

Wild Tracks

southwest wildlife rehabilitation & educational foundation, inc.

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OTTERS: They're playful and charming —and they need our help.

by Jeff Egerton

In this and the next issue of Southwest Wildlife's *Wild Tracks*, we'll feature two riparian mammals that are the Type A and Type B personalities of the animal world. Beavers are known for their tireless industry and hard work. They're planners and builders, nature's general contractors. Otters, on the other hand, are playful, light-hearted, and mischievous. They appear to have an idyllic life, but there's more to their demeanor than meets the eye.

Otters have four objectives in life—raising their young, grooming, sleeping, and eating. When they're not busy with these chores, they play. In the case of sea otters, they may spend hours floating on their backs, napping, while wrapped up in kelp leaves to hold them in place.

A fully grown otter must eat a third of its body weight in food every day. This means several trips a day foraging for meals. Sea otters, which can weigh

in at sixty pounds, have to make several dives to the ocean floor looking for urchins, squid, or octopi, and the chances of finding something in one trip that's more than a few ounces are slim.



Grooming may seem like a luxury, time spent pampering one's self. For sea otters, this is a life-saving pastime. They are the only marine mammals to rely upon their fur to keep them warm, because, even in the coldest climates, otters lack the blubber that keeps other marine mammals warm. They're entirely dependent on the insulating blanket of air trapped among their tightly packed fur fibers (which may number close to 800 million!). Because of this, otters are extremely clean. Any dirt or interference in the natural function of their coat could be deadly.

When not otherwise busy, both young and adult otters play a variety of games. They've been seen playing with rocks and sticks, and they play tag and hide-and-seek. They will also wrestle with each other and love dunking their playmates when in the water. Their favorite pastime is sliding, either down a muddy river bank or across ice and snow.

As is the case with many wild species, otters have only one critical predator and that is man. Otter pups have fallen prey to foxes, wolves, or raptors, but not to the extent that these predators threaten their numbers. Gill nets, hunting for pelts, pesticides, and

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A Recent Rescue: Javelina on Black Mountain

by Linda Searles

The call came in at the end of a very long, hot August day. The caller said that a javelina was stuck in a fence. I set out, grateful that this rescue would be a slam dunk—the javelina was already trapped in the fence, so I wouldn't need to track him through the desert.

The caller's home was on the side of Black Mountain, surrounded by dense thorny brush, cactus, and slippery shale. After I arrived at the home I was lead on a journey around the house to the back, where I got my first glimpse of him.

He had been stuck in a fence alright, but he was no longer attached to it. Somehow, he had detached

himself from it. However, a wire was wrapped around his body, tying up his front leg under his chin.

"How hard could this be," I asked myself? He could not possibly out run even me, even though I had failed miserably at sports in school. As I approached slowly with my equipment, he got up and started hopping off. I followed him. As he hopped with ease through the cactus and brush, I slipped and slid on the shale rock, catching my clothes and equipment on cactus and in the brush.

It seemed that, as I tracked him, every bush exploded with quail, giving my position away and running him further into the dense brush. Time to go to plan B: come back another day with a dart gun and increase my odds of success. I explained to the home owner that perusing him in this habitat was not feasible and to call me when she saw him again.

Sure enough, the next day she called to say he was back. This time, I loaded up all my gear, including



the dart gun, and took off. When I arrived, I saw him resting under a tree with another javelina. I was able to get close enough to dart him with out alerting him to my presence.

He was startled when the dart hit him and took off. Pursuing him would only frighten him more, which would raise his adrenalin level and make it harder for the tranquilizer to take effect. So I sat down on a high point and listened. The sound of his hooves on the shale and the agitated quail indicated to me his direction of travel.

In a few minutes, everything was quiet. I hiked down to where I thought he was. Naturally, he had chosen the absolute thorniest bushes under which to fall asleep: hackberry and graythorn knitted together under a low-hanging palo verde tree.

I poked at him with my jab stick to make sure he was asleep enough to carry down the hill. He raised his head, so I decided to give him another cocktail. I wanted him to be safely in a deep sleep for the hike down.

