

WildlifeWire

North Carolina Wildlife Federation



Wildlife and Habitat News



The mission of NC Wildlife Federation is to conserve, protect, and restore North Carolina wildlife and habitat. You can invest in North Carolina wildlife and wild places and become a partner in our work by [clicking here](#).

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American River Otters in North Carolina

The American river otter is a joy to see in nature due to its playful and curious personality. Their elegance in the water makes them appear at ease with the world despite their near extinction from North Carolina in the early 1900s due to over-trapping and exploitation for their fur.

After becoming extinct from the western parts of the state, it was discovered that river otter populations survived on the coastal plain. This is largely due to the inaccessible and hard to navigate swamps and marshlands that make up much of the coastal landscape. After re-introduction of the river otter by the Wildlife Resource Commission in the 1990s into western parts of the state, otter populations have rebounded and recovered. NCWF and Duke Energy jointly funded a pair of river otters for re-stocking in the upper South Fork basin in the early 1990s, aiding in conservation efforts.



By Neal Herbert

Despite their abundance across the state after recovery, they are still rather rare to see due to their nocturnal habits and their elusive nature. River otters live in streams, swamps and marshes on the coastal plain and in streams and rivers in the mountain region. Their diet consists largely of fish and crayfish, but they will also eat crabs, amphibians and other aquatic-dwelling vertebrates.

In the spring, river otters will mate and females will seek out dens in abandoned burrows, natural cavities, overhanging banks or tall grass. A single female may have 2-3 pups in a year. The pups will stay with their mother for about 8 to 12 months before going off on their own (though siblings may stick together for a little while longer). Typically, river otters will live alone or in pairs, but they can also be seen hunting or socializing in bands of 5-10.

Since American river otters are considered a keystone species, they play a vital role in keeping their ecosystems and food chains balanced. Due to their role as a top predator, pollutants can easily bio-accumulate in their bodies and cause certain health problems. To help protect aquatic habitats from dangerous pollutants, do not dump chemicals, pesticides, gasoline or oil into the environment and dispose of all trash into the correct waste bins.

In the News

[Calls for Reform of "Broken" NC Fisheries Management](#)

[Stirring up the waters: Lawsuit demands NC coastal fishing reforms](#)

[Wildlife Commission Reminds Dove Hunters to Practice Safety and Ethics](#)

NCWF Local Wildlife Chapters

[Albemarle Conservation & Wildlife Chapter](#)

[Bull City Trailblazers](#)

[Catawba River Wildlife Coalition](#)

[Charlotte Wildlife Stewards \(CWS\)](#)

[Community Alliance for Wildlife](#)

[Concord Wildlife Alliance \(CWA\)](#)

[Enfield Economic Development Revitalization Commission \(EEDRC\)](#)

[Gaston County Piedmont Area Wildlife Stewards \(PAWS\)](#)

[Habitat and Wildlife Keepers \(HAWK\)](#)

[Inner Banks Wildlife](#)

[Lake James Area Wildlife and Nature Society](#)

[Lake Norman Wildlife Conservationists](#)

[Marvin Area for the Restoration and Sustainability of wildlife Habitat \(MARSH\)](#)

[Mountain WILD!](#)

[Neuse River Hawks](#)