

River Otters of South Florida

**ROSF**



# **Otter Sightings**

## **Roadway Mortality Sightings in Florida**

### **Photos of Non-Otter and Otter Roadway Mortalities**

#### **River Otters of South Florida: Otter Research and Otter Education Programming**

It may be uncomfortable for some to view the images included here. Also, you may or may not be confident in your ability to tell the difference between a rabbit, an opossum, or a river otter struck by a motorized vehicle. Most of these photos, of various mammal species that became roadway mortalities, are photos of mammals other than the river otter. However, photos of river otter roadway mortalities had to be included for comparison. Animal roadway mortalities are frequently referred to as “road kills”. If you are uncertain of the identity of a road kill you should consider taking a photo and compare it to the photos presented here. You might also consider looking at “photos of road killed mammals” on the internet. Some of these photos were downloaded from this resource.

There are certain physical characteristics of an animal that are not obliterated shortly after being struck by a motorized vehicle. The longer the “roadkill” remains on the roadway the more difficult it becomes to identify. Additionally, scavenging of these carcasses by vultures and carrion eating mammals also quickly obliterates these characteristics. A few of these characteristics will be defined for each species shown as well some characteristics that should help you easily identify a river otter struck by a motorized vehicle.



The **opossum**, or more correctly called the Virginia opossum, is relatively easy to identify. The face is pointed and elongated and lightly colored to mostly white. The tail is long, thin, and hairless and the body hair appears long and sparse. Ears are medium in size and usually held upright. (Photo credit: cheamagazine.com)



The **Eastern cottontail rabbit** is most readily identified by its long ears and the small rounded, tail that is white and cotton-like underneath. Except for the white under the tail and along the underside, the rest of the body is covered with dark to light brown fur and the hind legs are very long compared to the short front legs. (Photo Credit: Joel Satore)



The **raccoon** is probably the easiest medium-sized mammal to recognize as a roadway mortality. The distinct black mask surrounding the eyes and the black rings on the tail readily identify the raccoon. (Photo Credit: begoodorbegoodatit.blogspot.com)



The **Eastern gray squirrel** is another mammal species easy to identify as a roadway mortality. The inside of the legs, the abdomen and throat are an obvious white or very light gray. The hair on the remainder of the body is grey mixed with various amounts of rust-colored hair. The tail, especially in winter, has a border of white hair. (Photo Credit: almay.com D5FF5M)



The **Nine-banded armadillo**: Many individuals have never seen an armadillo before and may also have no idea what one may look like if struck by a car. The nine-banded Armadillo is the only armadillo species found in North America and is quite prevalent in south Florida. It is called a nine-banded Armadillo because it has nine, obvious and separate bands along its sides and back. (Photo Credit: indystar.com)

### Photos of Non-Otter and Otter Roadway Mortalities



The North American river otter is a long, slender mammal with a long, thick tail approximately 1/3 the total length. Adult males reach lengths slightly greater than 4 feet and the females are somewhat shorter than males and this is usually only apparent when they are both together. The average weight of an adult male is more than 33 pounds and female averages 18 pounds. The fur color on the sides, upper body, tail and legs and the top of the head is a uniformly brown color. The fur of some North American river otters may be a rusty brown color. The throat and underneath side of the body, and sometimes the sides of the face, may be a light gray and the cheek area may have some black markings. The fur always appears darker when wet-in the darker brown otters the fur may appear almost black when wet. From the middle of Spring to the middle of Summer a large otter and a smaller otter might be seen together killed on the road by a motorized vehicle. When running, young otters run single file behind the adult with the leading young otter frequently in direct contact with the adult's hind quarter. Photo Credit: CLAYCORD

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The **American mink** looks much like a small river otter and might be confused with a young otter roadway mortality. An average adult male is 24 inches long and weighs 3 ¼ pounds and female averages 19 inches in length and weighs 2 pounds. The fur is a rich brown to nearly black. The underside may be lighter and have some white spots. The underside of the chin may also be white. (Photo Credit: Gordon Rigby/flickr.com)

