



Facts about the illegal otter pet trade:

In recent years, otters have been traded online in Southeast Asia.

An increase in the number of **seizures of live otters** in Southeast Asia suggests an unprecedented trend of otters being poached for the illegal pet trade in this region.

Social media plays a significant role in the **online trade of animals, particularly otters.**

It functions as an arena for **advertisements, viral exotic pet videos** and the **otter trade market** itself.

Otters are charismatic animals and videos of otters as pets spread rapidly on social media. These videos, online comments and discussions often entice people to purchase otter pups as pets for themselves. The legalities, the otters' wellbeing and safety issues rarely come up on social media discussions.

Online trade research conducted by TRAFFIC over 4 months period, from January – April 2018 shows 560 ads were analyzed, offering a maximum of 1189 otters for sale across 4 countries: Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam, and Malaysia.

Small-clawed otter is the most frequently traded species.

Smooth-coated otter is the second most traded.

Commercial exploitation of otters is taking place both domestically and internationally in clear violation of national laws and CITES.

The retail price in the Japanese market has reached **over 300 times** the reported black market price in Thailand (USD30 in Thailand compared to USD9,000 per juvenile or more in Japan) . This suggests strong financial incentives underpinning attempts to smuggle live otters to Japan.

About Otters

Otters are semi-aquatic carnivores that require to live in and around water-bodies and are not suited to domestication. Therefore, human homes pose a very stressful environment for them to be in.

Furthermore, otters are designed to eat crustaceans (crabs), which means they have a powerful and very painful bite which can cause severe damage and may result in hospitalization.

The most popular species in the pet trade, the Small-clawed otter, is a social animal that lives in a family group and does not survive long as an individual in captivity.

In the wild, its family is crucial for otters survival. Otter pups depend on their parents; born blind, they open their eyes only a month later, following which they must learn to swim, to groom and to forage. Grooming, foraging, along with play time and resting are all activities done together with the entire family in their natural habitat – in the wild.

What happens to otters in the pet trade?

Wild adult otters with recently born pups, will usually be killed by poachers, so that the pups can be taken away to be sold in the pet trade. Pups will usually be a few days old, with eyes closed and unable to fend for themselves. The next stage in the process is the transit of the pups, which results in a lot of the animals dying due to stress, dehydration, and excess use of sedatives or from suffocation while kept in suitcases. Others die from diseases and malnourishment because of an inappropriate pet food diet.

And did we mention they bite? Quite hard actually, since their teeth are strong enough to crack shells, crabs, clams etc, they can probably bite off someone's finger, in the best case scenario.

Help us stop the illegal otter pet trade.

Sources:

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2287884X18302681>

<https://www.traffic.org/publications/reports/asian-otters-at-risk-from-illegal-trade-to-meet-booming-demand-in-japan/>

<https://www.traffic.org/publications/reports/illegal-otter-trade-in-southeast-asia/>

<https://www.traffic.org/publications/reports/illegal-otter-trade/>

