Otter

**Conservation Status:** Least Concern

There are two otter species in Gorongosa: spotted-necked otter (*Hydrictis maculicollis*) and cape clawless otter (*Aonyx capensis*). The spotted-necked otter is a medium-sized otter, varying in color but generally dark brown, with distinctive spots and streaks of paler color on the throat, neck, and in some cases the upper lip. More aquatic than other African otters, this species has fully webbed paws with sharp, well-developed claws. They have a broad head, blunt muzzle, short legs, and a long, flattened tail.

The Cape clawless otter is a large otter species with a big head, a wide, flat skull, and powerful jaws. They have a sleek coat that is tan to dark chocolate brown in color. Its underparts are lighter and they also have unspotted white or buff patches on the chin, throat, and chest extending onto their neck and face below the eyes. The Cape clawless otter has forefeet that resemble hands, with opposable thumbs, whereas their hind feet are webbed to their outer joints. The tail is long, bulky, and tapered toward the tip.

**Fun Facts**

1. Spotted-necked otters can run 4 to 5 km per hour (2.5-3 mph).
2. Spotted-necked otters use 15 to 20 distinct vocalizations to communicate.
3. Cape clawless otters can close its nose underwater.

**Habitat**

Otter can be found occupying rivers, streams, reservoirs, lakes, streams, swamps, canals.

**Diet**

Fish, amphibians, shellfish, insects and reptiles

**Predators**

Crocodiles, pythons, and eagles

**Behavior**

Spotted-necked otters are primarily diurnal, and they spend most of the day in shallow waters feeding on fish and other prey. They show both solitary and group behaviors, with group size varying depending on location. They do not appear to be territorial, but they do have home ranges that feature networks of regularly used trails as well as set sleeping areas and dens in the form of holes in banks or logs. They spend a considerable amount of time during the day grooming themselves. In the water they are agile but appear awkward on land.

More mobile than river otters, Cape clawless otters are known to travel considerable distances overland. They use their dexterous hands to overturn rocks, churn up mud, and probe vegetation to locate food. Cape clawless otters are often observed alone, but—being a more sociable species than river otters—they are sometimes seen in groups of up to eight individuals. They sleep and rest in thick vegetation, among rocks, or in underground dens.

**Breeding**

After a gestation period of two months, two or three young are born. Otters breed year-round.

**Size**

Length: 58-91 cm

Height: 30-35 cm

**Weight**

4-21 kg

**Life Span:** 8-15 years

**Gestation Period:** 2 months

**Average number of offspring:** 2 or 3