As I sat there awaiting the last of the drugs to take affect, I was enjoying the kind of peace and quiet that only the Sonoran Desert can offer. Just as I was immersing myself in the beauty of the desert, I heard food steps coming up behind us. It was his friend coming to check on him. Now I had to find a way to run his friend off, so I could get Sleeping Beauty off the side of the mountain.

“How am I going to manage this?” I asked myself. Suddenly, the peace and quiet of the desert was shattered. My pager beeped and my cell phone rang simultaneously! Well, his friend wasn’t having any part of all that nonsense and took off to get away from all the noise.

Now that his friend was gone, I realized that I was faced with a new problem: how to get a 60-pound male javelina off the side of a steep, shale-covered mountain side, through dense brush and cactus. The home owner, who had been watching from a distance, offered to help.

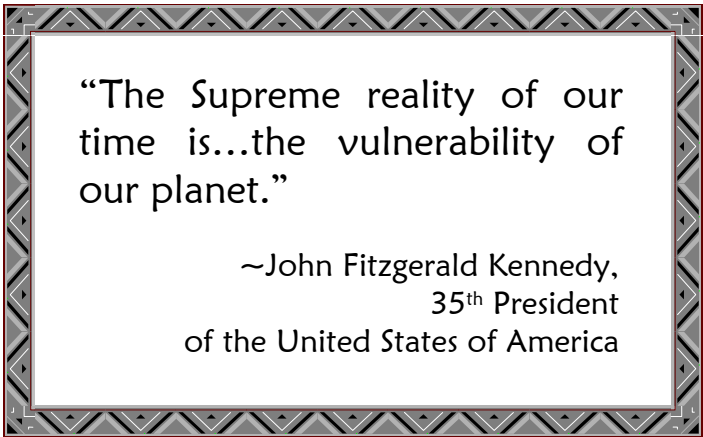
We put him on the gurney and stumbled and slid down the side of the mountain, into a large wash. There, we faced our next challenge. The truck was parked up on the side of the mountain, at the caller’s home. It would not be easy to get the javelina up to the truck; we would have to work our way through

brush and cactus, while trying not to slip on the shale.

I noticed a house just down the wash, so I asked the caller to knock on the door and ask for permission to carry Sleeping Beauty through their house. Amazingly, they agreed! We were able to carry him across their patio to their driveway. I retrieved my truck and we loaded him into it.

After we arrived back at Southwest Wildlife's Clinic, he was given a little more sedation so the wire could be cut off and he could move his leg freely once again. Unfortunately, the wire had caused some deep lacerations. Those were cleaned and medicated, and he was put on oral antibiotics until they were healed. We are happy to tell you that he has made a complete recovery and is back with a herd in the wild again.

The wire that became wrapped around this javelina’s body was not actually from a fence, but was a discarded end left over from some nearby construction project. This story is an excellent illustration of how trash and debris can often unintentionally trap and injure wildlife.



“The Supreme reality of our time is...the vulnerability of our planet.”

~John Fitzgerald Kennedy,
35th President
of the United States of America

Southwest Wildlife Needs...

- ...donations to our *Wild About Wildlife X* dinner and fundraising auction. For more information, please call Stephania at 480-951-3082.
- ...volunteers to work at *Wild About Wildlife X*. We will need help with set-up on the day of the event and that evening at the event. If you would like to contribute to the success of this important, fun event, please call LoriAnn at 480-471-0125.

River Otter Facts

by Jeff Egerton

The North American river otter, *Lontra canadensis*, ranges over most of North America, including Alaska, with the exception of tundra areas and the Aleutian Islands. Other species of river otters inhabit every continent except Antarctica and Australia. All are members of the family Mustelidae, along with mink and sea otters. Archeological remains indicate otters have been around since 200 B.C.

Otters can be described as a thick set, yet streamlined, mammal with short legs, a stocky neck, inconspicuous ears, and a muscular body. They have a powerful tail that is a third as long as its head and body. Adult otters weigh 15 to 35 pounds and are 40 to 60 inches in length. Females are about 20 percent smaller than males. At its prime, the otter's pelt is blackish-brown with a lighter colored belly.



