

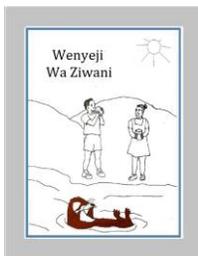


## African Otter Network

Visit with Tanzanian outreach partner William Mgomo  
Jan Reed-Smith (Director), Brenda Stalter (donor), John Ngoma (field logistics)  
17 May 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 will be aided by equipment A.O.N. purchased with donated funds.

The equipment includes 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 Ziwani*, crayons (photo Brenda Stalter presenting donated crayons), pens, pencils, sharpeners, and composition books; some of these will be used as prizes for his planned World Otter Day events on 31 May 2017 (Photo 5). This is an event sponsored by the International Otter Survival Fund (IOSF), an organization that has been sponsoring William's work since 2015.



### Current project status

At this time, the fishermen of Lake Nyasa report they do not experience much damage to their nets, however William will continue 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 A.O.N funds sent in late in 2016 for William to continue visits to Lake Nyasa as well as the outreach work in local villages.

Visits to owners of fish ponds continue; these visits include new and previously assessed locations. One of these pond owners, Bwana Salvius Komba (photo 1, 1a, 1b), 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 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 (Photo 2 & 3). 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 include: 1) creating a fence-post style barrier across the middle of the pond forcing the otter to leave the pond when chasing fish (photo 4), 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 (photo 5), sinking the barrier into the ground to prevent the otter from digging under. Plans are, with future funding, to test all three of these methods. We also set as another objective obtaining a camera trap that can be used to identify the number of otters visiting these ponds. As part of this outreach effort A.O.N. has created otter identification sheets that include some basic natural history of each species. With the assistance of Pay Mbaryo these sheets have been translated into Kiswahili and William has translated them into Kinyasa and Kimatengo, two of the local languages used in southern Tanzania. These materials will aid him in future visits and allow him to assess on return visits the pond owners interest in understanding the otters.

### 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. We created a list of the data to be collected at each site and discussed information collection at each pond site to allow for tracking of progress and assessment of results. As this project continues the information and insight collected will help inform mitigation and awareness raising efforts in other locations throughout the rest of Tanzania and across Africa.

### Photos

Photos 1 Komba farm, 1a Bwana Komba, 1b Komba family with A.O.N. partner Jan and William.



Photo 2 & 3 Otter scat and “run” worn in the grass used to enter the pond.



Photo 4 Example of fish fence that allows fish to pass but forces otters to go around.



Photo 5 Pond fencing, small-scale example.

