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# DIET OF A RECENTLY REINTRODUCED RIVER OTTER (LONTRA CANADENSIS) POPULATION IN TAOS COUNTY, NEW MEXICO

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> Gabriela Alexandra Wolf-Gonzalez, Student Dr. John J. Cox, Major Professor Dr. Steven J. Price, Director of Graduate Studies

## DIET OF A RECENTLY REINTRODUCED RIVER OTTER (*LONTRA CANADENSIS)* POPULATION IN TAOS COUNTY, NEW MEXICO

## **THESIS**

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Forest and Natural Resource Sciences in the College of Agriculture, Food and Environment at the University of Kentucky

By

Gabriela Alexandra Wolf-Gonzalez

Lexington, Kentucky

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and Dr. Matthew T. Springer, Assistant Extension Professor of Wildlife Management

Lexington, Kentucky

2020

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#### ABSTRACT OF THESIS

## DIET OF A RECENTLY REINTRODUCED RIVER OTTER (*LONTRA CANADENSIS)* POPULATION IN TAOS COUNTY, NEW MEXICO

North American river otters (*Lontra canadensis*), native to every U.S. state and Canada, experienced extensive population decreases and range reduction until the mid- $20<sup>th</sup>$  century as a result of overexploitation and habitat loss during European colonization. The last known river otter in New Mexico was killed on the Gila River in 1953, although unverified reports continued thru 2008. After a nearly 60-year absence from New Mexico, 33 adult river otters were reintroduced to the Rio Pueblo de Taos in the northern part of the state between 2008-2010; however, they were not subsequently monitored or studied. I characterized diet of this reintroduced otter population by collecting 877 scat samples from 20 latrine sites located on major rivers (Rio Grande = 16, Red River = 2, Rio Pueblo = 2) in Taos County, New Mexico between February, and December 2018. Hard prey remains were identified to family for fish and order for crayfish. Crayfish (66.2%) and fish (61.8%) were the most frequently occurring prey items in this study. Other prey items included mollusks and clams, birds, reptiles, and mammals. Salmonidae (39.6%) and Catostomidae (37.1%) were the most frequently identified fish families in otter scats, followed by Esocidae (14.3%), Cyprinidae (12.4%), and Centrarchidae (3.2%). Significant seasonal differences in occurrence of scat prey items was found for fish as a main prey group ( $p < 0.001$ ), including the families Salmonidae ( $p < 0.001$ ), Catostomidae ( $p < 0.001$ ), Esocidae ( $p < 0.01$ ), and Cyprinidae ( $p < 0.001$ ), and for crayfish ( $p < 0.001$ ). In summary, otters in the Upper Rio Grande appear to similarly consume prey to that found in other studies conducted in the U.S. My study provides the first dietary description of river otters in New Mexico and should inform otter management in the state.

KEYWORDS: diet, food habits, mustelid, reintroduction, Rio Grande, scale identification, scat analysis, scatology, semi-aquatic, southwest Gabriela Alexandra Wolf-Gonzalez

*(Name of Student)*

04/25/2020

Date

# DIET OF A RECENTLY REINTRODUCED RIVER OTTER (*LONTRA CANADENSIS)* POPULATION IN TAOS COUNTY, NEW MEXICO

By Gabriela Alexandra Wolf-Gonzalez

John J. Cox

Co-Director of Thesis

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04/25/2020

Date

# DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the kids stuck indoors longing for an outdoor adventure, you're never too old to go camping.

This thesis is also dedicated to my grandmother, Roberta K. Warshawsky, who really did not like camping, but loved that I did.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

<span id="page-6-0"></span>I want to extend thanks and appreciation to my funding sources: The New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, University of Kentucky College of Agriculture, Food and Environment, and the University of Kentucky Student Sustainability Council. I thank the employees at the University of New Mexico's Museum of Southwestern Biology for helping me develop my fish scale identification methods, Amigos Bravos for lending us equipment, and employees at Bureau of Land Management who helped me with permitting and during field activities.

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#### <span id="page-10-1"></span>Life History

The North American river otter (*Lontra canadensis*; hereafter, river otter or otter), is a medium-sized (5-15 kg, 90-130 cm long) carnivore in the family Mustelidae that inhabits a variety of wetland types (i.e., ponds, lakes, rivers, and coastal marine habitat) across the United States and Canada (Melquist & Hornocker 1983, Tesky 1993, Larivière & Walton 1998, van Zyll de Jong 1987). The river otter is one of thirteen otter species worldwide, with seven accepted subspecies (Melquist et al. 2003, van Zyll de Jong 1987).

River otters have webbed, five-toed feet, use all four limbs in a "thrust-recovery" swimming motion, and are capable of sustaining swim speeds of 11 km/hr for short periods of time (Tarasoff et al. 1972, Larivière & Walton 1998). Otter body size adheres to Bergmann's rule, i.e., north to south, but not east to west (Toweill & Tabor 1982, van Zyll de Jong 1987, Yom-Tov et al. 2006). Home ranges vary among genders, age classes, and seasons (Melquist & Hornocker 1983, Melquist & Dronkert 1987, Blundell et al. 2002a, Melquist et al. 2003, Ben-David et al. 2005, Depue & Ben-David 2010).

River otters do not dig their own dens, instead they use natural landscape features and abandoned dens of other species (Melquist & Dronkert 1987, Melquist et al. 2003). Den selection is influenced by food availability and river stage or water level (Melquist & Hornocker 1983, Anderson & Woolf 1987). Breeding season usually occurs between December and April with parturition between February and April (Melquist & Hornocker 1983). Female reproduction can occur annually beginning at two years of age, with earlier pregnancies possible, although rare (Liers 1951, Liers 1953, Melquist & Dronkert 1987). Males become sexually mature at two years, but successful reproduction typically occurs at approximately five to seven years of age (Liers 1951, Melquist & Dronkert 1987, Melquist et al. 2003). Although litter sizes of up to six have been recorded, litters of two to three pups are typical (Melquist & Hornocker 1983, Melquist & Dronkert 1987). Pups are typically self-sufficient by six or seven months, but usually remain with the mother until the birth of a new litter (Melquist & Hornocker 1983, Melquist  $\&$ Dronkert 1987).

River otters are uncharacteristically social mustelids that are often observed in groups known as "romps," where family (female and offspring) or adult male "bachelor" groups are most common; sibling and mixed sex groups are less common (Blundell et al. 2002a, Ben-David et al. 2005, Depue & Ben‐David 2010, Crait et al. 2015). The degree of sociality has been linked to prey abundance, with larger romps in areas of higher prey abundance (Melquist & Hornocker 1983, Ben-David et al. 1998, Ben-David et al. 2005, Depue & Ben-David 2010).

