

# THE RIVER OTTER JOURNAL

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*One-Time Resident of the Wildlife Rehabilitation Center*

*Photo by Barbara Gregory*

## Wildlife Rehabilitation Center and Otter Habitat

*By Tracy Johnston*

This June I had the privilege of visiting The Wildlife Rehabilitation Center and Otter Habitat located near Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Typically, caretaker Barbara Gregory oversees the rehabilitation of over 600 mammals and perching birds every year and is well on her way to exceeding that number this year. When I visited the facility, Barbara was busy caring for injured animals, including tube-feeding a tiny fawn with a shattered jaw. Other temporary residents I observed in rehabilitation included a second fawn, a beaver, several birds and geese.

Although Barbara's goal is to rehabilitate and release every animal which arrives at the facility, some simply would not survive if returned to the wild due to various types of disabilities. Permanent homes must be found when these situations occur. Often, we think of zoos as ideal places for these types of animals. However, zoos unfortunately do not gen-



*"Pebbles," a Former Resident of the Center*

*Photo by Barbara Gregory*

erally accept animals which are not "cosmetically perfect." Therefore facilities such as rehabilitation centers may be the only long-term option for such animals.

Permanent "non-releasable" residents at The Wildlife Rehabilitation Center and Otter Habitat include three otters, a

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THE RIVER OTTER JOURNAL is a semi-annual publication of the River Otter Alliance. Look for the next edition of THE RIVER OTTER JOURNAL in Spring 2000!

## River Otter Alliance Mission

The River Otter Alliance promotes the survival of the North American River Otter (*Lutra Canadensis*) through education, research and habitat protection. We support current research and reintroduction programs, monitor abundance and distribution in the United States, and educate the general public through our newsletter, THE RIVER OTTER JOURNAL, on the need to restore and sustain River Otter populations.

Our goal is to be a center of communications among wildlife biologists, environmental organizations, fishermen, and all interested otter lovers on a national and international basis, in order to ensure the healthy future of the North American River Otter.

# President's Message



Judy Berg

Mother Nature has presented us with my favorite time of year, autumn. The brisk ambient temperatures make her colorful foliage tremble with anticipation of what lies ahead. Is it not the same for her fauna? Since our last journal, we inter-mountain westerners have progressed from the green leaves of summer to the colorful leaves of fall, and, soon, to the bare limbs of winter. We people of snow country get to experience it all, as does our nonmigratory wildlife, including, of course, the river otters.

My summer seminar on the natural history of river otters went well. The participants comprised an enthusiastic group of teachers and naturalists. It was nice to share my otter-related knowledge and my study area with such a good group. Individuals also shared their nature-related knowledge with the rest of us. It was a positive experience.

Now I have reached a closure in my life's work. I presented my "Final Report of the River Otter Research Project on the Upper Colorado River Basin" to Rocky Mountain National Park and to the State Division of Wildlife. This was both a feeling of accomplishment and of sadness. My life of active wildlife research has now ended. I can only hope that my legacy of published scientific data on such a diverse group of animals from elephants to otters—also including okapi, Japanese serow, Chinese goral and barasingha deer—will in some way benefit these species for many years to come. Then my life will have had meaning!

It is now time to move onto a new chapter in my life, that of writing. Does this mean abandonment of river otters?

Definitely not! In fact, I will hope to excite a wider audience of the reading public to this animal. My first attempt is a short story mystery. My last attempt will be a book on a river otter's journey through life.

In the last journal I said I would share with you a brief on my two sightings of an adult otter with two young. In each case the young would have been four to five months of age. The first sighting occurred during late afternoon on 2 September 1993. I encountered three otters moving very swiftly into and under the water and then onto a log several times. The larger otter retained an approximately 12" long fish during the entire 15 minute period they were in my view. The playful behavior of the young chasing, diving and attempting to take the fish from the adult would have been an important stage in their learning to fish.

