

River Otters of South Florida

ROSF



Otter Information

The World's Otters

INTRODUCTION: There are 13 species of otters in the world. Otter are found in the New World and the Old World. The New World includes North America, Central America, and South America. The Old World includes Europe, Great Britain, Russia, Middle East, Africa, and Asia. The Sea Otter is the only otter species found in both the New World and the Old World. This species is limited to extreme eastern Asia along the Japanese island chain and north to waters off the Kamchakta Peninsula of eastern Russia. The Sea Otter inhabits the Aleutian Islands chain and extends southward along the eastern Pacific Ocean to central California.

Information about an otter species is drawn from several sources. The primary sources of this information are the IUCN Red List, IUCN Otter Specialist Group (OSG) and books on carnivores and otters. Credit for all photographs are either on the photo or below the photo and presented when the source of the photo and the photographer is known.

Suggestion: If you are becoming or you're already an otter enthusiast this author would like to recommend a great otter book. Check out "Otters of the World" by Paul and Grace Yoxon. In addition to providing excellent natural history information on all 13 species of the world's otters the Yoxons have included informative information on Rescue and Rehabilitation, Otters and Pollution, Otters and Fisheries, Illegal Trade, and The Future of Otters. This book was published in paperback, in 2015 and is available through Amazon.com. As of 4 August 2017 used books are selling on Amazon for \$21.50 US + \$3.99 US for shipping and new books are selling for \$15.98 US to \$25.33 US + \$3.99 US to \$4.99 US for shipping.

New World Otters

North American River Otter (*Lontra canadensis*)



Photography by Unknown

Photo by Mrs. Fox; Bonita Springs, FL

Range: “*Lontra canadensis* currently occurs throughout the United States of America and Canada.”

Size: The weight of the North American river otter is 11 to 31 pounds (5 to 14 kg). A large male may weigh more than 33 pounds (15 kg). The female is smaller and has an average weight of 18 pounds (8.3 kg) while the average weight of a male is 25 pounds (11.3 kg). The length of total body alone is between 26 and 42 inches (42-66 cm) long and the length of the tail is approximately one third the body length. Therefore, the total length of the North American river otter would then be approximately 35 to 56 inches (89 to 142 cm). (Camp 2018a)

Diet: The North American river otter’s diet varies with the seasons and availability of prey. Fish are the most prevalent prey of the river otter followed by crayfish. The river otter also eats a wide variety of other vertebrate prey species and some invertebrate species. These include amphibians, reptiles, birds, insects, snails and clams and even some mammal species. (Camp 2018b)

Conservation Issues: “Threats to otter populations in North America vary among regions and are influenced by type, distribution, and density of aquatic habitats and characteristics of human activities.” (IUCN 2014). Uncontrolled trapping was the initial population threat to the North America river otter. As of today, 21 states in the U.S.A. have successfully reintroduced otters into habitats comparable to the habitats formerly occupied by the North American river otter. This program is a classic example of successful wildlife management. In many of these states river otter populations have reached a level whereby trapping has become an important wildlife management technique to help keep otter populations in balance with their habitat resource needs.

IUCN Red List Status: LC. A Species of Least Concern

References:

-The IUCN Red List. (2014).

-Camp, V.L. (2018a). NARO Natural History/G. Physical Characteristics.

Available at: [riverotterssouthflorida.com/Otter Information/NARO Natural History/G. Physical Characteristics](http://riverotterssouthflorida.com/Otter%20Information/NARO%20Natural%20History/G.%20Physical%20Characteristics). (Camp 2018a)

-Camp, V.L. (2018b). NARO Natural History/E. The Diet of the North American River Otter (*Lontra canadensis*). (Camp 2018b)

Available at: [riverotterssouthflorida.com/Otter Information/NARO Natural History/ E. The Diet of the North American River Otter \(*Lontra canadensis*\)](http://riverotterssouthflorida.com/Otter%20Information/NARO%20Natural%20History/E.%20The%20Diet%20of%20the%20North%20American%20River%20Otter%20(Lontra%20canadensis)).