River otter latrine sites are areas that are repeatedly used for defecation and olfactory communication, scent-marking (Kruuk 1992, 1995, Ben-David et al. 1996, Durbin 1998). There are several hypotheses as to why otters scent-mark: intragroup communication, signaling of reproductive status, territory signaling, signaling the use or depletion of food patches, and mutual avoidance (Kruuk 1992, Blundell et al. 2002b, Rostain et al. 2004, Ben-David et al. 2005). Latrine sites are typically located close to the water, up to several meters from the water's edge, and usually elevated with a view of the water, escape route, and shading or other cover (Ben-David et al. 2005, Stearns 2008, Depue & Ben-David 2010). Latrine sites are often located at prominent features (i.e., rock formations, fallen logs, vertical banks) that are closer to waters with higher fish densities and beaver activity (Crait & Ben-David 2006, Stevens & Serfass 2008, Oldham & Black 2009, Depue & Ben-David 2010, Crowley et al. 2016). Latrine site use and fidelity is also related to social group type and prey abundance. Social otters typically use fewer latrines, but with higher frequency, where non-social, typically female, otters use a greater number of latrines with less frequency (Blundell et al. 2002a, Ben-David et al. 2005). Intensity, duration, and frequency of latrine site use is linked to availability of shelter, food, and water (Melquist & Hornocker 1983, Melquist & Dronkert 1987).

By using latrine sties, and consuming most of their prey on land, river otters are thought to contribute to allochthonous nutrient input, thereby leading to increased heterogeneity and nutrient rich patches along the river edge (Ben-David et al. 1998, Ben-David et al. 2005). These inputs, particularly nitrogen, affects plant nutrient uptake and potentially plant species composition (Ben-David et al. 1998, Ben-David et al. 2005); however, the scale of heterogeneity and nutrient richness is dependent on latrine visitation rates (Ben-David et al. 2005).

#### <span id="page-12-0"></span>History, Status, and Distribution

Commercial demand for pelts during European colonization and exploration led to drastic population declines and extirpations of many furbearers in North America, including river otters (Melquist & Dronkert 1987, Obbard et al. 1987, Raesly 2001, Melquist et al. 2003), which is considered to be one of the most valuable furs (Obbard et al. 1987). Consequently, river otters were extirpated from most of their historic range by the mid-1900s, including 15 states in the USA (Raesly 2001).

Colorado was the first state to reintroduce river otters, releasing 107 individuals among 5 sites between 1976-1991 within the state (Raesly 2001). By 2001, 4,018 otters were reintroduced in 21 different states, thereby successfully reestablishing the species in major portions of its historic range. By 2019, river otters had been observed in 49 states, 12 Canadian provinces, and all Canadian territories (Stenson et al. 1984, Raesly 2001).

Before European colonization, river otters were abundant along the Rio Grande and neighboring rivers and tributaries. In the upper Rio Grande (URG) region, they were utilized by the Taos Pueblo people (Polechla Jr & Carrillo-Rubio 2009). Officially, the last river otter recorded in New Mexico was killed in a beaver trap on the Gila River, near Cliff, NM in 1953 (Salmon 2005). Although there were unverified reports of a few remnant individuals, there were no confirmed river otter sightings in New Mexico from 1953-2008 (Raesly 2001, New Mexico Game and Fish 2006a, Polechla Jr & Carrillo-Rubio 2009).

New Mexico was the last U.S. state to reintroduce river otters. Thirty-three otters were translocated from Washington to one release site on Taos Pueblo land adjacent to the Rio Grande between 2008-2010 (Savage & Klingel 2015); however, additional translocations were cancelled in 2012 (Montoya Bryan 2012, Paskus 2012, Savage & Klingel 2015). The New Mexico Department of Game and Fish (NMDGF) did not issue an official statement regarding the reason for discontinuing the program; however, it is speculated that the reason was because of concerns about the possible depredation of game and sensitive native fish species (Montoya Bryan 2012, Paskus 2012).

#### <span id="page-13-0"></span>Food Habits

River otters are considered semi-aquatic and opportunistic predators, relying mainly on aquatic prey; however, they do not have a specialized diet (Greer 1955, Melquist & Hornocker 1983, Melquist & Dronkert 1987, Reid et al. 1994`, Taastrøm & Jacobsen 1999, Melquist et al. 2003, Skyer 2006, Stearns 2008, Stearns & Serfass 2011, Barding & Lacki 2012, Cosby 2013, Feltrop et al. 2016, L. Johnson, personal communication). Although similar prey compositions are observed across much of its range, river otter diet is typically dictated by availability, accessibility, and abundance of prey, also referred to as "catchability" (Melquist & Dronkert 1987, Stearns 2008). Because river otter diet composition is positively correlated with prey abundance, and predation is inversely proportional to fish swim speed, otter diet is assumed to be limited by hunting ability, rather than prey preference (Ben-David et al. 2005, Stearns & Serfass 2011, Barding & Lacki 2012, Crait et al. 2015, Feltrop et al. 2016).

In general, otter prey diversity varies seasonally, with the highest number of prey categories recorded in summer and spring (Knudsen & Hale 1968, Crait & Ben-David 2006, Stearns 2008, Stearns & Serfass 2011, Cosby 2013). This variation is usually due to changes in catchability linked to changes in prey behavior or abundance (Melquist & Hornocker 1983, Stearns 2008, Stearns & Serfass 2011, Cosby 2013). For example, fish and crayfish are often the most frequently observed prey of river otters annually (Taastrøm & Jacobsen 1999, Casariego-Madorell et al. 2008, Stearns 2008, Stearns & Serfass 2011, Barding & Lacki 2012, Feltrop et al. 2016, Cruz-García et al. 2017). Fish are typically slower (easier to catch) in colder winter months while crayfish availability decreases, whereas in warmer summer months, fish swim speeds are accelerated while crayfish activity increases (Videler 1993). Because of these changes in availability, it is common to see higher fish frequencies in otter diet during cold periods and lower in warm periods, while crayfish typically increase in frequency during warm periods and decrease in cold temperatures (Taastrøm & Jacobsen 1999, Skyer 2006, Dekar et al. 2010, Stearns & Serfass 2011, Barding & Lacki 2012, Cosby 2013, Feltrop et al. 2016).

Although typically a minor component of river otter diet, amphibians, typically frogs, and birds can comprise a significant portion of river otter diet, particularly during periods of breeding, nesting, and migratory stopovers (Dubec et al. 1991, Stearns 2008,

Cosby 2013). Cosby (2013) observed frogs in 10.6% of samples across all sites, while Stearns (2008) found amphibians occurring in 11% of scats. Seasonal increases of amphibians in river otter diet can occur. Dubec et al. (1991) noted frogs to be the most commonly occurring item during summer months. Although typically a very minor component of otter diet, Cosby (2013) reported a mean bird occurrence of 21.3% in scats, ranging by location from 0.8 - 45.2%, a finding higher than most studies conducted in North America, with the exception of Quinlan (1983), Grenfell (2012) who reported birds at frequencies of 38% and 86%, respectively. Cosby (2013) also noted that bird consumption dramatically increased in fall and winter months when the sites were used as a stopover by migratory birds. In coastal regions, river otters will consume crab, shrimp, and lobster (Toweill & Tabor 1982, Melquist & Dronkert 1987, Cosby 2013, Johnson 2019).

