

Project Update: March 2001

Surveys in the Vwaza Marsh Wildlife Reserve covered some 30km of river bank, while those in Nyika National Park investigated 45km. as otters are such secretive animals, the team generally used indirect observation ie searched for signs such as spraints, dens, tracks and food remains. In Vwaza, otters signs were recorded mainly in the marsh in the northern part of the reserve, and were very rare in the southern area. Threats include streambank cultivation, siltation and fires as well as competition for fish and crabs with local human communities.

In Nyika, there were far more signs of otter presence, probably due to habitat conditions here being more attractive to otters - good riverine vegetation cover, continuous water flow, little human activity on rivers and streams. Hence the team concludes that Nyika has high potential for the continued existence and survival of the clawless otter. Recommendations emerging from the study include:

- (a) implementation of early burning regimes to reduce dry season hot late fires which are indiscriminately destructive;
- (b) regular patrols to reduce fish poaching and introduction of a closed season fishing period;
- (c) awareness campaigns among the local communities on the importance of conserving wetlands and their associated wildlife, and also about bushfire hazards and streambank cultivation impact.