

African Otter Outreach Project (AoTOP): Working With Range Country Stakeholder Groups on Education Outreach for the Lake Victoria Ecosystem

Jan Reed-Smith, AoTOP Director

Affiliated with Columbus Zoo & Aquarium, Endorsed by AZA Otter SSP, AZA Cichlid SSP



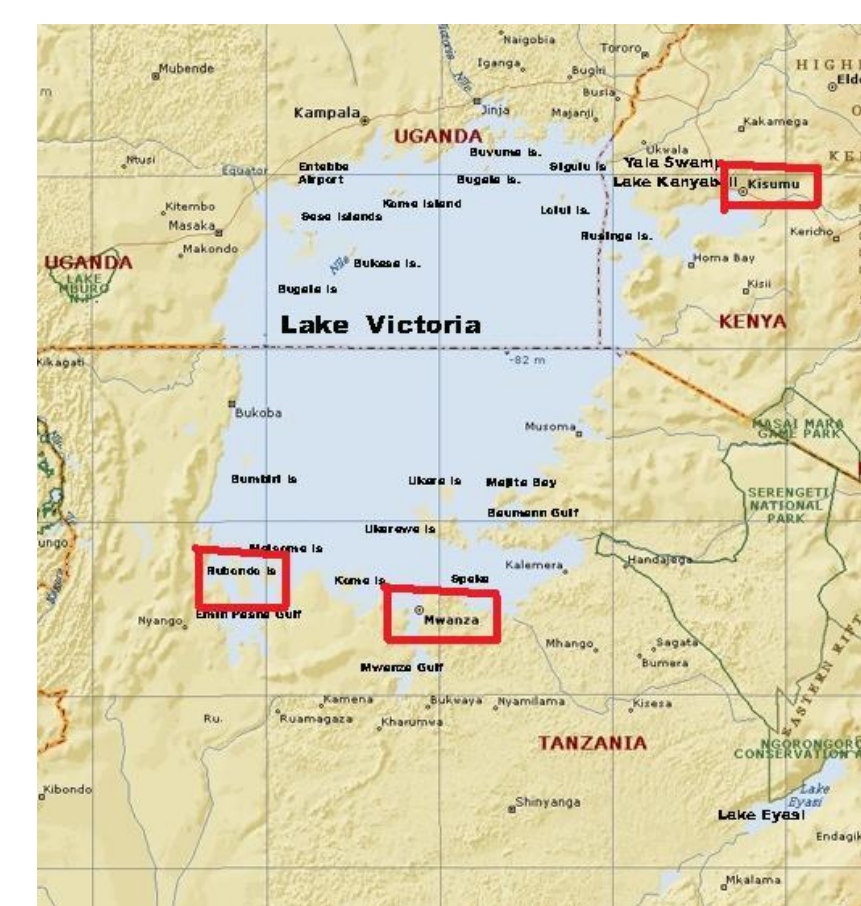
Project Origins and Locations

Since 1998 the IUCN Otter Specialist Group has recognized the importance of working with other groups focused on ecosystems occupied by otters. An additional priority has been training local wildlife biologists and improving conservation education, particularly in Africa where knowledge of otters is sparse and conflicts with human populations is possible high.

In 2005 a team of OSG members led by Dr. T. Serfass conducted preliminary otter surveys in Kenya and Tanzania. As part of this effort students and teachers from Kisumu Day High School were taken on a field trip to Lake Victoria. While the long-range study of spotted-necked otters (2006 – 2009) was to be located in Tanzania's Rubondo Island NP, the Kisumu students and teachers initiated their own Otter Conservation Clubs.



In 2009 RINP Otter team member J. Reed-Smith visited with stakeholder groups the team had worked with or become aware of over the years. The African Otter Outreach Project (AoTOP) was founded in November 2009. The groups selected to work with the project are located in Kisumu, Kenya, as well as Mwanza District and Rubondo Island NP, Tanzania.



Partners & Supporters

Our International partners include:

International Otter Survival Fund (IOSF, www.otter.org), Scotland; AZA Otter SSP, AZA Lake Victoria Cichlid SSP, TANAPA Director General & RINP Chief Park Warden, Tanzania; Kenya Wildlife Service, Impala Park, Kisumu; Kenya National Museum, Kisumu.

