

School children chose the river otter as the species to best represent the returning health of the Elizabeth River. Recently river otters have been widely reported including at our Paradise Creek Nature Park, Nauticus and other parts of the Elizabeth River. Look for them at dawn and dusk and report your sightings to [info@elizabethriver.org](mailto:info@elizabethriver.org).



## North American River Otter

***Lontra canadensis* (Scientific name)**

**Common Names:** River otter and Northern river otter.

**Size:** Males average 25 lbs. Females average 18 lbs. **Lifespan:** Up to 13 years

**Habitat:** The Elizabeth River and wetland coastal areas of the United States and Canada.

**Range:** From the Aleutian Islands in Alaska to coastal Florida.

**Diet:** Fish are the primary food of otters (99%). They will also eat aquatic insects, small mammals, clams, mussels, oysters and snails.

**Appearance:** River otters have long whiskers to detect prey in dark or cloudy water and clawed feet for catching slippery prey. Their fur is dark brown and lighter brown on the belly and face.

**Predators:** The river otter has few natural predators in water. On land, the river otter is more vulnerable and predators include the bobcat, domestic dog, wolf, black bear and red fox.

**Habitat:** River otters are spotted in the Elizabeth River wetlands, marshes and on docks. Old tree stumps and dense vegetation are great habitat for otters. Otters are sensitive to pollution and disappear from polluted areas. That's why we are excited when we spot an otter!

**Communication:** Otters use scent marking, vocal barks, chirps and clucks.

**What can you do?** Maintaining clean waterways is the best way for you to ensure a healthy population of river otters. Also healthy shorelines and keeping marine debris and litter out of the river

### On-Line Resource

[https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/kidspost/river-otters-arent-just-cute-they-are-a-sign-of-hope-for-the-environment/2020/03/17/71122ffa-5a89-11ea-ab68-101ecfec2532\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/kidspost/river-otters-arent-just-cute-they-are-a-sign-of-hope-for-the-environment/2020/03/17/71122ffa-5a89-11ea-ab68-101ecfec2532_story.html)



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