The second sighting occurred during late morning on 2 September 1994. I encountered an active group of five otters! These animals were in and out of view for a two hour period. The most likely composition of this group would have been two males (larger animals), two young (most active and smaller), and one female (middle-sized). The two smaller animals played and chased each other while in the water, and, at one point they rolled together in a ball that looked like a ferris wheel! They moved onto logs next to an island where they self-groomed and rolled on the logs (to dry their fur) then took a short rest. The five otters remained in the same immediate area during the entire period of time. Yes, they also eliminated and on the same large boulder. First the lead otter eliminated—marked while performing what is called the 'otter dance.' Then the others followed its lead after scenting the first otter's leavings. They left their researcher a 'gift' of five fresh scats! Then the otters followed the lead otter in

a line, one at a time, off from the boulder into the water and swam out of my view. This was a very exciting experience to an animal behavior professional.

In our next issue, Christy Vanfraechem of Belgium will share with us some of her observations and experiences on a different species of otter. Elaine Anderson of the Denver Museum of Natural History will share with us discoveries of fossils of the North American river otters in Colorado. We call on others of you to also share your personal otter experiences and your professional knowledge. Remember we all like diversity in our journal. It can be from a few words to many. Also, don't forget your otter photos. The next deadline is 15 March 2000. Sharing, caring and educating are the emphases of our group.

May the new century bring all good things to you and your families, and to our special friends, the river otters.

— Judy Berg, President

## See The River Otters A Tribute to Colorado's Ocean Journey Aquarium

By John Mulvihill

*Now otters will greet all the masses  
When our aquarium opens for classes  
Explaining with glee  
That they're not from the sea  
Shouting "river" as everyone passes.*

*It's not that they dislike their kin  
But question the water they're in  
Which provides them with clams  
But no beaver dams  
To real river otters, a sin*

## Otter Updates

By Tracy Johnston

- At a recent symposium marking the 10th anniversary of the 1989 Exxon Valdez oil spill, marine biologists from the University of California Santa Cruz reported only nine of the 37 rescued sea otters sent to zoos and aquariums are still alive. Biologist Terrie Williams said more than 75% have died prematurely, apparently from oil-related causes. Most of the otters died from the same type of lung damage that killed many sea otters within weeks of the spill. Many of the otters also had deteriorated livers, and approximately half of the pups born to the rescued otters have been stillborn.

- An otter workshop was held at the annual American Association of Zookeepers (AAZK) conference September 12-16, 1999, in Portland. AAZK Board Members Kevin Shelton of the Florida Aquarium and Jan Reed-Smith of the John Ball Zoo hosted the workshop. Agenda topics included discussions of diet, water treatment, health care, breeding, enrichment and training for husbandry procedures.

- The River Otter Alliance welcomes author Dorothy Wisbeski and her husband Luke to their mailing list. Mrs. Wisbeski recorded their experiences raising South American river otters as pets in suburban New Jersey during the 1960s and early 1970s in three delightful children's books: *The True Story of Okeo the Otter*, *Okeo: The Story of an Otter in the House* and *Picaro, A Pet Otter*.

- Want to learn more about sea otters? Go to the Discovery Channel Online web page ([www.discovery.com/stories/nature/otters/nursery.html](http://www.discovery.com/stories/nature/otters/nursery.html)) and read about the Sea Otter Research & Conservation Program (SORAC)'s latest otter rescues. You'll also be able to view the Monterey Bay Aquarium's nursery through the "Otter Cam."

- A workshop on the Conservation and Public Awareness of Otters will be held in Taipei, Taiwan, December 9-12, 1999. Goals for the workshop include: 1) To establish Asian strategies of promotion of public awareness for otter conservation through the case study of success stories in Europe; 2) To promote involvement of media persons into otter conservation; 3) To assist in initiating country conservation projects through production of awareness materials in local languages. The seminars will be in English. For information on the program, contact Hiroshi Sasaki, Secretary-General, Otter Research Group Japan, Chikushi Jogakuen Junior College, 2-12-1 Ishizaka, Dazaifu, 818-01 JAPAN.

