

African Clawless Otter

Onychia capensis ("Clawless dweller on the Cape of Good Hope")

What do they look like? They have long bodies which are dark brown, greyish-brown or pale tan and short front legs the hind legs are a bit longer so they lope when they run. Although they are called clawless otters they sometimes have tiny little claws on their third and fourth digits of the hind legs. They use their dexterous and sensitive hands to capture prey. Their tails are long, and tapered toward the tip. The sides of the face, neck, throat, belly and ear edges are white to cream coloured. They have very long white whiskers.

African clawless otter has a pair of scent glands which it uses to scent-mark. They have almost no webbing on their toes (the back feet are a little bit webbed), and usually don't have any claws on their toes.

Where do they live? Rainforests, open plains, rivers, streams, reservoirs, lakes with clear water, swamps and streams, fish farms, canals and ditches, and also beaches, rocky shores, mangroves, and mudflats - wherever sufficient food is available. Populations of Cape clawless otters are known from coastal areas of South Africa where they are known to forage equally in the sea and coastal freshwater marshes. The Cape clawless otter's distribution, which is closely associated with water systems, extends from Senegal in the west, to Ethiopia in the northeast, and south to South Africa.

What do they eat? Lots of fish and crustaceans.

How long do they live? Up to 10 but usually closer to 5.

How many babies do they have? Usually they have two cubs, but they can have up to four.

How big are they? 120- 150 cm and weigh 10 – 21 kg. (males bigger than the females).

What is harming them? Pollution of water; being hunted for fur and medicinal purposes in some areas and killed in others as a perceived competitor for fish, particularly in areas where the rainbow trout has been introduced; the impact of persistent drought in parts of their former range and the seasonal disappearance of streams and rivers.

How bad is it? Endangered status: Least Concern – the population appears to be generally stable (neither growing nor shrinking). Very few otter species are this lucky!

