**Scientific Name:**
*Lutra canadensis*

**Other Names:**
None

**Range:**
United States and Canada

**Habitat:**
Freshwater rivers and streams

**Average Size:**
Length: 3 - 5 ft.
Weight: 10 - 30 lbs.

**Description:**
Male: Long, slender body covered with thick, dark brown waterproof fur. All feet have five short, clawed, webbed toes.

Female: Smaller than male

**Lifespan:**
In the wild: Estimated at 10 years
In captivity: Up to 20 years

**Diet:**
In the wild: Fish, frogs, small reptiles, and shellfish
In the zoo: Prepared feline diet, fish, protein biscuits, crayfish and crickets

**Gestation:**
10 - 12 months

**Litter Size:**
2 - 3 pups

**Sexual Maturity:**
1 year

**Predators:**
Humans and large carnivores

**Population Status:**
Not Threatened

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**Conservation**
While some otter species are threatened with extinction, North American river otter populations are stable. For years, they were hunted by the thousands for their pelts and were a mainstay of the fur trade of this country for the better part of the 17th and 18th centuries. Now, the largest threat to this otter is human encroachment, which causes loss of habitat, polluted water sources and loss of adequate food.

Although this species of otter is rather adaptable in its lifestyle, researchers are concerned that the otters cannot adapt fast enough to the changes humans are making in their riverine habitats.

The largest concentration of otters in California is the Suisun Marsh, just 40 miles from Sacramento.

**Behavior**
The North American river otter is solitary except when mating or raising young. They have large territories of up to 75 square miles that they mark with musk, an oily liquid secreted from scent glands at the base of the tail. Although they are sometimes seen foraging for food or sunning themselves on rocks during the day, these otters are most active during the night.

River otters keep their eyes open underwater, which aids in their hunting. When submerged, they also use their stiff, sensitive whiskers and excellent hearing to help find their prey.

Even though these otters are mostly aquatic, they do spend some time on land. Because of their large territories, they may travel several miles to reach another lake, river or stream. Although their dense fur is water repellent, it is not waterproof. The fur acts much like a drysuit does for humans, trapping a layer of air between it and the skin to keep the otter insulated in cold temperatures. To properly maintain their fur’s insulating quality, the otters must sun themselves on land and groom their fur after spending many hours in the water.

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Reproduction and Breeding
North American river otters breed in the spring, and due to delayed implantation, give birth in the following spring. The embryo remains undeveloped in the female until it is evident by her health that there is plenty of food for her offspring. If her health is not good enough to continue with the gestation, the embryo is aborted naturally.

The den is usually made in an abandoned muskrat or beaver lodge, but can be made in a hollow in the riverbank and secluded in the vegetation. The pups are born blind but their eyes open within the first month. At three months of age, the mother begins to teach her pups to swim and forage for food. They are fully weaned at four months, and by the time they are seven months of age the pups are proficient swimmers and hunters. Although not fully grown until two years of age, they are independent at one year old.

Amazing Facts
River otters can hold their breath for as long as four minutes!

Although they are solitary, otters make a variety of vocalizations!

The den of an otter is called a holt!