter *Lutra felina* in Appendix I 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

1.4. Genus, species and subspecies, including author and year: *Lutra felina* (Molina 1782) (In Sagg. Str. Nat. Chili: 284)

1.5. Common name(s), where appropriate

English: Southern marine otter

Spanish: Chungungo, Chinchimen, Nutria de Magallanes, Gato marino, Gato de mar, Huallaque

French: Loutre de mer

**2. Biological data**

**2.1. Distribution (present and past)**

Southern coast of Peru and whole of Chile up to Cape Horn. In Argentina, the southern coast of Isla Grande de Tierra del Fuego and Isla de los Estados.

In Peru it takes in the Departments of Tacna, Moquegua, Arequipa and Ica. It ranges northwards no further than Lima (12°00'S) (Pulido 1991). It has been reported on the coasts of Moro de Suma, Chala, the Paracas National Reserve, Napla, Ancón, Isla Pachacamac and Paraíso (Parera 1994).

In Chile it is present throughout the coastal area, although it is regularly to be seen only in the southern part of the country and in a few places on the northern coast and in the centre (Sielfeld et al 1977). In the centre and north of Chile its distribution would appear to take the form of isolated groupings in Chañaral, Caldera and Coquimbo. It is rare in central Chile (Quintay and Valparaíso), where there is little of the habitat favourable to the species up to the north of Chiloé (Chehebar 1990), whereas south of 48° S occupation is practically continuous (Parera 1994).

In Argentina it occupies only the coasts of Tierra del Fuego province, having been recorded in Isla Grande de Tierra del Fuego in Bahías Aguirre (Merniez, priv. com., Schiavini 1992) and Buen Suceso (Schiavini and Lichter 1992), and in Isla de los Estados (Schiavini 1992, Massoia and Chebez 1993).

There is scant information available concerning the historical distribution of the southern marine otter. Various sources quoted in Massoia and Chebez (1993) suggest that it was already considered common in the last century in Tierra del Fuego archipelago (Argentina and Chile). It is clear however that hunting has had a decisive role in the fragmentation of its historical range. Each stage in the species' biological cycle takes place in range since it does not possess breeding or wintering areas.

2.2. Population (estimates and trends)

There is only very scant information available.

In Peru it is reported that in protected areas in the Paracas National Reserve, such as Isla San Gallan, the species density is one to 100 metres of shoreline (Riveros, pers. com. in Reyes 1992). There are no estimates for other areas.

In Chile, Cabello (1977) speaks of 10 individuals per km north of Chiloé. Castilla and Bahamondes (1979) estimate 2.5 animals per km of coast in the sector of Los Molles, Coquimbo. Castilla (1982) gives densities of 0.5 individuals per km of coast in Yerba Buena, 1.5 individuals per km of coast in Punta Lobos, 1 individual per km of coast in Chañaral and 0.04 individuals per km of coast in Canal Beagle. Sielfeld (1982) provides information regarding the relative abundance of the species south of 48°50'S, putting burrow density at between 10,550 and 14,450 (with a 90 per cent reliability margin), with a burrow density of 2.2-3.0 burrows per km of coast.

In Argentina there are no data available. According to Merniez (pers. com.), the southern marine otter is fairly common in the Bahía Aguirre area, in the extreme south-east of Tierra del Fuego.

2.3. Habitat (brief description and trends)

The southern marine otter is a marine species, to be found typically on rocky shores exposed to oceanic groundswell. Rocky shores offer a rich variety of animal life of interest to the species, in addition to a large number of places where the otters can take refuge.

Sielfeld (1983, 1990) identified habitat features for the species in southern Chile, south of 48°50'S latitude, stating that in the southern part of Chile 50.9 per cent of the southern marine otter's burrows are located in areas with stunted hygrophilous coastal woods containing sour "Guindo" (*Nothofagus betuloides*) as the dominant species, and "Canelo" (*Drymis winteri*) and hardwood or mayten (*Maytenus megellanicus*) as secondary species, while 40.06 per cent of burrows are to be found in areas of coastal thicket with *Hebe elliptica*. This demonstrates the species' preference for shores exposed to wind and surf. Furthermore, a positive correlation was noted between the presence of the seaweed *Durvillea antarctica* (typical of exposed coastline) and of burrows of the species. In the southern part of Chile, apparently only 10 per cent of the coast presents characteristics defined as optimal for the establishment of the southern marine otter.

