Animal Life, Death and Human Identity: An Otter Obsession

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1pm
Room 0.06
William Smith Building

Green:Keele
Keele University’s Sustainability Research Network
Seminar Series Autumn 2015
1. Childhood Obsession
2. Academic Expertise
3. Public Outreach & Wider Impact
1986 – VHS Rental Store in Wigan
Childhood otter obsession led to new book

By Melanie Hall
October 21, 2010

A GUILDFORD author’s childhood interest proved rather useful as he proudly launched his book taking a “cultural look” at otters.

Dr Daniel Allen, 30, has written his first book, Otter, on the welfare of the animals that captured his imagination as a boy growing up in Sandhurst.

Dr Allen explained that rather than being a biology text, the book explored the cultural dimensions of otters and their interaction with humans.

A cultural geographer by trade, Dr Allen decided to write it after researching the social practices of otter hunting for his PhD.
Key Questions:-

Approached:-
Otter Hunting
- As an activity that reflected and shaped values and ideas about nature and society.
- As a tool for looking at wider socio-cultural change.

The Otter
- As a cultural object and living subject around which people formed arguments, practices and identities.
Otter as Source of Sport

- No Horses
- Pedestrian
- Affordable & Inclusive
- Up to 30 miles a day
- Healthy & Invigorating
- Not confined to banks of waterside
Otter as Source of Leisure
‘The element in which the otter moved, was not only watery, it was a landscape in motion. Abounding with currents and erratic flows, this fluid constitution had the capacity to conceal an otter’s movements, and, confuse the noses of the hounds.’

(Allen, 2007:156)
Otter as Respected Quarry

‘The inclusiveness heightened a sense of belonging. The close proximity positioned the bodies and prepared the eyes for the kill.’

(Allen, 2010:78)
“Despite being the idea of a relatively marginal and fragmented community the hunted otter gained acceptance within the more established hunting fraternity and became embedded within the broader rural imagination.” Allen, 2013 p. 139

'The inclusiveness heightened a sense of belonging. The close proximity positioned the bodies and prepared the eyes for the kill.'

(Allen, 2010:78)
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By 1999, 117 released
2007, approx 10,295 population

‘Mission Accomplished’
Philip Wayre (2009)
‘The difficulty that otter conservationists face today is that traditional attitudes of fishery communities are bubbling to the surface, protectionist rhetoric has been tinged with sentimentality and the once authoritative hunting rhetoric which dissuaded from indiscriminate killing has been lost.’