Neotropical Otter (*Lontra longicaudis*)



Range: *Lontra longicaudis* occurs from northwestern Mexico to Uruguay, across the central and northern part of Argentina to Buenos Aires, and on into Brazil except for the arid region in the northeast. (IUCN, 2014)

Size: "This is an average sized, robustly built otter, very similar in appearance to the other American river otters. The tail can be notably long, forming more than a third of the body length. They are around 1.2-1.5m long (in some places males can reach 1.75m), usually weighing 7-15kg (in some places males can reach 25kg). The species shows sexual dimorphism - the male is generally 20-25% larger than the female." (Rhinehartz, 2009)

Diet: The primary prey of this otter species is fish. Additional prey consumed are crustaceans (crayfish and crabs), insects, amphibians, reptiles, birds, molluscs, and small mammals. (IUCN, 2014)

Conservation Issues: Although illegal hunting of this species occurs, habitat destruction and water pollution are the two major threats to this species. (Rhinehartz, 2009)

Red List Status: DD Data Deficient (IUCN, 2008)

References:

Rheinhartz, M. (2009). *Lontra longicaudis* (Olfers, 1818). The neotropical otter. Revised. IUCNotterspecialistgroup.org. The IUCN Red List. (2014).

Marine Otter (*Lontra felina*)



Photos by Mike Bowler

Range: Along the eastern coast of the Pacific Ocean from Central Peru south to the tip of South America

Size: The head and body length of the Marine Otter measures 53-79cm (21-31 inches) and the length of the tail measures 30-36.2 cm (11.8-14.6 inches) and they weigh 3.2-5.8 kg (7-12.75 lbs.). (Hunter 2011). Metric conversions made by author (VLC)

Diet: “The main food of the Marine Otter is Crustaceans, Molluscs and Fish, though the proportion varies with location. They prefer omnivorous or carnivorous prey from the inter/sub tidal zone - for example, they rarely take echinoderms despite their abundance. The usual main component of the diet is crabs, such as the Chilean King Crab or la Centolla (*Lithodes antarctica*). They also have a taste for freshwater prawns (*Criphiops caementarius*), and will follow freshwater streams high above sea level to find them. They have been seen attacking sea birds. At certain times of year, they seek out and eat fruit from coastal shrubs.” (IUCN/OSG 2015)

Conservation Issues: The population is decreasing due to numerous factors including: “Accelerating habitat destruction and degradation, reduction of prey biomass due to competition with man, direct persecution by aquaculturalists, poaching, killing by dogs and entrapment in fishing gear” This means the Marine Otter population “...will continue to decline by around 50% over the next 10 years.” (IUCN/OSG 2015)

Red List Status: EN. Endangered, population decreasing

References: References in the above text are in parentheses located at end of citations listed below

-Hunter, L. 2011. Carnivores of the World. 240 pp. Princeton University Press (Hunter 2011)

-IUCN Otter Specialist Group. Marine Otter: *Lontra felina*. Updated February 22, 2015 (IUCN/OSG 2015)

-The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species: *Lontra felina* – published in 2015 (IUCN/Red List 2015)

Southern River Otter (*Lontra provocax*)



Range: "Patagonian Argentina and Chile." (Hunter 2011)

Size: The head and body length of the Southern River Otter measures 50-80cm (19.7-31.5 inches) and the length of the tail measures 35-43 cm (13.8-17 inches) and they weigh 8-14.5 kg (17.6-39 lbs.). (Hunter 2011). Metric conversions made by author (VLC)

Diet: "Crustacean specialist, eating mainly large freshwater crabs and crayfish; small slow moving fish are the second most important food category. Also eats molluscs and, less so, amphibians and birds."(Hunter 2011).