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- Draft reports from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service released this March report efforts to relocate sea otters from Southern California fishing grounds has been a failure and recommended the program be discontinued. Only 15 of the 140 otters trapped and moved to San Nicolas Island between 1987 and 1990 remain. According to the Fish and Wildlife Service, the rest either swam back to the mainland or died from the stress of the capture.

The program—initiated in 1986 to protect the state's shellfish industry—attempted to keep otters out of mainland waters south of Point Conception. The shellfish industry is angry the government may discontinue the relocation program, in spite of the recent decline in the California sea otter population to approximately 1,937. The Fish and Wildlife Service estimates the California sea otter requires a minimum population of 1,850 to sustain its existence.

## Rehabilitation Center

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beaver, a raven, an owl, and a lion. The otters include adult male and female river otters and their 1 1/2-year-old female offspring. The adult male, Emmett is missing part of his tail. The adult female, Tripod is missing her left front leg. In spite of these disabilities, Emmett and Tripod are healthy and happy and living in a large wooden house attached to a wire grain silo where their 300 gallon swimming tub is located. Their daughter, Lori B. also lives at the facility in another enclosure



"Lori B."

Photo by Barbara Gregory

with a slide and swimming tub of her own. Barbara sometimes brings Lori B. along on lectures to help educate people on the facility and the work they do for animals.

The Center has been in operation for eighteen years and is licensed by the Pennsylvania Game Commission and the U.S. Government. As a private facility, all funding is through donations, membership fees, educational talks, and tours. For information on opportunities to help, including the "Adopt an Otter" program which helps pay for the food and care of the resident otters, contact Barbara Gregory, Wildlife Rehabilitation Center and Otter Habitat, 515 Sipe Road, York Haven, PA 17370; phone: 717-938-4040; fax: 717-938-8231.

# When and Where to See Otters

## in zoological parks, aquariums and conservation centers

By Ian Reed-Smith

When you are going to a zoo to see otters, there are a few things you can do to increase your chances of actually "seeing" them. After all, they are generally most active in the morning or early evening, not the times when most of us visit a zoo. First, go when the zoo opens or go later in the afternoon and plan on staying until it closes. Second, if you don't see them at first, look around—especially under trees, bushes, logs, etc. Third, if you still do not see them, go and see some of the other animals and try again later. Fourth, ask an employee (or keeper if you can find one) when the animals might be active. Animals frequently have typical activity patterns, and the animal you see sleeping at 11 a.m. may often be up and swimming at noon.

If you are lucky and the animals are active, watch for these behaviors: periscoping (standing up on their hind legs to look around—they are nosy and you can't see much when you are that low to the ground); roll grooming (they roll around on their backs and squirm, a great way to dry and clean your coat); self grooming; hauling straw, grass or whatever from one place to another (bed-making otter style); latrine dance (self explanatory); and (of course!) playing, chasing and swimming. Try and stay awhile; you will increase your chances of seeing the animals active or observing something interesting, and if you don't, it's a nice way to spend an hour.

This list is not exhaustive, but here are some of the places you can go to see otters. The city where the facility is located is listed only if it is not self-evident in the name. In all uses, "N.A." is an abbreviation for "North American" (river) otters.



Otter at Metro-Toronto Zoo in Ontario  
Photo by Kurt Butkiewicz

### Canada

- African Lion Safari, Rockton, Ontario - N.A. otters
- Assiniboine Park Zoo, Winnipeg, Manitoba - N.A. otters
- Blodome, Montreal, Quebec - N.A. otters
- Calgary Zoo, Alberta, Canada - N.A. otters
- Granby Park Zoo, Quebec - Cape clawless otters
- Jardin Zoologique De St. Felicien, St. Felicien, Quebec - N.A. otters
- Quebec Zoo, Quebec - N.A. otters
- Salmonier Nature Park, St. Johns, Newfoundland - N.A. otters
- Toronto Zoo, Toronto, Scarborough, Ontario - N.A. otters & Spotted-necked otters
- Valley Children's Zoo, Edmonton, Alberta - N.A. otters

