

Name: _____ Date: _____

River Otter – North American



The North American river otter is a semi-**aquatic** mammal that lives on the continent of North America. They are also known as the northern river otter.

Description: The river otter grows to weigh 25-30 lbs. and they grow to be 26-42 inches in length with a 12-20 inch long tail. They have short brown fur. They have small eyes, flat heads, round ears, and whiskers. They can live an average of 21 years in **captivity** and 8-9 years in the wild.

Diet: The river otters are able to adapt and eat what is in their environment. They typically eat fish, crayfish, small amphibians, aquatic insects, small mammals, and mollusks. Their primary food source is small fish. They use their **sensitive** whiskers to detect prey in the water.

Behavior: River otters are very social and enjoy playing and chasing each other. They live in social groups or families of 10-17 otters. They are active year round. They are most active at night and will migrate if food sources become scarce. They are very good swimmers and they are able to run on land. They are able to hold their breath for up to four minutes and swim 440 yards underwater.

Habitat: The river otter lives throughout waterways of Canada and North America. They make their homes in lakes, rivers, and coastal waterways. They make their dens in small **burrows** under the water or in logs. They also will use underground burrows that have been made by other animals.

Breeding and Reproduction: The male and female otter both become mature at two years of age. The typical breeding season takes place between December and April. Due to a specialized skill of being able to delay implantation for up to 8 months the gestation period can last up to 10 months. The true gestation period after **implantation** is 61-63 days. The average litter size is 1-3 babies. The females raise the babies without help from males. They learn to swim at two months and the mothers provide food for them for 9-10 months. They will reach full adult size at 3-4 years of age.

Scientific Classification		
Kingdom: Animalia	Phylum: Chordata	Class: Mammalia
Order: Carnivora	Family: Mustelidae	Subfamily: Lutrinae

Review Questions

1. What are they also known as?

- a) chicken egg
- b) dinosaur bear
- c) skunk dog
- d) northern otter

2. How big do they grow?

Weight: _____ Length: _____

Tail: _____

3. How many years can they live in captivity and in the wild?

Captivity : _____ Wild: _____

4. What are 5 things that they typically eat?

_____ and _____

_____ and _____

_____ and _____

5. What do they use to detect prey in the water?

- a) leg
- b) ear
- c) whiskers
- d) ESP

6. How many otters live in a social group?

- a) 2-5
- b) 10-17
- c) 100-200
- d) 1,000

7. How long can they hold their breath?

8. How far can they swim underwater with one breath?

9. Where do they make their dens?

10. How long is the true gestation period after implantation?

11. At what age do they learn to swim?

12. When do they reach full adult size?

Vocabulary: Use each word in a sentence or define each word

Aquatic - _____

Captivity - _____

Implantation - _____

Sensitive - _____

Burrows - _____