Conservation Issues: "Populations have been confirmed in only seven isolated areas all of which are threatened by a variety of factors including the removal of river bank vegetation, dam construction, river and stream canalization, and dredging which has recently become one of the most serious threats to otter habitat. Furthermore, the large scale of forest destruction in southern Chile may be affecting several of the freshwater habitats through severe flooding and deposition of soil on the river beds." (IUCN/OSG 2015)

Red List Status: EN Endangered, population decreasing

References:

- Hunter, L. 2011. Carnivores of the World. 240 pp. Princeton University Press (Hunter 2011)
- IUCN Otter Specialist Group. Southern River Otter: *Lontra provocax*. Updated February 22, 2015 (currently being revised). (IUCN/OSG 2015)

Giant River Otter (*Pteronura brasiliensis*)



Range: “Currently remnant populations exist in Bolivia, Brazil, Columbia, Ecuador, French Guiana, Paraguay, Peru, Suriname and Venezuela.” (IUCN/OSG 2015)

Size: The head and body length of the Giant River Otter measures 86-103cm (33.9-40.5 inches) and the length of the tail measures 45-75cm (17.7-29.5 inches). The female weighs 22-26 kg (48-57.2 lbs.) and the male weighs 26-34 kg (57.2-74.8 lbs.). (Hunter 2011). Metric conversions made by author (VLC)

Diet: “Primarily piscivorous; adults eat around 3kg of fish per day, mainly characins (piranha family), catfish, perch and cichlids. Most fish captured measure 0.1-0.4m, but Giant Otter is capable of taking catfish measuring over 1m. Other prey types infrequently recorded include reptiles (including anacondas to 3m, caimans to 1.5m and large turtles), small mammals, birds, crustaceans and molluscs.” (Hunter 2011).

Conservation Issues: “Although they still face other serious threats – habitat destruction and degradation, poaching, and unmanaged tourism are the primary threats faced by giant otter today. The areas in South America where the giant otter lives are rapidly being destroyed and degraded by logging, mining, exploitation of fossil fuels and hydroelectric power (dams), river and land pollution, and over-fishing. Some giant otter cubs are still being taken from the wild illegally to be kept as pets and they usually die in the hands of inexperienced caretakers. Tourists can disturb giant otters when they are rearing cubs. This can have a negative effect on how successfully parents rear their litters.” (IUCN/OSG 2015)

Red List Status: EN Endangered, population decreasing

References:

- Hunter, L. 2011. Carnivores of the World. 240 pp. Princeton University Press (Hunter 2011)
- IUCN Otter Specialist Group. Giant Otter: *Pteronura brasiliensis*. Updated February 22, 2015 (currently being revised). (IUCN/OSG 2015)

Sea Otter (*Enhydra lutris*)



Range: The sea otter historically inhabited the coastal waters of western North America from near the southern tip of the Baja Peninsula of California north-ward along the entire length of the western Pacific Ocean of North America to Alaska and westward through the Aleutian Islands and the northern waters of the eastern Pacific including the southeastern coastal waters of the Kamchatka Peninsula and then southward through the Kuri Islands, off northern Japan, to the coastal waters surrounding the Japanese Island of Hokkaido. Currently, there are a number of gaps of extinction occurring in the distribution of the Sea Otter. These include the coastal waters of the Baja Peninsula and southern California and northern California to Washington state, the Queen Charlotte Islands and adjacent coast of British Columbia, the extreme western end of the Aleutian Islands adjacent to the Kamchatka Peninsula, and the coastal waters surrounding Hokkaido Island. (Camp 2018)

Size: The head and body length of the Sea Otter measures 100-120cm (39-47 inches) and the length of the tail measures 27-37cm (10.6-14.8 inches). The female weighs 14.5- 32.7kg (32-72 lbs.) and the male weighs 21.8-45kg (48-108 lbs.). (Hunter 2011). Metric conversions made by author (VLC)

Diet: "Diet overwhelmingly dominated by marine invertebrates such as sea urchins, clams, abalones, mussels and crabs. Squid and octopus are eaten especially during episodic abundances, e.g. California. Fish comprise only occasional prey, but are important to Aleutian Islands populations." (Hunter 2011).

