



Care For Us
Asian small-clawed otter
(*Aonyx cinereus*)



Animal Welfare

Animal welfare refers to an animal's state or feelings. An animal's welfare state can be good, neutral or bad.

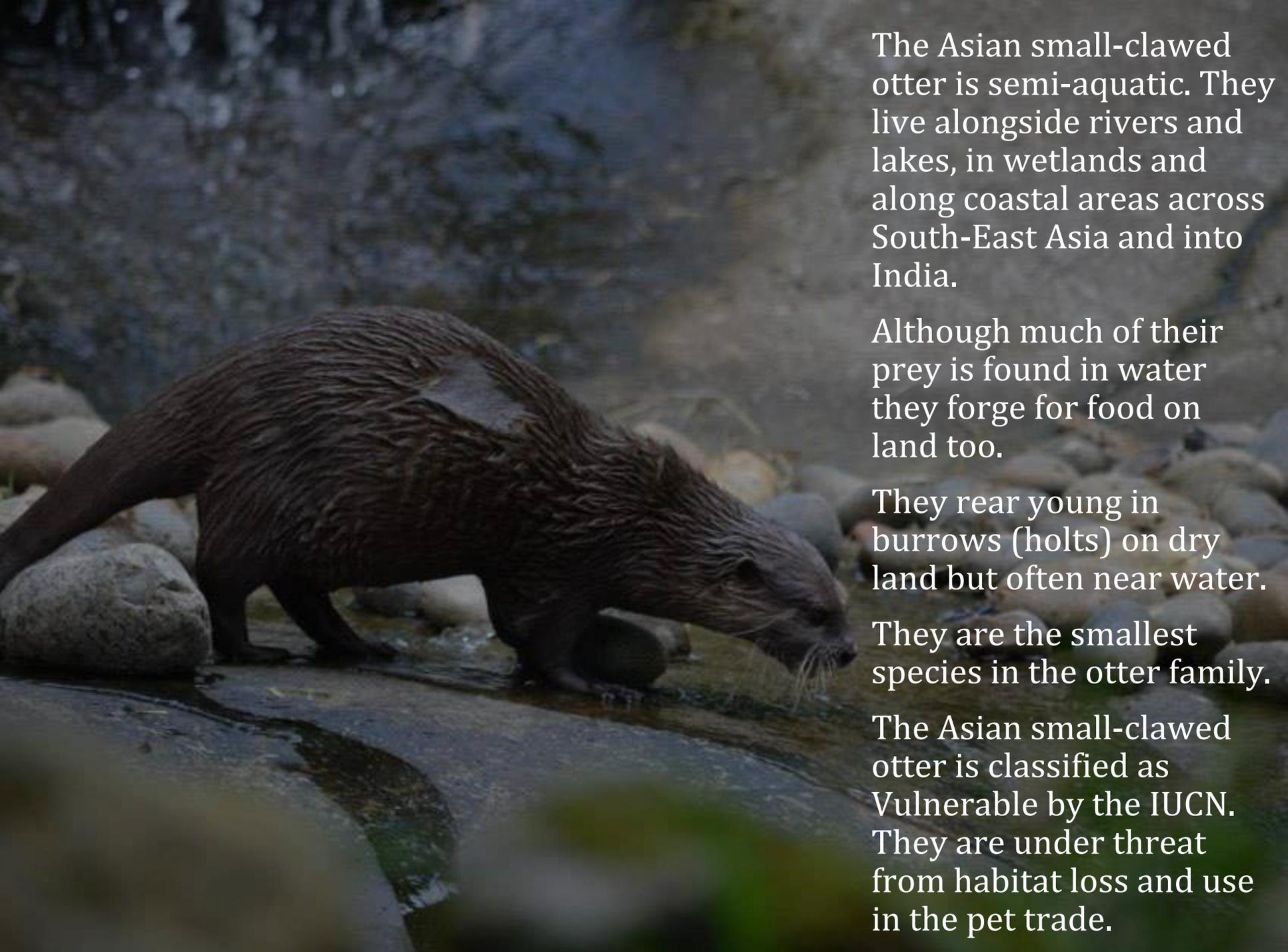
An animal's welfare has the potential to differ on a daily basis. When an animal's needs - nutritional, behavioural, health and environmental - are met, they will have good welfare.