Where predators of otters are absent, river otters, are often considered an apex predator, and consequently, it has been speculated that they could induce a trophic cascade within riverine systems by consuming large amounts of fish and crayfish (Estes & Duggins 1995, Pace et al. 1999, Lodge et al. 2000, New Mexico Game and Fish 2006a, Fabrizio et al. 2008, Estes et al. 2011, Nishijima et al. 2017). However, their relative impact on prey behavior and population dynamics is poorly understood. The overall ecological impact when river otters' function as an apex predator is largely unknown and likely varies throughout its range (Fabrizio et al. 2008). Dekar et al. (2010) suggested that based on their consumption rates, otters may play a vital role in triggering a trophic cascade, with other environmental factors (i.e. system carrying capacity, strength of predator-prey associations, etc.) influencing the magnitude of any top-down effects (Gese & Knowlton 2001, Fabrizio et al. 2008). For example, it is possible that river otters could alter species composition, possibly inducing a trophic cascade, by consuming large amounts of fish and crayfish (Lodge et al. 2000, New Mexico Game and Fish 2006a, Fabrizio et al. 2008, Nishijima et al. 2017).

Crayfish are a common prey of river otters, and some have speculated river otters could regulate the population growth and spread of non-indigenous crayfish (Savage & Klingel 2003, New Mexico Game and Fish 2006a). Crayfish are considered exotic, invasive taxa west of the Pecos River in the southwestern U.S. having been introduced

via their use as fishing bait (Savage & Klingel 2003, New Mexico Game and Fish 2006a, Nolen et al. 2016). Crayfish can alter both biotic and abiotic components of ecosystems (Nishijima et al. 2017), and consequently have been labeled as both keystone species and ecosystem engineers due to their potential to cause physical modifications to wetland habitat and species compositional changes within ecological communities (Fabrizio et al. 2008, Brown & Lawson 2010, Gherardi et al. 2011, Nishijima et al. 2017, Putra et al. 2018). Introduced crayfish often compete with native crayfish and small fish for shelter and food, and can negatively affect egg and fish survival, and fish growth (Savino  $\&$ Miller 1991, Gherardi et al. 2011, Faller et al. 2016, Nishijima et al. 2017).

#### <span id="page-15-0"></span>Food Habit Studies

There are three methods that have been commonly used to determine river otter diet composition: scat analysis, stomach content analysis, and fatty acid analysis. Stomach content and fatty-acid analyses pose logistical challenges in obtaining robust sample sizes, particularly for analyzing seasonal differences in diet. When conducting a stomach content analysis, otter digestive tracts are collected from trappers or from roadkilled otters (Knudsen & Hale 1968, Barding et al. 2010, Barding & Lacki 2012, Satterthwaite-Phillips et al. 2014). While most food habits studies exclude mollusks and other soft bodied prey, report them at small percentages, or combine them in "other" categories, Satterthwaite-Phillips et al. (2014) described mollusks as composing a far larger proportion of river otter diet (second most consumed, 32%) (Melquist & Hornocker 1983, Roberts et al. 2008, Stearns 2008). Fatty-acid analysis (FA) has been more commonly used in investigating the less diverse diets of marine mammals, but has also been used to describe the diet of river otters and other predators to facilitate identification of soft-bodied prey (Iverson et al. 1997a, Iverson et al. 1997b, Iverson et al. 2004, Nordstrom et al. 2008, Loseto et al. 2009, Satterthwaite-Phillips et al. 2014). Apart from requiring a tissue sample from a live trapped or dead otter, another disadvantage of FA requires knowing the fatty-acid signature of all or most potential prey species for that community. When not all species or prey groups are accounted for, over- and underestimation of dietary items can occur. In states where otter populations are small, road kills are rare, or a trapping season does not exist, few samples will be available and

determination of seasonal differences in diet is difficult due to small sample size (Trites & Joy 2005, Barding et al. 2010, Barding & Lacki 2012).

Scat analysis involves the collection of animal droppings and subsequent analysis of foods based on identifiable parts that remain in scats following digestion and excretion; scats are most often found at communal latrines (Greer 1955, Grenfell 1974, Toweill & Tabor 1982, Melquist & Hornocker 1983, Ben-David et al. 1998, Ben-David et al. 2005, Trites & Joy 2005, Casariego-Madorell et al. 2008, Stearns 2008, Crimmins et al. 2009, Stearns & Serfass 2011). Scat analysis is frequently used because of the relative ease of sample collection, year-round availability of samples, and lower processing cost versus lab analysis that uses chemical or genetic analytical methods. Because scat analysis relies on recognizable remains, low digestibility food parts and easily identified prey items can be overestimated, while difficult to identify prey and soft bodied items (i.e. mollusks, clams, and larvae) are often underrepresented (Melquist & Hornocker 1983, Carss & Parkinson 1996, Satterthwaite-Phillips et al. 2014, Feltrop et al. 2016). Although acknowledging the pitfalls of over- and underestimation of prey items, Erlinge (1968), determined scat content analyses as reported in percent frequency provide a reasonably accurate description of the important food groups within a system.

Observations of river otters in the upper Rio Grande of New Mexico were reported after the 2008 reintroduction thru 2017; however, no formal ecological studies were conducted during this period to assess whether otter consumption of game fish (e.g. trout) or threatened or endangered fish (e.g. Rio Grande chub) supported these concerns. Therefore, understanding river otter ecology in this area is necessary if future river otter reintroductions are planned regionally.

In early 2018, a river otter population study was conducted in this area to estimate population growth and size (J. Cox, unpublished data). This study relied on collection of scats to non-invasively collect genetic samples, thus providing an opportunity to simultaneously assess river otter food habits. My objective was to study river otter diet on the upper Rio Grande and to investigate any seasonal variation. I hypothesized that, as found in other studies, river otters in the upper Rio Grande of north-central New Mexico would be comprised primarily of fish and crayfish, and that diet would be similar throughout the study area. I also hypothesized that seasonal differences in diet would

occur, where fish would be consumed at higher frequencies during colder and drier months, and that crayfish would be more common in river otter diet in during warmer and wetter periods when they are most accessible. Findings from this study should be informative to wildlife and fisheries managers seeking answers concerning river otter impact on prey species, particularly fish that are important game species or listed as threatened or endangered.

#### <span id="page-17-0"></span>Study Area

My study occurred in the southern Rocky Mountains ecoregion that is characterized by marked elevation changes, ranging from 1793-4,143 m above sea level. Shrub lands, pinyon forests, and juniper grasslands comprised the dominant plant communities on the plateau region (Figure 1) (New Mexico Game and Fish 2006b). Along the waterways, woody vegetation includes cottonwood (*Populus deltoides*), desert willow (*Chilopsis linearis*), and salt cedar (*Tamarix* spp.). Average annual rainfall for the city of Taos is 313 mm, the average high temperature is 16.8°C and the lowest temperature is typically around 0°C (USClimateData.com). Scat surveys were conducted in New Mexico along the upper Rio Grande River, and at the confluences of the Red River and Rio Pueblo with the Rio Grande. The study area is surrounded by land managed by the United States Forest Service (i.e., the Carson National Forest and the Columbine-Hondo Wilderness), the United States Bureau of Land Management (BLM) (i.e. Rio Grande del Norte Monument), and the United States National Park Service (i.e. Rio Grande Wild and Scenic River). All samples were accessed via land managed by the BLM. Much of the upper Rio Grande River is bordered by steep canyon walls  $\sim$  243.8 m.). The National Weather Service Advanced Hydrologic Prediction Service (water.weather.gov) lists 3 river stage monitoring points that monitor river stage (level above an established gauge at a given site or location) within Taos County: Rio Grande near Cerro, NM, Rio Grande below Taos, NM, and Rio Pueblo below Taos, NM. On the Rio Grande near Cerro the action stage is 4.6 m, flood stage is 16 m, moderate flood stage 5.3 m, and major flood stage at 6.1 m (water.weather.gov). On the Rio Grande below Taos the action stage is 2.7 m, flood stage is 3 m, moderate flood stage 3.7 m, and major flood stage at 4.6 m (water.weather.gov). On the Rio Pueblo below Taos the

