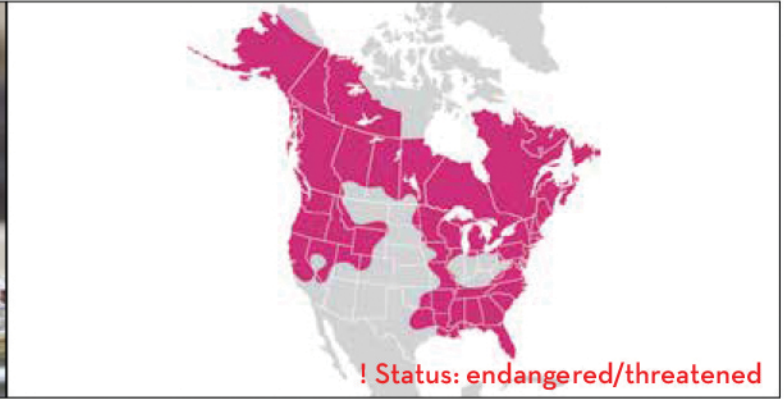


NORTH AMERICAN RIVER OTTER

updated March 2017



Range	Occur throughout Canada and the United States, except for areas of southern California, New Mexico, and Texas, and the Mohave Desert
Habitat	Rivers, lakes, marshes, swamps, and estuaries; anywhere there is a permanent food supply and easy access to water
Diet (wild)	Fish, frogs, mice, crayfish, and crabs
Diet (captivity)	Dog food, horse meat, fish
Description	Length: 16–21 inches; tail: 10–14 inches; weight: 15–30 pounds. Coat is brown and gray, dark above and lighter underside. The fur is dense and soft, effectively insulating these animals in water. The feet have claws and are completely webbed. Special glands secrete an oily material that the otter spreads throughout its coat.
Lifespan	Wild: 12 years. Captivity: 21 years
Reproduction	Females give birth to 1–6 young per litter, with an average of two to three, in a den near the water. Pups are born with fur, but are otherwise helpless. They open their eyes at one month of age and are weaned at about three months old. They begin to leave their natal range around six months. Males and females come together to breed in late winter or early spring. Gestation lasts two months, but the young may be born up to a year after mating because river otters employ delayed implantation of the fertilized egg in the uterus. Births occur from November to May, with a peak in March and April. Sexual maturity is reached at two to three years of age.
Behavior	North American river otters get their boundless energy from their very high metabolism, which also requires them to eat a great deal during the day. Males are solitary with no strong bond between mating pairs; family groups consist of female with young. Territorial, otters mark territory with secretions from anal scent glands (otters are members of the weasel family, known for their well-developed anal scent glands.) Scent glands are also used for communicating information regarding identity, sex, sexual state and receptivity. On land, otters can run at speeds up to 18 mph. Otters can remain submerged for up to 2 minutes and have been reported to swim at speeds up to 7 miles per hour. Maximum dives of up to 60 feet have been reported.
Our animals	1 female, 1 male. Born: 02/19/2013 (female, Nkeke); 02/25/2014 (male, Miles). Nkeke was born at Prospect Park Zoo in New York City and came to PPZ in 2017. Miles is the first otter born at PPZ. Unfortunately, his first-time mom was overzealous in grooming him after birth. Due to his injuries, he required surgery to his left front and back legs and tail.
Cool stuff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Otters are the only mammals apart from primates that have learned to use tools while foraging. • Otters are known as playful animals, exhibiting behaviors such as mud/snow sliding, burrowing through the snow, and water play. Many play activities actually serve a purpose and are used to strengthen social bonds, to practice hunting techniques, and scent mark. • North American river otters communicate in a variety of ways. They vocalize with whistles, growls, chuckles, and screams. • Otters' long whiskers are used to detect organisms in the substrate and the dark water. Prey is eaten immediately after capture, usually in the water, although larger prey is eaten on land. • Population trends have stabilized in recent years and reintroduction and conservation efforts have resulted in recolonization of areas where North American river otters were previously extirpated. Northern river otter populations are still considered vulnerable or imperiled throughout much of their range in midwestern United States and the Appalachian mountains. • North American river otters have a close relationship with beavers. Otters do not usually prey on beavers (which can weigh twice as much as otters) but they will often use beaver constructions as resting sites. Otters have even been observed sharing lodges with resident beavers on at least three separate occasions. Beaver dams also create excellent foraging opportunities for otters.

Phylum
ChordataClass
MammaliaOrder
CarnivoraFamily
MustelidaeGenus
Lontraspecies
L. canadensis