**Alabama** Birmingham Zoo - Asian small-clawed otters

### Arizona

- Arizona Sonora Desert Museum, Tucson - N.A. otters
- Phoenix Zoo - Cape clawless otters
- Reid Park Zoo, Tucson - Asian small-clawed otters

**Arkansas** Little Rock Zoo - N.A. otters

### California

- Monterey Bay Aquarium - sea otters
- Oakland Zoo, Knowland Park in Oakland - N.A. otters
- Sacramento Zoo - N.A. otters
- San Diego Zoo - N.A. otters, European otters & Asian small-clawed otters
- San Francisco Zoo - N.A. otters
- Santa Barbara Zoo - Asian small-clawed otters

### Colorado

- Colorado Springs Zoo - Asian small-clawed otters
- Colorado Ocean Journey, Denver - N.A. otters & sea otters
- Denver Zoo - N.A. otters

**Connecticut** Beardsley Zoo, Bridgeport - N.A. otters

**Delaware** Brandywine Zoo, Wilmington - N.A. otters

### Florida

- Brevard Zoo, Melbourne - N.A. otters
- Clearwater Marine Aquarium - N.A. otters
- Disney Wild Animal Park, Orlando - Asian small-clawed otters
- Flamingo Gardens, Ft. Lauderdale - N.A. otters
- Homosassa Springs State Park, Homosassa Springs - N.A. otters
- Jacksonville Zoo - N.A. otters
- Lowry Park Zoo, Tampa - N.A. otters
- Miami Metro Zoo - Asian small-clawed otters
- Tallahassee Museum of History and Natural Science - N.A. otters
- The Florida Aquarium, Tampa - N.A. otters
- The Zoo, Gulf Breeze - N.A. otters
- Zooworld, Panama City Beach - N.A. otters

**Georgia** Zoo Atlanta - Asian small-clawed otters

### Idaho

- Boise Zoo - N.A. otters
- Tautphaus Park Zoo, Idaho Falls - N.A. otters



Asian Small-Clawed Otters at Santa Barbara Zoo, California  
Photo by Chris Wittenbrink



*European Otter at Plankendaal Tierpark in Mechelen, Belgium*  
Photo by David Berg

#### Illinois

- Brookfield Zoo, Chicago - N.A. otters & Asian small-clawed otters
- Glen Oak Zoo, Peoria - N.A. otters
- Henson Robinson Zoo, Springfield - N.A. otters
- Lincoln Park Zoo, Chicago - N.A. otters & Asian small-clawed otters
- Miller Park Zoo, Bloomington - N.A. otters
- Niabi Zoological Park, Moline - N.A. otters
- Shedd Aquarium, Chicago - N.A. otters, sea otters
- Wildlife Prairie Park, Peoria - N.A. otters

**Indiana** Fort Wayne Children's Zoo - N.A. otters

**Iowa** Blank Park Zoo, Des Moines - N.A. otters

#### Kansas

- Hutchinson Zoo - N.A. otters
- Lee Richardson Zoo, Garden City - N.A. otters
- Sedgwick County Zoo, Wichita - N.A. otters
- Sunset Zoo, Manhattan - N.A. otters
- Topeka Zoo - Asian small-clawed otters

**Kentucky** Louisville Zoo - N.A. otters

#### Louisiana

- Aquarium of the Americas, New Orleans - sea otters
- Audubon Zoo, New Orleans - N.A. otters & Asian small-clawed otters
- Alexandria Zoo - N.A. otters
- Greater Baton Rouge Zoo - N.A. otters
- Zoo of Acadiana, Broussard - N.A. otters

#### Maryland

- Baltimore Zoo - N.A. otters
- Salisbury Zoo - N.A. otters

#### Massachusetts

- Capron Park, Attleboro - N.A. otters
- Franklin Park Zoo, Boston - N.A. otters
- Worcester Science Center - N.A. otters

