

## THE CURRENT STATUS AND CONSERVATION EFFORT OF HAIRY-NOSED OTTER (*LUTRA SUMATRANA*) IN MALAYSIA

Thye Lim Tee<sup>1</sup>, Wai Pak Ng<sup>2</sup>, Pazil Abdul-Patah<sup>3</sup>, Johnny Kissing<sup>4</sup>, Farez Dahlan<sup>5</sup> and Chee Yoong Woo<sup>5</sup>

Panthera Wild Cat Conservation Malaysia Sdn Bhd<sup>1</sup>, Enggang (Pekan) Sdn Bhd<sup>2</sup>, Department of Wildlife and National Parks (DWNP) Peninsular Malaysia<sup>3</sup>, Sabah Forestry Department<sup>4</sup> and Aurecon Lestari Sdn Bhd<sup>5</sup>, [cheeyoong.woo@aurecongroup.com](mailto:cheeyoong.woo@aurecongroup.com), (Woo)

The hairy-nosed otter (HNO; *Lutra sumatrana*) is classified as Endangered both globally (IUCN Red List) and nationally in Malaysia. However, conservation efforts and research on this species remain limited across Southeast Asia. In Malaysia, our knowledge of its distribution is largely based on opportunistic sightings and by-catch data from camera trap studies. The lack of ecological research of HNO, combined with wetland habitat fragmentation, raises concerns about threats to its population, including roadkill. The Malaysia Otter Network (MON) was established in 2020 as a coalition among government agencies, NGOs and conservationists advocating for research and conservation of Malaysia's three threatened otter species. MON has partnered with various organisations to initiate conservation projects for HNO. At the West Coast of Peninsular Malaysia, the mangrove forests and the North Selangor Peat Swamp Forest were surveyed to assess the spatial distribution of three species of otters and confirmed the presence of HNO near the peat swamp using spraint samples. This project also developed species-specific DNA primers to identify this rare species. Camera traps were deployed to monitor the HNO population in both Pahang and Sabah, alongside two other novel projects. At the East Coast of Peninsular Malaysia, the HNO has been detected through both camera trap records and roadkill incidents at the South-East Pahang Peat Swamp Forest. Positioning HNO as an ambassador species is a key strategy to enhance conservation efforts and garner public support for protecting its natural peatland habitat. In Sabah, surveys in the Deramakot Landscape, targeting the flat-headed cat (*Prionailurus planiceps*) indicated habitat overlap with HNO, suggesting shared hunting grounds associated with local water bodies. Observations included HNO preying on Tilapia (Cichlidae) and spraint deposition within the survey area. However, further structured research is essential to better understand its ecological range, resource dependencies, and unidentified threats to its survival.