An otter's coat consists of a dense undercoat that is overlaid with longer, courser guard hairs. Their coats keep the otters watertight underwater.

The otter is built to spend much of its time in the water. Its feet are webbed and, when submerged, its ears and nostrils close. Otters can stay submerged for 4-8 minutes, thanks to a reduced heart beat that slows to one tenth of their normal, 170-beats-per-minute rate to conserve oxygen. Dens are subterranean burrows usually built near water and with an opening into the water.

Otters live in groups, but the groups aren't always made up of the same family members. A group may consist of all bachelor males, a male with his family, or just a female and her pups. In the wild, otters may live and breed up to 15 years of age. Most active during nighttime, dusk, and dawn, otters may also be active during the day, especially if there is no human activity in the area. They are active year-round.

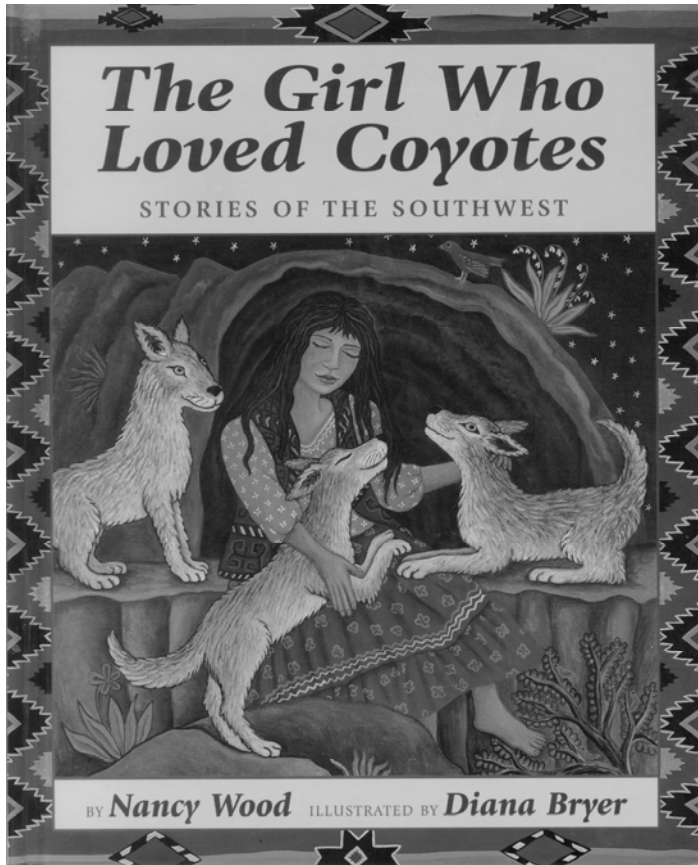
Otters have well developed senses of smell and hearing. Above water, their vision is not exceptional, as they are near-sighted. However, their vision is much better when they're submerged. They have several sets of strong whiskers that are used in hunting. Otters communicate with their noses by smelling territorial marks, made with musk scent glands in their tails and/or urine. They will also talk in the form of chirps, grunts, chuckles, whistles, and screams. When two otters are together, they seem to converse with a mumbling sound.

River otters reach sexual maturity at two years of age. A female will choose her mate and produce one litter each year. Although they breed in the spring, usually in May, implantation of the fertilized egg usually does not occur until fall. Because of delayed implantation, pregnancies may last 9-13 months. Once implantation occurs, however, gestation lasts approximately 2 months.

The litter of 1-6 pups are born blind and toothless in the spring. Their eyes don't open for seven weeks after birth. At two months, they begin to leave the den. They start swimming shortly thereafter, when their mother either coaxes or drags them into the water. The males usually leave shortly after the birth of the young and return to help care for them at this time. The pups are weaned at 3 months. They will strike out on their own within their first year.

An otter's diet is made up of snails, mussels, clams, sea urchins, insects, crabs, shrimp, octopi, frogs. Their primary food source is a variety of fish. Small meals are eaten on the surface of the water, but bigger meals are taken ashore. Otters are the only water mammals known to use tools to eat, using rocks to break open shellfish.