Project advisors are: Dr. Tom Serfass, Frostburg State University; Sadie Stevens, M.S., University of PA; Dr. Mordecai Ogada, Nairobi, Kenya; Grace Yoxon, Director IOSF, Scotland.

Our funding and material support: Rufford Small Grants Foundation, UK; John Ball Zoo, Columbus Zoo & Aquarium, AAZK Portland Chapter; AAZK Omaha's Henry Doorly Zoo Chapter; Phoenix Zoo, IOSF; AZA Otter SSP, and AZA Lake Victoria SSP

Kenyan Stakeholder Groups

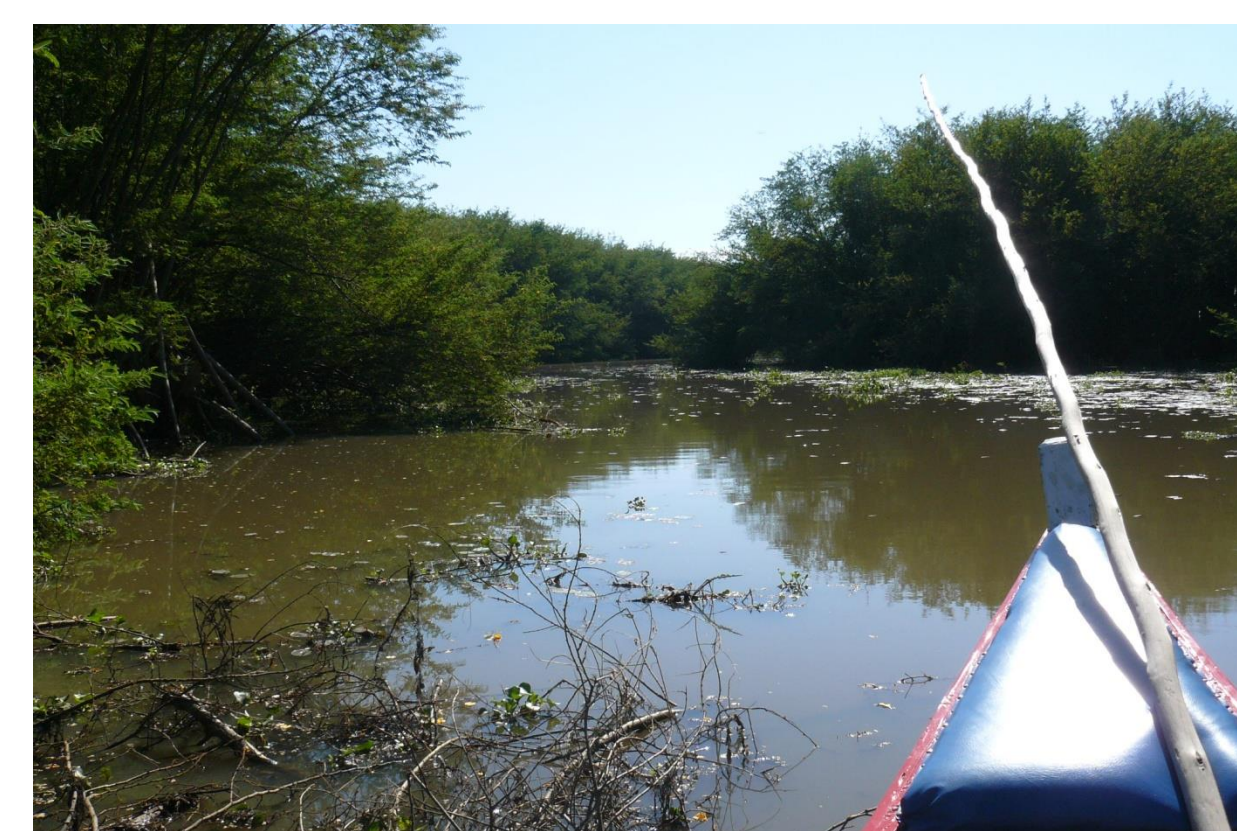
- **KISTOC** – Kisumu Science Teachers' Lake Victoria Otter and Wetlands Conservation Development Group
- **HFG** – Hippo Focus Group
- **Kenya National Museum, Kisumu**

KISTOC & HFG



The KISTOC group has now created 10 clubs at Kisumu area primary and secondary schools. Funds raised in 2010 have purchased a generator to run their projector and laptop during club presentations, funded additional field trips, and provided additional educational materials on the lake's wildlife and ecosystem.

