

## All about the Otters

- A. Otters have long, thin bodies with small legs, making them perfect for pushing through thickets or searching in tunnels. An adult male can grow to be up to 4 feet tall and weigh up to 30 pounds. Females are usually smaller than males. The nose of the Eurasian otter is the smallest of the otter species, with a shallow 'W' shape. The tail (or rudder, or stern) of an otter is thick at the base and thins out as it approaches the tip, where it flattens. When swimming quickly underwater, this is an element of the propulsion system. Otter fur is made up of two types of hair: robust guard hairs that form a waterproof outer layer, and dense and fine under-fur that serves as an otter's thermal underwear. Grooming is required to keep the fur in good condition. When otter fur is exposed to saltwater, it loses its waterproofing and insulating properties. Freshwater ponds are crucial to otters living on the coast for this reason. They crawl on the ground to rub dry against vegetation after swimming and washing off the salts in ponds.
- B. On land, the scent is used for hunting, communication, and detecting danger. The sensitivity of an otter's sense of smell is thought to be equivalent to that of a dog. On land, otters have tiny eyes and are likely short-sighted. They do, however, have the capacity to change the shape of the lens in the eye, making it more spherical and therefore overcoming water refraction. Otters can hunt fish by sight in clean water with good light. The eyes and nostrils of the otter are high on its head, allowing it to see and breathe even while the rest of its body is submerged. Except for steering, the otter holds its legs against the body underwater and flexes its hind end in a sequence of vertical undulations. River otters have webbing that runs the length of each digit, but not all the way to the end. The webs of giant and sea otters are considerably more noticeable, but the Asian short-clawed otter has none since it hunts for shrimp in ditches and rice fields, so it doesn't require the speed. Otter ears are small to save space, but they have extremely keen hearing and are protected by valves that close them against water pressure.
- C. The habitats suited for otters are limited by a number of restrictions and preferences. Water is essential, and rivers must be large enough to sustain a healthy fish population. Because they are such quiet and wary creatures, they will seek areas where man's activities do not have a significant impact. Of course, there must be no other otter in the area - something that has only recently become more important as populations begin to recover. Coastal otters have a substantially larger food source, and males and females may have a range of only a few kilometres of shoreline. Because the male range overlaps with two or three females - this is a good thing! Otters will consume whatever they can get their hands on, including sparrows, snakes, and slugs, according to reports. Crayfish, crabs, and aquatic fowl are the most prevalent prey, aside from fish. Small mammals, most typically rabbits, but also moles, are occasionally taken.
- D. Where food is plentiful, Eurasian otters will breed at any time. Cubs are born in the spring in regions where the conditions are more severe, like Sweden, where the lakes remain frozen for much of the winter. This guarantees that they are fully matured before the next round of bad weather arrives. Cubs are born in the summer in the Shetlands, when fish are more plentiful. Some otters do not breed every year, despite the fact that they are capable of doing so. This, too, is contingent on food availability. Other factors, such as the female's food range and quality, may have an

impact. With the exception of *Lutra canadensis*, whose embryos may undergo delayed implantation, Eurasian otters have a 63-day gestation period. To minimise interruptions, otters usually give birth in more secure dens. When mummy is away feeding, the cubs' nests are lined with bedding to keep them warm.

- E. To minimise interruptions, otters usually give birth in more secure dens. To keep the cubs warm while the mother is gone feeding, the nests are lined with bedding (reeds, waterside plants, grass). The litter size ranges from one to five. Coastal otters generate smaller litters for some unexplained reason. They open their eyes at five weeks, a tiny 700g cub. They are weaned onto solid food at the age of seven weeks. They leave the nest at ten weeks, blinking for the first time in daylight. They ultimately meet the water and learn to swim after three months. They start hunting after eight months, while the mother still gives a lot of food. She can finally chase them all away with a clear conscience after nine months, and relax — until the next fella shows up.
- F. The British otter's condition was recognised in the early 1960s, but the primary cause was not determined until the late 1970s. Pesticides like dieldrin and aldrin were first used in agriculture and other industries in 1955; these chemicals are extremely persistent and have been linked to massive population losses in peregrine falcons, sparrow hawks, and other predators. Pesticides found their way into river systems and the food chain, contaminating microorganisms, fish, and eventually otters, with each step increasing the toxic concentration. The pesticides were taken out starting in 1962, but while some species rebounded rapidly, otter populations did not, and continued to decline well into the 1980s. Habitat damage and road deaths were most likely to blame. When it comes to populations that have been fragmented by the rapid extinction in the 1950s and 1960s, the loss of just a few otters in one location can make an entire population unviable and lead to extinction.
- G. Otter populations are rebounding across the United Kingdom, with populations increasing in the few regions where they remained, and expanding from those areas into the rest of the country. This is virtually completely due to legislation, conservation initiatives, halting and reversing the erosion of appropriate otter habitat, and captive breeding programme reintroductions. Many people believe that releasing captive-bred otters is a last resort. The reasoning is that if they don't have sufficient habitat, they won't survive after being released, but if they do, natural populations should be able to expand into the area. Reintroducing animals into a fragmented and vulnerable population, on the other hand, may provide just enough drive for it to stabilise and spread rather than extinction. This is what the Otter Trust was able to achieve in Norfolk, where the otter population was estimated to be as low as twenty animals in the early 1980s. The Otter Trust has completed its captive breeding programme, which is fantastic news because it means the programme is no longer required.

### **Questions (1 - 4)**

*Do the following statements agree with the information given in the Reading Passage?*

*TRUE if the statement agrees with the information*

*FALSE if the statement contradicts the information*

*NOT GIVEN if there is no information on this*

1. An otter's stern is thick until it reaches the tip, where it flattens.
2. It is believed that the sensitivity of an otter's sense of smell is comparable to that of a bat.
3. Otter populations are recuperating throughout the United Kingdom and Europe, with populations strengthening in the few remaining regions and expanding from there to the rest of the region.
4. Because they are such timid and apprehensive creatures, they will seek out regions where human activity has little to no effect.

**Questions (5 - 10)**

*The reading Passage has seven paragraphs A-G Which paragraph contains the following information?*

*Write the correct letter A-G, in boxes 1-9 on your answer sheet.*

*NB You may use any letter more than once.*

5. The conflicting opinions on how to preserve.
6. The fit-for-purpose characteristics of otter's body shape
7. A reference to an underdeveloped sense
8. An explanation of why agriculture failed in otter conservation efforts
9. A description of how otters regulate vision underwater
10. A description of how baby otters grow

**Questions (11 - 13)**

*Answer the questions below.*

*Write NO MORE THAN THREE WORDS AND/ OR A NUMBER from the passage for each answer.*

11. Which type of otters has the shortest range?
12. What affects the outer fur of otters?
13. What skill is not necessary for Asian short-clawed otters?