

North American River Otter

Lontra canadensis



Class: *Mammalia*

Order: *Carnivora*

Family: *Mustelidae*

Characteristics: The North American river otter is highly adapted for aquatic life. It has a long, smooth, streamlined body with short, powerful limbs. The species has webbed feet, and long claws for digging and hunting. They are mostly dark brown in color with a light tan on the muzzle. The average length of the otter's body is 22-32 inches and the tail is 12-20 inches in length. These otters can weigh 11-30 pounds ([National Geographic](#)) with the males being larger than the females by about 5 percent. They have a densely packed underfur and long guard hairs over the top to trap a layer of air for insulation ([Arkive](#)).

Behavior: North American river otters have a reputation as very friendly and [playful](#) animals. They live alone or in small [family groups](#). Otters are very good swimmers and divers. They can also move quickly on land. ([Biokids](#)) River otters have been known to hunt at night, but are active at all hours of the day and night. Otters will den in riverside burrows, under rocks, in hollow trees, in undercut banks, or even in beaver and muskrat lodges. The otters communicate through [vocalizations](#) and scent-marking ([Arkive](#)).

Reproduction: Males and females will only be seen together during the breeding season. North American river otters reach sexual maturity at 2-3 years of age. The female otter will use [delayed implantation](#) to assure the young are born at the best time of year. Gestation is 2 months long, and the female will give birth to 1-6 offspring, but most often 2 or 3. The young are weaned at about 3 months old and will leave the mother's home at 6-12 months old ([Biokids](#)).

Diet: Wild: Amphibians, fish, turtles, crayfish, crabs, birds, eggs, small terrestrial mammals and sometimes aquatic plants.

Zoo: Trout, meat, apple, carrot, and vitamin supplements

Conservation: North American river otters are thought to be of least concern according to [IUCN Redlist](#). They have a very large range and the population is believed to be stable. There are several threats to the otter population including; hunting and trapping for furs, oil spills, water pollution, and degradation of aquatic habitats.

FYI: Otters have the densest fur of any mammal with up to 850,000 hairs per square inch.

They can stay underwater for up to eight minutes. ([Denver Zoo](#))



Range & Habitat:

Found throughout most of North America near rivers, creeks, streams, coastal waters, swamps and lakes.



Lifespan: up to 21 years in captivity, 9 years in the wild.

Special Adaptations: River otters have an oily, waterproof coat, webbed toes, and small external ears for life in the water.

IUCN Conservation Status:

Least Concern