action stage is 3.1 m, flood stage is 3.7 m, moderate flood stage 4.3 m, and major flood stage at 4.9 m (water.weather.gov). Portions of the Rio Grande allow boating; however, there are regions that are considered hazardous with fast flowing water  $(17-113.3 \text{ m}^3/\text{s})$ and white-water rapids. The combination of steep canyons and hazardous waters limited accessibility between sites.

The Rio Grande, Red River, Rio Pueblo provide various recreation opportunities for campers, hikers, anglers, kayakers, and swimmers. New Mexico Game and Fish (NMGF) stocks fish throughout the year and across the state. On 14 different occasions, between 01 January and 31 December 2018, NMGF stocked 7,939.7 kg of triploid rainbow trout, *Oncorhynchus mykiss*, totaling 38,527 fish ranging from 23.1 cm. to 31.5 cm. in length (E. Frey, personal communication). Rio Grande cutthroat trout, *Oncorhychus clarki virginalis,* were stocked once on the Rio Grande; 51.7 kg were stocked totaling 8,356 individuals at 8.6 cm. in length (E. Frey, personal communication).

#### <span id="page-18-0"></span>**Methods**

A total of 20 latrine sites were used for this study: 17 were opportunistically discovered by foot and watercraft in early February 2018 as part of a concurrent noninvasive genetic population study, and three were discovered by the public and recorded by Amigos Bravos, a local nonprofit organization involved with river restoration (S. Murphy, personal communication). Northernmost otter latrine sites were on the Colorado-New Mexico border, with the southernmost latrine site approximately 180 km north east of Albuquerque, New Mexico, off highway NM-68 N.

I attempted to collect otter scat throughout the 2018 calendar year to represent two major climatic periods: wet and dry seasons. All scats appearing older than 2 weeks were discarded at the onset of the study to keep the sampling period within the 2018 calendar year. Thereafter, scats were collected approximately every 7-10 days for 8 consecutive weeks through April 2018 to meet the mark-recapture assumptions of the population genetics study. After this initial concentrated sampling period (February – April) scats were collected again once during the months of June, September, and December.

Although the characteristics of all latrine sites varied, most could be associated with one or more features that included an accessible bank, vegetation cover, and a rock formation or a large boulder overlooking the river. I attempted to collect all scat present within the general vicinity of a latrine, defined as  $a \sim 30$  m search transect along the riverbank when vegetation, elevation change, or other accessibility issues did not impede this search distance. Each scat was considered an independent sample if it did not make physical contact (approximately 2.5 cm) with another scat. Extremely desiccated, powdery, scat that was not fresh and was likely to have been missed during prior checks was not collected. Scats were stored individually and labeled with the corresponding latrine site name, a unique identifier, and date, then frozen until processed as follows. Scats were cleaned by soaking each scat sample in warm water, rinsed of fecal material, filtered using a fine mesh (1mm) Oneida 6-inch sieve (Oneida, NY, USA) to retain hard prey remains, then dried on paper plates.

I initially sorted scats and identified major prey groups (fish, crayfish, bird, etc.). Large pieces of vegetation and non-food items (i.e., microplastics and fishhooks, weights, and sinkers) were removed during this initial screening. Because a fish scale identification key was lacking for the study area, it was necessary to create a prey identification key using reference scales from the University of New Mexico Museum of Southwestern Biology and fish samples provided by the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish (NMDGF). I developed an identification key using radii, circuli, and presence of cteni using a modified scale preparation whereby scales were hydrated in water before using a small paintbrush to gently remove remaining organic material (Bräger 2016). Scales were photographed using a Nikon dissecting scope with a Canon T3i Rebel mounted camera. I identified fish using scales, jaws, and pharyngeal teeth, and crayfish by their exoskeleton. When present, jaws and pharyngeal teeth were used to confirm identified scales or differentiate between families where scale properties were similar. I was only able to confidentially identify fish to taxonomic family where multiple species occurred. Because this study-type relies on hard prey remains, scale-less fish and soft-bodied prey items could not be accounted. Birds were identified by the presence of feathers and hollow bones, mammals by dense bones, and snakes by bones and skin.

Because prey availability data were unavailable from surveyed areas, I was unable to determine various dietary metrics (e.g. prey selection).

After identification was completed, I determined overall and seasonal diet at each location and for the study area by calculating frequency of occurrence (FO) and relative frequency of occurrence (RFO) (De Andrade 1997). FO is the frequency of a prey item across all scat samples and can be calculated as:

$$
FO = \frac{s_i}{n}
$$

where si is the number of scats, s, in which a food item, *i*, occurs. n is the number of scat samples collected in a given time period (i.e. season), while N is the total number of samples collected in the study (annual) see [Tables](#page-29-0) 2-4.

RFO is the frequency of a species in relative to all other prey items and can be calculated as:

$$
RFO = \frac{s_i}{I}
$$

where si is the number of scats, s, in which a food item, *i,* occurs. *I* is the total number of food item observations recorded for the given time period. Presence of prey groups in scat was recorded as present or absent, and then analyzed using a generalized linear mixed effect model, GLMM in R 3.6.1. The GLMM was fitted using Laplace Approximation (maximum likelihood method) performed in the R package 'lme4' (function 'glmer'). The response variable was the log-likelihood of prey group detection. The fixed, explanatory, variable was the season in which the sample was collected. Latrine site location was treated as a random variable. For ease of interpretation, the model output was transformed from log-likelihood (logit) to probability and then to odds and odds ratio. Finally, p values were interpreted to determine significance. Seasons were determined using precipitation and temperature data (U.S. Climate Data, usclimatedata.org 2018; WRRC, wrrc.dri.edu 2018), whereby the six wettest and warmest months were considered the "wet" season, while the six driest and coolest months were the "dry" season.

<span id="page-21-0"></span>Results

Site visitation and sampling varied seasonally, 65 field surveys occurred between 2 February 2018 and 12 December 2018, during which 877 scat samples were collected among 20 latrine sites [\(Table 1\)](#page-29-0). Of the 877 samples, 20 were excluded due to improper labeling during collection, possible contamination, or confusion with raccoon (*Procyon lotor*) scat. From these remaining 857 scat samples I identified 1695 prey items [\(Table](#page-30-1) 3). Most samples (686 of 857, 79.9%), were collected between 2 February 2018 and 19 April 2018, during the genetics survey. The remaining samples (173 of 857, 20.1%), were collected from June 20-23, September 24-27, and December 18-20, 2018. The mean number of scat samples collected per site visit was 5.0 and ranged between 1.6-10.6 during the dry season, and 0-20 during the wet season (Tables 1 and 3). Six sites had no samples collected during one visit within the dry season. The absence of scats during a few visits occurred during low stream levels for these sites which perhaps impacted prey availability.

