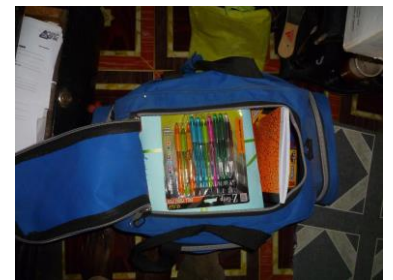




African Otter Network Update on Tanzanian outreach partner William Mgomo 12 November 2017

William Mgomo, who is one of A.O.N.s Otters For Africa outreach partners, is working in his home area of Ruvuma District, Southern Tanzania to raise awareness about otters and assess mitigation solutions to otter depredations at fish ponds. His work has already resulted in identifying the presence of the African clawless otter in the areas around Mbinga and other southern highland villages as well as the continued presence of the spotted-necked otter in the southern reaches of Lake Nyasa. This work began with equipment purchased with donated funds and educational materials created by AON member Carol Bennetto.

The original equipment included binoculars, a tablet with which he can share information and photos as well as a GPS unit that will allow him to precisely locate otter sightings/reports and otter sign. Additionally, A.O.N. provided him with copies of the Swahili coloring book, *Wenyeji Wa Ziwhani*, crayons (photo Brenda Stalter presenting donated crayons), pens, pencils, sharpeners, and composition books; some of these were used as prizes for his World Otter Day events on 31 May 2017. This event was sponsored by the International Otter Survival Fund (IOSF), an organization that has been sponsoring William's work since 2015 and funding from donations to AON via Crowdrise.



Current project status

At this time, the fishermen of Lake Nyasa report they do not experience much damage to their nets, however William continues to expand the area of his visits and the evaluation of local attitudes towards otters as well as begin the assessment of the status of existing otter populations. IOSF is providing additional working capital as a supplement to AON funds sent in late in 2016 for William to continue visits to Lake Nyasa as well as the outreach work in local villages. In November 2017 AON was chosen as a grant recipient by Columbus Zoo which



will fund the next 12 months of William's work. These funds will allow him to continue his outreach work and evaluate the efficacy of his approach. This evaluation will then be used to improve community relations and work towards local solutions aimed at conserving otters while mitigating conflict issues

Visits to owners of fish ponds continue; these visits include new and previously assessed locations. One of these pond owners, Bwana Salvius Komba, has become our first test site to evaluate pond exclusion options. He has removed a trap that had been set for an otter(s) that routinely visits one of his two fish ponds. During our April visit, we saw evidence of the otters continued use of his pond; what is unclear at this time is whether the otter is eating crabs (also found in the pond) the fish, or more likely both as the scat located consisted primarily of crab but did contain fish remains. William has done an excellent job of interfacing with Bwana Komba and we discussed different options that can be tried and evaluated for excluding otters from his ponds. These included: 1) creating a fence-post style barrier across the middle of the pond forcing the otter to leave the pond when chasing fish, 2) planting pineapple around the perimeter of the pond forming a natural barrier and one that can be harvested, and 3) fencing the perimeter of the pond, sinking the barrier into the ground to prevent the otter from digging under. As a result of the recent Columbus Zoo funding work will begin on fencing around one of Bwana Komba's ponds in the near future as well as creation of a barrier through the second pond and the planting of pineapples to test its efficacy (this is a long-term project as the grow time for pineapple is approximately 5 years). One of the two camera traps donated by IDEA WILD will be placed at the ponds to aid in identifying otter visitation patterns, number of otters visiting, frequency of visits and then assess the efficacy of mitigation efforts. The other camera donated by IDEA WILD will be going to one of two places, Benin or another Tanzania location. The two GPS units donated by IDEA WILD are in high demand and assigned in the near future.



Photos (above) William Mgomo, Jan Reed-Smith and Komba family; Mr. Salvius Komba, pond owner.

Photos (right): fencing through water as a barrier forcing otters to go around yet allowing fish to go through and small-scale fencing around pond.



A new effort being launched is the Power of One x The Power of Many. Each of us have something to contribute to the conservation of our wildlife and environments. Together, we can be like the sociable weavers and create something magnificent and livable for all of us. William will be the first to use this approach for AON and the piece is available in English and Swahili on the AON website.

THE POWER OF ONE \times THE POWER OF MANY

Together we can make a difference conserving Africa's freshwater ecosystems for otters and people

Weaver bird nests take a lot of work from hundreds of small birds, each bringing one small twig at a time.

Let's work together like weaver birds, each contributing one small service to protect our wetlands, making them cleaner and safer for wildlife and people.

otterspecialistgroup.org & International Survival Fund - www.otter.org
africanotternetwork.wordpress.com & africanotternetwork@gmail.com
www.columbuszoo.org

NGUVU YA MMOJA \times NGUVU YA WENGI

Kwa pamoja tunaweza fanya mabadiliko kwa kuhifadhi ikolojia ya Maji safi ya Afrika kwa ajili ya Fisi maji na Binadamu

Ujenzi wa kiota cha ndege aina ya kwelea kwelea huwa kazi kubwa kwa ndege wadogo takribani mia, kila ndege huleta kipande kimoja kidogo cha mti.

Hivyo tufanye kazi kwa pamoja kwa kushirikiana kama ndege aina ya kwelea kwelea kwa kila mmoja kuchangia huduma kidogo kuhifadhi ardhi oevu kwa kuhisafisha na kuhifanya salama kwa ajili Wanyamapori na Binadamu.

otterspecialistgroup.org & International Survival Fund - www.otter.org
africanotternetwork.wordpress.com & africanotternetwork@gmail.com
www.columbuszoo.org

Conclusion

William's work, started as a concerned citizen after attending the first African Otter Workshop in July 2015 has morphed into the passion of a self-starting citizen-scientist. He represents the best of all of us and serves as an example to all of us working to raise awareness about Africa's otters. AON would like to thank William, Pay, Carol, Joan, Hetherwick, Frederick, Hugues, Mordecai, Jordaan, Nicola, Dave, Michael, John, James, Patrice, Faith, Allai, Peter, Trevor, Nicci, Charley, Isaac, Teresa, Dusty, Bill, KISTOC, IOSF, AZA, AAZK chapters, Meagan, Columbus, IDEA WILD and every individual donor for their support in our first year. Each of you is an AON ONE that when added together have made a difference.

African Otter Network: africanotternetwork.wordpress.com & Facebook@[africanotternetwork](https://www.facebook.com/africanotternetwork)
africanotternetwork@gmail.com

