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NOTE

FIRST RECORD OF OTTER CIVET *CYNOGALE BENNETTII* (MAMMALIA: CARNIVORA: VIVERRIDAE) KEPT AS A PET IN INDONESIA, REPRESENTING A POSSIBLE NEW THREAT TO THE SPECIES

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Otter Civet *Cynogale bennettii* is a nocturnal, semi-aquatic species of small carnivore that resembles an otter in appearance. Very little is known about the species. It was believed to be largely confined to lowland peat swamp forests in the Sunda region: Sumatra (Indonesia), Borneo (Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei Darussalam), peninsular Malaysia, and peninsular Thailand (Cheyne et al. 2016), however, it has been recorded in lowland dipterocarp forests, secondary forests, bamboo forests, logged forests, freshwater swamp forests and limestone forests (Ross et al. 2015). It is assumed to hunt fish, crustaceans, molluscs, small mammals, and birds (Lekagul & McNeely 1977). The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species has assessed it as Endangered and in decline (Ross et al. 2015). This species is mainly threatened by habitat loss, although there are records from degraded and fragmented environments that suggest the species adapts to some degree to these altered environments (Evans et al. 2016). Other threats are silting and pollution of waterways and hunting for wild meat, as non-selective hunting and trapping methods are commonly used throughout its range. There has been no evidence of any selective hunting, including that for the pet trade and numerous research on wildlife trade in Indonesia and other range countries have not recorded them in trade before (e.g., ProFauna Indonesia 2009; Shepherd & Shepherd 2010; Nijman et al. 2014; Krishnasamy & Stoner 2016; Phassaraudomsak & Krishnasamy 2018).

During a survey carried out by TRAFFIC on the online trade of otters in southeastern Asia, a picture of a juvenile

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Otter Civet in a cage was discovered. The picture was posted on 6 January 2017 on the 'Otter Lovers Indonesia X Facebook Group', a group where people keeping otters as pets exchange information and pictures. Further research uncovered another picture of probably the same animal from 6 June 2016 on the owner's Facebook page, and two Youtube videos from 9 June 2016 on the owner's Youtube channel. The owner was located in Bekasi on Java, and it is unclear if the animal was being kept as a pet or whether it was for sale. The man uses an alias and posts pictures of him with different species of nationally protected animals, which raises the suspicion that he is a wildlife trader. Information on his Instagram, like his alias name, more pictures of the same animal (Image 1) and the other species of animals he displays, suggests he obtained it from the island of Borneo.

This is the first time this species has been recorded as being kept as a pet. On 15 August 2016, however, police seized two Otter Civets, among other wildlife,

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TRAFFIC
the wildlife trade monitoring network

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Image 1. Instagram screenshot of a juvenile Otter Civet in a cage with signboard of keepers' alias, to show actual possession and possible availability to potential buyers.

in Makassar's Soekarno Hatta Harbour (Mappesona 2016). The animals arrived on a truck from Balikpapan, East Kalimantan Province, and were hidden in boxes and baskets without destination or sender details. The police arrested two men when they were about to pick the animals up. The result (e.g., if there was a conviction) of this enforcement action is unknown.

In Indonesia, Otter Civet is categorised as Protected by the Government Regulation No. 7/1999 on Preserving Flora and Fauna Species. The Government Act No. 5/1990 Concerning Conservation of Living Resources and their Ecosystems article 21(2) states that it is prohibited for any person to catch, injure, kill, keep, possess, care for, transport and trade in a protected animal. Article 40(2) states that a person who intentionally violates those provisions is liable to punishment by imprisonment of up to a maximum of five years and a fine of up to a maximum of IDR100 000 000 (USD 7,533 at 15 September 2017 rates at <https://www.oanda.com/>). Information on the individual with the Otter Civet observed online was passed on to Interpol in April

2017. Since keeping an Otter Civet is against Indonesian law and the species is threatened, the poaching of any individual animal should be taken seriously. It is unknown whether notifying authorities has resulted in an investigation and what action may have been taken.

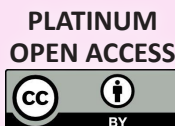
The trade in and keeping of civets in Indonesia in general has been largely unregulated, even though quotas are in place for several species and full protection status in place for others (Shepherd 2008). The trade and keeping of civets (Nijman et al. 2014) and other small carnivores, like mongooses, ferret badgers (Shepherd 2012) and otters (Gomez & Bouhuys 2018) as pets is increasing in popularity in the country. As the keeping of small carnivores is increasing, the desire to keep threatened species, like Otter Civet, may increase, leading to increased poaching and trafficking. It is therefore essential that Indonesian authorities ensure that perpetrators are prosecuted according to the full extent of the law. This account attests to how social media and the internet in general are being used to show off endangered animals, often openly, and how

platforms such as Facebook are enabling the illegal wildlife trade. Enforcement against the online illegal wildlife trade is becoming increasingly important in species conservation in southeastern Asia, including in Indonesia.

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