Crayfish (66.2%) and fish (61.8%) had the highest overall FO in otter scats (Table 3). Not all fish identifications were identified to family ( $n = 102$ , FO: 11.9%, [Table 3\)](#page-31-0), but when comparing across all prey items using FO, the primary fish families found were Salmonidae (24.5%) and Catostomidae (22.9%). Other fish prey included species within the families Esocidae (8.6%), Cyprinidae (7.7%) and Centrarchidae (3.2%). Salmonidae and Catostomidae had the highest FO of fish prey, recorded at 39.6% and 37.1% respectively, followed by Esocidae (14.3%), Cyprinidae (12.4%), and Centrarchidae (3.2%). Minor prey items (3.4%) in scats included freshwater mollusks (2.7%), birds  $(0.5\%)$ , reptiles  $(0.1\%)$  and mammals  $(0.1\%)$ .

Seasonal differences were detected for crayfish and fish, as well as the fish families Catostomidae, Cyprinidae, Esocidae, and Salmonidae. Seasonal differences were not detected for Centrarchidae, reptiles, and mollusks. Crayfish were more frequently found in scats during the wet season (94.5%) than the dry season (61.3%); the probability of identifying crayfish in a scat sample was 0.94 during the wet season and 0.63 during the dry season ( $p < 0.001$ ) [\(Table 2](#page-30-0) and 5). Fish were the most frequently observed group during the dry season (68.5%) and second most frequently observed group during the wet

season (23.4%). The probability of a sample containing fish was higher during the dry season (0.74) than the wet season (0.23) ( $p < 0.001$ ) [\(Table 2](#page-30-0) and 5).

Of the 531 samples containing fish, nearly a quarter were salmonids ( $n = 210$ , 24.5%), with almost all  $(n = 206, 98.1\%)$  observed during the dry season. The probability of a scat sample containing a salmonid during the dry season was 0.25 and 0.03 during the wet season ( $p < 0.001$ ; [Table 4](#page-32-0) and 5). Although I was not able to identify to the species level, the study area included brown trout, *Salmo trutta*; rainbow trout, *Oncorhynchus mykiss*; Rio Grande cutthroat trout, *O. clarki virginalis*.

Catostomids (white sucker, *Catostomus commersonii* or Rio Grande sucker *C. plebeius*) were the second most frequently identified prey item occurring among scats with fish ( $n = 197, 37.1\%$ ). Although catostomid remains were primarily observed during the dry season ( $n = 188, 95.4\%$ ) the probability of a scat sample containing castostomid remains was identical for both dry and wet seasons  $(0.19, p < 0.001$ ; [Table 4](#page-32-0) and 5).

Esocids (northern pike, *Esox lusicus)* were identified in 14.3% of all samples (n = 76), with 6.7% and 14.8%, of samples collected during the dry and wet seasons, respectively,  $p < 0.01$  [\(Table 4](#page-32-0) and 5). The probability a scat sample containing esocid remains was equal across both seasons (0.10).

Cyprinids (Rio Grande chub, *Gila pandora*; longnose dace, *Rhinichthys cataractae* ; common carp, *Cyprinus carpio;* flathead chub, *Platygobio gracilis*; fathead minnow, *Pimephales promelas*; red shiner*, Cyprinella lutrensis*) were identified in 66 of 531 (12.4%) samples containing fish, with 59 (11.8%) in the dry season, and 7 (23.3%) in the wet season. The probability of a scat sample containing cyprinid remains was 0.06 during the dry season and 0.03 during the wet season ( $p \le 0.001$ ) [\(Table 4](#page-32-0) and 5).

Centrarchids (smallmouth bass, *Micropterus dolemieu*; largemouth bass, *M. salmoides*; bluegill, *Lepomis macrochirus*; green sunfish, *L. cyanellus*) were only found in 17 of 531 (3.2%) samples containing fish and were all found during the dry season (3.4%). Although the probability of a scat sample containing centrarchid remains was 0.015 during the dry season and zero during the wet season, results were not significant  $(p > 0.05)$  [\(Table 4](#page-32-0) and 5).

Mollusks, reptiles, and mammals occurred at very low frequencies throughout this study (2.7%, 0.1%, and 0.1%, respectively). Birds occurred 4 times in otter scat during

the entire study (0.5%); however, the GLMM model failed to converge for this group and significance was not determined for seasonal differences (Tables 3 and 5). The probability of identifying mollusks in the wet season was 0.005 and while during the dry season the probability of identifying mollusks was 0.014. No statistical difference was determined which is likely a result of a small sample size ( $p > 0.05$ ). The mollusks observed appeared to be the Asiatic clam (*Corbicula fluminea*), an exotic species established in the lower Rio Grande (D. White, personal communication); further studies are needed determine the extent of invasion and establishment in the upper Rio Grande. Microplastics (plastics  $\leq 5$  mm, see Arthur et al. 2009) visible to the naked eye were also discovered in approximately 5% of scat samples.

#### <span id="page-23-0"></span>Discussion

Frequency of occurrence of food items in food habit studies may reflect availability of foods (accessibility or catchability) or dietary preferences (selection). I found crayfish and fish had the highest frequency of occurrence among major prey items in the upper Rio Grande in Taos County, New Mexico. These results are similar to other studies across the United States (Greer 1955, Melquist & Hornocker 1983, Melquist & Dronkert 1987, Taastrøm & Jacobsen 1999, Skyer 2006, Stearns & Serfass 2011, Barding & Lacki 2012, Cosby 2013, Feltrop et al. 2016). Although fish frequencies are usually observed at  $\geq$  75% both annually and seasonally in otter scats (Grenfell 1974, Stearns 2008, Stearns & Serfass 2011), I found fish in only 61.8% of scats. Here, I report crayfish occurring more frequently than fish at 66.2%. Crayfish are commonly found in river otter diets, but rarely the most frequently consumed prey (Roberts et al. 2008). Soft-bodied prey occur infrequently in most scat-based otter diet studies; however, this may be due to inherent bias in scat studies (Taastrøm & Jacobsen 1999, Satterthwaite-Phillips et al. 2014).

In North America, Catostomidae, Cyprinidae, and Centrarchidae are commonly reported in otter diet studies. These fish families are diverse, widespread, and are relatively slow swimmers. Salmonids had the highest FO and RFO of fish items in the URG, specifically during the during the dry season [\(Table 3\)](#page-31-0) which was not surprising given that rainbow trout are frequently stocked in this area. The dry season (October-

April) partially overlaps with trout spawning periods, (April – June for brown trout, April-October for rainbow trout), and therefore represented an opportune time for river otters to prey on salmonids (Hayes 1987). The high FO of salmonids could also be explained by observer bias, because unlike other fish families, salmonid scales were plentiful and easily identifiable in scats (Tarasoff et al. 1972). A comparison between stocking rates, dates, and diet in future studies might determine whether river otters in the URG are selecting salmonids over other fish, or if findings could be explained by increased salmonid availability resulting from stocking.

