



# CONGO CLAWLESS OTTER

*Aonyx Congicus*

Size - Up to 1.5m long and 20kg in weight.

Found in small numbers in the countries along the Congo River basin and is the least adapted to the aquatic way of life that we see in other otters.

Feeds on worms, crabs, frogs, mud-dwelling fish, tadpoles and snails.

Near threatened on the IUCN Red List.

Very little research in the wild for this scarcely found species.

Hunted for bush meat and skins, whilst also facing habitat loss.

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INTERNATIONAL OTTER SURVIVAL FUND

The Congo Clawless Otters (*Aonyx congicus*), also known as swamp otters, are very large, growing up to 1.5m in length and 20kg in weight. Closely related to African Clawless Otter, the Congo Clawless Otter is mainly dark brown above and pale on the chest, with silver tips to the end of hairs on the neck and head, as well as dark patches of fur between the eyes and nostrils. This species is the least adapted of all otters to an aquatic way of life, and has short fur providing less insulation. The back feet are only partly webbed and the front have no webbing at all, giving them great dexterity.

Little is known about the ecology and biology of the Congo Clawless Otter, but a lot has been learnt about their behaviour through the care and rearing of orphaned cubs in the Democratic Republic of Congo. These cubs have also acted as ambassadors encouraging otter conservation. In the wild they are thought to be mostly nocturnal and largely solitary, although mothers and cubs have been seen in the daytime in the swamps and rivers of the Congo Basin. It would appear that they reach sexual maturity at about two years old and usually the female will have only one or two cubs, although there is very little research on this. It lives exclusively in marshes and shallow margins of lakes and is the most terrestrial species of otter.

The distribution of Congo Clawless Otters is very patchy, but they are found in the Congo River basin (Democratic Republic of Congo, Republic of Congo, Central African Republic, Gabon, Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea) as well as Burundi, southwest Uganda and Rwanda. They have also been reported in Angola, southeast Nigeria and Zambia but information is scarce. They particularly like lowland swamp forests but are also found in rivers and streams in rainforests.

It has been found that these otters eat a lot of worms, some as long as spaghetti, which they catch by digging in the mud with their clawless feet and pulling them out. They also eat crabs, frogs, mud-dwelling fish, tadpoles and even snails, using their “fingers” to reach into the snail shell to get the food.

As mentioned, the Congo Clawless Otter is one of the least known otter species, and is listed as Near Threatened on the IUCN Red List. The main threats that we know of to the survival of this species are being hunted for bush meat and skins, habitat loss and degradation, and reduced fish stocks due to overfishing and pollution. As they are more terrestrial, they are also very vulnerable to snares set on land.

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