

North American river otter *Lontra canadensis*

Kingdom: Animalia

Division/Phylum: Chordata

Class: Mammalia

Order: Carnivora

Family: Mustelidae

ILLINOIS STATUS common, native

FEATURES

The adult North American river otter has a head-body length of 26 to 30 inches, and a tail that is 12 to 17 inches long. It weighs about 20 to 25 pounds. The body is covered with short, red-brown hair. The belly fur is a little lighter than that on the rest of the body, and the throat area is white. The sides of the face are tan. Its toes are webbed. The small ears can close when the otter is under water. The otter's tail is thick and decreases in size to the tip.

BEHAVIORS

The North American river otter may be found at scattered locations throughout Illinois. It lives in large rivers, swamps and lakes. This mammal feeds on aquatic birds and insects, mussels, crayfish, fishes, frogs, muskrats and turtles. It is very playful and will slide down the banks of its water body. This animal is active during the night and day. It is a great diver and swimmer and moves much easier in the water than out of it. Mating occurs in summer. After mating, the fertilized eggs undergo a period of time in which they do not implant in the uterus or develop much. Therefore, the gestation period is very long, nearly nine months. Young are born in February or March. Litter size varies from one to six.

HABITATS

Aquatic Habitats

lakes, ponds and reservoirs; rivers and streams; swamps

Woodland Habitats

none

Prairie and Edge Habitats

none

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