A good life in captivity might be one where animals can consistently experience good welfare throughout their entire life.

Understanding that animals have both sentient and cognitive abilities as well as pain perception, reinforces the need to provide appropriate husbandry for all captive animals, to ensure good welfare.

In captivity, the welfare of an animal is dependent on the environment provided for them and the daily care and veterinary treatment they receive.





The Asian small-clawed otter is semi-aquatic. They live alongside rivers and lakes, in wetlands and along coastal areas across South-East Asia and into India.

Although much of their prey is found in water they forage for food on land too.

They rear young in burrows (holts) on dry land but often near water.

They are the smallest species in the otter family.

The Asian small-clawed otter is classified as Vulnerable by the IUCN. They are under threat from habitat loss and use in the pet trade.

Otters like water

Otters are semi-aquatic and have adapted to life in and around water. Their fur is waterproof and keeps them warm. The otters spend a long time keeping their fur in good condition to maintain its water repellent qualities.

Positive behaviours to encourage

Otters must have access to good quality water bodies, that have sufficient depth and complexity. This offers them choices on where to play, hunt and bathe. Providing running water will encourage further opportunities for rewarding behaviours. They use their whiskers and paws to search for food, so feeding or offering enrichment in the water encourages natural foraging behaviours.



A photograph of two otters in a naturalistic enclosure. One otter is perched on a large, weathered log, while the other is on the ground below. The background shows some green grass and rocks. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

Otters like different substrates

The Asian small-clawed otter is found in many different habitats in the wild but always near water. They do forage on land and by creating different habitats in a captive environment you will be able to recreate some of their natural behaviours.

Positive behaviours to encourage

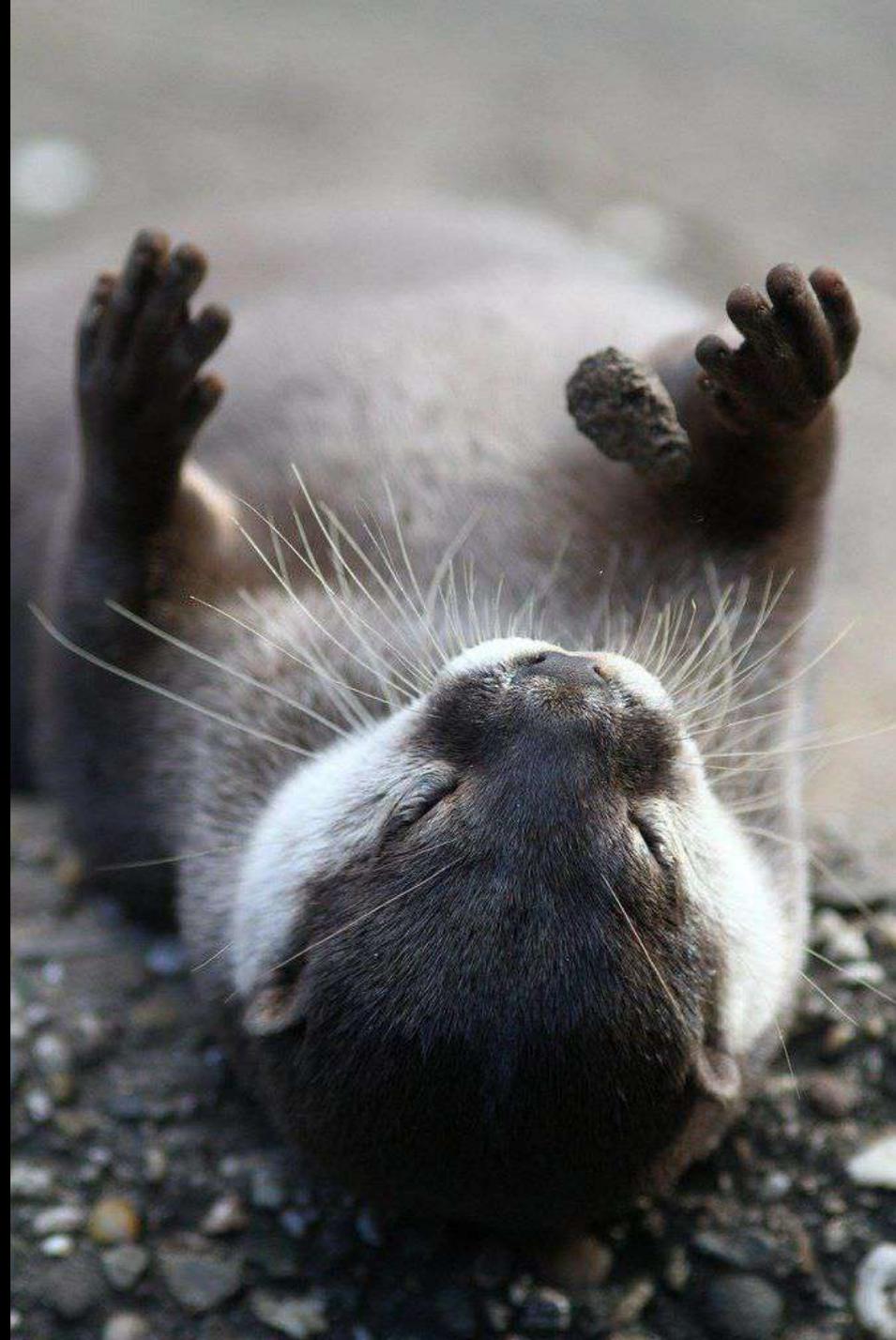
Otters enjoy experiencing different substrates. By offering sand, bark, grass and gravel you will encourage natural grooming behaviours which helps keep their fur in good condition. They will also enjoy foraging through the substrates with their paws. Having soil, gravel and logs in and around the water will encourage more foraging behaviour.

