

Northern River Otter



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River otters live in coastal areas with marshes, streams, rivers and other bodies of water in the Golden Gate National Recreation Area. This photo was taken in the Marin Headlands.

What's a River Otter?

River otters (*Lontra canadensis*) are a semi-aquatic, carnivorous member of the weasel family. Though they may look cute and cuddly, these charismatic mammals are bigger than you may think. They can weigh between 10 and 30 pounds and measure up to 4 feet long.

River otters are built for a life in the water. Their streamlined body, muscular tail, and webbed feet help them swim very quickly, and their thick, dark brown coat helps keep them dry and warm.

Fun fact: River otters have fur on the bottoms of their feet! Their fuzzy paws give them better traction on slippery surfaces.

River otters forage for food in shallow waters, and can live in either fresh or saltwater habitats as long as food is plentiful. Fortunately, a river otter's diet has lots of variety! They eat fish, crayfish, eels, turtles, snails, insects, amphibians, birds, eggs, small mammals, and occasionally aquatic plants.

Though they can be solitary, you are more likely to see river otters in mated pairs or family groups. These groups are very playful and vocal, communicating with chirps, screams, growls and whines.

River Otters in the Bay Area

Hunting restrictions and coastal waterway restoration may be responsible for the resurgence in river otter numbers seen in the past few decades. Though they were once a rare sight in the Golden Gate National Recreation Area, river otters now live in the Marin Headlands, Redwood Creek in Muir Woods, Muir Beach, and elsewhere in the park. They have even been seen in San Francisco!

The National Park Service is partnering with the River Otter Ecology Project to learn more about our local river otters. You can help by reporting sightings on their otter spotter website: www.riverottterecology.org



Please Keep Wildlife Wild!

River otters are curious by nature and will sometimes approach people. Although this may seem charming, for your safety please keep a safe distance. Wild animals can be unpredictable, and river otters have been known to attack people. Report any encounters or attacks to Park Dispatch at 415-561-5510. It is violation of Federal law to feed or approach wildlife CFR2.2(a)(2).