



River Otter
Lontra Canadensis

Geographical Range: North American river otters are found throughout Alaska, Canada and the contiguous United States.

Habitat: Otters enjoy a variety of habitats but spend most of their time in or near streams, rivers, lakes and marshes. They often build a den or a burrow in their home territory.

Exhibit Location: Part of our new master plan, the river otter exhibit is located west of our Elephant House.

Physical Characteristics: River otters possess a long, streamlined (hydrodynamic) body with a long neck, short powerful legs, a flat head, strong claws, whiskers and webbed feet. Their muscular tail is thick and flat, tapering to a point, which helps them to propel themselves through the water. They have rich brown hair on top with a silvery sheen on the bottom, no hair on their nose. A layer of fat under their skin and their dense oily fur protects them from the cold. The average size is 18 pounds and 40 inches long. Males can be larger.

Diet: This member of the Mustelidae family eats fish, crustaceans, insects, birds, muskrats, fish, frogs, rodents, turtles and clams. At the Zoo, they will most likely be fed commercially prepared canine diet, trout and chicken parts.

Did you know?

Otters are very vocal and communicate with a large variety of calls, such as whistles, buzzes, twitters, staccato chuckles and chirps. Otters may swim in circles, creating a whirlpool, which brings up fish hiding on the bottom of the river or lake.

Status: All otter populations continue to decline due to water pollution, over fishing and habitat destruction. All otter species are considered threatened, while at least five of the thirteen species are listed as endangered. The North American River Otter is not an endangered species; yet its population has been severely reduced. Since 1976, efforts have been made to reintroduce it into the interior states of the United States.