To date, clubs have been engaged in writing songs, poems and plays about the lake, the otters, and the importance of conservation. However, their resources have been very limited and students are anxious to be able to engage in more experiential learning. The AZA LVSSP is a new partner with the KISTOC outreach program providing educational materials and assistance directed at the lake's fish fauna.



The HFG restored 20km of wetlands near Kisumu in 2008 which are now home to a large hippo pod, numerous birds, reptiles, otters, and a returning fish population.

With financial support from Rufford Small Grants, AoTOP and KISTOC have assisted this small stakeholder group with the building, licensing, & insuring of a boat and purchase of a motor. The boat will be used to take tourists and students on the lake to see the wildlife and restored wetlands. Partial funding for a patrol/fishing boat is secured. Kenya Wildlife Service is a partner.



Tanzanian Stakeholder Groups

- **TANAPA** – Tanzania National Park Authority, Rubondo Island National Park & Saa Nane Island Wildlife Sanctuary
- **Roots and Shoots Clubs**, Mwanza District
- **CHEC** – Children's Health and Environment Caretakers

Rubondo Island NP Education Outreach

Since 2006, the RINP otter team has worked with our primary TANAPA partner, Outreach Officer Hobokela Mwamjengwa. This has included:

- Speaking with classes
- Providing materials
- Creating an otter coloring book in KiSwahili
- One year of wildlife training at Mweka Wildlife College for Hobokela (funded by Columbus Zoo).



AoTOP has grants pending to fund additional visits to the island for students & teachers, a teacher workshop, inter-club competitions, and rewards for conservation action.

RINP incorporates the only truly protected waters in Lake Victoria and is home to thriving crocodile, hippo, sitatunga, fish eagle, Haplochromine cichlid populations, otters, and many other species.

An important conservation site!

Roots & Shoots and CHEC, Mwanza



AoTOP outreach efforts with the CHEC and Roots & Shoots clubs began in April 2010 with a grant awarded by John Ball Zoo's Conservation Fund. With this award a laptop was purchased allowing transfer of important education materials to Mussa Mashishanga, coordinator for both groups. Additionally, club members have participated in Gombe 50 events, visited the Sikuma Museum, and held an initial beach clean-up day.

Jane Goodall shared these thoughts with the group during her visit: [I am] "...excited to hear that, Roots and Shoots and CHEC in Mwanza are working on otters and encourage you to put more efforts into your conservation learning".

2011 - 2013 Goals

The goals for Kenya:

- Create 10 new KISTOC clubs
- Conduct knowledge of Lake Victoria/wildlife student & teacher pre- and post-testing.
- Lead at least 1 field trip to Lake Victoria for each club.
- Develop club generated activities for conservation action.
- Build patrol boat and further develop HFG action plan.
- Present AZA LVSSP education module to each existing club & evaluate outcomes/effectiveness.
- Incorporate field trips with school visits to the museum.

The goals for Tanzania:

- Conduct knowledge of Lake Victoria/wildlife student & teacher pre- and post-testing.
- Disseminate additional educational materials.
- Better utilize RINP Otter coloring book.
- Develop club generated ideas for conservation action and club activities.
- Conduct a teacher workshop on RINP with District officers.
- Organize an inter-club competition between existing RINP conservation clubs.
- Host additional school visits to RINP and Saa Nane Island.



The Process & Lessons Learned in Year One

Working cross-culturally takes time & patience!

Important things to remember are:

- Everything takes longer.
- People have their own agendas, needs, and goals which must be considered.
- Contact all possible stakeholders early on, it may help with the "politics" of conflicts that will undoubtedly arise.
- Many groups have grand plans but progress is made in small steps; getting everyone involved is key, rewarding them is vital.
- Rewards for success come in many forms; recognition is a powerful one.
- Our objective is to encourage their identified actions to preserve their ecosystem; this will help all wildlife and in our case, the otters.

Contact information

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