

## **Project Update: October 2015**

Many months (March – present) have been spent walking the banks of the Sungai Relau and Sungai Ceruai, in Taman Negara, Peninsular Malaysia, in search of the elusive hairy nosed otter (*Lutra sumatarna*). I haven't had the privilege of seeing the hairy nosed otter as yet although I have seen signs of their presence. These signs will have to be confirmed with an actual sighting or with a camera trap as it is difficult to be sure. However, the small clawed otter (*Aonyx cinerus*) is abundant along these rivers. Ten Bushnell Trophy cameras have been placed the area which have yielded a variety of wildlife including small clawed otters. Also, captured on camera is evidence of poachers in the same area as where otters frequent. This is might be an indication of the continued persecution of otters for the illegal wildlife trade. A serious problem in South East Asia and one that I am working with TRAFFIC South East Asia to determine.

I have been working closely with the "Bateq" the indigenous community that live in the forest. They have been my guides and have shown me areas where otters used to be in the past and that have disappeared over the years. I have also done a lot of outreach with their community as a whole. The bateq have, in the past, used otters as bushmeat. This, they say in not necessary any more as there are other sources of protein for them that are available in the markets. However, I have heard conflicting reports on the veracity of these claims. Something that needs to be investigated further.

Apart from collecting evidence of otters and data on their habitats, I have also been involved in a lot of outreach.

This includes:

- Presentation at Borneo Rhythms of Rimba Wildlife Festival 2015.
- Visiting the Centre for Marine and Coastal studies in Penang to teach and train students about otters, otter habitats and otter research.
- Guiding a Honours project at Monash University on smooth coated otters
- Taking local people (who are interested in the outdoors) walks to Kuala Selangor Nature Park -- and talking to them about otters and their importance to ecosystems.
- Taking people on otter walks and showing them how we set up camera traps at Taman Negara and talking about otters and the need for otter conservation.
- Teaching the younger generation of the Bateq community about the importance of otters.
- A public lecture at Monash University about the trade in otters in South East Asia.