Children's Book Review



The Girl Who Loved Coyotes: Stories of the Southwest

by Nancy Wood
illustrated by Diana Bryer

The Girl Who Loved Coyotes is a mystical book filled with Southwestern Native American folklore. The book starts with a brief history of the southwest and the Native Americans who occupied that land. Then, the book moves on to twelve folklores. The folklores focus on the spiritual connection the Native Americans had with the animal world around them. This beautiful book explains how the coyote got his song, how the eagle learned to see, how the coyotes lost their voices, and many more animal legends. Throughout the book, Spanish terms are used to add a little flavor to the stories. *The Girl Who Loved Coyotes* has magnificent illustrations which resemble patch work quilts, and it also has a glossary of the Spanish words used in the book. This book is great for kids of all ages and adults who want to learn a little bit more about Native American animal folklore—especially about the wily coyote.



Update on Sabino

Many of you have inquired about the welfare of Sabino, the female mountain lion captured in Sabino Canyon in April, 2004. Today, Sabino shares a large enclosure with two neutered male mountain lions: Pecos and Kino. The enclosure was specially designed for mountain lions and is landscaped with mesquite, palo verde, and lysiloma trees. They have an evaporative-cooled den for the summer months that also serves as a cozy resting place and many high platforms on which to rest and from which they can see much that goes on around them. They love their large hammock constructed of old fire hoses and made by Eagle Scouts. They receive hides, scents, and other items of enrichment to keep them busy.

It is Southwest Wildlife's wish that every wild animal could remain in the wild. However, when that is no longer possible, for whatever reason, a sanctuary is a caring environment to which most wild animals can habituate.



BOOK REVIEWS

The Wilderness World of River Otters

by Ken L. Jenkins



This brief photographic essay of river otters and the natural environments they inhabit is by wildlife photographer Ken Jenkins. Ken also leads natural history/photography hikes into the wilderness near his Smoky Mountain home and lectures regularly on bears and other mammals. He has contributed to numerous other books on

various species of wildlife.

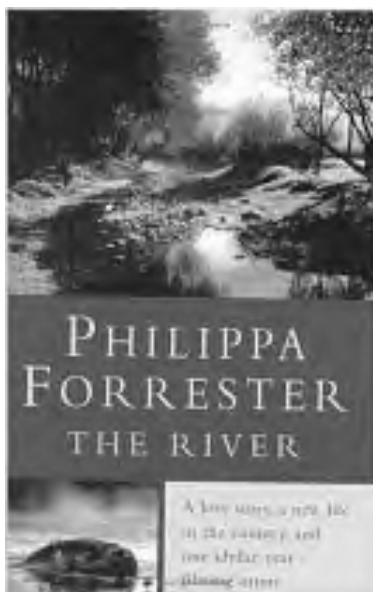
The River:

A Love Story, a New Life in the Country, and One Idyllic Year Filming Otters

by Philippa Forrester

illustrations by Delia Delderfield

photographs by Charlie Hamilton James



This is a true story about the author and her new husband, a wildlife photographer & cinematographer, who decide to leave the bustle of the city and move to the countryside, into an old cottage beside a river. They soon fall in love with the wildlife in the area. The otters especially capture their hearts, and they set out to research and film

them in an effort to help protect the species. The book includes many hilarious stories, many of them related to the playful, fun-loving otters.

Otters

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pollutants are their biggest threats. In spite of these dangers, otters have managed to hang on against tremendous odds and, in the past few decades, supporters of otters have made progress. However, it is precarious progress, at best.

River otters have legislated protection in most states, but it is still legal to kill otters for their pelts in four states and one Canadian province. This is particularly prevalent in Alaska, where it's estimated between one and two thousand animals are taken annually. There is a much larger river otter population there than in the lower forty-eight, and they don't have the pollution problem that river otters here suffer, but it's still a large loss.

A senior marine biologist at the California Fish and Game's Marine Culture Laboratory concluded, from studies over a thirty-year period, that sea otters cannot coexist with shell fisheries harvesting such things as abalone, clams and sea urchins. Of course, where shell fishing is at its heaviest, the sea otters are considered to be the enemy. Because of this conflict, northern California sea otters are being moved to some new habitats, but finding new environs that suit the otters has proven to be tricky.