In the central and north-central areas of Chile, Castilla and Bahamondes (1979) report a preference for a rocky, rugged seaboard habitat, with coastal caves formed by several galleries.

In the Argentine part of Isla Grande de Tierra del Fuego, the characteristics of the habitat in which the species has been detected match those described by Sielfeld for the southern marine otter in southern Chile.

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, regularly crossing national boundaries in the southernmost part of Chile and Argentina throughout its annual cycle, more especially on the south-east coast of the Tierra del Fuego archipelago, between Cape Horn and Isla de los Estados, over a distance of some 150 kms. There may also be movements around the border between Chile and Peru.

**3. Threat data**

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

Capture

In Peru fishermen sometimes hunt the otters for their skin, and an indeterminate number are caught accidentally in fishing nets (Reyes 1992).

In Chile there is no exact record of numbers captured in the past. Iriarte and Jaksic (1986) relate that 38,263 otter skins were exported 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.

No reliable data exist for Argentina.

According to Foster-Turley et al (1990), the level of trade in the skins of this species was high in the past but is practically non-existent at the present time. The species is not mentioned in CITES reports from 1978 to 1981.

It is very difficult to keep a check on illegal hunting owing to the isolated conditions in which some of the otter populations live. In addition, many fishermen are forced by their low incomes to hunt the species, despite it being illegal to do so.

Accidental capture occurs in Peru in the course of fishing activities (Chehebar 1990, Reyes 1992).

Predation

No data are available concerning predation directed at this species.

Fragmentation of populations

The fragmentation and isolation of populations is a problem in itself.

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

Sielfeld (1992) has shown that in southern 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 Canal Beagle, the presence of otters is made impossible.

The intensive harvesting of belts of seaweeds like *Lessonia* sp. and *Macrocystitis pyrifera* can alter the productivity and abundance of the invertebrates and fish on which otters depend (Chehebar 1990).

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

No data are available as yet. Reyes (1992) notes that the habitat of *L. felina* is dwindling through the effects of pollution. Chehebar (1990) states that pollution through heavy metals as a result of mining activities in northern Chile and through sewage and waste in central Chile is becoming a threat to otters.

3.4. Threats connected especially with migrations

Marine otters are demanding in terms of coastal habitat and the whereabouts of their burrows. The modification or destruction of this habitat affects its capacity to support populations and prevents the resettlement of areas formerly occupied by the species, as in the case of the southern coast of Isla Grande de Tierra del Fuego.

3.5. National and international utilization

Being a likeable animal, the otter possesses tourist value. However, owing to its shyness, it is difficult to make it a centre of attraction for ecotourism. Be that as it may, the significant increase in the population of the Californian marine otter, which is now a tourist resource, offers an encouraging example of what can be achieved.

**4. Protection status and needs**

4.1. National protection status

The species is protected in Argentina through its presence in the Isla de los Estados Provincial Reserve in Tierra del Fuego province. In this province the southern marine otter is protected from capture, marketing and industrialization by Provincial Act 137, promulgated on 15 April 1994.

In Peru the southern marine otter is considered to be in danger of extinction by virtue of Ministerial Regulation No. 1082-90 - AG. The only protected populations are to be found in the Paracas National Reserve (Pulido 1991).

In Chile the southern marine 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 "vulnerable" in the Red Book of Terrestrial Vertebrates of Chile (Glade 1988). The same book labels it as "vulnerable" in Regions I, V, X, XI and XII, and "endangered" in Regions II, III, IV and IX.

Various protected natural areas in Chile contain populations of this species, such as the Alacalufes, Isla Riesco and Holande Forest Reserves and the Hernando de Magallanes, Alberto de Agostini and Cabo de Hornos 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) and is listed in Appendix I of the CITES.

4.3. Additional protection needs

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

Inclusion of aspects relating to the conservation of coastal and shore habitats in land-use management and development plans at national, regional and provincial levels, with respect both to the terrestrial habitat and to the coastal maritime zone and the algal belts on which this species depends.

Establishment of protected areas within Peruvian and Chilean jurisdiction (in the central and northern parts of the latter country) in order to increase protection in the northern portion of the species' range.

