Source: *The Straits Times,* pB6
Date: 30 November 2017

New litter of pups brings total otters here to over 60



An otter and a pup (above) and a new litter (below) spotted in the Marina Bay area. Biology lecturer N. Sivasothi, who heads OtterWatch, said that though the number now exceeds 60, its population growth hinges on the availability of food and competition for it. PHOTOS: OTTERWATCH, YANE KANG

SCAN TO WATCH
The new litter playing in the Marina Bay area. http://str.sg/ok23

Lydia Lam

A new litter of pups is frolicking with the Bishan otter family, raising the estimated number of otters in Singapore to more than 60.

At least six pups have been spotted since Sunday with the famous Bishan family, which now has 16 members, otter watcher Jeffery Teo told The Straits Times on Tuesday.

Facebook user Ng Soon Lee captured the new pups on camera and posted a clip on her Facebook page over the weekend. She said she spotted seven new pups but since then, one is believed to have died.

News of the expanded family comes as otter community page OtterWatch launches talks to help people, among other things, learn about the mammals and their living environment.

Online stories of the otters have led some to express concern about its growing population here.

The first reported count, in April last year, said there were at least 50.

Biology lecturer N. Sivasothi, who heads OtterWatch, said that though the number now exceeds 60, its population growth hinges on the availability of food and competition for it.

"Pups are lost during movement between holts. Individuals are killed by traffic and entanglement. Others disperse in search of new territories and mates," he said.

"Reduced prey availability due to rising population will limit litter size and growth, which is why otters, like other carnivores, defend their territories against other otter families."

Mr Sivasothi noted the Marina Bay family has lost the battle for territory to the Bishan family. It now lives in the Bishan-Ang Mo Kio Park, which was originally home to the Bishan family. Also, it lost at least two pups in territorial battles.

Mr Sivasothi, who has studied the mammals since 1994, said otters are often spotted in the Marina Bay area, where they can forage for fish.

The mammals have caught the attention of Singaporeans and even people overseas. The BBC visited Singapore in January this year to film otters for a documentary.

In July last year, the 13th International Otter Congress was held in Singapore for the first time. The series of meetings was organised by the IUCN/SSC Otter Specialist Group, an international group of biologists focused on otter conservation.

OtterWatch will hold public talks at National Parks Board, PA Water Venture and NUS venues "in the months ahead". Its Facebook page will give more details, said Mr Sivasothi.

lydialam@sph.com.sg

Source: The Straits Times © Singapore Press Holdings Ltd. Permission required for reproduction.