Another problem that river otters face is the loss of riparian habitat due to urban sprawl. In an effort to introduce new populations of otters, over one thousand otters have been "transplanted" to eleven states, including Arizona. This, and the constant vigilance of groups such as the River Otter Preservation Society and the Otter Preservation Center, should help our furry friends in their survival efforts, but they can't do it without our help.

Educational Grant Renewed

The Nina Mason Pullium Charitable Trust recently renewed their annual grant for Southwest Wildlife's Educational Department staff. With this grant, we have been able to educate more people about wildlife and create new educational resources and aids over the past year. We look forward to continuing to expand the role our Educational Department plays in local schools and at area parks and civic groups.

Southwest Wildlife Donation Form

You may also make donations online at: www.southwestwildlife.org

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Email Address:

Giving Thanks

Wonderful things happened at Southwest Wildlife over the past year, many of which we have shared with you in previous issues. Now, we'd like to point out just a few of the most recent.

Artist Kelly Bedson (www.myflyingbunny.com) made it possible for a long-time dream to become a reality. She provided the artwork and layout for Southwest Wildlife's educational coloring handout. Kelly did a wonderful job of depicting the animals in a very realistic manner, without making them seem scary. In addition, Kelly is currently working with Southwest Wildlife educator Hillary Williams on a wildlife coloring book.

Shelley & Scott Brown, along with Scott's brother, took time away from their families during the holidays to pick up 90 unsold Christmas trees from Fountain Hills' Target. These trees provide enrichment activities for both our sanctuary and rehab residents.

Tom Dynjan and his staff at Dynjan & Advertising didn't stop at creating Southwest Wildlife's terrific new logo! They also created a beautiful, full-color, holiday fund raising brochure AND organized various donors (paper, print, mail service, etc.) to print and mail it for us at no cost!

Randy, Jim, et.al., of City Wide Metals, came to haul away several expired freezers/refrigerators, as well as countless wooden pallets. We almost always have wooden pallets available. If you can use them, call us to arrange a pick up time.

*Wild About Wildlife X:
a Celebration
of the Bear*

**Saturday
March 24, 2007
6:00 p.m.**

**Four Seasons Resort
Scottsdale at Troon North**

For more information:
www.southwestwildlife.org/WAW

SOUTHWEST WILDLIFE

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Southwest Wildlife wishes to thank all individuals and organizations that have given so generously to enable us to help the many animals that come through our doors—we couldn't do this without your help!

Dr. Steve Gilson & Dr. Mark Soderstrom of Sonora Veterinary Specialists	Veterinary Hospital Dr. Yael Bar-Shalom Mark Finke, Nutritionist	California Pools for continuing to maintain the pump and filter for the bear pool
Dr. Lilian Rizzo, Dr. Carol Samson, Dr. Leo Egar, Dr. Gorman, and the Veterinary Interns and staff at Sonora Veterinary Specialists	BZ Rodents, Inc. AJ's Fine Foods for produce Safeway for produce Albertsons-Via Linda for produce Basha's in Carefree for produce Whole Foods	Tohono O'odham Farming Community Dale Husband of Husband Car & Truck Repair Kelly Bedson, artwork & layout for educational coloring handout
Dr. Chris Henrich	Sprouts	Target in Fountain Hills for donating 90 Christmas trees for animal enrichment
Dr. Arch Robertson & Dr. Todd Smithenson of Vet Med Consultants	USA Mobility for pagers Extreme Internet for the web site Safeway eScrip Program	City Wide Metals
Dr. Ronald Sigler, Dr. Jennifer Urbanz, and Staff of Eye Care for Animals	Bill Hood, Scottsdale Accounting Service	Dynjan & Advertising for creating our new logo and creating and organizing the printing & mailing of a full-color holiday fund raising brochure
Dr. Visser, Dr. Kaufman, and Staff of Aid Animal Dental Clinic	Shalako Nut Farm Nestle Purina	
Dr. Barnes and staff of Del Lago	Wes Patrick of Critter Control	

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