

# Eurasian Otter

Otters are charming and charismatic semi-aquatic mammals that grace the diverse landscapes of India. Known for their playful nature, these enchanting creatures can often be observed splashing about in the country’s pristine rivers, streams, and wetlands. India is home to three otter species: the smooth-coated otter, the Eurasian otter, and the small-clawed otter, each uniquely adapted to its particular habitat. Unfortunately, these delightful creatures are facing a range of threats, including habitat destruction from dams and deforestation, water pollution from industries and agriculture, and illegal poaching for their valuable fur and meat. These threats are putting tremendous pressure on otter populations across the country, making conservation efforts crucial to the survival of these remarkable animals.

## Eurasian Otter

Sl NO	Characteristics	Description
1	Common Name	Eurasian Otter
2	Scientific Name	Lutra lutra
3	Length	90-130 cm (35-51 inches)
4	Colour	Eurasian Otters have dark brown fur on their back and sides, while their underside is a lighter cream colour
5	Average weight	5 to 12 kg
6	Food habits	fish, crustaceans, mollusks, and occasionally small mammals and bird
7	Habitat	rivers, lakes, and wetlands

8	Any interesting facts about them	They have sensitive whiskers that help them to detect prey underwater, and their powerful jaws are designed to crush the hard shells of their favourite prey.
---	----------------------------------	---

## Features

The Eurasian Otter (*Lutra lutra*) is a semi-aquatic mammal found throughout Europe and Asia. Eurasian Otters have dark brown fur on their back and sides, while their underside is a lighter cream colour. They have streamlined bodies, short legs with webbed feet, and long, tapered tails. Their ears and nostrils can be closed underwater. Their eyes are located towards the front of their head, giving them a binocular vision that helps them to judge distances accurately. Males are larger than females, weighing between 7-12 kg (15-26 lbs) while females weigh between 5-7 kg (11-15 lbs). They measure about 90-130 cm (35-51 inches) in length, including their tail, which can make up to 40% of their total length. Eurasian Otters have several adaptations that allow them to thrive in aquatic environments. Their fur is thick and waterproof, providing insulation and buoyancy. They have sensitive whiskers that help them to detect prey underwater, and their powerful jaws are designed to crush the hard shells of their favourite prey, such as crayfish and clams. They also have excellent hearing and can communicate with other otters using a variety of vocalisations.

Eurasian Otters are known for their playful behaviour and can often be seen sliding down riverbanks or diving and swimming in the water. They are also very territorial and use scent marking to communicate and defend their territory. Unfortunately, Eurasian Otters are threatened by habitat loss, pollution, and hunting, and their populations have declined

significantly in some areas.

## Food Habits

Eurasian Otters are carnivorous and feed primarily on fish, but they also eat crustaceans, mollusks, and occasionally small mammals and birds. They are opportunistic feeders and will consume whatever prey is available in their habitat. Otters are active hunters and use their excellent swimming and diving skills to catch prey underwater. They can hold their breath for up to eight minutes and can swim up to six miles per hour.

## Habitats

Eurasian Otters are semi-aquatic and require a freshwater habitat such as rivers, lakes, and wetlands. They prefer habitats with clear water and abundant vegetation, which provide cover and a source of food. Otters are also known to dig burrows in riverbanks or use abandoned burrows of other animals as their den.

## Vulnerable Species

The Eurasian Otter (*Lutra lutra*) is classified as a Near threatened species by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), which means that it is at high risk of extinction in the wild. In India, the species is listed under Schedule II of the Wildlife Protection Act of 1972, providing it with legal protection.

The exact population of Eurasian Otters in India is not known due to their elusive nature and difficulty in monitoring them in the wild. However, the species is known to be declining in numbers due to habitat loss, water pollution, and hunting.

The construction of dams and hydroelectric projects has altered the natural flow of rivers, leading to a reduction in the availability of prey species and causing habitat fragmentation. Pollution from agricultural runoff, industrial discharge, and sewage has also contaminated water bodies, making them unsuitable for otters to live in. Additionally, otters are hunted for their fur, which is highly valued in some parts of India.

In conclusion, the Eurasian Otter is vulnerable in India, and urgent conservation efforts are needed to protect this species from further decline.

## Protected Areas

Eurasian Otters (*Lutra lutra*) are found in several protected areas and national parks in India.

Great Himalayan National Park is located in Himachal Pradesh and is home to several species of wildlife, including otters. The park has a network of rivers and streams that provide an ideal habitat for otters.

Located in Assam, Kaziranga National Park is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and is home to the one-horned rhinoceros, tigers, and otters. The park has several water bodies, including the Brahmaputra River and its tributaries, where otters can be found.

Located in Arunachal Pradesh, Namdapha National Park is one of the largest protected areas in India and is home to several endangered species, including the Hoolock Gibbon and otters. The park has several rivers and streams that provide an ideal habitat for otters.

Located in Assam, Dibru-Saikhowa National Park is a biodiversity hotspot and is home to several species of flora and fauna, including otters. The park has several water

bodies, including the Brahmaputra River and its tributaries, where otters can be found.

Located in Kerala, Periyar National Park is home to several species of wildlife, including otters. The park has several water bodies, including the Periyar River and its tributaries, where otters can be found.

These national parks play an important role in the conservation of Eurasian Otters and their habitats in India. The park authorities work towards maintaining the ecological balance and preserving the natural habitats of wildlife, including otters.

## Conservation

Conservation measures for otters in India demand urgent attention and decisive action. Here are some critical steps that need to be taken:

**Habitat preservation:** Otters thrive in undisturbed riverine and wetland habitats with clean water sources. It is imperative to safeguard their natural habitats from the ravages of human activities such as pollution, damming, and deforestation.

**Population monitoring:** Regular surveys must be conducted to track otter populations and their distribution in India. This will aid conservationists in identifying potential threats and taking timely action.

**Prevention of poaching and illegal trade:** Otters are hunted and traded illegally for their valuable fur, meat, and other body parts. Strict enforcement of anti-poaching and anti-trafficking laws is essential to curb such illegal activities.

**Awareness campaigns:** Educating local communities about the ecological significance of otters and the need for their

conservation can mobilize public support for their protection.

Mitigation of human-wildlife conflict: Otters can come into conflict with fishermen and farmers, and to address these challenges, alternate livelihood options and compensation schemes should be developed.

Restoration of degraded habitats: The restoration of degraded habitats is critical to creating new habitats for otters and enhancing the quality of existing ones. Afforestation and wetland restoration initiatives can help in this regard.

Research: Comprehensive research is necessary to better understand the ecology and behavior of otters in India. This can assist conservationists in developing more effective conservation strategies for these elusive and endangered animals.