

## SHORT NOTE

### ATTACK OF OTTER ON HUMANS IN THRISSUR, KERALA, INDIA

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**Abstract:** Human-otter conflict is a rare phenomenon, but has been reported from North and South America, and the Indian sub-continent. This paper reports on three Smooth-Coated otter (*Lutrogale perspicillata*) attacks in Thrissur, Kerala, India, discovered during a detailed study of human-wildlife conflict which ran from April 2009 to March 2012. Focus group discussion was carried out with local people with follow-up of individual anecdotes. One fatal and two non-fatal attacks were reported; ex gratia payments to victims were sanctioned by the Kerala Forest and Wildlife Department. All attacks were by groups of otters at dawn or dusk. Two incidents were in the breeding season (August to November) and one in June 2011. The reason for the attacks appears to be territorial.

Keywords: Smooth-coated otter, human-otter conflict, Kerala, India

#### INTRODUCTION

Three species of otters inhabit India, and the Smooth-coated otter (*Lutrogale perspicillata*) is common in Kerala (Menon, 2014) and mainly feeds on fishes (Prater, 1965). Bite attacks of otters on humans were reported from North America (*Lontra canadensis*) (Potter et al., 2007) and South America (*Pteronura brasiliensis*) (McTurk and Spelman, 2005). Several anecdotal incidents of human-otter (*Lontra canadensis*) conflicts and rabies infection within the species were reported by Belanger et al. (2011). An attack by Smooth-coated otter at Tungabadra, India was reported by Nagulu (1992). In this paper, Smooth-coated otter (*Lutrogale perspicillata*) attacking people in Thrissur District, Kerala, India is reported. Hunting of smooth-coated otter is illegal as this species is protected by the Wildlife Protection Act of India.

#### STUDY AREA

Thrissur District (10°46' to 10°7' N and 75°57' to 76°55' E) is in the central part of Kerala State, India, spanning an area of about 3,032 km<sup>2</sup>. The District has a tropical humid climate and plentiful seasonal rainfall (2500 mm to 3500 mm). The study area is comprised of 11 Forest Ranges within three Forest Divisions namely Thrissur (210.64 km<sup>2</sup>), Chalakudy (279.71 km<sup>2</sup>) and Vazhachal (413.94 km<sup>2</sup>) and three