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## Eurasian Otters Return: 27 Eurasian Otters Now Live in the Han River

- All 27 Eurasian otters are related, with five Eurasian otter families consisting of parents and offspring also identified

The National Institute of Biological Resources (NIBR, President Yoo Ho) under the Ministry of Climate, Energy and Environment (MCEE) announced that genetic analysis of Eurasian otter (Class I endangered wildlife) fecal samples collected from the Han River between January and April this year confirmed that 27 Eurasian otters inhabit the river.

This is an approximately 80% increase from the 15 Eurasian otters identified in a survey conducted by the Seoul Metropolitan Government in 2022. The NIBR analyzed genetic material from 106 Eurasian otter fecal samples collected at 27 sites\* along the Han River between Gayang Bridge and Godeok Bridge (13 sites along the main river and 14 along tributaries). The analysis identified 21 Eurasian otters in the main river and six in tributaries, with 16 females and 11 males.

\* In 2022, the Seoul Metropolitan Government collected and analyzed 34 fecal samples from 17 sites (11 along the main river and six along tributaries).

In particular, the survey confirmed that Eurasian otter families are living together in the Han River. All 27 Eurasian otters whose individual genetic profiles were identified were related to one another as siblings or other relatives, and five Eurasian otter families consisting of parents and offspring were also identified.

These families were found to be concentrated mainly in the eastern part of the Han River, including Seongnaecheon Stream and Jamsil Bridge. Seongnaecheon Stream had the highest number of Eurasian otters, with five identified, followed by four at Hangang Bridge and three each at Yangjaecheon Stream, Jamsil Bridge, and Jungnangcheon Stream.

Eurasian otter habitat along the Han River declined significantly due to concrete channelization projects in the 1960s and 1970s, but has gradually expanded since the 2000s as riverside ecological areas were created through projects to restore the river's natural environment.

Accordingly, following the first sighting of Eurasian otters in the Tancheon Stream area of the Han River in 2016, four Eurasian otters were first confirmed in 2017. Their range has since expanded to the western reaches of the main Han River in Gangseo area and to the tributaries of Jungnangcheon Stream to the north and Anyangcheon Stream to the south.

This survey was conducted as part of the "Wildlife Population Survey Project," which the NIBR has been carrying out since 2007, to analyze changes in the urban Eurasian otter population and its genetic health and develop systematic management measures.

President Yoo Ho said, "The continued increase in the Han River's Eurasian otter population is a positive sign that the river's ecosystem is recovering." She added, "We will continue to conduct scientific surveys and research, as well as conservation and management efforts, so that people and urban wildlife can coexist in a healthy environment."