#### Michigan

- Clinch Park Zoo, Traverse City - N.A. otters
- Detroit Zoo - N.A. otters
- John Ball Zoo, Grand Rapids - N.A. otters
- Potter Park Zoo, Lansing - N.A. otters

#### Minnesota

- Lake Superior Zoo, Duluth - N.A. otters
- Minnesota Zoo, Apple Valley (Minneapolis) - N.A. otters & Asian small-clawed otters

#### Missouri

- Dickerson Park Zoo, Springfield - N.A. otters
- Kansas City Zoo - N.A. otters & Asian small-clawed otters
- St. Louis Zoo - N.A. otters

**Montana** Zoo Montana, Billings - N.A. otters

#### Nebraska

- Folsom Children's Zoo, Lincoln - N.A. otters
- Henry Doorly Zoo, Omaha - N.A. otters & Asian small-clawed otters
- Riverside Park Zoo, Scottsbluff - N.A. otters

**North Carolina** The North Carolina Zoological Park, Asheboro - N.A. otters & spotted-necked otters

**North Dakota** Dakota Zoo, Bismarck - N.A. otters

**New Jersey** Cape May Zoo - N.A. otters

**New Mexico** Alameda Park Zoo, Alamogordo - N.A. otters

#### New York

- Bronx Zoo, N.Y. - N.A. otters & Asian small-clawed otters
- Burnet Park Zoo, Syracuse - N.A. otters
- Central Park Zoo, N.Y. - N.A. otters
- Niagara Falls Aquarium, Niagara Falls - N.A. otters
- Seneca Park Zoo, Rochester - N.A. otters
- Staten Island Zoo, N.Y. - N.A. otters
- Trevor Zoo, Millbrook - N.A. otters
- Turtleback Zoo, West Orange - N.A. otters

#### Ohio

- Akron Zoo - N.A. otters
- Cincinnati Zoo - N.A. otters
- Cleveland Zoo - Asian small-clawed otters
- Columbus Zoo - N.A. otters
- Toledo Zoo - Cape Clawless otters



*Otter at Niagara Falls Aquarium*  
Photo by Kurt Butkiewicz

**Oklahoma** Tulsa - N.A. otters

#### Oregon

- High Desert Museum, Bend - N.A. otters
- Oregon Zoo, Portland - N.A. otters



*Giant Otter at Philadelphia Zoo*  
Photo by Tracy Johnston

#### Pennsylvania

- Elmwood Park Zoo, Norristown - N.A. otters
- Erie Zoo - N.A. otters
- Philadelphia Zoo - N.A. otters
- Pittsburgh Zoo - N.A. otters
- Trexler Lehigh County Game Preserve, Schnecksville - N.A. otters
- ZOOAMERICA, Hershey - N.A. otters

**South Carolina** Brookgreen Gardens, Murrells Inlet - N.A. otters

#### Tennessee

- Knoxville Zoo - N.A. otters
- Nashville Zoo (Grassmere Wildlife Park) - N.A. otters
- Tennessee Aquarium, Chattanooga - N.A. otters

#### Texas

- Caldwell Zoo - N.A. otters
- Ellen Trout Zoo, Lufkin - N.A. otters
- The Texas Zoo, Victoria - N.A. otters
- The Texas State Aquarium, Corpus Christi - N.A. otters

**Virginia** Virginia Living Museum, Newport News - N.A. otters

#### Washington State

- Northwest Trek, Eatonville - N.A. otters
- Woodland Park Zoo, Seattle - N.A. otters
- Seattle Aquarium - sea otters

**Washington, D.C.** National Zoo - Asian small-clawed otters

**West Virginia** Oglebay's Good Children's Zoo, Wheeling - N.A. otters

#### Wisconsin

- Green Bay Wildlife Sanctuary, Green Bay - N.A. otters
- Henry Vilas Zoo, Madison - N.A. otters
- Milwaukee Zoo - N.A. otters
- NEW Zoo, Green Bay - N.A. otters
- Racine Zoo - N.A. otters