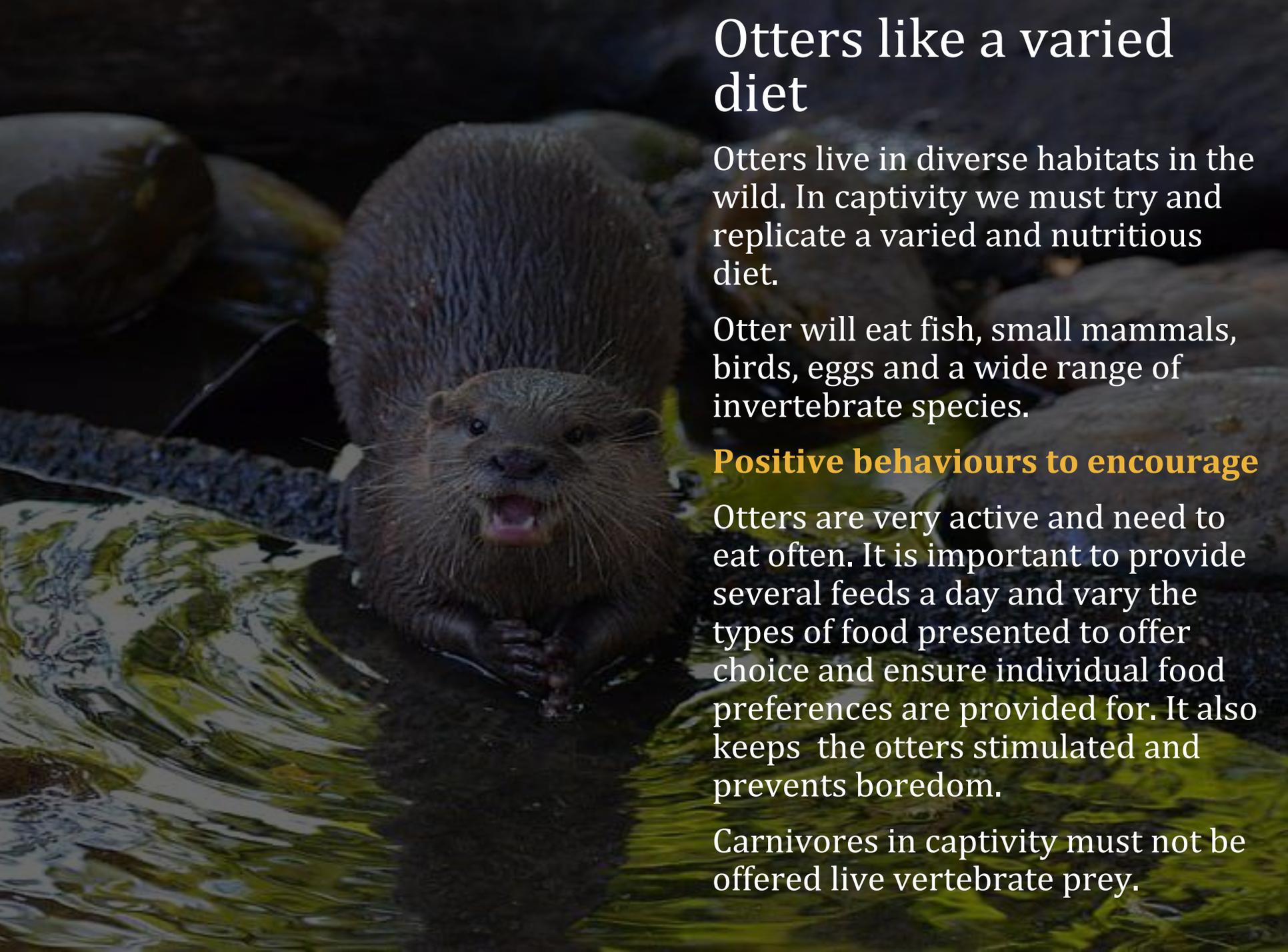
Otters like using their paws

Asian small-clawed otters have partially webbed toes on their feet which allows them to use their digits (fingers) to hold and manipulate objects and also forage for food. The tips of their digits are very sensitive and able to find small invertebrates and other food items in mud and murky water.

Positive behaviours to encourage

Providing otters with an environment that offers different substrates allows them to use their paws to manipulate and forage naturally, exhibiting natural behaviours. Enrichment items that encourage use of their paws for manipulation and objects, such as small stones for them to play with will provide rewarding opportunities.





Otters like a varied diet

Otters live in diverse habitats in the wild. In captivity we must try and replicate a varied and nutritious diet.

Otter will eat fish, small mammals, birds, eggs and a wide range of invertebrate species.

Positive behaviours to encourage

Otters are very active and need to eat often. It is important to provide several feeds a day and vary the types of food presented to offer choice and ensure individual food preferences are provided for. It also keeps the otters stimulated and prevents boredom.

Carnivores in captivity must not be offered live vertebrate prey.

Otters are social



Asian small-clawed otters live in family groups. There is normally a dominant, adult pair which breeds and the other family members are made up of adult offspring and pups.

They are territorial and have a very strong bond between family members. Otters will sleep, groom, play and forage as a family group.

Positive behaviours to encourage

Keeping otters in an appropriate social group is very important. They need the social interaction to behave naturally and offer them the highest standards of welfare. These groups can be single sex to help control breeding but they must be kept in a group.

Otters like privacy

Like most wild animals, otters enjoy privacy. Loud noises, disturbance from visitors and an inability to escape from perceived threats will be stressful for them.

Positive behaviours to encourage

Multiple hiding spaces (dens/indoor spaces) that are not accessible to the public should be provided. This gives the otters a choice as to whether they want to retreat or not. Hollowed logs, and artificial dens can be used.

Providing more than one offers the otters choice and control on where to go.