Conservation Issues: "There are currently two populations of sea otters listed under the Endangered Species Act in the United States, the southern sea otter (*E. l. nereis*) located along the California coast and the northern sea otter (*E. l. kenyoni*) in southwestern Alaska (which includes Alaska Peninsula and Bristol Bay coasts, the Aleutian, Barren, Kodiak, and Pribilof islands). The primary threats to the southern sea otter included, a restricted range, incidental mortality in commercial fishing operations, and environmental pollutants and disease agents that have reduced survival. The primary threats to the northern sea otter in southwest Alaska are less clear but may include increased mortality due to predation by killer whales (*Orcinus orca*)."

Red List Status: EN Endangered, population decreasing

References:

- Camp, V.L. (2018). Otter Information /Coastal Marine Otters in NA. (Camp 2018)
Available at: [riverotterssouthflorida.com/Otter Information/Coastal Marine Otters in NA/ Coastal Marine Otters](http://riverotterssouthflorida.com/Otter%20Information/Coastal%20Marine%20Otters%20in%20NA/)
- Hunter, L. 2011. Carnivores of the World. 240 pp. Princeton University Press (Hunter 2011)
- IUCN Otter Specialist Group. Sea otter: *Enhydra lutris*. Updated February 22, 2015 (currently being revised). (IUCN/OSG 2015)

Old World Otters

Eurasian Otter (*Lutra lutra*)



Range: “This species is the most widely distributed of all the otters, ranging through Eurasia up to the Arctic Circle, from Ireland to Kamchatka, and south to North Africa, Sri Lanka and Indonesia.” (IUCN/OSG 2015)

Size: The head and body length of the female Eurasian Otter measures 59-70cm (23.2-27.6 inches) and the male measures 60-90 cm (23.6- 35.4 inches). The length of the tail measures 35-47cm (13.8-18.5 inches). The female weighs 6-12 kg (13.2-26.4 lbs.) and the male weighs 6-17kg (13.2-37.4 lbs.). (Hunter 2011). Metric conversions made by author (VLC)

Diet: Eurasian otter “...mainly eat fish, especially slow-moving, nutrient dense species such as eels and butterfish, but also take water birds, crayfish and frogs.” (IUCN/OSG 2015). Hunter (2011) states the Eurasian otter “Eats principally fish, freshwater amphibians and invertebrates, especially crabs, crayfish and aquatic insects. Occasional prey items consist of birds including seabirds such as fulmars and guillemots in coastal populations, water voles, rats, rabbits (which are killed in their burrows) and reptiles.”

Conservation Issues: “Water pollution is the major threat to Eurasian Otters, and has caused recent local extinctions from which Western European populations are only now recovering as a result of environmental improvements and focussed conservation efforts. The main dangers are biomagnified dieldrin, DDT/DDE, PCBs and Mercury which affect otter physiology directly, and reduction of food supply due to nitrate-induced eutrophication from agricultural run-off and untreated sewage, and acidification from atmospheric pollutants. Oil spills threaten coastal populations. In parts of the range, illegal hunting is a major issue, and the rise of fish farming has led to conflict, resulting in some countries in licences to kill otters being issued by authorities. Bycatch, especially in eel fykes and crab traps, can be a significant local problem, as can accidental capture in traps and snares, and accidental killing during mink hunts. In Western Europe, road traffic accidents are becoming a major cause of mortality.” (IUCN/OSG 2015)

Red List Status: NT Near Threatened, population decreasing

References:

- Hunter, L. 2011. Carnivores of the World. 240 pp. Princeton University Press (Hunter 2011)
- IUCN Otter Specialist Group. Eurasian Otter: *Lutra lutra*. Updated February 22, 2015 (currently being revised). (IUCN/OSG 2015)

Spotted-necked Otter

(*Hydrictis [Lutra] maculicollis*)



Range: Sub-Saharan Africa, from Guinea to Ethiopia, south to South Africa. (Hunter 2011).

