

# Otters

Otters belong to another group of animals, the mustelids.

This word comes from the Latin, and means "weasel." Other members of this family of animals include weasels, skunks, and badgers.

They are all short-legged, have thick coats of fur and sharp, tearing teeth, and are carnivorous or meat-eating mammals.

Otters love water, and their webbed feet, thick tails, and dense fur make them well-suited for life in the water. Two kinds of otters are found in and

around North America. One is a fresh-water otter; the other is a sea otter.

The home of the fresh-water otter is usually a hole dug into the bank of a stream or lake. The hole leads to a den lined with leaves.

Here, the young, usually two or three, are born in late winter or early spring. Before the young can swim, the mother sometimes carries them about on her back in the water and feeds them milk.

But the young learn very quickly to swim themselves.

Their parents teach them to dive and to catch the fish on which they feed. Soon the cubs are able

to stay underwater for as long as four minutes.

Sea otters are larger and heavier than fresh-water otters. Their thick fur is dark brown with white at the tips and has a frosted appearance. They have

white whiskers from which they get the nickname, the "old men of the sea."

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