

Animal Life, Death and Human Identity: An Otter Obsession



Dr Daniel Allen
@Dr_Dan_1

Teaching Fellow in Geography

Wednesday 28 October 2015
1pm
Room 0.06
William Smith Building

Green:Keele

**Keele University's Sustainability
Research Network**
Seminar Series Autumn 2015



Talk Outline

1. Childhood Obsession
2. Academic Expertise
3. Public Outreach & Wider Impact

1986 – VHS Rental Store in Wigan



U
TRAILER

ADVERTISING

A
FILM

BRITISH BOARD OF FILM CENSORS

Childhood otter obsession led to new book

By [Melanie Hall](#)

October 21, 2010

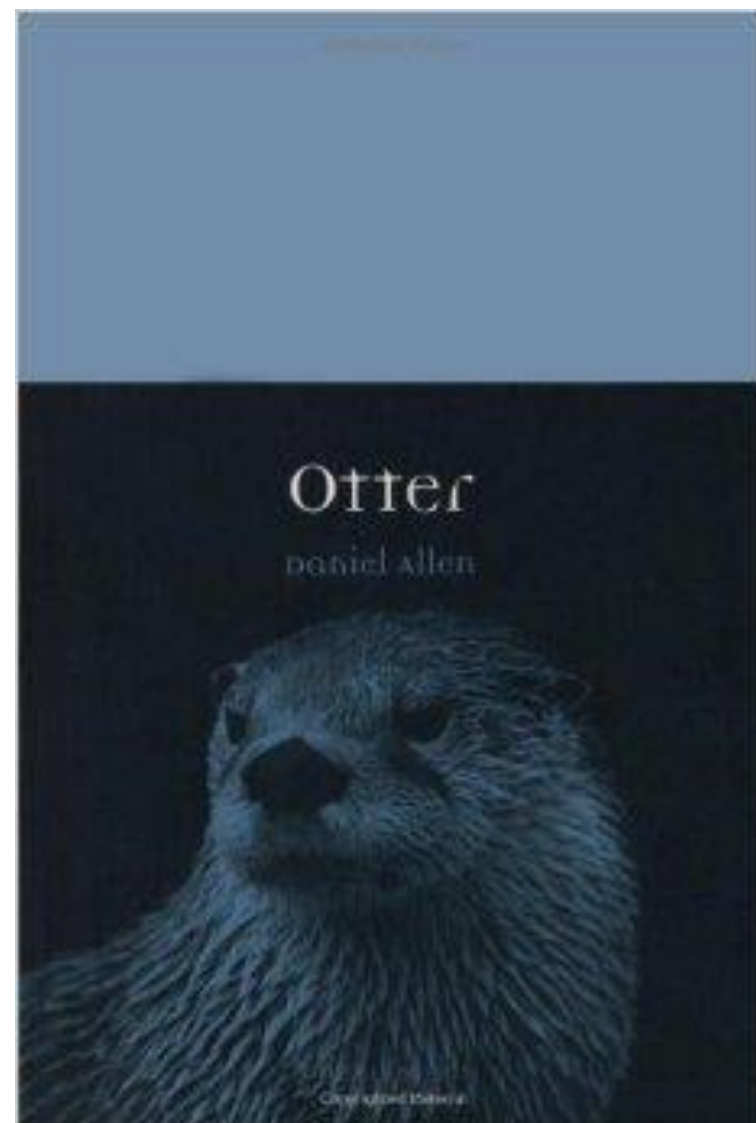


A GUILDFORD author's childhood interest proved rather useful as he proudly launched his book taking a "cultural look" at otters.

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.



The Cultural and Historical Geographies of Otter Hunting in Britain, 1830-1939

Key Questions:-

1. How did the activity develop?
2. What did people enjoy?
3. Why did others oppose it?

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



Unseen Otter



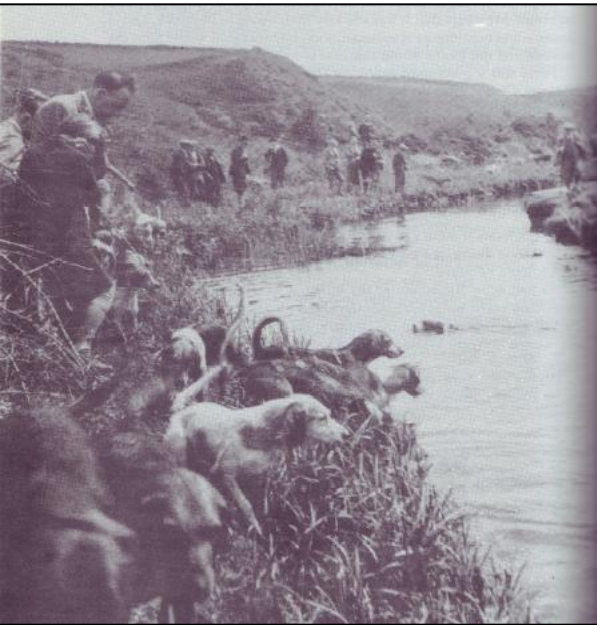
‘The element in which the otter moved, was not only watery, it was a landscape in motion. Abounding with currents and erratic flows, this fluid constitution had the capacity to conceal an otter’s movements, and, confuse the noses of the hounds.’

(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

Daniel Allen (2013) *The Hunted Otter in Britain, 1830–1939*.
In: *Wild Things: Nature and the Social Imagination* (eds.)
William Beinart, Karen Middleton and Simon Pooley

Otter as Victim



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

(Allen, 2010:78)

	<i>Delights</i>	<i>Cruelties</i>
<i>Otter Hunting</i>	<i>Beauties of Nature</i>	<i>Relic of Barbarism</i>
Summer	Leisurely	Breeding Season Cowardice
Duration of Pursuit	Extended Days Sport	Relentless Lack of Mercy
Pace & Proximity	Houndwork	Bloodlust
Strength of Otter	Brave Quarry	Prolonged Animal Suffering
Participatory Practices	Inclusiveness Equality	Greater Contribution to Killing More Responsible for Death

Symbol of Survival



By 1999, 117 released
2007, approx 10,295 population



'Mission Accomplished'
Philip Wayre (2009)

Otters are back – in every county in
England

Thursday 18 August 2011

theguardian

‘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**.’

Daniel Allen (2013, p.139) ‘The Hunted Otter in Britain, 1830–1939’
In: *Wild Things: Nature and the Social Imagination* (eds.) William Beinart, Karen Middleton and Simon Pooley. The White Horse Press, Cambridge