



RIVER OTTERS AND THEIR ENVIRONMENT



Habitat

River otters use a variety of habitats. They frequent lakes and ponds but usually live in marshes and along wooded rivers and streams.

Otters live in dens, usually borrowed from beavers, muskrats, or woodchucks. Dens have openings above water in summer, but in winter these are closed and the only entrance is below water. The entrance opens up to a large nest chamber, which may have a bare floor or a slight accumulation of leaves or grass.

Diet

Otters are carnivores (meat eaters). They eat mostly fish, amphibians, snakes, water insects, snails, worms, small mammals, birds, frogs, turtles, any aquatic invertebrates, and crustaceans (animals with shells). Otters typically hunt by diving and chasing fish or by digging in the bottom of ponds and streams.

Fun Otter Facts

- Otters are expert swimmers and divers, swimming at an average speed of 7 miles per hour and staying underwater for up to 2 minutes.
- North American river otters can dive to a depth of 60 feet.
- Baby otters are called pups and are helpless at birth.
- An otter has 2 to 6 babies in a litter per year.
- The largest of the 13 species of otter is the giant otter, reaching a length of up to 6 feet and known in Peru as the river wolf.
- The smallest otter is the Asian small-clawed otter and grows to about 24 inches.