Size: The head and body length of the Spotted-necked Otter measures 57.5-76cm (22.6-30 inches) and the length of the tail measures 38.5-44cm (15.2-17.3 inches). The female weighs 3.5-4.7kg (7.7-10.3 lbs.) and the male weighs 4.5-6kg (9.9-13.2 lbs.). Males may weigh up to 9kg (19.8 lbs.) (Hunter 2011). Metric conversions made by author (VLC)

Diet: "Eats mostly small fish (<20cm), especially chichlids, catfish, barbell, tilapia and introduced trout. Also eats crabs and frogs, especially in fish-poor waters of southern Africa; diet almost entirely fish in the richer great lakes of Central and East Africa. Opportunistically eats aquatic insects, their larvae and occasionally waterbirds." (Hunter 2011)

Conservation Issues: "The Spotted-necked otter is decreasing throughout its range, mainly as a result of the alteration or degradation of freshwater habitats and riparian vegetation. This rapid habitat loss is exacerbated by a growing, poor population engaged in unsustainable agricultural activity and unsustainable fishing practices. These practices have led to bank and shoreline erosion, denuding of important vegetative cover used by the otters, increased human presence which is disruptive to otter denning, increased use of smaller mesh nets and poisoning to improve catches, and the change or depletion of the otters prey base. Pollution of waters with agricultural, livestock, and societal wastes also are threatening with evidence of the bioaccumulation of organochlorines and other biocontaminants recorded in Spotted-necked Otters. The rate of otters becoming entangled in set and discarded fishing nets is impossible to determine however, based on known entanglement of other species it has likely increased over the occasional drowning reported previously. Otters are also killed for food or skins, as a perceived threat to poultry, or as a competitor for fish. Introduction of alien fish species that out-compete the smaller indigenous fish was identified as a main threat for the Lake Victoria population." (IUCN 2014)

Red List Status: NT Near Threatened, population decreasing

References:

- Hunter, L. 2011. Carnivores of the World. 240 pp. Princeton University Press (Hunter 2011)
- IUCN Red-List (2014) Assessment (IUCN 2014)

Hairy-nosed Otter (*Lutra sumatrana*)



Range: “Endemic to extreme southeast Asia, with discontinuous populations known from south Myanmar, south Vietnam, south Cambodia, extreme south Thailand, south Malaysia, Borneo and Sumatra.” (Hunter 2011).

Size: The head and body length of the Hairy-nosed Otter measures 57.5-75cm (22.6-29.5 inches) and the length of the tail measures 31-51cm (12.2-20 inches) and they weigh 5-8kg (11-17.6 lbs.). (Hunter 2011). Metric conversions made by author (VLC)

Diet: “Thought to mainly eat fish such as gouramis, climbing perch, walking catfish and snakeheads. Water snakes are frequent prey in Thailand. Also eats small numbers of crabs, insects, frogs, lizards, birds and small mammals.” (Hunter 2011)

Conservation Issues: “Very little is known, but it is likely that this species is threatened by destruction of peat swamp forests for logging and agriculture, and a very high degree of population fragmentation makes populations numerically vulnerable. Furthermore, cubs of this species have been found in several cases of pet trading in Indonesia.” (IUCN/OSG 2015)

Red List Status: EN Endangered, population decreasing

References:

- Hunter, L. 2011. Carnivores of the World. 240 pp. Princeton University Press (Hunter 2011)
- IUCN Otter Specialist Group. Hairy-nosed Otter: *Lutra sumatrana*. Updated March, 3 2015 (IUCN/OSG 2015)

Smooth-coated Otter (*Lutrogale perspicillata*)



Range: "This species is found in Java, Sumatra and Borneo, northward to south-western China, east through Nepal and Bhutan and India to Pakistan, excluding the Indus Valley (due to barrages and dams). There is an isolated population in the marshes of Iraq (*L. p. maxwelli*), indicating the range must once have been wider." (IUCN/OSG 2015)

