The Impact of Anthropogenic Effects on North American River Otter (Lontra canadensis) Behavior at Latrine Sites

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While it is well known that wildlife is affected by humans due to pollution, the mere presence of humans in close proximity to wildlife can also have an impact. Previous research has found that wild river otter populations near latrine sites, which experience high human use, had less otter visitation than latrine sites with low human use. On land, otters often visit latrine sites. At these sites, otter scat can be found to indicate the number of otter visitations to that site. Otter activity has also been monitored using motion-sensor trail cameras. These cameras were created so that they only record the animals' activity in the camera's vicinity. They also were designed to minimally impact the animals being observed. This data was collected to determine the level of usage by otters at five latrine sites. The amounts of human and predator activity were also calculated at each latrine site. Further, this data was then analyzed to determine whether the levels of otter presence could be related to proximity to human activity. Data showed that sites with greater average distances from areas of human activity such as trails and roads, had greater amounts of otter activity. It was also observed that sites with greater amounts of human and predator activity had lower amounts of otter activity. Therefore, it was found that otters were more active at latrine sites with lower levels of both human and predator activity and less proximity to areas of high human use.

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