



Woodland Park Zoo, with help from Washington Sea Grant, is studying North American river otter (*Lontra canadensis*) populations to better understand their relationships within Washington State ecosystems.



River otters are at the top of the food chain and consume a wide variety of prey, making them an excellent reflection of the health of our environment.

Use this guide to find out whether you spotted a river otter or another of the Pacific Northwest's amazing mammals. Then add to our understanding of local ecosystems by reporting your river otter observations! Visit www.zoo.org/otters.



Common name	RIVER OTTER	SEA OTTER	MUSKRAT	MINK	NUTRIA	BEAVER	HARBOR SEAL	CA SEA LION
Latin name	<i>Lontra canadensis</i>	<i>Enhydra lutris</i>	<i>Ondatra zibethicus</i>	<i>Neovison vison</i>	<i>Myocastor coypus</i>	<i>Castor canadensis</i>	<i>Phoca vitulina</i>	<i>Zalophus californianus</i>
Habitat preference	Fresh or salt water	Salt water; highly unlikely to be found in Puget Sound	Usually fresh water	Fresh or salt water	Usually fresh water	Usually fresh water	Usually salt water but may swim up river	
Typical adult length, with tail	3-5 ft	3-6 ft	1.3-2 ft	1.7-2.5 ft	2.1-3.7 ft	3-3.8 ft	4-6 ft	8 ft
Typical adult weight	11-30 lbs	40-80 lbs	1.5-4 lbs	1.5-5 lbs	12-27 lbs	35-60 lbs	~250 lbs	♂~600 lbs; ♀~200 lbs
Body color	Dark brown; face and underside lighter	Dark brown to blonde with lighter head	Nearly black to yellowish brown	Dark brown to tan; may have white on chin/cheek	Brown to gray	Brown to reddish-brown	Light to dark gray; spotted	Dark brown to golden; dark flippers
Head	Rounded; large, wide, black nose; small, round ears	Rounded; blunt muzzle; black nose; ears small	Slightly pointed face; dark, subtle whiskers	Pointed face; small pink to brown nose	Blunt face; visible, orange teeth; white whiskers	Blunt face; dark whiskers	Very round; blunt nose; no external ears	Pointed face; external ears
Tail	Thick, tapering, fur-covered	Short—less than $\frac{1}{3}$ rd body length, fur-covered, flat	Rat-like, scaly, flat sides	Bushy	Rat-like, scaly, rounded cross-section	Large, flat, scaly paddle	Very small (much shorter than hind flippers)	
Feet	All webbed	Webbed front; rear flippers	Back partially webbed	All partially webbed	Only back webbed	Only back webbed	Short, wide flippers	Long, large flippers
Diet includes	Fish, crayfish/crabs, insects, reptiles, amphibians, birds, eggs, small mammals	Fish, marine invertebrates—urchins, crabs, clams, snails shrimp, abalones, mussels	Only plants	Fish, crayfish/crabs, insects, reptiles, amphibians, birds, eggs, small mammals	Only plants	Only plants	Fish, squid and sometimes shellfish	
While swimming	Active, fast, playful; frequent diver; arches tail for dive; often only head/neck visible	Floats high in water, primarily on back with flippers held out of water	Plows straight ahead; top of body visible; tail whips snake-like	Active, fast; top of body visible	Plows straight ahead; top of body visible; tail trails smoothly or may curl out of water	Plows straight ahead, sometimes dragging plant material; top of body visible	Swims and dives slowly; rests with only head above water; observant of humans	Swims and dives slowly, or 'porpoises' out of the water when traveling quickly
On land	Loping gait with arched back; rests on land and docks	Almost never seen on land; rests in kelp beds or open water	Steady walk; usually chewing vegetation or in transit	Slinking, scurrying movements; rarely seen resting	Steady walk; usually chewing vegetation or in transit	Steady walk; usually chewing vegetation or in transit, sometimes dragging plant material	Undulates entire body to move on land; rests on land/rocks	Able to 'walk' on land; can climb onto docks and large buoys



© person

DID I SEE A RIVER OTTER?

- ◆ long and slender
- ◆ larger than a cat
- ◆ brown with lighter coloring underneath
- ◆ tail long, thick, furry and tapering (not flat and scaly or rodent-like)
- ◆ very active and playful
- ◆ possibly eating fish or crayfish/crabs (but definitely not plants)



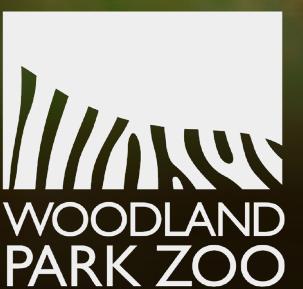
TRACKS

Much larger than mink tracks, and very different shape than muskrat, nutria, and beaver tracks. Careful, though, they can be confused with raccoon tracks!

WHAT ABOUT SEA OTTERS?

By the early 1900s, fur hunters had eliminated sea otters from Washington State. They have been successfully reintroduced on the outer coast, but sea otter sightings in Puget Sound are still extremely rare. Sea otters are larger and fluffier than river otters, and are almost always seen in the water, often floating on their backs. For more information search the web for 'river otters vs. sea otters'.

Be an OTTER SPOTTER!



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THINK YOU SAW A RIVER OTTER? Share your observations!

WWW.ZOO.ORG/OTTERS