Cyprinids have been previously reported to be among the most consumed fish families, most likely because of their widespread distribution (Stearns 2008). In the URG, however, the FO of cyprinids was relatively low compared to all prey items (7.7%) and other fish families (12.4%). Interestingly, in contrast to other fish families, the highest FO of cyprinids occurred during the wet season. Low FO in this family could reflect low availability during the dry season, lower catchability or accessibility, or lower preference relative to other fish species.

Centrarchids are commonly observed in other river otter studies [\(Stearns 2008\)](#page-87-0); however, they were rarely found in my study. Centrarchids were the least consumed fish family overall (2%) and during the dry season (2.3%) and were not observed in any samples during the wet season. It is possible that low frequency in this study reflects a low abundance of the family in this study area, possibly due to cold waters, as centrarchids tend to inhabit warmer waters. Environmental dissimilarities between this study area and others may explain differences in FO.

Minor prey groups in otter scats included mollusks, birds, reptiles, and mammals, which occurred at low frequencies throughout the year. Mollusks occurred at an overall frequency of 2.7% which is uncommonly frequent; Stearns and Serfass (2011) reported mussels at 0.2% frequency and Skyer (2006) at 1.4%; however, many studies do not report soft-bodied items or include them in an "other" group. Satterthwaite-Phillips et al. (2014) used fatty acid analysis and estimated mussells to comprise up to 32% of river otter diet in Illinois, USA. Mollusks are likely underreported in scat-based studies of diet because of their high digestibility, with identification typically only recorded when the shells are observed. Nonnative mollusks (Quagga mussel, *Dreissena bugensis*, zebra

mussel, *D. polymorpha* and Asian clam) have the potential to invade this area, and examination of otter scat may aid in early detection and identification via presence of shells or using environmental DNA methods. Only 4 birds were detected during this study, all of which appeared to be ducklings based on feather size. One snake and rodent were consumed during the wet season. Birds, reptiles, and mammals are typically reported at very low frequencies in otter diet studies, and usually considered opportunistic food items with relatively low dietary importance as compared to major fish and crayfish (Dubec et al. 1991, Stearns 2008, Cosby 2013).

Exotic species were abundant in otter diet within the URG and represent a novel resource (2006) in this ecosystem. Crayfish, northern pike (*Esox Lucius*, Esocidae), common carp (Cyprinidae), suckers (Catostomidae), rainbow trout (Salmonidae), and Asian clam are all non-native to this study area and were introduced to the area via recreational fishing and range expansion from other invaded areas. Crayfish are invasive in New Mexico and had the highest FO of any prey group. Catostomids and Esocids were also important prey items in otter diet. Catostomids were the third most frequently consumed prey item (22.4%) and second most consumed fish family (37.1%), and the most frequently consumed fish family consumed during the wet season (30.0%). The Northern pike is an aggressive, predatory esocid that preys on native species (e.g. trout). Otters may target spawning Esocids, as northern pike tend to spawn just as ice disappears and seasons transition, typically March (dry season) to early April (wet season). Mollusks found in otter scats of the URG appeared to be the Asian clam, although it has not been officially verified here. Otter scats could provide a valuable source material for the detection of invasive species (i.e. bio-surveillance). For example, in Washington state, otter scat analysis is being used to detect the invasive European green crab (*Carcinus maenas*) in Makah estuaries (Nash 2019, B. Buzzel and A Akmajian, personal communication ).

#### <span id="page-25-0"></span>Management Implications

The reintroduction of predators to an ecosystem is often a controversial subject, which can be exacerbated by negative media portrayal and public attitudes (Bohrman 2011, Serfass et al. 2014, Pearce et al. 2017). North American river otters (*Lontra* 

*canadensis*), are frequently described as "nuisance" predators and deemed "greedy" and often accused of "decimating" trout (Hamilton 2007, Bohrman 2011, Paskus 2012, Serfass et al. 2014, Associated Press 2018, Reed 2018). Although river otters are often blamed for declines in game fish populations and the lack of "keeper-sized" or trophy fish, numerous studies have determined that they prefer small to mid-sized and slowmoving fish and will often consume crayfish at significant portions and for significant time periods (Melquist & Dronkert 1987, Melquist et al. 2003, Savage & Kling el 2003, Hamilton 2007, Roberts et al. 2008, Stearns 2008, Stearns & Serfass 2011, Serfass et al. 2014, Pearce et al. 2017). Otters have also been reported to "plunder" private ponds, decimating stocked fish numbers (Hamilton 2007, Serfass et al. 2014, Pearce et al. 2017). Pearce et al. (2017) surveyed fisheries facilities in Pennsylvania and determined that even when otters were present, fish losses were minor. In reality, river otters are opportunistic carnivores, whose diet is limited by catchability (Melquist & Hornocker 1983, Anderson & Woolf 1987, Reid et al. 1994`, De Andrade 1997, Skyer 2006, Stearns & Serfass 2011, Grenfell 2012, Cosby 2013, Murphy 2019). The consequences of the loss of predators can have various negative effects, including but not limited to mesopredator release, overpopulation of herbivores, and increased vulnerability of ecosystems to invasion by exotic species (Mittelbach et al. 1995, Gese & Knowlton 2001, Finke & Denno 2005, Fabrizio et al. 2008, Heithaus et al. 2008).

Despite the demonstrated importance of predators to ecosystems, negative attitudes and less than favorable media attention might inhibit further otter reintroductions in New Mexico. It is important to note that negative views published in the media may not accurately reflect overall public attitudes, and should not be the sole basis for reinstating, or discontinuing, river otter reintroductions (McCombs & Shaw 1972). Given the importance of recreational fishing and other outdoor recreation in this region, I recommend an economic analysis and quantitative and qualitative social science studies (e.g. questionnaires or interviews) be conducted to assess public valuation of river otters and better understand public perception and attitudes towards this species (Bohrman 2011, Serfass et al. 2014, Pearce et al. 2017).

Otters consume catchable prey: what's available, assessable, and abundant. Typically, highly catchable fish are numerous, slower-moving, and are found in calm

areas of waterways, or with some species juvenile fish select slower moving waters and occasionally congregate in higher numbers, thereby increasing their catchability (Buzzell et al. 2014, Scordino et al. 2016). Occasionally, sensitive species are susceptible to otter predation, including during spawning or upstream migration. In the Pacific Northwest, river otters have been recorded to consume rockfish (genus: *Sebastes*) which include a variety of threatened and endangered species (Drake et al. 2010, Buzzell et al. 2014). In Washington, river otters have been known to consume Lake Ozette Sockeye Salmon (*Oncorhynchus nerka*), a federally threatened species, that may be more vulnerable when they encounter weirs. In Yellowstone National Park, otters rarely consume nonnative lake trout, FO: 5.0% (*Salvelinus namaycush*), and they consume higher rates of declining native cutthroat trout, FO: 9.0 – 24.0%, possibly because cutthroat trout's preference of shallower lake waters (Crait & Ben-David 2006, Wengeler et al. 2010, Crait et al. 2015). Although not confirmed in this study, it is possible that river otters may be consuming sensitive species such as the Rio Grande cutthroat trout, Rio Grande sucker, flathead chub, and others. Genetic analysis using environmental DNA (eDNA) and DNA metabarcoding analysis may prove useful in future research to fully analyze the diet of river otters in this region (Massey et al. 2019, Sanders 2019).