## Otter Slides

By Judy Berg

When an otter slides down an embankment of snow or mud or across the ice on a waterway, it holds its front feet back along its sides with its hind feet out behind in a "streamline arrangement" (Murie, 1974). Tracks will be found at the beginning and end of a slide, unless it leads into the water. When an otter traverses level ground through heavy snow, it moves itself by pushing with its feet held underneath its body, so tracks will be found in this trough of snow. Otters will slide on snow and ice but also on slick mud embankments. (I inadvertently tried one of their slick mudslides. Splash!) Sliding can occur at any time of the year and has been considered a "favorite amusement" (Coues, 1877). In his book published in 1909, Seton wrote several accounts of otters being observed sliding down an embankment of snow and ice or mud. He stated that the sport was pursued by using the same slide more than once and with more than one otter engaging in the activity. John James Audubon, in the mid-1800s, wrote an account of such activities in which he observed a pair of otters sliding down a "soap-like" muddy surface of an embankment 22 times each, stopping only when they detected their human observer. This sliding behavior was written from accounts in the eastern sections of North America and southern United States (Seton, 1909). There also have been some later accounts of this behavior in these same areas, and in the midsections of the United States (Liers, 1951 and 1953; Murie, 1974). Liers, in his book *An Otter's Story* (1953), described a family of otters in Michigan sliding over and over again down a mud-slick embankment. He stated that they would slide down the embankment and into the water, then swim to the bank, run up to the top of the embankment, and slide down again. He said that the more they slid the wetter and slicker the slide became. (Sounds like fun!) Seton, when discussing otters and their slides, stated that "...this is the only



River Otter Slide with Embedded Tracks  
Photo by Judy Berg

case I know of among American quadrupeds where the entire race, young and old, unite to keep up an institution that is not connected in any way with the instincts of feeding, fighting, or multiplying, but is simply maintained as an amusement" (1909, p. 834). However, even in this time period, the "otter toboggan" behavior was not observed, or at least not reported, in western North America. In more recent literature, this behavior continues to be rare for this part of the country (Melquist and Hornocker, 1983).

I was never fortunate to observe otters making a slide but did find evidence following the event. In most cases only one slide was detected in an area—across ice on the river, through snow on land, and on a muddy embankment—and was moving in one direction as determined from the direction of the tracks found in combination with the slide. The documented slides either led to water or appeared to be a method of movement across the ice and snow. Sliding across ice and snow in the colder climates is a means of travel (Melquist and Hornocker, 1983). On two occasions I did find indications of more than one otter making a

slide. In one location I found two slides together of different widths containing tracks of different dimensions, indicating two otters. These signs occurred in snow and next to open water on the Colorado River. One slide was 6" wide with tracks 2" wide by 2 1/2" long; one slide was 8" wide with tracks of 3" wide by 3 1/2" long. All five toes were evident in the tracks. A sighting of two otters "playing" together in this location was reported one week prior to my find. In another location I found three slides together, each of a different width, indicating three otters. These signs occurred in snow and across ice of a waterway. One slide was 9" wide with tracks of 2 1/2" wide by 3 1/2 to 4" long. The slide was approximately 40 feet long then a pattern of tracks, slide, then tracks. There were shorter length slides of 8" wide with tracks of 2" wide by 3 1/2" long; then another set of shorter-length slides of 7" wide with tracks of 2" wide and 3 1/2" long. A sighting of three otters was seen in this location prior to my find. In both of my above cases the slides led to open water. I can't state from the results that what I saw was the "fun" behavior that others had observed in the above reports, but I can certainly conjecture that the otters enjoyed their adventure.

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## An Otter Legend Derived from the Cree Indians

As the story is told, in the days when the earth was new and there were no men but only animals, the sun was far away in the sky. It was so far away that there was no summer. It was so far away that the trees and the grasses did not grow as they should.

