European Otter Conference

MARCH 12 & 13, 2026

ANTWERP, BELGIUM

Interreg Vlaanderen-Nederland
Gefinancierd door de Europese Unie

Otter over de grens

European Otter Conference

DAY 1 - CONFERENCE MARCH 12, 2026

ANTWERP PROVINCE BUILDING, Kon. Elisabethlei 22, 2018 Antwerp, Belgium

9:00	**Welcome coffee**
9:30	**Welcome speech and introductions**
	Distribution of the European otter, *Anna Loy, IUCN Otter Specialist Group*
	Rewilding: landscapes made by beavers, crowned by otters, *Ellen Van Norren, Dutch Mammal Society*
	Co-existence: lessons learned from Austria, *Christina Wolf-Petre, WWF-Austria*
	Ecotoxicology, the European otter as indicator of environmental health, *Anna Roos, Greenland Institute of Natural Resources*
11:30	**Break out sessions:** • **Otters in Belgium,** *Vinciane Schockert (DEMNA), Joris Everaert (INBO), Quentin Dubois (National Parc Semois)* • **Modelling distribution and densities,** *Simon Lacombe (University of Montpellier)* • **Education and outreach,** *Ben Yoxon (International Otter Survival Fund)*
12:30	**Lunch break**
13:30	**Camera trapping for insights in otter ecology,** *Patrick White and Mel Findlay, Edinburgh Napier University*

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13:50	**Reintroductions: experiences from The Netherlands and Debate: Is reintroduction a solution for the nearly "empty" otter regions in Western Europe?** *Arjen de Groot & Hugh Jansman, Wageningen University*
15:05	**Break out sessions:** • **Otters in cities,** *Paddy Sleeman (University College Cork)* • **Connectivity**, *Irene Weinberger (ProLutra) and Michiel Stas (Interreg Project Otter across borders)* • **Otters in France,** *Cecile Kauffmann (French Society for Study and Protection of Mammals)*
15:55	**Break out sessions:** • **Otter collaboration in Europe**, *Michiel Stas (Interreg Project Otter across borders)* • **Monitoring with dogs and eDNA,** *Ellen Van Krunkelsven (Federal Police), Brenda Fabre (Province of Antwerp) and Rein Brys (Flemish Research Institute for Nature and Forests)* • **Otter-friendly fish fykes and fish ponds,** *Sarah Layendecker (WWF-Austria)*
	Closing speech
17:00	**Reception**
18:00	**Optional: Dinner at Special Belge** *(bookings via the registration form)*

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⟶ It is compulsory to participate to day 1 to take part in the field trip.

DAY 2 - FIELD TRIP — MARCH 13, 2026

SCHELDT VALLEY

9:00	**Departure from Antwerp**
9:30	**Guided walk (4km) or bike ride (15km), floodplain in Kruibeke.** This excursion is organized with the support of the National Park of the Scheldt Valley. **Guides:** • Stefaan Nollet (Flemish Waterway for the Polders of Kruibeke) • Piet Thys (De Vlaamse Waterweg for the Sigmaplan) • Bram Vereecken (ANB for the Polders of Kruibeke) • Peter Claus (National Parc Scheldt Valley)
13:00	**Back in Antwerp**

REGISTRATIONS OPEN UNTIL MARCH 1.

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SPEAKERS

***Anna Loy** is a Professor of Zoology at the University of Molise, Italy. She has been committed to otter research and conservation since the 1980s, contributing to the Italian Otter Action Plan and many research projects. She is Co-Chair of the IUCN SSC Otter Specialist Group, where she also served as Species Coordinator for Lutra lutra for nearly ten years.*

***Anna Roos** studies contaminants and health in aquatic top predators, such as marine mammals (seals and cetaceans), otters and ospreys. Her PhD focused on otters (Lutra lutra), contaminants and health. She is part of the management group for IUCN Otter Specialist Group (OSG).*

***Ellen Van Norren** is a species conservation specialist at the Dutch Mammal Society. She focuses on bringing back native wildlife by combining collaboration, solving bottlenecks, habitat restoration, and ecological monitoring. Her work helps create the right conditions for species such as the otter and the beaver to return and thrive.*

