



Recent observations on the hairy-nosed otter (*Lutra sumatrana*) in South Sumatra

The hairy-nosed otter (*Lutra sumatrana*) is an endangered species of the family Mustelidae (Harris 1968, Sasaki *et al.* 2021). It is a medium-sized otter with a distinct pale chin and upper lip (Payne & Francis 2005, Wright *et al.* 2008) and was once believed to be extinct in the wild (OSG 1998). However, to date, only a few specimen measurements have been published (see Wright *et al.* 2008). In Sumatra, two reported sightings were from Sekayu, Palembang (Lubis 2005), and Bukit Barisan Selatan National Park (Latifiana & Pickles 2013). Another evident sighting from Palembang was a road kill (Lubis 2005). Here we report a few sightings from South Sumatra.

Our two-week biodiversity survey (with 2 or 3 observers) was carried out in a High Conservation Value (HCV) open swamp area covered with grasses (Fig 1) in Tanjung Sari Estate, Rantau Durian-II Village, Ogan Komering Ilir, South Sumatra from 27 February to 7 March 2024.

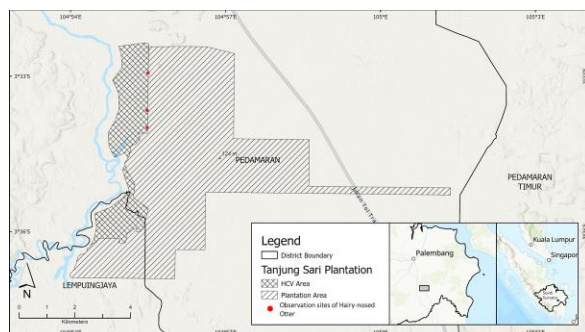


Figure 1. The HCV in Tanjung Sari, South Sumatra

The swamp is adjacent to the Lempuing River and is usually dry during the dry season, making it prone to fire, but flooded during the wet season. The HCV swamp area is next to an oil

palm plantation. The HCV swamp and the oil palm plantation are separated by a dirt road and a canal next to the plantation. We recorded three sightings of the hairy-nosed otter on (i) 4 March 08:50 hr (Fig. 2A), (ii) 5 March 07:33–07:52 (Fig. 2B), (iii) 6 March 07:00 hr. Each time, one individual of this solitary species was observed crossing the dirt road from the canal to the HCV area. Identification was made using photographs, in which the proportion of the tail was diagnostic. However, we could not confirm whether all three sightings were of the same individual.



Figure 2. Two sightings of the hairy-nosed otter at the HCV in Tanjung Sari, South Sumatra

The sightings are an addition to the previous sightings in the same province, close to the Musi River with a similar habitat, oil palm plantation, and open swamp area (Lubis 2005). Lubis (2005) found a carcass of *L. sumatrana* on the road from Sekayu to Palembang, which is ~200 km from

the HCV swamp. The habitat there was also a flooded open swamp area surrounded by oil palm plantations. There are other reported sightings in the area but they have not been published (R. Lubis pers. Comm., 1 January 2024). Many areas in South Sumatra have swampy coastal plains (Prasetyo 1995), which suggests that South Sumatra Province may support more populations of the hairy-nosed otter.

In the HCV area, the hairy-nosed otters live sympatrically with the Asian small-clawed otter (*Aonyx cinerea*), which we only detected from their tracks on the dirt road during the same survey. The tracks showed that the Asian small-clawed otter was in groups. An individual *Aonyx cinerea* was seen in the same area during our previous survey carried out in the dry season in August 2023. However, the hairy-nosed otter was not detected during that previous survey. The swamp was reduced to ponds interspersed with dense vegetation during the dry season (Fig. 3A), which may affect the movement of the otter. During the wet season, most areas of the HCV were inundated by water up to 2 m deep or even more, which offers more potential habitat (Fig. 3B) for the hairy-nosed otter.

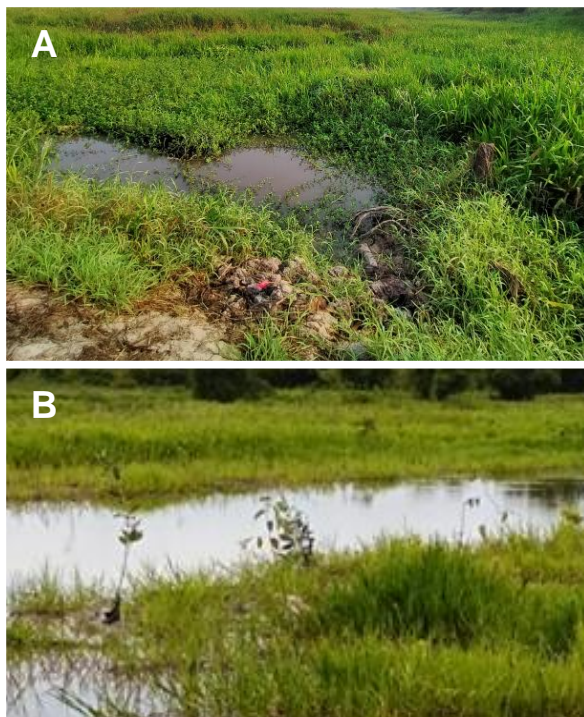


Figure 3. HCV area during (A) dry, (B) wet seasons

Previous reports on the hairy-nosed otter stated that this species inhabits flooded forests, marshes, and streams near mixed forests (Wright *et al.* 2008). In Thailand (see Kachanasaka 2001), the hairy-nosed otter has been observed in

swamp forests dominated by *Melaleuca cajuputi* (Myrtaceae), but in Cambodia (see Heng *et al.* 2016) it was reported in mountains at 800 m a.s.l.

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