



WILD DISCOVERIES

The effects of human presence on social behaviors of captive Asian small-clawed otters

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Captive animals typically interact differently when compared to wild animals. Facilities need to know how human presence can effect these interactions to ensure the best possible care of their animals. Asian small-clawed otters are very social animals, so the study resolved around their behavior. Four major types of human presence were observed: while keepers were cleaning the enclosure, while keepers were placing diets, while guests were watching the otters, and while there was no human presence. It was hypothesized that the otters would be most interactive with each other while there were no humans present, and least interactive while there was food present. We created and used ethograms to record behaviors. We categorized the behaviors by splitting them into social and individual. Social behaviors were grooming, playing, aggression, mating, moving, and resting. Individual behaviors were grooming, moving, alert, resting, and foraging. Not visible was an inconclusive behavior. Two observers were present at the same time and assigned to one otter. Each observation lasted give minutes and a behavior was captured every fifteen seconds. Our results proved inconclusive due to multiple outside factors not originally considered. However, data gathered did appear to support our hypothesis. When humans were present, the otters were more social 3% of the time observed. When no humans were present, otters were social 68% of the time. It is still important to know what effect human presence has on captive animals as keepers need to know what might cause stress or positive stimulation for their animals. However, we suggest future studies do so under much more controlled conditions.