 When predators consume threatened, endangered, or high value stocked species, managers may choose to remove or deter the predator; however, otter removal may not be desired or feasible in the URG given the small population size was only estimated at 83-100, and projected to reach just 400 by 2033 given current growth trajectories. It may also be difficult to physically exclude river otters along a vast area such as the Rio Grande; however, behavioral deterrents such as acoustic harassment may be effective in preventing otter presence in habitats with sensitive species (Scordino et al. 2016).

Otters in the URG are predators of exotic crayfish in the URG, taxa which can alter biotic and abiotic components of their environment, including predation of fish eggs, small fish, alteration of zoobenthic communities and macrophyte structure, and increasing erosion and siltation (Lodge et al. 2000, Gherardi et al. 2011, Machida & Akiyama 2013, Baldridge & Lodge 2014, Faller et al. 2016, Nolen et al. 2016, Nishijima et al. 2017). Manual or mechanical removal of crayfish has been shown to significantly reduce crayfish numbers, but not enough to fully eliminate them and is also time

intensive (Gherardi et al. 2011). River otters may act as a biological control agent against crayfish and other aquatic, exotic species in the URG, particularly if the population can grow and expand its range.

<span id="page-29-0"></span>

	Wet $(n=128; x=3.9)$			Dry (n=731; $x=5.3$ )			Annual (n=859; x=5.0)			
	20-23 June; 24-27 Sept			02 Feb.-19 Apr; 18-19 Dec				$02$ Feb $-19$ Dec		
Site	n <sub>1</sub>	<b>Visits</b>	$\mu$ site	n <sub>1</sub>	<b>Visits</b>	<b>µ</b> site	n <sub>1</sub>	<b>Visits</b>	<b>µsite</b>	
RG <sub>1</sub>	6	$\overline{2}$	3.0	68	9	7.6	74	11	6.7	
RG <sub>2</sub>	7	$\overline{2}$	3.5	51	8	6.4	58	10	5.8	
RG <sub>3</sub>	$\overline{2}$	$\overline{2}$	1.0	64	8	8.0	66	10	6.6	
RG4	9	$\mathbf{1}$	9.0	42	$\tau$	6.0	51	8	6.4	
RG <sub>5</sub>	40	$\overline{2}$	20.0	66	8	8.3	106	10	10.6	
RG <sub>6</sub>	8	2	4.0	41	9	4.6	49	11	4.5	
RG <sub>7</sub>	$\overline{0}$	$\overline{2}$	0.0	10	$\overline{4}$	2.5	10	6	1.7	
RG8	$\overline{0}$	$\mathbf{1}$	0.0	32	$\overline{7}$	4.6	32	8	4.0	
RG <sub>9</sub>	$\overline{0}$	1	0.0	43	8	5.4	43	9	4.8	
<b>RG 10</b>	$\overline{0}$	1	0.0	26	6	4.3	26	7	3.7	
<b>RG11</b>	$\theta$	$\overline{2}$	0.0	25	6	4.2	25	8	3.1	
<b>RG 12</b>	23	$\overline{2}$	11.5	8	5	1.6	31	7	4.4	
<b>RG 13</b>	$\mathbf{0}$	$\overline{2}$	0.0	26	7	3.7	26	9	2.9	
<b>RG 14</b>	6	$\overline{2}$	3.0	8	$\overline{4}$	2.0	14	6	2.3	
<b>RG 15</b>	11	$\overline{2}$	5.5	24	5	4.8	35	7	5.0	
<b>RG 16</b>	6	$\mathbf{1}$	6.0	95	9	10.6	101	10	10.1	
RP <sub>1</sub>	10	$\overline{2}$	5.0	55	10	5.5	65	12	5.4	
RP <sub>2</sub>	$\overline{0}$	$\overline{2}$	0.0	14	7	2.0	14	9	1.6	
RR <sub>1</sub>	$\overline{0}$	1	0.0	15	6	2.5	15	$\overline{7}$	2.1	
RR <sub>2</sub>	$\boldsymbol{0}$	1	0.0	18	6	3.0	18	$\overline{7}$	2.6	

Table 1: Number of visits per river otter latrine site to collect scats, upper Rio Grande, NM, 2018.



Table 2: Major prey groups in the diet of river otters in the upper Rio Grande, NM, 2018.

<span id="page-30-0"></span> ${}^{a}$ FO% = count/all identifications, the sum of which does not equal 100%

 ${}^{b}$ RFO% = count/all samples collected, the sum of which equals 100%.

 $n_1$  = the number of samples collected in a time period

<span id="page-30-1"></span>n2= the number of (prey) identifications in a given time period



Table 3: All prey items of river otters in the upper Rio Grande, NM, 2018.

<span id="page-31-0"></span>Note: This table includes the frequency of unidentified fish prey.

 ${}^{a}$ FO% = count/all identifications, the sum of which does not equal 100%

 ${}^{b}$ RFO% = count/all samples collected, the sum of which equals 100%

 $n_1$  = the number of samples collected in a time period

n2= the number of (prey) identifications in a given time period



Table 4: Composition of identified fish families within the diet of river otters in the upper Rio Grande, NM, 2018

<span id="page-32-0"></span>Note: This table does not include the frequency of unidentified fish prey.

 ${}^{a}$ FO% = count/all identifications, the sum of which does not equal 100%

 ${}^{b}$ RFO% = count/all samples collected, the sum of which equals 100%

 $n_1$  = the number of samples collected in a time period

n2= the number of (prey) identifications in a given time period

	Wet Season		Dry Season							
	20-23 June; 24-27 Sept		02 Feb -19 Apr; 18-19 Dec							
Major Prey Group	Probability	Odds	Probability	Odds	$\mathfrak{v}$					
Fish	0.23	0.03	0.74	4.60	$***$					
Salmonidae	0.03	0.30	0.25	0.33	***					
Catostomidae	0.19	0.04	0.19	0.24	***					
Esocidae	0.10	0.02	0.10	0.11	$**$					
Cyprinidae	0.03	0.03	0.06	0.06	***					
Centrarchidae	0.00	0.00	0.02	0.02						
Crayfish	0.94	16.26	0.63	1.72	***					
<b>Mollusk</b>	0.005	0.005	0.014	0.014						
Reptile	0.00	0.00	0	$\Omega$						
Avian										
*** $<0.001$ ** $0.01$ ,										

<span id="page-33-0"></span>Table 5: Probability and odds of identifying prey remains in otter scats during the dry and wet seasons, upper Rio Grande, NM, 2018.

# River otter latrine sites, upper Rio Grande, NM, 2018



Gabriela A. Wolf<br>University of Kentucky Department of Forestry and Natural Resources

Taos County, New Mexico, 2018.