Size: The head and body length of the Smooth-coated Otter measure 59-75cm (23.2-29.5 inches) and the length of the tail measures 37-43cm (14.6-16.9 inches) and they weigh 7-11kg (15.4-24.2 lbs.). (Hunter 2011). Metric conversions made by author (VLC)

Diet: "It is mainly a fish eater, taking larger prey than the four species that share parts of its range - the Eurasian, Hairy-Nosed and Asian Small-Clawed Otters. It also eats shrimp/crayfish, crabs, insects, frogs, mudskippers, birds and rats." (IUCN/OSG 2015)

Conservation Issues: "The area occupied by these animals has reduced significantly in the last 10 years as development of their habitat takes place. Some authorities consider that decline may be occurring faster than generally thought, and ex situ conservation has been recommended." (IUCN/OSG 2015)

Red List Status: VU Vulnerable, population trend decreasing

References:

- Hunter, L. 2011. Carnivores of the World. 240 pp. Princeton University Press (Hunter 2011)
- IUCN Otter Specialist Group. Smooth-coated Otter: *Lutrogale perspicillata*. February 22. 2015. (currently being revised). (IUCN/OSG 2015)

African Clawless Otter (*Aonyx capensis*)



Range: “The Cape clawless otter’s distribution, which is closely associated with water systems, extends from Senegal in the west, to Ethiopia in the northeast, and south to South Africa.” (IUCN/OSG 2015) and as stated by Hunter (2011) the Cape Clawless Otter inhabits “Most of sub Saharan Africa; absent from the Congo Basin and arid south west and north east Africa.”

Size: The head and body length of the female African Clawless Otter measures 73-73.6cm (28.7-29.9 inches) and the head and body length of the male measures 76.2cm (30 inches). The length of the tail measures 46.6-51.5cm (18.3-20.3 inches). The female weighs 10.6-16.3kg (23.3-35.8 lbs.) and the male weighs 10-21kg (22-46.2 lbs.). (Hunter 2011). Metric conversions made by author (VLC)

Diet: “Crustacean specialist, eating mainly crabs, crayfish and lobsters. Also eats fish, octopus, frogs and molluscs. Cape populations increase fish consumption during the cold winter when fish are sluggish and easily caught. Aquatic insects, birds and small mammals (mostly riparian rodents and shrews) are occasionally consumed. Sporadically kills domestic ducks and geese on farmland.” (Hunter 2011)

Conservation Issues: “At present, this species is not under severe pressure. The most important threats to the Cape clawless otter today are increasing human populations and the resulting changes to their habitats. These include pollution of water systems, increased siltation and agricultural run off and the introduction of the Louisiana red crayfish which has altered the prey base in some of their previous range. While the otter does prey on the crayfish, the seasonality of the crayfish and heavy predation on them by other species appears to have impacted the otters in some areas (Ogada 2005 and in prep.). Additionally, the otter is hunted for its pelt and medicinal purposes in some areas and killed in others as a perceived competitor for fish, particularly in areas where the rainbow trout has been introduced. The impact of persistent drought in parts of their former range and the seasonal disappearance of streams and rivers previously known to flow year around has yet to be thoroughly investigated.” (IUCN/OSG 2015)

Red List Status: NT Near Threatened, population decreasing

References:

- Hunter, L. 2011. Carnivores of the World. 240 pp. Princeton University Press. (Hunter 2011)
- IUCN Otter Specialist Group. African Clawless Otter: *Aonyx capensis*. February 22. 2015. (currently being revised). (IUCN/OSG 2015)

Asian Small-clawed Otter (*Aonyx cinerea*)



Range: “Although the species' range appears large, in the last decade, actual distribution has shrunk, especially in the west, compared to historical records. They are currently found from the Himalayan foothills of Himachal Pradesh eastward throughout south Asia, extending up to Philippines and down through Indonesia. A population which was previously thought to be isolated, exists in the hill ranges of the Western Ghats, and more recently they have been reported from protected areas in the Eastern Ghats which might better explain their distribution in South India. Their range in the Western Ghats too has increased with sightings and evidence being reported from the northern Western Ghats, well extending their range beyond the hills of Coorg and Ashambu. They were formerly found in Sri Lanka, but their current status there is unknown. The only areas in which these animals are today known to be common are Peninsular Malaysia, especially in Kedah, in the western forests and southern marshes of Thailand, and in the Western Ghats of India where it appears to be the most common species of otter.” (IUCN/OSG 2015)

