

Night Life

Small-clawed Otter



The small-clawed otter (*Aonyx cinereus*) also called Oriental small-clawed otter, Asian short-clawed otter, or ash otter belongs to the weasel family (Mustelidae) and is the smallest otter species in the world. The name of the species comes from its reduced claws that do not extend outside the pads of the digits. These reduced claws and incomplete webbing give the animal great dexterity, allowing it to use its forepaws to handle food objects, and even sometimes, tools! Found across south and southeast Asia, small-clawed otters occur in freshwater habitats, hill streams, mangrove swamps, rice fields, canals and reservoirs. Shy and mostly nocturnal, the species is not very easily sighted, but very rarely can be seen during the day in remote areas that are free of human activities. They usually feed on crabs, fish, molluscs and snails, and occasionally on snakes and frogs. A social mammal, it is known to form family groups of up to 15 individuals. Threatened due to habitat loss, habitat pollution, and poaching for animal parts and the pet trade, there is very little information about current distribution or population size of the species.

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