

River Otter

Lontra canadensis

- Otters can hold their breath under water for eight minutes.
- In a single dive, they can travel as deep as 60 feet, and can swim at a rate of seven miles per hour.
- These mammals can close their nostrils to keep water out during long dives.

Population: River otters have been protected in Wisconsin under the state's Endangered Species Act since 1999. The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) estimates there are only about 500 wild river otters in the state. River otters were once common in Wisconsin but were nearly wiped out by the early 1900s due to hunting and habitat loss. They have made a comeback in recent years, thanks to conservation efforts, but are still considered at risk.

Habits: River otters can be found in Wisconsin's streams, rivers, marshes, lakes, and ponds. Otters need about 3 square miles to find a sufficient amount of food but will sometimes have territories as large as 15 square miles. They mark their territory using scents from their feces, urine, and musk.

River otters are very social animals, and they communicate by making various sounds like chirping, grunting and high-pitched screams. When they get surprised or frightened, you may even hear them snort! They love to play, and have been seen wrestling or chasing other otters, and playing 'capture and release' with live prey.

In the winter, you could see otters traveling on land by bounding 3-4 times, pushing off with their hind feet, and then belly-sliding 5-15 feet on the snow.

Diet: They will eat fish, crayfish, frogs and other aquatic animals. They tend to forage near shorelines, overhanging banks, and areas where fish are found. They will also eat birds and vegetation on land at times.

Mating and Young: Otters use dens, which are often old animal burrows, hollow logs, brush piles or abandoned beaver lodges, to raise 2-4 pups which are born in spring, sometimes following one year of pregnancy. They are a mammal that can "delay implantation" of fertilized eggs until conditions are adequate for rearing their young. The true gestation period only takes about 60 days once the egg attaches to the mother's womb.

Information from: <https://www.eekwi.org/animals/mammals/river-otter> & [North American River Otter | National Wildlife Federation \(nwf.org\)](#)

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