

Prey size selection of the Eurasian Otter, *Lutra lutra* (Linnaeus, 1758), at the Jajrood River, Iran

(Mammalia: Carnivora)

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Abstract. Eurasian Otters, *Lutra lutra* (Linnaeus, 1758), prey at the River Jajrood, east of Tehran, generally on fish between 3 and 21 cm in length, but the size range varied with different species and at different sites. The length of *Alburnoides bipunctatus* in the diet correlates with the length of fish found in the river, but a similar correlation is not found regarding *Leuciscus cephalus* and *Capoeta* spp. Otters appear to select these two species according to their size: *L. cephalus* and *Capoeta* spp. with a size between 9 and 15 cm and *A. bipunctatus* with a size between 3 and 9 cm. At site 2, a significant correlation was found between the length of *A. bipunctatus* in the diet and in the river, but there was no similar correlation for *L. cephalus* and *Capoeta* spp. As at site 1, otters appear to select *L. cephalus* and *Capoeta* spp. according to their length. At site 3, finally, we found a significant correlation between the length of *A. bipunctatus* and *L. cephalus* in the diet and in the river, but not in *Capoeta* spp. These results emphasise the diverse spectrum of the diet of the Otter in Iran. The differences between the three sites on the same river suggest that the Otter preys opportunistically.

Key words. Eurasian Otter, *Lutra lutra*, Jajrood River, diet, prey selection, feeding ecology, Iran.

Introduction

The Eurasian Otter (*Lutra lutra* (Linnaeus, 1758)) is a semi-aquatic mustelid that predominantly feeds on fish; other animals are also consumed and, in some instances, form an important part of the diet, either in a particular area or at a particular season (see CHANIN 1985). The diet, feeding ecology and foraging behaviour of the Eurasian Otter have been studied in the wild throughout much of its range; studies examining prey size include TAASTROM & JACOBSEN (1999), KLOSKOWSKI et al. (2000), COPP & ROCHE (2003), BRITTON & SHEPHERD (2005). These studies suggest that otters prey largely on small, less mobile fish species, with a high calorific value, a low handling time and which, consequently, are easier to catch in preference to large or highly agile prey (CARSS 1995, KRUK 2006). Cubs, while learning to hunt, often favour prey that is readily available, with the emphasis on ease of capture rather than the calorific value or shortest handling time, such as crabs (WATT 1991, KRUK 2006).

The Eurasian Otter is distributed throughout most of Iran's aquatic ecosystems. As there is, however, a lack of information about its feeding habits under these specific environmental conditions, we examined its prey selection. We compared the size of the prey fish with the size of the fishes found in their habitat in three sections of the River Jajrood in Tehran Province.