He-Who-Made-the-Animals saw how it was that there was not enough sun to heat the earth, and so he fashioned a snare. The Sun did not see the snare in his path, walked into the snare, and the snare held him fast.

Then the sun was close to the earth. In fact, the snare held the sun so close to the earth that there was no night. Day after day the sun shown and the earth dried and the grasses withered. There was not enough food or water for



the animals and they desperately called a council. "Sun," the animals said, "You give too much heat to the earth."

"Set me free from this snare" the Sun said, "and I will go away."

"But if you go away, then there will not be enough heat." "Set me free," the Sun said, "and I will come to the edge of the earth in the morning and in the evening; then at noon-time I will stand straight above the earth and warm it then."

The animals sat around the council fire and they said, "Who is going to set the sun free?"

"I shall not do it," Wildcat said. "Whoever sets the sun free must go so close to the sun that he will be burned to death." Lynx said, "Whoever sets the sun free must chew the leather thong that holds him; the sun will burn him to death before he can do it." "I shall not do it," said the deer, the wolf and the raccoon.

"I shall do it," Otter said. "How can you do it?" said the animals. "You are too small, your teeth are for fish, and your fur has already burned away." None of the other animals liked the otter because he played too much. They did not think he was brave.

"Let him try," Bear said. "He will burn to death, but we will not miss him. He is of no use to us. He looks silly now that his fur is gone." The animals laughed.

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## The River Otter Alliance

**ENROLL NOW FOR 2000!**

As a member you will be supporting research and education to help ensure the survival of *Lutra Canadensis*, the North American River Otter. You will receive a semi-annual newsletter, THE RIVER OTTER JOURNAL, with updates on otter-related:



*Educational Programs  
Environmental Issues  
Research Information  
River System and  
Population Surveys*

**and much more!**

### *Please Provide Mailing Address Below:*

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### **Annual Membership Dues:**

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- \$35 .....Family
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Complete and return this form with your 2000 membership check to:

**THE RIVER OTTER ALLIANCE  
6733 S. Locust Court  
Englewood, CO 80112**

## An Otter Legend

*continued from page 7*

Ignoring the taunts, the otter set off to the place in the sky above the earth where the sun was held by the snare. Otter took many days to get to the sun. The sun burned him. The sun was so bright, Otter had to close his eyes. When he reached the sun, Otter began to chew on the leather thong that held the sun. His skin was burning and blistering, his eyes were hot stones. But Otter did not stop chewing.

Suddenly he chewed through the leather. The animals saw the sun rise into the sky. The animals felt the cool winds begin to blow on the earth. Otter had freed the sun from the snare.

Time passed. Otter lay in the center of the council ring. There was no fur at

all left on his body. His skin was burned and scorched and his flesh was falling off his bones. His teeth were only blackened stumps.

He-Who-Made-the-Animals also stood in the center of the council ring. "Otter," he said, "the animals will not forget what you have done for them. I will see that they do not forget," and he gave Otter new strong teeth, tireless muscles, keen eyesight, and a powerful tail to help him in his hunting and in his play. He did not have to give him bravery. But he gave him new fine fur that was like down on his skin, and a second coat of fur to guard the first so that he would not get cold in water or in winter. Then he gave him joy so that he would always be happy in his otter's life, and Otter has so remained until this day.

— *Contributed by John Mulvihill*

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The River Otter Alliance is a non-profit, tax-exempt group which is organized to promote the survival of the North American River Otter (*Lutra Canadensis*) through education, research, reintroduction, and habitat protection.

All work and efforts for this organization and newsletter are on a volunteer basis by those who share a common concern for the welfare of the river otter and its habitat. We invite all interested persons to contribute their time at any level of the organization.



## The River Otter Alliance

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### INSIDE:

*The Autumn 1999 update on  
river otter sightings, research news,  
and interesting stories!*