5. **Range States**  
Argentina, Chile and Peru.
6. **Comments from Range States**
7. **Other comments**
8. **References**

- Cabello, C. 1977. La nutria de mar *Lutra felina* (Mol.) en la Isla de Chiloé, Chile. Otter Specialist Group, IUCN Paramaribo, Surinam. 7 pp.
- Castilla, J.C. 1982. Nuevas observaciones sobre conducta, ecología y densidad de *Lutra felina* (Molina 1782) (Carnivora: Mustelidae) en Chile. Museo natural de Historia Natural. Publicación Ocasional 38: 197-206.
- Castilla, J.C. e I. Bahamondes 1979. Observaciones conductuales y ecológicas sobre *Lutra felina* (Molina) 1782 (Carnivora: Mustelidae) en las zonas Central y Centro-Norte de Chile. Archivos de Biología y Medicina Experimental 12: 119 -132.
- Chehebar, C.E. 1990. Action Plan for Latin American Otters. En Foster-Turley, P.; S. MacDonald; C. Mason. (Eds.) 1990. Otters, An Action Plan for their Conservation. International Union for the Conservation of Nature. Gland, Switzerland. 126 pp.
- Foster-Turley, P.; S. MacDonald; C. Mason. (Eds.) 1990. Otters. An Action Plan for their Conservation. IUCN. Gland, Switzerland. 126 pp.
- Glade, A. (Ed.) 1988. Libro Rojo de los Vertebrados Terrestres de Chile. Corporación Nacional Forestal. Santiago, Chile. 65 pp.
- Groombridge B. (Ed.) 1993. 1994 IUCN Red List of Threatened Animals. IUCN, Gland, Switzerland y Cambridge, U.K. 1 vi + 286 pp.
- Iriarte, J.A. y F.M. Jaksi 1986. The Fur Trade in Chile: An Overview of Seventy-five Years of Export Data (1910 - 1984). Biological Conservation 38: 243-253.
- Massoia, E. 1976. Mammalia. Fauna de Agua Dulce de la República Argentina. Volumen XLIV. Buenos Aires. 128 pp.
- Massoia, E. y J.C. Chebez 1993. Mamíferos Silvestres del Archipiélago Fueguino. Literature of Latina America. Buenos Aires. 261 pp.
- Parera, A. 1994. Las "Nutrias verdaderas" de la Argentina. Boletín Técnico de la Fundación Vida Silvestre Argentina 21. Buenos Aires. 40 pp.
- Pulido, V. 1991. El Libro Rojo de la Fauna Silvestre del Perú. Lima, Perú. 219 pp
- Reyes, J.C. 1992. Informe nacional sobre la situación de los mamíferos marinos en Perú. Informes y Estudios del Programa de Mares Regionales del PNUMA N° 145. PNUMA.
- Schiavini, A.C.M. 1992. Nutrias (*Lutra* spp.) en Tierra del Fuego, Argentina. Quinta Reunión de Trabajo de Especialistas en Mamíferos Acuáticos de America del Sur. Buenos Aires, Argentina, 28 de septiembre al 2 de octubre de 1992.
- Schiavini, A.C.M., y A. Lichter. 1992. Bahía Buen Suceso. Paginas 146-147 en: Lichter, A. [Ed.]: Huellas en la Arena, Sombras en el Mar. Los mamíferos marinos de la Argentina y Antártida. Ediciones Terra Nova, Buenos Aires.
- Sielfeld, W. 1983. Mamíferos marinos de Chile. Ediciones de la Universidad de Chile. Santiago. 199 pp.
- Sielfeld, W. 1989. Sobreposición de nicho y patrones de distribución de *L. felina* y *L. provocax* (Mustelidae, Carnivora) en el medio marino de Sudamérica austral. Anales del Museo de Historia Natural de Valparaíso 20:103-108.
- Sielfeld, W. 1990. Características del hábitat de *L. felina* (Molina) y *L. provocax* Thomas (Carnivora, Mustelidae) en Fuego - Patagonia. Revista de Investigaciones Científicas y Tecnológicas. Serie Ciencias del Mar 1: 30-36.
- Sielfeld, W. 1992. Abundancias relativas de *L. felina* (Molina, 1782) y *L. provocax* Thomas 1908 en el litoral de Chile austral. Revista de Investigaciones Científicas y Tecnológicas. Serie Ciencias del Mar 2: 3-11.
- Sielfeld, W.; C. Venegas y A. Atalah 1977. Consideraciones acerca del estado de los mamíferos marinos de Chile. Anales del Instituto de la Patagonia de Punta Arenas 8: 297-315.