***Paddy Sleeman** has been involved in research on wild mammals for many years, focusing on Irish stoats, badgers, bats as well as otters. He was involved in the development and delivery of vaccine against bovine tuberculosis for badgers. He has also worked in East Africa and Madagascar de-ratting islands.*

***Patrick White** is an Associate Professor of Applied Ecology in the Centre for Conservation and Restoration Science. His research focuses on enhancing professional practice in ecology and conservation, by working to provide a robust evidence-base for practitioners in wildlife monitoring, management and policy.*

***Arjen de Groot**, as a genetic ecologist, focuses on using DNA analysis to monitor biodiversity and the vitality of animal populations. Arjen is project leader of the monitoring programme for the Dutch otter population, for which non-invasive genetics has formed the basis for over 20 years.*

***Mel Findlay** is a senior visiting research fellow at Edinburgh Napier University and runs Findlay Ecology Services Ltd, a small ecological consultancy in Scotland. Otters have been a central theme throughout her career, which led to a PhD examining how field surveys and camera-trapping methodologies can be optomised. This research also resulted in novel behavioural observations of otters, with a focus on otter resting places.*

***Hugh Jansman** originally studied at the medical school but then retrained as an ecologist. He works as an animal ecologist at Wageningen University & Research, where he deals with wildlife management and conservation in the Netherlands. He has been a key player in the scientific follow up of the otter reintroductions in The Netherlands.*

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Cécile Kaufman *joined the French Society for the Study and Protection of Mammals (SFEPM) as coordinator of the National Action Plan (2019–2028) for the Eurasian Otter, after completing her studies in biodiversity conservation. She leads the implementation of the Plan at the national level and coordinates various projects in collaboration with stakeholders across the country.*

Vinciane Schockert *is a zoologist, graduated from ULiège. She is currently a qualified 'Mammal Expert' at the Department of Study of the Natural and Agricultural Environment (DEMNA) of the Walloon Public Service (SPW). She holds a Master's degree in Sciences for developing countries, zoology/animal biology, and an interuniversity Master's degree in Ecodevelopment, Natural Sciences of the Earth and Life.*

Joris Everaert *is a biologist, working as a birds and mammals specialist at the Research Institute for Nature and Forest (INBO) of the Flemish government. He is the co-author of the Flemish otter protection plan, mainly for the defragmentation action part. As a volunteer he is also very active with monitoring and protection projects in the Durme and Scheldt river valleys in Flanders.*

Christina Wolf Petre *studied zoology and environmental economics. She is part of the species conservation team at WWF-Austria and has been working on conflict species such as lynx, wolf, beaver and otter since many years. To meet today's challenges of growing conflicts, she recently finished her training as a mediator.*

Brenda Fabre *is a parc ranger for the Province of Antwerp with a particular interest for bats and otters. She is training her dog to detect otter spraints.*

Ellen Van Krunkelsven *is a biologist. She works for the federal police, where she is a trainer and provides advice on dog behavior as a behavioral biologist. In addition, she coordinates the eco-search dog project for INBO for research, monitoring or control of invasive species. She trains her dog on otterspraints and the larva of the European stag beetle.*

Quentin Dubois *is in charge of several actions including scientific monitoring, restoration and protection measures linked to watercourses for the Semois Valley National Park. He implements actions of restoration/protection targeting riverine plantations, river banks and wetlands and adapting bridges through wildlife crossings creation.*

Ben Yoxon *is IOSF's education officer who focusses on including people in otter conservation through the means of education. Through community outreach and IOSF's Team Otter programme, Ben is inspiring the next generation of environmental conservationists by using otters as a mascot.*

Sarah Layendecker *works for WWF-Austria, focussing on national species protection (otter & beaver). She did her thesis with ProLutra on microplastic pollution on the otter. In addition, she leads wildlife excursions for children.*

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INSTITUUT NATUUR- EN BOSONDERZOEK

Credits: Yves Adams

provincie Oost-Vlaanderen

GEMEENTE BREDA

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