

Smooth-coated Otter spotted in Kiliyur Lake, Tamil Nadu, India



Image 1. Smooth-coated Otter in Kiliyur Lake.

Otters are semi-aquatic mammals and classified in order Carnivora of family Mustelidae. Smooth-coated Otter has flattened head, thick muscular tail, smooth & dense epidermis, and large paws that are webbed between fingers. There are 13 species of otters spread all over the world except Antarctica and Australia, and India has three species—Smooth-coated Otter *Lutrogale perspicillata*, Small-clawed Otter *Aonyx cinerea*, and the Eurasian Otter *Lutra lutra* (Johnsingh & Manjrekar 2013; Menon 2014). In the Cauvery Basin, Smooth-coated Otters are well documented (Shenoy 2003;

Shenoy et. al. 2006). Smooth-coated Otters have a large family and are highly social, they mainly eat shrimps, crustaceans, oysters, invertebrates, fishes, and even birds (Duplaix & Savage, 2018). Kolappan (2018) reported the presence of Smooth-coated Otters in the Vaduvor Birds Sanctuary.

According to IUCN Red List (2015), the Smooth-coated Otter is listed as “Vulnerable” species and its presence indicates a healthy aquatic ecosystem. In the Indian Wildlife Protection Act of 1972, the otter is included under schedule II and listed in appendix II



Images 2–9. Antics of Smooth-coated Otter on loose soil and grass.



Image 10. Missing back leg foot observed in Smooth-coated Otter from Kiliyur Lake.

under CITES. We observed and recorded the presence of otters in Kiliyur Lake in Tiruchirappalli District, Tamil Nadu. Major threats to the otter population are the conversion of wetlands for settlements and agriculture, loss of wetland habitats due to the construction of large-scale hydroelectric projects, reduction in prey biomass, poaching, and contamination of waterways by pesticides (Hussain 1999; de Silva et al. 2008; Nawab 2007, 2009; Shenoy et al. 2006).

Smooth-coated Otter sighting in Kiliyur Lake

Kiliyur Lake (10.81346 N & 78.84825 E) is located in Kiliyur Village

in Tiruverumbur Taluk of Tiruchirappalli District in Tamil Nadu. This lake receives water from Cauvery River via Vellar River. Kiliyur Lake is one of the bird diversity hotspots in Tiruchirappalli District. The surrounding area is fully covered by agricultural landscape and mostly cultivated for paddy crop. During bird watching in Kiliyur Lake we observed and recorded one Smooth-coated Otter (Neer Nai - Tamil) in the central mound of the lake under the plant *Prosopis juliflora*. The otter was photographed using Nikon D3300 with zoom lens 500mm and photos were analyzed and later

identified using a field guide (Menon 2014) as Smooth-coated Otter. The sighting of Smooth-coated Otter was on 01 January 2021 at 09.48h. The otter was observed for more than 10 minutes basking and vigorously rubbing its fur on loose sand, soil and grass on the ground, rolling and blowing of air into the fur. This was the first time we observed the otter in this lake. From the photographs we realized that the Smooth-coated Otter has only three legs.

The otters hind left foot was missing as it appeared to be cut and healed. There can be many possible reasons for the injured cut foot. The otter may have got trapped in some hunter's bait; cut in the fishing net or lost to predators. The presence of the otter in this lake can become a suitable place to study its behavior, ecology, and biology.

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