Size: The head and body length of the Asian Small-clawed Otter measures 36-47cm (14.2-18.5 inches) and the length of the tail measures 22.5-27.5cm (8.8-10.8 inches) and they weigh 2.4-3.8kg (5.3-8.4 lbs.). (Hunter 2011). Metric conversions made by author (VLC)

Diet: “Specializes in freshwater crabs, followed by small fish such as mudskippers, catfish and gouramis. Also eats snails, aquatic insects, shell fish, amphibians, snakes and small mammals.” (Hunter 2011)

Conservation Issues: “The main threat throughout Asian is habitat destruction because of deforestation (loss of the smaller hill streams), agriculture (especially tea and coffee plantations in India, draining of peat swamp forests, and destruction of coastal mangroves for aquaculture) and settlement. Water courses are being polluted with pesticides from plantations and other intensive agriculture, and heavy metals, affecting the gill-feeders on which this species depends, and interfering directly with otter physiology. Prey biomass is also being reduced by overexploitation, and in some places, the vast aquaculture industry regards otters as pests and persecutes them directly. They have even been recorded from storm water drains in Jakarta, indicating their adaptability to modified habitats. These otters are known to be highly elusive in disturbed landscapes, and this could potentially contribute to the perception of a decline in population.” (IUCN/OSG 2015)

Red List Status: VU Vulnerable, population decreasing

References:

- Hunter, L. 2011. Carnivores of the World. 240 pp. Princeton University Press. (Hunter 2011)
- IUCN Otter Specialist Group. Asian Small-clawed Otter: *Aonyx cinereus*. March 27, 2015. (IUCN/OSG 2015)

Congo Clawless Otter (*Aonyx congicus*)



Range: "This species occurs in the Congo Basin: Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Congo, and DRC (ex Zaïre) are the strongholds of *A. congicus*. They are also found in southern Cameroon, Central African Republic, southwestern Uganda, Burundi, Rwanda and northern Angola." (IUCN/OSG 2015)

Size: The head and body length of the Congo Clawless Otter measures 79-97cm (31-38 inches) and the length of the tail measures 41-56cm (16.1-22 inches) and they weigh 14-25kg (30.8-55 lbs.). (Hunter 2011). Metric conversions made by author (VLC)

Diet: "Diet includes earthworms, frogs, freshwater crabs, fish and aquatic insects" (Hunter 2011)

Conservation Issues: "Otters are occasionally hunted for bush meat, but have the reputation of being quite difficult to catch. While meat is sought after in Congo and Cameroon, this is not the case in Gabon.

Moreover, in Gabon, otters are sometimes considered as a dangerous animal giving an electrical shock when caught with a spear. In Central and West Africa, their meat has the reputation of being an aphrodisiac (as it is with many other species as well). In some areas, the otter is said to possess magical powers: by wearing a piece of fur one can become invisible to an opponent, or escape an enemy as otters escape fish traps.

In Democratic Republic of the Congo, killing has exponentially increased over the recent decade with the proliferation of weapons and munitions, making the shooting of otters from pirogues and the river bank much more common (Thompson pers.com.)

Degradation of watersheds via expansion of forestry concessions is a concern for *A. congicus* as is potential dam construction in the Ogouï River (Gabon) from where high densities of the species are known." (IUCN/OSG 2015)

Red List Status: NR Near Threatened, population decreasing

References:

- Hunter, L. 2011. Carnivores of the World. 240 pp. Princeton University Press (Hunter 2011)
- IUCN Otter Specialist Group. Asian Small-clawed Otter: *Aonyx congicus*. March 29, 2015. (IUCN/OSG 2015)