GEORGIA AQUARIUM ANIMAL FACT SHEET

Asian Small-Clawed Otter

Aonyx cinerea

Range Habitat

- The Asian small-clawed otter is found in Southern India, Southern China, Southeast Asia, Indonesia and the Philippines.
- This shallow-water otter lives in freshwater wetlands and mangrove swamps.

Physical Characteristics

- The Asian small-clawed otter is the smallest otter. It ranges in size from 2 to 11 lbs. (1 - 5 kg), with a head and body length of 18 to 24 inches (45 - 61 cm) and a tail length of 10 to 14 inches (25 - 35 cm).
- The body of the small-clawed otter is elongated so that it can easily move through the water. It has partially webbed feet for swimming.
- Its body also is adapted for diving in that its heart rate and oxygen consumption are reduced while submerged, and it can seal its nose and ear canals while underwater.
- The lenses of its eyes enable it to adjust its vision easily as it goes from land to water. Numerous folds work to enlarge the retina so that it can easily locate its prey underwater.
- Whiskers help it to detect changes in water current and pressure.
- This otter is predominantly dark brown in color with a lighter patch on its throat and relatively short hair.
- Its tail is very thick and muscular at the base, and is gradually tapered to a thin tip. Lateral motions of the tail propel it while diving.

Diet/Feeding

- The Asian small-clawed otter is a carnivore. It feeds on mollusks, fish, frogs, crabs and other crustaceans.
- It immediately consumes its catch and digests its food quickly, so it is hungry soon after feeding. This rapid metabolism also explains the otter's energetic nature.

Conservation Status

- The Asian small-clawed otter is listed as "lower risk" on the IUCN Red List, meaning it is close to being qualified as "vulnerable".
- Wetlands where it resides are being destroyed to accommodate the growing population in Asia.
- In addition, environmental pollution threatens these otters and drastically reduces their food sources.
- Like the mink, the otter is hunted for its pelt.

Additional Information

- This otter also is called the "clawless otter" and the "oriental small-clawed otter".
- Otters are members of the mustelid family, related to badgers, minks and weasels.
- The feet of the Asian small-clawed otter are very narrow and are only webbed to the last joint, not to the end of the toe. It has short, blunt claws. The fact that its paws are only partially webbed gives it an excellent sense of touch and coordination. It catches prey in its paws instead of with its mouth (unlike other otters).

- In the wild, these otters have been observed sliding on mud banks and chasing each other through the water. These types of "play" behaviors help to reinforce social bonds. It is also a way for young otters to practice their hunting techniques.
- Compared to other otter species, the Asian small-clawed otter spends more time on land than in the water. However, typically they are in the water more than half of the day. Whether in or out of the water, these otters spend their day hunting, at "play", or resting in reed nests, rock caves or burrows, locations that offer protection from hawks and snakes, their main predators.
- These otters leave small feces or urine deposits to communicate, but this social species will also use a communal latrine, where they stomp their hind paws on the waste in order to grind it into the substrate.
- Otters are family-oriented. The Asian small-clawed otter is very social and both the
 male and female provide care for their young. The female gives birth to one to six
 whelps per litter. The whelps are born small and helpless and do not open their eyes
 until they are out 40 days old. They start to swim at about 63 days and eat solid food
 at about 80 days.
- Sometimes the young stay with their parents into adulthood and form a small social group or family of 4 to 12 individual otters. They can also communicate to each other by using some 12 different calls.

Sources

http://www.thebigzoo.com/Animals/Asian Small-Clawed Otter.asp http://animaldiversity.ummz.umich.edu/site/accounts/information/Amblonyxcinereus.html http://nationalzoo.si.edu/Animals/AsiaTrail/SmallClawedOtters/\http://www.wellingtonzoo.com/animals/animals/mammals/otter.html http://www.lioncrusher.com/animal.asp?animal=162