



**river otter**  
***Lutra canadensis***

Kingdom: Animalia  
Division/Phylum: Chordata  
Class: Mammalia  
Order: Carnivora  
Family: Mustelidae

**FEATURES**

The adult 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 is a little lighter than 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 river otter may be found at scattered locations throughout Illinois. It lives in large rivers, swamps and lakes. The river otter 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**

- bottomland forests
- coniferous forest
- southern Illinois lowlands
- upland deciduous forest

**ILLINOIS STATUS**

- common
- endangered
- threatened
- native
- exotic

**ILLINOIS RANGE**

Permanent resident: statewide  
Summer resident:  
Migrant:  
Winter resident:

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Illinois Department of Natural Resources. 1999.  
Biodiversity of Illinois, Volume 2: Woodland Habitats CD-ROM.