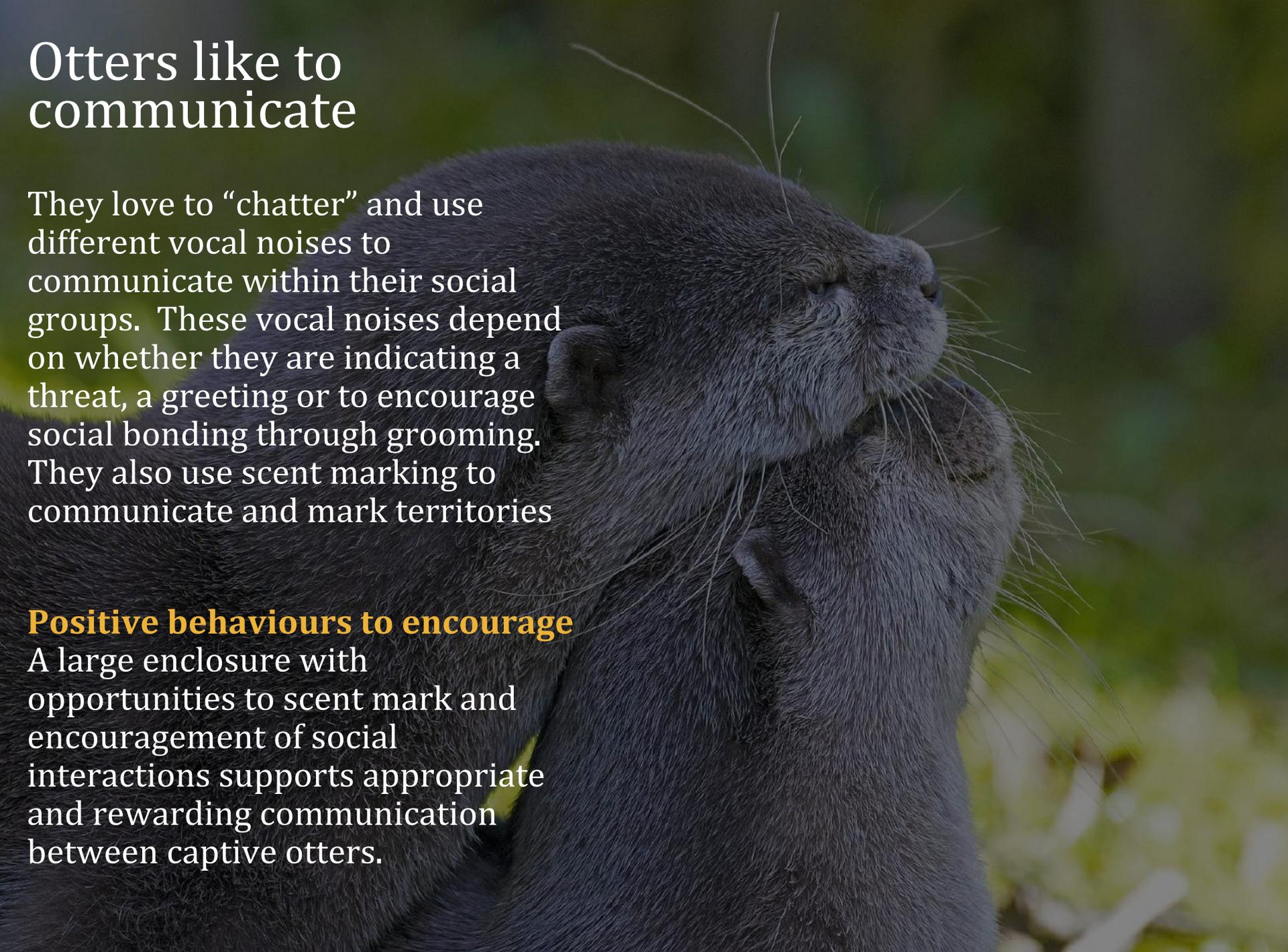
Otters are active

Otters are energetic and spend a lot of time being active, playing/socialising, foraging and investigating. This is part of hunting, social bonding and courtship activities. They will also have rest periods, often together as a social group.

Positive behaviours to encourage

An enclosure should be appropriately complex and stimulating to encourage exploration and socialisation. Multiple hiding spaces, different substrates, running water, different pools, and a regular enrichment programme should be provided.

Otters like to communicate



They love to “chatter” and use different vocal noises to communicate within their social groups. These vocal noises depend on whether they are indicating a threat, a greeting or to encourage social bonding through grooming. They also use scent marking to communicate and mark territories

Positive behaviours to encourage

A large enclosure with opportunities to scent mark and encouragement of social interactions supports appropriate and rewarding communication between captive otters.



Asian small-clawed otters enjoy...

Exploring and foraging in different substrates with their paws and swimming in water.

They enjoy the company of their family group and spend time grooming, feeding and playing together.

By creating a stimulating and diverse habitat in captivity, we can meet the behaviour and emotional needs of the Asian small-clawed otter.

