

North American River Otter (*Lontra canadensis*)



Taxonomy:

Family Mustelidae. Also known as the river otter or common otter. The regional subspecies *Lontra canadensis pacifica*.

Description:

River otters are semi-aquatic and have long, slender bodies. They have thick guard fur with dense oil under the fur and the coloration is a dark brown with

a lighter, cream-brown on the underside. They have small round ears, a long tail, and webbed toes adapted for an aquatic life.

Total length: 889-1,300 mm; Tail length: 300-507 mm; Weight: 5-14 kg.



Distribution:

The range of the river otter once included most of Canada and the United States with exception of the Mojave Desert and the southern regions of California, New Mexico, and Texas. They were extirpated from much of their historical range in the U.S. but have been widely reintroduced into many areas, including northern Utah.

Ecology and Diet:

River otters can occupy any coastal marine or freshwater habitat that has a permanent food and water supply. They are very skilled swimmers and divers and can stay submerged for up to 8 minutes.

Their diet consists mainly on fish, crayfish, frogs, crabs, birds, eggs, and turtles, but occasionally they will feed on small mammals or aquatic plants. They are active mainly during the daytime and do not hibernate so they are active year-round.

Life History:

River otters breed only once a year, usually in late winter or early spring. The pregnancy period typically lasts only two months, but because the species uses delayed implantation gestation can last up to a year-long. The young are born between November and May with the peak birthing season happening around March and April. A single female can have a litter from 1-6 pups, but the norm is usually 2 or 3. The pups are weaned after 3 months and usually disperse from their mother after 6 months and will reach sexual maturity after 2-3 years.

Reference: Cebellos-G, 1999.