Figure 1: River otter latrines, Upper Rio Grande

## APPENDIX A: R CODE

## **#Title: "GLMER analysis for river otter diet data"**

**#Last updated: 17 September 2019**

#packages used: "lme4"

## **# Install and Load Packages#**

install.packages("lme4")

<span id="page-35-0"></span>library(lme4)

# **# Load Diet Data#**

```
diet<-read.csv(file="Dry_Wet.csv", header=TRUE, sep=",")
```
# run glmer for each prey class#

## **#FISH#**

fish<- glmer(Fish~ Wet.Season +(1|Latrine.ID), family=binomial, data=diet)

summary(fish)

#Calculate probability, odds, and odds ratio of finding fish in the Wet and/or Dry Season#

#estimate probability:

 $pFD < -(\exp(1.0515)/(1+\exp(1.0515)))$  # probability of detecting fish of fish during dry season

 $pFW < -(\exp(1.0515 - 2.2738)/(1 + \exp(1.0515 - 2.2738)))$  # probability of detecting fish during wet season #odds#
$oFD < -(pFD)/(1-pFD)$  # odds of detecting fish during dry season

 $oFW < -(pFW)/(1-pFW)$  # odds during wet season

#### **#CRAYFISH#**

CF<- glmer(Crayfish~ Wet.Season +(1|Latrine.ID), family=binomial, data=diet)

summary(CF)

#estimate probability

pCFD<-(exp(.54)/(1+exp(.54)))

```
pCFW<-(exp(.54+2.2486)/(1+exp(.54+2.2486)))
```
#odds#

OCFD<- $((pCFD)/(1-pCFD))$  # odds of detecting fish during dry season

# **OCFD**

OCFW<-(pCFW)/(1-pCFW) # odds during wet season

**OCFW** 

#### **#SALMONIDAE#**

Sal<- glmer(Salmonidae~ Wet.Season +(1|Latrine.ID), family=binomial, data=diet)

summary(Sal)

## #estimate probability

```
pSD<-(exp(-1.1045)/(1+exp(-1.1045)))
```
### pSD

```
pSW<-(exp(-1.1045-2.5015)/(1+exp(-1.1045-2.5015)))
```
pSW

### #odds#

OSD<- $((pSD)/(1-pSD))$  # odds of detecting during dry season

### OSD

```
OSW<-(pSW)/(1-pSW) # odds during wet season
```
#### OSW

#### **#CENTRARCHIDAE#**

Cen<- glmer(Centrarchidae~ Wet.Season +(1|Latrine.ID), family=binomial, data=diet)

summary(Cen)

#estimate probability

```
PCED<-(exp(-4.156e+00)/(1+exp(-4.156e+00)))
```
### PCED

PCEW<-(exp(-4.156e+00-2.571e+01)/(1+exp(-4.156e+00-2.571e+01)))

PCEW

### #odds#

OCED<- $((PCED)/(1-PCED))$  # odds of detecting during dry season

# **OCED**

OCEW<-(PCEW)/(1-PCEW ) # odds during wet season

#### **OCEW**

#### **#ESOCIDAE#**

### Esc<- glmer(Esocidae~ Wet.Season +(1|Latrine.ID), family=binomial, data=diet)

summary(Esc)

## #estimate probability

PED<-(exp(-2.2028)/(1+exp(-2.028)))

## PED

```
PEW<-(exp(-2.2028-2.0111)/(1+exp(-2.2028-2.0111)))
```
## PEW

## #odds#

OED<-((PED)/(1-PED)) # odds of detecting during dry season

OED

OEW<-(PEW)/(1-PEW) # odds during wet season

OEW

## **#Cyprinidae#**

Cyp<- glmer(Cyprinidae~ Wet.Season +(1|Latrine.ID), family=binomial, data=diet)

summary(Cyp)

#estimate probability

```
PCYD<-(exp(-2.815489)/(1+exp(-2.815489)))
```
## PCYD

```
PCYW<-(exp(-2.815486-.628155)/(1+exp(-2.815486-.628155)))
```
PCYW

### #odds#

 $OCYD< ((PCYD)/(1-PCYD))$  # odds of detecting during dry season

OCYD

OCYW<-(PCYW)/(1-PCYW) # odds during wet season

OCYW

#### **#CATOSTOMIDAE#**

Cat<- glmer(Catostomidae~ Wet.Season +(1|Latrine.ID), family=binomial, data=diet)

summary(Cat)

#estimate probability

```
PCAD<-(exp(-1.4494)/(1+exp(-1.4494)))
```
PCAD

```
PCAW<-(exp(-1.4494-1.7088)/(1+exp(-1.4494-1.7088)))
```
PCYW

#odds#

OCAD<-((PCAD)/(1-PCAD))#odds of detecting during dry season

OCAD

OCAW<-(PCAW)/(1-PCAW)#odds during wet season

OCAW

### **#MOLLUSKS#**

Mol<- glmer(Mollusk~ Wet.Season +(1|Latrine.ID), family=binomial, data=diet)

## summary(Mol)

#estimate probability

PMD<-(exp(-4.2414)/(1+exp(-4.2414)))

PMD

PMW<-(exp(-4.2414-1.1532)/(1+exp(-4.2414-1.1532)))

### PMW

### #odds#

OMD<- $((PMD)/(1-PMD))$  # odds of detecting during dry season

### OMD

OMW<-(PMW)/(1-PMW)  $\#$  odds during wet season

# OMW

### **#BIRDS#**

Bird<- glmer(Bird~ Wet.Season +(1|Latrine.ID), family=binomial, data=diet)

summary(Bird)

#estimate probability

```
PBD<-(exp(-5.4917)/(1+exp(-5.917)))
```
# PBD

```
PBW<-(exp(-4.4917+.6475)/(1+exp(-4.4917+.6475)))
```
PBW

### #odds#

OBD<- $((PBD)/(1-PBD))$  # odds of detecting during dry season

OBW<-(PBW)/(1-PBW) # odds during wet season

OBD

OBW

## **#REPTILES#**

Rep<- glmer(Reptile~ Wet.Season +(1|Latrine.ID), family=binomial, data=diet)

summary(Rep)

#estimate probability

```
PRD<-(exp(-38.11)/(1+exp(-38.11)))
```
PRD

```
PRW<-(exp(-38.11+32.57)/(1+exp(-38.11+32.57)))
```
## PRW

### #odds#

ORD<-((PRD)/(1-PRD)) # odds of detecting during dry season

ORW<-(PRW)/(1-PRW) # odds during wet season

ORD

ORW

## **#MAMMALS#**

Mam<- glmer(Mammal~ Wet.Season +(1|Latrine.ID), family=binomial, data=diet) summary(Mam)

#estimate probability PMD<-(exp(-36.67)/(1+exp(-36.67))) PMD PMW<-(exp(-36.67+31.82)/(1+exp(-36.67+31.82))) PMW #odds# OMD<- $((PMD)/(1-PMD))$  # odds of detecting during dry season OMW<-(PMW)/(1-PMW) # odds during wet season

OMD

OMW

# APPENDIX B: MASTER FOOD HABITS TABLE

Fish were identified to family when possible. However, there was one occurrence where a common carp was positively identified using pharyngeal teeth. In this study area all fish in Catostomidae belong in the genus *Catostomus*, and those in Esocidae are identified as northern pike (*Esox lucius).* If an identification was not possible the sample was labeled as "fish".


































































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